

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA



**IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP STYLES ON CAREER ADAPTABILITY AMONG
EMPLOYEES IN SMALL AND MEDIUM SCALE ENTERPRISES IN GHANA**



**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial
fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of
Master of Philosophy
(Human Resource Management)**

**Department of Management Sciences
School of Business**

OCTOBER, 2025

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DECLARATION

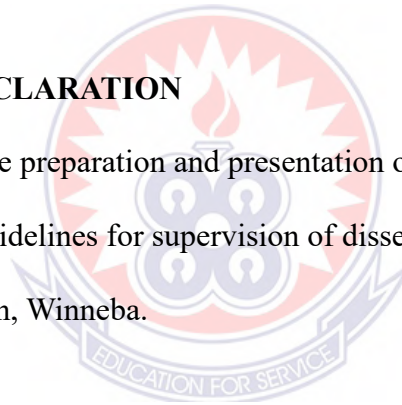
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I, **Oppong Nicholas**, declare that this thesis, except for quotations and references contained in published works that have been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for degree elsewhere.

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SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work were supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of dissertation as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.



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Signature: Date:

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my family and friends for their care and support.



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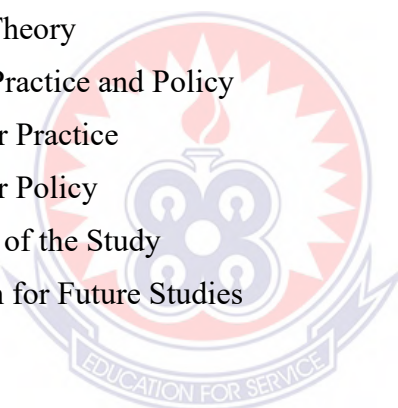


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ABSTRACT

This study explores impact of leadership styles on career adaptability of employees within small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Ghana. Employing a quantitative approach, data were collected using a structured 5-point Likert-type scale questionnaire, and analysed through descriptive and inferential statistics. A purposive sampling technique yielded a sample of size 234 respondents from a population of 710 from among the various SMEs. The analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (Smart PLS v.4). The findings indicated a significant positive relationship between transformational and transactional leadership styles and the various dimensions of career adaptability of SMEs. The study highlights the complementary roles these leadership styles play: transformational leadership fosters personal growth, innovation, and self-management, while transactional leadership provides structure, measurable goals, and stability. Based on the results, the researcher recommends that government bodies and industry associations recognize the critical role of leadership development in enhancing the performance and career adaptability of employees in SMEs, particularly in developing economies.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a pivotal role in national economic growth and socio-economic development. They contribute significantly to overall employment creation, income generation, poverty reduction, and the economic empowerment of vulnerable groups. In many developing economies, SMEs serve as engines of innovation and inclusive growth.

Despite their importance, the management of SMEs has become increasingly challenging due to rapid technological advancement, globalization, economic volatility, and evolving workforce expectations. These dynamics require organizations to adopt more strategic and adaptive approaches to managing both human and material resources. Within this context, leadership becomes a critical determinant of organizational sustainability and performance.

Leadership may be understood as a process through which an individual influences other toward the attainment of shared goals. In contemporary organizations, leadership extends beyond directing tasks; it involves motivating employees, shaping organizational culture, guiding strategic decisions, and fostering innovation. The style adopted by leaders significantly affects employee attitudes, commitment, engagement, and overall performance.

Effective leadership is particularly crucial in SMEs, where organizational structures are often informal and decision-making is centralized. Leaders in such environments play a direct role in shaping employee experiences. Factors such as motivation,

communication quality, reward systems, emotional intelligence, and supportive supervision influence employee productivity and organizational outcomes. Leaders who demonstrate self-awareness, empathy, and strong interpersonal skills are better positioned to build trust, inspire performance, and promote employee development.

Conversely, ineffective leadership can result in reduced morale, diminished organizational commitment, high employee turnover, and poor performance of many organizations especially SMEs. In rapidly changing business environments, leaders must create a compelling vision, encourage adaptability, and encourage a culture of continuous learning which will empower employees to take initiative and embrace new challenges. The leadership can strengthen employees' ability to adjust to evolving career demands.

Although leadership has been widely studied, limited empirical attention has been given to its influence on employees' career adaptability, particularly within SME contexts in developing economies. Career adaptability has become increasingly relevant in today's unpredictable labour market, where employees must continuously adjust to technological changes, job transitions, and evolving skill requirements. Therefore, this study examines how leadership styles influence employee career adaptability within SMEs in Ghana.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Small and Medium Enterprises constitute a huge proportion of businesses in Ghana and are central to employment generation as well as economic growth and development. Despite their economic relevance, many SMEs struggle with human resource management challenges, particularly in developing and retaining adaptable employees.

Leadership practices within Ghanaian SMEs are often informal and heavily owner-driven. Many SME owners lack formal leadership training, resulting in management approaches that may not adequately support employee growth and professional development Odoom and Acheampong (2017)

Weak leadership practices have been associated with employee dissatisfaction, low motivation, limited skill development, and high turnover.

At the same time, the Ghanaian labour market is becoming increasingly competitive and dynamic. Employees are expected to acquire new competencies, manage transitions effectively, and remain resilient in the face of uncertainty (Okan & Okan, 2024).

However, evidence suggests that many SME employees in most developing economies lack structured career development support, mentorship, and empowerment opportunities. Leadership behaviours that focus narrowly on task completion without fostering long-term development may limit employees' adaptability (Osei & Boateng, 2020).

While previous studies have examined transformational and transactional leadership within Ghanaian SMEs, limited research has directly explored how these leadership styles influence the four dimensions of career adaptability. This gap is particularly significant in sectors characterized by high labour mobility and competitive pressures.

Given the strategic importance of both effective leadership styles and employee career adaptability amongst SMEs, it is necessary to examine the influence of leadership styles on career adaptability amongst employees.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine the influence of transformational and transactional leadership styles on employee career adaptability among SMEs in the Accra Metropolitan Assembly of Ghana.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine the extent to which transformational and transactional leadership styles influence the career adaptability of employees working within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Assembly of Ghana.

More importantly, the study seeks to accomplish the following specific objectives:

- i. To evaluate the influence of transformational leadership style on employees' career concerns.
- ii. To evaluate the influence of transactional leadership style on employees' career concerns.
- iii. To assess the effect of transactional leadership style on employees' career control.
- iv. To assess the effect of transformational leadership style on employees' career control.
- v. To explore the influence of transformational leadership style and employees' career curiosity.
- vi. To explore the influence of transactional leadership style and employees' career curiosity.

vii. To assess the influence of transformational leadership style on employees' career confidence.

viii. To assess the influence of transactional leadership style on employees' career confidence.

1.5 Research Hypotheses

Drawing from the objectives of the study, the following hypotheses were formulated for empirical testing:

H1: Transformational leadership style exerts a significant positive influence on employees' career concerns.

H2: Transactional leadership style exerts a significant positive influence on employees' career concerns.

H3: Transactional leadership style exerts a significant positive influence on employees' career control.

H4: Transformational leadership style exerts a significant positive influence on employees' career control.

H5: Transformational leadership style exerts a significant positive influence on employees' career curiosity.

H6: Transactional leadership style exerts a significant positive influence on employees' career curiosity.

H7: Transactional leadership style exerts a significant positive influence on employees' career confidence.

H8: Transformational leadership style exerts a significant positive influence on employees' career confidence.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to both theory and practice.

Practically, the findings will assist SME owners and managers in understanding how specific leadership behaviours or styles influence employee career adaptability. The results may guide leadership development programs and managerial training initiatives aimed at strengthening employee resilience and career adaptability.

From a policy standpoint, insights from this study may inform government agencies and SME-support institutions in designing interventions that enhance leadership capacity within the SME sector.

Academically, the study contributes to leadership and career development literature by extending further research and understanding on the relationship between leadership styles and career adaptability amongst SME employees.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study emphasis on SMEs operating within the Accra Metropolitan Assembly of Ghana. The geographical focus was selected due to the high concentration of SMEs and the prevalence of informal leadership structures within the Accra Metro.

The study specifically examines the influence of transformational and transactional leadership styles and on the career adaptability amongst SME employees especially on the dimensions of career adaptability involving career concern, career control, career

curiosity, and career confidence. The research does not examine other leadership styles or broader organizational performance indicators.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

The study is subject to some limitations amongst them include the following;

First, it depends greatly on self-reported data from employees, which is subject to response bias.

Second, it is geographically restricted to SMEs within Accra Metropolitan Assembly, which may limit generalizability to other regions or larger organizations.

Third, external factors such as macroeconomic conditions, industry dynamics, and government policy were not directly examined, although they may influence both leadership practices and employee career adaptability.

Future research may adopt longitudinal designs, expand geographic coverage, and incorporate additional leadership constructs to enhance generalizability.

1.9 Definition of Terms

Transformational Leadership: A leadership style branded on inspiration, vision articulation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and the motivation of employees to exceed expectations.

Transactional Leadership: A leadership style based on structured tasks, performance monitoring, and the use of rewards and corrective actions to achieve a set goal.

Career Adaptability: An individual's readiness and resources to cope with current and anticipated career-related tasks, transitions, and challenges. It encompasses four dimensions; career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence.

Small and Medium Enterprise (SME): A business entity employing not more than 100 employees and meeting asset thresholds as defined by Ghanaian regulatory standards.

1.10 Organization of the Study

This study is structured into five chapters.

Chapter One of the study presents the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, the research hypotheses, the scope and limitations of the study, and definitions of some key terms used.

Chapter Two also reviews the relevant theoretical and empirical literature relating to leadership styles and employee career adaptability.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology adopted for the study, it includes the research design, population of the study, sampling techniques, the data collection procedures, and the method of analysing the data.

The fourth Chapter also presents the results of the empirical analysis and discusses the key findings of the study.

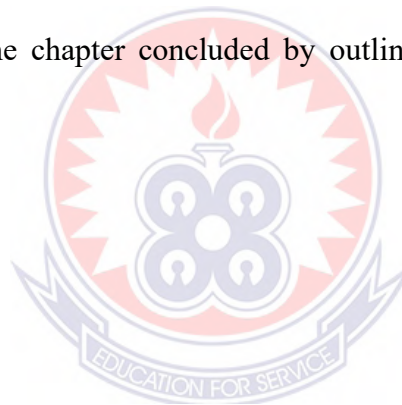
Chapter Five provides a summary of the study, it also presents the conclusions drawn from the findings, and offers recommendations for policy and practice and area concerned for future research.

1.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has clearly established the conceptual as well as the contextual foundation of the study. It highlighted the strategic importance of SMEs in Ghana and emphasized the growing need for adaptable employees in dynamic labour markets.

The chapter identified leadership style as a pivotal factor influencing employees career adaptability amongst SMEs, while noting the limited empirical attention given to this relationship within Ghanaian SMEs.

The research objectives and hypotheses were developed to examine how transformational and transactional leadership styles influence the four dimensions of career adaptability. The chapter concluded by outlining the scope, limitations, and structure of the study.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The chapter two presents scholarly arguments and viewpoints on the relationships between transformational and transactional leadership styles and employee career adaptability within Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). It examines key concepts, discusses the theoretical foundations underpinning the study. It synthesizes empirical findings from previous research, and presents the conceptual framework that informs the proposed relationships among the study variables.

Leadership theories commonly assert that leaders who apply appropriate leadership styles in given contexts tend to achieve high performance while their subordinates experience increased job satisfaction, commitment, and retention (Adi & Nereida, 2023). The extent to which employees demonstrate emotional engagement and organizational commitment is significantly shaped by leadership style (Riaz et al., 2012). Leadership style comprises various traits, characteristics, and behaviours that leaders use to interact with their subordinates (Ebrahim, 2018). Modern leadership styles reflect the dynamic evolution of leadership in response to changing organizational, societal, and economic conditions (Hassan, 2019). Influential leaders often blend multiple leadership styles, adapting their approach to meet specific organizational and team needs (Bilimoria et al., 2021).

A wide range of leadership styles including autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, transformational and transactional leadership styles, and servant leadership have been identified in the literature (Northouse, 2019; Bass & Avolio, 1994). Within the Ghanaian SME context, leadership practices tend to be informal and context-driven,

often resulting in the use of hybrid styles (Odoom et al., 2021). Nonetheless, empirical studies and field observations indicate that transformational and transactional leadership styles remain the most prevalent among SME leaders due to their adaptability to small business settings that often require both visionary and task-oriented leadership approaches.

While acknowledging the existence of other styles, this study focuses on transformational and transactional leadership due to their theoretical robustness, relevance to the Ghanaian SME environment, and established influence on employee outcomes. Transformational leadership emphasizes vision, innovation, and employee development, aligning well with the need for adaptability in dynamic work environments (Bass, 1990). Transactional leadership, on the other hand, emphasizes performance, structure, and reward-based exchanges which are essential features in resource-constrained settings typical of many SMEs (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Their conceptual contrast and empirical significance offer a comprehensive framework for examining how leadership influences employee career adaptability.

2.2 Transformational Leadership Style

Transformational leadership theory is amongst the earliest frameworks for understanding leadership from psychological and methodological perspectives (Saad, 2021). Burns (1978) described it as a process focused on internal relationships and values, wherein leaders influence others by adapting their behaviours to meet challenges, ultimately facilitating organizational change. The theory affirms that effective leaders inspire and motivate followers to transcend self-interest, fostering both personal and professional growth (Steinmann et al., 2018).

According to Riaz et al. (2012), transformational leaders bring positive change to their followers. These leaders are dynamic, passionate, and invested in the success of each team member. Prior research indicates that career salience is influenced by job involvement, which is linked to organizational commitment, strengthened by transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership fosters a positive organizational culture, encourages innovation, and empowers employees to achieve their potential. This results in increased commitment, punctuality, motivation, and confidence, both intrinsically and extrinsically (Berkemajuan, 2023).

Transformational leadership enhances employee motivation, morale, and development by promoting positive change, ultimately aiming to shape employees into future leaders (Mlinarevic et al., 2022). This leadership approach is especially important in today's fast-paced, tech-driven industries where agility and modernization are crucial to organizational success and development (Benmira & Agboola, 2021).

Salamah et al. (2023) emphasized that transformational leadership is essential in fostering employee development, creating a safe and healthy work environment, and improving morale, skills, and motivation. Transformational leaders stimulate creativity and innovation among team members. Employees under such leadership are empowered to take risks and explore opportunities, enhancing career adaptability.

According to Mai et al. (2022) transformational leadership significantly influence career adaptability by nurturing a culture of learning, innovation, support, and resilience. Employees under transformational leadership are better equipped to navigate complex and rapidly evolving work environments.

Bass and Riggio (2006) acknowledged that there are four core dimensions of transformational leadership, which are Idealized Influence (Charisma), Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. These dimensions collectively create a transformative impact, stimulating followers to exceed self-interest and strive for personal and professional growth and improvement in one's career.

Chebon et al. (2019) opined that a leader who possesses idealized influence inspires admiration, trust, and respect in his followers. These are leaders who act as ethical role models, embodying organizational values and visions (Pawar, 2016). Such leaders articulate a compelling vision and energize followers toward shared goals (Khan et al., 2022). A research found that idealized influence and inspirational motivation positively influence employee performance due to trust employees have in the leaders, employees are motivated to work hard to achieve success because employees tend to exhibit higher job satisfaction, willingness to learn, and adaptability (Kim-Soon & Manikayasagam, 2015, Lin et al, 2023).

Tarigan et al. (2019) explained intellectual stimulation as a leadership behaviour that encourages critical thinking, challenges assumptions, and supports creativity. Transformational leaders promote a learning culture that helps followers expand their capabilities. Pawar (2016) further added that transformational leadership promotes independent thinking and views unanticipated challenges as development opportunities. Khan et al. (2022) confirmed that intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration are strongly associated with idealized influence.

Wang et al. (2017) found that transformational leadership encourages job crafting by promoting adaptability and proactive behaviour. Employees become more willing to

seek challenges and resources. The researchers concluded that transformational leadership is a key driver of adaptability and proactivity.

Individualized consideration involves providing mentorship and personalized guidance. Therefore, leaders who demonstrate this trait promote sense of belonging, empowerment, and professional growth amongst employees or subordinates (Alfiyah et al, 2022). A study by Ogola et al. (2017) in Kenyan SMEs confirmed that individualized consideration has a significant positive relationship with employee satisfaction and performance. Similarly, Skopak and Hadziahmetovic (2022) observed that individualized influence significantly enhances job satisfaction in Bosnia's food industry which encourages employees to stay longer in the organization.

2.3 Transactional Leadership Style

Burns (1978), emphasized that the interaction between leaders and followers are the foundation for transactional leadership style. Bass (2006) further developed the theory, asserting that transactional leadership involves clarifying roles and duties, setting expectations, negotiating agreements, and recognizing or rewarding performance as well as achievements. Thahira et al. (2020) are of the view that transactional leadership establishes a foundation for leader-follower relationships based on structured exchanges. Transactional leaders rely heavily on a system of rewards and punishments to motivate followers to meet established goals and achieve results (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). This leadership style is grounded in the belief that individuals are motivated by external incentives and consequences. Leaders using this approach clarify job responsibilities, set performance targets, and help build employee self-confidence in achieving those standards (Riaz et al., 2012). Wamalwa (2023) adds that transactional leaders define roles and expectations, offering rewards or penalties based on employee performance.

Transactional leadership is especially effective in environments where tasks are well-defined and employees are externally motivated. However, it can limit creativity and innovation, as employees may focus strictly on meeting minimum requirements rather than exploring new ideas (Oyelade et al., 2022). Transactional leaders typically emphasize short-term goals, compliance with rules and procedures, and adherence to organizational policies (Jaqua & Jaqua, 2021). Such leaders closely supervise tasks to minimize deviations from expected standards, prioritizing structure, discipline, and predictability (Akhigbe et al., 2014). Their clarity in goal-setting helps employees understand their responsibilities, boosting confidence and encouraging adaptability in structured environments (Thahira et al., 2020).

Transactional leaders focus on maintaining the status quo by reinforcing existing procedures. The implicit or explicit agreement between leaders and followers involves rewarding desired behaviour, such as with promotions or bonuses and punishing undesirable conduct, such as with demotions or terminations (Udayanga, 2020).

Avolio and Bass (2004) categorized transactional leadership as Contingent Reward, Management by Exception (Active) and Management by Exception (Passive).

Contingent reward involves leaders offering recognition, promotions, or tangible benefits to motivate specific performances and achievement. Chen and Weng (2023) explain that leaders set clear expectations and reward employees who meet their target. Layek and Koodamara (2024) observed that while contingent rewards may not directly predict success, they contribute to employee satisfaction.

Similarly, Hadziahmetovic and Skopak (2023) found that contingent reward positively impacts job satisfaction under transactional leadership. As Xu et al. (2019) argue,

leaders can encourage goal-directed behaviour by tying rewards to successful task performance.

Management by Exception (Active) involves leaders proactive monitoring and offering intervention when deviations from expectations occur. Leaders identify and correct issues before they escalate (Karim et al., 2023; Maundu et al., 2020). In contrast, Management by Exception (Passive) refers to a reactive approach, leaders intervene only when problems become serious (Oyelade, 2022). This passive approach can foster employee independence and trust, leading to increased commitment and, potentially, greater career adaptability. According to Willis et al. (2017), this hands-off style helps employees develop self-confidence and autonomy.

Despite its advantages, transactional leadership is often criticized for fostering a compliance-driven culture in which employees are motivated primarily by rewards rather than intrinsic interest in their work. It may also be less effective in environments requiring creativity, innovation, or complex problem-solving (Young et al., 2021).

2.4 Career Adaptability

Career Adaptability Theory, as developed by Savickas (2002) and cited in Hartung & Taber, 2008), focuses on individuals' ability to navigate and thrive in their careers despite challenges and transitions. It postulates that individuals with higher adaptability are better prepared to manage career changes, cope with insecurity, and pursue their career goals without fear of the unknown.

‘Omar and Tajudeen (2020) defined professional adaptability as the capacity to adjust to changes resulting from personal trauma, career shifts, or career advancement activities. Their research indicates a positive relationship between employee well-being, career flexibility, commitment, and career success. This

implies that leadership styles such as transformational and transactional leadership, which emphasize personal development and resource provision, enable employees to adapt to various career objectives and workplace opportunities’.

Wang et al. (2022) described career adaptability as the ability to handle both anticipated career responsibilities and unexpected changes arising from evolving work environments and leadership. Sumarmi et al. (2022) conceptualized career adaptability as a set of competencies, behaviours and attitudes used to navigate occupational changes, comprising four key dimensions; career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence. Curiosity involves exploring possible career paths and future opportunities. Control reflects responsibility and agency in career development. Concern refers to preparing for future roles and career tasks. Confidence denotes belief in one’s capacity to overcome career challenges.

According to Di Maggio et al. (2020), career adaptability is grounded in the assumption that individuals construct their careers by adapting to dynamic social environments in pursuit of personal and professional goals, thereby regulating their development and aligning with societal roles and expectations.

2.5 Dimensions of Career Adaptability

Career adaptability is defined as an individual’s readiness and resources for managing current and anticipated career-related tasks, transitions, and traumas (Savickas, 1997). Understanding career adaptability is essential for employees in SMEs who often face dynamic work conditions, shifting responsibilities, and limited career structures.

Career adaptability is seen as a psychosocial construct which is composed of four interrelated dimensions which are; career concern, career control, career curiosity, and

career confidence (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). These dimensions are not isolated traits but dynamic capabilities that interact to shape an individual's overall career adaptability. Their inclusion in this study is grounded in both theoretical clarity and empirical support, making them a more appropriate and comprehensive focus than broader, less-structured conceptions of adaptability.

These four dimensions have been adopted not only because they offer a validated, operational framework for measuring career adaptability (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) but also because they align with the research objectives of understanding leadership's influence on employee development. They provide a focused, measurable, and theoretically grounded means of assessing how leadership styles manifest in employees' career-related behaviours, thus justifying the exclusion of alternative or generic aspects of adaptability.

By integrating these dimensions, the study offers a nuanced exploration of how leadership styles shape key facets of employee adaptability, making it more targeted, theoretically grounded, and practically relevant to the SME context.

2.5.1 Career Concern

Career concern reflects individuals' awareness of the importance of planning and preparing for future career tasks and transitions. It is a forward-looking dimension of adaptability that emphasizes proactive career development and engagement with emerging opportunities (Haenggli & Hirschi, 2023).

Urbanaviciute et al. (2019) described career concern as encompassing both anxiety and excitement about one's career future, including regret over past performance, stress from current responsibilities, and aspirations for upcoming tasks. Effective leadership plays a pivotal role in cultivating such concern. Leaders who provide mentorship,

training opportunities, and a clear vision can alleviate fears and motivate employees toward strategic career planning (Grossman, 2023).

Grossman defined employee development as the process through which workers gain new skills and knowledge, supported by management, to enhance their career growth. Steinmann et al. (2018) emphasized that leadership that communicates long-term organizational goals helps employees see their future within the company, encouraging adaptability.

Basuki and Widyanti (2022) found that there is a significant positive relationship between an organizational learning culture and employee career planning and development. They argued that career management enables individuals to implement and monitor career strategies that benefit both the employee and the organization. In SMEs, where formal development structures may be lacking, leadership must be intentional about fostering career concern to promote retention and business continuity.

A study by Akpamah and Matko (2023) found that many SMEs in Ghana fail within five years, contributing to unemployment and business instability. This highlights the importance of leadership that promotes career growth and adaptability. According to Nasir et al. (2022), SME leaders should prioritize employee development through coaching, feedback, and continuous learning. Peláez Zuberbuhler et al. (2020) similarly advocated for personalized development plans to raise employees' awareness of the need for adaptability and strategic planning in their careers.

2.5.2 Career Control

Career control refers to how individuals perceive themselves as responsible for shaping and managing their vocational futures. It implies the belief in one's capacity to influence career outcomes through deliberate planning, decision-making, and self-directed action

(Paszowska-Rogacz, 2020). This dimension of career adaptability emphasizes agency and self-regulation in career development, enabling individuals to actively steer their career trajectories.

Akça et al. (2018) assert that individuals are the primary decision-makers of their futures, capable of making meaningful choices about their careers. This sense of control fosters confidence and ownership over professional growth. Leaders who delegate authority, foster autonomy, and provide resources for skill development empower employees to take charge of their career paths. When leaders build a culture of trust and autonomy amongst employees, they are more likely to feel control of their future and, consequently, more adaptable to change (Cherry, 2017, Konyeha, 2023).

Shah and Kazmi (2020) demonstrated that delegation of authority significantly improves employee confidence leading to job satisfaction and performance improvement, which in turn contributes to organizational growth and success. This highlights the importance of reinforcing employees' sense of control and promoting adaptive behaviours in the workplace.

In the context of SMEs, where resource limitations and flat organizational hierarchies are common, empowering leadership becomes especially crucial (Klösel, 2021). Leadership approaches such as servant leadership and shared leadership can distribute decision-making authority and promote employee participation, thereby strengthening their career control and adaptability.

Düger (2021) emphasizes that even within the constraints of smaller organizations, SME leaders can enhance employees' sense of control by promoting autonomy, encouraging innovation, and involving them in strategic decision-making processes.

Such practices not only foster a sense of responsibility and ownership but also support employees in navigating career challenges more effectively.

2.5.3 Career Curiosity

Career curiosity refers to an individual's willingness to explore new opportunities, acquire new knowledge, and reflect on how these experiences may influence their professional development and work environments (Silvia & Christensen, 2020). It is a critical psychological resource that drives individuals to actively seek information about themselves and their occupational contexts, thereby fostering informed decision-making and adaptability.

Curiosity is a tool for innovation and exploratory behaviour in the workplace. It originates from an intrinsic desire to learn, experiment, and apply work-related knowledge for present and future career advancement (Chang & Shih, 2019). Employees who exhibit high levels of curiosity are more inclined to embrace challenges, remain receptive to novel ideas, and proactively seek solutions, all of which contribute to both personal growth and organizational effectiveness. For instance, Adiningrum (2021) found that curiosity significantly enhances the identification and perception of entrepreneurial opportunities, a vital capability in today's competitive business environment.

Further, (Suma & Budi 2021, Murrie, 2023) argues that curiosity stimulates creative problem-solving and continuous learning, and these are attributes that are indispensable for career adaptability.

In SMEs where agility and innovation are essential for survival and growth leaders who promote a culture of continuous learning inspire employees to pursue new knowledge and competencies (Waseel et al., 2023). Fostering a growth mind set and celebrating

intellectual exploration, leaders create an enabling environment where employees feel encouraged to explore diverse perspectives and ideas (Cooley & Larson, 2018).

Additionally, leaders who model inquisitive behaviours influence employees to adopt similar attitudes towards their own career development, thus enhancing their adaptability (Rumanti et al., 2023). Strategies such as cross-functional collaboration, knowledge-sharing platforms, and support for calculated risk-taking can be effective in fostering curiosity among employees (Cătălina, 2023).

In sum, career curiosity enhances adaptability by encouraging exploratory behaviour, openness to change, and continuous learning. In the context of SMEs, where resource constraints and environmental uncertainty are prevalent, curiosity becomes a vital driver of individual career success and organizational resilience.

2.5.4. Career Confidence

Confidence represents self-reliance and self-assurance in a person's ability to overcome various difficulties and changes encountered throughout a career (Ataç et al., 2018). Confidence expresses an individual's capacity to manage career-related challenges, transitions, and obstacles successfully without fear of failure, in order to accomplish career goals or actualize their objectives (Rudolph et al., 2017). Patel (2019) suggests that confidence is demonstrated through self-awareness, learning from past successes and failures, trusting one's abilities, embracing uncertainty, and being open to both praise and criticism.

Supportive leadership, through constructive feedback, recognition, and encouragement can enhance employees' confidence in their skills due to the leader's concern for subordinates' well-being and the organizational climate (Fabac et al., 2022). Effective

people-centred communication by leaders boosts employees' confidence and facilitates ongoing training and development (Zanabazar et al., 2023).

Leaders who invest in employee development, offer training opportunities, and provide mentorship contribute significantly to employee confidence. This creates a supportive and inclusive work environment that fosters belonging and self-assurance is critical for career adaptability (Bilderback & Miller, 2023).

Pasha (2019) opined that building employee confidence is vital for enabling career adaptability within SMEs, where employees often assume multiple roles and must navigate challenges and uncertainties. Increased organizational self-esteem leads to greater self-confidence and more creative behaviour, enhancing the likelihood of innovative outcomes (Sujatha et al., 2023).

Leaders can promote confidence by mentoring, offering opportunities for initiative, recognizing achievements, providing development opportunities, and encouraging accountability (Dennison, 2023). A leadership behaviour can significantly affect the team's ability to develop confidence and overcome obstacles at any career stage (Sajithkumar, 2024).

By nurturing employee confidence, leaders in SMEs can help individuals build the resilience and self-assurance required to thrive in dynamic work environments and adapt to career demands. A study on individualized consideration in leadership found that high employee performance in SMEs is achieved when leaders recognize efforts, build confidence, and promote self-development, communication, mentoring, and coaching (Ogola et al., 2017).

2.6. Theoretical Review

Career Construction Theory (CCT), developed by Mark Savickas, is a psychological framework that explains how individuals develop their careers over the lifespan. It emphasizes that careers are constructed through a series of actions and decisions shaped by personal traits, social contexts, and evolving work environments (Savickas, 2005).

Rudolph et al. (2017) opined that individuals who have knowledge of career adaptability are better equipped to manage transitions, cope with uncertainties, and pursue their career goals effectively. As individuals navigate different life stages and career transitions, they must remain flexible and open to change (Oztemel & Akyol, 2021). Adaptability involves adjusting career goals, acquiring new skills, and addressing unforeseen challenges and opportunities.

Savickas and Porfeli (2012), as cited by Lan and Chen (2020), outline two key features of career adaptability, Career adaptability resources vary by context and can be developed in the workplace. These resources are self-regulatory strengths enabling individuals to address vocational tasks and adapt to their environment.

Transformational leaders can foster employee adaptability by providing growth opportunities, mentorship, coaching, and promoting a learning-oriented culture that removes fear and encourages future readiness (Afsar et al., 2014). CCT also posits that social relationships, including those with supervisors, are predictors of career adaptability (Savickas, 2005).

In dynamic SME environments, where roles and responsibilities frequently evolve, employees benefit from being proactive in shaping their career paths (Horváth & Szabó, 2019). Career adaptability allows them to realign their goals and competencies with organizational needs, making them more effective contributors in flexible workplaces.

Transactional leaders can also support career adaptability by setting clear expectations, providing feedback, and offering rewards for skill enhancement and performance improvements (Wamalwa, 2023). CCT recognizes feedback as a critical factor in promoting career learning and growth (Rudolph et al., 2019). Transactional leadership, in this context, can guide employees in evaluating their strengths, addressing developmental needs, and planning long-term career goals.

In SMEs, where employees often multitask, career adaptability becomes essential. Transformational leadership fosters a culture of learning and growth, enabling employees to adapt and thrive in fast-changing environments (Kumari et al., 2021).

2.7. Empirical Review

2.7.1. The Impact of Transformational Leadership Style on Career Adaptability

Organizations can remain relevant and competitive, ensuring long-term success and sustainability, by adopting leadership models that address the evolving demands of dynamic business environment (Shadraconis, 2013). Effective leadership provides a clear vision and direction, which helps employees understand organizational goals and purpose. This clarity enables employees to align their career aspirations, adapt their skills, and develop competencies that contribute to the development and growth of the organization (Tamsah et al., 2023).

According to Saif et al. (2023) transformational leaders possess a clear vision, a sense of purpose, and high emotional intelligence. They are skilled in planning, organising, delegating, monitoring, and evaluating team performance. In the current rapidly changing business landscape, such leadership is essential for engaging employees and guiding them in adapting their careers to evolving work demands (Turan & Cinnioğlu, 2022).

A study conducted to understand how transformational leadership, career adaptability, and career success influence employee adaptability found that transformational leadership has a significant impact on employees' career success and adaptability (Al-Ghazali, 2020). However, a study conducted by Riaz et al. (2012) also has it that transformational leadership had an insignificant influence on career salience.

Dukhaykh et al. (2024) and Muthuveloo et al. (2014) found a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership, work engagement, and career adaptability in the banking sector and telecommunications industry respectively due to the fact that leaders are able to inspire employees to go beyond personal interests for the benefit of the organisation.

This is because transformational leaders foster a culture of innovation, creativity, and adaptability by setting high expectations, providing support, and cultivating a shared vision. Therefore, employees under such leadership are more likely to embrace change, seek growth opportunities, and demonstrate increased commitment, resulting in reduced turnover (Steinmann et al., 2018).

Manaf and Latif (2014) found that adaptability, when embedded in the organisational culture and driven by leadership, plays a critical role in strategic redirection to achieve sustainable outcomes. Likewise, Sumarmi et al. (2022) reported that career adaptability and work motivation positively influence employee performance, highlighting the importance of leadership support for employee career growth and development.

According to Lan and Chen (2020), transformational leadership influences career adaptability through communication and developmental tasks aligned with career construction theory. These leaders actively identify organisational change needs and shape environments conducive to employee engagement and adaptability (Ng &

Feldman, 2014). This approach provides employees with opportunities to connect with new workplace situations, thus activating their adaptability resources.

Transformational leaders also prioritise employee well-being by emphasising empathy, collaboration, and active listening. They create psychologically safe environments that promote continuous learning and encourage experimentation, leading to reduced turnover (Sultan, 2020, Saeed & Jun, 2022).

2.7.2. The Impact of Transactional Leadership Style on Career Adaptability

Transactional leadership theory emphasises a transaction between leadership and followers, focusing on rewards, punishments, and performance expectations to stimulate employee's performance (Rodgers et al., 2022). Transactional leaders assign specific tasks to employees and use systems of rewards and punishments to drive performance. They typically concentrate on short-term goals, formal procedures, compliance with rules, and task-oriented structures, often displaying resistance to change (Jaqua & Jaqua, 2021).

A research found that career adaptability was negatively related to turnover intention of employees but positively associated with supervisor-rated job performance, career satisfaction, and annual income (Haibo et al., 2018).

Transactional leaders often provide feedback and recognition based on employees' performance relative to predefined standards. The structured nature and feedback encourages employees recognize their strengths and weakness for improvement, facilitating informed decisions about career development and satisfaction (Febrian et al., 2023). Riaz and Haider (2010) also found that while transformational and transactional leadership style have a positive correlation with job and career satisfaction. However, transactional leadership style was found strongly correlated with

job success compared to transformational leadership style which had a stronger influence on career satisfaction.

Additionally, the promise of rewards or recognition for meeting specific targets can motivate employees to pursue growth and adaptability (Pratama et al., 2022, Gerschberger et al., 2023). Several studies including; Abdelwash et al. (2023, Wahyuni et al. (2021) and Kalsoom et al. (2018) also affirmed the positive influence of transactional leadership on employee performance.

Conversely, Mahfouz et al. (2022) reported that there is an insignificant influence of transactional leadership on employee performance in a Malaysian construction industry. However, Aljumah (2023) found that transactional leadership moderates the relationship between motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) and job satisfaction. Notably, transactional leadership was found to enhance the extrinsic motivation on job satisfaction while weakening the effect of intrinsic motivation.

Rabiu et al. (2024) assert that job satisfaction positively influences employees' willingness to invest in their careers. Satisfied employees are more inclined to seek development opportunities, which enhances career adaptability. This highlights the centrality of job satisfaction in promoting adaptability, as satisfied employees are more open to change and proactive in navigating new challenges.

Shatha (2019) proposed a conceptual framework indicating that transactional leadership significantly contributes to employee commitment. Yahaya et al. (2023) explored the moderating role of organisational commitment in the relationship between transactional leadership and employee turnover intentions. They concluded that while transactional leadership positively predicts turnover intentions, strong organisational commitment can mitigate this effect. Furthermore, Ferreira (2019) suggested that

employee commitment strongly correlates with career adaptability. Committed employees tend to invest in learning and development, plan their careers, and adjust effectively to changing organisational needs.

Mabasa and Eresia-Eke (2022) conducted a research into how the contingent reward (CR) and management-by-exception (MBE) components of transactional leadership style affected employee commitment. It was found that CR facet have a significant positive influence on commitment, while the passive form of MBE negatively affected commitment. No significant relationship was found between active MBE and any commitment type. The study recommended the use of contingent rewards to foster employee commitment and, by extension, improve career adaptability.

Transactional leaders tend to be risk-averse, prioritising stability and consistency. While this offers employees a sense of security, it may also limit innovation and adaptability by imposing rigid rules and discouraging creative exploration (Khairy et al., 2023). Nevertheless, leaders can reduce the negative effects of risk aversion by fostering a culture of learning from failure and promoting experimentation as a path to growth (Lutkevich, 2020). By doing so, they can positively influence employee adaptability and commitment, especially in dynamic work environment.

2.7.3. The Influence of Transformational Leadership Style on Career Concerns

Transformational leaders are visionary and capable of recognising changes and dynamics in their environment and convert such into opportunities for both organizational and employee success (Purba & Sudibjo, 2020).

According to Avolio and Bass (1991), transformational leadership significantly impacts individuals' career concerns by fostering trust, offering developmental opportunities, clarifying career paths, empowering subordinates, motivating teams, recognising

achievements, and promoting innovation. These leadership attributes create a supportive environment that helps address employee anxieties about career growth and progression.

A study in the United States which engaged 297 participants, found that transformational leadership style significantly enhanced employees career satisfaction and development due to the leaders' ability to offer career-related support and address concerns which is central to career success and adaptability (Kim and Eby (2012) Similarly, a study conducted in Portugal with a sample of 310 employees in the hospitality industry showed that transformational leadership style has a significant positive influence on employees due to motivation and learning culture provide by leaders with such behaviour, thus affirming the connection between leadership style and career prospects (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010, Ferreira et al., 2020).

Additionally,) established that personal growth initiatives mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and career development. This suggests that transformational leaders who prioritise personal growth can help reduce employee concerns related to career uncertainty and direction. (Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2019, Perry & Kirkman.,2021)

In summary, the literature shows a consistent pattern: transformational leadership not only enhances organisational performance but also plays a pivotal role in addressing employee career concerns, supporting growth, and fostering satisfaction in dynamic work environments.

2.7.4. The Impact of Transactional Leadership Style on Career Control

Research conducted by Yang and Zhang (2021) proved that transactional leadership style had a significant positive influence on employees' perceived career control due to

clear expectations, performance-based rewards, and corrective feedback provided by leaders which are the basic elements that empower and motivate employees to take charge and control of their career growth and development.

According to Greenhaus et al. (1990), perceived career control refers to an individual's belief in their ability to influence career-related outcomes through intentional decisions and actions. Therefore, when employees feel in control of their career progression, they are more likely to engage in proactive career behaviours such as seeking new opportunities, networking, and enhancing their skills.

A study which explored the relationship between career control and career satisfaction, considering the moderating roles of leader-member exchange and perceived organisational support, found that supportive leadership environments can enhance employees' sense of career control. Although the study was not solely focused on transactional leadership, it contributes to understanding the broader factors that influence perceived career control, including transactional leadership behaviours (Nadiri et al., 2020).

Several studies including (e.g., Epitropaki & Martin, 2005; Yang & Zhang, 2021) have supported the link between transactional leadership and career control. These studies demonstrated that employees under transactional leaders report higher levels of job clarity and receive more structured feedback are both of which are critical components of perceived career control.

2.7.5. The Influence of Transformational Leadership Style on Career Control

Transformational leadership has been found to significantly enhance employees' perceived career control by fostering an environment that encourages personal growth and self-efficacy (Liu et al., 2019). Such leaders provide a clear vision, inspire trust and

confidence, and actively promote both personal and professional development opportunities, which collectively enhance individuals' sense of career control. Consequently, transformational leadership boosts career control through increased work engagement and career optimism (Collins, 2020).

A study investigating how transformational leadership influences career satisfaction through personal growth and career development opportunities confirmed that transformational leadership significantly increases employees' perceptions of career control by fostering an environment that promotes self-efficacy (Martin & Epitropaki, 2017). Similarly, Seibert et al. (2018), in a study focusing on the relationship between transformational leadership and proactive career behaviours, found that transformational leadership has a significant positive impact on perceived career control, which in turn promotes proactive career-related actions.

Several studies (e.g., Liu et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020) have demonstrated that transformational leaders empower employees, thereby enhancing their perceived career control and facilitating career advancement. Furthermore, Bliese et al. (2021) examined how transformational leadership influences career advancement through the mediating role of psychological empowerment and found that such leadership positively affects perceived career control by psychologically empowering employees, ultimately supporting career progression.

2.7.6. The Influence of Transformational Leadership Style on Career Curiosity

Transformational leadership has been found to promote employees' organisational commitment by demonstrating personal sensitivity to each worker's career goals and developmental needs (Ayranci & Ayranci, 2017). Career curiosity, which fosters creativity, innovation, and individual learning, can be significantly enhanced in

environments that encourage continuous personal and professional development (Adiningrum, 2021). A leadership style that supports and stimulates subordinate learning increases employees' desire to explore more about themselves and their organisation.

Gardner and Young (2022) postulate that transformational leadership fosters career curiosity by inspiring individuals to explore new possibilities and embrace growth. Similarly, a study by Segers et al. (2020) on IT professionals found that transformational leadership enhances career curiosity by intellectually stimulating employees and encouraging them to explore diverse career paths through the articulation of a compelling vision and the provision of challenging opportunities.

A further study focused on the millennial workforce confirmed that transformational leadership promotes career curiosity among millennials by leveraging visionary and supportive leadership traits. These qualities inspire millennials to be more inquisitive about their future career trajectories and opportunities (Gardner & Young, 2022). Likewise, Steele and Johnson (2020) explored how transformational leadership influences employee career development through the lens of career curiosity. The findings revealed that transformational leaders nurture an environment that is conducive enough to motivate employees to seek out career opportunities and engage in continuous career-related learning, thus significantly enhancing career curiosity.

Additionally, a study by Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2019) within the hospitality industry found that transformational leaders' supportive and motivational behaviours increase

employees' willingness to explore and adapt to new career directions. Their research confirmed that transformational leadership positively influences career curiosity by encouraging openness to new experiences and willingness to embrace career change.

2.7.7. The Influence of Transactional Leadership Style on Career Curiosity

A leadership which is characterised by an exchanged-based rapport between leaders and followers, and where leaders encourage subordinates to achieve organisational or personal goals by offering rewards for meeting objectives or applying penalties for under performance is transactional (Agbo, 2023).

A study conducted in the United States which sampled of 350 employees across various departments, examined how transactional leadership influences career development through structured feedback and recognition mechanisms found that transactional leadership positively impacts career curiosity by offering clear, consistent feedback and recognition, which motivate employees to explore career opportunities (Smith & Johnson (2021). Regular feedback and performance-based recognition were shown to stimulate employees to achieve more and aspire to greater professional development.

Similarly, Carter and West (2020) conducted a study in a technology company in the Pacific Northwest, exploring the effect of transactional leadership on employee career curiosity with job satisfaction as a mediating factor. The study, involving 200 participants, found that transactional leadership enhances career curiosity by improving job satisfaction through mechanisms such as contingent rewards and management-by-exception. Their findings suggest that employees who are more pleased with their jobs are also more likely to display higher levels of curiosity concerning their career paths.

Further evidence from Harper and Grey (2019) indicated that transactional leadership contributes to organisational performance by fostering career curiosity among

employees. Their study found that employees respond positively to performance expectations and reward systems, which, in turn, inspire exploration of career advancement opportunities.

Additionally, studies by Monroe and Evans (2018) and Thompson and Flores (2022) demonstrated that transactional leadership positively affects career curiosity by creating structured work environments where employees clearly understand the benefits of career progression. These studies emphasised that providing transparent career pathways and tangible rewards encourages employees to pursue new goals and explore professional growth opportunities.

2.7.8. The Influence of Transactional Leadership Style on Career Confidence

Leadership style significantly influences employees' career confidence and job satisfaction, and it serves as an important factor in building organisation's capacity to adapt effectively to change (Chepkirui et al., 2023; Ferry & Zahara, 2024).

A research conducted amongst some employees in a firm in Uganda found a significant positive relationship between transactional leadership and employee job satisfaction, motivation, and career confidence. The findings emphasised that the use of contingent rewards and clearly defined structures by transactional leaders strengthens employees' confidence in their career direction and advancement and success (Mugisha & Katamba, 2021).

Similarly, an investigation by Osei and Boateng (2020), which surveyed 200 employees in Ghana's banking sector, demonstrated that transactional leadership positively influences job satisfaction, thereby boosting employees' confidence in their career growth. The structured approach characteristic of transactional leadership was found to

offer clear direction, consistent guidance, and performance feedback are factors critical to learning and improvement within the financial sector.

2.7.9. The Influence of Transformational Leadership Style on Career Confidence

Transformational leaders motivate employees to strive toward both organisational and individual goals, thereby increasing their positivity and confidence regarding their career prospects (Afzal et al., 2016). Employee confidence is often reflected in their behaviour, attitude, and even body language (Triwahyuni et al., 2014). According to Jun and Lee (2023), transformational leaders foster an environment that encourages risk-taking and innovation. The support provided by such leaders helps employees build resilience and self-confidence in their ability to navigate uncertainty and career-related challenges.

A study carried out in South Korea by Lee et al. (2021), which included employees from different manufacturing firms, revealed a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employees' career satisfaction and confidence. This relationship was attributed to the consistent provision of career development opportunities and leadership support. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2021), in a study focusing on small-scale industries in China, revealed that transformational leadership significantly enhances several dimensions of career adaptability, particularly career confidence.

Furthermore, a research conducted by Wang (2022) in a hospitality industry in Taiwan's on the effect of transformational leadership on both management and staff. The study found a positive correlation on employee creativity and commitment. This mediation effect further strengthens employees' motivation and contributes to the development of career confidence

Research further indicates that transactional leadership significantly affects organisational commitment and career development, which subsequently strengthens career confidence and lowers turnover intentions (Yanto, 2019). Moreover, Nkosi and Mhlongo (2022), in a study of 350 employees in the South African retail industry, found that transactional leadership substantially improves employee commitment and confidence in career development. Employees under transactional leadership reported feeling safe, secure, and more confident about their career trajectories due to the presence of clear performance measurement systems and tangible rewards.

2.8. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework drawn below was generated following a review of the existing literature to explore the research hypotheses. This framework demonstrates leadership styles (transformational and transactional) as independent variables that explain career adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence), which functions as the dependent variable among SMEs.

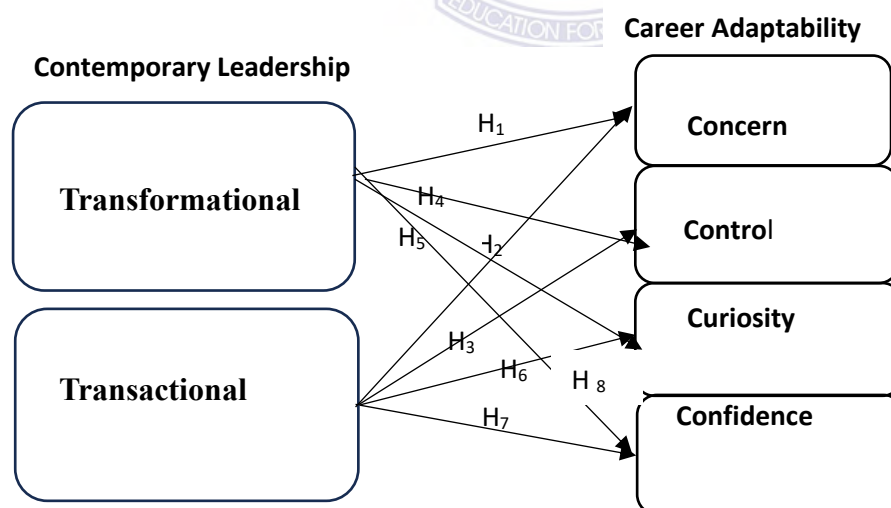


Figure 1. The Research framework

In the conceptual framework, the independent variables; transformational and transactional leadership styles represent the primary leadership behaviours displayed by managers within SMEs. These leadership styles are hypothesised to influence the dependent variable, career adaptability, which is operationalised through four key dimensions; career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence.

The arrows linking each leadership style to the dimensions of career adaptability illustrate direct causal relationships, suggesting that the manner in which leaders engage, motivate, and manage employees influences how effectively employees anticipate future career tasks, assume responsibility, explore opportunities, and believe in their ability to succeed.

Thus, the framework hypothesises that leadership behaviour is a critical driver influencing employees' capacity to navigate career transitions and adapt to changing work environments. Each arrow represents a testable hypothesis and forms the empirical basis for examining how different leadership styles promote or hinder the development of career adaptability among SME employees.

2.9. Chapter Summary.

This chapter specifically reviewed literature on both theoretical and empirical. The theoretical review was based on career contractionary theory propounded by Mark Savickas in 2005, explaining how individuals actively build their careers through self-regulation, adaptability, and responses to changing work environments. The empirical review also dealt with how Transformational leadership enhances career adaptability by promoting growth, innovation, mentorship, and a learning-oriented culture. It fosters emotional support, vision-sharing, and employee empowerment, helping workers adjust to dynamic roles, especially in SMEs. Conversely, transactional leadership

emphasizes structured exchanges like rewards, performance monitoring, and compliance. Though more rigid, it can improve adaptability by offering clear expectations, feedback, and incentives for skill development. Research shown that both leadership styles, when properly aligned, can promote career adaptability by shaping employee behaviours, perceptions, and development paths. In SMEs, where flexibility and multitasking are common, adaptable employees under effective leadership contribute significantly to organizational resilience and performance.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0. Introduction

The chapter focuses on the methodological elements of the study, encompassing the research approach, design, population, sampling techniques and procedures, instrumentation, and data collection methods. The researchers detail the instruments and methods used for data collection, along with the procedures for data analysis, to ensure alignment with the steps taken to address issues related to consistency, internal and external validity, dependability, and confirmability.

3.1. Research Paradigm

Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba (1994) argued that a research paradigm is a comprehensive belief system and worldview that guides researchers in their attempt to understand social phenomena. This paradigm encompasses researchers' assumptions, methodologies, and interpretations of findings, reflecting their perspectives on truth (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology), and the processes through which knowledge is generated (methodology).

The positivist paradigm in the study of social reality is grounded in the philosophical ideas of Auguste Comte, who argued that observation and reason are the most reliable means of understanding human behaviour (Ryan, 2018). He maintained that genuine knowledge is derived from sensory experience and can be obtained through systematic observation and experimentation.

Understanding the assumptions underlying different paradigms enhances the quality of findings that support scientific research and helps identify gaps in the development of reliable evidence. Therefore, selecting a research paradigm depends on the research

objectives, hypotheses, and the nature of the phenomenon being studied. Researchers must ensure that their ontological and epistemological beliefs align with their methodological approaches to maintain coherence, consistency, and validity in their research (John W. Creswell, 2014). This study is based on the positivist approach because it facilitates the objective development and testing of hypotheses without bias, in line with the study's goals.

The positivist paradigm provides a framework for quantitative research, emphasizing that an objective reality can be measured and quantified. This is achieved through standardized tools such as surveys, questionnaires, and tests, which are designed to generate quantifiable data suitable for statistical analysis (Alan Bryman, 2012). Positivists focus on data collection through observation and experimentation, which are used to test and validate hypotheses, thereby reinforcing or challenging existing theories (Karl Popper, 1959). This approach also allows findings to be generalized to larger populations through the use of representative samples and statistical inference (Robert K. Yin, 2018).

3.2. Research Design

The procedure which guides the collection of data, analysing and interpreting data as well as reporting data in a study is known as the research design. It is a comprehensive strategy that helps researchers link research problems with relevant empirical data (Lelissa, 2018). In other words, the research design provides an appropriate framework for a study, outlining the necessary data, collection and evaluation technique, and how the study would address the research questions or hypotheses (Sileyew, 2019). Creswell and Creswell (2018) added that a research design is a structured framework or blueprint guiding the collection, measurement, and analysis of data in a study. This is a crucial

element that ensures the research is conducted in a way that produces valid, reliable, and relevant results. Cohen et al. (2018) mentioned that in quantitative studies, research designs can be descriptive, correlational, experimental, or quasi-experimental.

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional design which was appropriate because the researcher to systematically described and assessed the impact of leadership styles and the level of career adaptability among employees in SMEs. According to Ndidiamaka and Chikeme (2020), descriptive cross-sectional studies are useful for providing a "snapshot" of a phenomenon, capturing its status within a defined population at a given time. In this case, it allowed the researcher to gather data from SME employees across various sectors to identify which leadership styles are more commonly associated with higher or lower levels of career adaptability. Thomas (2023) explains that cross-sectional studies are particularly suitable when the research goal is to collect data from multiple respondents simultaneously without manipulating variables. This aligns with the current study's objective of exploring correlational trends rather than causal effects. By employing this design, the researcher could describe how leadership practices currently manifest in SMEs and how they correlate with employees' readiness to adapt to career changes which is key concern in today's dynamic job environment.

3.3. Research Approach

To achieve the aim and objectives of the study, a quantitative approach was adopted. The approach sought to enhance understanding and knowledge regarding various assumptions developed throughout the research (Guo et al., 2017, Ghanad, 2023). It emphasized quantifiable aspects of social behaviour, focusing on patterns rather than solely interpreting the meanings that individuals attribute to their actions (Rahman, 2020). This methodology enabled the analysis of collected data through numerical

values and various statistical techniques. As noted by Simplilearn (2024), the quantitative method is characterized by its emphasis on numerical measurement and statistical analysis to comprehend social phenomena.

Derek and Kerry (2020) asserted that quantitative methods facilitate the application of statistical techniques to explore relationships between variables. Researchers can utilize methods such as correlation analysis, regression analysis, or structural equation modelling to investigate how different phenomena relate to one another (Tarek et al., 2024).

The quantitative method allowed the researcher to assess the influence of various leadership styles on career adaptability (Chukwuba, 2015). It also supported the implementation of a cross-sectional survey, which involved data collection at a specific moment in time. Furthermore, it enabled the prediction, explanation, description, and control of the variables of interest (Akyereko, 2021).

3.4. The Study Area

This study was specifically conducted among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating within Accra Metropolitan Assembly in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. Accra Metro was selected as the study area due to its strategic economic significance, especially in the development and proliferation of SMEs. It represents a miniature of Ghana's broader SME environment, offering a diverse range of business types, sectors, and operational models (GSS, 2020, NBSSI, 2020). The high concentration of SMEs in Accra Metro especially Makola, Osu, Kantamanto, and Adabraka, provided a rich ground for data collection and analysis, enabling the study to explore varying leadership styles and their effects on employee career adaptability across different business contexts.

Moreover, the accessibility of the area, availability of secondary data, and the presence of supportive institutional frameworks further justify its suitability for this research. Studying SMEs in Accra Metro provides insights that are relevant not only locally but also applicable to urban SMEs across Ghana and other developing economies.

The SMEs selected for this study were registered and actively operating at the time of data collection, identified through the Metro's local government registry and guided by definitions from the Ghana Statistical Service and the National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI).

3.5. Target Population

The target population for this study comprised all employees working in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) located in key commercial zones within the Accra Metropolitan Area, specifically Makola, Osu, Kantamanto, and Adabraka. These areas were selected due to their high concentration of SMEs and their strategic economic significance. In total, 710 employees from 15 SMEs selected through convenience sampling were identified as the accessible population. The selection of these enterprises were based on their established internal leadership structures, which were considered essential for obtaining reliable insights into leadership behaviours and their influence on employee career adaptability.

In line with the definition provided by the Venture Capital Trust Fund Act 680 (2004), an SME in Ghana is classified as a business entity that employs not more than 100 people and has a total asset base, excluding land and buildings, not exceeding the cedi equivalent of one million US dollars (VCTF, 2009). This definition served as the basis for selecting eligible businesses for the study.

Of the accessible population of 710, 255 employees were identified as the target population based on inclusion criteria aligned with the study's objectives. Specifically, respondents were required to be in permanent employment with their current organisation for at least one year. The rationale for this threshold was that employees with at least one year of tenure would likely have sufficient exposure to the organisation's leadership practices, enabling them to provide meaningful and informed responses.

Employees who were recently hired (i.e., with less than one year of service) or engaged in casual or temporary employment were excluded from the target population. This benchmark was adopted to ensure that the sample comprised individuals with adequate familiarity with their workplace environment and leadership dynamics, thereby enhancing the dependability and validity of the data collected.

3.6. Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A sample is a subset of individuals drawn from a larger population from which data are collected in order to make inferences about the entire population. The sample size represents the total number of respondents whose data are used for analysis. According to Dan Remenyi and Nigel Money (2017), sampling involves selecting a smaller group from a population to make inferences about the whole. McCombes (2023) also describes sampling as a fundamental statistical process used to obtain information from selected observations in order to understand a larger population.

In quantitative research, an adequate sample size is essential to enhance the reliability and validity of research findings (Remenyi & Money, 2017). To decide the appropriate sample size for the study, Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling determination table was

used. Given a total population of 255 employees, a sample of 234 respondents was considered which is suitable for the study according to Krejcie and Morgan.

SMEs as well as participants for the study were conveniently selected. A convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are chosen based on their accessibility, availability, and willingness to participate in the study (Bryman, 2016). The technique was considered appropriate because of the practical constraints associated with gaining access to firms and the willingness of employees to respond to the questionnaires.

For the purpose of data collection, the Accra Metropolitan Area was demarcated into three zones (Zone A, Zone B, and Zone C) based on the concentration of SMEs as identified by the Ghana Statistical Service and the National Board for Small Scale Industries. Within each zone, SMEs that were easily accessible and willing to participate were conveniently selected. Five SMEs were chosen from each zone, resulting in a total of fifteen (15) SMEs participating in the study.

Within the selected SMEs, respondents were also chosen through convenience sampling. Employees who were available at the time of data collection, had a minimum of one year of work experience, and expressed willingness to participate were included in the study. The adoption of convenience sampling was justified by the dispersed distribution of SMEs within the Accra Metropolitan Area. This technique enabled the researcher to obtain relevant data from accessible and information-rich participants, thereby facilitating the attainment of the study objectives (John W. Creswell & J. David Creswell, 2018).

Table 3.1 presents a summary of the study area, population, target population, and sample size. The total population of the study comprised 710 employees, out of which a target population of 255 employees was identified. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, a sample size of 234 respondents was selected from SMEs across the three zones. The identities of the selected SMEs are represented by initials for ethical reasons.

Table 3.1: Summary results of data collection

ZONE	COMPANY NAME	POPULATION	TARGETED EMPLOYEES	SAMPLE SIZE
ZONE A	BBG	62	22	19
	CK	74	17	14
	MM1	38	15	14
	DDE	61	22	19
	TFT	45	15	14
	TOTAL	280	91	80
ZONE B	DQ	67	33	28
	KA	55	25	24
	TF5	34	10	10
	DK	35	15	14
	TM	44	14	14
	TOTAL	235	97	90
ZONE C	KMD	38	11	11
	MTT	43	16	14
	SKB	27	12	12
	DSC	52	15	14
	FAG	35	13	13
TOTAL	195	67	64	

Source: Field Survey (2024)

The study area (Accra Metro) was demarcated into three zones (Zone A, Zone B and Zone C) based on the concentration of SMEs as defined by Ghana statistical service (GSS) and National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI) where five SMEs were selected from each zone based on industry type, location and size and number of employees. The target population were those who have permanent employment and have one or more years of working experience with their SMEs. The names of selected SMEs whose employees were used for the study are represented with their initials due to ethical reasons.

3.7. Measurement Instruments

The research instrument comprised three main sections. The first section (Section A) focused on the demographic characteristics of the respondents and contained four items covering socio-demographic information, including gender, age, level of education, and work experience.

The second section (Section B) addressed employees' career adaptability. It consisted of 24 items adapted from Mark L. Savickas and Erik J. Porfeli (2012), based on the four dimensions of career adaptability: career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence.

The third section (Section C) sought to identify the leadership styles used to manage respondents in their respective organisations. This section contained 18 items measuring transformational and transactional leadership styles, adapted from Bernard M. Bass and Bruce J. Avolio (2004).

In total, the instrument comprised 42 items, all measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Transformational and

transactional leadership were assessed using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bernard M. Bass and Bruce J. Avolio (2005). The MLQ was theoretically developed and empirically validated to capture the dimensions of transformational and transactional leadership, including specific subscales that distinguish among various leadership behaviours (Avolio et al., 1999). According to Kern (2013), findings based on the MLQ indicate a statistically significant relationship between leadership effectiveness and transformational dimensions such as charisma, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation, as well as the transactional dimension of contingent reward. However, the transactional dimension of management-by-exception generally demonstrates a weak correlation with effectiveness.

3.8. Data Collection Procedure

A structured questionnaire was administered which comprised two components; the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) and the Career Adaptability Scale. The MLQ measured employees' perceptions of leadership behaviours using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Fairly Often). To ensure that respondents had sufficient exposure to leadership practices within their organisations, only employees who had worked in their respective SMEs for at least one year were included in the study.

The second component assessed participants' career adaptability using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This facilitated the collection of quantitative data on employees' capacity to manage career-related challenges and transitions. Before administering the questionnaire, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The purpose of the study was clearly explained, and

respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. On average, participants spent approximately 20 minutes completing the questionnaire.

A total of 234 questionnaires were distributed across selected SMEs within the Accra Metropolitan Area. Of these, 216 were completed and returned, representing a response rate of 92.3%. Eighteen questionnaires (7.7%) were excluded due to incomplete responses or multiple answers to single items, rendering them invalid. Consequently, only the 216 valid responses were used for data analysis.

The high response rate may be attributed to the mode of administration, the clarity of the questionnaire, and the relevance of the study to participants. The collected data were subsequently coded and analysed quantitatively, providing a solid basis for examining the influence of leadership styles on career adaptability among SMEs in the Accra Metropolis.

Table 3.2. Summary of Measurement Instrument

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Transformational leadership	15	.795
Transactional leadership	9	.754
Career Concern	6	.769
Career Control	6	.738
Career Curiosity	6	.748
Career Confidence	6	.753

Source: Field Survey (2024)

3.9. Validity and Reliability

Validity defines the extent to which a concept accurately measures what it intends to measure. It tells whether or not the instrument measures the behaviour or quality it is intended to measure and also evaluates how effectively the measuring instrument performs its function in the study (Heale & Twycross, 2015, Sürücü & Maslakçı, 2020).

The drafted instrument was critically assessed to ensure validity and reliability as well as consistency of the items in order to achieve the research objectives. Construct validity was also assessed using factor analysis to align the items with the theoretical constructs of the study, thereby confirming their appropriateness (Brown, 2018). This process allowed for necessary corrections, modifications, and adjustments to the questionnaire before obtaining the supervisor's approval.

Sugiarta et al. (2023) postulated that the validity of a study's instrument is determined by the meaningful and appropriate interpretation of data obtained from the measuring instrument. To further ensure general acceptability, face validity was established through feedback from non-experts and reviewers who critically examined the instrument for clarity and relevance (Johnson & Lee, 2017). A comprehensive theoretical and empirical literature review was conducted to ensure content validity, and subject matter experts were consulted (Smith & Jones, 2019).

After data collection, the scale-level reliability of the study was assessed. Reliability refers to the extent to which a study's instrument consistently produces the same results when used under the same conditions on repeated occasions (Heale & Twycross, 2015).

3.10. Method of Data Analysis

The data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v.20) and SmartPLS (SmartPLS v.4). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarise demographic variables such as gender, age, years of work experience, and academic qualifications. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure normality by examining skewness and kurtosis, as well as identifying missing values.

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to test the direct relationship between leadership styles and employees' career adaptability. According to Hair et al. (2014), the SEM approach provides distinct item loadings onto their corresponding variables and allows for the observation of measurement errors in the variables.

A systematic process of collecting and evaluating quantifiable and verifiable data using statistical techniques was employed to analyse the participants' responses (Ali, 2021). This approach enables researchers to categorise, summarise, and illustrate observations, thereby providing a clearer understanding for both researchers and readers (James & Simister, 2020). The data were organised into well-structured categories for statistical investigation.

Walter Peller (1967) posits that statistical measurement involves categorising numbers into various scales, including nominal scales, which organise observations into distinct groups; ordinal scales, which arrange variables based on rank; and interval scales, which measure categories to indicate the degree of a variable's quality. Researchers can also quantify observations through frequency distributions, graphs, t-tests, chi-square tests, and other statistical methods.

3.11. Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations are essential in research, as studies may fail if ethical standards are not upheld. Therefore, before participation, respondents were duly informed about the research purpose, and its objectives, the procedures and potential benefits as well as possible risks. Participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions they had after which and they voluntarily gave their consent. Participants were assured that their identities and personal information would remain confidential and anonymous. Consequently, the researcher ensured that important details, such as names and contact information, were not disclosed.

3.12. Chapter Summary

The chapter Three focused on the methodology adopted for the study. The study is anchored in the positivist paradigm, which supports an objective and scientific approach through hypothesis testing and statistical validation. The study area, Accra Metro, was selected because of its high concentration and diversity of SMEs, particularly in zones such as Makola, Osu, Kantamanto, and Adabraka. The target population were 255 based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria set by the researcher. Ethical protocols, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were strictly followed throughout the study.

Data were obtained through a structured questionnaire comprising 42 items adapted from validated sources, including (Bass & Avolio, 2004, Savickas & Erik Porfeli, 2012).

Of the 234 questionnaires distributed, 216 valid responses (92.3%) were retrieved and analysed using SPSS v.20 for descriptive analysis and SmartPLS v.4 for structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM).



CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The fourth section emphasizes on the analysis and discussion of the findings obtained from the field. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means. For data cleaning and analysis, Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, predictive relevance statistics, and structural equation modelling were employed to analyse respondents' perspectives on leadership styles and to analyse the relationships among the study constructs.

Finally, the findings of the current study are discussed in relation to previous studies.

4.2 Background Information of Respondents

This section provides a detailed analysis of the demographic characteristics (gender, academic qualification, age and years of working of experience) of the respondents.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	115	53.2
Female	101	46.8
Age		
30 years and below	90	41.6
31 – 40 years	105	48.6
41 years and above	21	9.8

Working Experience		
1 – 5 years	122	56.4
6 – 10 years	43	19.9
11 – 15 years	17	7.8
16 – 20 years	18	8.3
Academic Qualification		
JHS	4	1.9
SHS	54	25.0
Degree	117	54.2
Master's Degree	34	15.7
PhD	7	3.2

Source: Field Survey, (2024)

The gender distribution shows a relatively balanced representation, with males slightly outnumbering females. Specifically, 53.2% of the respondents are male (115 individuals), while 46.8% are female (101 individuals). This near-equal gender split suggests a diverse perspective in the study. The most of the respondents were within the age group of 31-40 years, accounting for 48.6% (105 individuals) of the sample. A significant portion, 41.6% (90 individuals), are 30 years and below, indicating a younger workforce. Only 9.7% (21 individuals) are 41 years and above, suggesting that the study primarily captures the views of a younger to middle-aged demographic.

Majority of the employees who responded to the questionnaire had at least 1-5 years of working experience, representing 56.4% (122 individuals) of the sample. This suggests that a significant portion of the participants are relatively early in their careers. Those

with 6-10 years of experience make up 19.9% (43 individuals), while smaller percentages are seen in the 11-15 years (7.8%, 17 individuals), 16-20 years (8.3%, 18 individuals), and above 20 years (7.4%, 16 individuals) categories. This distribution indicates that the workforce has a mix of both newer employees and those with more extended experience, though the former predominates.

In terms of academic qualifications, the majority of respondents hold a degree, making up 54.2% (117 individuals) of the sample. Those with a Master's degree follow at 15.7% (34 individuals). Participants with a PhD are relatively few, accounting for only 3.2% (7 individuals). Those with SHS (Senior High School) education represents 25.0% (54 individuals), while a minimal number of respondents, 1.9% (4 individuals), have only completed JHS (Junior High School). This data shows that most respondents have higher education qualifications, with a significant proportion holding undergraduate and postgraduate degrees.

4.3. Preliminary Analysis of Data

Before testing the hypotheses, preliminary data analysis was conducted to ensure that the data met all assumptions of multivariate analysis. Specifically, missing values were addressed, outliers were examined, and normality tests were performed. This process was essential to confirm that the data conformed to the key assumptions of structural equation modelling, which requires the absence of missing values, normally distributed data, and the identification of outliers.

4.3.1. Missing Data Analysis

In order to confirm the validity of the results, missing data which can arise from various sources including non-response and data entry errors, and can significantly impact the estimates and inferences drawn from the model was addressed. In Structural Equation

Modelling (SEM), the presence of missing data can lead to biased estimates, reduced statistical power, and complications in the interpretation of model fit (Enders, 2010). Researchers adopt several techniques to deal with missing data so as to ensure validity and reliability. Amongst them include; pairwise deletion, which retains cases based on available data for each pair of variables. However, this approach can lead to inconsistencies in the covariance matrix, affecting the reliability of SEM results. Multiple Imputation (MI) technique is also used, especially where multiple sets of plausible values are generated for the missing data, creating multiple complete datasets. These datasets are then analyzed separately, and the results are combined to produce estimates that account for the uncertainty due to missing data (Rubin, 1987). In addressing the missing data concerns, the researcher adopted the listwise deletion approach, where any case with missing data on any variable was excluded from the analysis. Initially, the researcher used frequencies in checking individual responses through the use of smartPL4 to check the output. A total of 18 responses representing 7.7% of the total 234 were completely deleted since they were not fully completed or had more than one response, hence considered invalid for the study. While this method was easy to implement, the researcher was mindful not to reduce the sample size to unreasonable quantity that might affect the analysis and the results obtained for the study.

4.3.2. Normality Test of Data

Normality refers to the distribution of data, specifically whether the data points follow a normal distribution. This is a key assumption in many statistical methods and affects the accuracy and reliability of parameter estimates, standard errors, and fit indices (Kline, 2016). It also assesses whether the data deviate significantly from a normal distribution. Common tests include the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test and the Shapiro–

Wilk test, which provide a statistical basis for determining whether the data are normally distributed (Razali & Wah, 2011). However, even in PLS-SEM, extreme deviations from normality, especially with small sample sizes, can lead to biased estimates and invalid conclusions (Hair et al., 2017).

For normality testing, Ghasemi and Zahediasl (2012) suggest that if the p-value from the Shapiro–Wilk or Kolmogorov–Smirnov test is less than 0.05, the data significantly deviate from a normal distribution. According to Kim (2013), for data to be considered normally distributed, the skewness and kurtosis values should be close to zero. However, a common rule of thumb is that skewness and kurtosis values should fall within the range of -2 to $+2$ for the data to be regarded as approximately normal (Kim, 2013). Table 4.2 below presents the results of the normality test conducted.

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variable

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Transformational Leadership style	3.4459	.43186	-.235	-.002
Transactional Leadership style	2.8392	.73436	.349	.491
Career Concern	3.620	1.215	-.070	-.860
Career Control	3.833	1.067	0.573	-.974
Career Curiosity	3.981	.991	.759	-.999
Career Confidence	3.843	.988	.400	-.812

Source: Field Survey (2024)

The results in Table 4.2 confirmed that the skewness and kurtosis values for the latent variable met the rule of thumb of -2 to +2, as suggested by Kim (2013). Therefore, the data was normally distributed and suitable for multivariate data analysis.

4.4 Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling

Partial Least Squares (PLS) is a statistical technique used in multivariate data analysis. It is more important when dealing with datasets that include many variables or complex relationships (Memon et al., 2021). This statistical methodology is used to establish and analyse relationships among latent variables that cannot be directly observed in a study. PLS-SEM has been widely applied across various academic disciplines, including the social sciences, marketing, and information systems (Sarstedt et al., 2019).

Hair et al. (2019) postulated that PLS-SEM has two main components which are the measurement model and the structural model. The measurement model explains the correlation between indicators and latent variables (Hair et al., 2017). The structural model also examines the relationships among latent variables. In a structural equation model, the relationships between latent variables are typically represented as paths (Hair et al., 2017).

4.4.1 Factor Loadings

The factor loading is a numerical value that assesses how much an observed variable correlates with a latent component. The numerical values play a crucial role in comprehending how each indicator effectively captures the fundamental construct and the degree to which the construct accounts for the variability observed in the indicator. A threshold value of 0.7 or higher is deemed suitable for the outer loading in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). However, a loading between 0/4 and 0.7 is considered appropriate when its deletion will not significantly increase

the AVE (Hair et al., 2021). Table 4.3 shows that factor loadings are suitable for this model because most loading values are above the threshold of 0.7.

4.4.2 Reliability of Construct

Reliability, also referred to as internal consistency, measures the degree to which constructs or items are correlated. It is measured using statistical techniques such as Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (Hair et al., 2021).

When there is high internal consistency reliability, it shows that the item consistently measures the same underlying construct. Therefore, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values of 0.7 and above are considered indicative of acceptable reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Table 4.3 below indicates that the reliability threshold is met, as all constructs have Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values above 0.7.

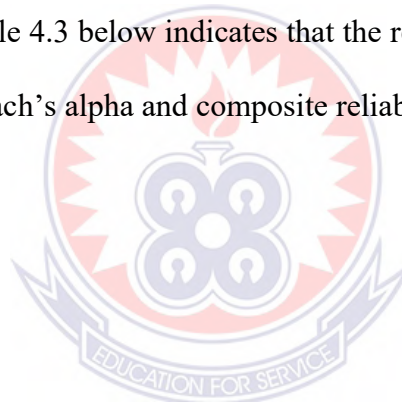


Table 4.3: Summary Results of Measurement Scales and Model indicator

Constructs	Loading Value	Cronbac h's alpha	Composit e reliability (rho_a)	Composit e reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracte d (AVE)
Transactional leadership					
Transac1	0.715				
Transac2	0.852				
Transac3	0.817				
Transac4	0.841				
Transac5	0.803	0.926	0.926	0.938	0.628
Transac6	0.765				
Transac7	0.785				
Transac8	0.792				
Transac9	0.755				
Transf. leadership					
Transform1	0.784				
Transform3	0.792				
Transform4	0.820				
Transform5	0.742	0.910	0.912	0.927	0.614
Transform6	0.787				
Transform7	0.820				
Transform8	0.703				
Transform9	0.812				
Career Concern					

Con1	0.808				
Con2	0.788				
Con4	0.770				
Con5	0.711	0.826	0.831	0.878	0.590
Con6	0.762				
Career Confidence					
Conf1	0.867				
Conf2	0.743				
Conf3	0.808	0.872	0.879	0.908	0.663
Conf4	0.869				
Conf5	0.778				
Career Control					
Cont1	0.754				
Cont2	0.840				
Cont3	0.737	0.884	0.889	0.912	0.634
Cont4	0.855				
Cont5	0.755				
Cont6	0.829				
Career Curiosity					
		0.886	0.888	0.917	0.690
Cur1	0.786				
Cur2	0.880				
Cur3	0.730				
Cur4	0.848				
Cur5	0.896				

Source: Smart PLS Output (2024)

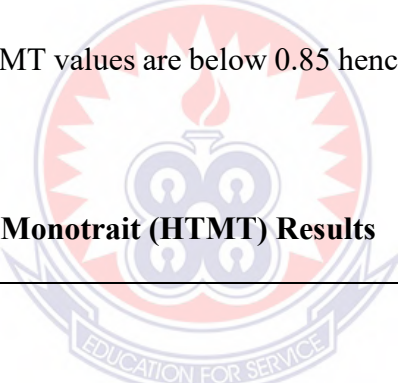
4.5. Validity of Construct

The concept of construct validity holds significant importance within measurement modelling.

Construct validity refers to the degree to which a measurement or assessment instrument captures accurately and represents the underlying construct it is intended to measure (Hair et al., 2017). It evaluates whether the instrument truly measures the concept it is designed to assess (Hair et al., 2019).

To assess the discriminant validity of the constructs, Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio was used (Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2015). Also, to confirm discriminant validity using HTMT, the values should be below 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). Table 4.4 indicates that all HTMT values are below 0.85 hence the HTMT threshold has been meet.

Table 4.4: Heterotrait Monotrait (HTMT) Results



	Con	Conf	Cont	Cur	Transac	Transform
Career concern						
Career Confidence	0.561					
Career Control	0.785	0.482				
Career Curiosity	0.810	0.522	0.724			
Transactional Leadership	0.672	0.711	0.634	0.674		
Transformational Leadership	0.773	0.719	0.711	0.715	0.442	

Source: Smart PLS Output (2024)

NB. Con = Career concern, Conf = Career Confidence, Cur = Career Curiosity, Cont = Career control, Transac = Transactional leadership and Transformational leadership

Figure 4.6: The Final CFA(Measurement) Model with Standardized Loading

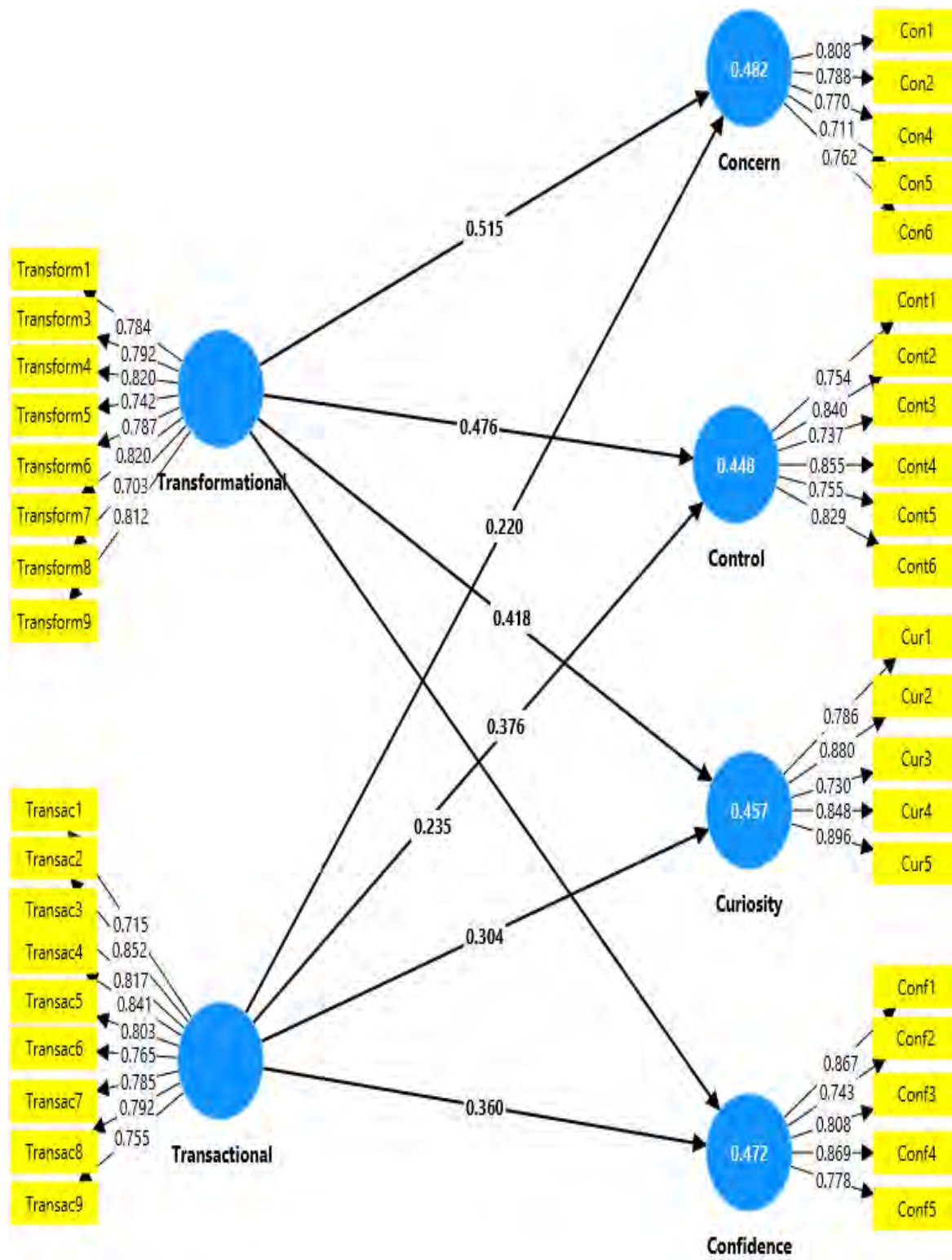


Figure 2: PLS-SEM Measurement Model Output

4.6 Assessment of Structural Model

After ensuring that the constructs in the model are valid and reliable, the next step is to assess the structural model. According to Hair et al. (2017), evaluating the structural model involves checking for multicollinearity, assessing the significance of path coefficients, and calculating the coefficient of determination (explanatory and predictive power).

4.6.1 Multicollinearity Test

The method begins by analyzing the degree of collinearity between the variables. To analyze multicollinearity, statisticians use the variance inflation factor (VIF) tool, which has a maximum score of 5 (Hair et al., 2017). It is fair to assume that there are no problems with multicollinearity because Table 4.6 contains no VIF values higher than 5, and all of the VIF values displayed there have values lower than 5. Table 4. 5:

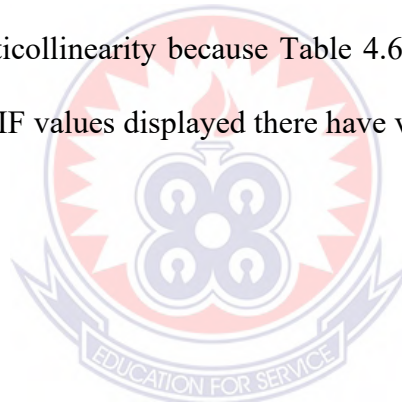


Table 4.5: Summary Results of Multicollinearity

Items	VIF Values
Con1	2.103
Con2	1.956
Con4	1.673
Con5	1.574
Con6	1.653
Conf1	2.529
Conf2	1.625
Conf3	2.113
Conf4	2.504
Conf5	1.833
Cont1	1.779
Cont2	2.395
Cont3	1.912
Cont4	2.717
Cont5	1.763
Cont6	2.409
Cur1	1.942
Cur2	3.025
Cur3	1.570
Cur4	2.830
Cur5	3.863
Transac1	3.792
Transac2	1.111
Transac3	3.674
Transac4	3.322
Transac5	3.441
Transac6	3.274
Transac7	3.472
Transac8	3.385
Transac9	4.025
Transform1	2.636

Transform3	2.581
Transform4	2.663
Transform5	2.431
Transform6	2.680
Transform7	2.756
Transform8	1.949
Transform9	3.146

Source: Smart PLS Output (2024)

4.6.2. Coefficient of Determination (R^2 , f^2 , Q^2)

The adjusted R-squared, commonly denoted as R^2_{adj} , is a modified version of the R-squared (R^2) statistic that accounts for the number of independent variables included in a regression model. The R-squared coefficient indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variables. However, the adjusted R-squared considers the potential effect of including irrelevant or redundant predictors in the model and adjusts the value accordingly (Henseler et al., 2015). Therefore, the adjusted R^2 provides a more accurate measure of the extent to which the independent variables explain variation in the dependent variable.

According to Table 4.11, the adjusted R^2 values for concern, confidence, curiosity, and control are 0.482 (48.2%), 0.467 (46.7%), 0.448 (44.8%), and 0.457 (45.7%), respectively. These results indicate that 48.2%, 46.7%, 44.8%, and 45.7% of the variance in the respective constructs is explained by transactional and transformational leadership variables.

The Q^2 statistic is used in Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis to assess the predictive relevance of the model. PLS is a statistical technique widely applied in multivariate regression analysis, particularly when dealing with multiple correlated independent

variables. The Q^2 value measures the model's predictive accuracy for the dependent variable. Although it is similar to the R-squared (R^2) measure used in ordinary least squares regression, Q^2 is specifically designed for PLS analysis. A Q^2 value greater than zero indicates predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs. The closer the Q^2 value is to the adjusted R^2 , the stronger the model's predictive capability (Henseler et al., 2015). In this case, the results suggest adequate predictive performance of the PLS-SEM model (see Table 4.7).

The term F-square (f^2) refers to the change in the coefficient of determination (R^2) when a specific exogenous variable is removed from the model (Hair et al., 2021). According to Hair et al. (2017), f^2 values of approximately 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate small, medium, and large effects, respectively. From Table 4.7, the effect sizes range from small to large. Transactional leadership on concern shows the smallest effect size (0.041), whereas transformational leadership on concern demonstrates the largest effect size (0.228).

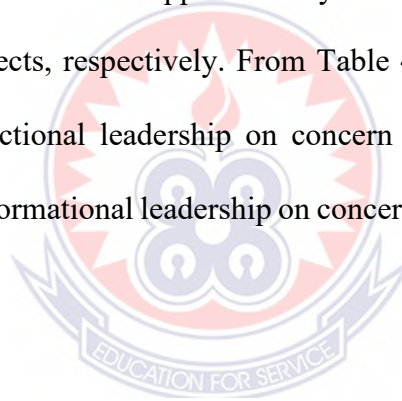


Table 4.6: Coefficient of Determination Diagnostic

Construct	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F ²	Q ²
Transa Ld → CaCon			0.041	
Transa Ld → CaConf	0.482 (Conc)	0.478	0.109	0.470
Transa Ld → CaCtrl	0.472 (Confi)	0.467	0.045	0.462
Transa Ld → CaCur	0.448 (Cont)	0.443	0.076	0.433
Transf Ld → CaCon	0.457 (Cur)	0.452	0.228	0.438
Transf Ld → CaConf			0.119	
Transf Ld → CaCtrl			0.183	
Transf Ld → CaCur			0.143	

Source: Smart PLS Output (2024)

NB: *Transf Ld* → Transformation Leadership, *Transa Ld* → Transactional leadership, *CaConf* → Career Confidence, *CaCur* → Career Curiosity, *CaCtrl* → Career Control and *CaCon* → Career Concern

4.4.2. Model Fitness

The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), is used in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), to determine a model fit using the squared Euclidean distance (d_ ULS), the geodesic distance (d_ G), the chi-square statistic, and the Normed Fit Index (NFI). Dash and Paul (2021) are of the postulate that a model is deemed fit or good when SRMR and d_ ULS are less than 0.08, and d_ G is less than 0.10. A non-significant chi-square value ($p > 0.05$) also indicates satisfactory model fit. Regarding NFI, the model is regarded as fit when the values for the saturated and

estimated models are closer to 1. Based on these criteria, the model is considered fit for the study.

Table 4.7: Summary of Model Fit

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.078	0.076
d_ ULS	0.251	0.194
d_ G	0.917	0.916
Chi-square	1036.937	1019.745
NFI	0.923	0.927

Source: SMART PLS 4 Output (2024)

4.6.3 Path Coefficient

The path coefficient is evaluated by examining its significance, relevance, and direction in relation to the study hypotheses. A path coefficient is considered statistically significant at the 5% level if zero is not included within the 95% confidence interval (Hair et al., 2017). In assessing the relevance of path coefficients, the values typically range from -1 to $+1$, indicating the strength and direction of negative or positive relationships (Henseler et al., 2015).

Path coefficients indicate that when all other exogenous variables are held constant, a change in an exogenous construct is associated with a corresponding change in the endogenous construct, expressed in standard deviation units. For example, a path coefficient of 0.213 indicates that a one standard deviation increase in the exogenous construct leads to a 0.213 standard deviation increase in the endogenous construct.

T-values are used to test the significance of the hypotheses. A T-value greater than the recommended threshold of 1.96 indicates statistical significance at the 5% level.

Hypothesised paths with T-values above 1.96 are supported (fail to reject the null hypothesis), whereas those with T-values below 1.96 are not supported (Henseler et al., 2015). Table 4.8 presents the detailed path coefficient results.

Table 4.8: Path Coefficient and Hypotheses Diagnostics

s/n	Hypotheses	Path	Standard	T	statistics	P values	Remarks
		Coefficient (O)	deviation (STDEV)				
H ₁	Transf Ld → Cacon	0.515	0.077	6.660		0.000	Supported
H ₂	Transa Ld → CaCon	0.220	0.080	2.764		0.006	Supported
H ₃	Transa Ld → CaCtrl	0.235	0.085	2.753		0.006	Supported
H ₄	Transf Ld → CaCtrl	0.476	0.082	5.819		0.000	Supported
H ₅	Transf Ld → CaCur	0.418	0.074	5.648		0.000	Supported
H ₆	Transa Ld → CaCur	0.304	0.080	3.786		0.000	Supported
H ₇	Transa Ld → CaConf	0.360	0.074	4.883		0.000	Supported
H ₈	Transf Ld → CaConf	0.376	0.073	5.126		0.000	Supported

Source: Smart PLS Output (2024)

NB: *Transf Ld* → Transformation Leadership, *Transa Ld* → Transactional leadership, *CaConf* → Career Confidence, *CaCur* → Career Curiosity, *CaCtrl* → Career Control and *CaCon* → Career Concern

4.7. Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis one: There is a significant positive influence of transformational leadership style on career concerns

From Table 4.8, there is a significant positive influence of transformational leadership style on career concern ($\beta = 0.515$, $t = 1.96$ and $p = 0.000$), hence the hypothesis that transformational leadership style will significantly impact career concern (i.e. H1) is supported. This indicates that transformational leadership proves to have a significant positive impact on the career concern. In essence, holding all other variables constant, transformational leadership induces a 51.5 % change in career concern. Thus, this result demonstrates that when transformational leadership is improved by 1%, it will cause a significant positive change in career concern by 51.5%.

Hypothesis two: There is a significant positive influence of transactional leadership style on career concern

From Table 4.8, it can clearly be seen that there is a significant positive effect of transactional leadership style on career concern ($\beta = 0.220$, $t = 2.764$ and $p = 0.006$), therefore, the hypothesis that transactional leadership will significantly impact career concern (i.e. H2) is supported. Thus, transactional leadership proves to have significant positive impact on the career concern. In essence, holding all other variables constant, transactional leadership induces 22.0 % change in career concern. Thus, this result proves that when transactional leadership is improved by 1%, it will cause an insignificant positive change in career concern by 22.0%.

Hypothesis three: There is a significant positive influence of transactional leadership style on career control.

As indicated in table 4.8, transactional leadership has a significant positive effect on career control ($\beta = 0.235$, $t = 2.753$ and $p = 0.006$), hence the hypothesis that transactional leadership will significantly impact career control (i.e. H3) is supported. Thus, transactional leadership proves to have significant positive impact on the career control. In essence, holding all other variables constant, transactional leadership induces 23.5 % change in career control. Thus, this result proves that when transactional leadership is improved by 1%, it will cause a significant positive change in career control by 23.5%.

Hypothesis four: There is a significant positive influence of transformational leadership style on career control

From Table 4.8 it can be seen that transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on career control ($\beta = 0.476$, $t = 5.819$ and $p = 0.000$), hence the hypothesis that transformational leadership will significantly impact career control (i.e. H4) is supported. Thus, transformational leadership proves to have significant positive impact on the career control. In essence, holding all other variables constant, transformational leadership induces 47.6 % change in career control. Thus, this result proves that when transformational leadership is improved by 1%, it will cause a significant positive change in career control by 47.6%.

Hypothesis five: Transformational leadership style has a significant positive influence on career curiosity.

From Table 4.8 it can be seen that transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on career curiosity ($\beta = 0.418$, $t = 5.648$ $p = 0.000$), hence the hypothesis that transformational leadership will significantly impact career curiosity (i.e. H5) is supported. Thus, transformational leadership proves to have significant positive impact

on the career curiosity. In essence, holding all other variables constant, transformational leadership induces 41.8% change in career curiosity. Thus, this result proves that when transformational leadership is improved by 1%, it will cause a significant positive change in career curiosity by 41.8%.

Hypothesis six: There is a significant positive influence of transactional leadership style on career curiosity.

From Table 4.8 it can be seen that transactional leadership has a significant positive effect on career curiosity ($\beta = 0.304$, $t = 3.786$ and $p = 0.000$), hence the hypothesis that transactional leadership will significantly impact career curiosity (i.e. H6) is supported. Thus, transactional leadership proves to have significant positive impact on the career curiosity. In essence, holding all other variables constant, transactional leadership induces 30.4% change in career curiosity. Thus, this result proves that when transactional leadership is improved by 1%, it will cause a significant positive change in career curiosity by 30.4%.

Hypothesis seven: There is a significant positive influence of transactional leadership style on career confidence.

From Table 4.7 it can be seen that transactional leadership has a significant positive effect on career confidence ($\beta = 0.360$, $t = 4.883$ and $p = 0.000$), hence the hypothesis that transactional leadership will significantly impact career confidence (i.e. H7) is supported. Thus, transactional leadership proves to have significant positive impact on the career confidence. In essence, holding all other variables constant, transactional leadership induces 36.0% change in career confidence. Thus, this result proves that when transactional leadership is improved by 1%, it will cause a significant positive change in career confidence by 36.0%.

Hypothesis eight: There is a significant positive influence of transformational leadership style on career confidence.

From Table 4.8 it can be seen that transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on career confidence ($\beta = 0.376$, $t = 5.126$ $p < 0.000$), hence the hypothesis that transformational leadership will significantly impact career confidence (i.e. H8) is supported. Thus, transformational leadership proves to have significant positive impact on the career confidence. In essence, holding all other variables constant, transformational leadership induces 37.6% change in career confidence. Thus, this result shows that when transformational leadership is improved by 1%, it will cause a significant positive change in career confidence by 37.6%.

4.8 Discussion of Results

The study explored the impact of leadership styles on career adaptability amongst employess SMEs in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The findings are discussed in detail in the following sections.

The first objective was to assess the influence of transformational leadership style on employee career concern. It was discovered that there is a significant positive influence of transformational leadership style on employee career concern. The findings from this study is consistent with that of Avolio and Bass (2004), who highlighted that transformational leadership style significantly influences employees' attitudes, including their concerns about career progression. The study indicated that when transformational leaders inspire and motivate employees, it offers the employees the opportunity to think deeply about their career goals. The present findings also align with Ng and Feldman (2014), who found that transformational leadership positively affects career-related outcomes, particularly in dynamic and uncertain work

environments. Transformational leaders provide vision and clarity, enabling employees to navigate their career paths more effectively.

Several studies across different disciplines and geographical contexts confirm the significant impact of transformational leadership on employees' career concerns (Al-Ghazali, 2020; Arthi & Sumathi, 2020). Within the SME context, particularly in developing economies, transformational leadership fosters an environment in which employees become more engaged and attentive to their career development. Through mentoring, vision sharing, and motivation, transformational leaders create conditions that encourage employees to invest in long-term career growth.

However, Epitropaki and Martin (2005) found mixed results regarding the role of transformational leadership in shaping career attitudes. Although transformational leadership elevated career aspirations, it did not consistently reduce career-related concerns among all employees. This partially contrasts with the current findings, which demonstrated a significant positive effect of transformational leadership style on employee career concern.

The second objective examined the influence of transactional leadership style on employee career concern. The results revealed that there is a significant positive influence of transactional leadership style on employee career concern. This is supported by a previous finding from a studies conducted by (Syaharudin et al., 2022; Agrawal & Pradhan, 2024), which argue that transactional leaders, through clear goals, rewards, and performance-based evaluations, provide employees with structured career guidance. Such structure motivates employees by linking performance to career progression and job security. Clear expectations also reduce uncertainty about career growth.

The significant t-value ($2.764 > 1.96$) suggests that, in SMEs, transactional leaders actively address and support employees' career concerns. In contexts where formal career development systems may be limited, transactional leadership helps clarify roles and progression paths. Employees understand how achieving performance targets contributes to their career advancement, thereby reducing concerns about career stability.

Transactional leadership also contributes to employee satisfaction and retention. Employees who perceive that their leaders prioritize their personal growth and development are more committed to the organizations progress and success. This is particularly important in SMEs, where high turnover can negatively affect growth. By aligning organizational goals with individual aspirations, transactional leadership strengthens engagement and supports long-term career planning.

Nevertheless, Judge and Piccolo (2004) reported that while transactional leadership positively correlates with job satisfaction, its effect on career concerns is less consistent. They argued that transactional leadership's emphasis on short-term goals may not fully address broader career development issues. This contrasts with the current study, which found a statistically significant positive relationship.

The third objective explored the influence of transactional leadership on career control. The findings indicate that transactional leadership significantly and positively influences career control. This aligns with Chen et al. (2020), who found that clear expectations and contingent rewards enhance employees' perceptions of control over their careers. The structured environment created by transactional leadership enables employees to navigate their career paths more effectively.

Similarly, previous research (Sunarsi et al., 2021; Wanjala et al., 2017) highlights the importance of leadership in fostering employee development and career control. In SMEs, personalized leadership approaches can significantly shape individual career trajectories and organizational adaptability.

The fourth objective assessed the impact of transformational leadership on career control. The results show a significant positive effect. This finding supports prior research (Zhang et al., 2021; Al-Ghazali, 2020), which emphasizes the role of transformational leadership in promoting career growth, learning, and adaptability. Transformational leaders empower employees, encourage skill development, and strengthen resilience, thereby enhancing career control (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Guan et al., 2016).

In contrast, transactional leadership, with its focus on maintaining the status quo, may not always promote long-term career autonomy to the same extent. Within the Ghanaian SME context, where financial constraints and limited advancement opportunities may exist, transformational leadership becomes particularly important in guiding employees to recognize and pursue career opportunities.

The fifth objective investigated the influence of transformational leadership style on employee career curiosity. The findings from the study revealed that there is a significant positive influence of transformational leadership style on employee career curiosity. The findings from this study is consistent with that of Mengyue et al. (2023), who found that transformational leadership style enhances employee curiosity and growth. By challenging the status quo and encouraging innovation, transformational leaders stimulate employees' interest in exploring career opportunities.

Similarly, a study by Lan and Chen (2020) concluded that transformational leadership style enhances intrinsic motivation, which fosters a greater employee career curiosity. As employees become more curious, they become more engaged and proactive about learning and seek for new challenges, supporting organizational innovation and competitiveness.

However, Chang and Shih (2019) argue that individual characteristics and cultural contexts may moderate this relationship. This suggests that while transformational leadership generally promotes career curiosity, its effectiveness may vary across organizational settings.

The sixth objective also examined the influence of transactional leadership style on employee career curiosity. The results indicated that there is a significant positive influence of transactional leadership style on employee career curiosity. The structured tasks as well as performance-based rewards, provides a stable environment that encourages employees to explore career development opportunities. Similar findings were reported by Kark et al. (2018) and Zhao and Sun (2024), who observed that transactional leadership can positively influence employee creativity and growth.

Although some studies (Ali Khan et al., 2021) suggest that transactional leadership may not consistently drive long-term career development, the current findings indicate that within Ghanaian SMEs, it contributes positively to career curiosity. Contextual factors such as organizational size and resource availability may explain this variation.

The seventh objective further examined the influence of transactional leadership style on employee career confidence. The findings demonstrate a significant positive effect. By providing clear expectations and performance-based rewards, transactional

leadership creates a sense of stability and predictability, which enhances employees' confidence in managing their careers (Sunarsi et al., 2021).

Demographic factors within the Ghanaian SME context may also influence how leadership styles affect career confidence. Age, gender, and regional background may shape employees' responses to leadership behaviours (Abbas & Ali, 2023; Kalsoom et al., 2018). However, while demographic considerations are important, individual capabilities and organizational culture remain central in shaping career confidence.

Finally, the eighth objective investigated the influence of transformational leadership on employee career confidence. The findings revealed a significant positive effect of transformational leadership style on employee career confidence. Transformational leadership style enhances employee motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction, which are closely linked to career confidence (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Yukl, 2013). In many Ghanaian SMEs, where career advancement and opportunities may be limited, transformational leaders play a very important role in mentoring and empowering employees'

Although the relationship is positive, factors such as organizational culture and existing career development systems may moderate the strength of this effect.

4.9 Chapter Summary

Chapter Four presented the data analysis and findings of the study. The results met the assumptions for SEM, demonstrating strong reliability, validity, and model fit. All eight hypotheses were supported, indicating that both transformational and transactional leadership styles significantly influence the dimensions of career adaptability in SMEs. Transformational leadership exhibited a comparatively stronger effect. Overall, the

study demonstrates substantial explanatory and predictive power and offers practical implications for leadership development within Ghanaian SMEs.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter provided a brief summary of the study, taken into consideration the findings, the purpose and rationale behind this research. From these, conclusions are drawn, and the relevant implications for theory, practice, and policy are outlined. Recommendations for future studies are also presented.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings of the Study

This study examined the influence of transformational and transactional leadership styles on employee career adaptability amongst small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Ghana. The formulated hypotheses were subjected to statistical and inferential analysis using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). This approach was employed to assess the correlation among the study variables in order to determine the nature of their relationships. A structured questionnaire were used for data collection. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v.23) and Smart PLS. The following sections present a summary of the key findings, conclusions, theoretical and practical implications, and recommendations.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The first objective of the study was to evaluate the impact of transformational leadership styles on employees' career concern within SMEs. Hypothesis 1 proposed that transformational leadership style has a significant positive influence on employee's career concern. The findings confirmed the proposition, indicating that transformational leadership style significantly and positively influence employees'

career concern. The findings underline the importance of transformational leadership as a tool for enhancing career concern among employees. Leaders who prioritize career concerns can improve employee retention, motivation, and productivity, thereby ensuring better organizational performance. This is particularly vital in SMEs, especially in developing economies like Ghana, where leadership can serve as a critical driver of employee development despite limitations in financial or training resources. The study demonstrates that transformational leadership fosters career growth in settings where traditional career development structures may be lacking.

The second objective of the study was to examine the influence of transactional leadership style on employee career concern. The findings indicated that transactional leadership positively impacts employees' career concern. Employees who perceive their leaders as actively supporting their career development through structured and measurable goals are more likely to remain committed to the organization, reducing turnover intentions a key challenge in SMEs. Moreover, transactional leadership aligns individual career aspirations with organizational objectives, creating a mutually beneficial environment that enhances employee engagement and long-term organizational competitiveness. The results provide substantial evidence that transactional leadership significantly influences career concern within SMEs. The structured and performance-based nature of transactional leadership addresses employees' immediate career concerns and contributes to long-term career planning.

The third objective examined the impact of transactional leadership style on employee career control. The results indicated a statistically significant positive influence of transactional leadership styles on employee career control. In the SME context, transactional leadership's impact on career control is crucial, as it emphasizes goal-

setting, rewards, and performance evaluation, empowering employees to take charge of their career development. The study highlights transactional leadership's pivotal role in enhancing career control within SMEs, ultimately contributing to improved organizational performance and employee development. By fostering an environment that emphasizes clear career paths and rewards for performance, transactional leadership supports employees in taking proactive steps toward managing their careers.

The fourth objective of the study assessed the influence of transformational leadership style on employee's career control. The findings strongly support the hypothesis, indicating a statistically significant association between transformational leadership style and employee career control. The outcome underscores the important role transformational leadership style plays in empowering employees to take charge of their professional development and career trajectories, particularly in the resource-constrained context of SMEs in Ghana. Transformational leadership, characterized by inspiring, motivating, and fostering personal growth and encouraging employees to take ownership and control of their career paths. The evidence demonstrates that transformational leadership significantly enhances career control in SMEs.

The fifth objective investigated the influence of transformational leadership on career curiosity. The results reveal a significant positive relationship. Transformational leaders in SMEs create environments that promote innovation, open communication, and personal development, inspiring employees to explore career growth and development opportunities.

The sixth objective examined the influence of transactional leadership style on employee career curiosity. The findings revealed that there is a significant positive influence of transactional leadership style on employee career curiosity. This result

suggests that within SMEs, transactional leadership style creates a stable and structured environment that encourages employees to take calculated risks and explore career development opportunities. It also highlights the positive role of transactional leadership in fostering career curiosity and supporting both individual and organizational development.

The seventh objective examined the impact of transactional leadership on employee career confidence. The findings proved that transactional leadership has a significant positive influence on employee's career confidence, supporting the seventh hypothesis. These results indicate that leadership characterized by clear expectations, structured roles, and performance-based rewards enhances employees' sense of stability, which is essential for building career confidence. Consequently, SME management in Ghana can strengthen employees' career confidence by adopting transactional leadership practices.

The eighth objective evaluated the influence of transformational leadership on career confidence. The results demonstrated a significant positive effect, supporting the eighth hypothesis. Transformational leadership meaningfully enhances employees' confidence in managing and advancing their careers. Therefore, SME managers in Ghana can promote career confidence by cultivating transformational leadership behaviours.

The overall objective of this study was to assess the extent to which transformational and transactional leadership styles influence employees' career adaptability in SMEs in Ghana. Career adaptability was operationalized through four dimensions which are career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence. The eight

objectives and corresponding hypotheses assessed how each leadership style affects each of these dimensions.

Across all eight the hypotheses, the findings consistently proved statistically significant and positive correlation between both transformational and transactional leadership styles and employee career adaptability. Specifically, transformational leadership significantly enhanced career concern, control, curiosity, and confidence by inspiring employees, promoting personal development, and creating a supportive and visionary work environment. Similarly, transactional leadership demonstrated a significant positive influence on all four dimensions by providing structure, clear expectations, and performance-based rewards that guide and stabilize employees' career development efforts.

This convergence of results suggests that both leadership styles play complementary and reinforcing roles in promoting career adaptability among SME employees. While transformational leadership drives long-term growth and personal investment in career development, transactional leadership strengthens immediate structure, feedback, and reinforcement that build confidence and direction.

Therefore, the study's main aim has been comprehensively addressed, with evidence demonstrating that both transformational and transactional leadership styles are critical determinant of employees' ability to navigate and adapt to career-related challenges in the SME sector. The findings highlight the importance of adaptive and contextually relevant leadership practices in fostering resilient, confident, and future-oriented workforces in Ghanaian SMEs, ultimately contributing to both individual and organizational sustainability.

5.3 Conclusions

This study examined the influence of transformational and transactional leadership styles on employee's career adaptability amongst SMEs within the Greater Accra Metropolitan Assembly of Ghana. Career Construction Theory is the theory which underpinned this study. Career adaptability was measured using four dimensions which are career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence.

The findings confirmed that both transformational and transactional leadership styles have statistically significant and positive effects on employee's career adaptability. Transformational leadership style, characterized with vision, mentorship, and empowerment, proved very effective in enhancing employees' intrinsic motivation, self-direction, and willingness to explore new career opportunities. This is especially important in the Ghanaian SME context, where formal career development systems are often limited.

Similarly, transactional leadership emerged as a meaningful contributor to career adaptability. Its structured and reward-based approach promotes stability, role clarity, and alignment between individual and organizational goals. Employees under transactional leadership reported improved career control and confidence due to clearly defined expectations and consistent feedback mechanisms. These findings demonstrate that transactional leadership not only supports performance management but also contributes to the development of employee adaptability in dynamic work environments.

The findings suggest that career adaptability in SMEs is best cultivated through a balanced integration of both leadership styles. Transformational leadership provides long-term developmental support, while transactional leadership offers immediate

structure and reinforcement necessary for day-to-day career progression. Together, they form a comprehensive leadership approach that addresses both the psychological and practical needs of employees.

The study has successfully tested the direct relationships between leadership styles and the four components of career adaptability, providing actionable insights for SME managers and policymakers.

However, some limitations emerged. The study employed a cross-sectional design, limiting causal inference. Additionally, it was confined to SMEs in the Accra Metropolitan Area, so findings may not generalize to other regions or rural SMEs. Furthermore, the study focused solely on employee perceptions; future research could incorporate multi-source data, including managerial assessments or longitudinal tracking, to capture leadership influence over time.

In conclusion, the findings contribute to both theory and practice. They extend the applicability of Career Construction Theory to leadership research within the SME sector and provide practical guidance for SME leaders aiming to build resilient, adaptable workforces. The study underscores the necessity for leaders to adopt both transformational and transactional behaviours to nurture career adaptability, an essential trait in today's unpredictable and rapidly changing work environment.

5.4 Implications for Theory

The study's findings align well with the core tenets of Career Construction Theory (CCT), particularly in how leadership influences employee career adaptability in SMEs. The theory emphasizes the role of individuals in constructing their careers using

personal attributes, experiences, and the work environment to adapt to changing job roles and opportunities.

The results demonstrate that leadership styles play a critical role in enhancing career adaptability among employees in SMEs. Leadership is a contextual factor enabling individuals to construct and manage their careers effectively, even in resource-limited environments like Ghanaian SMEs. The findings extend CCT by showing how leadership can support career adaptability and development in diverse organizational and economic contexts.

Additionally, the study highlights the complementary nature of both leadership styles, particularly in SMEs. It also expands the understanding of how leadership influences employee career adaptability and outcomes, such as achieving promotions, developing specialized skills, or successfully transitioning to new career paths.

5.5. Implications to Practice and Policy

The findings of this study are very important implications for both organizational practice within SMEs and policy interventions aimed at strengthening the SME sector in Ghana in terms of its leadership approaches. By empirically establishing the influence of transformational and transactional leadership styles on employee career adaptability, this research identifies leadership as a strategic mechanism for developing adaptable and resilient employees. It underscores the need for SME owners and managers to adopt effective leadership approaches that enhance employees' capacity to respond to changing work demands and sustain organizational performance.

5.5.1. Implications for Practice

The study reveals that both transformational and transactional leadership styles are instrumental in enhancing career adaptability among SME employees. This insight implies that SME managers must not rely solely on a single leadership style but should be equipped with the competencies to apply both styles fluidly depending on organizational and employee needs. Therefore, the positive influence of transformational leadership on employee career curiosity and control implies that SME leaders should foster environments that promote innovation, employee autonomy, and inspiration. Leadership practices such as vision-sharing, personalized mentorship, and encouragement of professional exploration are not simply desirable, they are functionally necessary for building adaptive employee behaviours in dynamic business environments.

Similarly, the role of transactional leadership in supporting career concern and confidence suggests that goal clarity, structured feedback, and reward systems are key mechanisms through which employees become more confident and engaged in career development. Thus, SME operations should formally integrate these mechanisms into their performance management and employee development systems.

Also, training programs for SME leaders must go beyond technical skills and address behavioral and strategic leadership capacities, as these directly influence workforce adaptability and, ultimately, organizational sustainability.

Importantly, employee career adaptability in SMEs is not solely an HR function but a leadership outcome. Therefore, ownership of career development should be a shared responsibility between employees and leadership, embedded in daily supervisory and strategic routines.

5.5.2. Implications for Policy

From a policy standpoint, the findings highlight the critical role of leadership in SME workforce development and suggest the need for targeted support from government and regulatory bodies. For instance, the study underscores that leadership development should be considered a public good, particularly within the SME sector where resources for such initiatives are often limited. As such, government agencies and development partners should create subsidized leadership capacity-building programs tailored specifically for SME managers. These programs should emphasize the dual importance of transformational and transactional leadership behaviour.

Again, the demonstrated link between leadership and employee adaptability presents a justification for public policies that incentivize SMEs to invest in structured career development programs. For instance, tax credits, grants, or preferential access to government contracts could be extended to SMEs that adopt formal leadership training or employee development frameworks.

Finally, policy interventions aimed at enhancing employee retention and productivity in the SME sector must consider leadership development as a critical enabler. Policies that promote public-private partnerships with business associations to deliver continuous professional development for SME leaders would ensure broader access and sustainability.

5.6 Recommendation of the Study

Based on the key findings and emerging issues identified in the study, the following recommendations are made to improve leadership practices and employee career adaptability within SMEs in Ghana:

It is recommended that leaders of SMEs should regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their leadership practices. The study revealed that both transformational and transactional leadership styles significantly influence career adaptability dimensions such as career concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. However, there was no evidence of systematic monitoring mechanisms in most SMEs. To address this gap, SMEs should institutionalize leadership assessments through periodic employee surveys, performance metrics, and 360-degree feedback systems. These tools will provide data-driven insights into how leadership behaviour affect employee development and organizational outcomes. The information gathered should inform leadership training, coaching, and strategic HR adjustments.

It is recommended that SME leaders should ensure that leadership strategies align with both organizational goals and employee career aspirations. The findings indicate that transactional leadership supports career control and concern, yet misalignment between individual and organizational goals can lead to disengagement. To bridge this gap, SMEs should organize bi-annual career planning sessions and integrate personal development objectives into performance appraisals. This dual focus on individual growth and business targets will enhance employee motivation and organizational performance.

It is recommended that SMEs should create and sustain a culture of continuous learning and innovation, especially since transformational leadership was found to significantly enhance career curiosity and confidence. To implement this, SME leaders should provide access to capacity-building opportunities such as online training platforms, in-house seminars, and education sponsorships. In addition, establishing internal mentorship and knowledge-sharing systems will encourage learning from peers, foster creativity, and enhance employee retention.

Again, it is recommended that leaders in SMEs should embed structured goal-setting and feedback mechanisms into their leadership practices. The results showed that transactional leadership, which thrives on clarity and reward-based motivation, significantly affects employee career development. SMEs should implement quarterly performance review meetings, with documented career progress discussions and tailored goal-setting frameworks. This approach will give employees a clear sense of direction, reinforce accountability, and support long-term career planning.

Furthermore, it is recommended that SME owners and policymakers should invest in targeted leadership development programs. Since the study identified leadership as a critical factor in enhancing employee adaptability, capacity-building efforts should focus on equipping leaders with competencies in both transformational and transactional behaviour. Government agencies and SME support institutions (e.g., NBSSI, GEA) should provide subsidized leadership training initiatives. These programs should include modules on emotional intelligence, strategic goal alignment, employee engagement, and adaptive leadership.

5.7. Recommendation for Future Studies

Although this study made significant progress in examining the influence of transformational and transactional leadership styles on the career adaptability of employees in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), it encountered certain scope limitations that future research may address to develop a more comprehensive understanding.

Future studies should consider examining additional leadership styles, such as servant leadership, charismatic leadership, democratic leadership, and laissez-faire leadership. The present study focused specifically on transformational and transactional leadership

due to their strong theoretical and empirical foundations within the Full Range Leadership Model (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The exclusion of other leadership styles was based on conceptual boundaries and methodological manageability. Incorporating multiple leadership frameworks within a single study would have expanded the scope beyond what was feasible, given time constraints, sampling limitations, and measurement considerations.

Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of this study limited the ability to assess how leadership styles influence career adaptability over time or following targeted interventions. Future researchers are encouraged to adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to examine the long-term effects of leadership development programmes and training interventions on employees' career adaptability. This would not only establish causal inferences but also provide practical guidance on how investments in leadership development translate into improved employee adaptability and organizational resilience.

This study focused on SMEs in the Accra Metropolitan Area, and while efforts were made to ensure representativeness through stratified sampling, the findings may not generalize to other regions or sectors. Future research should consider replicating the study in rural SMEs, or across different industries (e.g., manufacturing, fintech, agribusiness), to examine whether context-specific factors influence the nature and strength of the leadership–career adaptability link.

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APPENDIX

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA.

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

The researcher is investigating the impact of leadership styles on the career adaptability among SMEs. Your kind assistance is needed to help complete these questionnaires. There are no wrong or right answers, just be candid in your opinion. Please do not write your name. Every information you provide shall be treated confidentially and used for academic and research purposes only.

Thank you.

SECTION A

Demographic variable

Tick the correct one that best suit you.

1. Gender Male [] Female []
2. Age
3. Years of working experience
4. Academic qualification
JHS [] SHS [] Degree [] Master's degree [] PhD []



SECTION B

You are kindly requested to evaluate each statement on a scale of 1 to 5, reflecting your level of agreement or disagreement. This assessment pertains to your perception of your supervisor's leadership style within your organization, using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree).

NO.	Career adaptability scale:	1	2	3	4	5
	Employee concern					
1	My supervisor demonstrates genuine concern for my career development needs.					
2	I feel that my supervisor genuinely cares about my career growth within the company.					
3	My supervisor takes the time to listen to my concerns about my career progression					
4	I believe that my supervisor has invested in helping me overcome any obstacles to my career advancement.					
5	I feel supported by my supervisor in addressing any anxieties I have about changes in the workplace that may affect my career.					
6	My supervisor supports me financially to take up more training courses to advance my career goals.					
7.	Employee control	1	2	3	4	5
	My supervisor helps me maintain a positive attitude even when facing challenges in my career					

8.	My supervisor makes me feel self-confident at work in my ability to make decisions about my career without relying heavily on others.					
9	I take ownership of the consequences of my career-related decisions and actions.					
10	I am able to stand firm in my convictions and principles at workplace irrespective of the situation I find myself in					
11	My supervisor allows me rely on my own abilities and judgment to navigate my career path.					
12	My supervisor helps me prioritize my own needs and goals when making career-related decisions in the organization					
No.	Employee curiosity	1	2	3	4	5
13	My supervisor encourages me to actively seek to explore new opportunities and experiences in my work environment.					
14	My supervisor's leadership approach enables me to constantly lookout for opportunities to develop personally and professionally.					
15	My supervisor's leadership style enables me to explore different options and possibilities before making career-related decisions.					

16	My supervisor's leadership style allows me to observe and consider different approaches and methods in my work.					
17	My supervisor supports me to delving deeply into questions and challenges to gain a better understanding and experience.					
18	My supervisor challenges and encourages me to be more curious about new opportunities					
	Employee Confidence	1	2	3	4	5
19	My supervisor's leadership style makes me feel confident in my ability to perform tasks efficiently in my role within the company.					
20	I take pride in my supervisor for ensuring that I do things well in my work responsibilities.					
21	My supervisor is confident in my ability to learn and adapt to new skills relevant to my job.					
22	My supervisor makes me feel confident that I am working up to my full potential in my current role.					
23	My supervisor is very confident in my ability to overcome obstacles and challenges that arise in my work.					
24	My supervisor makes me feel confident in my problem-solving abilities when faced with work-related challenges					

SECTION C

This section poses questions regarding leadership styles. Please evaluate the statements using the provided scale: 1 = Never [N], 2 = Almost Never [AL], 3 = Occasionally [OA], 4 = Sometimes [S], 5 = Fairly Often [FO], and 6 = Frequently, if not Always [FA]. Select the response that best reflects your experience.

Transformational leadership style							
Charismatic leadership							
25	My supervisor is able to instil pride, faith and respect in me	1	2	3	4	5	6
26	My supervisor has a gift in seeing what is very really important.						
27	My supervisor transmits a sense of mission to us employees.						
Individualized consideration							
28	My supervisor delegates power to us to provide learning opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5	6
29.	My supervisor treats each employee as an individual						
30	My supervisor provides coaching training to improve our skills						
Intellectual stimulation							
31	My supervisor encourages us to think in a new way	1	2	3	4	5	6
32	My supervisor avoids criticizing us in public						

33	My supervisor always emphasizes problem solving and the use of reasoning before taking action.						
TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP STYLE							
Contingent reward							
34	My supervisor provides rewards if any worker performs or exceed the necessary effort in accordance with agreements and requirement.	1	2	3	4	5	6
35.	My supervisor provides assistance in exchange for effort						
Active management -by-exception							
36.	Commends us when we do a better-than average job.	1	2	3	4	5	6
37.	My supervisor actively monitors my work I do						
38	He keeps track of my mistakes						
39	He takes action when targets are not met						
Passive management-by-exception							
40	My supervisor preserves the status quo and does not consider trying to make improvement as long as things are going along all right according to earlier plans	1	2	3	4	5	6
41	My supervisor reacts only after problem have become serious.						
42.	He avoids making decisions.						

Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample determination table.

Table for Determining Sample Size for a Given Population

N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S
10	10	100	80	280	162	800	260	2800	338
15	14	110	86	290	165	850	265	3000	341
20	19	120	92	300	169	900	269	3500	246
25	24	130	97	320	175	950	274	4000	351
30	28	140	103	340	181	1000	278	4500	351
35	32	150	108	360	186	1100	285	5000	357
40	36	160	113	380	181	1200	291	6000	361
45	40	180	118	400	196	1300	297	7000	364
50	44	190	123	420	201	1400	302	8000	367
55	48	200	127	440	205	1500	306	9000	368
60	52	210	132	460	210	1600	310	10000	373
65	56	220	136	480	214	1700	313	15000	375
70	59	230	140	500	217	1800	317	20000	377
75	63	240	144	550	225	1900	320	30000	379
80	66	250	148	600	234	2000	322	40000	380
85	70	260	152	650	242	2200	327	50000	381
90	73	270	155	700	248	2400	331	75000	382
95	76	270	159	750	256	2600	335	100000	384

Note: "N" is population size
"S" is sample size.

Source: Krejcie & Morgan, 1970

