
**LEADERSHIP INFLUENCE AND BEHAVIOURAL PRACTICES IN SMALL AND
MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN UGANDA’S GREATER KIBAALE REGION**

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Abstract

This study explores how follower voice behaviour affects leadership competencies within small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Uganda’s Greater Kibaale Region. Using a mixed-method approach involving surveys, interviews, and documentary analysis, data were collected from 340 employees and 54 owner-managers across selected SMEs. The research hypothesised that promotive follower voice behaviour positively influences leadership competencies, while prohibitive voice behaviour has a negligible effect, with leader–member exchange quality acting as a moderating factor. Findings revealed that follower voice behaviour significantly shapes the leadership skills and decision-making processes of SME owner-managers. Additionally, the quality of leader–member exchange strengthened this relationship, highlighting the importance of inclusive leadership practices. The study advances scholarship on SME leadership by positioning follower input as a key driver of competence development and workplace learning. Recommendations were made for enhancing governance, leadership practices, and financial management systems within SMEs to improve their performance and sustainability.

Keywords: Enterprises, Leadership Skills, Authority, Manager Competence, Sustainability

Introduction

The study aimed to explore the subtle dynamics of leadership competencies and office behavioural practices within small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the Greater Kibaale Region of Uganda. These enterprises are typically managed by SME owner–managers (SOMs) who often lack the necessary leadership competencies required to ensure SME success and sustainability (Sumesh et al., 2024; Long & Pisani, 2025). In most cases, SOMs assume leadership roles by virtue of founding their enterprises rather than through formal leadership or managerial education. This challenge is further compounded by a generally negative attitude towards formal learning and a marked preference for incidental, unstructured, and informal approaches to skills development (Messmann et al., 2018; Akbar et al., 2023). Additionally, these leaders are resource-constrained and overwhelmed by the daily operational demands of running an SME, limiting their opportunities to enhance and expand their competencies.

Despite this situation, little empirical research has sought to identify practical actions that providers can take to meet SME leadership learning needs (Union et al., 2022). Yet owner–managers remain reluctant to participate in conventional training and development

programmes. Against this backdrop, examining follower voice behaviour emerges as a potentially effective workplace-based approach to developing leadership competencies. This is supported by extensive evidence that leadership is a co-created, follower-driven phenomenon (Kilgallon & Wright, 2025), a collaborative partnership between leaders and followers aligned to a common purpose (Guthrie & Devies, 2024). Leaders cannot lead without followers, and good leadership is often the result of effective followership (Kilgallon & Wright, 2025). Followers influence leaders and act as proactive partners in leadership processes, making them an indispensable part of the leadership equation (Lapierre & Carsten, 2014). Moreover, diverse follower input brings substantial benefits such as preventing crises and mistakes, fostering individual learning, and facilitating the accumulation of skills.

The concept of follower voice is therefore proposed as a viable mechanism to assist SME owner-managers in enhancing their leadership abilities, yet its influence within Uganda remains underexplored (Quisumbing et al., 2019). Given that leadership competency gaps represent one of the most serious inhibitors to SME growth (Nations, 2020), understanding how SME leaders acquire and develop such competencies adds an essential dimension to our knowledge of SME performance in emerging economies like Uganda. This study is also rooted in the global recognition of competencies as a critical success factor for SME growth, combined with the rise of entrepreneurship in Uganda and the Government's emphasis on SME development as engines of economic growth under Vision 2040 (Nations, 2020).

Leadership competence, though a longstanding field of study, remains historically grounded within leadership scholarship. Long before David McClelland introduced the concept of competencies in leadership (Agnes et al., 2022), the idea of measuring individual abilities can be traced back over 3,000 years to the Chinese Empire, which employed civil service examinations to select candidates for government roles (Lawson et al., 2020a). In medieval Europe, apprentices acquired essential job skills by working alongside master craftsmen, and for centuries educators have defined the knowledge and skills to be covered in curricula (Lawson et al., 2020b). With the advent of the 20th century and the rise of "classical management," Frederick Winslow Taylor – often called the father of scientific management – promoted greater division of labour, worker motivation, job simplification, and enhanced managerial control of the workplace (Chowdhury et al., 2023). This period also saw the publication of the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, which identified knowledge and skills associated with various occupations (Livingstone et al., 2021).

By the 2020s, researchers began systematically identifying and analysing broad performance factors. Many psychologists examined individual competencies that could predict job performance effectively (Jamrozik & Selgelid, 2021). Teacher competencies, for instance, are typically derived from analyses of expert performers, with key behavioural indicators for success being linked directly to specific competencies (Kiiza, 2014). In the early 2010s, a major study commissioned by the American Management Association further anchored the concept in behaviour and performance, defining competency as "an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to effective or superior performance" (Agnes et al., 2022). Boyatzis subsequently identified 19 generic behavioural competencies associated with above-average managerial performance, organised into five clusters. As the competency movement gained momentum, it expanded to incorporate leadership, particularly after authors began distinguishing between management and leadership (Saunders & Limb, 2020).

Consequently, numerous studies have attempted to identify the core competencies that characterise effective leadership. Contemporary leadership research consistently identifies competencies such as interpersonal skills, self-awareness, knowledge management, integrity and honesty, developing others, technical competence, and communication as fundamental to effective leadership (Guthrie & Devies, 2024). For example, Agarwal (2020) found that leadership competencies across organisations include managing change, problem-solving and decision-making, demonstrating ethics and integrity, showing drive and purpose, communicating effectively, developing others, and valuing diversity. Building on the ASK model, Kezar (2023) developed seven leadership competencies – including strategic vision, decision-making, communication, empowerment, promotion and encouragement, and understandability – and subsequently expanded them into 21 competencies such as open-mindedness, tolerance, reflection, principled thinking, communication, and cooperation.

Researchers like Kezar (2023) further identified competencies such as accountability, team building, relationship management, continual learning, and conflict management as especially vital for SME leaders. Yet the rudimentary leadership competencies prevalent among many owner–managers often contribute to the early collapse of SMEs, which poses a serious threat to emerging economies such as Uganda. Developing leadership competencies within SMEs is complex, as owner–managers tend to be less trained and educated, resource-poor, and sceptical of formal training (Pugach, 2023). These gaps, combined with limited empirical research on the relationship between follower voice behaviour and leadership competencies, necessitate deeper investigation. The overarching purpose of this study, therefore, is to establish the relationship between follower voice behaviour and leadership competencies among Ugandan SME leaders.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive mixed methodology that enabled collection of both quantitative and quantitative data. The research used a cross sectional research designed which posted into positivists philosophy and ontology space to simplify the study (Ofiazoglu, 2017). The descriptive cross-sectional design simplified the comprehensive and extensive understanding of the variables under investigation. Positivism draws from the researcher's belief that the world is external and objective, knowledge stems from human experience and that only "factual" knowledge gained through observation is trustworthy (HUB, 2023).

The researcher is independent from the study, the researchers' role is limited to data collection and interpretation through objective approach and the research findings are observable and quantifiable. A survey is a detailed investigation into the characteristics of a population as expressed at a particular point in time (Zadoks, 2023).

According to Kumar (2005), cross sectional is ideally suitable for studies that require rapid data collection and an understanding of the population from a part of it and they take place at a single point in time and do not involve manipulating variables. Adam-Bagley et al., (2023) suggests that in cross sectional research design enabled the study sample a sizable number from the target population and notes that cross-sectional design is good for establishing the prevalence of a phenomenon across the whole population.

This study employed a cross-sectional design because it intended to select only representative sample elements of a cross section of the population over a short period of time (Jha, 2023). This design was preferred because it enabled the researcher to obtain detailed information from a number of respondents within the most appropriate. Generally acceptable time period coupled with the fact that its results could be generalized to a larger population within defined boundaries (Jha, 2023)

As recommended by (OECD, 2022) the survey method was preferred because it allowed the researcher to obtain more accurate and detailed information directly from people (SME owner-managers and their followers) who are actively involved in running SMEs, thus enhancing the external validity of the results (The Digital Transformation of SMEs, 2021).

More so, by preserving anonymity and confidentiality it allowed respondents to be more truthful and straightforward in their responses than if they were identified (Hallman & Mendoza, 2024). Considering time and financial limitations, a survey was also preferred for been a cost-friendly avenue of collecting large amounts of data within the most appropriate and generally acceptable time period.

The use of both qualitative and a quantitative techniques concurrently was recommended (Bourne et al., 2021) especially where the study involves investigating opinions of a large number of people. Quantitative approach was used to generate quantifiable data to explain the relationship between the study variables. More so, qualitative data as suggested by (Lawson et al., 2020a) was collected using one to one interviews to capture peoples thinking and feeling about the study variables which afforded respondents the freedom to express themselves openly and honestly with the interviewer.

The triangulation of the above two approaches helped to generate both qualitative and quantitative information about the respondents to be more truthful and straightforward in their responses than if they were identified (Nations, 2020)

Whereas the 340 research representatives were engaged and these were selected and identified using random sampling, purposive and stratified approaches (Tziner & Fein, 2021). These members were sampled from 54 small scale and medium enterprises. The enterprises were selected from western region that is Greater Kibaale region in Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom. The SME networks because of the unavailability in the commercial offices of registers of data about SMEs in of these districts which is not strange given that (OECD, 2021) had warned that a robust population is difficult to ascertain in studies involving SMEs in Uganda since most of them are not registered.

The choice of the three districts considered the fact that the SMEs are so scattered throughout the country and therefore collection of data from all of them was envisaged to be very difficult, expensive and time consuming endeavor for the researcher (Sarferaz, 2022).

The choice was further justified by the fact that most studies regarding SMEs are centered around the capital city of Kampala thus ignoring other towns and the eastern corridor. This is where the Census of Business Establishments, by Uganda Bureau of Statistics in 2011 found out that the eastern region had only 14.6% of the surviving businesses yet it had not featured in any research (Daniels et al., 2021).

Another justification of the choice of the three districts was the fact that the SME sector is homogenous because they are faced with similar challenges across geographical boundaries implying that no new districts could add anything new to the findings and as such the findings from the three districts could still be used to draw accurate generalizations (Biemer et al., 2017). Both owner-managers and their followers were considered as respondents to avoid common method bias because previous research indicates that managers and subordinates' perspective of similar measures could significantly differ (Burris et al., 2013; Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Both owner-managers and their followers were also sampled because they were considered to be key players and could therefore provide valid and reliable information required for the study. Thus all variables in this study were measured from both the ownermanager's and their followers' perspective. The different categories of business the identified SMEs were engaged in ensured that the researcher captured diverse perspectives across all businesses sectors in the districts and also came up with a more reliable finding (Parsafar & Miller, 2024).

To establish the relationship between follower voice behavior and leadership competencies, quantitative data was obtained from the close-ended questionnaires and then analysed. The analysis of data was guided by the objectives of the study and best statistical practice was observed throughout this phase. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 16.0 was used to analyze the quantitative data from the questionnaire because it is user friendly (Venkataraman, 2025).

Descriptive statistics helped to summarize the data in meaningful and useful ways and to describe the levels of dispersion and distribution of respondents on each of the variables of the study data which was then presented descriptively using percentages and tables (Houser, 2021).

Finally, hierarchical multiple regression was used to assess the effects of a moderating variable. The qualitative data gathered through interviews was categorized, interpreted and analysed according to the themes and patterns, and then content analysis was used as a data reduction technique. This data was used to triangulate and corroborate findings from the quantitative data analysis (Daniels et al., 2021).

Four ethical considerations recommended were made in this study. This was to ensure that both the study method and the study condition never posed any danger to the participants (Duarte & Miguel, 2022). The researcher sought the consent of every participant and had him or her sign a consent form.

To cater for the privacy and confidentiality of sensitive information provided by the respondents, the researcher made sure that every record remained anonymous. Instead of names, identification numbers were used so that no information could be traced to any respondent (Biemer et al., 2017). Before the data collection exercise, the researcher sought permission from the relevant authorities of the respective districts. Finally, all participants were informed of their right to participate voluntarily, and of their freedom to withdraw from participation in the study. This catered for voluntary participation.

Results

The findings clearly based on analysis sought to establish from the silent dynamics of leadership experts and influence office voice behavior practices over leadership competencies. The investigation was on the direct influence of owners' leadership competencies and

promotive follower voice behavior practices in Uganda. 340 employees and these were drawn from 54 units of analysis owner managers in SMES in Uganda.

Discussion

The study observed that there was a relationship between promotive voice behavior and leadership competencies drawn from results of the descriptive, correlation, regression analysis and the key informant interviews. When asked whether followers/employees develop and suggest ideas to influence leadership competencies, the respondents agreed (Owner-managers: Mean = 3.19, SD = 1.375), (Followers: Mean = 2.86, SD = 1.357). This evidence suggests that followers practice promotive voice exertion behavior.

The respondents in the study also agreed with the statement that followers/employees express new ideas which are beneficial to the leader/boss of the enterprises (Unkovski-Korica & Vejzagić, 2024). Mean = 3.24, SD = 1.196), (Followers: Mean = 3.53, SD = 1.227). This means that leader-targeted promotive follower voice behavior is being practiced in SMEs. When the respondents were asked whether they communicate suggestions to improve knowledge, abilities, skills and behaviors of their leaders/bosses, they agreed (Owner-managers: Mean = 3.31, SD = 1.210), (Followers: Mean = 3.43, SD = 1.252) implying that followers attempt to influence leadership competencies through their promotive voice exertion behavior.

When participants were asked whether they share with their leaders constructive suggestions that help their SMEs to achieve its vision, they agreed (Owner-managers: Mean = 3.50, SD = 1.342), (Followers: Mean = 3.60, SD = 1.278) suggesting that followers attempt to influence leadership competencies through their constructive suggestions (Kindre, 2023). The respondents also agreed that they express suggestions to improve their leader's performance (Owner-managers: Mean = 3.31, SD = 1.301), (Followers: Mean = 3.55, SD = 1.326). All in all, it was therefore well accepted by the respondents in the study that followers in SMEs practice leader-targeted promotive voice exertion behavior to influence leadership competencies of their owner-managers.

The correlational results between promotive voice behavior and leadership competencies showed a positive and significant relationship (Pearson Correlation Coefficient) for followers ($r = 0.521$, $p < .05$), leaders/owner-managers ($r = 0.515$, $p < .05$), and aggregated ($r = 0.525$, $p < .05$). Thus, the hypothesis that Followers practicing have a significantly positive influence over leadership competencies of owner-managers in SMEs in Uganda is accepted.

The findings of the current study were cross-referenced with those of other scholars and displayed similar relationships between promotive voice behavior and leadership competencies. For example, these findings concurred with findings. Ahmad,

(2022) who argued that speaking-up with supportive content (promotive voice behavior) plays an important role in voice recipients' reactions and influenced his/her actions and supportive remarks generated positive reactions.

Wilkinson et al., (2020) also proved that Promotive voice led to higher idea endorsement by supervisors drawing similarities with Liang. Similarly, the findings further concurred with

views of (Agarwal, 2020) that managers are more likely to endorse suggestionoriented voice (Promotive) behavior. However, it's worth noting that much as others scholars suggested that no relationship existed between the variables (Wilkinson et al., 2020), (Kindre, 2023) the current researcher based on the empirical findings highlighted above opines that there exists a relationship between promotive voice behavior and leadership competencies .

Leadership Competencies of owner-managers

The research participants did agree that they sometimes advise their leaders against undesirable behaviors that would hurt performance (Sözen & Basım, 2022). Mean = 2.85, SD = 1.106), (Followers: Mean= 2.95, SD= 1.310). There was also agreement that followers sometimes bring to notice of their bosses leadership related problems that might cause serious loss to the business even at the face of dissenting opinions (Owner-managers: Mean = 3.39 SD = 1.123), (Followers: Mean= 3.71, SD= 1.215). Furthermore, respondents agreed that followers sometimes dare to expose negative behaviors of leaders that might affect efficiency of the business, even if it would embarrass the leaders (Owner-managers: Mean = 3.00, SD = 1.346), (Followers: Mean = 3.31, SD = 1.239).

Further still, the findings showed that followers sometimes dared to point out leadership problems when they appear, even if that would hamper relationships with their bosses (Owner-managers: Mean = 3.24, SD = 1.228), (Followers: Mean = 3.24, SD = 1.278) and that they sometimes dare to expose leadership problems that exists to management (Owner-managers: Mean = 3.35, SD = 1.362), (Followers: Mean = 3.61, SD = 1.320). From Combined results of owner-managers and their followers, participants did state their opinion regarding “Prohibitive voice behavior and leadership competencies

The study at the level of “moderately agree” thus confirming that followers to a moderate degree practiced prohibitive voice behavior to influence the leadership competencies of their owner-managers as shown by the general scores (Mean=3.35, S.D=1.2834). Summarily, respondents in the study moderately agreed that followers in SMEs indeed practiced leader-targeted prohibitive voice exertion behavior. The study indicated that influence leadership competencies of their owner-managers though to a lesser degree than promotive voice behavior (Reiter-Palmon & Hunter, 2023).

The correlational results between the two variables showed positive and significant relationship (Pearson Correlation Coefficient) were $r = 0.506$, $p < .05$ for followers, $r = 0.310$, owner-managers $p < .05$ and $r = 0.477$, $p < .05$ for the combined implying that prohibitive voice behavior is a significant factor in the development of leadership competencies and practically meaning that followers who practice prohibitive voice behavior may significantly influence leadership competencies of their owner-managers. This discovery further reveals the importance of prohibitive voice exertion behavior as a force for change and as a tool for learning (Rinku & Verma, 2025).

The regression results on the other hand also revealed that prohibitive follower voice behavior is also a good predictor and has a positive and significant influence over the leadership competencies. The results indicate SMEs owner-managers and as such, the null hypothesis

that 'Followers practicing Prohibitive voice behavior (Einarsen et al., 2002). They have no significant influence over leadership competencies of owner-managers in SMEs in Uganda' is rejected was rejected.

The results of the current study on prohibitive voice behavior and leadership competencies relate to the findings of (Kezar, 2023) who found out that prohibitive follower voice behavior generally. The study had influence on recipient outcomes and not all prohibitive voice elicits negative response from recipients and that different types of prohibitive voice were more influential and less threatening than others. This position is supported by (Duarte & Miguel, 2022) who concluded that prohibitive voice influence recipient actions and results in improvements to objective outcomes even if those who express it upset voice recipients who must engage in change.

The findings of this study with those of other scholars however revealed negative results which is a recommendation for further research. For example, (OECD, 2021) argued that that receiving negative feedback caused negative emotions in recipients and as such would not influence the recipients' actions other than creating bias. Agarwal, (2020) also alludes to negative relationship between prohibitive voice and leadership outcomes because the "prohibitive" aspect of voice calls harmful factors to a stop resulting into lower idea endorsement and influence on the recipients. Similarly, the findings contradicts those of Burris, who all concluded that a negative relationship exists between prohibitive voice and recipient outcomes (Liu & Ma, 2022).

In line with the above analysis, therefore, the results of the current study and the views expressed by other scholars on the relationship between the two variables,. It is therefore concluded that a valid relationship exists between prohibitive voice behavior and leadership competencies (Saura et al., 2023), (Rauf et al., 2023). Practically, this result sends a signal that prohibitive voice behavior influences leadership competencies of owner-managers in SMEs in Uganda but it is slightly less effective in its influence than promotive follower voice behavior (Rauf et al., 2023).

Quality on the relationship between Leadership competencies and Follower Voice behavior

The results of the moderated regression analysis showed that the interaction between Promotive voice and quality and the test of statistical significance of the interaction term was significantly correlated with Leadership competencies (Beta=0.180, $t=4.329$, $p=.000$). Thus the significance of the addition of relationships means that the relationship between leadership competencies and promotive voice behavior differs according to the quality (Long & Pisani, 2022).

Summarily, the conclusion is that quality moderates the relationship between Promotive voice behavior and leadership competencies and therefore the hypothesis that Promotive voice behavior doesn't significantly predict follower influence over leadership competencies due to the quality of relationships was rejected (Kindre, 2023).

Leadership competencies reveals that the interaction between Prohibitive voice and quality was significantly correlated with Leadership competencies (Beta=0.093, $t=2.364$, $p=.019$). The fact

that the interaction changed the R^2 by 0.009 implies that a statistically significant ($p < .005$) predictive power of 0.9 % was added to the model by the addition of quality which sends a signal that quality moderates the relationship between Prohibitive voice and leadership competencies (Chen & Carré, 2022).

More so, opinions gathered from the key informant interviews indicate a general agreement that the relationship quality moderates the relationship between promotive as well as prohibitive follower voice behavior and leadership competencies.

The above findings are in agreement with (Long & Pisani, 2022) who observed that the relationship quality between subordinates and managers is an essential determinant of the relationship between voice behavior and recipient outcomes.

The findings further concur with (Kroll, 2023) who argued that employees who maintain a positive relationship with the manager are less afraid to express voice, because they feel it is interpersonally safe to prohibitively express to their managers.

Furthermore, the findings are in tandem with (Kindre, 2023) who found out that high quality of the relationship between the leader and the follower influenced leader interest and decision-making directly and moderates the path between follower voice type and leader decision-making. The findings also fall in line with (The Digital Transformation of SMEs, 2021), (Kibwika, 2023)

who suggested that the higher the relationship, the more likely that followers are motivated to speak up promotively with the intention of helping the leaders identify the issues.

Generally, the above findings gave proof and confirmed the theory by contends that high relationship quality between subordinates and managers is an essential determinant of voice behavior and voice outcomes (Tziner & Fein, 2021). This can be construed from the finding that quality moderates the relationship between promotive as well as prohibitive follower voice behavior and leadership competencies in SMEs.

In view of the above findings and the views expressed by other scholars as cross-referenced, it is therefore concluded that a quality significantly moderates the relationship between leadership competencies and promotive voice behavior (Long & Pisani, 2022). The study observes as well as the relationship between prohibitive voice behavior and leadership competencies in Uganda.

Conclusions

Regarding the influence of leadership competencies over promotive follower voice behavior was accepted. Thus, the study established a strong positive relationship between leadership competencies and promotive follower voice behavior. This implied that expression of promotive voice behavior by followers had a strong influence over leadership competencies of owner-managers in

Ugandan SMEs

Overall, the study established that followers/employees in Ugandan SMEs have been practicing promotive voice behavior and that this partly contributed to development of leadership competencies of their owner-managers. The study conclude that prohibitive voice behavior of followers had influence over leadership competencies of owner-managers in SMEs in Uganda but the influence was lesser compared to promotive follower voice behavior (Duarte & Miguel, 2022).

Finally, the fourth hypothesis was accepted because the interaction between Prohibitive follower voice behavior and quality was significantly correlated with Leadership competencies of owner-managers. This implied that indeed moderates to a significant degree the relationship between Prohibitive follower voice behavior and leadership competencies (Long & Pisani, 2022).

Theoretical Implications

The main theoretical implication of this study in terms of voice behavior is that followers in the current study did express upward suggestions or concerns about leadership issues to their leaders which validated exit, voice and loyalty theory. The concluded that voice can have a positive effect on leadership competencies, depending on one's relationship with the leader as affirmed by (ReiterPalmon & Hunter, 2023).

The study has bridged the gap in existing literature on the relationship between voice behavior and leadership competencies. It also contributes to the Human Resources, Organizational Behavior and leadership literatures by demonstrating that follower play an important role in sharpening leadership competencies as advanced by (Kiiza & Basheka, 2018). These of SMEs owner-managers leadership skills influence the performance of these enterprises more likely when both parties build high-quality relationships with one another.

Practical Implications

The study concludes that promotive voice behavior has more influence on leadership competencies that prohibitive voice behavior. This also implies that followers need to be careful before expressing prohibitive messages especially in cultures where negative speaking is discouraged and punished (Tziner & Fein, 2021).

The study also suggested that leaders dislike prohibitive voice behavior unless when quality is high, this implies that leaders should be aware of their own biases towards certain followers who practice prohibitive voice behavior, as they may be deaf to potentially useful input when coming from disfavored followers. With employee voice being cited in literature as a key enabler for change, SMEs also need to ensure that their employee's voice is informed (Alesina et al., 2020).

From a relationship perspective, an important practical implication is that leaders who do not establish good relationships with their followers may not hear diverse and valuable arrays of competence enhancing ideas, insights, and opinions from their followers and they may miss on the opportunity to use this goldmine of ideas to sharpen their competencies (Kindre, 2023).

Therefore, leaders should build high-quality relationships with all followers where possible. Otherwise SME performance and growth shall continue to be constrained unless leaders give attention to followers' views and introduce appropriate avenues to capture feedback from them given that their proximity to suppliers, customers and colleagues gives them valuable intelligence. Also, followers should attempt to build high-quality relationships with their leaders if their suggestions or concerns aimed at polishing leadership competencies are to be heard.

For leaders who seek to harness and utilize constructive input from diverse workforce to improve leadership skills and enhance performance (Duarte & Miguel, 2022). What theory implies is that the types of relationships leaders develop with their subordinates out of daily work interactions matters a lot because the time spent at work is more than time spent outside work. Leaders should never underestimate the power of such workplace relationships given the implications for workplace attitudes and morale and the potential to create an environment characterized by favoritism and unfairness (Tziner & Fein, 2021). Therefore, leaders should be aware of how they build these relationships, cultivate workplace relationships consciously, be open to forming good relationships with all staff and prevent these relationships from leading to an unfair work environment.

In the same context but from a job satisfaction perspective, those who choose to express voice (in terms of both suggestions and concerns) could be those who are deeply frustrated and who no longer care about interpersonal harmony and under such circumstances it could be practical to identify the wider reasons behind their frustrations because this may not be sustainable in the long run.

Lastly, in terms of practical use, this study offers less costly and time sensitive solution to how SOMs develop and learn and responds to calls made by, among others. (Long & Pisani, 2022), (Kroll, 2023) who highlighted owner-manager complaints that training programmes were irrelevant to their business or individual needs, never suited their specific needs and considered the modes of delivery to be inconvenient and disruptive to their business operations besides doubting the credibility and expertise of the providers. It thus offers a means of engaging in learning which relevant and useful leadership of SMEs in Uganda.

Recommendations

The study recommends that awareness campaigns should be undertaken to promote the key benefits of followers as sources of knowledge. It is important that understand that followers are always available for them to use as much or as little as they wish. All of these benefits must be sold to encourage learning and development. There is also need to put in place systems and policies to support voice and learning.

It also recommends that there is a need for having deliberate business model and promote follower voice behavior as an effective tool in influencing leadership competencies of owner-managers. This will encourage and promote follower voice behavior given that it's the more

effective in influencing leadership competencies than prohibitive voice. More so, followers need to be encouraged and rewarded to practice promotive voice behavior

The article recommends for having practical well-developed business plan for SME for their successful progress to offering a listening ear, to the positives in the prohibitive messages of followers. Followers need to be trained on how to read the wind and understand the most appropriate time to voice prohibitive messages for compliance in business.

It recommends for Policy-makers to come up with internal control measures in business education and training of services providers should ensure that policies are adhered to for effectiveness and efficiency. Likewise, they should recognize and celebrate employees' achievements and their voice behavior.

The study recommends that, Policy-makers, analysts, consultants and other interested parties should enrich their collaboration and work engagements with in designing initiatives and tools that integrate follower voice behavior and leadership learning in SMEs. Providers using more structured learning approaches should as well incorporate features of informal learning where possible.

It also recommended for on-the-job training and Learning of employees so as to gain the required competencies and relevant skills in order to achieve a competitive advantages over other businesses in the community. More so, policy-makers and training providers should build a strong force in SME employees to create more learning opportunities at the workplace.

The study recommends for guidelines into developing appropriate systems for tapping diverse ideas, opinions or suggestions from employees which could be vital source of learning for them. For learn from their followers, there is need to create an environment where the same followers feel comfortable speaking up, and such the best ideas can then flow straight up to the leader.

It recommends for creating a learning culture and innovative physical work environment which fosters regional collaboration, openness of employees to freely perceive new ideas and innovations as recommended for efficient service delivery of SME in Uganda.

The article recommends Employees to share knowledge and information, exchange ideas in order to create bounding solutions to enrich learning. When business followers moderate of the leader's influence, and as vehicles for the actualization of the leader's vision, mission or goals of small and medium enterprise which guarantee that they present leadership competence enhancing effectiveness.

Lastly SME followers should be dictated about the important salient demands of their roles as business followers and the critical impact they have on their leaders in particular and the performance and growth of their SMEs in general. In line argument that both leadership and its consequences as largely constructed by followers, followers need to be aware of the important role they play.

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