



**How Leadership styles mediate succession planning practice and SME**

**Sustainability**

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**Abstract**

The importance of succession planning in safeguarding the business's well-being and continuity cannot be overstated. For SMEs to promote the sustainability of their enterprises and ensure business continuity there is the need to put the needed structures in place to adopt succession planning. The purpose of this article is to determine whether there is influence of succession planning on SME sustainability with leadership styles acting as a mediator. The population in the study is made up of 237 valid quantitative data analysed. The Sampling technique used was stratified random sampling method. The hypothesis developed and tested is the relationship between succession planning and SMEs sustainability as mediated by the presence of leadership style. The study recommended that SME owners and managers should proactively invest, engage and implement effective succession planning as it impact on sustainability of the organization. SMEs should periodically assess their culture and adjust leadership styles to ensure ongoing alignment since culture is not static, but it rather evolves.

## **Leadership Styles and impact on Succession Planning**

The landscape of how teams collaborate has evolved significantly in recent years. Factors like remote work and the rise of complex cross-functional projects have necessitated more flexible and innovative leadership approaches. One such approach that has emerged from this evolution is the Team Leadership Theory.

### **1.1 Team Leadership Theory**

This dynamic model of leadership challenges the traditional hierarchical structure where a single leader holds authority. Instead, it recognizes that leadership can be situational, with the most knowledgeable and experienced person taking the lead as required by the circumstances.

The Team Leadership Theory is rooted in the idea that team members are interdependent, working together to achieve common goals. In this model, every team member is seen as having a valuable contribution to make. The ultimate objective is to enhance team effectiveness, with the quality of teamwork being a key determinant of success.

The goal is high team effectiveness often determines the outcome. However, it needs a strong team to succeed – one where interpersonal dynamic are seamless, everyone buys into the process, and the team has a level of experience.

The pros and cons of leadership teams is another variation on the theme. The participative model can be applied to almost any business. By necessity, it relies on a democratic approach with all the positives and negatives that come with that.

The advantages of leadership teams are effective problem solving for complex issues, particularly by using creativity, Strong working relationships and collaboration between team members, Information-sharing enables team members to develop broader knowledge beyond their specialist areas. This leads to thorough and carefully

considered solutions – many heads are better than one. Higher levels of job satisfaction as everyone feels that their knowledge and experience matters.

The disadvantages of leadership teams are that: First the democratic processes take time and patience, so they're less effective when you need a quick decision. Individual opinions may be rejected in favour of others which can lead to disappointment or a sense of being undervalued. There are times when a team cannot reach a consensus. This might mean needing an odd number of team members to force a casting vote, or require a chairperson.

## **1.2 Transactional Leadership Style**

Transactional leadership style comprises three components; contingent reward, management-by-exception (active) and management-by-exception (passive). A transactional leader follows the scheme of contingent rewards to explain performance expectation to the followers and appreciates good performance. Transactional leaders believe in contractual agreements as principal motivators (Nawaz, 2016) and use extrinsic rewards toward enhancing followers' motivation. Contingent Reward leadership focuses on achieving results. As humans appreciate concrete, tangible, material rewards in exchange of their efforts, thus, this behavior surfaced.

“Where transformational leadership acknowledges individual talents and builds enthusiasm through emotional appeals, values, and belief systems, transactional leadership engenders compliance by appealing to the wants and needs of individuals” (Omar, 2017). Manager leaders who use contingent reward are expected to show direction to the employees, so the job gets done. In a nutshell, key indicators of contingent reward encompass performance-based material rewards, direction-setting, reciprocity, and confidence-building in the team.

Management-by-exception explains leaders' behavior with regards to the proper detection of deviations from expected followers' behavior. These is divided into active and passive.

Management by Exception (Active). This is not the relinquishment of leadership; it is characterized by a laissez-faire leadership. Leaders who follow management by exception (active) have an inherent trust in their workers to end the job to a satisfactory standard and avoid rocking the boat. "This type of leadership does not inspire workers to achieve beyond expected outcomes, however, if target is achieved, that means the system has worked, everyone is satisfied, and the business continues as usual," (Akpapere, 2019). There is a little sense of adventure or risk-taking, new perspectives, or white-water strategies in case of management by exception leaders. It corresponds need-driven change culture. To sum it up, management by exception (active) includes trust in workers, poor communication, maintenance of the status quo, and lack of confidence.

The final component is Management by Exception (Passive). "It is the style of transactional leadership in which the leaders avoid specifying agreement and fail to provide goals and standards to be achieved by staff. Sometimes, a leader waits for things to go wrong before taking action" (Akpapere, 2019).

Literature revealed that the "transactional style retards creativity and can adversely influence employees job satisfaction.

The application of both styles varies from situation to situation and context to context. The situations entailing high degree of precision, technical expertise, time-constraints, particularly in technological intensive environment, shall prefer transactional leadership management whereas, in human-intensive environment, where focus is on

influencing the followers through motivation and respecting their emotions based on common goals, beliefs and values, preferable option is transformational leadership style (Khan, 2015).

### **1.3 Transformational Leadership Theory**

Transformational leadership is a compelling leadership model that has shown its positive impact on both individual and organizational levels. Leaders who adopt this style empower their followers to pursue higher-order needs, such as self-actualization and self-esteem (Nawaz, 2016). They are adept at boosting motivation among their followers, inspiring self-sacrifice, and aligning individual goals with the overarching objectives of the organization (Nawaz, 2016). In the context of transformational leadership, several key dimensions play pivotal roles in driving change and fostering growth:

The following themes equally made up the transformational leadership theory. The first is **Idealized Influence**. Idealized Influence is a core attribute of transformational leadership, often synonymous with charisma. Leaders exhibiting this characteristic serve as role models, generating values, establishing a sense of purpose, and infusing significance into the lives of their followers. Idealized Influence is fundamentally inspirational, cultivating attitudes about what truly matters in life. Charismatic leaders instil confidence in their followers, fostering a belief in their ability to make sacrifices and achieve exceptional goals. These leaders exude a sense of self-determination, emotional stability, and control, and they lead by example, communicating the mission and goals of the organization (Nicoloski, 2015).

The second one is **Inspirational Motivation**. This focuses on raising followers' awareness, aligning them with the organization's mission and vision, and motivating them to embrace this vision as their own. This style places the principles of organizational existence at the forefront, rather than emphasizing the personality of

the leader. Leaders who employ this style encourage their employees to contribute their best, granting them autonomy to make decisions without constant oversight. They set high standards, clearly communicate their vision, and inspire employees to push beyond conventional boundaries for personal and organizational growth (Khan et al., 2016)

The third one is Intellectual Stimulation. Leaders characterized by intellectual stimulation are adept at intellectually challenging their followers, promoting creativity, and embracing challenges as part of the job. They maintain emotional equilibrium and exhibit rationality when dealing with complex problems, while instilling these qualities in their employees. Problem-solving skills and consensus decision-making are hallmarks of this leadership approach. Leaders with this style prioritize mentoring, coaching, and building organizational character, fostering a culture of supportive challenge (Jetten et al., 2015).

The final in the series is Individualized Consideration. Individualized consideration is a fundamental aspect of transformational leadership, focusing on recognizing individuals as vital contributors to the workplace. Leaders who practice individualized consideration demonstrate care for their employees' needs and actively support their development. Their leadership style may shift between participatory and autocratic as they reassure, care, coach, and maintain an open and consultative approach to individuals.

#### **1.4 Succession Planning and Business Sustainability**

Succession planning is a critical aspect of ensuring the long-term sustainability and survival of businesses, particularly in the context of family-owned and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Extensive research supports the notion that

strategic succession planning is not merely a formality but a fundamental strategy for maintaining the continuity and success of businesses across various global contexts.

Several studies have shed light on the vital role of succession planning in business sustainability. Amanquah (2021), for instance, highlighted the significance of strategic planning and succession in the context of family-owned businesses, particularly SMEs, in Kenya. The findings emphasized the interplay between strategic planning and succession in determining the sustainability of such enterprises.

Similarly, Lowan and Chisoro (2016) conducted a study in South Africa, affirming the key role of succession planning in ensuring the survival of businesses. Their findings echoed the importance of having a well-thought-out succession strategy to navigate the complexities of business transitions.

Nyoni (2019) delved into the specifics of SMEs' survival after the retirement or demise of founders, pinpointing four critical constructs that influence this survival: mentoring, entrepreneurial orientation, level of education/training, and the capability of the successor. The research revealed that the capability of the successor had the most significant impact on the sustainability of SMEs, followed by entrepreneurial orientation and mentoring, with the level of education/training having the least effect.

These studies collectively underline the multifaceted nature of succession planning's influence on business sustainability. From Kenya to South Africa, the readiness of successors, mentoring, and the capability of the successor emerge as pivotal factors. The significance of succession planning extends beyond geographical boundaries, offering valuable insights into the survival of SMEs in diverse settings.

## **1.5 Mediation role of Leadership styles on succession planning practice and SME Sustainability.**

In the dynamic landscape of contemporary business, the importance of human resources is paramount. They are not only essential for achieving a competitive edge but also a significant factor in organizational and employee performance (Batarliene et al., 2017). Organizations grapple with the dual challenge of retaining experienced, talented employees and ensuring that they remain committed despite enticing offers from competitors. This is a fundamental aspect of maintaining a competitive advantage and ensuring long-term sustainability (Schein, 2018).

Effective leaders and managers play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges. A key responsibility of exceptional leaders is to oversee and guide the behavior and performance of employees. Successful leaders inspire employees to be proactive and dynamic in their daily roles. Consequently, the leadership styles adopted within an organization can have a profound impact on its sustainability. Poor leadership can negatively affect employee behavior and sustainability. Hence, the choice of leaders is instrumental in nurturing employee satisfaction, retention, and, consequently, effective succession planning (Ali et al., 2015; Almeshref and Khawanda, 2022).

Leadership styles have been widely studied in the context of their impact on various organizational outcomes (Essa. 2019). A comprehensive understanding of the leadership styles preferred by employees can be instrumental in securing their commitment to an organization's sustainability and growth (Budin and Wafa, 2015).

Failing to consider effective leadership styles in managing individuals can result in decreased productivity and the wastage of resources (Budin and Wafa, 2015). The literature extensively confirms that leadership style significantly influences employees' attitudes and behaviors (Pantuvokis and Patsiouras, 2016). Leadership style is not a



static concept but a dynamic practice that encompasses relationship-building, information gathering, interaction, and decision-making (Drzewiecka et al., 2019). It stands as one of the most influential factors contributing to a firm's sustainable growth and improvement (Berg et al., 2017).

This article delves into the nexus of leadership styles with succession planning and SME sustainability, focusing on the mediating role of leadership styles in these relationships. Leadership styles are not universal; they need to be tailored to the organizational context and culture (Asrar-ul-Haq and Anwar, 2018; Sachit and Al Himyari, 2022). However, there is still a paucity of research linking leadership styles to sustainability and succession planning, particularly within the Ghanaian context (Yaseen et al., 2018; Zymbura et al., 2020).

Of the numerous leadership styles, this article zero in on transformational and transactional leadership styles. The impact of these leadership styles have on succession planning and SME sustainability in the Ghanaian context is explored. The hypothesis that leadership styles mediate the relationship between these two factors was established.

Transformational leadership emphasizes building trust, motivating employees to prioritize the organization's interests over their own, and engaging them in goal setting (Xie et al., 2020). This leadership style is recognized for its four dimensions: vision, incentive, leader charm, moral model, and individualized consideration (Alessa, 2021). Transformational leaders, with their visionary approach, employ diverse means to inspire employees and attain organizational goals (Pantuvokis and Patsiouras, 2016)

In contrast, transactional leadership includes dimensions such as contingent reward and management by exception (Xenikou, 2017). Leaders following this style employ a system of rewards and penalties to motivate employees to accomplish predetermined

goals (Miranda, 2019). Employees are incentivized through materialistic rewards, creating an exchange system where employees receive tangible benefits for meeting the set objectives (Xie et al.,2020).

Transactional and transformational leadership styles represent two distinct paradigms in motivating and influencing employees. The significance of these styles within the context of SME sustainability and succession planning is explored in this article, through shedding light on their pivotal role in the sustainable growth of organizations.

## **Research Methods**

### **1.6 Research Approach and Design**

A research design refers to the 'methodology for collecting, analysing, interpreting, and presenting data in research endeavours' (Kivunja, 201). It represents the overarching plan for harmonising conceptual research objectives with practical and achievable research endeavours. This design provides a structured blueprint for gathering and analysing data and offers strategies for tackling the specific research question, as Reed (2021) highlighted. Leung (2015) has asserted that adopting systematic procedures is essential to imbue research with a degree of generalizability.

Snyder (2019) highlighted that the research design facilitates a logical connection between empirical observations and the ultimate conclusions regarding the original research subject. The guiding structure that shapes the methodology for data collection and analysis is commonly referred to as the research design, serving as the foundational framework for the entire research process. A research design encompasses a set of interrelated assumptions, perspectives, research models, and data collection and analysis methods (Cleland, 2017). According to Tie (2019), the

design encompasses the decisions regarding what to investigate, the approach to analysis, the selection of data to collect, and how findings are interpreted.

### **1.6.1 Research Design**

A research design is the methodological plan used for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. It's the blueprint that harmonizes research objectives with practical execution (Kivunja, 2015). The design connects empirical observations to research conclusions and encompasses various decisions regarding investigation, analysis, data collection, and interpretation (Tie, 2019). Research design philosophies include positivism, interpretivism, and critical thinking (Cleland, 2017). A research design is a structured strategy that delineates methods and procedures for data collection and analysis.

### **1.6.2 Objective of the article**

This article aims to explore the framework of causal analysis, particularly focusing on succession planning and SME sustainability the mediating role of leadership styles.

### **1.6.3 Research Method**

The study employed a quantitative approach, relying on post-positivist principles, cause-and-effect reasoning, structured questions, measurement, and hypothesis testing. Quantitative analysis aimed to formulate and assess conceptual frameworks, theories, and hypotheses (Eyisi, 2016).

### **1.6.4 Research Population**

The research population included profit-making businesses in Ghana, with a specific focus on SMEs. The study concentrated on middle-level employees, management personnel, and CEOs of SMEs.

### **1.6.5 Sample and Sampling Technique.**

A sample size of 237 participants were selected from the accessible population of SMEs in Ghana. This sample size was determined using the sample determination sampling formula.

### **1.6.7 Sources of Data**

The study utilized exclusively primary data collected through well-structured survey questionnaires.

### **1.6.8 Validity and Reliability**

The research instrument underwent validation through content and face validity checks. Expert opinions were sought to ensure clarity and alignment with measurement objectives.

### **1.6.9 Data Collection Procedure**

Participants were approached with an introductory letter, informed consent was sought, and questionnaires were administered. Data collection aimed to ensure the confidentiality and well-being of participants.

### **1.6.10 Analysis of Data**

Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis using structural equation modeling (SEM), and the examination of construct measures and hypothesis.

### **1.6.11 Ethical Consideration**

The study adhered to ethical principles, including participants' selection, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and participants' right to withdraw.

## **Mediation Relationship**

### **1.7 H1. Leadership styles mediate the relationship between succession planning practice and Small and Medium Enterprise Sustainability.**

The hypothesis and mediation analysis examined the potential mediating role of leadership style in the relationship between succession planning and Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) sustainability. The findings suggest that:

- The overall influence of succession planning (SP) on SMEs sustainability (SS) was significant (H1:  $\beta = 0.583$ ,  $t = 13.904$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).
- When the mediating factor, leadership style (LS), was included, the impact of succession planning on SMEs sustainability remained significant ( $\beta = 0.331$ ,  $t = 4.197$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).
- Importantly, the indirect effect of succession planning on SMEs sustainability was also significant ( $\beta = 0.252$ ,  $t = 4.146$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

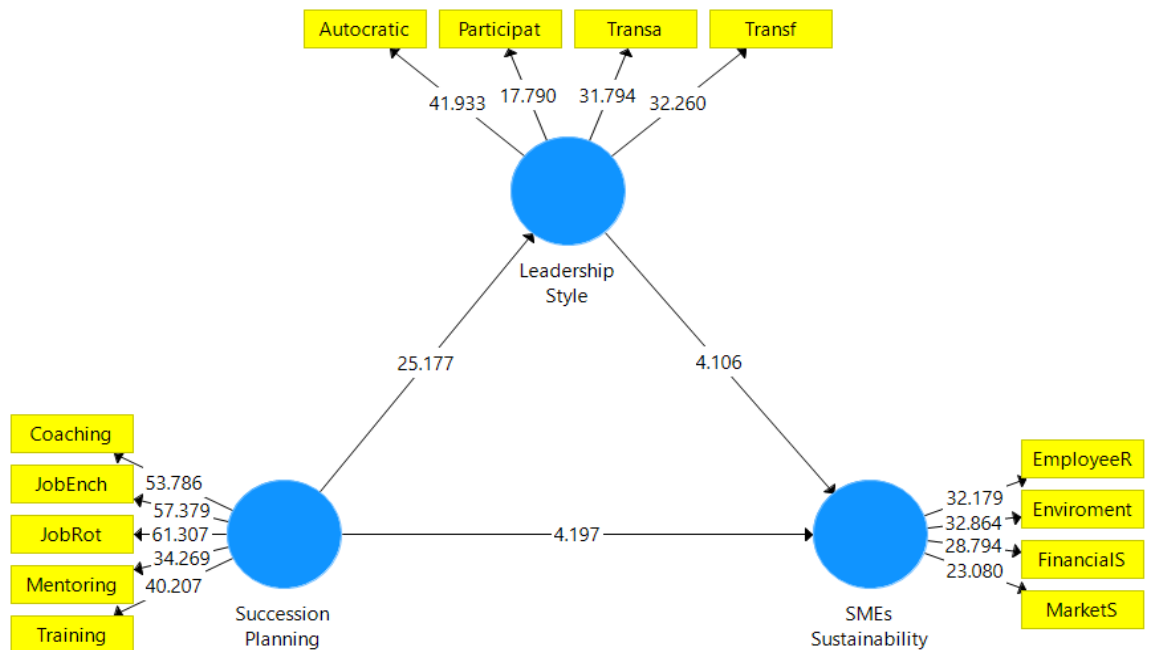
These results indicate that leadership style partially mediates the relationship between succession planning and SME sustainability. In other words, while succession planning has a direct impact on SME sustainability, part of this relationship is explained by the influence of leadership style. The mediation effect of leadership style is significant, demonstrating that it plays a role in enhancing the effect of succession planning on SME sustainability.

The summary statistics for the coefficients and p-values are shown in Table 1, and Figure 1 visually represents the hypothesis test result. The analysis suggests that leadership style is an important factor that contributes to the connection between succession planning and SME sustainability.

**Table 1. Mediation Analysis Result**

Total effect (SP-SS)		Direct effect (SP-SS)			The indirect effect of (SP-SS)				
Coefficient	P Value	Coefficient	P Value		Coefficient	SD	T Value	P Value	BI [2.5%;97.5%]
0.583	0.000	0.331	0.000	H4: SP >LS> SS	0.252	0.061	4.146	0.000	0.136 0.481

**Figure 1: Hypothesis Test Result**



## 1.8 Conclusion

This article explored how leadership styles mediate succession planning and sustainability of SMEs. It started with an analysis of the various leadership styles. The first leadership styles reviewed in the article was team leadership theory. This is followed by transactional leadership style. The transactional leadership style with the following components, contingent reward, management by exception (active) and management by exception (passive). Followed by transformational leadership theory which was also divided into idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration.

Also the article looked at succession planning and business sustainability. This was followed by the mediation role of leadership style on succession planning practice and SME sustainability.

The research methodology was not left out. The methodology started by looking at research approach and design, the research method, the research population, sample and sampling technique, source of data, data collection method, validity and reliability, data collection procedure, analysis of data and ethical consideration.

The final part of the article came up with the testing of the hypothesis, the mediation role of leadership style on succession planning and SME sustainability. The test results showed that leadership style of an organisation plays a mediation role in succession planning and sustainability of the organization.

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