



# Improving Leadership Capacity at Small and Medium Enterprises Based on the Digital Economy in Ho Chi Minh City

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## Abstract

In the context of the strong development of the Fourth Industrial Revolution 4.0, the digital economy plays an increasingly important role in the economic structure of each country. Vietnam is no exception to that trend. Digital economic activities have been overgrown and have been given the attention and priority of the government for development. Besides, the operating environment is increasingly complex and constantly changing. Businesses need to adapt in the way of management and administration. Correct identification of change and successful management is a significant challenge. Therefore, the study's objective is to assess the current situation based on the leadership capacity of the managers of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), on that basis, to propose groups of possible solutions to develop and further improve the leadership capacity of SMEs. The survey results show that the surveyed business managers had concentrated on the business size; out of 200 managers of small and medium enterprises, 175 samples were processed. The author applied the results of descriptive statistics to suggest managerial implications.

**Disciplinary:** Management Science (Leadership, HRM).

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## 1 Introduction

Leadership in general and leadership capacity, in particular, have long become hot topics, attracting the attention of scholars and researchers and the attention of leaders of other countries. According to Bagheri & Pihie (2011), leadership is a social influence process that seeks the

voluntary participation of subordinates in the implementation of goals and missions. Enterprise practicum has shown that leadership is a decisive factor for success, precisely leadership capacity.

According to Harrison et al. (2018), leadership capacity synthesizes knowledge, skills, experience, behaviors, and attitudes to turn organizations and businesses into a cohesive, unified block, ensuring a thriving competition marketplace. In Vietnam, the issue of developing and improving leadership capacity in enterprises had also begun to receive attention and be used to create human resources in opening up and integrating the country (Chitra, 2017; Franco & Matos, 2015).

Small and medium enterprises play an essential role in creating jobs, increasing incomes for workers, helping to mobilize social resources for development investment, hunger eradication and poverty reduction in the locality, and active support for the development of the provinces. But with its compact nature, this object is vulnerable to when unfavorable business environment. Also, in the general context of the whole country, the number of small and medium enterprises in the region that dissolved stopped operating went bankrupt has increased significantly in the past few years (Huxtable-Thomas et al., 2016; Bouchard & Basso, 2011).

One of the reasons leading to the above situation is the weak human resource management, especially the development of management capacity and leadership capacity of the managers and the management team. The lack of attention is why it is difficult for small and medium enterprises to continue developing. As a business operator, the director of a small and medium enterprise must conduct leadership activities that are both comprehensive and operational, directly manage production and business activities, and carry out Human leadership activities in the business. To perform well in his role, the director of a small and medium enterprise needs to have actual leadership capacity, full knowledge, skills, attitudes, and qualities to lead himself, lead team performance effectively, effective leadership of the whole organization. Maintain and develop the business in the market and bring legitimate income for themselves and other company members. Thus, the author applied the results of descriptive statistics to suggest managerial implications for improving leadership capacity at small and medium enterprises based on the digital economy in Ho Chi Minh City.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Concepts of Leadership**

Leadership is a particular type of relationship characterized by the perception of group members that another member of the group has the right to demand certain kinds of behavior from other members in their activities as a group member (Leitch et al., 2013; Musa & Chinniah, 2016). The leadership process has influenced an organization's activities. It is a process in which an object of persuasion grants the desired action. An interpersonal relationship in which others agree to do so is voluntary, not forced.

According to Razak (2011), leadership is an interaction between people in which one person presents information so that others become convinced of his outcomes. This outcome had perfected as the subject's resides treated according to what is suggested or required. The purpose of leadership is to get results through others, and the vehicle of leadership is the ability to build cohesive and oriented teams. Good leaders make workgroups that get results across different circumstances (Renko et al., 2015; Rowe, 2001; Reddy and Babu, 2021).

Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree on what needs to do and how to do it effectively. It is the process of facilitating individuals and groups can strive to achieve the organization's goals (Uchenwamgbe, 2013; Arham, 2014).

According to Wonglimpiyarat (2015), there are many different definitions of leadership, but it is essential to understand that no one description is complete. Although these concepts emphasize the various nuances of leadership, they all speak of two common factors, the group phenomenon and the group influence process. No matter how you look at it, a leader must ensure three factors: the ability to create a vision, inspire, and influence (Ofori, 2009). Thus, in the simplest sense, leadership is the process of influencing and influencing by creating conditions, environments and encouraging people to seek their voluntary participation to achieve goals, tasks, the mission of the organization's group.

## **2.2 The Concept of the Manager of a Small and Medium Enterprise**

The concept of corporate managers has also changed over time. The director is seen as a position in a centrally planned economy because the State appoints it. Therefore, the criteria for selecting business managers' careers are mainly political qualities and moral character. In countries with a developed market economy, the director had considered a profession because it requires training through schools. Before being selected as a director, they must pass an entrance exam and hand test profession (Kempster & Cope, 2010; Strubler & Redekopp, 2010)).

For Vietnam, the director has been conceived as a position and a profession in recent years. Therefore, many enterprises have implemented the mode of election of managers or votes of confidence or polls. There are cases such as the owner as of the director and the board hiring the director. Thus, many owners of the business's assets are also the company's managers. However, with the characteristics of SMEs, tiny and micro-enterprises, the separation between ownership and management rights is not clear (Truss, 2001; Arham et al., 2013).

According to Fontana & Musa (2017), managers play an essential role in formulating strategies to achieve organizational goals, are knowledgeable about financial issues, solve organizational problems. Besides, they are sensitive to information relevant to the organization, quickly seize opportunities, develop and foster its human resources, and ensure the right decisions bring high economic efficiency. Accordingly, the SME director will be an individual response to the owner to lead, manage and operate the organization, focusing on vision, strategy, orientation, leadership, administration, and other issues factors in the organizational environment.

And at the same time receive remuneration commensurate with the results brought. And in the research paper will only mention the capacity of the executive director, the direct leader of SMEs. According to the following definition, they may be the owner of corporate assets or may not. In that position, the director holds the number one position critical to forming and developing the enterprise's success or failure. This role is even more crucial for the managers of SMEs when the business environment of SMEs is increasingly tricky, risks are more and more intense, and competition is increasingly harsh. In short, people compare a business to a boat with the director at the helm (Boyatzis, 1993; Dhar & Mishra, 2001).

### **2.3 Concept of Leadership Capacity of SMEs Manager**

In any human activity, to perform effectively, people need to have some necessary psychological qualities, and the combination of these qualities is called competence. Thus, it is essential to understand that capacity is not a single psychological attribute but a combination of individual psychological characteristics that meet operational requirements and ensure operating performance when it comes to capacity that achieves the desired result. Capacity is a hidden element in every person. It can be innate and had acquired through learning, accumulation, and training (Ahmed et al., 2010; Rodriguez-Gutierrez et al., 2015).

According to Kansikas et al. (2012), capability can be divided into many forms, such as management capacity, professional capacity, thinking power. From these perspectives, the qualities or attitudes, skills, and knowledge (ASK) competency model is a popular model to express the individual ability of the employees. ASK is a model used in human resource management to train and develop personal ability. This model provides professional standards for job titles based on three criteria: Qualities or attitudes, Skills, and Knowledge. According to this model, competence combines knowledge, skills, and qualities that an individual needs (Regan & Ghobadian, 2004).

To carry out a leader's main job, which is to create a vision for the organization, to inspire and influence people to realize that vision, a leader must have the knowledge, skills, qualities, unusual behavior. Thus, there are many different approaches to leadership capacity. But based on the ASK model of accommodation that we analyzed in the previous section, the leadership capacity of the managers of SMEs. The author understood the paper as the synthesis of knowledge skills, qualities, and attitudes that a business director needs to lead himself, lead a team of subordinates, and lead the organization to achieve the business's goals (Lobo et al., 2016; Ojokuku et al., 2012).

## **3 Method**

This study used both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The objective of the qualitative research is to synthesize and identify the elements constituting the leadership capacity of 31 managers of SMEs in HCMC. In a qualitative study to determine the leadership capacity of managers, expert interviews were conducted with structured questionnaires. This quality is a method of interviewing all subjects with the same prepared questions.

The objective of quantitative research is to quantify the relationship between factors through the application of statistical analysis tools that are often applied based on descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation. Quantitative research had carried out through the sampling method of 200 managers of SMEs in Ho Chi Minh City (Hair et al., 2021).

The primary data source was collected by interviewing 200 managers of SMEs in Ho Chi Minh City. Also, the author has multi-dimensional assessment information, and the study also conducted interviews to investigate a team of middle managers who directly work with business managers. The author carries out the survey and discussion with these two subjects in three forms: direct distribution of questionnaires, survey via email by sending a link to the questionnaire, and investigation via email by word file via the interviewee's email address.

With a sample size of 200 SME managers, the selection of the proposed sampling method here is a random sampling method. Participants in this study include managers and managers of SMEs in Ho Chi Minh City. Besides anticipating the investigation process's difficulties and achieving the sample size above, the author distributed 200 questionnaires to business and middle managers. The survey had conducted during July-September 2021. The author had the survey samples and sample access in an unexpected and convenient form (Hair et al., 2021).

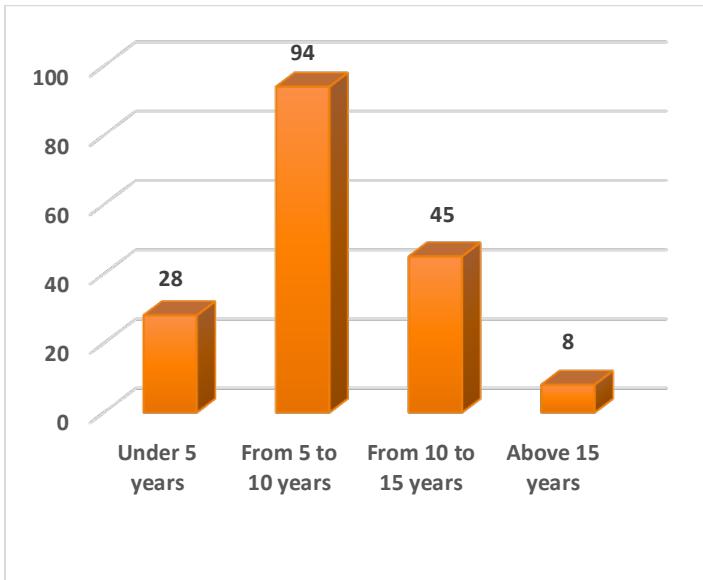
Descriptive statistics describe the essential characteristics of data collected from experimental collections. Descriptive and inferential statistics together provide simple summaries of samples and measures. It can help the researcher have an overview and compare the difference in the evaluation level between different groups of objects. In addition, through the graphical representation of data (Hair et al., 2021).

Descriptive statistics are coefficients that briefly describe or summarize a specific data set, which can also be representative of the whole or a sample of a population. Descriptive statistics had divided into concentration trend measures and volatility measures.

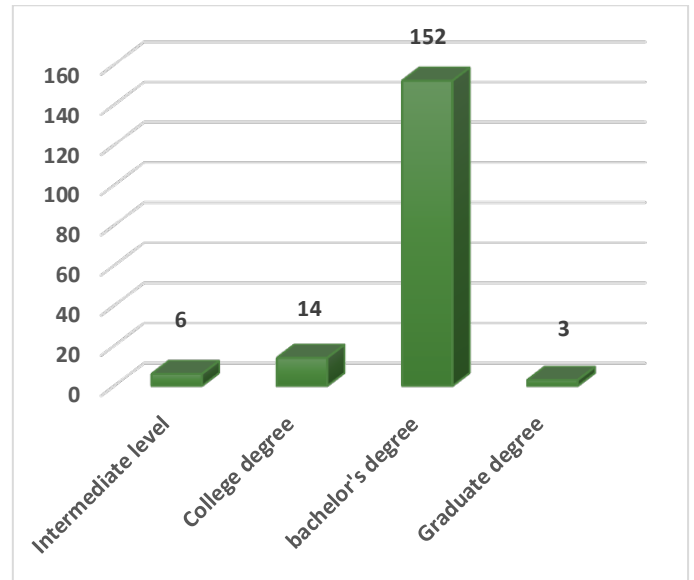
## 4 Result and Discussion

A descriptive statistic is a summary statistic that quantifies or summarizes features from a set of information, while descriptive statistics is the process of using and analyzing statistics. Descriptive statistics are distinguished from inferential statistics by their purpose of summarizing a sample rather than using data to learn about a population the data sample had thought to be representative. This factor usually means that, unlike inferential statistics, descriptive statistics are not developed based on probability theory and are usually non-parametric. When data analysis draws key conclusions using inferential statistics, descriptive statistics had presented.

Some commonly used measures to describe a data set are measures of central tendency and measures of variation or dispersion. Measures of central tendency include mean, median, and mode, while measures of variability include standard deviation or variance, minimum and maximum values of the variables.



**Figure 1:** Descriptive statistical analysis for managers' experience.



**Figure 2:** Descriptive statistical analysis for managers' qualification.

Figure 1 shows that 175 business managers gave reasonable answers from 200 people, of which business management experience under five years accounted for 16.0%, corresponding to 28 people, followed by management experience from 5 years to 10 years accounted for a relatively high rate of 53.7%, equivalent to 94 people. Besides, management experience from 11 years to 15 years accounted for 25.7%, respectively 45 people and lastly, over 15 years of business management accounted for the lowest, 4.6%. Thus, business management experience from 5 to 15 years accounts for more than 70.0%.

Figure 2 shows that 175 business managers gave reasonable answers to 200 people. The enterprise director with intermediate level accounts for 3.4%, corresponding to 6 people, followed by the business director having a college degree accounts for 8.0%, reaching 14 people. Besides, business managers with university degrees accounted for the highest proportion of 86.9%, equivalent to 152 people, and finally, business managers with graduate degrees accounted for the lowest, 1.7 percent. Thus, business managers with college and university degrees accounted for more than 90.0%.

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistical analysis for leadership capacity

Contents	References	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Capacity building vision and strategy	(Leitch et al., 2013)	1.00	5.00	3.394	0.999
Enhance capacity to initiate change	(Musa & Chinniah, 2016)	1.00	5.00	3.040	1.047
Improve team development capacity	(Uchenwangbe, 2013; Arham, 2014)	1.00	5.00	3.297	0.905
Improve the capacity to mobilize and coordinate resources	(Rodriguez-Gutierrez et al., 2015)	1.00	5.00	3.171	0.991
Improve the capacity to motivate employees	(Lobo et al., 2016; Ojokuku et al., 2012)	1.00	5.00	3.166	0.960

Table 1 shows that the mean is close to 3.0, and the standard deviation is around 1.0. This result is the basis for suggesting governance implications. Based on methods and approaches to assess leadership capacity, current research on leadership often follows two fundamental trends. It is the study of leadership capacity in the direction of knowledge - skills - qualities/behaviors/attitudes of leaders; and the second trend towards the approach to components, also known as sub-competencies. If overseas studies on leadership are incredibly diverse, this topic has and will still have many gaps for research.

Through the survey of managers and mid-level managers of small and medium enterprises in HCMC, the author has assessed the current situation of the current level of leadership responsiveness of this team. Besides, the group of managers of small and medium enterprises in HCMC has met quite well in industry knowledge in business. Business; sociocultural; legal politics; self-leadership; marketing, finance, accounting; service production management. Understanding of vision and strategy, change management - risk, and knowledge of corporate culture, social responsibility, information technology, and foreign languages. However, business managers still have few ideas.

Regarding leadership skills, the director of the business showed quite well his self-understanding skills, work-life balance skills; learning skills; problem-solving skills, leadership communication skills. However, both managers and subordinates assess those corporate managers have limited skills related to vision and strategy building activities, team development, resource mobilization, coordination, initiating activities change, and encouraging and encouraging. Improve employee motivational skills. The director of SMEs wants to use this skill to influence employees, motivate them to work actively, and achieve high efficiency for the common goal of the enterprise. The managers need to evaluate the capacity of employees. Employees, pointing out to employees their limitations in work.

Regarding leadership qualities, the director generally has a good level of satisfaction with risk-taking and flexibility and understanding, inclusivity, work ethic, and confidence. Besides, the two qualities of small and medium enterprises managers have still limited: foresight and innovative thinking. Research results have also shown that in different groups of business sizes, types of businesses, and business fields, the leadership capacity of business managers is also other.

The director of SME needs to participate in training courses, seminars, and seminars organized by the Association of SMEs in the province, participate in programs of organizations that support consulting and training related to such matters as: managing change in the organization; risk management; leading change; methods of managing change in the organization. In addition, the director also needs to be equipped with knowledge about international integration: understand the nature, content, forms, and properties of global integration; understand the necessity and consequences of international integration as a significant trend in the modern world. SME managers can self-study and read more reference books written on change management, information in the era of international economic integration, and learn the successful change

management methods of successful leaders and entrepreneurs globally. Know how to seize opportunities and create competitive advantages; grasp and apply knowledge to build optimal strategies for businesses. Learn how to deploy the process to each unit to ensure effectiveness, evaluate the results and effectiveness of the plan, and adjust the design to adapt to changing business conditions.

Understand the contents and principles of employee training and development activities in human resource management, such as the "Managing People" training program. SME managers need to raise their awareness of their role in human resource development activities and spend appropriate time and resources to invest in this activity. Enterprise managers need to attend training courses, seminars, exchanges, join associations to enhance understanding and update human resource development. Managers of SMEs can also learn, refer to and learn more experiences and models of employee capacity development in the world. SME managers need to practice team building and development skills, setting goals, defining actions, strategies, and specific time frames for employee training and development. Employee assessment skills, helping the director to assess the strengths and weaknesses in the employee's learning and working efforts. Skills to train, develop and guide employees to acquire more knowledge and skills; select the appropriate training courses to meet the staff development needs. In addition, the director needs to orient employees to review the work to understand the employee's capacity, creating conditions for employees to develop themselves.

SME managers need to improve their knowledge of corporate governance in general; comprehensively understand and grasp human resources, finance, production, information, marketing, and administration issues. To obtain such comprehensive knowledge, business managers need to participate in business administration training programs at intermediate schools, colleges, and universities in non-focused training courses. Through the practice, SME managers can improve their understanding of SME governance; have the opportunity to exchange with colleagues and lecturers with long experience in business administration and finance; expand opportunities to interact with other businesses. Learn from successful examples. Having general knowledge of human resource factors in such an enterprise can help SME managers improve their ability to mobilize and coordinate their resources. The author finds that in the scope of the ability to mobilize and coordinate these resources, the managers of SMEs face the most problems with factors such as capital, finance, machinery and technology, and the market.

Regarding knowledge related to employee motivation: SME managers need to attend training courses for SME leaders on topics such as organizational behavior and work motivation. , method of motivating employees. SME managers need to use effective motivational measures to help employees' self-discipline and effort to perform work, thereby building loyalty, dedication, and desire follow the manager. The methods to motivate employees are the design method, redefining work; practical ways of encouragement, support, feedback, and praise; job rotation method; staff development methods; fundamental values-oriented approach.



To improve the leadership capacity of the director of small and medium enterprises in HCMC in the coming time, the business director himself needs to focus on groups of solutions. To improve the capacity of vision building and strategy formulation; ability to initiate change; team development capacity; mobilizing and coordinating resources, and capacity for mobilizing - encouraging. In addition, the proposal of some recommendations on the part of the State and relevant departments; Recommendations from the government, associations, and relevant agencies of the provinces will also contribute to developing the leadership capacity of managers of small and medium enterprises in the region.

To improve the skills of building a vision and making a strategy for the business, the SME director needs to meet the requirements of thinking skills, strategic planning skills, forecasting skills, and judgment skills. Besides, qualities are related to building vision and business strategy. Leaders must be ambitious, always looking to a bright future for their business. Having foresight helps the SME director to be able to recognize essential changes in the company that will happen in the future, or to predict when transitions will occur accurately. From there, you will build the most effective strategies for your business.

## 5 Conclusion

For SME managers, all three factors that constitute leadership capacity, knowledge, and skills had been discussed. Research results of 175 SME managers in HCMC show research data on leadership capacity. The results show that the leadership capacity and the actual situation of the SME managers' leadership capacity had analyzed through descriptive statistics.

Regarding leadership knowledge, the director of SMEs in general, through his assessment and the assessment of middle managers, has met well with knowledge of the industry, culture - society, politics and law, and personal leadership. Some knowledge is quite good, such as marketing, finance, production and service management, and international integration. However, the results also show that in terms of the current level of responsiveness in leadership knowledge, the SME managers still have a limited understanding of strategy, change management knowledge, culture knowledge, entrepreneurship, and social responsibility.

For leadership skills, statistical results show that, in general, most SME managers have met quite well the skills of self-understanding, work-life balance skills, learning skills, problem-solving, leadership communication, encouragement, team leadership, and organizational and implementation skills. However, a proportion of SME managers still do not have a good level of performance and response to these skills. A low educational background and lack of training to become leaders formally and professionally lead to the fact that business leaders in Vietnam are currently. Today, they lack many skills to lead and run a business well. This result partly reflects the general leadership capacity of Vietnamese enterprises' current team of managers. Common skills that most managers lack skills. Do not have but have not yet turned into technical skills such as decision-making skills, communication skills, foreign language skills, planning skills, strategy, leadership skills, management skills, delegation skills.

About leadership qualities/behavior: Many economic research experts have identified the necessary attributes for a business leader to be: passion, understanding and curiosity, foresight, creativity, talent, skill, courage, willingness to take risks, great talent. However, due to a low starting point in our country, many SME managers lack an entrepreneur business leader's essential qualities and qualities. In that general situation, the assessment results of the current condition of meeting leadership qualities of the director of HCMC SMEs show that foresight, innovation, and creative thinking are two limited qualities. Through investigation, the main reason is that SME managers are still limited in their ability to build visions and strategies.

## 6 Availability of Data and Material

Data can be made available by contacting the corresponding author.

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