

## A Systematic Literature Review of the Importance of Leadership to the Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises



John Bwalya, MBA<sup>1</sup>, Austin Mwange, Ph.D<sup>2</sup>, Joseph Chiseyengi<sup>3</sup>, Robbison Manda, MPA<sup>4</sup>, Golden Mashiri, MSc.<sup>5</sup>, Musonda Ashley Masase-Muza, MSc<sup>6</sup>, Nizah Mutambo, MSc<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Senior Lecturer, Business Department, ZICT University Ndola, Zambia & Doctorate in Business Administration Student, Department of Business Administration, School of Business, ZCAS University, Lusaka, Zambia

<sup>2</sup> Senior Lecturer, Department of Economics, School of Social Sciences, ZCAS University, Lusaka, Zambia

<sup>3-7</sup> Doctorate in Business Administration Student, Department of Business Administration, School of Business, ZCAS University

**ABSTRACT:** In order to understand the importance of leadership to the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), SMEs are the major engine that drives the growth of any nation's economy. The contribution that is made by this sector to the country's growth and economic development cannot be overemphasized as it is a critical feature of development of an economy. Several researchers have suggested that leadership effectiveness is a key factor that rolls the performance of organizations. The literature has highlighted the significance of leadership to any organization. Besides, review of the literature suggests the leadership in SMEs enhances performance and growth. The study also attempted to examine leadership behavior that has been adopted by some leaders in the sector. The outcome of the review demonstrated that the performance and growth of SMEs is dependent on leadership effectiveness and management skills.

**KEYWORDS:** - Leadership, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Management Practices

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Leaders are essential to all kinds of organizations, and they play various roles as well as performing different critical functions in any organization. Presently, the existence of an organization is merely to endure and uphold its entity through enhancement of performance. In order for organizations to remain competitive in the markets, it is important for organizations to improve their performance. (Arslan and Staub, 2013). The performance of SMEs is topical and has recently generated several discussions between, practitioner, researchers, politicians, and academics (Arham, 2014). Time in memorial literature review has always suggested that in order to achieve better performance of organizations and leadership, leadership plays a critical factor in this case (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). Harms and Creda (2010) defines leadership as being a process where an individual is able to influence a group of people for the purpose of to achieving one common goal. To improve performance of organizations, leadership has a crucial role to play, hence, for firms to come up with the best possible services and products by way of adequate usage of existing resources, a leader is accountable to all stakeholders of its organizations (Gul et al., 2012).

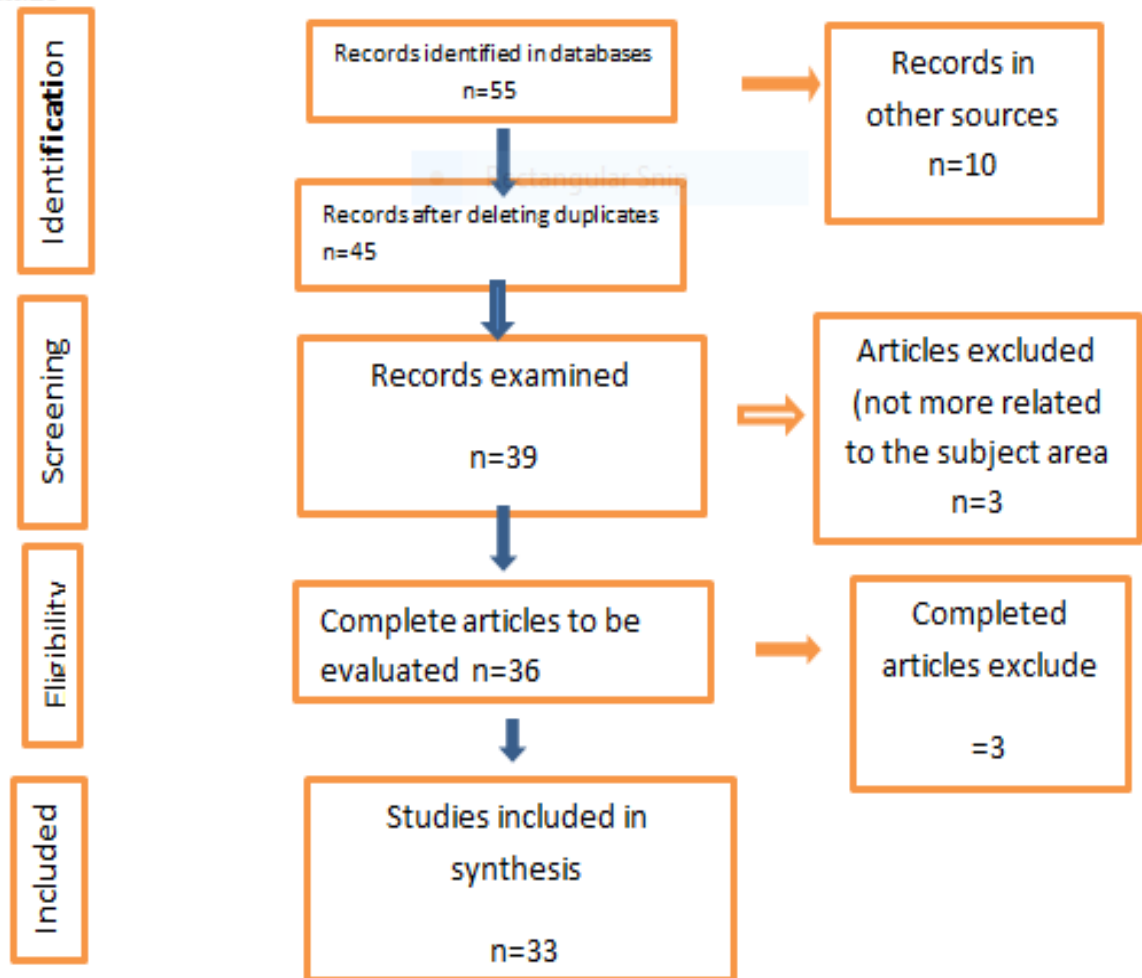
Hashim et al (2012) states that leaders of the 21st century are mostly faced with ever increasing challenges that border on the effective leading of their organizations. Thus, leaders need to focus on enhancing their effectiveness and make use of it to their advantage as a strategic direction to outwit competitors. Small Medium Enterprises are always distressed by severe struggle within their sector and from global aspect. There is inadequate evidence as regards literature to suggest whether performance of small and medium enterprises is essentially associated to leadership of the leaders (Spinelli, 2006). According to Avolio and Yammarino (2013) maintains that leadership is a driving force of any organization. Therefore, Leadership is required to shift an organization to the next level by organizing, motivating, managing, and leading members of staff to a more enhanced performance level (Tucker and Russell 2004). As a result, an ideal leadership is needed for optimal performance of organizations and teams (Hogan and Kaiser 2005). Leadership is viewed as being effective when it produces positive efficacy in terms of performance that relates to an efficient organizational performance. Organizational performance depends on the leadership effectiveness; therefore, leaders contribute largely to the firms' failure or success (Madanchian et al., 2016).

# A systematic review of the importance of leadership to the growth of Small and Medium Enterprises

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

This systematic review was carried out for the purposes of finding and analyzing appropriate articles and journals from reliable and credible databases. Electronic databases covering credible as well as reliable published articles and journals, Google Scholar, JSTOR and websites for international based organizations and associations such as the World Bank were searched. The cited databases were rigorously searched beginning as early as 1995 to 2021. The journal articles searched comprised of both narrow and wide terms. Furthermore, what was also essential as regards search strategy was consideration of the usage of different concepts or terminologies by different regions. The search terms included: SMS, leadership in SMEs, leadership practices, leadership and management and digitalization of SMEs. Figure

Figure 1-PRISMA



## 3.0 RESULTS

The outcome of this research is based 33 publications that qualified to be included as per criteria clearly outlined in the methodology. Before conducting the analysis, it was decided that all publications be classified according to categories in order to appreciate the underpinning on which it was conducted. The articles consisted of mixed themes as illustrated in the outcome in Table 1 below. These journal articles examined the importance of leadership to the growth of SMES. The results demonstrated that the growth of SMEs is dependent on leadership and management skills. The study also looks at leadership in the digital space and how it is promoting growth at global level.

## A systematic review of the importance of leadership to the growth of Small and Medium Enterprises

<b>Table: 1</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Title of Study</b>	<b>Study Purpose</b>	<b>Subject</b>
1995	Denison	Paradox and Performance	Importance of effective leadership	Business growth and success
1996	Fiedler, F. E	Research on leadership selection and training	Contribution of leaders to the failure or success of the firm	Business growth and success
2000	Mcgrath and Macmillan	Effects of leadership style	Improvement of organisational performance	Business growth and success
2001	Boal and hooijberg	Strategic leadership research	Achieving better performance of an organisation	Business growth and success
2003	Avolio et al	Leadership models, methods, and applications	Positioning of SMEs at the global level	Business growth and success
2004	Youndt et al	Intellectual capital profiles	How SMEs deal with human capital	Employee development
2006	Spinelli	Applicability of Bass's model of transformational	Association of leadership to SMES	Leadership style and behavior
2007	Samad & Hassan	Assessing the effects of job satisfaction	Challenges facing SMEs	Employee development
2009	Kilpatrick et al	Boundary crossers, communities, and health:	Unity of teams	Employee Development
2010	Langowitz & Allen	Small Business Leadership	Importance of leadership SMEs	Business growth and success
2010	Harns and Creda	Emotional Intelligence and transformational	Individual influence over people	Leadership style and behavior
2010	Shuymee and Ghani	The relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and business performance	Inadequate resources among SMES	Business growth and success
2010	Zenger & Stinnet,	Coaching as a Management Style	Employee training	Employee development
2011	Kassim & Sulaiman	Market orientation and leadership styles of managers	The importance of SMEs in the national economy	Leadership style and behavior
2011	Obiwuru T	Effects of leadership style	Sustainability of competitive edge	Business growth and success
2011	Razak, R. A	Entrepreneurial Orientation as a Universal Remedy for the Receding Productivity	Causes that lead to failure of SMEs	Leadership style and behavior
2012	Gul et al	Leadership Styles	Accountability of leaders to stakeholders	Business growth and success
2012	Hushim et al	A study in leadership style in SMES	Leadership style	Business growth and success
2012	Popa, O	Corporate social responsibility "A new perspective for SMEs"	The influence of leadership styles and behaviors	Leadership style and behavior
2013	Maina et al	Constructs of Successful and Sustainable SME Leadership in East Africa	Sustainability of leadership	Leadership style and behavior
2013	Mwangi, R. M	Constructs of Successful and Sustainable SME Leadership	Leadership sustainability	Business growth and success
2013	Avolio et al	Transformational and Charismatic leadership	Leadership drives performance	Business growth and success
2013	Lockett et al	Entrepreneurial	Identification of business opportunities	Business growth and success
2014	Nanjundeswara swamy, & Swamy	Leadership Styles	Effectiveness of leadership styles	Leadership style and behavior
2014	Arham A	Leadership and Performance	Performance of SMES	Business growth and success
2015	Hayton, J	Leadership and Management Skills in SMEs	Enhancement of performance through leadership skills	Business growth and success
2015	Lacerda T	Leadership Effectiveness in Organisation setting	Sustainability of effectiveness leadership	Business growth and success
2015	Kouzes and Posner	The leadership challenge	Definition of leadership	Leadership style and behavior
2015	Department for Business Innovations and Skills	Leadership and Management Skills in SMEs	Management capabilities	Business growth and success
2016	Henman, L	Leadership: Theories and Controversies	Effectiveness of leadership	Business growth and success
2017	Madanchian & Taherdoost	Role of Leadership in Small and Medium Enterprises	Contribution of SMEs at micro & macro levels	Business growth and success
2021	Nduhura & Walugere,	Leadership Practices and Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises	Business practices that steer business	Business growth and success
2021	Otting et al	The future of leadership	How leadership changes	Leadership style and behavior

## **A systematic review of the importance of leadership to the growth of Small and Medium Enterprises**

### **4.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Most of the countries have recognized small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as an important factor for development and growth of the economy. The contribution made by SMEs in most countries is comparatively insufficient especially in developed countries, and largely this is attributed to absence of leadership and managerial skills. As aforementioned, it is important for the leaders of small and medium enterprises to equip themselves with various skills that are effective in order to enhance their performance in their organizations and reduce on the rate of failures. According to Kouzes and Posner (2007) described leadership as a relationship the exist between those that aspire to lead and those that have chosen to follow. Therefore, the success of an organization is driven by good leadership; leadership is a key element to success of any business. The literature undertaken indicates that inadequate and ineffective leadership skills are major factors that instigate failure of most SMEs (Madanchian et al., 2015). For that purpose, SMEs require to establish their leadership behaviour so that they can guide their businesses through difficult situations. Research conducted in Leadership Effectiveness has pointed out that effectiveness of leadership is a main interpreter of failure or success of any organization. According to Denison (1995) effective leadership is important and it influences organizational outcome. Thus, effective leadership has an impact on organizational performance. Besides, several researchers have also maintained that leadership in SMEs has been receiving unprecedented attention from the time literature acknowledged that the sector could not succeed in developing new and small businesses in the absence of effective leadership. Thus, the current systematic review intends to review existing literature on SMEs by analyzing the insight of leadership effectiveness's perspectives and the significance of leadership effectiveness in respect to success and growth of SMEs. As Shuhymee and Ghani (2010) suggest that as a result of small size and restricted amount of resources make the appreciation for leadership effectiveness of leaders of small and medium enterprises vital in ensuring more development to the sector. Research conducted by Lacerda (2015) revealed that leadership effectiveness is able to sustain organizational performance, and aid managers to be aware of effective leadership process within an organization. In addition, studies conducted by McGrath and MacMillan (2000) suggest that in order to know the effect of leadership as regards to organizational performance, the leadership need to undertake a key role that is aimed at improving organizational performance, consequently, for the organization to enhance and sustain its competitive edge requires effective leadership (Obiwuru et al., 2011).

### **5.0 DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs)**

According to Abe et al., 2012 there was no definition for SMEs that cuts across, it differs from country to country depending on the context. SMEs have been viewed as mainstays of any nation as they are interconnected with nearly every facet of the economy and society. Madanchian et al. (2016) also viewed SMS as a key sector that drives growth as well as a facilitator for social economic transformation in a nation. The contributions made by SMEs at both micro and micro levels are mostly because of successfully managed SMEs by effective and efficient leaders (Madanchian et al, 2016). Therefore, this is attained through leadership styles or behaviors of leaders in the SMEs with direct influence as regards their company's performance, successes, and competitive edge (Popa, 2012). According to Samad & Hassan (2007) SMEs are faced with a unique constraint bordering on inadequate financial resources, lack of experience, insufficient education background, and more importantly limited managerial skills. Thus, there is always an attempt to appreciate the performance improvement of SMEs, the attempts that have been made are important since SMEs are well known to be one of the key drivers of growth for any nations 's economy (Kassim & Sulaiman,2011). The key features comprised of change of attitudes, staff development, and upgrading of business as well as leadership skills. Any successful SMEs is driven by good leadership which is one of the main elements. According to Razak (2011) inadequate and ineffective leadership skills have been identified as major factors that lead to the collapsing of most small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Thus, in order for SME to provide proper guidance to its respective firm in all situations of different crises times require to develop its leadership style and behavior. For SMEs to circumvent the organization from failure and enhance the firm's performance, there was need to have a right leadership style and behavior, this is a critical element. According to Fiedler (1996) states that, leaders can contribute to the failure or success of the firm, hence having effective leadership is important. As it stands, the ideal response to most challenges that SMEs are faced with today can only be possibly resolved by means of adoption of leadership positions by different individuals in control (Ladzani, 2010). There is need to develop the required effectiveness and competences of leadership at all levels, this includes, clear objectives, well defined mobilizing goals, team building of high performers, development of best talents, creating enabling environment for innovation, and creation of value addition culture that is founded on the unity of teams as well as the quality of services being rendered (Kilpatrick et al, 2009).

## **A systematic review of the importance of leadership to the growth of Small and Medium Enterprises**

### **5.2 Leadership in SMEs**

Small and Medium (SMES) firms have now taken position at the global level (Avolio et al. 2003). It is of great importance to appreciate that, in this new world order, leaders are faced with the difficulty of working with different ethnic workforce that includes various traditions, values, beliefs and customs which forms effective leadership. Several authors have identified numerous organizational factors that are able to influence leadership in small and medium enterprises. Nonetheless, Short et al. (2002) has indicated that up to this end no researcher has attained any consensus regarding these factors. Thus, the more insight of leadership's influence in Small Medium Enterprises, the more the sector can be assisted in their development and growth. It is no doubt that leadership is a vital factor in a successful implementation of small manufacturing firms. Most SMEs have shown competitiveness in an environment which is full of challenges and changes, therefore, the way they deal with human capital has changed as well (Youndt, Subramaniam, & Snell, 2004). In modern time people are now regarded as organization asset who can bring more or less value to the organization. Therefore, the success of the organization is dependent on the interaction of behavior among the employees, and this must be encouraged by the leader, its success depends much on leadership style.

### **5.3 Leadership Practices and Growth (SMEs)**

It was established that for SMEs to register business growth there is need for the owners as well as employees to embrace both management practices and leadership behaviors. Leadership is largely associated with ushering the company to a next level by means of identifying and taking advantage of available opportunities, this requires vision in order to produce meaningful change (Lockett, 2013). They further indicated that leadership in small and medium enterprises have more discretion compared to those operating in established firms, hence leaders in SMEs have more impact on the organization behavior as well as results. According to Henman (2016) leadership styles outweighs traits when it comes to determine the effectiveness of leadership. Engagement of various leadership styles influences the firm's effectiveness (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014). Style is only associated to one's model of firm's behavior. The manner in which leaders communicate to members in an organization detracts or contributes to overall performance of firms. Ensley, Hmieleski, & Pearce, (2006) identified a directive leadership behavior to be a critical form of vertical leadership in a new business. This assertion comes as result of reward contingencies and clear goals that need to be put in place prior and during the creation of new business venture. According to Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (2014) explains that as business grows, the top –down traditional leadership starts exhibiting negativity as a result of directives. It was also highlighted that when teams together with managers gain skills to manage the organization, the responsibility of their senior leaders was merely to coach and institute sense of direction as opposed to imposition of new ways of working in manner the requires top-down. According to Vailati (2014) leadership style should not be imposed in application but considerate of diversity of culture for its effectiveness. What is viewed as a weakness in a particular culture was seen as a strength in another culture (Sharma & Sharma, 2010). It was suggested that leadership should be aligned to situations in order to enhance performance and growth of organizations

### **5.4 Management Practices in SMES**

Based on the leadership and management skills in SMEs the growth of firms is highly dependent on the developmental of capabilities in organizations such as innovations, market development and continuous improvement. Leader's beliefs were found to be an important and risky investment undertaking as regards the firm's efficacy. It was also noted that managerial skills had an impact regarding investment decisions for the growth of the business. There is challenge when it comes to measuring practices as only a few can be applied across a diverse context. Therefore, focusing on management practices standardizing measures, this process disregards several practices which were found to be influential to performance in the past. However, it was noted that managerial practices were a key intermediary linkage in the chain between performance and growth and L&M skills in SMEs. Management abilities are associated with organization performance, and this includes small and medium enterprises (Department for Business Innovations and Skills, 2015).

### **5.7 How digitalization has enhanced growth of SMES and change leadership**

Digitalization has brought changes that are critical to small and medium enterprises, which has typically proved to be limited in terms of time for development of leadership (Chadwick et al. 2013). Leadership quality is important owing to the fact that SMEs are functioning under circumstances where resources are limited (Garavan et al. 2016). Therefore, Leadership developments in small and medium enterprises are now aligned with operating context and strategy (Colbert 2004). In order to provide leadership in the changing environment, major changes have been identified that concern SMEs in the digital space leadership. Digitalization in this sector is aimed at increasing the implementation of intelligent as well as interconnected technological aspect, which has not only changed work machinery and production lines but has also changed organizational structures,

## **A systematic review of the importance of leadership to the growth of Small and Medium Enterprises**

requirements, and tasks of work (Kauffeld and Maier 2020). Digitalization has changed work design as well as leadership (Cascio and Montealegre 2016). The technological aspect is a context factor that has changed how employees work and this has made leaders to enable workloads with a lot of easiness such management of resources, tasks regarding procurement and allocation, maintenance, and monitoring. Most of the highlighted tasks have been influenced by the increased usage of intelligent technology. Other tasks have reduced because of the usage of the digital space but others have become increasingly vital, and this has accelerated performance and growth of SMEs.

### **6.0 CONCLUSIONS**

In summary the present business atmosphere, aside factors in the industry such as innovation and strategy as well as finance, it becomes vital to know about leadership obtaining in SMEs, this is as a result of increased need to know the route to achievement and the process of generating a sustainable competitive edge, in short, SMEs should be able to find and embrace workable strategies that enables them to overcome challenges that they are faced with (Madanchian et al., 2016). In line with the literature reviewed regarding leadership practices in small and medium enterprises, it has revealed that, leadership practices enhance organizational performance. Leadership behavior plays an important role in small and medium enterprises growth

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## A systematic review of the importance of leadership to the growth of Small and Medium Enterprises

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