

**Small and Medium Enterprises within South Africa: An exploration into
the role of transformational leadership on organisational evolution**

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ABSTRACT

SMEs are major contributors to the economy, through economic outputs and job creation. However they are at a high risk of failure, due to a myriad of issues they face and their leaders are required to make difficult decisions to ensure the survival and the growth of the business. Although there has been prior work on transformational leadership and organisational growth, there is very little empirical research that serves to understand how these two aspects are linked.

An exploratory qualitative research study was undertaken with ten leaders of SMEs that are at the five different growth phases of the Greiner Growth Model. This was done to gain the personal insights from SME leaders, into the link between transformational leadership and organisational growth. Each of the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis that picked up on common themes that arose from the respective interviews.

The findings were such that the leadership style applied was dependent on the growth phase in which an SME found itself. In many of the cases, the leaders served to build teams that could be self-sufficient however in others they still required leadership interventions. Leaders however sought to be the ones leading the teams vision.

KEYWORDS

Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Organisational Evolution, Transformational Leadership, Greiner's Growth Model

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

04 November 2024

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	ii
KEYWORDS	ii
DECLARATION	iii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background to the Problem	1
1.2 Context of the Study in South Africa	2
1.3 Leadership in SMEs	3
1.4 Challenges Facing SMEs	4
1.5 Description of the Problem	7
1.6 Research Objectives and Scope	8
1.6.1 Research Objectives	8
1.6.2 Research Scope	8
1.7 Importance of the Study	9
1.7.1 Academic Need for the Research	9
1.7.2 Business Need for the Research	10
1.8 Structure of the Research	11
1.9 Conclusion	11
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	12
2.1 Introduction	12
2.2 Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs)	12
2.2.1 SMEs in South Africa	12
2.2.2 Contributions of SMEs	14
2.2.3 Evolution of SMEs	15
2.3 Leadership Theory	17
2.3.1 Different Leadership Styles	18
2.4 Organisational Evolution	23
2.4.1 Greiner Growth Model	23
2.5 Gaps in Literature	28

2.6 Conclusion	29
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTION AND PROPOSTIONS	30
3.1 Research Proposition 1	31
3.2 Research Proposition 2	31
3.3 Research Proposition 3	31
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLGY AND DESIGN	32
4.1 Research Design	32
4.1.1. Research Philosophy	32
4.1.2. Approach to Theory Development	33
4.1.3. Methodological Choice	33
4.1.4. Research Strategies	34
4.1.5. Time Horizon	35
4.2 Research Methodology	35
4.2.1. Population	35
4.2.2. Unit of Analysis	35
4.2.3. Sampling Method and Size	36
4.2.4. Measurement Instrument	37
4.2.5. Data Analysis Approach	39
4.2.6. Reporting	41
4.2.7. Quality Controls	41
4.2.8. Ethical Considerations	43
4.2.9. Research Limitations and Assumptions	43
4.2.10. Conclusion	44
CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS	45
5.1 Introduction	45
5.2 Data Analysis Approach Followed	45
5.3 Description of the Sample	45
5.4 Presentation of Findings	46
5.5 Results for Research Proposition 1	48
5.5.1. Leadership Evolution	51
5.5.2. Leadership Flexibility	53

5.5.3. Growth Phase-Specific Leadership	54
5.5.4. Leadership-Organisational Fit	55
5.5.5. Leadership in Dynamic Environment	56
5.5.6. Growth Phase Challenges	57
5.6 Results for Research Proposition 2	58
5.6.1 Leadership Competence	61
5.6.2 Resilience in Leadership	62
5.6.3 Leadership Versatility	63
5.6.4 Problem-Solving Capability	65
5.6.5 Decision-Making Agility	66
5.6.6 Crisis Management	67
5.7 Results for Research Proposition 3	68
5.7.1 Vision-Driven Leadership	71
5.7.2 Leadership for Sustainability	72
5.7.3 Strategic Leadership	73
5.7.4 Personal Influence on Strategy	74
5.8 Conclusion	75
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	77
6.1 Introduction	77
6.2 Discussion of Findings for Research Proposition 1	77
6.2.1 Leadership Evolution	78
6.2.2 Leadership Flexibility	78
6.2.3 Growth Phase-Specific Leadership	79
6.2.4 Leadership-Organisational Fit	79
6.2.5 Leadership in Dynamic Environment	80
6.2.6 Growth Phase Challenges	80
6.2.7 Conclusive findings for Research Proposition 1	81
6.3 Discussion of Findings for Research Proposition 2	81
6.3.1 Leadership Competence	82
6.3.2 Resilience in Leadership	82
6.3.3 Leadership Versatility	83
6.3.4 Problem-Solving Capability	83
6.3.5 Decision-Making Agility	84

6.3.6	Crisis Management	84
6.3.7	Conclusive findings for Research Proposition 2	85
6.4	Discussion of Findings for Research Proposition 3	85
6.4.1	Vision-Driven Leadership	86
6.4.2	Leadership for Sustainability	86
6.4.3	Strategic Leadership.....	87
6.4.4	Personal Influence on Strategy	87
6.4.5	Conclusive findings for Research Proposition 3	88
6.5	Discussion of Findings for Research Question	88
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION	.....	89
7.1	Introduction.....	89
7.2	Research Context and Relevance	89
7.3	Main Findings.....	90
7.3.1	Research Question and Propositions	90
7.3.2	Research Methodology.....	90
7.3.3	Consolidation of Research Findings.....	91
7.4	Recommendations from the Research Study	93
7.5	Limitations of the Research Study	93
7.6	Recommendations for Future Research	93
7.7	Concluding Remarks	94
REFERENCES	.....	95
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE	.....	109
A.1	Introduction	109
A.2	Interview Questions	109
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER	.....	111
APPENDIX C: ATLAS.TI CODEBOOK	.....	112

List of Figures

Figure 1: WEF Global Risks Outlook in two to ten years (WEF, 2024)	5
Figure 2: Classification of small enterprises in South Africa (DSBD, 2019) ...	13
Figure 3: Life cycle of organisations (Monticelli et al., 2019)	15
Figure 4: Factors contributing to SME growth (Lakuma et al., 2019)	17
Figure 5: Transformational vs Transactional Leadership (El Nour, 2021)	21
Figure 6: Greiner's five elements for organisational development (Greiner, 1998)	24
Figure 7: Greiner's Five Phases (Greiner, 1998)	27
Figure 8: Categories of Unit of Analysis (Kumar, 2018)	36

List of Tables

Table 1: Details of the Greiner Growth Phases	25
Table 2: Details of the Interviewees from the Sample	46
Table 3: Codes and their frequencies for research proposition 1.....	48
Table 4: Codes and their frequencies for research proposition 2.....	58
Table 5: Codes and their frequencies for research proposition 3.....	69

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Problem

Organisational growth is essential for all businesses as it allows for them to be sustainable and maintain their competitive advantage. According to Collins et al. (2020) the growth of a business ensures that they can have a better ability to deal with volatility and economic shocks. This growth will not only drive the business forward but serve to contribute to economic growth of a country (Surya et al., 2021). However, in the case of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) these are businesses that often struggle to achieve consistent growth due to the number of challenges they face, in the form of access to both resources and capabilities. The absence of these crucial components and that of financial resources results in significant pressure being applied on the leadership of the business to drive organisational growth with limited support.

Leadership is therefore crucial for the survival and success of SMEs, particularly as these businesses navigate through different phases of growth. With Madanchian et al. (2018), placing emphasis that leaders are responsible for influencing their team to undertake their jobs such that they can contribute to positive organisational outcomes. Organisational evolution is best described by the work done by Greiner, whose Growth Model serves to present five distinct growth phases that an organisation must navigate, with each requiring a unique set of leadership skills (Greiner, 1997). Therefore the Greiner model is useful in that it provides a framework that can assist in studying SME growth and that of leadership adaptation. However the issue that arises is that, for many SMEs there is a failure to progress through these stages, which is often linked to the leadership's inability to manage growth-related challenges, be it either in the form of strategic decision making or organisational complexity.

It is well understood the importance of leadership within an SME, however, there exists limited research on how the leadership styles, especially that of transformational leadership serves to impact SME growth. Transformational leadership is associated with inspiration and the promotion of innovative thinking for team and is relevant for SMEs in that it can assist in making the business competitive and adaptable (Yangailo, 2023). Nielsen et al. (2008) suggests that transformational leaders can generate a commitment in their teams to the mission of the organisation and enables these team members to look past their own personal interests.

The problem that is to be addressed by this research is whether the transformational leadership style can effectively address the constraints faced by SMEs, to aid this business to successfully navigate the organisational growth phases as described by Greiner's Growth Model.

1.2 Context of the Study in South Africa

In South Africa the issue of unemployment is well documented, with the unemployment rate further contributing to high levels of inequality amongst the country's citizens. The Gini coefficient of South Africa (SA) is one of the highest in the world and in 2023 it was indicated to be 0.63 (Dyvik, 2024). Francis and Webster (2019) place emphasis that in SA almost half of the country's citizens are poverty stricken. Coupled with the issue of high rates of unemployment, is that of the high inflation rates and stagnant economic growth facing the country, which when combined further the high levels of inequality in the country. These issues are required to be addressed to improve the wellbeing of both the country's people and the economy. Economic growth is a potential solution to address the issues that are plaguing the country as it can serve as a catalyst for investment and the creation of jobs which in turn, aids in the reducing the poverty rate and improving the quality of people's lives.

South Africa's difficult past has played a role in the encouragement of individuals to start SMEs, as large groups of the population were not allowed to participate in the country's economy. Governments drive to accelerate the participation of previously disadvantage individuals into the economy, resulted in the implementation of policies that sought to promote the creation of SMEs (Musabayana & Mutambara, 2022). These policies were in the form of the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act 53 of 2003, which served to encourage the involvement of previously disadvantage individuals. Bhorat et al. (2018) indicated that SMEs serve as a potential medium to address unemployment, promote inclusivity and grow the South African economy. It must be noted that this sentiment of the power of SMEs within a country, is a globally accepted view in which SMEs can promote economic growth, contribute to job creation, improve social aspects of citizens lives in the form of addressing both poverty and social equality in developing and undeveloped countries.

One of the key drivers of economic growth for a nation, is that of the creation and sustainability of SMEs, as these entities are major employers within a country and

serve to contribute to social stability in the areas in which they operate from. Kalidas et al. (2020) quantifies that SMEs serve to employ approximately 50 to 60% of South Africa's workforce. In doing so, these organisations make contributions to the development of local economies, using local resources and supply chains.

SMEs are described as entities that push innovation as they seek new methods of doing things. Knezović and Drkić (2021) recognises that a transformational leadership style serves as one of the determinants for innovative behaviour. It is well understood that SMEs typically have a high rate of failure and the role in which leadership plays in driving organisational performance is important. Leadership in an SME serves as an important driver of success as they are the decision makers and steer the business towards the strategic goals. In South Africa the failure rate is significantly greater than that of other countries, with an estimated 70 to 80% of small businesses failing within five years of starting up their operations (TGS South Africa, 2020).

1.3 Leadership in SMEs

Good organisational performance can be achieved through fostering job satisfaction within its employee ranks and thereby leading to strong employee job performance. Organisational performance is directly influenced by employee performance, which serves as an indicator to judge organisational efficiency and productivity (Na-Nan et al., 2018). In the case of employees both their attitudes and performance are impacted by both the organisational culture and social relationships they have at work (Berberoglu, 2018). However, in the case of an SME the organisational performance is highly dependent on the leaders as their leadership style has a direct impact on the performance of the business (Manzoor et al., 2019). Nguyen et al. (2021) frame why this is case as the leadership has influence on the firm strategies and is the decision maker within the firm. Due to the decision making powers that reside with SMEs, they in comparison to larger businesses have a greater impact on the firm performance and growth trajectory of a business (Soomro et al., 2019).

SMEs differ from those larger companies in that they can take risks and capture opportunities in the market. The concept of entrepreneurial leadership is expressed by Nguyen et al. (2021), in which it is stated to be the crossover of entrepreneurship and leadership. This translates to ensuring that the performance of an SME by providing guidance and directing the talent of the company's employees. Entrepreneurial leadership lends itself to being more discretionary in nature, whereby

leaders often allow for freedom in the decision making by their employees. However, this leadership style also does allow for the leaders to evolve based on the position of the organisation at the time (Nguyen et al., 2021). This aspect of entrepreneurial leadership aligns itself with transformational leadership as Manzoor et al. (2019) describes transformational leadership as a style through which a leader works closely with teams to identify aspects that need to change and works together with the team to drive this change. One of the reasons for this is that transformational leaders can manage organisational resources such that they can perform better (Qalati et al., 2022).

The ability that SMEs must adapt and evolve through the various phases of an organisational lifecycle is a defining characteristic of SMEs. Initially, they start as small startups with a primary focus on planning and growth strategies. As these enterprises mature, they develop more structured organisational frameworks and acquire skilled workers necessary for executing their tasks effectively. The dynamic nature of SMEs necessitates a shift in leadership styles as the organisation progresses through its lifecycle. Early stages may benefit from transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision, inspiration, and change management. As the enterprise grows and requires more formal structures and processes, a shift towards transactional leadership becomes essential. This style focuses on clear roles, responsibilities, and performance-based rewards, which are crucial for maintaining efficiency and achieving operational goals.

1.4 Challenges Facing SMEs

The county has seen significant growth in the number of SMEs, with The Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA, 2022) reporting that in 2022 alone they were additional 148,000 firms in the country up by 5.9% when compared to 2021. However, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic brought about a sharp decrease in the number of SMEs that exist within the country. This however has since changed as these numbers have rebounded, with the number of SMEs in South Africa in 2022 being in the region of 1.7 million with a contribution of 30% to the nation's total employment (Opperman, 2023). A deeper investigation of SMEs indicates that approximately 15% of these businesses are located within rural areas and have been started due to an individual's need for a source of income (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OCED], 2022).

SMEs across the globe are faced with numerous challenges and because of these challenges there lies the potential for high rates of failure. With Naicker and Rajaram (2019) stating that the challenges facing SMEs have risen over the past few years, due to the changes in the economic environment of which these companies operate within. In South Africa alone, SME failure rate is in the region of 60 to 80% within the first and second year of operating, this is around the highest failure rate in the world (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). According to Chen et al. (2022), The World Economic Forum (WEF) reported that in 2022, the survival and expansion rate for SMEs was 67%. Unlike larger entities SMEs do not have a multitude of resources, be it human or capital at their disposal and they often fail victim to failure as they run on very tight margins. Therefore, it is important to understand the mechanisms impacting SMEs and how SMEs can be protected for their contributions to be realised. SMEs are also subject to the same global risks that are faced by larger entities and in the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2024) Global Risk Report it is indicated that the world is likely to be faced with the following risks within the next two to ten years, illustrated in Figure 1.

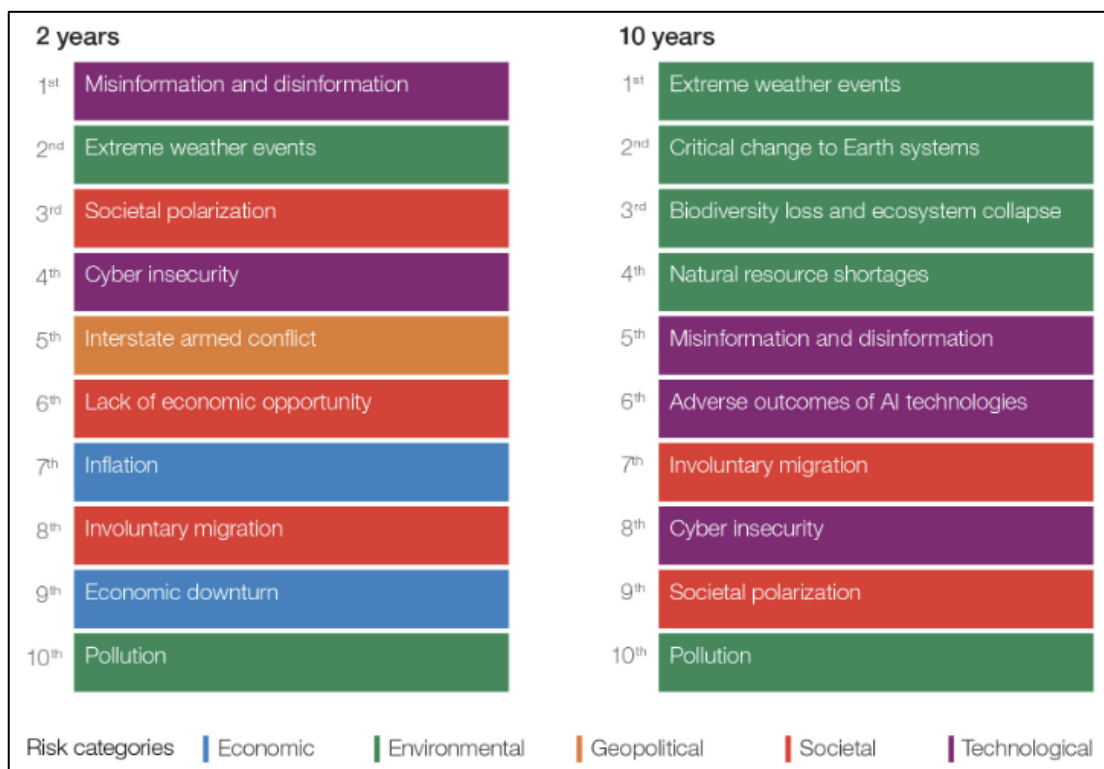


Figure 1: WEF Global Risks Outlook in two to ten years (WEF, 2024)

In the work by Bushe (2019) that centred on the causes of SME failure in South Africa the following key themes we identified:

- Entrepreneurial Capacity and Mindset
In this theme it was learnt that many of the SMEs in South Africa failed because of the owners or leaders do not have an entrepreneurial mindset, which requires them to focus on being proactive, being able to innovate and identify opportunities for growth thereby ensuring business sustainability.
- Financial Issues
Another failure mechanism impacting SMEs was the lack of financial support, as they did not have access to funding mechanisms which limited their ability to grow and innovate and, in some cases, to continue to operate. Together with the lack of access to funding was the aspect of financial mismanagement in the business.
- Leadership Competence
Leadership represented another key failure mechanism due to the incompetence of the leaders that they were not able to provide the business with the strategic direction and the ability to drive operations efficiently. This lack of effective leadership prevents the business from navigating periods of difficulty and does not improve low employee morale.
- Business Strategy
The lack of these SMEs to have a business strategy serves to contribute to their failure, as many of these businesses were started without a deep understanding of the sector in which they plan to operate. There is the failure to understand market trends and customer needs which inevitably leads to poor decision making.
- External Environment
No business is exempt to the external environment and in the case of SMEs this is particularly true. South Africa's challenges with electricity have significantly impacted business operations in the country, with many SMEs being forced to close due to the unavailability of electricity. The electricity issues coupled with the lack of government support systems, in the form of government initiatives and programs are further contributors to the demise of SMEs. The social issues facing the country such as high levels of unemployment, service disruptions which delay the supply of goods and services are also causes of SME failure.

SMEs serve countries by creating jobs, uplifting communities, and driving economic growth. In the case of SMEs these are entities that facilitate employment in countries

as employ individuals who are part of the least fortunate within country's economy (Maksimov et al., 2017). Ndiaye et al. (2018) indicate that SMEs are crucial to all economies and in the case of emerging economies they are understood to make up 60% of the total employment within an emerging economy.

The ability that SMEs must adapt and evolve through the various phases of an organisational lifecycle is a defining characteristic of SMEs. Initially, they start as small startups with a primary focus on planning and growth strategies. As these enterprises mature, they develop more structured organisational frameworks and acquire skilled workers necessary for executing their tasks effectively. The dynamic nature of SMEs necessitates a shift in leadership styles as the organisation progresses through its lifecycle. Early stages may benefit from transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision, inspiration, and change management. As the enterprise grows and requires more formal structures and processes, a shift towards transactional leadership becomes essential. This style focuses on clear roles, responsibilities, and performance-based rewards, which are crucial for maintaining efficiency and achieving operational goals.

1.5 Description of the Problem

Like with larger organisations, who typically start from humble beginnings and grow into multinational companies, SMEs are also forced to grow and develop to maintain their competitive advantage. SMEs initially start as small startups with a primary focus on growing and becoming sustainable. As these enterprises mature, they develop more structured organisational frameworks and acquire skilled workers necessary for executing their tasks effectively. The dynamic nature of SMEs necessitates a shift in leadership styles as the organisation progresses through its lifecycle. Early stages may benefit from transformational leadership, which emphasises vision, inspiration and change management. As the enterprise grows and requires more formal structures and processes, a shift towards transactional leadership becomes essential. This style focuses on clear roles, responsibilities, and performance-based rewards, which are crucial for maintaining efficiency and achieving operational goals. The problem facing SMEs is that there exists no defined processes or procedures that dictate what is to be done, unlike larger companies who have a dedicated structure which serves to dictate the organisational requirements and the vision as to where the company is to end up at.

This research aims to explore the value of transformational leadership of a leader of a SME and how transformational leadership can hold back the evolution of an SME, thereby impacting organisational performance and sustainability. By examining the factors influencing this transition, the study seeks to provide insights into best practices for leadership within SMEs, ultimately contributing to their success and longevity. Understanding these dynamics is vital for policymakers, business leaders, and stakeholders who are committed to supporting the SME sector and leveraging its potential for economic development in South Africa. With the overall aim being to contribute to the field of SMEs and leadership.

1.6 Research Objectives and Scope

1.6.1 Research Objectives

The focus of this study is on the influence that leaders of SMEs have on the company's evolutionary life. Leaders in the context of an SME are the drivers of the organisation, their contributions are crucial for the SMEs. The success and sustainability of SMEs are crucial for South Africa and hence necessitates this study.

Therefore, the objective of this research is to understand the relationship between the evolutionary lifecycle of an SME and the transformational leadership style of the leader of an SME. By following a qualitative approach, the collected data that has been sourced from leaders of SMEs who serve to navigate their businesses through the evolutionary life cycle of their business.

1.6.2 Research Scope

The scope of the study serves to illustrate the boundaries of this research and specifies what the study is to focus on. For this research study the focus is on SMEs in South Africa as they are major contributors to the country's economy and will focus on leaders from SMEs who will serve to provide the data. An exploratory study will be used to understand how leadership style changes in each of the various organisational life cycles. To best understand the influence of transformational leadership style on organisational success through the evolution of an SME, the research study will make use of semi-structured interviews. These interviews will allow the researcher to obtain lived experiences of leaders of SMEs. However, it is anticipated that the insights gained from this research can be applied to SMEs outside of South Africa.

1.7 Importance of the Study

The relevance and importance of SMEs to both a nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), reducing unemployment and addressing inequality issues that were illustrated in the sections above. In the context of South Africa, the economic growth and improvements in unemployment levels, which strongly benefit the country and its people. A major contributor that can ensure SMEs are successful in meeting these aspects is that of leadership. Due to the size of the company and the influence a leader of an SME their contributions are crucial. This research has significant impact, on understanding leadership style within an SME and how this contributes or inhibits the growth of the business. The other critical aspect is that SMEs like other businesses are required to evolve to maintain their competitive advantage. Leaders of SMEs are the drivers of how the company approaches their evolution. Therefore, by performing the study, we can gather relevant and meaningful insights as to how an SMEs is best placed to better ensure higher levels of success and therefore reducing the high failure rate. Even though the study has high importance within the South African context, given the country's issues, this study has a potential to take the insights gained and apply these to other developing nations who are in a similar position to South Africa.

1.7.1 Academic Need for the Research

There is a need from an academic perspective for this research, in that the literature on SMEs in developing countries is limited. Within the field of SMEs, the literature that exists in terms of developing countries is minimal (Knezović & Drkić, 2021). The position of an SME as a contributor to the economy makes the understanding of these companies important.

By looking at leadership and that of transformational leadership in South African SMEs, the theory that is gained through the insights from leaders can be used to contribute to both existing leadership theory and in SME theory for developing countries. The contribution of this research can be to entrepreneurial leadership theory who is focused on how the management and development of small businesses is undertaken by SME leaders (Simba & Thai, 2019).

Another academic contribution brought about by this research is to the field of organisational behaviour theory, as this is something that is critical in the case of an SME, due to the sheer size and the close interactions that leaders of SMEs have with the employees in driving organisational success. Organisational behaviour centres

on the relationships between individuals in the organisation and how these interactions influence the company success (Crail, 2024).

The researcher aims on refining and expanding on existing theories within the context of SMEs. In doing so they plan to add into the space of transformational leadership by exploring how the existing theories play a role within the space of an SME in South Africa and in the evolution of the organisation. In doing so there will be contributions to the fields of transformational leadership, organisational evolution and SMEs.

1.7.2 Business Need for the Research

SMEs hold a pivotal role in contributing to economic growth and prosperity of a country. Dobrovic et al. (2018), stresses that presence of SMEs serves as indicators of a healthy economy and are a valuable driver of a nation's economic development. The relevance of SMEs is noted by the Banking Association of South Africa (BASA, 2021) to contribute to 91% of formalised businesses within the country. Therefore, their position in the economy is crucial for any country. These entities are plagued with high rates of failure and as a result an understanding as to how to ensure organisational success is important.

The business need for this research is such that it will allow for a deeper insight into SMEs and how transformational leadership transitions from the start-up to the mature phases of a business and what is the influence it has in SME performance. By understanding this relationship, it would assist SMEs to formulate business strategies and help financial institutions to provide guidelines and or policies that SMEs can implement. Leadership within the context of an SME plays a significant role in aiding the business to overcome challenges, driving innovation and promoting growth, to achieve these leaders of SMEs pull together the company's resources. Soriano and Martínez (2007) highlights the importance of leaders in SMEs as they can create groups who work together in a collaborative manner to be successful. Therefore, understanding how the leadership style evolves as the SME progresses through their organisational life, provides vital insights into the resilience of an SME. These valuable insights that are gained are not only applicable to South Africa but has relevance for the entire global business community as SMEs are present in countries across the globe. For example, in the case of the European Union, SMEs are contributors to 99% of enterprises and provide employment to over 100 million people (Herr & Nettekoven, 2017).

1.8 Structure of the Research

The outline of the background and contributions associated in undertaking this research study is presented in this chapter, Chapter one. In chapter two, the literature review presents the existing theory related to this research study and the gaps that have been identified in the current literature. Chapter three presents the research question and propositions that have been designed using the research objectives and available literature. The methodology and the design to be followed in undertaking the research study is illustrated in Chapter four of this report. With this chapter further detailing how the researcher will collect and analyse the data, together with the justifications as to why this methodology was chosen. In Chapter five the findings from the data collection process are articulated, which will then be critically discussed and analysed in Chapter six. Finally, the study will be closed out by Chapter seven in which the researcher will conclude and provide recommendations for both business and academia. Additionally the limitations of the research and the suggestions for future research into the field will also be presented in Chapter seven.

1.9 Conclusion

SMEs are crucial components that drive a country economy and therefore both their longevity and successes is required to be well understood. In undertaking this research, the researcher set out to understand how leaders within SMEs influence organisational success. Therefore, an exploration into how transformational leadership influences the evolution of an SME is required. This chapter served to provide an overview of the research problem, the purpose and the contributions to be made in completing the research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provided an overview of the literature reviewed as part of this research study. The review focused on current literature, particularly on transformational leadership and is structured to explore organisational evolution within the context of SMEs. The chapter explored SMEs in South Africa, leadership theory and organisational evolution theory, followed by the identification of the gaps within existing literature. The objective of this literature review was to gain a deeper insight into the research topic and to determine how this study will be positioned within the context of current knowledge. Additionally, the review sought to identify relevant models or frameworks that could support this research project. By understanding the literature and identifying the gaps, research propositions can be developed, which will then be addressed during the in the data collection process.

2.2 Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

2.2.1 SMEs in South Africa

The National Small Enterprise Act of 1986 initially defined small enterprises as businesses managed by a single owner with a focus on one sector of the economy. In 2019, this was amended to incorporate the aspect of turnover threshold values (Department of Small Business Development [DSBD], 2019). The inclusion of these amendments served to better classify businesses within the SME landscape. However, even though the South African government has set out specific categories for these enterprises, as presented in the figure below, they are generally all referred to as SMEs.

According to Motsomi et al. (2021), the SME landscape of South Africa is such that in 2020 the number of SMEs were 3.2 million, an increase by about 14% from 2010. Not only does the presence of SMEs aid in creating employment for the citizens of South Africa, it benefits the country by contributing to the GDP and thereby adding to economic growth. Fatoki (2018) suggested that SMEs serve to contribute to the following areas in South Africa which are unemployment, economic growth and addressing social inequality.

However, one crucial aspect associated with SMEs is their rate of failure, with their performance being a driver for this failure. Yusoff et al. (2018) stated that within the SME space 80% of these entities do not survive the initial three years. Thus, an

understanding as to how the performance of SMEs can be maintained and grown such that these companies can become pillars of a country's economy is important. These issues are key for South Africa as the country faces a myriad of issues and challenges which make starting and operating a business difficult in such a hostile environment (Fatoki, 2018).

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
Sectors	Size or class of enterprise	Total full-time equivalent of paid employees	Total annual turnover
Agriculture	Medium	51-250	< 35.0 million
	Small	11-50	<17.0 million
	Micro	0-10	<7.0 million
Mining and Quarrying	Medium	51-250	<210.0 million
	Small	11-50	<50.0 million
	Micro	0-10	<15.0 million
Manufacturing	Medium	51-250	<170.0 million
	Small	11-50	<50.0 million
	Micro	0-10	<10.0 million
Electricity, Gas and Water	Medium	51-250	<180.0 million
	Small	11-50	<60.0 million
	Micro	0-10	<10.0 million
Construction	Medium	51-250	<170.0 million
	Small	11-50	<75.0 million
	Micro	0-10	<10.0 million
Retail, motor trade and repair services	Medium	51-250	<80.0 million
	Small	11-50	<25.0 million
	Micro	0-10	<7.5 million
Wholesale	Medium	51-250	<220.0 million
	Small	11-50	<80.0 million
	Micro	0-10	<20.0 million
Catering, Accommodation and other Trade	Medium	51-250	<40.0 million
	Small	11-50	<15.0 million
	Micro	0-10	<5.0 million
Transport, Storage and Communications	Medium	51-250	<140.0 million
	Small	11-50	<45.0 million
	Micro	0-10	<7.5 million
Finance and Business Services	Medium	51-250	<85.0 million
	Small	11-50	<35.0 million
	Micro	0-10	<7.5 million
Community, Social and Personal Services	Medium	51-250	<70.0 million
	Small	11-50	<22.0 million
	Micro	0-10	<5.0 million

Figure 2: Classification of small enterprises in South Africa (DSBD, 2019)

SMEs are faced with the same economic challenges of larger firms but are more likely to not survive based on the unavailability of resources unlike their larger counterparts. To cope with such difficulty SMEs, display resilience which enables them to adapt to change and provides them with the ability to be able to innovate to navigate such challenges (Thukral, 2021). Bak et al. (2020) stated that one aspect

which aids SMEs to be resilient is their lack of tangible assets unlike larger businesses, this makes it easier for them to make changes quickly in response to changing market conditions. The concept of resilience is important for the ability of an SME to grow and evolve during the context of its life and this ability differs for each company with some able to better respond to changes faster than other during periods of uncertainty (Dias et al., 2022).

2.2.2 Contributions of SMEs

The area of SMEs was looked at and it became clear that they are an important cog within a country's economic landscape. Eldridge et al. (2021) noted the importance of SMEs as a major business unit that is a source of economic growth. Together with this is the benefits SMEs yield in terms of both job creation and their contributions to a nation's GDP. South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) focused on the role of SMEs to drive inclusive growth and development (Bhorat et al., 2018). Looking at countries within the European Union (EU), SMEs served to employ 45.18% of citizens but only account for 9.63% of companies in the region (Erdin & Ozkaya, 2020).

Erdin and Ozkaya (2020) described that the true value of SMEs lies with their ability to be agile in adapting to changes in economic conditions. Their ability to be flexible and undertake faster decision making in response to both client and market requirements because of their organisational structures, differentiates them from larger entities (Gherghina et al., 2020).

A closer inspection into the contributions made by SMEs show that these businesses employed almost 13 million people in the form of full, part-time and seasonal workers (Motsomi et al., 2021). This was a significant improvement in employment numbers with the employment contribution by SMEs being 9.7 million in 2010 (Motsomi et al., 2021). The World Bank (2019) reported that employment was the major contributor of SMEs with these businesses accounting for over 50% of employment across the globe and with the world requiring over 600 million jobs by 2030 the role of SMEs becomes more critical than ever.

SMEs as stated by Erdin and Ozkaya (2020) can utilise new technologies due to the flexibility of their business. Another important factor associated with SMEs, is that they are typically able to navigate issues like global market downturns better in comparison to larger companies as they do not require goods that are imported. This

was clear when Indonesia experienced their economic crisis in 1998, which forced many larger companies to declare bankruptcy and smaller companies to continue to operate as they were able to serve the domestic market (Tambunan, 2019).

The contribution of SMEs to the economy is not isolated to South Africa but is a global phenomenon, due to the nature of their size and ability to be flexible, these businesses are easily adaptable to changes. South Africa's Nation Development Plan discusses the importance of SMEs in the country's economy, as contributors to economic growth and employment. According to Matekenya and Moyo (2022), SMEs are contributed to 56% of employment and around 45% to the nation's GDP.

2.2.3 Evolution of SMEs

SMEs are required to evolve to ensure their long term sustainability. Zamani (2022) recognised that SMEs are facing new challenges each day and are required to adapt to remain relevant. This adaptation by an SME is through the concept of evolution in which there is a change in something that a firm undergoes (Odlin, 2019). These changes have long been described using the life cycle model that has been adapted from biology. Poisson-de Haro and Normandin (2020) best explained the life cycle approach for organisational change is based on five phases: the initial phase the birth phase, the growth phase, the maturity phase, the revival phase and finally the death phase, as seen in Figure 3.

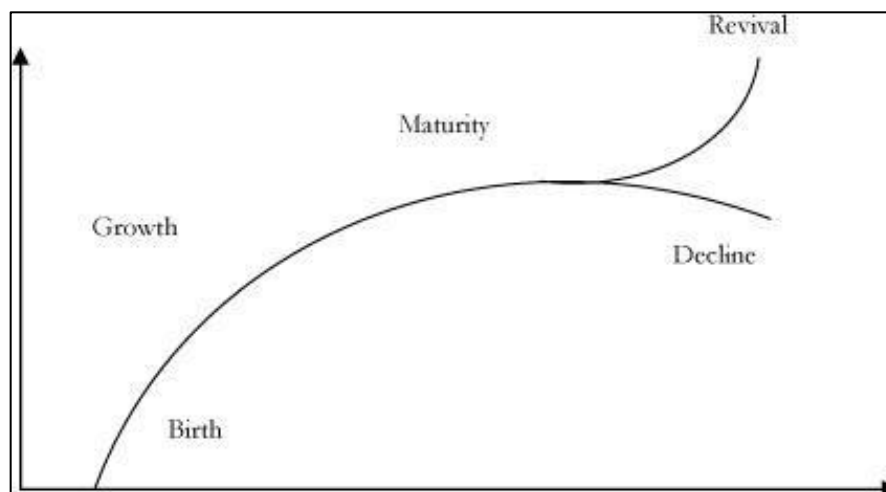


Figure 3: Life cycle of organisations (Monticelli et al., 2019)

Throughout each of these phases there is a transition in the management approach which impacts both the organisational direction and performance. Applying the life cycle model to the evolution of an SME, it can be found that each of these phases are characterised by the following (Poisson-de Haro & Normandin, 2020):

- Birth stage – this is at the start-up of the business, with the owner playing a central role and being the sole decision maker. The business operates informally and is focused on their survival and the acquisition of customers.
- Growth stage – there is a shift towards some form of formal structure with the business growing their operations and customer base, leading to decision making becoming decentralised.
- Maturity stage – growth has slowed down and the business seeks to maintain their position in the market. The business has implemented a management structure that is very formalised.
- Revival stage – businesses seek to transition into the next phase by increasing their competitive advantage. They have now shifted to operate in a divisional structure.
- Decline stage – there has been a shift back to a conservative approach which is characterised by low levels of innovation. This is leading to the business struggling to compete and being operational in the long run.

For an organisation to grow there are areas which are not all under the control of the organisation but are subject to external factors. For SMEs to grow, Ndiaye et al., (2018) provided the following areas which influence their ability to grow and develop within the economy:

- Access to finance – financial institutions often view SMEs as risky investment options due to the lack of comprehensive financial records. In instances where an SME can secure funding, they are faced with high premiums for banks to mitigate the risks.
- Firm characteristics – the size and age of the firm serve as factors that influence SME business performance.
- Availability of infrastructure – serves as obstacles facing the SMEs and in developing countries this is a major issue.
- Informal nature of business – SMEs that operate in an informal nature, often lends this behaviour to the firm not being able to grow and the staff not to have formal working structures.
- Innovation ability – SMEs that can innovate are often able to achieve organisational success and to grow.
- Legal landscape – contributes to whether the business environment is favourable or not, through effective taxation rates and government policies.

- Workforce – employees of SMEs are drivers of the performance of SME, both in the case of non-financial and financial performance.

In the work by Lakuma et al. (2019) which investigated the growth of SMEs in Uganda, the above factors that contribute to the drivers of growth or an SME were supported, with the addition of the concept of bribery as illustrated in Figure 4. This aspect serves as transaction in which a firm pays to get things done, with Lakuma et al. (2019) reported that in their work 24% of firms stated outright that they offered a bribe to get things done.

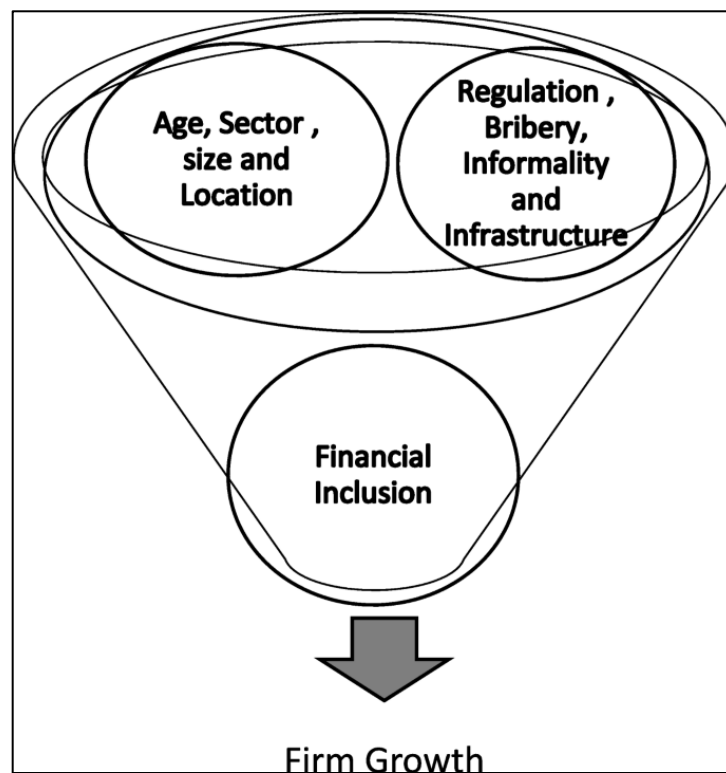


Figure 4: Factors contributing to SME growth (Lakuma et al., 2019)

2.3 Leadership Theory

Leaders are important facilitators of organisational success, as their actions significantly influence both employee morale and business decisions. Therefore, understanding leadership styles is crucial to gain insights into what motivates leaders and how they interact with their teams. Connolly et al. (2019) stated that all leadership theory is focused on three aspects of leadership which are: the level of respect awarded to those looking to influence others, the objective of the task at hand and the level of authority held by the influencing person. It is therefore then important to understand how the leadership style serves to influence the outcomes of a business both in the short and long term.

2.3.1 Different Leadership Styles

The field of leadership has received extensive attention and there has been a lot of contributions to the field. Through the seminal work of Burns (1976), we learnt that leadership can be distinguished into transformational or be transactional leadership. This classification into two distinct categories essentially served to indicate that employee performance can be achieved through transformational leadership which focuses on inspiring employees and transactional leadership that focuses on rewarding employees (Ellen, 2016). However, it was learnt later through Bass and Avolio (1993) that there is a third aspect to this, which is avoidant or passive leadership. Passive leadership centres on a leader's ability to allow their employees to make decisions until such a point where they are required to step-in (Guhr et al., 2019).

2.3.2.1 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership theory has been a well-established body of knowledge, having been studied for over 40 years. Siangchokyoo et al. (2020) described it as one of the most researched leadership styles. According to Anderson (2017), transformational leadership is defined as a leader who identifies and inspires change within the members of the team. In the context of SMEs, this is critical as the leaders are the primary decision-makers and the decisions made by them impact the business and its employees. While Yangailo (2023), defined transformational leaders as being inspirational and creative, which they leverage off to guide their employees to perform at a high level.

Much of the foundational work on transformational leadership is still relevant today. Avolio et al. (1991) provided four distinct characteristics of transformational leaders, which are the following:

- Individualised consideration – the leaders have a focused approach on the individual needs of employees, this enables them to harness employee strengths and develop their respective weaknesses.
- Intellectual stimulation – these leaders are characterised by their problem solving approaches that are aligned to both organisation objectives and their own personal values. This enables leaders to have the ability to lead their teams to follow suit with new ways of thinking.

- Inspirational motivation – leaders are seen as role models whom through their behavioural displays are perceived as role models by their employees and offer them inspiration.
- Individualised influence – leaders who show their employees what can be achieved through respect, open communication and building trust. They can motivate employees to achieve their full potential, which would be beneficial for themselves and that of the organisation.

It is well understood that leadership within an organisation serve as the drivers for both success and sustainability. For SMEs, the role of leadership is especially crucial due to the smaller size and the greater dependency of the organisation on leadership decisions. Given their limited resources, SMEs cannot ignore the contribution of their leaders, who are instrumental in driving the organisation forward and ensuring long-term sustainability, who display a transformational leadership style have charisma and can inspire their team through the vision and mission for the business (Bednall et al., 2018).

As discussed, the entrepreneurial leadership style common in SMEs aligns with transformational leadership. Knezović and Drkić (2021) explained that transformational leaders display creative behaviour that links employee performance with organisational outcomes. This aspect is critical in the early phases of the organisational life of the business, as transformational leaders motivate employees to achieve the organisations goals rather than focusing on their own interests (Qalati et al., 2022).

According to Qalati et al. (2022), the characteristics displayed by transformational leaders is that they add value to SMEs by stimulating innovation, showing influence, being considerate and motivate their teams. In the context of SMEs, a transformational leader focuses on the bigger picture rather than their own needs. These leaders share a vision, which their team can buy into, ensuring the alignment with organisational goals. Their charisma and focus enable their teams to trust and have confidence in them (Niessen et al., 2017). Moreover, Lai et al., (2020) stated that transformational leaders provide personal attention to team members, creating a supportive workspace for growth.

Examining this in the context of the organisational evolution of SMEs, a transformational leadership style has a significant role in guiding the employees through the evolutionary life of the business. This kind of influence can be both

positive and negative depending on the individual and how they apply the transformational leadership style. In terms of the advantages of transformational leadership, Spalding University (2023) described these as the following:

- Employees are motivated
- Open and honest working environment
- Low staff turnover
- Innovation and professional development encouraged

Comparing this to the disadvantages associated with transformational leadership which are as follows (Spalding University, 2023):

- Focused on long-term goals over the short-term
- Slow decision making due to communication required with all parties
- Potential for burnout for leaders and employees through behaviour or constant innovation

2.3.2.2 Transactional Leadership

A well-known theory is that of transactional leadership which takes place every single day across the globe, whereby employees are rewarded for the completion of a task (Cho et al., 2019). Using rewards, employee's self-interest is forced to align to that of the organisation's goals (Susanto et al., 2023). This method or approach serves as a tool to motivate employees and direct their behaviour in such a manner that it is positioned to benefit the organisation. Jacobsen et al., (2022) indicated that this type of leadership style is based on the principle of reward through which bonuses, praise and the potential loss of employment is such that employees experience extrinsic motivation. This leadership approach differs from that of the transformational leadership style whose focus is on inspiring employees to perform as can be seen in Figure 5.

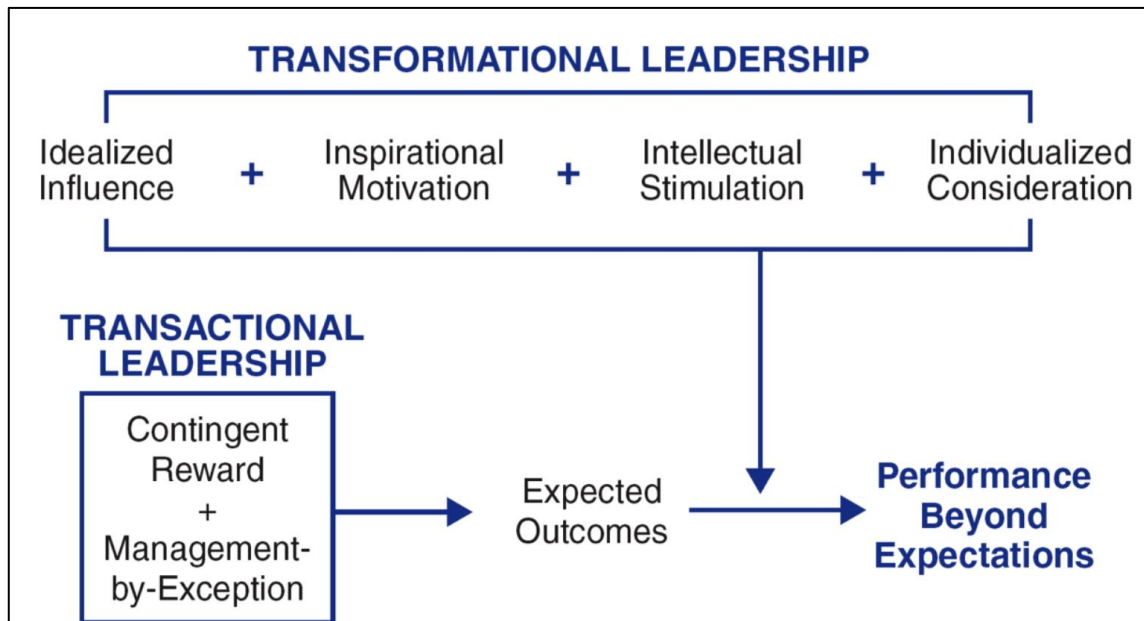


Figure 5: Transformational vs Transactional Leadership (El Nour, 2021)

To get the employees to align with the organisational goals, leaders displaying this leadership style show traits such as problem solving, planning and organisational skills (Tavanti, 2008). These leaders are required to ensure that employees remain motivated as some tasks may end prior to the employees receiving their reward and as a result would still need to be motivated to ensure that the contract between the organisation and the employees is maintained. Abbas and Ali (2023) denoted that transactional leaders are required to monitor their employees and step-in when required to ensure that they can deliver on their assigned tasks.

Due to the nature of how transactional leadership works this kind of leadership style is best suited to work or tasks that are more routine in nature and do not require the employees to be innovative (Abbas & Ali, 2023). The approach followed by transactional leadership can be viewed in a negative light as the drive to simply complete tasks can lead a business to become complacent and therefore lose their competitive advantage. Cui et al. (2022) identified that in instances where there is employee innovation, it is typically limited to the task at hand to achieve short term rewards.

Due to the nature of an SME being adaptable and not having prescribed rules to follow, the transactional leadership approach is not favoured in the life of the business as transactional leadership lends itself to leaders who are focused on complying with designated rules and procedures (Boukamcha, 2019). This type of leadership style is best suited for an SME who is well-established and is seeking a

shift into the next stage of their organisational life cycle and not within the infancy phase.

2.3.2.3 Passive Leadership

In the case of passive leadership, this is a leadership style totally devoid of any leadership impact as these are leaders who avoid responsibility (Franco & Matos, 2015). Passive leadership is associated with an absent leader with Vullingsh et al. (2020) indicating that the characteristic of this leadership style is that leaders do not interact with their employees. This lack of interaction by leaders of the business is in the form of support through the provision of important information or feedback (Vullingsh et al., 2020). Sims et al. (2021) stated that passive leadership is likely to yield a negative relationship between leaders of a business and their employees. This is as leaders are perceived to be aloof and not aware of what is going on within the business. Leaders adhering to a passive leadership style have difficulty making business decisions, do not serve as role models for proper workforce behaviour and are not aware of the workplace issues facing the staff (Adeel et al., 2018).

Passive leadership is classified as a destructive or negative form of leadership style due to the lack of interest from leaders, who typically set out to only take notice of problems when there frequently rise (Chênevert et al., 2015).

Much work has gone into the exploration of a passive leadership style on an organisation and the results are such that there is largely a negative view when following this leadership style (Harold & Holtz, 2015). This negative impact on a business was through a case of psychological distress and via increases an employee injury (Harold & Holtz, 2015).

Laissez-faire leadership is a passive leadership approach that is typically seen in business. This type of leadership approach which is focused on the leader of the business being avoidant and non-responsive (Ågotnes et al., 2018). In the case of laissez-faire leadership, this approach is associated with the employees making all the decisions and leadership presence is non-existent. Thanh and Quang (2022) stated that in the case of laissez-faire leadership the benefit is that it serves to promote innovation and decision making within the business as employees do not have a manager to seek approval from. With this leadership approach comes the negative aspects that result that include the avoidance of problems within the organisation, which results in the employees being left frustrated and demoralised

as they do not have the support from their leaders (Ågotnes et al., 2018). Lundmark et al. (2022) indicated that managers who practice this form of leadership style are viewed to avoid their responsibilities, fail to support employees needs and ignore work related issues.

2.4 Organisational Evolution

Growth is required for any organisation to maintain their presence within the market as with time customer preferences change, their technology changes and new markets are identified. In looking at organisational evolution this is referring to how an organisation transitions through the various stages of development across their existence, from start-up, to growth, to maturity and finally to death or a change in direction. For SMEs the case of organisational evolution, holds true in that you have a company that is starting-up or that has started-up and is looking to grow within the market. These are businesses that transition through the organisational evolutionary stages as resources become available, such as finance, human resources and or the access to customers. The Greiner Growth Model is a classical tool that highlights the various stages of organisational evolution, with Hotamişli et al. (2009) stating that it is a model that has been accepted by organisation theorists.

2.4.1 Greiner Growth Model

The evolution of an organisation has well been researched and through the seminal work of Greiner a useful model has been developed. Greiner's Growth Model is a theoretical model that was developed in 1972 and serves to describe the phases of growth for an organisation.

According to Greiner's model (Mosca et al., 2021) there are sequences of evolution and revolution. The model that is depicted in Figure 6, shows that during their life organisations, transition between periods of evolution and revolution, with Greiner (1997) defining these as the following:

- Evolution – this refers to periods of growth within the business
- Revolution – this refers to periods when the business is in turmoil

Greiner indicates that in the model, each of the evolutionary and revolutionary periods are characterised by the dominant management style and dominant management problem. The dominant management style, that takes place in the evolutionary period, serves to enable growth whilst the dominant management

problem, that takes place in the revolutionary period, is required to be solved before growth can take place (Greiner, 1997).

In both periods, organisations are required to make changes, which places demands on management. Greiner (1998) highlighted that there are five elements interact to prescribe the direction of an organisation's development. Greiner's five elements are the age of the organisation, the size of the organisation, the stages of evolution, the stages of revolution, and the growth rate of the industry (Greiner, 1998).

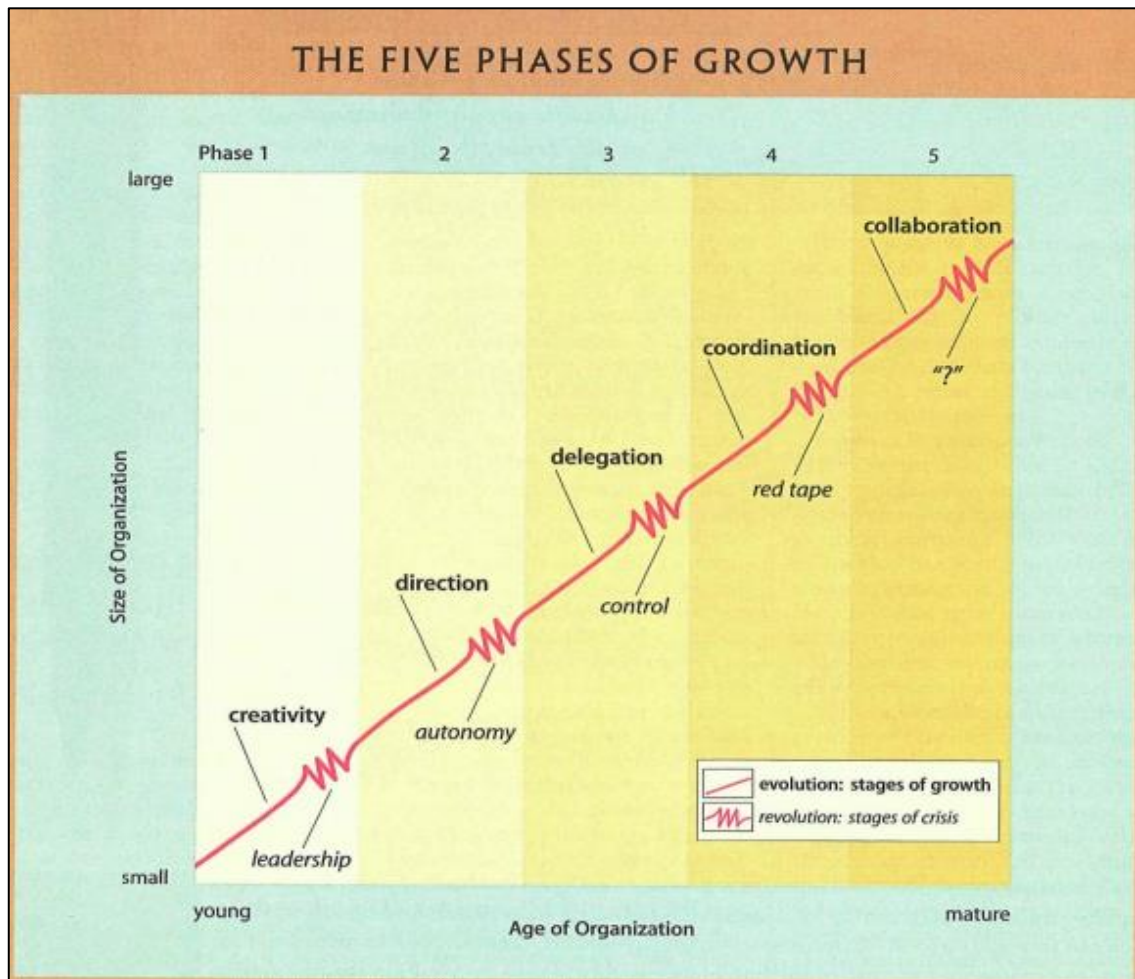


Figure 6: Greiner's five elements for organisational development (Greiner, 1998)

Figure 6 also depicts that there are five phases of growth in the Greiner Growth model. These phases transition between one another, with Greiner (1998) stating that each of the phase's serves is due to the previous phase. The details of these five growth phases are presented in Table 1 (Greiner, 1998).

Table 1: Details of the Greiner Growth Phases

Phase	Description	Characteristics
Creativity	This is the initial stage of the organisation, where the focus is on the creation of the product and market for the offering. Leadership style is that the owner or entrepreneur is responsible for all decision making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Founders are usually technically or entrepreneurially focused with their attention focused on the new product. • Communication style in the business is informal. • Long work hours with little reward. • Business is responsive to customer reactions.
Direction	Organisation has survived its infancy period and is now under a period of growth, under directive leadership even though there are managers in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational structure is introduced to create the separation of job activities. • Formal enterprises systems implemented for the business operations. • Communication shift to be more formal. • New management start to assume the responsibility for instituting direction.
Delegation	There is continued growth, with the decision making having seen a shift as the company has moved towards a decentralised structure allowing for the delegation of authority.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision making powers are now greater for individual sites. • Management is concentrated on outside activities. • Communication is hierarchal and is

		infrequent when coming from the top.
Coordination	Organisation is still on their growth trajectory. There are formal systems in place which allows for the leadership to become more collaborative, which contributes to greater coordination and teamwork across the departments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grouping different decentralised units into product groups. • Capital expenditures are carefully assessed and allocated across the organisation. • Certain functions and strategic decision making become centralised.
Collaboration	The presence of formalised systems has resulted in slow decision making. Management is required to exercise greater spontaneity in their decision making whilst ensuring that there is social control and self-discipline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift towards quickly solving problems. • Simplification of formal control systems. • Focus on the use of real-time information into decision-making processes.

From the above, we can see that there is a continuation in the leadership approach from the creativity stage to the direction stage. Poisson-de Haro and Normandin (2020), discussed that this is the case as leaders who were initially focused on creativity and problem solving are now faced with making decisions across all areas of the business. Even with the hiring of new staff to help with the workload leaders need to allow for these new staff members to become aligned with the organisation's goals. Therefore, in these two stages leaders are subject to significant strain due to the growing complexity of the organisation.

Each of the growth phases are linked to a crisis phase, these phases are leadership, autonomy, control and red tape. These phases are described as follows (Greiner, 1997):

- Leadership – founders are under strain and cannot make all the decisions and this require support via the introduction of new managers.

- Autonomy – low level managers require greater autonomy in the decision making process.
- Control – disconnect in the management, with top executives feeling that they are losing control and lower level managers operating under their own without coordination.
- Red tape – criticism of the bureaucratic system involved in decision making.

In the work of Greiner (1997) they served to provide the management actions that are undertaken across each of the growth phases within organisational evolution.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Phase 1</i>	<i>Phase 2</i>	<i>Phase 3</i>	<i>Phase 4</i>	<i>Phase 5</i>
Management Focus	Make & Sell	Efficiency of Operations	Expansion of Market	Consolidation of Organization	Problem Solving & Innovation
Organization Structure	Informal	Centralized & Functional	Decentralized & Geographical	Line-staff & Product Groups	Matrix of Teams
Top Management Style	Individualistic & Entrepreneurial	Directive	Delegative	Watchdog	Participative
Control Systems	Market Results	Standards & Cost Centers	Reports & Profit Centers	Plans & Investment Centers	Mutual Goal Setting
Management Reward Emphasis	Ownership	Salary & Merit Increases	Individual Bonus	Profit Sharing & Stock Options	Team Bonus

Figure 7: Greiner's Five Phases (Greiner, 1998)

In each phase described by the figure above, there is a requisite for a distinct management approach to successfully navigate through these respective phases. The model presented by Greiner provides an exemplary framework for a research project aimed at exploring the organisational evolution of an SME. This model enables an in-depth examination of how the leadership style within the SME must adapt to effectively manage the demands and challenges associated with each phase of organisational development. Zaheer et al. (2022) placed particular emphasis that in Greiner's model as the organisation changes from one phase to the next the managerial skills differ. In Gutterman (2023) it is indicated that for an organisation to navigate the change and the resultant crisis's that are described by the Greiner model, it requires the founders of the organisation to delegate their authority to others within the business to direct the operations.

2.5 Gaps in Literature

SMEs and their contributions to the economy have been well documented, however a deeper understanding of why SMEs have difficulty surviving beyond a period of three years is important. The lack of research that exists is with regards to the survival of SMEs over a long period of time, with an understanding of these factors providing contributions to the long-term sustainability of an SME. With majority of the focus within the sector not looking at country's operating environment. This is a critical aspect especially in the case of South Africa whose SMEs are faced with a myriad of challenges all which are set out to contribute to their failure as discussed by Bushe (2019).

Together with this is the influence that SME leaders have on the business and how through their leadership style are they able to impact the business in a positive way enabling the growth of the SME over its organisational life. Leaders of SMEs represent one of the most important aspects for organisational success and their actions or lack of action has significant impact on the business trajectory therefore an exploration into how this impact, is translated across the businesses operational life will yield highly important insights.

Leadership theory has been well researched and a focus on leadership theory within the context of an SME grown significantly over the years. However, the gap within the space is the lack of focus within organisational performance over a period in an SME rather than a focus at a singular point, in time and what is the effect of an SME leaders' style is on the growth of the business. Many of the previous works have focused on the various influencing factors which determine a leader's style and focused on specific business sectors, such as manufacturing or within the tech fields. Transformational leadership is carried out early in the life of an SME, however it has not been explored whether this form of leadership has an influence at the latter stages of the SME life cycle. The charismatic characteristics of transformational leaders may serve to impede decision-making which has the potential to prevent the growing of business operations.

Several different organisational theory models were presented, and it became apparent that across these models there exists a level of commonality. These similarities either lie with the number of stages of organisational evolution, the drivers of evolution be it external or internal and when is this evolution triggered. For the purposes of this study, Greiner's model offers the potentially best option to be used

in adhering to a framework for organisational evolution. Together with this is that Luigi et al. (2021) stated that there are periods of organisational evolution are driven by organisational turmoil. SMEs are perfect businesses who are faced with multiple contributors to turmoil. The model serves as an effective tool that can be used to understand how businesses navigate the turmoil and what strategies leaders utilise. Greiner's model serves an effective tool for this research as it enables the researcher to better understand how businesses evolve and what are the management activities at each of these respective stages.

It is important to understand that as businesses grow, the leadership style needs to evolve to adapt to these changes and an understanding of this is required to note whether there is a disconnect between the leadership style and structure of the SME. SMEs continue to fail at high rates across the globe, in the context of South Africa these failures need to be reduced as they are both detrimental to the people and the country's economy. Therefore, the relevance of this research is that by the researcher addressing these gaps, the contribution is such that there will be a better understanding of SMEs in South Africa and how these businesses grow and the impact that their leadership has on them through this growth.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided a review of the relevant literature associated with leadership in SMEs, with a focus on transformational leadership and organisational evolutionary theory. There was an examination of the importance of SMEs in the context of South Africa and the failure mechanisms of these SMEs. Transformational leadership was highlighted to be a driver of innovation and resilience especially in the context of an SME. The transactional and passive leadership styles are understood to be relevant when the organisation is in a more stable state as they are not drivers of creativity and innovation. It was found that the impact of transformational leadership in the growth of the organisation has not been explored.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTION AND PROPOSTIONS

In this chapter, the research question and research propositions that will be evaluated as part of this research study are presented. Both the research question and propositions are based on the concepts and gaps identified during the literature review, which was shown in Chapter 2. Creswell and Creswell (2017) indicate that in the case of exploratory research, the study requires a main question which serves to guide the research. Furthermore the exploratory nature of the research makes the use of propositions suitable for this study. In undertaking this study, the researcher seeks to assess whether these propositions are correct or whether there are additional aspects that need to be considered.

According to Ulaga et al. (2021), a research proposition serves as a novel statement that specifies the relationship between concepts. In the case of this research, it examines the linkage of transformational leadership to that of organisational evolution within the context of SMEs. This approach therefore allows for the evaluation of this relationship through empirical testing (Ulaga et al., 2021).

For this study the main research question is as follows:

How does the transformational leadership style influence and potentially hold back the organisational evolution of an SME?

In Chapter 2, the transformational leadership style in an SME was presented to show that it yields inspired and creative team members (Knezović & Drkić, 2021). It is further shown through the work of Avolio et al. (1991) that transformational leadership fosters greater employee engagement and serves to drive organisational performance.

Given all the positive aspects associated with a transformational leadership style, there exists the possibility that this leadership approach can essentially hold a SME back. This may be due to the leaders of the SME, being committed to the long-term and failing to consider short-term goals of the business (Spalding University, 2023). Coupled with this is the aspect that the slow decision making process may result in the business not evolving at the right time and failing to capture opportunities in the market.

Therefore this question is aimed to explore the role of transformational leadership within the organisational life of an SME by focusing on whether it could potentially negatively impact organisational growth.

To gain a better insight into SME leadership within the context of organisational growth the following research propositions were developed which will guide the direction for the research.

3.1 Research Proposition 1

Leaders of SMEs must adapt their leadership style to align with the challenges in each of the organisational growth phases.

This proposition is in alignment with Greiner's Growth Model which indicates that the evolution of an organisation across the various phases requires a shift in the leadership style (Greiner, 1997). Nguyen et al. (2021), discussed that the leaders of SMEs are impacted by the company's position in its organisational lifecycle.

3.2 Research Proposition 2

SME leaders have the ability to adapt their leadership style based on the characteristics of their team and the growth phase that the business is in.

SME leaders can adjust on their leadership style as the business evolves and as team dynamics change (Soomro et al., 2019). In entrepreneurial leadership which is at play in the context of an SME, the SMEs are organisations that are required to take risks and be quickly adaptable to changes in the market to survive and remain competitive (Nguyen et al., 2021).

3.3 Research Proposition 3

The different components of an SME leader's transformational leadership style serve to provide different levels of value and contribution at the various phases of organisational evolution.

According to Simba and Thai (2019), the SME owner or entrepreneur is the decision maker, and their leadership style is crucial for the management and development of the business. Therefore their approach to leadership and how they serve to interact with their teams is import for the business as it transitions through their organisational lifecycle. Charisma is just one characteristic of a transformational leader and through this, leaders can influence their team towards a specific strategic direction. Bednall et al. (2018) indicate that this is a trait of the transformational leader that can be essential in achieving long term success.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This chapter outlines the research methodology and the research design used to undertake the study, including the rationale behind the key methodological choices for the research. Details of the research design, the population and the unit of analysis together with the measurement instrument and the data analysis approach were presented. The chapter concludes with the controls put in place by the researcher to ensure the quality of the data, the ethical considerations made in undertaking this research and the limitations in completing the research.

4.1 Research Design

The research design serves as the framework that the researcher utilises to first collect the data and then perform the analysis on this data to answer the research question and test the research proposition (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Sileyew (2019) indicates that the research design provides the approach as to how the data for the study was collected.

For this research an exploratory study was followed as the researcher aimed to develop new theory on the relationship between organisational evolution of an SME and transformational leadership and is well suited for a qualitative research study. The researchers use of a qualitative approach ensured that there was a deeper and intimate understanding of the collected data through personal narratives of leaders in SMEs that have progressed to the organisational life cycle. In following the qualitative approach, it was important that the researcher follow a systematic approach as described by Nassaji (2020) in collecting, analysing, interpreting and reporting of the findings. Due to the nature of this research study, setting out to understand the context leadership within specific phases of an SMEs organisational evolution, the interpretive paradigm provides the best approach for the researcher to follow as it allows for a focused approach on a specific topic (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

4.1.1. Research Philosophy

The research philosophy as described by Saunders and Lewis (2018) involves the development of knowledge. With regards to the research philosophy there are five different philosophies that exist and in terms of the qualitative research approach is focused on either interpretivist or constructivist paradigms. This study followed an interpretivist research philosophy to understand leadership in SMEs. Ryan (2018)

framed that interpretivism is focused on understanding the experiences of people and how these individuals perceive their experiences. Therefore, the selection of this philosophy is ideal in obtaining qualitative data from personal insights of leaders of various SMEs.

Through the direct interaction with individuals specifically involved in leadership positions within SMEs, their unique viewpoints were sourced and used to be build theory (Creswell & Poth, 2016). However, the researcher was aware that these insights are subjective and there exists potential biases associated with the participants perspectives (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Even though there exists the potential of subjectivity qualitative research design offers the researcher the ability to explain the linkage of leadership changes within the evolutionary life of an SME (Bayot et al., 2019).

4.1.2. Approach to Theory Development

An inductive approach was followed for this research study, through which the researcher aims to explore the link between transformational leadership and SME evolution. The researcher followed an inductive approach in undertaking the following stages as presented by Saunders and Lewis (2018). These stages were as follows:

- Development of the research question and propositions from existing literature
- Detailing as to how the research question and propositions must be evaluated
- Collecting data to evaluate the research question and propositions
- Analysis of the data collected
- Confirmation that the analysed data aligns with existing literature

4.1.3. Methodological Choice

The methodological choice serves to illustrate how the required data will be collected (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). In the work by Al-Ababneh (2020) it was noted that there are three types of research methodological choices, which are:

- mono method – involves the collection of data through a single technique
- multi method – involves the collection of data through more than one data collection technique
- mixed method – involves the collection of data by both qualitative and quantitative methods

For the purposes of this research project, the researcher is to use a single data collection technique. This mono method qualitative study is to be utilised, as data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews.

4.1.4. Research Strategies

Johannesson et al. (2021) recognised that the research strategy serves to guide the researcher in to be able to conduct the research via a sequence of planning, executing and monitoring. Dinnen (2014) indicated that the research strategy serves as a plan of action that guides the researcher to conduct the research; in a systematic way and do so on schedule to yield good quality results. The approach to be followed is crucial when undertaking qualitative research as there exists several research strategies as indicated in the work by Creswell and Poth (2016), which were:

- Narrative research – focused on the personal insights of individuals
- Phenomenological research – focused on a participant’s lived experiences
- Grounded theory research – focused on the development of theory
- Ethnographic research – focused on describing and interpreting shared patterns
- Case study research – involved a study of a topic through multiple cases

For the purposes of this research study, the research propositions and objectives served to guide the study and for this research study. Therefore, the researcher utilised a case study strategy as it offered an in depth investigation of, this specific research topic. Case studies as described by Yin (2009) is a technique which essentially provides an investigation of a phenomenon in its real life setting. In doing so, case studies serve to offer an in depth examination of a particular area or occurrence which allows for the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the research area (Asenahabi, 2019). Therefore, the use of a case study approach will be to obtain data which illustrates how the leadership style of leaders evolves as the SMEs transition through the organisational life cycle. Due to the nature of the study focusing on leaders of SMEs at different phases of organisational evolution a single case study is not sufficient but rather a multiple-case study is required. Heale and Twycross (2018) indicated that a multiple-case study allows for an in-depth understanding of the cases through the ability to compare these different cases with each other.

4.1.5. Time Horizon

In undertaking the research study, it is important to understand the time which is being assessed. There are two possible time periods of focus, a cross sectional and longitudinal study (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Due to the nature of what this research topic is setting out to explain, the aspect of organisational evolution of leadership style within the context of SMEs, a longitudinal study is to be undertaken. The longitudinal study was selected as the researcher seeks to explain how transformational leadership changes across the operational life cycles of an SME. Longitudinal studies as defined by Saunders and Lewis (2018) is focused on studying a topic over a period.

4.2 Research Methodology

The research methodology presented in the section below serves to illustrate the population, the unit of analysis, the measurement instrument, data analysis and reporting.

4.2.1. Population

The population as described by Saunders and Lewis (2018) refers to the entire group of individuals or entities under the study. For this study the population was the group of individuals who have the desired characteristics required to undertake the study were leaders or those in leadership positions of SMEs that are progressing through their organisational evolution. In the context of this research study, the population is explicitly set on leaders within SMEs in South Africa. SMEs are critical pillars of the economy and they contribute to 34% of the South African GDP (BASA, 2021). Not only do SMEs serve to make economic contributions but they are important contributors to a nation socioeconomics, this is often in the form of job creation, community upliftment and industrial development (Epede & Wang, 2022).

In terms of the SMEs no sector was selected, with a wide variety of industries being assessed. However, Stratton (2021) noted that it may not always be possible to get every member of the population to be involved in the study, in this case leaders of SMEs in South Africa. Based on this a researcher is required to follow a sampling technique to source data that can be representative of the population.

4.2.2. Unit of Analysis

Kumar (2018) stated that the definition of the unit of analysis serves as the initial step in analysing the data as it defines what or who is the focus of the study. There are

four categories of unit analysis which are groups, individuals, organisations and social artefacts and interactions as described by Rosenberg (1968, as cited in Kumar, 2018).

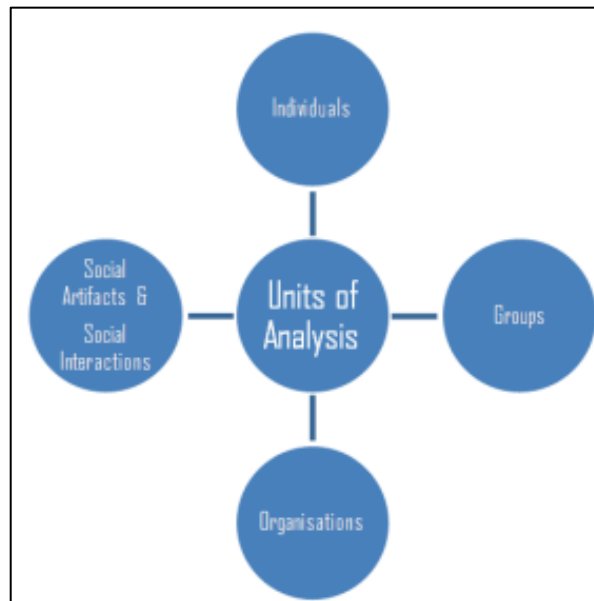


Figure 8: Categories of Unit of Analysis (Kumar, 2018)

The unit of analysis for the research is that of individuals who are leaders within the SMEs that are in decision-making positions, at an executive level in companies going through the organisational life cycle. This means that these individuals were involved in making the strategic decisions which influence the respective business direction and therefore the company growth.

4.2.3. Sampling Method and Size

Primary data was collected through a purposive sampling technique, with individuals that lead SMEs being selected based on both their experience and information they possess. In this case the use of a purposive sampling technique offered the researcher the ability to select members of the population that can provide invaluable insights into the research topic through the availability of limited resources (Campbell et al., 2020). Saunders and Lewis (2018) described that this technique requires the researcher's subjectivity to select the members of the sample. To ensure diversity across the sample, no selection criteria was utilised to select the participants of the research. The researcher did however select participants who had given the researcher consent and are where willing to participate in the interviews. These individuals had to also be able to converse in English to avoid language barriers from influencing the data collection process.

The sampling frame for this research study was a sample size ten of leaders that are involved with SMEs at the five growth stages of their organisational life, for the researcher to be able to generate credible conclusions from the findings. These will be two leaders from each of the following growth phases of organisational evolution as described by the Greiner Growth Model (Greiner, 1998):

- Creativity phase
- Direction phase
- Delegation phase
- Coordination phase
- Collaboration phase

It is noted that such a small sample is not a complete representation of the entire SME population, however through this exploratory qualitative research approach rich insights into the data are to be obtained.

4.2.4. Measurement Instrument

To obtain the data that will be used to undertake the analysis, the measurement instrument serves as the tool that can be utilised (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). It is important that the tool to be used undergo careful consideration as discussed by Souza et al. (2017). In this research study, semi-structured interviews were used as the source of primary data. These interviews were undertaken with leaders within SMEs, with the interviews being recorded and transcribed. The process of interviews is made up of different sections which include the details of respondent's background and leadership style.

This research project was setting out to explore the relationship between organisational evolution in SMEs and transformational leadership. Both concepts have previously been looked at in their individual capacities however this has not been done for them together. O'Keeffe et al. (2016) denoted that a semi-structured interview offers the best possible method for data collection where there exists both a time and resource constraint. By carrying out a semi-structured interview, the researcher can gain a perspective into the field of leadership and organisational evolution through individual perspectives currently involved in the field.

In the work by O'Keeffe et al. (2016), the methodology to be followed in performing a semi-structured interview was adapted. This methodology was as follows:

- Study preparation and interview design

A literature review into the research topic was undertaken, which enables the researcher the opportunity to understand the study area. Following which the research propositions were developed and subsequently the interview questions.

- Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was adhered to, to select interview participants that yield rich insights.

- Conducting the interview

Researcher presents the purpose of the research study and indicates to the participant that they are under no obligation to answer and that the details of their participation will be kept confidential.

- Data processing and analysis

All interviews will be transcribed verbatim to ensure no biases are introduced and will then be interpreted together with the interview recordings to identify themes.

Interviews are predominantly used in qualitative studies and Yin (2009) indicated that there are the following strengths and weaknesses:

- Strengths

- Interviews have a targeted approach that serve to focus on a specific case
- Offers a perceived viewpoint directly from the participants

- Weaknesses

- Biases may arise due to poorly asked questions
- Possibility of response bias
- There exists the potential of data inaccuracies due to poor recollection of events

Hart (2024) provided the steps which the researcher should follow in conducting the interview:

- Verify if the recording mechanism is working
- Ask the participants one question at a time
- Remain neutral throughout the interview
- Encourage responses from the participants
- Be careful when note taking as to not influence answers to future questions

- Provide a transition between the sub-topics in the interview questions
- Ensure that you are in control of the interview

The semi-structured interviews will be conducted via a one-on-one interview through Microsoft Teams and will be later transcribed. Through the interview, the researcher will make note of field notes to capture additional insights or information that arises. In producing transcriptions of the interview, the researcher shall represent verbatim the contents of the interview. The process of transcribing the data was adhered to according to the following principles described by McLellan et al. (2003):

- The form of the speech and the associated commentaries are to be kept close as possible in the transcripts.
- Use of speech markers to maintain the structure in the transcription.
- No reduction in the transcript as the recordings need to be reported verbatim.
- Use of everyday language in the transcription.

It is noted that the interview guide serves to assist the interviewer in undertaking the interviews, with the questions being open-ended it allows for the generation of rich insights from the participants (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). The interview guide, in Appendix A, presents the questions that the researcher asked to the interview participants, which are focused on the following areas:

- Background and Experience
- Personal Leadership Style
- Employee Engagement
- Impact of Leadership
- Adaptation and Flexibility
- Future Goals and Vision

The guide also is a tool which enables the researcher to adhere to some structure in undertaking the data collection process but is not meant for the interviewer to follow verbatim (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

4.2.5. Data Analysis Approach

For this research study to understand the leadership styles across the organisation life cycle of an SME it is required that the insights from the semi-structured interviews are understood. The researcher sought to utilise a multi-case analysis of two leaders at each of the five growth phases described by Greiner's Growth Model. According

to Gustafsson (2017). the multi-case analysis was better placed to understand the differences and commonalities amongst the cases. For the purposes of this research the differences relate to the various phases each of the SMEs are within the organisational evolution and the commonalities refers to everyone being a leader in an SME. This is perfectly suited to the qualitative research approach as Castleberry and Nolen (2018) stated by understanding a phenomenon through the viewpoint of the participants.

Data analysis of the collected data involved the researcher breaking the data down into smaller more manageable themes. This was done by firstly listening to the audio recordings from the interviews and then transcribing these interviews. The researcher in undertaking the analysis then goes through the semi-structured interview transcriptions and field notes to identify themes for the collected data, in a technique that is known as a thematic analysis. Castleberry and Nolen (2018) described the process of thematic analysis useful in that it is used to identify and report on patterns prevalent in the data. The thematic analysis approach involves the interpretation of the data by assigning codes and then creating categories to house themes that come across to evaluate the research propositions (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Thematic analysis is beneficial in that it is an easily adoptable analytical technique and secondly it serves to be capable of gaining insights from individuals personal experiences (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The process of the thematic analysis will be done using the Atlas.ti tool where the collected data will be loaded. Following which the themes, patterns or relationships that have been identified from the data will be presented and discussed in terms of evaluating the research propositions. A step-by-step guide in undertaking the thematic analysis has been prescribed by Kiger and Varpio (2020) that focuses on the following six steps:

- Step 1: Researcher is to become familiar with the data through reading and re-reading of the data.
- Step 2: Assign initial codes to the data and then note the patterns that emerge
- Step 3: Identify themes from the coded data, this can be done by comparing and combing codes to each other
- Step 4: Review the identified themes to ensure that they are an accurate reflection of the data
- Step 5: Assign names and a description to the themes which aids adding to the overall knowledge gained from the research

- Step 6: Report on the findings and evaluate these findings against the research propositions

The exploratory nature of this research study to explore the relationship between organisational evolution in SMEs and transformational leadership, the application of inductive reasoning, will guide the qualitative research to move from the unknown to the known. In doing so the researcher's approach is such that they move from a specific observation to broader realisations and theory (Trochim, 2020). Saunders and Lewis (2018) framed that, in the case of inductive qualitative analysis the researcher identifies patterns in the data to produce meaningful explanations and theory, doing so through the following steps:

- Create codes and themes that describe the data
- Assign the unit of data that aligns with your analysis
- Assign themes to the relevant data

In this research study the primary data was obtained through semi-structured interviews and transcribed verbatim. Following which themes associated with the data will be assigned, as the researcher reads and re-reads the transcriptions to make sense of the data and identify patterns or themes present. The themes generated from the research will then be used to assess the relationship between organisational evolution in SMEs and transformational leadership.

4.2.6. Reporting

The reporting of the results obtained, from the data gathered and analysed via the semi-structured interviews will be undertaken to showcase the findings of this research study. The aim of the report was to illustrate how leaders of SMEs leadership styles evolve across the life cycle of the SME.

4.2.7. Quality Controls

The results interpreted and presented are determinant on the quality of the collected data. Therefore, it is crucial that the research study be undertaken in such a manner that the collected data produces results that are reliable and that can be validated. Nassaji (2020) denoted that for a qualitative approach to be followed, the quality of the data needs to be ensured. Prior to the collection of the data through the semi-structured interviews, the researcher undertook a literature review to fully understand the existing theory and identify gaps present, by reviewing literature made available through journal articles that were highly ranked and peer reviewed. Another

important aspect is that of selection bias and to ensure that there are no biases to a particular sector, interview participants and companies were selected from a variety of different sectors.

Principles such as credibility, triangulation, dependability and confirmability are useful in qualitative research to ensure the quality of the data. In terms of credibility this principle focuses on whether the findings of the research study can be viewed as believable (Nassaji, 2020). To ensure that this, the researcher developed the interview guide that was informed by existing literature and was utilised to limit researcher bias. The interview guide was pilot tested with a leader of an SME. Credibility of this research was further considered with the researcher recording each interview and the capturing of the audio via transcriptions to provide an accurate representation of what was said. Coupled with the creditability principle was that of validity, which Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) suggest is aligned to how a method can be effectively utilised to understand a specific subject. In the work by Hayashi et al. (2019) the concept of validity was described as an important component in research as it describes both the quality and trustworthiness of the data collected. For this research, an internal validity test will be used to understand the relationship between the organisational evolution of SMEs and transformational leadership in South Africa. Lin et al. (2021) identifies that internal validity serves to draw connections through casual relationships. The internal validity test for this research will be such that each of the participants responses will be tested against each other for the various phases to best understand the cause and effect relationships for this research study. External validity test will compare the findings which will be compared across the various sectors and size of the organisation to determine whether these findings are generalisable.

Through the process of triangulation, the researcher sets out to be able to generalise the findings gathered to provide external validity (Lin et al., 2021). In the triangulation principle, Nassaji (2020) indicated that it is undertaken by using multiple methods that serve to encourage consistency. Triangulation for this research study was accomplished through multiple interviews with different leaders and SMEs.

In terms of dependability, this principle is linked to whether this study could be replicated by another researcher (Nassaji, 2020). This is possible as the researcher has clearly indicated in a step wise manner how the research was undertaken.

Finally, the researcher ensure confirmability through the removal of their own biases and this was achieved by adhering to the same questions in the interview guide, with these interviews being recorded and transcribed to ensure that they are a true reflection of the events.

4.2.8. Ethical Considerations

To best ensure that the research study was conducted in an ethical manner, the researcher focused on clearly presenting the details of the research in a clear and concise manner to the university ethics committee. Following ethical approval, the researcher can collect research data from participants of the study. The ethics associated with this research were as follows:

- Participants will be required to complete the informed consent forms prior to the interviews, as presented in Appendix B.
- The names of both the companies and participants will be omitted from the research report to ensure the participant anonymity.
- The researcher will handle, interpret and present the data with integrity and without any modifications.
- Coupled with this is that participants were requested not to mention specific details with regards to individuals and company names.

4.2.9. Research Limitations and Assumptions

In undertaking any study there exists limitations which are out of control of the researcher. For this research study, these are the following limitations:

- The availability of participants that are willing to participate in the interviews.
- The focus on two SMEs from each one of the organisational growth phases has the potential to limit the extent to which the findings can be generally applied.
- The SME leaders who have agreed to participate with the interviews may not feel comfortable to release the financial performance of their respective businesses.

The assumptions for the research study are the following:

- Assumption that participants answered the interviewer's questions in an honest manner and that the interviewer adheres to the interview questions.

- The assumption that individuals can understand the interview questions and are able to answer them.

4.2.10. Conclusion

The research methodology is focused on an exploration as to whether a transformational leadership style can hold back an SME in their organisational evolution, Through the process of data collection via semi-structured interviews involving leaders in SMEs in South Africa across the organisational evolutionary life cycle this will be examined in an exploratory qualitative approach. In undertaking the data collection and analysis the researcher has outlined the quality control process to ensure the validity of the research and to make sure that the process is undertaken in an ethical manner.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the collected data and subsequent analysis. The chapter is structured to unpack the results from the one-on-one semi structured interviews, organised according to the research propositions outlined in Chapter 3. This approach of presenting the findings through the research propositions is effective, as they are descriptively addressed by the interview questions found on the interview guide in Appendix A, which was utilised to conduct the semi-structured interviews.

5.2 Data Analysis Approach Followed

The data collection process involved conducting ten semi-structured interviews via Microsoft Teams. Each interview was recorded and later transcribed. Using the interview transcriptions, the data coding process was undertaken which involved uploading the interviews onto the Atlas.ti platform. The exact details of the data coding process are detailed in Chapter 4. Following the generation of codes, each of the respective codes were grouped on Atlas.ti per interview question. This followed an iterative process in which code groups were then assigned to categories. Further analysis of the categories consolidated them into themes.

5.3 Description of the Sample

Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with two leaders from each stage of Greiner's Growth Model. These stages of the model are as follows:

- Creativity phase
- Direction phase
- Delegation phase
- Coordination phase
- Collaboration phase

These interviews took place once the participants signed the consent forms to agree to be involved with this research study. The participants were selected via a purposive sampling approach as only leaders of SMEs across the various stages of the organisational lifecycle. Face-to-face interviews with the participants were not possible due to scheduling conflicts of the participants and their geographic location. Table 2 provides a summary of the participants, their position and the field in which

each of these companies operate. Names of both the individuals and their respective companies have been omitted to protect the identity of the participants and they will be reported as participant and the sector in which they operate.

Table 2: Details of the Interviewees from the Sample

Phase of Organisational Evolution	Participant Code	Company Sector	Number of employees	Position within the Company
Creativity	Participant A	Manufacturing	216	Co-founder and Operations Director
	Participant B	Marketing	5	Co-founder and Director
Direction	Participant C	Manufacturing	21	Director
	Participant D	Manufacturing	20	Director
Delegation	Participant E	Manufacturing	15	Director
	Participant F	Manufacturing	25	Co-founder
Coordination	Participant G	Financial Services	12	Director
	Participant H	Energy	24	Director
Collaboration	Participant I	Financial Services	15	Founder
	Participant J	Marketing	8	Founder

5.4 Presentation of Findings

This section covers the data analysed from the ten semi-structured interviews, where codes and descriptive tags were assigned to each of the interviews. A total of 110

codes were assigned to the interviews, these codes were then grouped according to themes to evaluate the research propositions. These identified themes were allocated, per each research proposition as follows:

- Research Proposition 1
 - Leadership Evolution
 - Leadership Flexibility
 - Growth Phase-Specific Leadership
 - Leadership-Organisational Fit
 - Leadership in Dynamic Environment
 - Growth Phase Challenges
- Research Proposition 2
 - Leadership Competence
 - Resilience in Leadership
 - Leadership Versatility
 - Problem-Solving Capability
 - Decision-Making Agility
 - Crisis Management
- Research Proposition 3
 - Vision-Driven Leadership
 - Leadership for Sustainability
 - Strategic Leadership
 - Personal Influence on Strategy

The presentation of the results is per each of the research propositions illustrated in Chapter 3.

5.5 Results for Research Proposition 1

Leaders of SMEs must adapt their leadership style to align with the challenges in each of the organisational growth phases.

Research proposition 1 serves to understand whether the leaders of SMEs can make the necessary changes to their leadership approach as they navigate the organisational evolution of the business. There needs to be a shift in a leader's approach as at the start of the business, leaders are required to be more hands-on. This approach is then required to change as the business grows and the leader is forced to delegate more responsibility and be focused on making strategic decisions. An understanding of whether this is possible is important as leaders need to be able to manage the transition from one evolutionary phase to another to ensure that the SME is growing and can both survive and remain competitive in the market.

The interview questions used to test this research proposition consisted of questions that focused on the background of the leader, their engagement with their employees and the impact that their leadership style has on the business all of which was aimed to understand if there is a change in leadership style as the business evolves. Results from the coding process as well as the associated themes aligned to this proposition are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Codes and their frequencies for research proposition 1

Code	Frequency	Themes
Adaptation: Expectations	2	Growth Phase Challenges (Codes = 9)
Adaptation: Resistant to change	1	
Business Operations: Small business struggles	1	
Leadership: Entrepreneurship	3	
Leadership: Environmental concern	1	
Leadership: Quality assurance	1	
Professional Development: Lack of clarity	1	
Challenges	5	
Firmness	1	
Business Operations: Business growth	2	
Business Operations: Employee feedback	1	

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Business Operations: Employee growth	1	Growth Phase-Specific Leadership (Codes = 17)
Leadership: Evolution	3	
Leadership: Community involvement	2	
Leadership: Competitiveness	1	
Leadership: Delegating	2	
Leadership: Diversification	1	
Leadership: Employee-centred	1	
Professional Development: Learning from different characters	1	
Growth	14	
Leadership style	1	
Management experience	1	
Transition	2	
Strategic planning	2	
Career growth	1	
Career development: Career planning	1	
Adaptation: Adaptation	2	Leadership Evolution (Codes = 21)
Adaptation: Adapting to change	1	
Adaptation: Efficiency	1	
Leadership: Evolution	3	
Leadership: Knowledge transfer	1	
Leadership: Knowledge-sharing	1	
Leadership: Leadership development	4	
Leadership: Partnerships	1	
Professional Development: Continuity	1	
Professional Development: Implementation	1	
Professional Development: Mistakes	1	
Professional Development: Reframing	1	
Career progression	2	
Change	2	
Development	2	
Employee development	2	
Experience	6	

Success	3	
Business management: Management	2	
Team support: Learning from peers	1	
<hr/>		
Adaptation: Flexibility	1	Leadership Flexibility (Codes = 21)
Adaptation: Growth mindset	3	
Adaptation: Resilience	2	
Professional Development: Comfort	1	
Professional Development: Setting boundaries	1	
Professional Development: Trust	7	
Adaptability	13	
Conflict resolution	2	
Flexible leadership	2	
Leadership skills	1	
Mentoring	3	
Training	5	
Career development: Work-life balance	3	
Team support: Coaching	1	
Team support: Continuous learning	2	
Team support: Coordination	1	
Team support: Facilitation	1	
Team support: Learning from others	1	
Team support: Learning from peers	1	
<hr/>		
Business Operations: Small business	1	Leadership in Dynamic Environment (Codes = 14)
Business Operations: Small business struggles	1	
Leadership: Leadership development	4	
Leadership: Self-awareness	2	
Professional Development: Questioning	1	
Professional Development: Retention	1	
Expansion	3	
Training	5	
Value recognition	1	
Business management: Strategic thinking	2	

Business management: Financial management	2	
Business management: Succession planning	1	
Business Operations: Business expansion	1	Leadership- Organisational Fit (Codes = 16)
Business Operations: Employee-employer relationship	1	
Business Operations: Process improvement	1	
Business Operations: Employee well-being	1	
Leadership: Empowerment	8	
Leadership: Partnerships	1	
Leadership: Self-awareness	2	
Professional Development: Support	4	
Organisational success	1	
Performance evaluation	2	
Team building	1	
Team dynamics	2	
Teamwork	16	
Business management: Policymaking	1	
Career development: Work environment	2	

In this section below the findings from the themes associated with the research proposition will be highlighted, which will be presented based on the frequency count.

5.5.1. Leadership Evolution

Some of the participants discussed how they have evolved their leadership style to account for organisational shifts, from a dictatorial to a more transformational leadership approach. However, there were some that still are focused on the daily running of the business and do note that they need to be more delegative.

- Creativity Phase

Participant B: *“A soft goal of saying you want to make the business a success, but you actually want to hit these objectives, which also helps people to buy in and to align as part of a group or organisational shared vision.”*

- Direction Phase

Participant C: *“I’ll focus more now on running speed and making sure all the costs and everything are aligned more than being handled.”*

- Delegation Phase

Participant F: *“Becoming an owner of a company, so I think my key leadership traits would be from my experience.”*

- Coordination Phase

Participant G: *“When you are growing and things you go through different growth spots in your life and we call them different like milestones in, in our business and milestones are really when you feel like you’ve just gone up to the next level of business, you’ve gone from a baby SME to like a little to an infant to a teenager and so on. And those little milestones.”*

Participant G: *“So I would never ask someone to do something that I have no idea how to do. And I think that that, that that comes with the journey that I’ve been through in this business from kind of the ground all the way to where I am at the moment.”*

Participant H: *“I think it’s mix matched. So, on the more senior people, giving them free reign and autonomy pays dividends immediately on the. Less experienced and greener, so the younger kind of people in the in the business. I have found that more hand holding is actually needed.”*

- Collaboration Phase

Participant J: *“First, the leadership goals. Becoming more effective in strategic thinking and decision making. Mentoring the next generation of leaders within the company.”*

The results showed how the participants leadership style evolved as the business progressed through the growth phases of Greiner’s Growth Model. Participants indicated that their approach to leadership was required to shift from a more direct style to a transformational leadership style, with a focus on the organisational vision and the delegation of responsibilities.

5.5.2. Leadership Flexibility

Participants responded how they are able to be flexible in their leadership approach due to the collaborative manner in which they interact with their teams, in doing so they are building trust.

- Creativity Phase

Participant A: *“how my leadership style has changed and then working with various cultures and people types. Is also something that that I've learned as a leader. And I've had to adapt as a leader because.”*

- Direction Phase

Participant D: *“you must understand that we in going to a business like this you are dictated a lot by laws of certain countries but also if the morality and ethics and what your customer wants so you have to align everything and. You know for us being innovative and caring and making sure that we follow these regulations we have to as I said before maintain our demand that our customer needs as well as managing supply chain.”*

- Delegation Phase

Participant E: *“The training programmes assisted the staff. I wanted regular feedback and also set up electronic reporting. As opposed to the manual systems that was there previously.”*

- Coordination Phase

Participant G: *“we've got the right people in place in office.”*

- Collaboration Phase

Participant I: *“Let them run their day as they as they choose to. As I said, I'm not yet to work, but what clock watching? Not yet to check. They work all the time. I trust him to get the work done.”*

Participants emphasised how they have had to adapt and become more flexible as they sought to create a collaborative environment and build trust with their respective teams. The results are indicative of the changes a leader needs to make to contribute to organisational growth success.

5.5.3. Growth Phase-Specific Leadership

Participants discussed how they plan to approach the aspect of growth in the form of targets and plans they have set for themselves to ensure the business evolves and can remain sustainable and competitive.

- Creativity Phase

Participant A: *“I think that was quite I think I was quite robust and hardheaded in my younger years. We're just more like a dictatorship and then. An inclusive model or an inclusive style.”*

- Direction Phase

Participant D: *“I think more your flexibility I think in terms of. Being able to align your goals with that of your employees and your company as a whole and in saying these things I think the biggest thing in terms of being a owner of a business and going forward is your ability to listen.”*

- Delegation Phase

Participant E: *“Our vision is to grow in, in, in the sector and be a market leader. We want to expand our marketing. We want to expand into different markets and I support the management team's vision to grow.”*

- Coordination Phase

Participant H: *“Guide people and let them know what the expectation is. In terms of the vision and what their objectives are, but I generally let people kind of get on with their own business and day-to-day.”*

- Collaboration Phase

Participant J: *“So for the next 5-10 years, I will plan would be is to actually grow the digital side of the business.”*

There was a recognition by the participants that they noted the need for growth and that they had a vision for the organisation. In the pursuit of this vision they also stated that their leadership style had to change to be able to drive the transition to the next phase of organisational growth.

5.5.4. Leadership-Organisational Fit

The participants highlighted the alignment of the leader's approach to the organisational goals. They have indicated the importance of teamwork and how the staff needs to be empowered to contribute to the organisational goals.

- Creativity Phase

Participant B: *"I think one of the most prominent challenges was just obviously from a startup background where, where the team is currently all full time employed and we work on the startup as a as in after hours."*

- Direction Phase

Participant D: *"I mean growth empowering them making sure that there's something for them apart from just a paycheck to go home they're improving themselves I mean with the with the technology that we currently use in our products."*

- Delegation Phase

Participant E: *"Well, I have regular. Meetings with staff. And we and discuss issues and we get their feedback. And I propose things rather than instructing stuff and. And it get their views and ideas."*

- Coordination Phase

Participant H: *"I think leading by example as much as possible. Supporting as much as possible as well and. Allowing people to figure things out themselves."*

- Collaboration Phase

Participant I: *"I think the best and most important thing is leading by example. You know there's. There's nothing I won't do in the office. I don't sit back and say I'm the MD."*

The participants result framed the relevance of team alignment to achieve organisational success. Participants highlighted aspects such as leading by example, providing feedback and celebrating success. It was also noted that finding

the time for the team to work together was difficult for those in the creative phase as the business was trying to get off the ground.

5.5.5. Leadership in Dynamic Environment

In a changing environment as the SMEs seek to survive and remain competitive the participants indicated the importance of training staff, looking for expansion opportunities and applying strategic thinking.

- Creativity Phase

Participant B: *“I think the vision for the company at this point is really just to make it a success. We're still in startup and we're in. We still in, in, in a more mature startup phase, but we're looking at trying to grow to get funding to onboard customers and users.”*

- Direction Phase

Participant D: *“empowering them making sure that there's something for them apart from just a paycheck.”*

- Delegation Phase

Participant E: *“Some people had formal education, but they didn't have like. Communication. Coaching. I had to coach them to.”*

- Coordination Phase

Participant G: *“Age gap between myself and the other senior leader in this business, I'm 20 years younger and I have a longer career ahead of me and I want to really grow this business to a substantial size business.”*

- Collaboration Phase

Participant J: *“Becoming more effective in strategic thinking and decision making. Mentoring the next generation of leaders within the company, so trying to also upscale them a lot.”*

Each of the participants placed emphasis on how important it was to ensure staff is empowered through training. Together with these participants discussed how they see the dynamic environments in which their businesses are in and how they are seeking to develop such that they can grow.

5.5.6. Growth Phase Challenges

Findings from participants was that as they sought to grow the business they were faced with several different challenges, for example access to funding, external environment and access to skills.

- Creativity Phase

Participant B: *“most prominent challenges was just obviously from a startup background where, where the team is currently all full time employed and we work on the startup as a as in after-hours”*

- Direction Phase

Participant C: *“economic challenge was the biggest one in the last two years. It's still going through it.”*

- Collaboration Phase

Participant I: *“the first challenge has always been trying to access sufficient debt funding to last to grow.”*

Together with the growth issues some participants raise the aspect of having expectations that the staff will know what to do or how to do the work assigned to them as a challenge in the growth of the SME.

- Delegation Phase

Participant F: *“For employees and stuff too, joke around and have you know, job, not a light atmosphere to work in. But yeah, as a leader I expect work to be done.”*

- Coordination Phase

Participant H: *“And it's a bit of a pain to be honest, because you do start to have to keep tabs on what people are doing and when.”*

The challenges faced by the participants in growing their business was clearly laid out, whether it is the absence of resources or funding. Participants described the expectations of staff as a challenge that they have had to overcome in growing the business.

5.6 Results for Research Proposition 2

SME leaders have the ability to adapt their leadership style based on the characteristics of their team and the growth phase that the business is in.

This research proposition seeks to understand if SME leaders can adjust their leadership approach depending on their teams and on the growth phase that the business is in. In terms of their team characteristics, are these leaders more hands on and display a directive leadership style with less experienced team members or do they shift to a hands off approach for skilled teams. For the business growth phase, there is a suggestion that one's leadership style adapts as the business grows. In either one of these situations a leader is required to have the ability to adapt their leadership style to meet the requirements of the business.

The questions used in the interviews to test this proposition focused on the background of the leader, their personal leadership style, their engagement with the team and how their leadership style has impacted the business. Results from the coding process as well as the associated themes aligned to this proposition are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Codes and their frequencies for research proposition 2

Code	Frequency	Themes
Adaptation: Dealing with stress	2	Crisis Management (Codes = 9)
Business Operations: Business challenges	2	
Accountability	1	
Clarity	4	
Communication	14	
Decision-making	7	
Uncertainty	4	
Business management: Financial oversight	1	
Business management: Risk management	1	
Adaptation: Increased productivity	1	

Adaptation: Independence	1	Decision-Making Agility (Codes = 11)
Adaptation: Perfectionism	2	
Business Operations: Business challenges	2	
Action	1	
Decision-making	7	
Open-mindedness	1	
Business management: Decision making	1	
Business management: Financial management	2	
Business management: Risk management	1	
Organisational focus	10	
Adaptation: Altruism	2	Leadership Competence (Codes = 20)
Adaptation: Ambitious	3	
Adaptation: Belief	1	
Adaptation: Integrity	1	
Adaptation: Passion	1	
Adaptation: Self-confidence	1	
Leadership: Competence	1	
Leadership: Self-efficacy	1	
Accountability	1	
Achievement	2	
Communication	14	
Professionalism	5	
Business management: Financial management	2	
Business management: Financial mindset	1	
Business management: Financial oversight	1	
Business management: Risk management	1	
Career development: Career Development	4	
Career development: Skill development	3	
Career development: Training and Development	1	
Organisational focus: Social responsibility	1	
Adaptation: Curiosity	1	

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Adaptation: Dealing with stress	2	Leadership Versatility (Codes = 14)
Adaptation: Informality	1	
Adaptation: Stability	1	
Leadership: Values-driven	1	
Leadership: Competence	1	
Collaborative leadership	2	
Ego management	1	
Empathy	4	
Feedback	4	
Introspection	1	
Motivation	5	
Career development: Work experience	2	
Multifaceted: Career	1	
Adaptation: Creativity	2	Problem- Solving Capability (Codes = 14)
Adaptation: Innovation	4	
Adaptation: Productivity	1	
Adaptation: Quality-oriented	1	
Leadership: Self-efficacy	1	
Professional Development: Influence	3	
Professional Development: Insightful	1	
Decision-making	7	
Negotiation	1	
Problem-solving	3	
Self-improvement	4	
Business management: Data analysis	1	
Business management: Decision making	1	
Business management: Financial mindset	1	
Adaptation: Dealing with stress	2	Resilience in Leadership (Codes = 16)
Adaptation: Dedication	1	
Adaptation: Economic hardships	1	
Adaptation: High expectations	2	
Adaptation: Optimism	1	

Adaptation: Stability	1	
Ambition	8	
Clarity	4	
Commitment	3	
Self-reflection	1	
Uncertainty	4	
Understanding	2	
Business management: Financial management	2	
Career development: Work experience	2	
Multifaceted: Health	1	
Team support: Hands-on approach	2	

In this section below the findings from the themes associated with the research proposition will be highlighted, which will be presented based on the frequency count.

5.6.1 Leadership Competence

An effective leader of an SME as highlighted by the participants is one that is professional, has good communication skills and is on a path of continuous development.

- Creativity Phase

Participant A: *“OK, so my management style is I try and involve everybody within the system, and I try and get their feedback. I mean obviously it, it is the long way around.*

In, in the sense that you have to listen to everybody and try and guide them to buy into your initial idea and obviously adapt your idea for any new information that comes in from these different managers at different levels.”

Participant B: *“how we interact with each other has had to change. You have to take a like a little bit more corporate structure or governance has to come in in terms of accountability, responsibility.”*

- Direction Phase

Participant C: *“And I was lacking a lot in management skills to work on face management positions. So then I actually started studying more in the field that*

all the entire quality, financial management, business management and then started studying a bit in project management as well and currently doing my e-commerce, my degree in my ecommerce basically I've out with all business kind of and RP under business actually for me.”

- Delegation Phase

Participant F: *“I won't. I wouldn't say that I'm hands off because I'm like, I make sure that I'm copied on all emails, no matter whether it'll be from. A receptionist sending it out to someone, or which I'll tell them to probably blind copy.”*

- Coordination Phase

Participant G: *“With everything that I expect someone to do, I know exactly how to do it from like the detail all the way through to kind of the higher level part of it. So I would never ask someone to do something that I have no idea how to do.”*

- Collaboration Phase

Participant I: *“Our ability to continually attract further debt funding, I have a good relationship with the banks who we've concluded that funding services with and I do think my leadership style has made a significance difference.”*

The participants highlighted the relevance of how they interacted with their teams, by having clear lines of communication and being transparent with the team. Companies in the creativity stage highlighted this specifically as they noted the need to shift to a more formal structure.

5.6.2 Resilience in Leadership

The ambitious and somewhat arrogant nature of leaders in SMEs was stated by the participants as a driver of their resilience.

- Creativity Phase

Participant A: *“performance ramps up quite quickly and we've basically instead of six month ramp up periods, we've we're trying to run a two-month ramp up period. So I think that that's quite ambitious.”*

Participant B: *“look for new opportunities and like get experience and things where we you might have a gap in the organisation of the business and then how do you plug those things?”*

- Direction Phase

Participant C: *“So economic challenge was the biggest one in the last two years. It's still going through it. Everyone is feeling the branch of the economy at the moment. So I'll change my focus from production to the maintenance.”*

- Delegation Phase

Participant F: *“growth is something that. I always want. To achieve more from a personal characteristic.”*

- Coordination Phase

Participant G: *“I want to grow a business, we want people to come and work. And possibly don't really want to grow a big corporate. Definitely not looking at that, but like a business that creates. A large amount of value.”*

- Collaboration Phase

Participant I: *“fintech, business, and that's really what I'd like to what I'd like to I'd like to achieve. There's, you know, there's a lot of new opportunities I'd like to see concluded over the next, you know, as I said, 5 to 10 years.”*

Participant J: *“for the next 5-10 years, I will plan would be is to actually grow the digital side of the business, social media marketing is actually.”*

Results showed how self-belief from these participants was evident, in terms of how they will grow the business. Their professional resilience and confidence are something which can be seen as a form of inspiration or motivation to their teams.

5.6.3 Leadership Versatility

Participants indicated the ability of leaders to change their approach to leadership based on business demands.

- Creativity Phase

Participant B: *“I think also part of the success of the goals is being very deliberate about on what your outcome is. It's not saying that you wanna make the business success, but you wanna, for example, you want to take on 10 customers by this time you want to be self-funded by X time. You wanna have so much of money in your bank account by a certain time.”*

- Direction Phase

Participant C: *“Everyone is feeling the branch of the economy at the moment. So I'll change my focus from production and the maintenance and start to downscaling the factory feed services, smaller markets so that when it does pick up the obviously just change as well.”*

- Delegation Phase

Participant F: *“So I think I've also learnt a lot dealing with different characters. You know, staff come and go. And yeah, you meet people in in different projects, especially now with freelancers. So you start understanding, OK you need to also change your ways into being able to get the best out of them so.”*

- Coordination Phase

Participant G: *“I'm a bit of a workaholic, and so I think that. I don't think I don't. I think that comes across as. As motivational and I think, obviously there's a there's a limit to whether I'm imposing too much on people.”*

- Collaboration Phase

Participant J: *“I like our business to be more family orientated, place in an environment where people come in and they I mean our team gets in, they are able to. Feel like they want to be at the studio and not be like it felt like it's a burden, so. They the team has that comfort of actually being able to tell me anything even in their personal life.”*

SMEs are known for their ability to be adaptable, this is driven by leaders who are versatile enough to see the bigger picture. Participants in their responses illustrated their commitment and the workplace environments they sought to create as their respective businesses navigated the organisations growth phases.

5.6.4 Problem-Solving Capability

Decision making as crucial skill of SME leaders was stated by the participants but the aspect of problem solving was also raised as an important trait of the leader. This ability and that of being innovative enable these leaders to aid the business to transition the life of the business and overcome any challenges.

- Creativity Phase

Participant A: *“Like I said, decision making was probably one of my very strong points.”*

- Direction Phase

Participant D: *“a very differing style but I would say it's probably more my leadership style is collaborative but fun.*

I do believe in giving employees and team members and room to innovate and also the ideas in design and production are always welcomed but my biggest thing is with timelines and deadlines.”

- Delegation Phase

Participant E: *“I have regular. Meetings with staff. And we and discuss issues and we get their feedback. And I propose things rather than instructing stuff and. And I get their views and ideas.”*

Participant E: *“To picking up on those challenges that we had. And the attention. Given to focus on those three items that were negatively affecting the cash flow of the business.”*

- Collaboration Phase

Participant J: *“so most of the projects when yeah, I tried to get involved myself and drive the wherever I can. So I think my team also gets a lot of experience from what I've been exposed to.”*

Problem solving ability of a leader was raised by many participants as important within an SME. These participants indicated that they sought to get inputs from their teams as the business becomes more mature.

5.6.5 Decision-Making Agility

Participants indicated that decisions are required to be made such that the business can be directed through these difficult periods. In doing so leaders need to maintain an organisational focus when they are deciding on the decisions to be made.

- Creativity Phase

Participant A: *“So, we had to do a machine change on, or a layout change on one of our lines. And literally the first thing I did, we had already decided as an executive management that we're going to be doing this change. And I sat down with them, and I said, James, this is the proposed idea. I didn't tell them we'd already made the decision.”*

- Direction Phase

Participant C: *“And that's way of that's our training, more towards trusting people to be able to do what are what is it? Looking over the shoulders, the arms completely hands open. The fact that they're stand back now and I'll let people learn their way. Bar making mistake and then we fix that, like, go along and then that will tell them.”*

- Delegation Phase

Participant F: *“So similarly like in a business environment, you know you're in an SME, yes. There's time for fun and jokes and all. And but once you start getting towards that corporate, you become more professional. You become more responsible and you have to make those harder decisions sometimes, you know, it might not be an easy decision, but you have to make it for them, you know, for the benefit of the company to progress.”*

- Coordination Phase

Participant G: *“the value creation and if we create a value for the shareholders which we are.”*

Participant H: *“more structured and regular all hands meetings. Very important performance management and career planning is also very important. And then just aligning.”*

- Collaboration Phase

Participant I: *“now if you've got the debt funding, what do we do with it and how do we attract new business? How do we lend more money and lend to the right to the right people? And that's been the second challenge in the business is to make sure we continue to grow our debtors book and to minimise the credit risk that comes with growing indebted debtors.”*

It was emphasised by the participants that they need to be decisive in the way in which the business is run. Decision making was highlighted to be core to both the business survival and growth. Participants mentioned the need for a professional environment when it was needed and the importance of regular team meetings.

5.6.6 Crisis Management

In this theme what was being indicated by the participants was the aspect of communication and how important it is for them. SMEs as many of the participants indicated are faced with several issues, which require that decisions are made quickly and effectively for them to navigate these periods.

- Creativity Phase

Participant A: *“inclusiveness, I think it's very important for me to get the by in of the team to a certain degree.”*

- Direction Phase

Participant C: *“Goal always has been open communication between myself and my employees, making sure that they we feel like they can trust me just as much as I trust them to make sure that if there's anything that goes wrong, if they need anything that, like I said, that open door policies.”*

Participant D: *“communication I would think so and also giving people freedom to work to improve themselves.”*

- Delegation Phase

Participant D: *“You know what I'm hands on from the time from our ground to the you I believe that you can't tell an employee to do something if you haven't done it yourself so.”*

I get involved in every on every aspect and I take as much I wouldn't say criticism but I say more problem solving troubleshooting whatever the guys want to think about and say OK can we improve here I will always be open to listen to it."

- Coordination Phase

Participant H: *"As much as it's good for people to have autonomy, you can't have, you know, 50 people running in different directions. So you have to orchestrate a few things a bit more."*

- Collaboration Phase

Participant J: *"I've also learnt a lot dealing with different characters. You know, staff come and go. And yeah, you meet people in in different projects, especially now with freelancers. So you start understanding, OK you need to also change your ways into being able to get the best out of them. Some there are some instances where we would need to be firm because the deadlines can become daunting."*

Participants described their respective approaches to navigating the business through crisis. Some mentioned that they were required to be in the loop continuously so that they were aware of any potential issues and could proactively respond to these issues. Whilst others indicated the importance of giving staff the autonomy to perform their tasks but also ensuring that they are steered in the correct direction to deal with potential issues.

5.7 Results for Research Proposition 3

The different components of an SME leader's transformational leadership style serve to provide different levels of value and contribution at the various phases of organisational evolution.

In this proposition what the researcher sought to explore is whether through the application of certain characteristics of a transformational leadership style, leaders of SMEs can provide value in growing the organisation. The reason for this is due to the nature of the an SME, where the leaders are the primary drivers behind the business strategy and future. With the business trajectory being dependent on the

leader's own personal aspiration and goals. The proposition essentially seeks to determine whether the personal impact of an SME leader is important for the business to be able to grow and be sustainable.

The interview questions asked to the participants of this study was used to test this proposition. These questions were focused on the background of the leader, the impact of their leadership style on the business and what is their vision as leaders for the business. Results from the coding process as well as the associated themes aligned to this proposition are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Codes and their frequencies for research proposition 3

Code	Frequency	Themes
Adaptation: Business Sustainability	5	Leadership for Sustainability (Codes = 18)
Adaptation: Quality of service	1	
Business Operations: Business ethics	1	
Business Operations: Business structure	1	
Business Operations: Business success	1	
Business Operations: Corporate	1	
Leadership: Values-driven	1	
Collaboration	7	
Corporate environment: Organisational vision	1	
Corporate environment: Organisational culture	1	
Financial performance	1	
Funding	1	
Future orientation	1	
Inclusive leadership	1	
Inclusiveness	1	
Revenue	1	
Transparency	1	
Value recognition	1	
Business Operations: Customer relationship	1	Personal Influence on Strategy (Codes = 10)
Leadership: Autonomy	4	
Leadership: Impact-driven	1	
Leadership: Visionary leadership	1	

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Corporate environment: Company Culture	1	
Corporate environment: Domain knowledge	1	
Team support: Recruitment	1	
Team support: Recruitment challenges	1	
Team support: Recruitment strategies	1	
Team support: Trust in team	1	
Business Operations: Business mindset	1	Strategic Leadership (Codes = 11)
Business Operations: Business perspective	1	
Leadership: Autonomy	4	
Impact	1	
Long-term Company goals	1	
Strategic planning	2	
Business management: Strategic thinking	2	
Business management: Marketing strategy	1	
Business management: Performance management	1	
Business management: Succession planning	1	
Organisational focus: Supply chain management	1	
Leadership: Autonomy	4	Vision-Driven Leadership (Codes = 19)
Leadership: Impact-driven	1	
Leadership: Team empowerment	1	
Leadership: Visionary leadership	1	
Corporate environment: Organisational vision	1	
Corporate environment: Firm leadership	1	
Goal setting	7	
Shared vision	2	
Team alignment	1	
Vision	2	
Career development: Academic/professional development	1	
Career development: Career aspirations	2	

Career development: Job satisfaction	2	
Career development: Personal growth	1	
Multifaceted: Future-oriented	1	
Organisational focus	10	
Organisational focus: Stakeholder alignment	1	
Organisational focus: Strategic focus	1	
Team support: Lead by example	1	

In this section below the findings from the themes associated with the research proposition will be highlighted, which will be presented based on the frequency count.

5.7.1 Vision-Driven Leadership

The importance of a vision in which the leader of the business can convey this to the team was highlighted with the participants discussing the aspects of goal setting and leaders having an organisational focus.

- Creativity Phase

Participant A: *“I think all of us. Are just aligned. I think that's probably the most important thing that we've put our egos aside, obviously because we all have an ego to a certain degree, and we've put that aside. On aligning to the strategy of the of the Company.”*

Participant B: *“My leadership style is very. Hands off but almost a partner leadership, I work with my team whether it be above me or below me. I work with them for and try to drive a shared vision or a shared goal in terms of from an objective point of view and trying to get everyone aligned in terms of what the purpose of our objective.”*

- Direction Phase

Participant C: *“So our problem I think right now has to be to better themselves first, to create the opportunity for themselves and the fact and the families going forward, a lot of them have taken up.”*

- Delegation Phase

Participant E: *“Firstly, we are set up deadlines. I said financial goals to measure. Financial performance. For example, the debited days, the stockholding or the stock.”*

- Coordination Phase

Participant H: *“Individuals expectations and objectives with the company's expectations and objectives, and to just illustrate to where everybody fits in and the importance of the role that they play to the greater organisation is very important.”*

- Collaboration Phase

Participant J: *“Everybody walks in and out at any time. Sometimes if I go to the office of late at night, I might find somebody there and it's because they're delivering on a job, that they have a timeline for.”*

Participants expressed that importance of team members knowing what is required of them that knowing what and how to meet the goals. Leaders are the drivers of the organisational vision in an SME and in doing so the need to ensure that the team is aligned and that there are clear well defined goals in place.

5.7.2 Leadership for Sustainability

In this theme participants served to indicate how they are focused on the sustainability of the business.

- Creativity Phase

Participant B: *“. I work with them for and try to drive a shared vision or a shared goal in terms of from an objective point of view and trying to get everyone aligned in terms of what the purpose of our objective is and the work that we're doing so that we can work together to, to achieve our goals.”*

- Direction Phase

Participant D: *“so your adaptivity works with your flexibility I would think so and so then also it works hand in hand without sustainable development concept that myself and my company run with and that's why it leads us to be we want a model ground on ethics.”*

- Delegation Phase
Participant F: *“So as much as you want to make money and make the bottom line work. At the same time, you still look at other places where you can benefit to others as well from the company.”*
- Coordination Phase
Participant G: *“I think we have to, we need we need to and it's the way we want to build this business and the culture in the business.”*
- Collaboration Phase
Participant I: *“I think it's allowed the company to grow. And organically integrate and conservatively. I do think that potentially the business could have. Grown more, perhaps, or perhaps had a higher performance.”*

There was a recognition by the participants that they need to ensure that their teams know what the long term business objectives are to ensure business sustainability. Each of the participants from each phase clearly noted that the leadership responsibilities change as they progressed through the organisational growth model.

5.7.3 Strategic Leadership

Concepts of strategic thinking and planning were highlighted by the participants as ways in which an SME leader ensures alignment in the organisation.

- Creativity Phase
Participant A: *“as I mentioned earlier, it is quite well thought out already in the in the sense that we've already got plans for phase two and three, this is only the first phase initial set up and production.”*
- Direction Phase
Participant C: *“I mean, if you're losing about 1/3 of yourself by the fiscal year on sales, it's not something else that you're dealing your, your business or anything is. So economic challenge was the biggest one in the last two years. It's still going through it. Everyone is feeling the branch of the economy at the moment. So, I'll change my focus from production and the maintenance.”*

Participant D: *“I was very hands on in every intricate detail of the company which anybody would be, because, I mean it was, it is and was my baby.*

I'm talking from sourcing to product development to production to end use we see as I said earlier to sales but as we've grown and as things have progressed I think. My vision is still there but I have more focus on strategy and long term.”

- Delegation Phase

Participant F: *“natural kind of leaders and changing of a mentality to create more strategic has allowed us to actually well if we've done the right job, we've got the right people in place in office, let's rather think strategically and examples like that are actually real world.”*

- Coordination Phase

Participant H: *“Individuals expectations and objectives with the company's expectations and objectives, and to just illustrate to where everybody fits in and the importance of the role that they play to the greater organisation is very important.”*

- Collaboration Phase

Participant I: *“Inclusive approach to leadership. I don't take a very hierarchical approach to leadership. I don't believe in a culture of bosses and underlings. If I can put it that way. I believe the employing adult professionals, people who are competent to what they do and people who will do what they are expected to do. So I don't look, look over people's shoulders. I don't. I don't micromanage and I also don't watch people watch people at the end of the day.”*

Each of the participants placed emphasis on how important planning is to the business to be able to realise both organisational alignment and long-term success. Through the transition of the various growth phases it is clear to see how the leadership style shifts to adapt to this changing environment.

5.7.4 Personal Influence on Strategy

Participants stated that the beliefs and values of the leader were key in steering the direction of the business and how important autonomy is.

- Direction Phase
Participant D: *“our growth has been driven by is the vision that I had when I started this company.
I wanted us to be groundbreaking.”*

- Delegation Phase
Participant F: *“There’s always gonna be a lot of challenges, especially when it comes to, for example, financially working capital spend operations. You know, ensuring you get the right stuff to fill the right positions.”*

- Coordination Phase
Participant H: *“Not a micromanager at all. I like to allow people the autonomy to. Operate. Within a perimeter or within parameters and I’m I prefer to just guide people and be an assistance to people when needed.”*

- Collaboration Phase
Participant J: *“Yeah, with the allowing them the flexibility of working. Not, not according to the clock, but being able to deliver on the job. So, in fact our offices. I don’t think we have a key to it anymore. It’s totally open. Everybody walks in and out at any time.”*

Participants expressed that their beliefs and values had a role in the business direction. The participants from almost every growth sage indicated that there is a vision that a leader has which serves as the roadmap to where the company wants to go and how they want to go about reaching there. A notable finding was that in the case of participants from the creativity phase of organisational growth, neither leader made any indication of the role of personal influence on the strategy. This could be since these businesses are still in their infancy and the leadership’s sole focus is on ensuring the survival of the business.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the results gathered from the ten semi-structured interviews conducted with SME leaders. The questions posed to these participants were designed to either support or challenge the research propositions outlined in Chapter 3. The transcriptions were analysed using an automated coding process, with the

transcripts being read and re-read to ensure accuracy. Codes were then assigned to the data, which were used to structure the findings for each research proposition.

The transcription data provided valuable insights in the form of personal perspectives from individuals active in the sector. In Chapter 6, these findings will be analysed further to assess whether they support the research propositions.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the research findings which are based on the analysis of the semi-structured interviews from Chapter 5 and the literature review in Chapter 2. By following this approach the researcher will therefore be able to answer the research question and test the research propositions. In doing so the result would be a contribution to better understanding the link between transformational leadership of an SME leader and organisational evolution.

As indicated in Chapter 4, this research study sought to follow an inductive approach, with the link between transformational leadership and that of organisational growth being explored through the experience of leaders of SMEs at various positions of organisational growth as described by the Greiner Growth Model. These personal narratives were sourced using semi-structured interviews with ten different SME leaders, with two per phase of the Greiner Growth Model.

A thematic analysis of the interview data was undertaken, with several themes arising from those interviews and were presented in Chapter 5. In the sections below, each of these themes will be discussed in accordance with the respective research proposition that they are aligned with.

6.2 Discussion of Findings for Research Proposition 1

RESEARCH PROPOSITION 1: *Leaders of SMEs must adapt their leadership style to align with the challenges in each of the organisational growth phases.*

This research proposition sought to understand the ability of SME leaders to make the changes to their leadership style based on the business requirements at each of the organisational growth phases of the business. The organisational growth model developed by Greiner indicated that this is something leaders of SMEs are required to do to ensure that they can successfully navigate the various growth phases (Greiner, 1997). SME leaders are forced to be adaptable when it comes to their leadership style as each phase of growth requires something different from a leader. In the case of a start-up, a directive leadership approach is required to drive the organisation forward and to ensure its survival. Contrast this with an organisation that seeks to grow, the leadership style needs to be focused on a vision for the business and hence a transformational leadership style is favoured. This style will serve to inspire the team in pursuit of growth as leaders have a strategic outlook for

the business (Yangailo, 2023). Due to their position as decision makers and those responsible for setting the strategy, SME leaders are impacted by the company's position within Greiner's Growth Model (Nguyen et al., 2021).

6.2.1 Leadership Evolution

The participants indicated that as the business has grown, they have had to change their leadership approach in accordance with the organisational growth and the associated challenges. This was a common consensus across each of the leaders at the various growth phases defined by Greiner's Growth Model. In the creativity phase, the participant touched on having defined objectives and a shared organisational vision which are associated with a transformational leadership style.

This therefore aligns to the work of Knezovic and Drkić (2021) who discuss that transformational leaders display creative behaviour which seeks to promote employee performance that contributes to moving towards the organisations vision. According to Avolio et al. (1991) this is the one of the four characteristics of transformational leadership, that of inspirational motivation. Those participants from the coordination and collaboration phases discussed how their leadership role was to act as a facilitator and focus on strategic thinking in the business.

6.2.2 Leadership Flexibility

The aspect of flexibility came through from the participant interviews. With participants from the creativity phase stating that it is necessary for a leader to adjust their style to build trust and cohesion. Participants from the creativity phase highlighted the importance of leadership flexibility as well, for a business that is in a start-up phase. These participants noted that they called on their own personal experience on the requirement to be flexible in one's leadership style when working with different cultures and people. At the delegation phase, this participant spoke about how, through their own personal experience of creating systems that promote autonomy.

Participants in the coordination and collaboration spaces stress the importance of the right people for the right jobs and encourage a more collaboration environment Qalati et al. (2022). The findings from the results stressed the importance of leadership flexibility to ensure effective work.

6.2.3 Growth Phase-Specific Leadership

In this theme what was evident was the way in which the leaders approached how they will achieve organisational growth. Participants from the creativity phase indicated how previously they had adopted what was deemed as a “hardheaded” approach to leadership that served to be more a dictatorship. This was supported by participants from the next growth phase, direction in which these leaders had to come the realisation that they could no longer deal with the day-to-day operations as they had appointed people to attend to those issues. As we progressed to the delegation and coordination phases, participants then illustrated that they adopted a transformational leadership style as they had a vision and objectives which they used to inspire the team. This approach allowed leaders the freedom to focus on other aspects of the business or new opportunities, which for example was highlighted by the participant of the collaboration phase.

This linkage between individual responses and the theory was clear in that as a business grows you have this shift in how a leader views their involvement in the business (Yangailo, 2023).

6.2.4 Leadership-Organisational Fit

This theme arose as participants discussed how a leaders approach needs to be aligned to the organisational goals. It was noted that many of these participants stressed the importance of having a team that bought into the organisations vision and that this was supported through clear feedback, management support and the celebration of team successes. Creativity phase participants are leaders of businesses that are at their infancy and as a result lack the resources, to mitigate against this participant raised the importance of creating a shared vision so that everyone knows where they were going. Whilst the participants from the direction phase discussed that to keep company morale high, they served to promote a collaborative work environment that recognises employee contributions. Through regular engagement employees will be inspired to create a productive team culture, as discussed by the participants in the delegation phase. In both the coordination and collaboration phases it was observed that leaders allowed their teams the autonomy to make decisions, whilst they focused on serving as a good example for the team.

Gherghina et al. (2020) stresses the ability of an SME to be able to adapt and respond to both the client and market demands is due to their organisational structure.

6.2.5 Leadership in Dynamic Environment

In terms of this theme, what came across was those leaders of SMEs had to navigate the team through different environments. Therefore this need, resulted in them having to adapt their approach to align with the business needs at a particular phase. The aspect of visionary leadership was raised by the participant of the creativity phase, whereby through this leadership style a business can be successful as leaders are required to deal with resources constraints and other demands. In the direction phase, the participant stated that their approach was to empower their teams to assist the business in being adaptable. This need to empower staff was also indicated by the participant of the last phase of the Greiner model, the collaboration phase in which the participant highlighted the need to be more strategic in their thinking and therefore needed to empower the next generation of leaders.

Zamani (2022) who discussed that SMEs are required to adapt to be sustainable even in the face of varying environments. This point resonated with the participant from the coordination phase whose view was already looking as to how the business will look like in the next few years.

6.2.6 Growth Phase Challenges

Growth serves not only as an opportunity for an SME to enter a new market and attract new customers but also comes with new challenges. Aspects such as the access to finance, the available resources and infrastructure as well as the business ability to innovate have an impact (Ndiaye et al., 2018).

This issue resonated with all the participants as they had all faced them before. For the creativity phase the participants highlighted how they needed access to resources but could not afford to have individuals as full time staff and were forced to make use of individuals time after hour. Participants from the direction phase where quick to point out that these challenges where also due to external factors, noting how market conditions have impacted the business in the last two years. Theory supports the next claim as SMEs are inhibited from growing due to the lack of funding (Bushe, 2019). Collaboration phase participants emphasised this as a huge challenge for their business. The other notable challenges raised was that of

the role that staff plays in the business. Both participants of the coordination and delegation phases indicated that staff need to be told what is expected of them up front and then be allowed to do it.

6.2.7 Conclusive findings for Research Proposition 1

Through research proposition 1, what was sought to be tested was that SME leaders need to adapt their respective leadership styles to be able to assist the business through the transition between each growth phase.

What has resulted is that the findings from the interviews align with the Greiner Growth Model, in that one's leadership style changes from being hands on in the early stages to a more strategic transformational leadership style once the business has grown. Through each of the interview's participants highlighted different aspects of a leader which was required to build a cohesive and trustworthy business, that gives the leader the opportunity to shift their focus into a more delegative and collaborative approach.

What also became apparent was the SME leaders need to ensure that they are aligned to organisational goals and in doing so they can then have clear and transparent discussions with their team and provide them with the support they need.

6.3 Discussion of Findings for Research Proposition 2

RESEARCH PROPOSITION 2: *SME leaders have the ability to adapt their leadership style based on the characteristics of their team and the growth phase that the business is in.*

SME leaders are dependent on their teams to meet the organisational objectives to achieve business objectives success and growth. In this research proposition what was aimed for, was to understand whether SME leaders can adjust their leadership approach based on the growth phase they find themselves in. According to Soomro et al. (2019) leaders of SMEs could adjust their leadership approach in accordance with changing team dynamics. This is best explained, that when a leader is required to deal with less experienced team members, they will employ a directive leadership style and when dealing with experienced team members they will shift to a transformational leadership style. This approach is crucial for SMEs, as entrepreneurial leadership leads the business to be in a position where they take risks and are quickly adaptable to organisational changes to survive and be competitive (Nguyen et al., 2021).

6.3.1 Leadership Competence

Participants all seemed to align with this aspect that an SME leader is required to be a good communicator, have a drive for continuous improvement and be professional. In doing so the leader can serve to create a sense of trust and inspiration for the team. This is supported by the Berberoglu (2018) as they discuss that an employee's attitude and performance is impacted by organisational culture.

In terms of the findings participants from the creativity phase stressed how they sought to create more of a collaborative environment, one that encourage all team members to have a voice but they did also note that this approach was also time consuming. The other aspect that is important is that managers need to realise their weaknesses and opportunities for development, with the participant from the direction phase noting how they had to work on their management skills as they knew they were lacking in this department. This is supported by the responses from participants in the coordination and collaboration phases, in which these participants highlighted how they believed their individual competence served as a driver to drive the business forward. They indicated that through their own abilities the business was able to move get staff to undertake tasks and attract outside funding.

6.3.2 Resilience in Leadership

Yusoff et al. (2018) discusses that for an SME to beat the failure trap they need to be resilient and his resilience is driven by the leaders of the organisation. The participants from all five growth phases seem to align with the fact that resilience was key for them to keep the business running and to be able to grow the business. However what was notable was that there came across as a form of arrogance or strong sense of self believe in their abilities of the participants.

Participants from the creativity phase discussed ambitious plans as to how they plan on growing the business in a few months and how they are willing to look for new opportunities and fight to obtain a position in the market. In the direction phase what was indicated was that the external factors forced a change in how they carried out their business activities, with the participant indicating the need to look at improving the plant availability and reducing costs on the maintenance side of things. The aspect of self-belief was evident from the participant in the delegation phase in which they indicated that they are continuously striving to achieve more. With those participants in the collaboration phase planning for new opportunities in the next 5 to

10 years. This approach is what can inspire teams as through the way in which a leader shares this vision they can be deemed to be seen as inspirational (Bednall et al., 2018).

6.3.3 Leadership Versatility

Leaders of SMEs are in direct contact with their employees as there are few levels of management that separate the leader from those employees on the ground. Therefore these leaders need to act in such a way that they serve to inspire the team to be able to meet organisational targets (Anderson, 2017). SMEs change as the business evolves and these changes require different actions from the leadership (Greiner, 1997).

Creativity phase participants indicated that they are very deliberate in their approach to the business objectives. With those in the direction phase indicating that you need to be aware of what is going on either internally or externally and be able to respond accordingly. In the delegation phase the participants noted that they have had to deal with different characters and that staff goes and comes which you need to account for. The hard working approach was one that the participants in the coordination phase favoured and saw this to motivate their teams. While those in the collaboration phase aimed to create an environment that was family orientated which means that team members want to be there and would be willing to do anything to support the business.

6.3.4 Problem-Solving Capability

Innovative and the ability to inspire employees is characteristics that are associated with a transformation leadership style (Avolio et al., 1991). In the case of an SME they are faced with multiple challenges as illustrated in Chapter 1. The aspect of problem solving is crucial as they need to guide the business to overcome these challenges. Much of the participants indicated that they had sought to get inputs from their teams as the business grows.

Participants from the creativity phase indicated that they had strong decision making capabilities which allows them to make quick decisive decisions to respond to problems. Direction phase participants indicated that they sought to have a collaborative approach to problem solving whereby they got inputs from the team before ultimately deciding on a way forward. This aspect was further supported by those participants in the delegation phase where they looked to have regular

sessions with the team to get their views and ideas. Once the business researched the final phase of the growth model, that of the collaboration phase what was observed was that these leaders served to drive the business forward relying on the team's experience to make decisions.

6.3.5 Decision-Making Agility

The theme of decision-making came across from the participants, which is something that is crucial for leaders of SMEs as they are responsible for giving direction to the business (Nguyen et al., 2021). Participants highlighted the importance of making the correct decisions such that the business can navigate these difficult periods. Leaders are required to ensure that they have an organisational focus when they are deciding on the decisions to be made.

Participants from the creativity phase showcased their decisive nature in ensuring how they managed to get the business operations going when they experienced some challenges. While the participants in the direction phase emphasised that they empower the staff by training them such that they can make the correct decisions but still maintained oversight. Participants in the delegation phase indicated that even though their business was still somewhat informal they needed to ensure that when decisions were required, they were able to make the difficult ones. The aspect of empowerment was again highlighted by those participants in the coordination phase where they indicated that there needs to be performance management and career planning in place to assist further decision makers in the business. Collaboration phase participants discussed how correct decisions are required especially in the case of the availability of funding and how to effectively make use of it.

6.3.6 Crisis Management

In Greiner it is mentioned that each of the growth phases are linked to a crisis phase where the leaders are placed under strain and require the support to their teams to enable them to transition out of this phase (Greiner, 1997). What the findings should was that the participants raised the aspect of how they valued communication and to overcome the issues placed in front of them. The participants varied in their response as to how they would navigate these issues, with some indicating the need to be kept in the loop continuously so that they were kept abreast of the issues, with others indicating that they allowed their staff the autonomy to perform tasks.

Both participants in the creativity and direction phases discussed how they ensure that their team feels included in the decision making process and that there are clear and open lines of communication, so that should something go wrong the team feels safe to disclose on this. Other participants like those in the delegation and coordination phases indicated that they hold regular engagements with the team and focus on providing guidance rather than instructing the staff. This approach is typically associated with transformational leadership at the later stages of growth as the leaders have built trust and shift their focus on more strategic issues (Greiner, 1997).

6.3.7 Conclusive findings for Research Proposition 2

Findings from research proposition 2 confirm that in the case when leaders must deal with teams that have varying characteristics at different points of the growth model, they are required to adjust their leadership approach. This is required as they need to adjust to the team dynamics and in doing so leaders can shift between a directional leadership style to that of a transformational style.

Participants were clear in that both competence and resilience were key for the leaders to be adaptable. These participants emphasised how through the evolution of the business they have had to face several challenges and their personal resilience served to inspire and motivate their teams. The theme of versatility, which came across from the thematic analysis, also highlighted this in that business demands dictated the leadership approach.

6.4 Discussion of Findings for Research Proposition 3

RESEARCH PROPOSITION 3: *The different components of an SME leader's transformational leadership style serve to provide different levels of value and contribution at the various phases of organisational evolution.*

Research proposition 2 looked to understand if leaders of SMEs apply different traits associated with transformational leadership style across the various phases of organisational growth. This proposition builds on the fact that transformational leadership is a style utilised by SME leaders to drive creativity and innovation with the organisation and in doing so it is crucial for the management and development of the business (Simba & Thai, 2019). In the case of transformational leadership, Bednall et al. (2018) stated that traits of transformational leaders are essential in achieving long term success. (Manzoor et al., 2019) place particular emphasis on

the fact that organisational performance is highly dependent on the leadership style of an SME leader which has a direct impact on business performance and growth. The proposition essentially seeks to determine whether the personal impact of an SME leader is important for the business to be able to grow and be sustainable.

6.4.1 Vision-Driven Leadership

According to Spalding University (2023) the benefits of transformational leadership is such that you have motivated employees and lower staff turnover, this is attributed to the fact that employees become aligned to the organisational vision through the leaders. In the context of vision this is greatly important as you need the leader to display these character traits that serve to motivate their employees such that they have goals and an organisational focus. The findings from these interviews showed that the participants were aware of the importance of team members knowing what is required of them and what the organisational goals were.

In the creativity phase participants indicated that they have ensured that the team is aligned with the direction of the business, but it did require that people put their egos aside and focus on the bigger picture. Together with this was the upliftment vision that the participants of the direction phase had for their staff in which they sort to create opportunities for them such that they can improve the qualities of both their lives and their families. The other aspect is that participants in the delegation and coordination phase indicated that financial measures were utilised to determine if the organisation was on the right track as well as the individual team members understand where they fit in the company's expectations and objectives. In the collaboration phase you are at the end of the growth model and everyone is aware of the vision which allows for greater autonomy as described by the participants in this phase.

6.4.2 Leadership for Sustainability

In an SME the aspect of sustainability is important due to the sheer size as the team has direct impacts on the direction as well as how the business operations are carried out. Transformational leaders are seen to have a vision, one that serves to inspire the team to undertake their roles such that they can contribute to the sustainability of the business (Anderson, 2017).

The participants all indicated various components as to how their leadership style approaches the sustainability issue for the business. They indicated that in the

creativity phase their approach was to ensure that the team was driven towards a shared vision or a shared goal and all of them were required to align in terms of the organisational objectives. The way in which the participant on the direction indicated their leadership approach was such that they wanted to do business in an ethical manner, which would serve to inspire their employees to be with an organisation that is seeking to do good. This was supported by the participant from the delegation phase who indicated that as much as profit was key, organisations need to look at ways to benefit others. Whilst the participants from the coordination phases indicated that they need to build an organisational culture which can ensure low staff turnover and keep employees motivated.

6.4.3 Strategic Leadership

Strategic leadership is associated with a transformational leadership approach in which the leader has a long term focus for the business. Qalati et al. (2022) supports this in that transformational leadership is focused on the bigger picture for the business. Participants indicated that the concepts of strategic thinking and planning where ways in which an SME leader ensured alignment within the organisation.

Participants from the creativity phase indicated that they know where they want to go. In the direction phase the participant raised the point that leaders need to be aware of what is going on in the market and be able to apply strategic thinking to assist in navigating these changes. Those participants in the delegation phase indicated that they sought to look at the people they employed as they were looking to grow the business and by hiring the right people, they can focus on the long term vision. In following this approach as the business transitioned to the next two growth phases, that of coordination and collaboration leaders were able to have a team that has bought into the vision and is willing to contribute to it.

6.4.4 Personal Influence on Strategy

A leader has a personal influence which serves to provide value and meaningful contributions to a business. These contributions vary on what is required of the leader, with Greiner (1997) reporting on this for each of the growth phases. The participants from each of the growth phases illustrated how important the beliefs and values of the leaders were in driving the business direction.

From the participants in the direction phase it was indicated that there was a personal drive to get the business to grow, as the leader held the value of sustainability close

to themselves. Participants from the delegation phase were clear in that they cannot do everything that they need to get the right people in, which they could influence to get to achieve the objectives for the business. Coordination phase participants noted that they cannot be sole decision makers as the business needs people to drive the operations and those to look for new opportunities and therefore need to allow their teams to make decisions.

6.4.5 Conclusive findings for Research Proposition 3

In terms of research proposition 3 the findings are in support of the claim that different traits of a leader are on display during the specific growth phase. Participants highlighted this was due to leaders having a vision, which centred on them aligning the team with the organisational goals.

The findings showed that leaders worked hard in the beginning phases of Greiner's Model such as the creativity and direction phases, in trying to get employees to buy-in to the organisations vision and plans for growth but in the latter stages this was made easier as team members understood their role in the business and how they were contributing to organisational growth.

One of the key components that were raised by the participants was that of strategic leadership and how leaders need to be focused on the long term vision and in doing so get the right people in place to be able to achieve organisational growth and success.

6.5 Discussion of Findings for Research Question

RESEARCH QUESTION:

How does the transformational leadership style influence and potentially hold back the organisational evolution of an SME?

Findings with respect to this research question showed that transformational leadership can inhibit organisational growth if the leadership approach is not adapted to the organisational needs. The participants served to highlight how they are required not only to have a long-term vision but also balance this with the awareness of the needs of the business to make correct and decisive decisions. It was also noted that many of the participants did indicate the positive aspects of transformational leadership and its application within the SME context.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

In this study the researcher sought to understand the influence that leaders of SMEs have on the company's evolutionary life. The literature review in Chapter 2, detailed how important leaders are within the context of an SME and how the leadership style of a leader is required to change as a business evolves, as described by Greiner's Growth Model. In Chapter 3, the researcher developed the research question and the research propositions, with the details as to how the research was going to be undertaken being presented in Chapter 4. Following which the data was collected through interviews with leaders of SMEs, with these results being analysed and presented in Chapter 5 of this study. In Chapter 6, a discussion of the findings was shown to better understand how the collected and analysed data could be used to answer the research question and the research propositions.

Therefore this chapter then provides details on the main findings of the research study which serves to close out the research in terms of discussing what was planned to be done, what was found by the researcher in undertaking the research study and the recommendations for SME leaders.

7.2 Research Context and Relevance

The context of this research was that of SMEs in South Africa. These SMEs are crucial to the county as they serve as drivers of the economy, contributing to both economic growth and in job creation. In the case of South Africa, who is faced with several challenges, SMEs offer the county with opportunities for both social and economic improvement, with the contribution of SMEs being detailed in Chapter 2.

SME leaders serve as the drivers of the business direction and are the ones that are the decision makers. Therefore their leadership style is crucial for the sustainability of the business and the business's ability to grow.

Therefore in undertaking this research, there is a vast array of knowledge that was able to be gained in the field of leadership theory and that of organisational evolution. The insights gained from this research can be utilised to improve the survival and growth of SMEs.

7.3 Main Findings

This section of the report details the research question and propositions that were sought to be answered by the study and an overview of what research methodology was followed to be able to answer the research question and test the propositions. Following which the interpretation of the findings from the research will be presented.

7.3.1 Research Question and Propositions

In undertaking the research, the research question and propositions were developed following the review of the existing literature and was done to be able to assist in understanding the link between a transformational leadership style of an SME and that of organisational evolution. The current literature on transformational leadership provided a departure point for the research as transformational leadership is often associated with aspects of creativity, innovation and employee engagement. This coupled with the model for organisational growth, as described by Greiner's Growth model allowed for the development of the following research question and research proposition:

- Research question
How does the transformational leadership style influence and potentially hold back the organisational evolution of an SME?
- Research proposition 1
Leaders of SMEs must adapt their leadership style to align with the challenges in each of the organisational growth phases.
- Research proposition 2
SME leaders have the ability to adapt their leadership style based on the characteristics of their team and the growth phase that the business is in.
- Research proposition 3
The different components of an SME leader's transformational leadership style serve to provide different levels of value and contribution at the various phases of organisational evolution.

7.3.2 Research Methodology

This study followed an interpretivist approach whereby the researcher sought to gain the personal insights on the leadership style and how this is linked to organisational growth of an SME. The detailed methodology is illustrated in Chapter 4, which indicated that ten semi-structured interviews were employed, with two interviews per

growth phase of Greiner's Growth Model. Following which these interviews were analysed through a thematic analysis to identify common themes which would be used to answer the research question and test the research propositions.

7.3.3 Consolidation of Research Findings

7.3.3.1 Research Proposition 1

Leaders of SMEs must adapt their leadership style to align with the challenges in each of the organisational growth phases.

It was found from the literature and the research findings that leaders of SMEs are required to adjust their leadership style when the company evolves through the various growth phases. The participants shared their own personal experiences as to how their hands-on leadership style that they relied upon in the creativity phase had to change to a more strategic style as the business transitions into the latter stages of the organisational growth cycle. This adaptation of their leadership style as the SME grows, aligned directly as to what is expected with Greiner's Growth Model.

Therefore the findings supported the proposition that leaders of SMEs are required to be adaptable to be able to align with the challenges in each of the growth phases. It must also be noted that many of the leaders did indicate that it was not always easy to let go and shift their focus, as they indicated the struggle to shift from a directive leadership style to that of a transformational leadership style. This is an indicator that even though leader are aware of their responsibilities to be adaptable they are not always capable of doing so.

7.3.3.2 Research Proposition 2

SME leaders have the ability to adapt their leadership style based on the characteristics of their team and the growth phase that the business is in.

This proposition sought to note that due to the make-up of the team and the phase or organisational growth the business is in, SME leaders are required to adjust their leadership style accordingly. Participants indicated that there needs to be agility in the leadership style and what decisions they make to navigate challenges and to steer the business through economic downturns. There was also the indication by participants that they were required to manage team expectations and ensure that their teams remain motivated.

Based on the findings this research proposition has been supported, the reason for this is that leaders have the ability to be agile and show resilience in their leadership approach and can successfully navigate the issues facing the SMEs.

7.3.3.3 Research Proposition 3

The different components of an SME leader's transformational leadership style serve to provide different levels of value and contribution at the various phases of organisational evolution.

The leadership style of an individual is made up of various components such as empathy, communication and strategic thinking. Leaders can call on these components when they are required by the business. In the findings the participants indicated that they had to utilise aspects such as personal vision, to drive the business forward and how they adapted their leadership style from being dictatorial early in the business life to that of a more inclusive and collaborative approach as the business matured.

In terms of this proposition, the findings supported this with SME leaders being responsible for the company position and outlook based on the leader's personal vision and strategic thinking.

7.3.3.4 Research Question

How does the transformational leadership style influence and potentially hold back the organisational evolution of an SME?

Many of the responses serve to indicate the positive association that transformational leadership has on the evolution of an SME. In that it contributes to leaders who can inspire and motivate team members who fall in line with organisational objectives.

However what also came across from the research findings was that SME leaders that had a focus on the long-term vision failed to consider the short term business needs which led to the rise in operational issues. Whilst the participants indicated that there were times when SME leaders did not fully trust their team's ability and they had focused their attention on the short-term objectives of the business. In doing so they neglected the long term focus of the business which led to the business not grasping potential opportunities.

This study serves as a useful means to show that a balance between transformational leadership and organisational growth is required to be aligned for the business to yield positive contributions.

7.4 Recommendations from the Research Study

This research study has been beneficial in that it has yielded rich insights from various leaders of SMEs that are progressing through the organisational growth phases. The following are some of the recommendations that leaders of SMEs can implement:

- SME leaders are to adhere to a flexible leadership style that aligns to the point of the organisational growth that the company is in.
- SMEs leaders should be looking to prioritize open communication and serve to create a supportive workplace.
- Leaders are to ensure that they not only look at balancing the short-term needs but also serve to have a long-term focus when making decisions.
- Leaders should be investing in their teams through training in both the aspects of leadership and management they will have a workforce that they can leverage off to assist in navigating the challenges facing the business.

7.5 Limitations of the Research Study

In undertaking this study the researcher notes that there are several limitations that were in existence. For this study the following limitations are noted:

- The availability of participants that are willing to participate in the interviews.
- The focus on two SMEs from each one of the organisational growth phases has the potential to limit the extent to which the findings can be generally applied. To achieve generality it is necessary to have a greater number of participants in each of the growth phases.
- The SME leaders who have agreed to participate with the interviews did not want to disclose their financial performance of their respective businesses.
- Due to the nature of the study following an interpretivist approach there may be biases in either responses of the participants or the interpretation of the data by the interviewer.

7.6 Recommendations for Future Research

This research study has yielded rich insights into the field however, there exists the opportunity for future research that can add to the body of knowledge. This can be in the form of:

- A quantitative study can be undertaken, that can serve to yield a more comprehensive understanding of leadership impact across the organisational growth phases.
- Larger group of participants can be used for the sample. Also this can be done across various sectors to provide a greater generalisability of the results.
- Further research can be done on SMEs outside of South Africa to determine whether cultural and regional factors influence leadership style,
- The impact of external market conditions can also be assessed to understand their roles in leaderships approach to dealing with volatile environments.

7.7 Concluding Remarks

The literature showed how vital the leadership style of a leader is in the context of an SME and how the position of the business in the specific growth phase dictates the requirements of the leader's approach. In this study what was being explored was the linkage between transformational leadership and organisational evolution, as described by Greiner's Growth Model. Through the process of conducting semi-structured interviews with leaders of SMEs that are at various positions in the growth model, rich insights were obtained which served to contribute to the existing literature. This study yielded insights as to how leaders adapt their leadership style in navigating organisational growth.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

A.1 Introduction

Start off by thanking the participant for their time to participate in the research process, explain how invaluable their perspectives will be for the research study and reassure them that their personal information will remain confidential.

A.2 Interview Questions

For this research study, semi-structured interviews are to be conducted to exploring the impact of transformational leadership on the evolution and performance of Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa. These interviews were undertaken with individuals that are in leadership positions within SMEs.

The questions for these interviews focused on the following aspects:

- Background and Experience
- Personal Leadership Style
- Employee Engagement
- Impact of Leadership
- Future Goals and Vision

The interview questions to be used are as follows:

Background and Experience

1. How long have you been at the company?
2. What is the role you hold at the company?
3. Can you provide me with a description of your educational background?

Personal Leadership Style

1. Can you describe your leadership style?
2. What are the key leadership traits that you believe are core to you?
3. How have you applied this leadership style within your company?
4. Has your leadership style evolved as the company has grown?
5. What challenges have you faced during the growth of the company? How has your leadership style been used to help overcome these challenges?

Employee Engagement

1. What have you done as a leader to motivate and inspire your employees to achieve organisational success?

Impact of Leadership

1. How has your leadership style influenced the performance and growth of your company?
2. What measurements do you use to determine the impact of your leadership on how the company performs?
3. SMEs benefit from being adaptable, how have you adapted your leadership to meet the requirements of a leader during the various phases of organisational evolution?

Future Goals and Vision

1. What is your vision for your company and how do you as a leader plan to influence this vision?
2. What goals have you set for yourself as a leader?

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA. My research focuses on exploring the impact of transformational leadership on the evolution and performance of Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa. Our interview is expected to last about an hour and your insights will be incredibly valuable in understanding how transformational leadership enhances the growth, innovation and sustainability of SMEs in South Africa. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. To ensure confidentiality, all the collected data will be reported without identifiers. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Your time and inputs are valued, and we thank you.

Research name: Trivesh Moodley

Email: 25221231@mygibs.co.za

Contact number: +27 84 999 2333

Research supervisor: Professor Albert Wöcke and Dr Malika Khodja-Möller

Email: WockeA@gibs.co.za and malika.khodja@twimsafrica.com

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: ATLAS.TI CODEBOOK

Codes

(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP1) Adaptation
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP1) Adapting to change
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP1) Efficiency
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP1) Expectations
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP1) Flexibility
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP1) Growth mindset
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP1) Resilience
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP1) Resistant to change
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Altruism
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Ambitious
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Belief
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Creativity
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Curiosity
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Dealing with stress
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Dedication
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Economic hardships
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) High expectations
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Increased productivity
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Independence
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Informality
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Innovation
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Integrity
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Optimism
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Passion
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Perfectionism
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Productivity
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Quality-oriented
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Self-confidence
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP2) Stability
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP3) Business Sustainability
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP3) Conservatism

(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Adaptation: (RP3) Quality of service
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP1) Business expansion
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP1) Business growth
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP1) Employee feedback
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP1) Employee growth
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP1) Employee relations
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP1) Employee-employer relationship
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP1) Process improvement
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP1) Small business
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP1) Small business struggles
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP2) Business challenges
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP3) Business ethics
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP3) Business mindset
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP3) Business perspective
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP3) Business structure
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP3) Business success
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP3) Corporate
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP3) Customer relationship
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: (RP3) Financial improvement
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Business Operations: Employee well-being
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2)
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): (RP1) Evolution
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): (RP2) (RP3) Values-driven
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): (RP2) Competence
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): (RP2) Self-efficacy
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): (RP3) Autonomy
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): (RP3) Impact-driven
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): (RP3) Team empowerment
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): (RP3) Visionary leadership
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): Community involvement
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): Competitiveness
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): Delegating
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): Diversification

(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): Employee-centered
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): Empowerment
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): Entrepreneurship
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): Environmental concern
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): Knowledge transfer
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): Knowledge-sharing
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): Leadership development
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): Partnerships
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): Quality assurance
(RP1) (RP2) (RP3) Leadership (2): Self-awareness
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2)
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): (RP2) Influence
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): (RP2) Insightful
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): (RP2) Reflection
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): Comfort
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): Continuity
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): Equality
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): Implementation
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): Importance
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): Lack of clarity
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): Learning from different characters
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): Mistakes
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): Operations
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): Questioning
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): Recognition
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): Reframing
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): Retention
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): Setting boundaries
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): Support
(RP1) (RP2) Professional Development (2): Trust
(RP1) Adaptability
(RP1) Career progression
(RP1) Change
(RP1) Conflict resolution

(RP1) Delegation
(RP1) Development
(RP1) Employee development
(RP1) Expansion
(RP1) Experience
(RP1) Firmness
(RP1) Flexible leadership
(RP1) Growth
(RP1) Leadership skills
(RP1) Leadership style
(RP1) Learning
(RP1) Management experience
(RP1) Mentoring
(RP1) Organisational success
(RP1) Performance evaluation
(RP1) Planning
(RP1) Professional Development (3)
(RP1) Professional Development (4)
(RP1) Success
(RP1) Team building
(RP1) Team dynamics
(RP1) Teamwork
(RP1) Training
(RP1) Transition
(RP2) (RP3) Collaboration
(RP2) Accountability
(RP2) Achievement
(RP2) Action
(RP2) Ambition
(RP2) Clarity
(RP2) Collaborative leadership
(RP2) Commitment
(RP2) Communication
(RP2) Cultural differences

(RP2) Decision-making
(RP2) Directness
(RP2) Ego management
(RP2) Empathy
(RP2) Evaluation
(RP2) Feedback
(RP2) Introspection
(RP2) Mentorship
(RP2) Motivation
(RP2) Negotiation
(RP2) Open-mindedness
(RP2) Problem-solving
(RP2) Professionalism
(RP2) Responsibility
(RP2) Self-improvement
(RP2) Self-reflection
(RP2) Uncertainty
(RP2) Understanding
(RP3) Alignment
(RP3) Career advancement
(RP3) Corporate environment
(RP3) Corporate environment: (RP3) Organisational vision
(RP3) Corporate environment: Company Culture
(RP3) Corporate environment: Domain knowledge
(RP3) Corporate environment: Firm leadership
(RP3) Corporate environment: Organisational culture
(RP3) Financial performance
(RP3) Funding
(RP3) Future orientation
(RP3) Goal setting
(RP3) Impact
(RP3) Inclusive leadership
(RP3) Inclusiveness
(RP3) Leadership

(RP3) Long-term Company goals
(RP3) Revenue
(RP3) Shared vision
(RP3) Strategic planning
(RP3) Team alignment
(RP3) Transparency
(RP3) Value recognition
(RP3) Vision
Business management
Business management: (RP1) (RP3) Strategic thinking
Business management: (RP1) Management
Business management: (RP1) Policy-making
Business management: (RP2) Data analysis
Business management: (RP2) Decision making
Business management: (RP2) Financial management
Business management: (RP2) Financial mindset
Business management: (RP2) Financial oversight
Business management: (RP2) Risk management
Business management: (RP3) Marketing strategy
Business management: (RP3) Performance management
Business management: (RP3) Succession planning
Career development (2)
Career development (2): (RP1) Career growth
Career development (2): (RP1) Career planning
Career development (2): (RP1) Work environment
Career development (2): (RP1) Work-life balance
Career development (2): (RP2) Career Development
Career development (2): (RP2) Skill development
Career development (2): (RP2) Training and Development
Career development (2): (RP2) Work experience
Career development (2): (RP3) Academic/professional development
Career development (2): (RP3) Career aspirations
Career development (2): (RP3) Job satisfaction
Career development (2): (RP3) Long-term hires

Career development (2): (RP3) Personal growth
Career development (2): (RP3) Work ethic
Career development (2): Career change
Career development (2): Work roles
Career development (2): Workaholism
Comfortable
Cooperation
Director
Education
Employee engagement
Employee involvement
Growth Phase Challenges
Growth Phase-Specific Leadership
Growth_Mindset
Improvement
Inclusivity
Individual growth
Inquiry
Leadership Evolution
Leadership Flexibility
Leadership in Dynamic Environment
Leadership-Organisational Fit
Maturity
Multifaceted
Multifaceted: (RP2) Career
Multifaceted: (RP2) Health
Multifaceted: (RP3) Future-oriented
Multifaceted: Business
Multifaceted: Deadline-oriented
Multifaceted: Finance
Multifaceted: Global challenges
Multifaceted: Marketing
Multifaceted: Pandemic impact
Multifaceted: Purpose

Multifaceted: Technology
Objectives
Organisational focus
Organisational focus: (RP3) Stakeholder alignment
Organisational focus: (RP3) Strategic focus
Organisational focus: (RP3) Supply chain management
Organisational focus: Educational role
Organisational focus: Goal-oriented
Organisational focus: Industry-specific challenges
Organisational focus: Operational oversight
Organisational focus: Organisational role
Organisational focus: Social responsibility
Professional growth
Quality
RP 1: Leaders of SMEs can adapt their leadership style
Team support
Team support: (RP1) Coaching
Team support: (RP1) Continuous learning
Team support: (RP1) Coordination
Team support: (RP1) Facilitation
Team support: (RP1) Learning from others
Team support: (RP1) Learning from peers
Team support: (RP2) Hands-on approach
Team support: (RP3) Lead by example
Team support: (RP3) Recruitment
Team support: (RP3) Recruitment challenges
Team support: (RP3) Recruitment strategies
Team support: (RP3) Trust in team
Team support: Encouragement
Team support: Engagement
Team support: Guidance
Team support: Open-door policy
Team support: Reciprocity
Team support: Referral

Team support: Supportive
Team support: Supportiveness
Team support: Word of mouth
Work pressure

Themes

(RP1) Theme Growth Phase Challenges
(RP1) Theme Growth Phase-Specific Leadership
(RP1) Theme Leadership Evolution
(RP1) Theme Leadership Flexibility
(RP1) Theme Leadership in Dynamic Environment
(RP1) Theme Leadership-Organisational Fit
(RP2) Theme Crisis Management
(RP2) Theme Decision-Making Agility
(RP2) Theme Leadership Competence
(RP2) Theme Leadership Versatility
(RP2) Theme Problem-Solving Capability
(RP2) Theme Resilience in Leadership
(RP3) Theme Leadership for Sustainability
(RP3) Theme Personal Influence on Strategy
(RP3) Theme Strategic Leadership
(RP3) Theme Vision-Driven Leadership