

## Leadership and Sustainable Growth in Small, Micro and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Gauteng

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| ARTICLE INFO                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                               | ABSTRACT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
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| Article History:                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                               | <p><i>South Africa faces problems due to the high rate of failure of start-up Small Medium and Micro sized Enterprises (SMMEs). The quest for enhancing leadership quality in South African SMMEs is vital for enabling SMMEs to grow and increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country. Since the SMME sector is vital for creating jobs and livelihood for the poor, it deserves to be supported adequately.</i></p> <p><i>The purpose of the study is to assess the relationship between leadership quality and sustainable growth in SMMEs in the Gauteng province. Key attributes in terms of measuring growth are job creation, survival, and profitability among others.</i></p> <p><i>Data was gathered from the various SMMEs identified as the target population of this study, hence the design used was a cross-sectional one. The study made use of quantitative or statistical methods of data collection and analysis.</i></p> <p><i>The results revealed that there is correlation between the type of leadership and the attainment of sustainable growth.</i></p> <p><i>The implementation of ethical practices is crucial for the long-term sustainability of SMMEs, with ethical leadership being a key component of this process. Leaders who emphasize integrity, transparency, and responsible business practices can establish trust with various stakeholders, such as employees, customers, and investors.</i></p> <p><b>KEYWORDS:</b> Leadership Quality, sustainable growth, SMMEs, Gauteng, Ethical Leadership</p> |
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### 1. Introduction

The quest for enhancing leadership quality in South African SMMEs is vital for enabling SMMEs to grow and increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country. The aim of the study is to assess the relationship between leadership quality and sustainable growth in SMMEs operating in Gauteng Province. Based on findings obtained from a 5-year longitudinal study, Marivate (2014: 53-72) has shown that leadership quality is vital for ensuring continued survival and profitability in SMMEs operating in Gauteng Province.

Key attributes in terms of measuring growth are job creation, survival, and profitability among others.

Socioeconomic factors relevant to the study were considered by collecting data from owners and operators of SMMEs in Gauteng Province. Stratification was done by economic sector. An assessment of leadership quality was conducted using a composite index used to evaluate leadership (Edoho, 2015: 127-147) in SMMEs.

According to Abor and Quartey (2010: 56), most companies in the SMMEs sector fail to achieve sustainable growth because leaders lack appropriate skills in both leadership and entrepreneurship in general. Fatoki (2014: 922) has shown that SMMEs remain profitable and highly successful when they are led by competent entrepreneurs leading them with good leadership skills. SMMEs that are

led by good leaders are relatively more sustainable and profitable in comparison with SMMEs that are led and operated by leaders who lack leadership skills.

The contribution made to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by Small, Micro and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMMEs) is significant (Marivate, 2014). The quality of leadership in SMMEs is associated with long-term viability (Worku, 2016). The SMME sector makes a significant contribution to job creation in South Africa. The failure rate among newly established SMMEs is about 50% (Marivate, 2014). South Africa faces problems due to the high rate of failure of start-up SMMEs. Since the SMME sector is vital for creating jobs and livelihood for the poor, it deserves to be supported adequately by the South African Government. The SMME sector needs strategic assistance and support in areas related to entrepreneurial skills, access to loans, mentoring and networking (Worku, 2017).

Entrepreneurs hardly turn their businesses into sustainable ventures. The study observes that most of the leadership approaches adopted in SMMEs in South Africa raise more questions than answers, which is a cause for concern. Fatoki and Garwe (2010) have found that leadership quality is essential for SMMEs to proceed from inception to sustained business operations. There are various stages of development in SMMEs. For SMMEs to go through the various stages of development, the quality of leadership of business operators and owners is a critical mediating factor.

Emerging SMMEs go through a series of phases that span from the fundamental existence stage and rise through survival, success, and sustained viability. The five-year-long study conducted by Marivate (2014: 58) in Gauteng Province has found that good leadership quality enables SMMEs to successfully transform themselves through the various stages of growth and development. The author argues that the leadership strategies followed by SMMEs influence the growth of SMMEs in the long run. Critical aspects of leadership quality are the culture of saving, willingness to improve entrepreneurial, auditing and networking skills, and willingness to partner with SMMEs working as competitors (Marivate, 2014: 53-72). SMMEs who lack such leadership skills and qualities do not have the potential for long-term viability.

The purpose of the study was to unearth the relationship between leadership quality and sustainable growth in Small, Micro and Medium Enterprises (SMMEs) in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The study constructed a practical framework that could be used for promoting good leadership in SMMEs operating in Gauteng Province. This study recommended the development of a national leadership framework best suited for adoption by

SMMEs. A framework based on the South African “Ubuntu” principle and the Japanese Samurai leadership approach was constructed for operators of SMMEs. The framework will go a long way in aiding firms in the sector to transform their leadership styles in line with global trends. The study also provided a theoretical and practical discourse infusing western, Eastern and African leadership models such as the Ubuntu and Samurai models to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of leadership in SMMEs in managing the dearth syndrome underlying this thesis per se.

The following sections of this study will comprise the literature review, methodology used, results and data analysis then a conclusion.

## **2. Literature Review**

Principles of sustainability in the context of SMMEs are an indispensable part of the process of value creation, on the one hand, centralising and combining ethical values and entrepreneurial values (Worku, 2016:276). Leadership plays a crucial role in ensuring that core principles and values are incorporated to lower levels of leadership and down to the entire staff. Bilateral communication is also key. It is reinforced by building strong brands as well as instilling a healthy corporate culture between employees and external stakeholders.

The general trend suggests a tale of leadership crisis and sustainability challenges in developing nations. In exploring the different dimensions of leadership, the most common definitions of leadership are reviewed. Teece (2017) conducted a study that revealed a widespread of various leadership definitions and most of them were based on leadership characteristics. Different traits were reviewed and such were also provided for the study. One of the definitions viewed leadership as a methodology of using multiple ways of communication as means of achieving strategic goals. It further views leadership as a process of gaining followership through influencing people and enabling them act voluntarily and commit to quality execution.

Copeland (2016) has shown the benefits of authentic, ethical, and transformational leadership on profitability and productivity in SMMEs. The author has shown that good leadership traits foster confidence, loyalty, good quality of service and customer satisfaction. Booyens (2011) has made a similar assessment. Several studies indicate a tremendous need for competent leadership in SMMEs. African leaders seem to have a different approach to leadership from those used by Western leaders. The issue of fear, innovation and narrow horizon bedevils progress amongst most SMMEs. Edoho (2015) pointed out that innovative leadership is vital for establishing sustained growth and development in SMMEs. Fatoki (2014)

understood that SMME owners and managers have a way of tapping into real thoughts of people as well as knowing how to make them achieve the best through hard work and long-term commitment. This also comes with discipline and perseverance which on overall fosters respect for good quality leadership. The author further argues that most SMMEs in South Africa do not have capable and innovative leadership that can handle organizational dynamism in the current trends.

### Hypothesis

The **null hypothesis (H0)** states that there is no relationship between leadership quality and sustainable growth in SMMEs in Gauteng Province

**The alternative hypothesis (H1)** states that there is a relationship between leadership quality and sustainable growth in SMMEs in Gauteng Province

### 3.Methodology

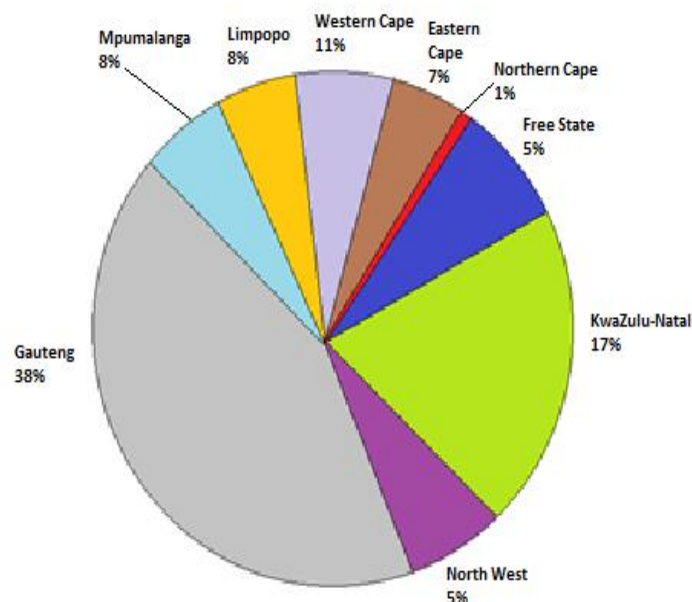
The design of the study is descriptive and cross-sectional (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022:19). Data was gathered from the various SMMEs identified as the target population of this study, hence the design used was a cross-sectional one. The study made use of quantitative or statistical methods of data collection and analysis. Raosoft Online Sample Size Calculator (2022) was used for sample size calculation. The level of significance of test was set at 5%.

Though some researchers identified over one million SMMEs in Gauteng, Marivate (2014) found that at least 50% of all newly established SMMEs fail within 3 years of establishment. The total number of SMMEs in Gauteng Province were 917 043 in 2021 (SEDA 2021Q3). Thus, the population size was 917 043. By using these figures, the

calculated sample size of study was 377. The sample size of study was adjusted upwards to 410 with a view to cater for potential dropouts from the study and to be able to perform robust parametric data analysis such as structural equations modelling for data analysis (Keith, 2019). However, upon completion of data collection, the actual total number of respondents amounted to 415 thus going overboard with 5 respondents since the questionnaires were being completed online.

The population for this study consists of the personnel in SMMEs in the Gauteng province. Data was collected from SMME owners and managers focussing on the types of leadership employed in these SMMEs. The total number of SMMEs in Gauteng are 917 043 (SEDA, 2021Q3). According to the SEDA Report (2021Q3), South Africa has a total of 2 363 513 SMMEs. Thus, from this number, about 38% of them are based in Gauteng. Gauteng is also recorded as having the highest number of formal SMMEs.

The diagram below shows the geographical representation of SMMEs in various provinces in South Africa. As the economic hub of the country (Kalitanyi 2019:2-32), the Gauteng province leads in terms of SMMEs representation with 38% of the total number of SMMEs. Following is KwaZulu Natal at 17% then the Western cape at 11%, Mpumalanga and Limpopo both at 8% each, Eastern Cape 7%, Free State and Northwest 5% and the least of them all is the Northern Cape with 1% representation. Therefore, in terms of population representation, the study is concentrated in the province with the highest number of SMMEs.



**Figure 1: Population of SMMEs (%) in SA by Province (SEDA 2021, Q3)**

From Table 1 below, Gauteng has seen a continuous growth from 2020 to 2021. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2021, the province was home to 783 410 SMMEs. There was an increase of at least 2% from one quarter to another with the overall annual percentage change of 17%. While some provinces experienced a decline over the period, Gauteng enjoyed a steady growth. Of note, South Africans from other provinces migrate to Gauteng in search of employment and greener pastures, hence the continuous growth of SMMEs in province as well as productivity in general. Thus, the high population ensures skills and labour force at SMMEs disposal.

Random sampling specifically stratified random sampling (Levy & Lemeshow, 2013) was used for selecting

eligible businesses into the study. Stratification was done by type of business activity or business industry. Eleven types of business activities that are commonly used by SMMEs were used as strata. The sampling was done proportional to the population, thus the higher the targeted respondents in a particular sector, the higher the sample size. From each stratum of business activity, eligible businesses were selected by using simple random sampling (Levy & Lemeshow, 2013). Table 1 shows the details.

Therefore, data were collected from each one of the 415 eligible business enterprises by using online self-administered questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted to pre-test the questionnaire before it was used for actual data collection.

**Table 1: Sample Stratification by Sector**

| Type of business activity     | Number of SMMEs |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| Manufacturing                 | 45              |
| Trade and Accommodation       | 75              |
| Finance and Business Services | 55              |
| Transport and Communications  | 50              |
| Agricultural businesses       | 20              |
| Retail Businesses             | 45              |
| Construction businesses       | 20              |
| Procurement and Logistics     | 30              |
| Information technology        | 25              |
| Health care businesses        | 25              |
| Other                         | 15              |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>410</b>      |

The instruments used in this study was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of four different sections comprising open selection choices and others guided by the five-point Likert scale section. The questionnaire was validated by three independent research experts. Data collection was completed over a 3-month period. The validity of the questionnaire of study was ascertained by conducting pre-testing and face validity (Welman et al., 2005).

The questionnaires were administered by the researcher and the field data collectors contracted by the researcher assisted in sending online questionnaires which were completed through a google link. This was done to reach all the

respondents; increase the response rate; and facilitate the audit process of the questionnaire. The questionnaires were each completed through email verification to ensure respondents would only participate once, also to assure confidentiality and seamless management of completed questionnaires.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section explains the findings of the study. The primary aim of the study was to evaluate the relationship between leadership quality and sustainable growth in SMMEs operating in Gauteng Province. The dataset comprises the feedback provided by individuals owning or managing SMMEs.

**Table 2: Leadership and sustainable growth**

| <b>Leadership and sustainable growth</b>                 | <b>General<br/>(N=415)</b> | <b>Low<br/>(N = 165)</b> | <b>High<br/>(N = 250)</b> | <b>&lt;0.001</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Poor LSG                                                 | 178 (42.9%)                | 138 (83.6%)              | 40 (16.0%)                |                  |
| Good LSG                                                 | 237 (57.1%)                | 27 (16.4%)               | 210 (84.0%)               |                  |
| <b>Democratic Leadership</b>                             |                            |                          |                           | <b>&lt;0.001</b> |
| No                                                       | 135 (32.5%)                | 72 (43.6%)               | 63 (25.2%)                |                  |
| Yes                                                      | 280 (67.5%)                | 93 (56.4%)               | 187 (74.8%)               |                  |
| <b>Autocratic Leadership</b>                             |                            |                          |                           | <b>0.095</b>     |
| No                                                       | 406 (97.8%)                | 159 (96.4%)              | 247 (98.8%)               |                  |
| Yes                                                      | 9 (2.2%)                   | 6 (3.6%)                 | 3 (1.2%)                  |                  |
| <b>Ubuntu Leadership</b>                                 |                            |                          |                           | <b>&lt;0.001</b> |
| No                                                       | 303 (73.0%)                | 139 (84.2%)              | 164 (65.6%)               |                  |
| Yes                                                      | 112 (27.0%)                | 26 (15.8%)               | 86 (34.4%)                |                  |
| <b>Samurai Leadership (Aggressive and Goal oriented)</b> |                            |                          |                           | <b>0.047</b>     |
| No                                                       | 394 (94.9%)                | 161 (97.6%)              | 233 (93.2%)               |                  |
| Yes                                                      | 21 (5.1%)                  | 4 (2.4%)                 | 17 (6.8%)                 |                  |
| <b>Servant Leadership</b>                                |                            |                          |                           | <b>0.052</b>     |
| No                                                       | 405 (97.6%)                | 164 (99.4%)              | 241 (96.4%)               |                  |
| Yes                                                      | 10 (2.4%)                  | 1 (0.6%)                 | 9 (3.6%)                  |                  |
| <b>Strategic Leadership</b>                              |                            |                          |                           | <b>&lt;0.001</b> |
| No                                                       | 278 (67.0%)                | 77 (46.7%)               | 201 (80.4%)               |                  |
| Yes                                                      | 137 (33.0%)                | 88 (53.3%)               | 49 (19.6%)                |                  |
| <b>Transformational Leadership</b>                       |                            |                          |                           | <b>0.001</b>     |
| No                                                       | 365 (88.0%)                | 134 (81.2%)              | 231 (92.4%)               |                  |
| Yes                                                      | 50 (12.0%)                 | 31 (18.8%)               | 19 (7.6%)                 |                  |
| <b>Transactional Leadership</b>                          |                            |                          |                           | <b>0.215</b>     |
| No                                                       | 390 (94.0%)                | 158 (95.8%)              | 232 (92.8%)               |                  |
| Yes                                                      | 25 (6.0%)                  | 7 (4.2%)                 | 18 (7.2%)                 |                  |
| <b>Charismatic Leadership</b>                            |                            |                          |                           | <b>&lt;0.001</b> |
| No                                                       | 321 (77.3%)                | 149 (90.3%)              | 172 (68.8%)               |                  |
| Yes                                                      | 94 (22.7%)                 | 16 (9.7%)                | 78 (31.2%)                |                  |
| <b>Bureaucratic Leadership</b>                           |                            |                          |                           | <b>0.004</b>     |
| No                                                       | 404 (97.3%)                | 156 (94.5%)              | 248 (99.2%)               |                  |
| Yes                                                      | 11 (2.7%)                  | 9 (5.5%)                 | 2 (0.8%)                  |                  |

The findings in table 2 indicate a notable correlation between the type of leadership and the attainment of sustainable growth, with a statistical significance of  $p < 0.001$ . SMMEs that possess effective leadership for sustainable growth (LSG) demonstrate superior performance across all sustainable growth metrics in comparison to those with inadequate LSG. The statement posits that the quality of leadership is a pivotal factor in propelling the sustainable growth of SMMEs. Organizations that exhibit effective

leadership in the context of sustainability are more prone to achieving favorable results across various facets.

The implementation of ethical practices is crucial for the long-term sustainability of SMMEs, with ethical leadership being a key component of this process. Leaders who emphasize integrity, transparency, and responsible business practices can establish trust with various stakeholders, such as employees, customers, and investors. Leaders who adhere to ethical principles prioritize adherence

to regulations, advocate for equitable labour practices, and proactively participate in initiatives related to corporate social responsibility. Leaders can enhance the reputation, stakeholder satisfaction, and long-term sustainability of SMMEs by exhibiting ethical conduct and integrating ethical principles into the organizational culture.

## 5. Conclusion

The aim of the study is to assess the relationship between leadership quality and sustainable growth in SMMEs in the Gauteng province. The design of the study is descriptive and cross-sectional (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022:19). Data was gathered from the various SMMEs identified as the target population of this study, hence the design used was a cross-

sectional one. The study made use of quantitative or statistical methods of data collection and analysis. Raosoft Online Sample Size Calculator (2022) was used for sample size calculation. The level of significance of test was set at 5%.

A survey was conducted gathering data from owners and managers of SMMEs, thus primary data was gathered. The findings of the study can be used by business experts in the government policy making decision positions to improve SMME leaders, accordingly, thus sustainably growing them. Though the study has unearthed fundamental information, there remains a need to explore further on areas such as SMME governance which still remains a challenge in SMMEs.

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