



**LEARNING TO LEAD AND STRATEGIC DECISION MAKING IN
SHARED LEADERSHIP ORGANISATIONS: CHALLENGES AND
PROSPECTS FOR START-UPS SMES' IN MALAYSIA**

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ABSTRACT

Durratulain Abd Razak

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The literature shows that shared leadership practice enhances the leaders' leadership skills and abilities through the leaders' collaboration and efforts. The objectives of the study are to understand the shared leadership within high growth SME startups in Malaysia, cover the leadership practice itself, the shared leaders' learning to lead process and its strategic decision-making process. Six case studies were involved in data collection procedure and data were gathered by conducting 25 in-depth interviews with high growth SME leaders and employees.

The study shows empirical evidence that the shared leadership practice has enhanced the leaders' leadership skills and capabilities through the leaders' teamwork and knowledge collaboration within the complex nature of the organization. There are three interesting emerging themes from the study findings that give a different perspective on the literature of shared leadership practice including early delegation of administrative team, friendship element as a basis for shared leadership team set up and additional leaders to the existing shared leadership team.

The main contribution of this study to the social sciences field is the acquisition of a better understanding of the shared leadership process in high growth startups, as there is a shortage of studies conducted on this area. Thus, it gives a better comprehension of the shared leadership advantages to leadership development and positive organizational performance. The findings of the study highlight the existence of conflicts in shared leadership implementation. Finally, this research brings theoretical and methodological contributions as well as offering implications for business leaders, government agencies and policymakers. This study is limited to Malaysia's business environment. Further research should be done on different settings, sectors, countries to examine shared leadership practice.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any institution or university. The thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been acknowledged accordingly. I also declare that this thesis has not been previously or simultaneously submitted, either partially or wholly, for any other qualification at any university or institution.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AIM-	Alternative Investment Market
ASEAN-	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
B-	Billion (b)
BioTechCorp-	Malaysian Biotechnology Corporation
BOD-	Board of Directors
CEO-	Chief Executive Officer
CFO-	Chief Financial Officer
COO-	Chief Operation Officer
CTO-	Chief Technical Officer
FELCRA-	Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority
FELDA-	Federal Land Development Authority
FFM-	Five Forces Model
GDP-	Gross Domestic Product
LSE-	London Stock Exchange
M-	Million (m)
MOSTI-	Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation
NBP-	National Biotechnology Plan
NSDC-	National SME Development Council
PEST analysis-	Political, Economic, Social and Technological
R&D-	Research and Development activities
RM-	Ringgit Malaysia
SDM-	Strategic Decision- Making process
SME-	Small and Medium Enterprises
SWOT-	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

1.1 Introduction

In today's complex and dynamic environment that surrounds the business world, organizations are taking more contemporary leadership approaches in order to stay competitive (Friedrich et al., 2009; Kocolowski, 2010). In early leadership studies, a 'solo hero' leadership style has been the centre of discussion among scholars (Bass, 1990). One of the popular individual leadership styles is directive leadership.

Directive leadership requires leaders to demonstrate authority by showing direction to subordinates in terms of organizational expectation, rules and procedures they need to follow (House, 1996). It also involves close scheduling and monitoring. In the early stages of a new venture, there is a need for directive behaviour by the founder or leader. This is supported by (Stokes and Wilson, 2006) where the authors concluded that smaller firms (with employees less than 5) favour an autocratic leadership style. This approach to management gives clear direction to employees on organizational goals. This is a crucial step due to the nature of new ventures, which are often related to the lack of formality in management and unclear rules (House and Mitchell, 1974).

Later, the organization will experience a business life cycle starting from its birth (or the start-up stage) and going through different phases (Greiner, 1972). In general, researchers agreed that organizations have different levels of growth (Wiklund et al., 2009). Growth is a dynamic process and means more than just an increase in size. The process involves development and changes within the organization. It also involves changes in the way the organization interacts with its external environment (Gupta and Chin, 1993).

For a fast-growing industry such as technology-based businesses, growth periods are rather brief (Phelps et al., 2007). The impact of growth on smaller and younger businesses is more significant in comparison to older and mature organizations (Macpherson, 2005). When small ventures grow rapidly, leadership crises could emerge (Wiklund et al., 2009). It is crucial for leaders to tackle it properly. This view is agreed by (Cope et al., 2011), based on their observation that businesses which are formed as entrepreneurial teams

from the beginning do not experience a crisis of leadership. Once the business grows, only then will a leadership crisis emerge.

Being leaders of a new business and taking on the leadership role while running other administration tasks is a huge challenge. This is especially true when they have little or no background and hands on experience in running an organization prior to the start-up. Leaders face a daunting challenge during a growth period as they are bombarded with such huge responsibilities (Scheer, 2009). It is unlikely for entrepreneurs to take on all leadership responsibilities by themselves once the business starts to grow rapidly (Ensley et al., 2003). Delegation of responsibilities helps to ease the leadership crisis either by hiring functional managers (Greiner, 1998) or by having extra leaders join the current team leaders (Avolio, 2009).

By being small new ventures, there is the possibility that the organizations might have a leader or a group of leaders to start with. As a firm evolves and grows, changes should be made to leadership styles and capabilities in the organization (Lester and Parnell, 2008). This is the point where team-based leadership styles such as shared leadership or distributed leadership would be incorporated into the organization. There is a shift in leadership style from directive leadership to team-based leadership styles (Avolio et al., 2009). This current study focuses on the concept of shared leadership.

Shared leadership involves a process of leading each other within a group of individuals with the main objective of achieving group or organizational goals (Pearce et al., 2008a). Shared leadership gives the opportunity for leaders to lead each other (Avolio et al., 2009). This style of leadership provides the opportunity for leaders to enhance their leadership skills throughout the leadership practice. Since there is a lack of empirical evidence, (Pearce et al., 2008b) suggest that researchers should investigate empirically how shared leadership operates and test the practicality of the theory within organizations.

Based on this notion, this current study investigates the process of how leaders of high growth SME start-up ventures learn to lead during the organization's growth phase, through the implementation of shared leadership. At the same time, explores the strategic decision- making process within this type of organization.

1.2 **Research Context: Malaysia**

The section explains the background of Malaysia and its Biotechnology sector in general and discusses the definition of SMEs from the Malaysian perspective.

1.2.1 **Background of Malaysia**

Malaysia is one of the ASEAN (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries and the nearest neighbouring countries are Thailand, Singapore, Brunei and Indonesia. It consists of thirteen states and three federal territories, Kuala Lumpur is the capital city. Putrajaya is the federal administrative centre of Malaysia. It is located in the Federal Territory of Putrajaya. Malaysia is divided into two regions separated by the South China Sea; Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia (Malaysia Borneo).

In the year of 1957, Malaysia got her independence from the Federation of Commonwealth. Earlier, Malaysia, previously known as Malaya, was being colonized by different powers in a different era: Portugal, Dutch, and the British Empire.

In 2016, Malaysia's population has reached over 30 million. The diversity of ethnicity, cultures and religions has made Malaysia a unique country due to her history of colonization that has taken place since 1511. The Malays are one of the largest ethnic group community in Malaysia and are known as the Bumiputras, who make up the majority of the Malaysian population at 50.4%. Followed by the other two majority ethnic group communities known as the Non-Bumiputras; Chinese and Indian. Bahasa Malaysia is the official language in Malaysia and English has been actively in use as the second language.

From an economic perspective, Malaysia is a newly industrialized market economy. Apart from manufacturing, these sectors play a significant role in generating the country's income: agriculture and tourism.

1.2.2 **Background of Small and Medium- Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia**

For the past two decades, the Malaysian government has initiated several development programs with the intention to support local Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to flourish because SMEs is one of the major sectors of Malaysian's engine of economic growth. In the international platform, small medium businesses are growing rapidly, yet have so far received insufficient attention especially in Malaysia. Due to its low productivity and poor performance, Malaysian SMEs face challenges in the global business environment and losing their competitive advantage (Tehseen et al., 2015).

There are several government organizations involve directly to support SMEs ventures in Malaysia such as Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), Malaysian Industrial Development Association (MIDA), Small and Medium Industries Development Corporation (SMIDEC) and Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation. These organizations have their own in helping Malaysian SMEs to develop and achieve in both local and international arena.

In July 2013, the Malaysian SMEs definition has been reviewed since there have been many developments in the economy by taking into account economic elements such as price inflation, change in business trends and structural changes. The endorsement of the new SME definition was done at the National SME Development Council (NSDC)¹ meeting. The new SME definition came into effect since 1 January, 2014. Table 1 below represents the simplified version of the new SME definition:

¹ NSDC is appointed as the highest authority to bring forward the national policy on the Malaysian SME development.

Table 1: Malaysia SME definition (Revised 2014)

Category	Sales
Manufacturing	Sales turnover not exceeding RM50 million <u>OR</u> full- time employees not exceeding 200 workers
Services and other sectors	Sales turnover not exceeding RM20 million <u>OR</u> full- time employees not exceeding 75 workers

Source: SME Corp. Malaysia (2013)

Table 2: SME definition by Size of Operation

Category	Small	Medium
Manufacturing	Sales turnover from RM300,000 to less than RM15 million <u>OR</u> full- time employees from 5 to less than 75	Sales turnover from RM15 million to not exceeding RM50 million <u>OR</u> full- time employees from 75 to not exceeding 200
Services & Other Sources	Sales turnover from RM300,000 to less than RM3 million <u>OR</u> full- time employees from 5 to less than 30	Sales turnover from RM3 million to not exceeding RM20 million <u>OR</u> full- time employees from 30 to not exceeding 75

Source: SME Corp. Malaysia (2013)

Based on the NSDC classification of sectors p: 2, manufacturing is defined as “physical or chemical transformation of materials or components into new products”. Definition for services cover all services including hotels and restaurants, distributive trade, business, private education and health etc.; and manufacturing related services such as research and

development (R&D), engineering, logistics etc. While others represent three key economic activities which are primary agriculture, mining and quarrying, and construction. Table 2 shows summary of SME definition by size of operation:

1.2.3 **Biotechnology Sector in Malaysia**

Generally, the biotechnology industry in Malaysia is dominated by small-to- medium-sized companies which give priority on R&D activities for their respective crops and concentration on the know how knowledge. Since two decades ago, Malaysia is actively building up its Biotechnology sector to generate national income through the utilization of its rich resources and human resources. Biotechnology Master Plan was established in 2005 in the context of the National Biotechnology Policy (NBP).

The fifteen- year plan is created in parallel with the country vision onto becoming a knowledge- based economy. The comprehensive framework serves as a guideline for national biotechnology development efforts. The integrated framework covers industry development, comprehensive set of goals, strategies and priorities. Over the past twelve years, the industry has showed a strong base and has successfully put Malaysia's biotechnology cluster among the top clusters in the Asia Pacific region. By the year 2020, it is expected that the industry will generate annual revenue of Euro 25 Billion (RM100 billion) (Corporation 2011).

The government takes the plan seriously through the establishment of three National Biotechnology Institutes. The main objectives of the establishment are to provide support and to ensure the success of the biotechnology sector. The institutes include the Malaysia Agro-Biotechnology Institute, Malaysia Institute of Pharmaceuticals and Nutraceuticals, and the Malaysia Genome Institute. Another serious measure taken by the government is to set up a special division; The National Biotechnology Division under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI). The main activities involve under this division are Research & Development, Technology Development, and promotion of Biotechnology programs. In order to execute the objectives of the NBP, an agency under the MOSTI was set up in 2005. The Malaysian Biotechnology Corporation (BiotechCorp)

holds crucial responsibilities in executing the objectives. BioNexus program is one of the initiative executed by BiotechCorp for the local biotech start-ups in order to materialize the national NBP. Table 3 shows the summary of the Malaysia Biotech Master Plan (2006- 2020).

Table 3: The Biotech Master Plan (2006 – 2020)

Indicators	Phase I 2006-2010 Capacity Building	Actual Achievement for Phase 1	Phase II 2011-2015 Science to Business	Phase III 2016-2020 Global Business
Investment by private sector and government	USD 1.7b	USD 1.7b	USD 2.6b	USD 4.3b
Total employment	40,000	54,776	80,000	160,000
Contribution through GDP	2.5%	2.2%	4.0%	5.0%

Source: Malaysian Biotechnology Corporation (BiotechCorp) – Malaysian, Biotechnology Country Report 2009/2010 Malaysian Biotechnology Corporation Score Card Report (October 2011).

The biotechnology sector is classified into three major areas: 1. Agriculture Biotechnology (Green Biotechnology) and the Target Sectors; 2. Healthcare Biotechnology (Red Biotechnology); and 3. Industrial Biotechnology (White). The BioNexus status companies can enjoy several privileges under the Bill of Guarantees, which main intentions to flourish and aids these companies to be successful.

Hence, this study intents to fill this gap by investigating the concept of shared leadership practice of SMEs in Malaysia in Biotechnology sector within these three topics; growth, leaders' learning to lead and strategic decision making process.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

Over the past century, the topic of leadership has captured a lot of interest from social science researchers. Complex and rapid changes which surround current organizations have forced a shift from classical to more contemporary approaches in leadership (Hersey and Blanchard 1988; Avolio et al. 2009; Derue et al. 2011). Collectively, various studies have brought knowledge and contribution towards better understanding of this complex phenomenon. The field of leadership is no longer a standalone topic. Throughout the years, it has progressed to become a broader concept in organizational studies (Avolio et al., 2009).

Many modern organizations nowadays are willing to include multiple leaders and encourage participative behaviour from subordinates in order to effectively deal with the demands of business (Avolio et al., 2009). This trend is seen as one of the alternative method to handle challenges during the crisis of leadership (Fitzsimons et al., 2011). Still the question remains as to why these organizations have to look for this type of leadership as an alternative to traditional approach to leadership? Another question is why do some organizations choose to stick with the traditional style of leadership regardless of all challenges that they faced?

Based on the evidence from the literature in Chapter 2, it can be concluded that once the organization experiences growth, limitation in terms of resources will surely surface. Moreover, the lack of experience and skills from the business founders or the entrepreneurs in leading a bigger organization will cause the business to be stagnant and in worst case be shut down. This is where human resource becomes an effective tool of intervention to ensure that the business will grow steadily.

When businesses start to experience growth in size, eventually there will be an increase in the number of employees and sales. According to Hatten, (2006) when the business experiences these scenarios, the way it is lead should also be changed. This step is taken to ensure that the leaders can give priority to the leading aspects which is more important in guiding the organization to achieve its goals.

(Ensley et al., 2006a) suggest that leaders especially in new ventures have to adapt to the environmental conditions surrounding their firms. They also believe that it is really vital

to understand the link between performance and the choice of leadership behaviour. Both are crucial factors that have an impact on the survival and performance of new ventures. This is due to the fact that leadership behaviour within the team leaders in small businesses has a great and direct impact on the business performance compared to larger and more established organizations (Ensley et al., 2006b).

Hence, shared leadership is seen as one of the best leadership alternatives to the growing organizations. Shared leadership gained its reputation when it becomes a preferred leadership approach due to its positive outcomes to an organisation. Among the advantages are the influential impact on team dynamics and team performance (Pearce and Ensley, 2004), positive growth in the overall performance of new ventures (Ensley et al. 2006).

Although the attention received, research in shared leadership is still active and needs further empirical investigation, especially in the sector of high technology startups. Pearce et al. (2008b) suggested that researchers should investigate empirically how shared leadership operates and test the practicality of the theory within organisations. Next is the area of leader learn to become better leaders. Constant changes and uncertainty exist in the business world. Leaders are expected to keep up with these scenarios if they want their organisations to stay competitive and successful. Therefore, leaders are required to have excellent leadership skill and continuously acquire business knowledge to become outstanding leaders.

According to shared leadership scholars, leadership learning aspect of business leaders from the shared leadership perspective, there are several approaches available for leaders of SME ventures to develop and upgrade their leadership skills (Corbett, 2005; Cope, 2005; Houvinen and Tihula, 2008).

In term of the strategic decision- making process, a recent study by Wu and Cormican (2016) reported that the fast decision-making process in shared leadership supports the necessary environment for innovation to occur. It is apparent from the above studies, and

shared leadership delivers a positive impact on the organisational decision-making process, especially to high growth organisations.

Based on the discussion on the related literature above, this study aims to investigate the shared leadership practice in high growth SME startups in Malaysia. This exploratory study was undertaken to examine the concept of shared leadership practice in these three scopes; leaders' learning to lead process and strategic decision-making practice within high growth SME startups in Malaysia, specifically in the biotechnology sector.

Table 4: Summary of the current research objectives

Research Objective	Objective
Objective 1	<i>To explore shared leadership practise in high technology SME startups in Malaysia (biotechnology sector).</i>
Objective 2	<i>To investigate the leaders' learning to lead process in high technology SME startups in Malaysia (biotechnology sector).</i>
Objective 3	<i>To analyse the strategic decision- making process during the implementation of shared leadership within biotechnology SME startups in Malaysia.</i>

Source: Researcher

1.4 Thesis Plan

This thesis comprises of six chapters. **Chapter 1**, the introduction chapter, provides synopsis of the thesis that includes research context, the research aims and objectives, and significant of the study.

Chapter 2 discusses the review of the literature of the study that cover a brief history of leadership styles, shared leadership, growth factor and the conceptual framework.

Chapter 3 justifies the methodology employed for the study. Among the sections in the chapter; the research paradigm and philosophy, justifications for selection of the research paradigm, research design, data collection technique, data analysis and research credibility.

Chapter 4 presents the within- case analysis of the six cases. The analyses cover the shared leadership approach, leaders' learning to lead process and strategic decision-making process.

Chapter 5 is the continuation from Chapter 4 where it discusses the cross- case analysis of the research study.

Chapter 6 provides the conclusion of the thesis that refreshes the research objectives, summary and recommendations, research contributions and lastly the directions for future research.

1.5 The Significance of the Study

1.5.1 Theoretical

From a theoretical aspect, shared leadership is proposed to help high growth organizations to cope with the complexity of a business environment from a leadership context, in which a single leader has limitations in possessing a complete package of an excellent leader in terms of skills and abilities (Kocolowski M. D., 2010). The majority of the studies are

done within these two fields; healthcare and education industries. Within the business industry the studies are scarce especially on SME startup ventures, it has lots of potential areas to be explored.

1.5.2 Empirical Evidence (Malaysia)

The main contribution of this study to the leadership field is the acquisition of a better understanding of leadership process from the shared leadership perspective among the leaders of high growth biotechnology SME startups in Malaysia. This research study focuses on these three areas; the growth impact on shared leadership practice, the leaders' learning to lead process and the strategic decision- making process from the shared leadership perspective.

A qualitative approach is employed within this research study due to the richness of the information, this helps to understand further the phenomena of leadership from a leadership setting. It gives better understanding on the leadership process, the challenges, the implementation and the impact of growth within the selected samples. The current study gives better insights on the shared leadership practice within these case studies.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1 of the thesis explains the aims of the research study, research context, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 discusses the review of the literature of the current study, conclusion of the chapter and the conceptual framework of the study. Chapter 3 explains the methodology approach employed based on the research paradigm and philosophical context. Next, Chapter 4 analyses each case study within the research scopes: shared leadership approach, leaders' learning to lead and strategic decision-making process. In Chapter 5, the findings of the research study are discussed through the cross- case analysis. Lastly, Chapter 6 concludes the findings of the research study, the contributions and the limitations.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the literature extant of the current study. The literature review is constructed under eight headings: business life cycle and growth, leadership crisis, a brief history of leadership, styles of leadership, shift in style of leadership, leaders' learning to lead, SDM process and conceptual framework of the study.

2.2 Business Life Cycles and Growth

This section explains the dynamism and complexity of the business growth environment. Specifically, various business growth models will be reviewed. The business world is not in a stagnant condition. It is dynamic in the sense that the context of the environment changes and evolves as the firm develops throughout time (Bolden, 2011). In general, a business or an organization could be viewed as having its own life cycle, starting from its birth or the start-up stage and going through different stages or phases in its life (Greiner, 1972; Macpherson, 2005; Lester and Parnell, 2008).

One of the significance phases in business life cycle is growth (Lester and Parnell, 2008). Firms that are in growth phase operate in both dynamic and complex environments. It is complex because as growth takes place, new skills and expertise are required (Macpherson, 2005). Environmental dynamism can be defined as the external factors which are unexpected and can rapidly change within the industry such as number of industry employees, industry revenue, and industry research and development intensity (Hmieleski and Ensley, 2007). It is a big challenge for leaders of the enterprises to make sure that the business grows and remains profitable.

2.2.1 Business Growth

Growth is a dynamic process and means more than just an increase in size. The process involves development and changes within the organization (Wiklund et al. 2009). The size of an organization changes dramatically as they move through the life cycle stages.

Growth also involves changes in the way the organization interacts with its external environment (Gupta and Chin, 1993).

Appropriate models for small and large organizations can help to explain the changes in organizational structure and behaviour. Those models explain the impact of an organization's growth process on leadership. This is especially true for new start-ups. The evolving processes have an effect on business performance and in each and every turning point, problems and crisis have to be managed effectively (Harrison et al., 1996; Wendt et al., 2009). Therefore, the key to survival is to constantly monitor the growth and development of ventures from many different aspects such as human resources and strategic position. For this current study, focus is on the leadership aspects within the Malaysian Biotechnology SMEs start-ups.

2.2.2 Business Life Cycle Models

This section discusses three different growth models with each model having different aspects to them. The models are the Greiner growth model, Churchill and Lewis growth model and tipping point theory. These three models discuss growth and its impact on the organization, especially on the leadership styles.

Among the most discussed growth model is the Greiner growth model (Macpherson, 2005). The 1972 model only covered five phases of growth and later, Larry E. Greiner added a sixth phase to his current growth model. The model explains phases that organizations experience as the business grows. Each growth phase is made up of a period of relatively stable growth. Crisis starts to emerge when major organizational changes occur in order for the company to carry on growing. The model indicates that the earliest crisis incurred during growth periods is the 'crisis of leadership' which he pointed out due to the impact of creativity. Greiner believed that there is a need for a change in leadership when the business has eventually reached a level of complexity.

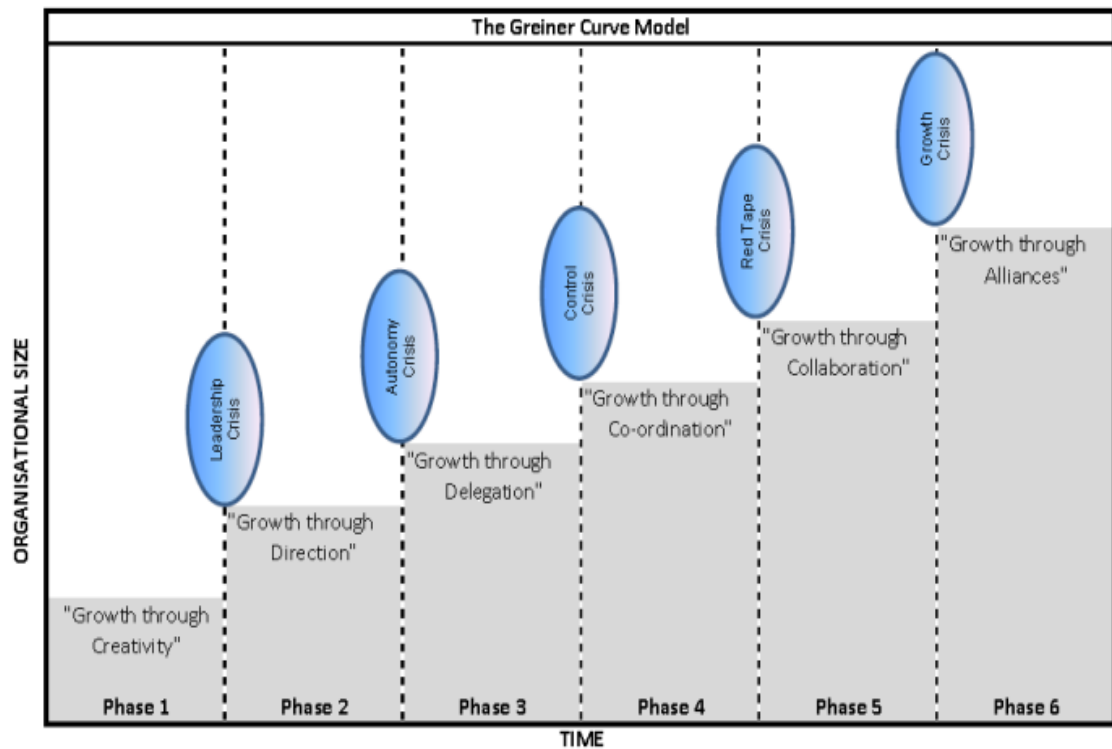


Figure 1: Greiner's Growth Model (1972, 1998)

There are several points that can be debated for this growth model. First, the assumption that this business growth model is applicable to all types of businesses can be debated. Overall, the Greiner's model is more suitable for large and mature organizations. The model indicates that organization experience relatively stable growth.

Furthermore, the model stresses that in order for the organization to grow, each point of crisis must be solved before moving to the next stage. One point needs to be emphasized is that not all businesses will face phases subsequently to the model. Indirectly, the model gives an indication that fail to deal with each crisis will hinder the organization growth. How about new small and high growth companies that might not experience all those five stages subsequently? Therefore, the model is not necessarily suitable for small and high growth type of organizations.

Next, Greiner did not thoroughly explain in detail about how this leadership crisis should be handled but he suggested appointing managers as a way of dealing with it. He indicated that the founders or the leaders of the companies are the experts in the technical area in which their focus is on product development. This scenario gives less opportunity for the

leaders to manage the companies effectively. By hiring managers, leaders are in better position to lead the companies efficiently whereby the managerial parts are dealt effectively by the newly appointed managers.

On the other hand, the model can be used as a guideline for new start-ups in terms of the growth phase in which a leadership crisis might emerge during this first life cycle stage. Greiner tried to raise the issue of delegation during the first and the third stage. His suggestion was to hire managers in order for the current leaders to lead effectively. But his theory did not mention anything on co-leading the organization. The model specifically instructed that the delegation act should be done during the autonomy crisis. There is a possibility that the action can be implemented earlier or later based on the specific needs of an organization. The Greiner's model can be considered a bit tight and restricted due to the specifically instructed growth phases crisis

Alternatively, it can be done by having new leaders to share or to distribute the leadership responsibilities. For instance, in areas where the leaders lack the skills and knowledge (such as business development), the new team leaders would attend to this matter while the other leaders focus on their area of expertise (such as research and development).

Meanwhile, Churchill and Lewis's growth model is more practical for small and young businesses. The model also has five stages which have some similarity with that proposed by Greiner. But (Churchill and Lewis, 1983) gave more emphasis on start-up phases involving activities in rising business funding and product delivery. The model points out, the start-up phase is defined as the inception and survival stages of the firm, and the transition to the growth phase is signified by the emergence of a clear growth strategy, followed by consecutive years of rapid growth (Churchill and Lewis, 1983).

At one point of the early phase, where an organization experiences a leadership crisis, capital can be depleted, and going for public funding can be seen as a sudden and rapid growth. Inevitably, there will be a drastic change in leadership approach whereby non-founder leaders would come in and get involved in the organizational leadership. At the same time, owners have to match the needed skills with given circumstances. The theory also suggests that during 'leadership crisis', the founders should give up control by

delegating some of the authority and responsibility to others in order to allow the business to grow.

There are few points that can be highlighted from Churchill and Lewis growth model. First, this growth model is also applicable to high- technology start-ups. In fast-growing industry such as technology based businesses, growth periods are rather brief (Lester and Parnell, 2008). Next, Churchill and Lewis's model suggests that delegation of authority is required during the leadership crisis. There are a few options for the owners. First, which is similar to Greiner's model is by hiring functional managers. Another suggestion is by inviting new leaders into the ventures and distribute the responsibilities among leaders. The latter reflects the existence of shared or distributed leadership indirectly. Similar to Greiner's, Churchill and Lewis did not give specific indication on when is the perfect time to start the delegation process. The two growth models discussed thus far lays the foundation for the discussion of business life cycle.

The impact of growth on smaller and younger businesses is more significant in comparison to older and mature organizations. But as we shall see later on in this section, some researchers argue that this approach of business life cycle model cannot be implemented generally to all businesses due to different nature of the business, size of the organization and other factors (Phelps et al., 2007).

Based on those circumstances, Phelps et al. (2007) suggested that there are a set of key issues that all growing firms have to face at some point during the growth process. The model uses a totally different approach from the conventional linear models. These important issues are known as tipping points. The findings are based on the absorptive capacity concept introduced by Cohen and Levintal (1990), growth models by both Greiner (1972) as well as Churchill and Lewis (1983).

The tipping points are people management, strategic orientation, formalized systems, obtaining finance, new market entry and operational improvement. In order to continue growing, firms must effectively tackle problems encountered throughout its tipping points. The theory highlights the need for organizations to change its structure and context of management especially in leadership parallel to its organizational evolution. As was discussed earlier by other growth models (Greiner, 1972, Churchill and Lewis, 1983),

leadership crisis demands that leaders of the organizations change their approach to leadership.

On the other hands, Wiklund et al (2009) took a different approach. They proposed a broad integrative model of small firm growth to appraise different aspects that are important to business growth. These aspects include entrepreneurial orientation, environment, strategic fit, resources and growth attitude. Their approaches are rather proactive where the owners or the leaders have a general idea of what awaits their businesses during the growth process.

Overall, various growth models of a firm or organization discussed earlier indicate that business organization face different crisis at certain point of their life cycle. There are general characteristics that most small organizations will experience ; they will have a start-up stage, then an expansion process (Churchill and Lewis, 1983). Subsequently, it will reach a maturity stage which could lead to diversification and thereafter a declining stage at a certain point. But, Lester and Parnell (2008) believe that all organizations can be described by just one life cycle model which could be utilized as a transition guide by managers who recognize that their decisions determine life cycle stages. In general, researchers agree that organizations have different levels of growth (Wiklund et al., 2009).

From the literature, it is deduced that organizations experience a series of crisis throughout its life span which includes a leadership crisis. Based on this knowledge, entrepreneurs and leaders must always be prepared to change and adapt accordingly (Burns, 2007). Every organization experiences several stages throughout its life time. Every phase occurs due to organizational and business environment change. Different stages have various set of problems. This is due to continuous and unpredictable changes occurring throughout the business life cycle. The dynamic and complex nature of the business growth environment gives challenges to leaders per se and, in particular new high technology start-ups. It is impossible to say that these organizations experience growth equally and at regular pace. It was argued that there isn't a universal growth model which fits every organization. Different size organizations are suited to a certain growth model.

This study links concept from life cycle models of firm development to shared leadership practice within the high technology- based SMEs start-ups. The aim of the study is to explore the leadership implementation within this type of organization in relation to growth factor. From the literature, it can be concluded that growth has impact on leadership within an organization. These models point out that leadership crisis happens when organizations grow. It will be argued that the leadership aspect of the organizations requires changes when they are experiencing growth. Therefore, organizations must take prompt action whenever a crisis occurs (Thorpe et al., 2011), especially the leadership aspect of the organizations. This action is taken to ensure that the business will survive to the next stage of the business cycle.

2.3 Leadership Crisis

In the earlier section, discussion on the selected business growth models indicated that business organizations experience leadership crisis during its growth process. There is a need for the owners and the entrepreneurs to attend to this matter meticulously for the survival and prosperity of the businesses (Martinez, 2009).

Many scholars agree that human capital plays a major role in the performance of any organization (Shepherd and Wiklund, 2005; Northouse, 2007; Bridge et al., 2009). As human capital is the organization's main resource and holds the key to achieving the organization's goals and objectives. Especially during the growth phase, small businesses need to address certain aspects including leaders' attitude towards goals, tasks and consequences of growth (Wiklund et al., 2009).

The main interest of this study is to investigate shared leadership practice the high technology SME start-ups. It means the subjects of the investigation are the leaders and the founders of the small businesses. It would be interesting to look at leadership challenges that these organizations face during the growth phase. These types of organizations might not have a formal management structure in contrast to the established organizations (Lester and Parnell, 2008). These new organizations might have limited resources (Bridge et al., 2009), such as having a small number of employees or having the founders as the only employees in the organization.

Being the only leader or being a small group of leaders of a new business and simultaneously taking on the leadership role while running other administration tasks is a huge challenge for entrepreneurs. This is especially true when they have little or no background and hands on experience in running an organization prior to the start-up (Stokes et al., 2010).

Founders face a demanding challenge during a growth period as they are bombarded with such huge responsibilities (Scheer, 2009). It is a huge task for entrepreneurs to take on all leadership responsibilities by themselves once the business starts to grow rapidly (Ensley et al., 2003; Wiklund et al., 2009). They should focus on the leading aspects rather than the managerial aspects of the organization. By prioritizing the leading aspects, these founders and leaders help in preparing themselves to be effective leaders. This step will ensure that their organizations are on the right track to success.

In the next section, a discussion on the characteristics of an entrepreneurial leader is crucial in order to make a distinction on the criteria of entrepreneurial leaders from functional managers.

2.3.1 Entrepreneurs as Leaders

This section discusses the leadership concept from an entrepreneurial perspective in new ventures. Entrepreneurship is highly related to leadership in the business sense. They are so interrelated and yet different in certain ways that it would be almost impossible to study one without considering the other.

Wickham (2001) included three important elements in his entrepreneur's definition with the intention to make a clear distinction between entrepreneur and other types of business people such as investors and 'general' managers. Those elements are personality aspects, economic perspective and activities involvement of an entrepreneur. His definition of an entrepreneur covers these three important aspects as a reflection of the variety of definitions available within the entrepreneurship field.

Meanwhile, Vecchio (2003) studied five different elements that make entrepreneurs stand out from general managers where the focal point is on personality traits. These elements are known as the "Big Five" and were made famous by (Begley, 1995). The elements

include risk taking propensity, need for achievement, need for autonomy, self- efficacy and locus of control.

Other researchers like (Hatten, 2006), summarizes entrepreneur definition by grouping entrepreneur activities into five different set of behaviours which are creation, innovation, risk assumption, general management and performance intention. Begley (1995) definition of entrepreneurs is clearly listing down certain criteria such as being a company founder, running a young company, and running or desiring to run a high growth company.

Some authors give a different title to leaders or founders of a business by calling them 'entrepreneurial leaders' (Harrison et al., 1996) or 'leaders of enterprise'. Indirectly it gives an indication that they are leaders of their own organizations. There is a huge difference between 'self-made' entrepreneurs of small businesses and managers of established and matured businesses (Hatten, 2006). Leaders from high-growth and middle size businesses are better known as 'professional entrepreneurs' as they are well-equipped with skills, experience and professionalism acquired from previous organizations. The exposure, training, skills and experience has made them more than ready to deal with the complexity and challenges of the business world (Harrison et al., 1996).

However, the lack of exposure and skills do not hinder self- made entrepreneurs from giving an absolute performance in bringing up their organizations. Most self- made entrepreneurs (especially those without having prior attachment to the corporate world) have the passion and are highly motivated to run their businesses. They will eventually pick up the business and leadership skills based in the later stage from hands-on experience (Scheer, 2009). It can be assumed that individuals learn entrepreneurial abilities through directly performing the roles and tasks associated with starting-up and leading entrepreneurial activities (Kempster and Cope, 2010).

Entrepreneurs in the early stage of a new venture as an all-rounder and a multi-tasking person due to limitation of resources, founders have to take multiple tasks (Kempster and Cope 2010). Apart from being leaders to their organization, they also have to perform almost all management. Implicitly, this statement gives an indication that founders have

at least the leadership abilities prior to the set –up phase. This scenario might exist due to the small number of employees available to share the tasks.

Another characteristic that differentiate functional managers from entrepreneurial leaders are the founders of the companies are also the leaders of their organizations (Hmieleski and Ensley, 2007) . This gives founders a strong access to daily operations of the organization and therefore implicitly holds the responsibility of a leader from the outset. They are involved in developing the companies from scratch and play active roles in strategic decision of the companies too. During this period, there are no formal procedures and organizational structure to follow.

Hence as the literature illustrates, a conclusion can be made that an entrepreneur is a person who acts as an economy agent that is equipped with a series of positive traits, equipped with high drive and motivation for the success that makes them distinct from general managers. Their behaviour and motivation for success plays an essential role in the business because the main objective is to bring profit and ensure survival to their businesses.

The next section will discuss leadership from the aspect of definition and the transition from heroic leadership to team-based leadership styles.

2.4 A Brief History of Leadership

In this section, various definitions of leadership will be stated to illustrate the many interpretations of this topic by diverse groups. The study will then look at the different approaches to the study of leadership from directive style to team-based style of leadership. To close this section, a conclusion from the gathered literature will be given.

2.4.1 Definition of Leadership

Though there is no ultimate or definite definition of leadership available, there is however an evolution towards interpreting the term (Avery, 2004; Winston and Patterson, 2006; Northouse, 2007). Most scholars agree on this definition issue. There are various definitions of leadership in social sciences and some scholars have focused the definitions

only on certain variables which are within their field of interest (Avery, 2004; Winston and Patterson, 2006).

Definition given by Campbell (2000) stated that leadership involves process of influencing among members in organization in order to achieve main organizational goal. Another example of leadership definition is from (Hersey and Blanchard, 1988), they have developed a special formula to sum up the leadership process. Their equation emphasizes on three important aspects that give meaning to leadership process. Those three factors include leader, group members and other situational variables.

Their work has been referred by many researchers and authors (Kouzes and Posner, 1995; Dubrin, 2001; Avery, 2004). Yet another definition by (Kouzes and Posner, 1995) depicts leadership as a process of organizing human resources within organization with main intention is to achieve shared goals. Though, there are many versions to leadership definition within the science social fields.

Based on the definitions earlier, it can be said that leadership requires a process of influencing others within the organizations in achieving the organisational goals. But at the same time leaders must not ignore other situational variables that they need to address, for instance business environment changes, growth and constraint in resources. In order to deal with these challenges, leaders have to gear up resources that they have.

2.5 Styles of Leadership

This section discusses the four different styles of leadership which are directive, integrated, distributed and shared leadership. This topic will be classified those leadership styles into two categories; single type of leadership (directive leadership) and the later as the team- based styles of leadership. The main intention is to show the differences between these four leadership styles.

2.5.1 Directive Leadership

Directive leadership was initially introduced as part of the path- goal theory of leadership. It accounts for one of two leader behaviours (supportive behaviour) that can influence the satisfaction and increase performance of subordinates (House, 1971). The theory has

evolved and later two leader behaviours are included in its scope. They are participative leadership and achievement- oriented leadership (House and Mitchell, 1974). This theory of leadership puts forward the idea that leaders have to pick a leadership style which best accommodates the needs of subordinates and their nature of work.

Directive leaderships involve giving direction to subordinates of the organizational expectation, rules and procedures they need to follow, scheduling and coordinating their works too (House, 1996). Apart from that, directive leadership include task-oriented behaviour, dominant actions from the leaders during interaction and requires personally direct task completion (Cruz et al. 1999). Directive leadership requires commitment from leader to accentuate management activities such as planning, organizing and controlling (Dubrin 2001).

This style of leadership is suitable to exercise when task characteristics are ambiguous, the rules are unclear and complex (House and Mitchell, 1974). An example of this scenario is where subordinates are inexperienced and unclear about their work. It is suggested that in this scenario, directive leadership supports the subordinates by giving guidance and psychological structure which leads to positive outcomes. This type of leadership improves morale of subordinates when the task is vague and unclear.

There is a study done by (Hmieleski and Ensley, 2007) where focus was given on two different set of business environments have on leaders behaviour. Findings show that in dynamic industry environments, start-ups with heterogeneous top management teams were found to perform best when led by directive leaders and those with homogenous top management teams performed best when led by empowering leaders.

Conversely in stable industry environments, start-ups with heterogeneous top management teams were found to perform best when led by empowering leaders and those with homogenous top management teams performed best when led by directive leaders. These findings were consistent across both samples and demonstrate the value in a contextual approach to leadership. It considers adjusting leadership behaviour in accordance to factors that are both internal and external to the firm. The decision- making process adopted by these leaders will ensure that their organizations secure its opportunity since they have the ability to act quickly.

There are a few setbacks in practicing directive leadership in terms of autocratic behaviour. This is especially true when a leader monitors the team actions too closely or being too dominant during discussion and the decision making process (Burke et al., 2006). Another setback is the tendency of employees to be dependent on their leaders' actions; waiting for instructions and showing less initiative to take active roles in their tasks. Therefore, leaders have to instruct employees on how to accomplish their tasks and intense supervision by leaders is a must to ensure the desired outcomes are achieved (Wendt et al., 2009). The authors also highlighted that there is a negative correlation between directive leadership and team cohesiveness.

Another issue in asserting directive leadership is team cohesion. An important component towards effective organization is having good teamwork (Macdonald et al., 2006). Based on the nature of directive leadership, it would be really difficult for employees to have open communication with their leaders since every task given is strictly structured and they are being closely monitored. This might create uneasiness for employees to give direct feedback to their leaders. These arguments are supported by (Cruz et al., 1999). Their study indicates that there is a negative relation between directive leadership and open communication. It also results in a lack of unison within the group. In order to foster team cohesion, many managers are in favour of supportive behaviour rather than directive behaviour ((Wendt et al., 2009).

2.5.2 Team Based Styles of Leadership

In contrast to directive leadership which relies solely on a single leader and an autocratic style of approach, many organizations nowadays are happy to have a group of leaders to run their organizations (Amason et al., 2006; Hill, 2010).

Why can it be advantageous for organizations to implement this style of leadership during a growth period? Based on Greiner's growth model, a business will generally encounter a crisis of leadership in phase 1. In this start-up stage, entrepreneurs are normally busy managing the business focusing on distributing products and creating new markets. During this phase, communication is still manageable between staff and management. Once the business starts to expand and more staff is employed, a leadership crisis will emerge and the business therefore needs intervention. Several options are available to the

founders at this critical situation. They could either change their style of leadership, bring in someone with the capability to run the business, or consider having a group of leaders to run the organization.

Greiner (1972) argued that founders should allow others to manage certain aspects of the operation especially on the managerial aspects of the organizations. This is due to the fact that as organizations become bigger, they become more participative and have more managerial posts. Historically researchers have suggested that a leader can bring in managers to do the day to day job freeing them to concentrate on strategy. Recently it was suggested that leaders need help in leading the business and not managing the business (Cope et al. 2011).

In response to the study by Greiner, other authors suggest that a model for organizational growth and development consists of five stages which are existence, survival, success, renewal and decline (Lester and Parnell, 2008). The five stages theory suggests that if small business owners wish for their firms to grow beyond their present scale, they must understand the changes required of them. Apart from delegation of responsibilities (Greiner, 1971), this includes letting go of some responsibilities and sharing leadership responsibilities. Those aspects play a crucial part in organizational survival, regardless of whether it is a mature and established organization or a small and new organization.

In response to the changes and dynamism in a business environment, evidence shows in the movement in leadership studies. The paradigm of leadership studies has progressed through several phases: classical; transactional; visionary and organic leadership (Avery 2004). The organic leadership approach is rather drastic compared to traditional leadership. It moves away from the regular top-down leader(s) structure towards a team-based structure (Avolio et al. 2009). Having more than one person to stand out as a leader is a new alternative to lead an organization (Kocolowski, 2010). If this concept is applied into leadership, it simply means that there is a team or a group of leaders which leads an organization.

One of the alternatives for new ventures to tackle the leadership crisis during a rapid growth phase is to have a team of leaders to lead an organization. Team leadership gives advantage to organization because they share common goals, have motivation to

coordinate and accomplish these goals (Hill, 2010). This leadership style is said to be beneficial during the decision making process (Avolio et al., 2009; Kramer and Crespny, 2011). This due to the notion that this leadership style gives more flexibility and an effective method to deliver a decision within a time constraint resulting from a complex business environment (Pearce and Manz, 2005). In other words, the leaders have the opportunity to react and tackle the challenges within a short time period because the strategic decision can be made urgently.

It has been suggested by Drucker (1986) that to have a group of leaders during the early stage of the business before it hits the maturity stage helps the organization to avoid the leadership crisis in the later. This view is supported by (Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven, 1990). Based on their research, it shows that firms founded by entrepreneurial teams have a higher chance of survival and experience faster growth in comparison to ventures started-off by individual entrepreneurs.

Based on all the evidence above, it can be concluded that during a crisis of leadership in new start-ups, team- based styles of leadership can give an added advantage to the organization. It can be seen as an alternative style of leadership from the much traditional top- down leadership approaches of the earlier days (Kramer and Crespny, 2011). The above scenario focuses on scenario when leadership crisis has happened, but what could happened to high technology SME startups, if team based styles leadership is employed from the start-off?

It all depends on the founders' will to build their own leadership team from the start-up stage. The issue that needs to be addressed is how feasible it is for founders to look into this matter if there are so many other things to consider in accommodating growth. Should they change and implement the team- based leadership styles or should they maintain the current traditional type of leadership they have been practising?

In the following sections, the characteristics of styles of three leadership styles are further explained. Three types of leadership are chosen which are integrated leadership, distributed leadership and shared leadership. The reason to look through these three types of leadership is to highlight the difference between those styles of leadership. Ultimately, the highlighted leadership approach in this current study is shared leadership.

2.5.3 Integrated Leadership

Integrated leadership requires leadership collaboration from other organizations. This is because different organizations need to integrate expertise and resources from each other. There are times when it is impossible to achieve an organization's goal without relying on outside expertise. The goal can only be achieved through collaboration between different organizations with different resources, expertise, knowledge and skills. How can all these resources be geared up together and who are going to take active roles in guiding the whole process? Integrated leadership can be the answer to the above issues especially in public sector.

Generally, this leadership concept can be seen in inter-sectorial or in inter-governmental organizations because it requires effective problem- solving activities. The justification to this scenario is that in order for organizations to collaborate effectively, it has to be led by a specific agency which takes responsibilities in ensuring the deliberation of effective and shared solution to the problem (Silvia and McGuire, 2010).

What is the characteristic of integrated leadership? It involves three important elements that act as a “catalyst” in bringing the leadership concept together. They are structural, process and individual where the main objective is to create public value (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). According to Morse (2010), integrative public leadership involve cross sector collaboration. The author also emphasizes that individual leaders with ‘*the vision of public value*’ are the main ‘*catalyst*’ to establish integration because they notice the opportunity which lies ahead. This is where the process of integration comes in with a great intention to create something new. The author also highlights the main characteristic difference of an integrative leader compared to a business entrepreneur is that an integrative leader creates public value where as a business entrepreneur's success is construed in market terms. Regardless of different sets of tasks and skills that vary from each type of leader, there are two main distinguishing features that integrative leaders have. According to him, they are “*entrepreneurialism and their ability to cultivate trusting relationship*”.

The concept of integrated leadership requires ‘*collective action*’ where parties involved need to contribute effectively towards achieving ultimate goals through integrated

structure which involves multiple actors that bind together most of the activities (Moynihan and Ingraham, 2004; Silvia and McGuire, 2010). Integrative public leaders play an important role to lead across sector boundaries in order to establish needed relationship and to ensure resource flows adequately so that the mission goals can be achieved (Crosby and Bryson, 2010).

There are two important elements that leaders need to look into during this leadership process to ensure that members know their responsibilities and tasks (Morse, 2010). These are boundary experience and boundary objects. Boundary experience is a set of activities that are held together with the main intention of creating a sense of community and to reduce gaps between participants. An example is to have a series of meetings among participants (Feldman et al., 2006). Meanwhile, boundary objects are mediums of interaction among participants. For instance, setting up a website or printing a brochure (Morse, 2010).

Among the problems that are faced from this type of leadership is it takes time to achieve a unanimous decision (Morse, 2010). This is due to the fact that not every member will agree automatically towards the suggested decision and it will take series of meetings and debates to make that ultimate unanimous decision. At the end of the day, the decision must be agreed by all parties.

The question is whether this leadership approach is suitable for high growth new ventures or not? Though this leadership encourage team cohesiveness, enhance communication among leaders, the existence of entrepreneurialism and effective decision- making process. But, given evidence from the literature, it can be concluded that this type of leadership is suitable for bigger and mature organizations which are in pursuit of public value and in need of resource sharing in order to achieve their ultimate shared goals. Integrative leadership works well when different organizations team up together and try to achieve shared goals among themselves. But, this current study will look into are smaller and start-up business ventures which implies that the leadership exists within that organizations alone without the involvement from other organization.

2.5.4 Distributed Leadership

The concept of distributed leadership was initially introduced by C.A. Gibb in the 1950s. He introduced the idea that leadership can have a distributed pattern. The concept has remained dormant until recently, where it has suddenly caught the attention of other researchers (Avolio et al., 2009). In general, the concept of distributed leadership is seen as a new movement away from the traditional 'top down' model (Mehra et al., 2006) because it is more organic, spontaneous and difficult to control (Harris, 2008). The approach is obviously divergent in terms of the process compared to the traditional top-down leadership concept.

Similar to other topics in leadership, in general there is yet to be a unified definition of distributed leadership to cover the overall view of this leadership concept (Hariss, 2008; Avolio et al., 2009; Currie and Lockett, 2011). In terms of the definition, there are a few arguments which indicate that the current definitions are still vague and imprecise. Hariss (2008) suggests that the concept of distributed leadership overlaps with other similar concepts such as shared, collaborative, democratic, and participative leadership. (Avolio et al., 2009) also have this tendency in referring to shared leadership, distributed leadership and collective leadership interchangeably while discussing their research.

Currie and Locket (2011) argue that because of the vast ranges of terms in describing distributed leadership, the boundaries of the concept become very ambiguous. To conclude, if each and every leadership concept is thoroughly investigated and analysed empirically for future references, the usage of these 'confusing' terms can be overcome. This issue is not within the scope of this current study. For the sake of clarity, researcher will treat the terms as different sets of entities.

For the purpose of this study, the definition given by Bennet et al. (2003) is referred. According to the authors, distributed leadership is "an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals...with openness of the boundaries of leadership...varieties of expertise are distributed across the many, not the few" (p.5). The definition covers the scenario, process involved and important elements that make the leadership process a success.

There are few characteristics of distributed leadership that distinguishes it from the other team-based styles. The first characteristic is the existence of the distributed leadership within an organization. Gronn (2008) points out that distributed leadership can exist within a dyad or even within the whole team. These leadership functions can be performed by the formal team leader and/or shared by team members. This contemporary style of leadership gives the opportunity to members of an organization with leadership potential to lead. However, it does not necessarily mean that everybody in the organization should take leading responsibilities at the same time (Hariss, 2008). The author reasoned that due to the lack of specific guidelines on how to define distributed leadership especially in relation to a team, it has resulted in the misconception that everyone in the team leads.

Secondly, distributed leadership requires that each leader has skills or knowledge in order to practice this type of leadership effectively. Organization members have to be well-educated or very skilful to enable them to solve problems that arise (Avery, 2004). This process indirectly leads to knowledge distribution (Currie and Lockett 2011), because the other leaders will indirectly learn the new knowledge and skills from the rest of the team.

Next is the decision-making process within business organizations. The decision-making process is really crucial when businesses start to grow. Distributed leadership allows team member to deal with the crisis that is within their knowledge and expert and once it is solved, they will step back and give others to take the lead.

Based on this notion, the existence of distributed leadership in SMEs is obvious (Cope et al., 2011). The authors proposed that it is essential to get involvement from more people especially during the decision-making process. This will lead them to be more responsible and accountable for different sets of business operations. Rather than having only one brain to deal with different set of business challenges it would be more efficient to have more brains to tackle those challenges. Meanwhile, distributed leadership is a leadership practice that requires distribution of leadership responsibilities among a group of individuals with a variety of skills and knowledge (Bennet et al., 2003). The concept of distributed leadership gives greater opportunity for founders to learn to be leaders while learning from other leaders (Cope et al., 2011). Unlike the traditional way of decision making, leaders will take the responsibility to take the final decision regardless of the

scenario. This type of leadership give access to the leaders to confront with daily business challenges promptly and effectively (Pearce et al., 2009).

In order for distributed leadership concept to succeed, it is suggested that there are several organizational factors that need to be addressed (Harris, 2008). The author indicates that these include ‘organizational growth, its readiness to change, its culture and its developmental needs’. In order for an organization to achieve higher performance through implementation of distributed leadership (Iles and Feng, 2011), the authors suggest that coordination is the best method to avoid a setback of this style. It gives the opportunity for the team to do the post mortem for every task finished. Improvements can be made for future tasks to ensure that the effectiveness of this leadership is maintained.

There are many areas to explore which are still vague. One area is how the distribution of leadership occur and who are the people involved during this leadership process (Harris, 2008). She added that due to the complexity and nature of distributed leadership it is difficult to identify who should be in charge and it is also hard to determine how the process happens. These issues need to be answered by serious empirical evidence as she highlighted in the research findings.

On the other hands, Gronn (2008) points out that there is still a lot of work to do conceptually and empirically in the study of distributed leadership. There is a shortage of empirical study in this specific leadership approach (Harris, 2008). In the beginning, the focus of study in distributed leadership was more conceptual. Later, more empirical studies were done and there are still to explore.

Most of the studies on distributed leadership remain extensively restricted to the field of school education especially in the UK (Bolden, 2011). Studies done on distributed leadership specifically focusing on small and new ventures are relatively few (Cope et al., 2011). The authors point out that the concept of distributed leadership in an SME context is considered foreign, especially during the start-up phase in business as there are very few is being done within this area. This gives a greater opportunity to explore about how this concept of leadership can help new ventures to flourish and develop better in the future.

Although there is a lack of empirical evidence and research regarding the notions of distributed leadership from an entrepreneurial team context (Harris, 2008, Cope et al., 2011), many authors have given at least a promising future on the theoretical ideas on how distributed leadership can work in organizations (Avolio et al., 2009).

It is really important to define the boundaries of the study to ensure the scope is thoroughly covered. Therefore, this work is interested in exploring further the distributed leadership within the high technology SMEs start-ups. The focus will be on how this type of leadership helps the leaders to flourish and develop their organizations from the context of learning to lead.

2.5.5 Shift in Style of Leadership

Earlier, four different styles of leadership were discussed with the intention to highlight the differences between their approaches. Those four leadership approaches are chosen because they are related to the current research objective focuses on the team-based leadership approaches. One leadership style which is directive leadership falls under the category of individual type of leader. Directive leadership concentrates more on an individual or a single 'hero' leader. From directive leadership style, it can be either the organizations will maintain their current leadership or there are changes for team-based leadership.

Meanwhile, the other three types of leadership which are integrated, distributed and shared leadership fall under the category of team-based style of leadership where it requires involvement from a group of leaders. Integrated leadership involves integration of resources from multiple organizations that share identical ultimate goals. In contrary, both distributed and shared leadership normally occur within a single organization. But the process is almost the same where it requires commitment and involvement from a group of leaders to achieve the goals.

Generally, there is a huge transition of leadership style compared to earlier days where the focus is more on the 'great man' theory where leadership exist solely only from one person. This earliest leadership theory has led to an expansion of other area of leadership

such as trait, behaviour and situational theories as well as transformational leadership approach (Northouse, 2007).

Furthermore, leadership today is represented in different models which include dyadic, shared, relational, strategic, global and complex social dynamic (Avolio, 2007). This prominent shift of leadership study from 'solo hero' to 'post heroic leadership' has attracted many scholars to examine to what extent leadership can be distributed (Harris, 2008) or shared (Pearce and Conger, 2003) among the team members. These two leadership styles can be seen as the alternative solution to many of the issues faced by business organizations nowadays (Fitzsimons et al., 2011).

Why has the notion of leadership changed from the traditional type of leadership towards having more than one person as a leader? Over the past decade, a lot of research effort has been invested in understanding the processes of this collective type of leadership in organizations (Pearce and Manz, 2005; Burke et al., 2011). Studies have also been done on how collective leadership contributes to the organization, especially towards overall company performance (Wood and Fields, 2007). Many scholars previously believe that leaders are born with leadership traits and only a selected few are born with these privileges (Yulk, 2002). But this view is no longer suitable to be applied in today's business world because leaders can be made and sculptured.

Leaders should make changes to managerial styles and capabilities in the organization (Lester and Parnell, 2008). This is due to the diversion of focus to overcome the challenges associated with leading complex organizational systems. Study by Martinez (2009) suggests that the use of planning and strategic tools help businesses get through survival barriers and enables them to grow appropriately. The result is consistent with (Perry, 2001). In his study, there is statistically significant relationship between planning and small business failure in America. Effective intervention has helped foster co-operative relations among leaders within SME clusters in Brazil, Mexico and India (Navdi, 1995).

Similarly, Mazzarol (2003) proposes a theoretical model for small business growth from the HR context. As businesses grow, there are changes in HR policies such as from previously having an informal organizational structure towards a more formal structure.

Moreover, the key to business success is based on the owner's willingness and ability to learn to delegate authority and responsibility in various ways. This includes delegation, team-building and even transfer of authority to a professional management team. Churchill and Lewis (1983) share the same opinions on the owner's managerial and willingness to be able to delegate responsibility to others. As the business grows and develops, this factor is very crucial in inducing the business success.

Another reason that organization need to consider is the behaviour of a leader. A leader's behaviour is frequently discussed in relation to task processes, relational dynamics and also changes which occur in an organization (Derue et al., 2011). This implies that there is a need for change in leadership approach.

In pursuit of growth, values of the organization which the business leaders regard as of utmost importance could be sacrificed. These values are often times not driven by just profits. For instance, the initial purpose of delivering a product of highest quality could be jeopardized as profit margins tend to vary inversely with quality. The management of human resource could become more rigid and a loose working environment envisioned by the business founder can no longer be tolerated (Hatten, 2006; Stokes et al., 2010).

Therefore, a balance needs to be struck in order to ensure the growth of the organization and simultaneously making sure that the initial purpose of the organization is not forgotten. This is where an introduction of a team- based leadership style into the organisation can be seen as an appropriate move.

2.6 Shared Leadership

Leadership researchers have discussed the topic of shared leadership with great attention given to its needs, and its advantages compared to the individual leadership approach (Gronn, 2002). Shared leadership popularity soars when it becomes a preferred leadership approach due to its reputation in bringing positive outcomes to an organisation. Among the advantages are the influential impact on team dynamics and team performance (Pearce and Ensley, 2004), positive growth in the overall performance of new ventures (Ensley et al. 2006).

The above positive outcomes have been indicated within the health and education industry (Ulhøi and Müller 2014). On the other hands, studies were done in different environments such as high-tech organisations, airlines, restaurants and megachurches also showed the above positive outcomes to organisations, shared leadership brought effectiveness to these organisations especially in making decisions (Pearce et al., 2014).

Thus, this study will delve into these three areas within shared leadership practise in high technology SMEs startups in Malaysia. This research study intends to investigate further the concept and the practicality of shared leadership in business organisations, specifically relating to leaders' learning to lead and the strategic decision- making process. The boundaries are set as this study do not wish to determine the complexity of other elements existed in shared leadership. In the next subsections, the existing literature examines shared leadership as a concept and in practice.

2.6. 1 Leadership Approach/Style

Despite the attention received, research in shared leadership is still active and needs further empirical investigation, especially in the sector of high technology startups. Having more than one person to stand out as a leader is a new alternative to lead an organisation (Kocolowski, 2010). Pearce et al. (2008b) suggested that researchers should investigate empirically how shared leadership operates and test the practicality of the theory within organisations. Ensley et al. (2003) point out the vital role of shared leadership in entrepreneurial top management teams. Not much empirical evidence can be explicitly found in these areas, as many authors only focus on the conceptual context of general organisations (Avolio, 2007). Thus, there are plenty of opportunities lies within shared leadership study to be explored further, to get a better understanding of the topic.

Hariss (2008) suggested that there is an overlap between the concept of distributed leadership and other similar concepts such as shared, collaborative, democratic, and participative leadership. Avolio et al. (2009) also have this tendency in referring to shared leadership, distributed leadership and collective leadership interchangeably while discussing their research. Therefore, it is essential to highlight the differences between

these two leadership styles to avoid misunderstanding. There are many definitions of shared leadership proposed by scholars. As for this research study, the definition proposed by Pearce and Conger (2003) chosen because it fits the objectives of the study. Pearce and Conger (2003, p.1) explain shared leadership as:

"a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organisational goals or both. This influence process often involves peers, or lateral, influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence" (Pearce & Conger, 2003).

The definition covers the most common understanding of shared leadership, which are the scenario, process involved and essential elements that make the leadership process a success. The above definition clearly shows that the main objective of shared leadership is to promote a leadership learning process among team leaders to achieve shared goals. Shared leadership is often confused with distributed leadership. Although many scholars use both terms interchangeably, both leadership styles are distinct (Fitzsimons et al., 2011). Distributed leadership's main objective is on the dissemination process of knowledge and skills among the leaders (Avolio et al. 2009). In the next subsections, in-depth discussion on criteria of shared leadership.

2.6.1.1 Distribution of Responsibilities

The difference between shared leadership and distributed leadership can be seen clearly through the element of responsibility distribution. Gronn (2008) pointed out that distributed leadership can exist within a dyad or even within the whole team. These leadership functions can be performed by the formal team leader or shared by team members. In comparison to the solo type of leadership for instance directive leadership where leaders take leadership role alone, leaders have to instruct employees on how to accomplish their tasks, and it involves intense supervision by leaders (Wendt et al., 2009). The authors also highlighted that there is a negative correlation between directive leadership and team cohesiveness because the authority element showed by the leaders to the organisational members restricted the knowledge sharing and one-way

communication only between leaders and their employees. This scenario is opposite to shared leadership practice.

Another aspect that distinguishes shared leadership from traditional leadership is that there is a broad sharing of power and influence among team members (Pearce et al., 2009). Leadership responsibilities are shared among the leaders (Burke et al., 2003). The authors suggested that when leadership responsibilities are shared, it has a positive impact on the overall performance of the organisation, for instance, the economic indicators such as revenue and employee growth of the organisation. The authors also indicated that shared leadership involves three elements of duty sharing. They are knowledge, skill and ability. By sharing responsibilities and some leadership role among the leaders, it may lead to an increase in self and team effectiveness as well as creating team loyalty (Pearce and Conger 2003; Ensley et al. 2006).

This contemporary style of leadership allows members of an organisation with leadership potential to lead. However, it does not necessarily mean that everybody in the organisation should take leading responsibilities at the same time (Hariss, 2008). The author reasoned that lack of specific guidelines on how to define distribution of responsibilities concerning a team resulted in the misconception that everyone can lead. It is crucial for leaders to understand the nature of the delegated tasks, so that they can perform the tasks adequately. Failure to meet the requirement, lead to dysfunction of shared leadership practice. Pearce et al. (2010) listed down the possible limitations to the scenario above, including newness to the project, training level and also member personality.

A method of responsibility distribution is through delegation. Pearce et al. (2008) mentioned that delegation facilitates shared leadership, provided the followers understand and act accordingly with the organisation's visions, goals and core values. Leaders are given the right to make decisions within their given authorities without having to refer to other leaders, especially in daily decisions that are related to the post that they are holding. This type of decision is made based on the leader's knowledge and experience. However, in the case of strategic decisions, they are made after discussing the matter among all

leaders. Scholars debate the extent of responsibility distribution practised in shared leadership as limited empirical evidence is available in this area (Wang et al. 2014).

Through the implementation of distribution of responsibilities, it promotes team collaboration to facilitate the leadership practice. A critical component of an effective organisation is having good teamwork (Macdonald et al., 2006). The strength of a shared leadership team stems from a shared vision (Pearce and Conger, 2002). Setting learning goals and giving feedback contributes to the development of team cohesiveness (Kozlowski et al., 2009). Bergman et al. (2012) also agreed that shared leadership promotes higher cohesion, intragroup trust and less conflict. But in shared leadership organisation, leaders have the motivation to coordinate and accomplish these goals because of the existence of team cohesiveness (Hill 2010). This leadership style is said to be beneficial during the decision- making process (Avolio et al., 2009; Kramer and Crespy, 2011). Shared leadership initiates active participation from team leaders which lead to an effective decision-making process (Ulhøi & Müller 2014).

In contrast, the nature of a traditional solo type of leadership which relies totally on a single leader to lead the organisation makes it hard to practice the element of team cohesion. Directive leadership is an example of this type of leadership. It requires the commitment from a leader to accentuate management activities such as planning, organising and controlling (Dubrin 2001). This is especially true when a leader monitors the team activity too closely or is being too dominant in a discussion and the decision-making process (Burke et al., 2006). Avolio et al. 2009 emphasised that shared leadership practise acquires these three elements, which are high levels of trust, integrity and identification for team members to carry out their task successfully.

2.6.1.2 Interaction and Communication

One of the reasons shared leadership is a preferred practice among businesses is due to the changes in today's organisational structure. According to Pearce and Conger (2003), organisations need to adjust to the organisational environment which requires self-managed teams, speed of delivery, the importance of information richness and job complexity (Pearce and Conger, 2003). Within the complex working environment,

despite having a level of experience or educational background, a sole leader would face difficulties in performing leadership functions effectively due to the complexity of the working environment (Wu and Cormican, 2016). One of the alternatives for the organisation to face those challenges is by implementing a suitable type of leadership. As for the high technology startups, rapid changes have a significant impact on its operation. Thus, adaptability and competent response to business changes are highly recommended. In this scenario, shared leadership is seen as the best option due to the nature of high technology business organisations.

Shared leadership is suitable to be practised by today's organisations due to its flexible structure in its implementation (Avolio et al., 2009). Shared leadership organisations opt for less hierarchical, flexible and dynamic structure (Anand and Daft, 2007). The organic leadership approach is rather drastic compared to the traditional leadership approach. It moves away from the regular top-down leaders' structure towards a team-based structure (Avolio et al. 2009). Based on the literature findings above, it suggested that shared leadership helps organisations to foster efficient interaction between the members through organisational structure. The shared leadership organisation structure gives added advantages in term of interaction flexibility. The surrounding help leaders and members of the organisation to deliver effective communication because of fewer red-tapes. Therefore, shared leadership practice encourages continuous innovation within an organisation (Pearce and Manz, 2005).

A different perspective of shared leadership was discussed in a study that compared vertical leadership and shared leadership in certain aspects (Ensley et al., 2006a; Ensley et al., 2006b). Vertical leadership may be viewed as an influence on team processes, whereas shared leadership is considered to be the influence on the leadership process. This leadership process involves the whole team rather than relying only on a single person. In contrast to vertical leadership where decisions rely more on the wisdom of an individual leader, decisions in shared leadership are made from a collection of knowledge (Pearce & Manz 2005). The shared leadership concept is different from the traditional leadership. The leadership of the traditional vertical approach takes place through a top-down influence process.

In contrast, shared leadership takes place through a collaborative process, and it fosters team commitment between the leaders. The leaders have a robust support system that helps them to develop their leadership abilities and become better leaders. Klimoski and Mohammed (1994), emphasised shared leadership supports continual interactions and social exchange within the team. It involves multi-directional influencing processes (Pearce et al., 2008b). For this reason, shared leadership continuously promotes effective team collaboration among organisation members, especially between team leaders. Therefore, shared leadership is seen as a practical type of leadership to be used by leaders of high growth new startups because this leadership approach gives excellent attention to leaders' leadership development through team efforts (Kocolowski 2010).

Another essential factor that makes shared leadership effective is trust. When leaders in a shared leadership setting have an accurate understanding of the skills and abilities of all other co-leaders, this promotes trust among leaders as well respect for the competencies of the co-leaders (Small & Rentsch, 2010). As was highlighted by Bergman et al. (2012), shared leadership promotes higher cohesion, intragroup trust and less conflict. Drescher et al. (2014) pointed out that trust is an essential element in the shared leadership concept. Therefore, these leaders need to ensure that they can trust their co-leaders, especially when it comes to deciding within their given leadership responsibilities.

Based on the literature extent concerning interaction and communication aspect in shared leadership practise, this type of leadership fosters effective interaction due to the organisational structure set up which less structural. The surroundings encourage transparent communication atmosphere whereby team leaders can interact and communicate without any restriction. The employees also get the benefits from the less organisational setting because they can directly interact and communicate between them and the leaders. Similar to other shared leadership criteria, trust is the main element in the interaction and communication process. There is insufficient empirical evidence from the literature on how the process happens under the shared leadership practise. Hence, this recent study intends to investigate the interaction and communication process from the shared leadership perspective in SMEs startups.

2.6.1.3 Conflicts

Despite all the advantages that this type of leadership brings to an organisation, there are some setbacks where shared leadership can cause responsibility overload, which leads to organisational conflict (Wood and Fields, 2007). The authors also pointed out that due to ambiguity in responsibilities, this leadership approach can cause job stress among team members. Another research finding made by Nicolaided et al. (2014), shared leadership is unsustainable because there is a likely emergence of power struggle and conflicts which arise during the process. All the above challenges might outweigh all the advantages of the approach is not carefully planned, and no check and balance mechanism is implemented in an organisation. Leaders must also take preventive actions at the early stage when all of those symptoms appear. The sooner they detect the scenarios, they can plan on how to tackle the potential problems.

Pearce et al. (2008) suggested that shared leadership should not be seen as the ultimate solutions to leadership obstacles in organisations as this type of leadership has several flaws too, and cultural resistance is regarded as one of the biggest challenges to it. The authors also pointed out that the success of shared leadership depends on the organisational members' support. Effective communication plays an essential role to avoid conflict among team members.

Ensley et al. (2003) pointed out the vital role of shared leadership in entrepreneurial top management teams. Not much empirical evidence can be found precisely in this area, as many authors only focus on the conceptual context of general organisations (Avolio, 2007). Since there is a lack of empirical evidence, Pearce et al. (2008b) suggest that researchers should investigate empirically how shared leadership operates and test the practicality of the theory within organisations.

2.6.2 Leaders' Learning to Lead

The studies intended to get a better understanding of the leaders' knowledge advancement while they lead their organisations. However, not many studies have focused on the entrepreneurial learning aspect especially in high growth SMEs startups even though it is a known fact that entrepreneurs can continuously learn as their surroundings evolve (Kempster and Cope, 2010; Deakins and Freel, 2003). Leaders must acquire new knowledge and skills to be excellent leaders during the critical growth phase. It is intriguing to find out how these self-made business leaders learn to lead their organisations without the luxury of proper training and corporate exposure in the early stages of their businesses.

2.6.2.1 Settings, Sources and the Process

Learning to lead is the fundamental process within the shared leadership concept because the objective of shared leadership is to improve the leaders' leadership capabilities through team collaboration via skills, abilities, knowledge and experience (Pearce et al. 2008; Avolio et al. 2009; Pearce and Wassenaar 2015). Another aspect in the leaders' learning process is the organization structure. According to Avolio et al., (2009), who suggested that shared leadership exist in the less structured or non-existent hierarchical levels type of organization.

Constant changes and uncertainty exist in the business world. Leaders are expected to keep up with these scenarios if they want their organisations to stay competitive and successful. Therefore, leaders are required to have excellent leadership skill and continuously acquire business knowledge to become outstanding leaders. They should focus on the leading aspect rather than the managerial aspect of the organisation. By prioritising the leading aspect, these founders and leaders help in preparing themselves to become effective leaders. At the same time, to ensure that their organisations are on the right track to success.

This scenario should be the main priority, especially to the high growth SMEs leaders. Based on the study by Boeker and Karichalil (2002), leaders of high technology

companies that experience rapid growth, where the leaders are not traditionally from the corporate world (for example scientists and researchers), appear to have a greater need for new sets of managerial and professional skills. The leaders will face difficulties in leading the companies because of the limitation in business knowledge and experience. In contrast to corporate managers who work in companies with standard and more established operating procedures, these founders have to lead their companies from scratch due to the lack of formal organisational structure to fall back on (Ensley et al., 2006).

Tipping points theory proposed by Phelps et al. (2007) discussed a set of critical issues faced by all growing firms at a certain point during the growth process. People management is one of the change factors that was discussed, and the authors emphasised that leaders of a business need to adapt and improve their skills and knowledge parallel to the business progress to solidify their leadership position. However, there is little explanation about the learning process of how these leaders try to develop their leadership capabilities through a team effort. These leaders require support and assistance to get through the business challenges, specifically during the growth phase (Wiklund et al. 2009). The authors also highlighted the issue of being the only leader or being a small group of leaders of new business while simultaneously running other administration tasks. It is a massive challenge to these leaders.

Leaders of high growth ventures face a demanding challenge during a growth period as they are bombarded with huge responsibilities due to the size of the organisation which has limited human and financial resources (Ensley et al., 2003; Scheer, 2009). There are instances where even though these leaders might not have the required skills when they first started their venture, they managed to grasp the skills along the way. However, these type of leaders from the new startups are known as 'heroic, high growth' type of entrepreneurs and are very rare (Wendt et al. 2009). In contrast, a phenomenological study done by Kempster & Cope 2010 pointed out that SMEs leaders faced challenges during the learning to lead process, especially to those who do not have prior organisational experience. But, according to the authors, it can be done if the leaders can acquire tacit knowledge about leadership while leading the organisations through team collaboration.

Another study by Houvinen and Tihula (2008) revealed that the advancement of leadership knowledge is one of the effective methods to lead startup organisations. The finding of the study also emphasised that the elements of cooperation, delegation, and sharing responsibilities among the team leaders hold the key to the organisation's success. These elements were not in the tipping point theory. Houvinen and Tihula however, failed to discuss thoroughly the concept of leaders' learning to lead. On the other hand, a study by Kempster and Cope (2010) showed that leaders from small and high growth ventures have the ambition and motivation to develop their leadership skills and knowledge. Their study revealed that the informal learning process occurring during the growth phase forced the leaders to evaluate and enhance their skills instantly for them to effectively lead their organisations. Similar to studies mentioned earlier, Kempster and Cope (2010) agreed that leaders in new startups could improve their leadership skills and knowledge due to growth challenges that they faced.

Many scholars have discussed the concept of leadership learning and yet there is no clear definition of this. Still, in general, this learning concept is a combination of leadership and innovative thinking that nurture changes, while, the ongoing process brings positive outcomes to the organisation (Atwood et al., 2010). The authors also specified that leadership holds the key to effective interactions within organisations, as the leaders are the main characters to foster the learning process.

According to shared leadership scholars, leadership learning aspect of business leaders from the shared leadership perspective, there are several approaches available for leaders of SME ventures to develop and upgrade their leadership skills (Corbett, 2005; Cope, 2005; Houvinen and Tihula, 2008). For instance, an in-depth study by Leitch et al. (2009) demonstrated that action learning occurs in small and medium enterprises. The leaders benefited the real-life problems solving experience where it requires them to take actions and revise the outcomes. This was reflected through the positive results in leadership development and business. The three significant elements, which are knowledge, cognition and creativity, must be covered by leaders during the learning to lead process. Furthermore, they must also acknowledge the fact that each individual has different

capabilities and adaptability (Corbett, 2005). This study identified the three major elements which exist in shared leadership practice, but it did not relate the findings to any specific type of leadership.

Leitch et al. (2009) suggested that there are two types of sources to help leaders in improving their leadership abilities and capabilities. The first source is internal, and the setting can be either informal or formal. For example, through team leaders and employees, it is based on individuals lived based experience (Kempster & Cope, 2010). The second source is external. The setting can either be formal or informal, for example through commercial business courses (e.g. action learning programmes) and networking (Leitch et al. 2009; Kempster & Cope, 2010; Goksoy, 2016). Another example of an external source that is meant to accumulate the learning to lead process within the organisation is learning through observation and guidance from experts that are brought into the organisation as well as through external leader coaching and support (Carson et al., 2007). Another alternative is leaders can also learn through short courses and management classes (Atwood et al., 2010).

Based on the literature above, leaders' learning to lead process helps leaders to improve leadership capabilities through team efforts. Supports and leaders understanding of the importance of continuous learning Among the crucial elements involve are leaders' cooperation, understanding the objective of learning to lead process, trust, exchange of knowledge and skills between the leaders. There are plenty of opportunities to explore within this area as to how leaders in high technology startups enhance leadership capabilities through the implementation of shared leadership.

2.6.2.2 Conflicts

Conflicts exist regardless of all positive outcomes; those ideas of leadership development bring to SMEs leaders. However, it does have side effects towards the overall process as has been mentioned by Kempster, 2006. In his study, he highlighted that leadership learning through apprenticeship is complex and lengthy. It requires a conducive environment such as mutual understanding and team efforts among the leaders to support the learning process. Another intangible aspect that is crucial during the learning process

is trust. Trust is part of the vital element within the social interaction, leads to transparency communication between the leaders (Leitch et al., 2009). Further, the authors highlighted trust is a fragile element that sometimes leaders tend to overlook, and this had caused them to face a hard time when miscommunication happened due to a lack of trust among themselves.

The learning to lead process in shared leadership is unique and differentiates it from other team-based leadership concepts, mainly distributed leadership. Leaders have the opportunity to improve their leadership skills and capabilities, provided that the rest of the team are on the same page. The success of shared leadership relies on the cooperation and commitment from all leaders (Manz et al. 2015). Shared leadership is based on voluntary team cooperation and effective interaction through leaders' competencies and a sense of responsibility (Goksoy, 2016). From the above literature, it is apparent that leaders have the opportunities to develop their leadership skills and capabilities if they understand the importance of leadership and willing to upgrade their leadership skills. On top of that, leaders need to be more flexible and adaptable to change too.

To summarise, most of the research studies mentioned in this subsection discuss the leadership learning to lead context in general without explicitly relating it to any leadership style, for instance, shared leadership. The discussions were done by looking into the general aspects of leadership attributes on how these leaders of high growth startups learn to lead. There is a shortage of in-depth investigation of how these leaders learn to lead within their organisations. Plus, whether there exist any collaboration elements among the leaders. Additionally, from the context of shared leadership practise, it is interesting to understand further how these leaders learn to lead and to become excellent leaders. In light of these relevant questions, our study aims to explore further the leaders' learning to lead process that is specific to the shared leadership context.

2.6.3 Strategic Decision-Making Process

In recent years, the strategic decision-making process has been one of the popular topics of research in the business field because of the positive impact it has on the overall performance of organisations (Surma 2012; Siddique 2015; Molloy and Johnson 2016).

For new startups, a strategic plan provides a clear business direction for these leaders to potentially become successful in the future (Molloy and Johnson 2016). There is a notably high rate of failure among new businesses, and one of the reasons is a failure in preparing the organisation's strategic plan (Perry, 2001).

The size of an SME, especially in the high technology sector, has a significant impact on its strategic decisions (O'Regan et al., 2012). The strategies reflect the future direction of the business that they want to pursue, and the indication of resources and capabilities they have to pursue successful business ventures. A strategic plan is a fundamental key to an organisation's planning process that is usually done by the organisation leaders. It requires intensive industry analysis and critical evaluation of organisational resources to be able to plan for an ultimate action strategy (Wheelen et al., 2012). This suggests that strategic plans help new founders or business leaders to predict business challenges and prepare them mentally and physically.

Unlike traditional leadership, where it is more hierarchical and centralised in terms of decision making, the shared leadership approach believes that leadership is more effective if it is shared and distributed among members of a group or team (Pearce and Conger, 2003; Bligh et al., 2006; Thorpe et al., 2011). O'Regan (2012) believes that shared leadership leaders need to prepare organisational short and long- term strategic plans as they give a clear business direction to the organisation. Manz et al. (2010) proposed that shared leadership can bring continuous performance improvements to organisations through the commitment of each team leader.

A strategic plan will ensure that team leaders understand the organisational goals and commit to its success. Similarly, shared leadership encourages a high level of interdependence, which leads to faster decision- making process (Pearce and Manz, 2005). Leaders must acknowledge one another for shared leadership positive outcomes (McIntyre and Foti, 2013). Building on these ideas, it can be said that shared leadership helps leaders to make effective decisions through team collaboration, provided that all members comprehend the organisational goals and objectives.

Shared leadership style gives more flexibility in making decisions, and it is an effective method to deliver a decision within a time constraint resulting from a complex business environment (Pearce and Manz, 2005). A study was done by Wang et al. (2014) supported the existence of shared leadership is significant in a complex working environment. The authors highlighted that decisions could be made according to the need for creativity in the organisation, thus encouraging continuous innovation within an organisation.

A recent study by Wu and Cormican (2016) reported that the fast decision-making process in shared leadership supports the necessary environment for innovation to occur. It is apparent from the above studies, and shared leadership delivers a positive impact on the organisational decision-making process, especially to high growth organisations. Leaders are on the same platform and share the same drives due to the agreed principles. In other words, the leaders have the opportunity to react and tackle challenges within a short period because the strategic decision can be made urgently.

The non- existence of hierarchical levels in shared leadership's strategic decision- making process encourage leaders to be creative and flexible in making decisions, especially in smaller groups compared to a mature and established organisation (Pearce et al. 2010). This less restricted structure of the shared leadership decision-making process gives an added advantage to organisations by being able to come out with faster and effective decisions within a required timeline. At the same time, it provides full empowerment to the leadership team and enables it to act efficiently towards business demands (Pearce & Wassenaar 2015).

Hence, the practise of shared leadership gives an advantage to high technology SMEs due to its small size, flexible organisational structure and a non-existent hierarchy. Therefore, leaders can make fast and precise decisions in this business environment (high technology-based industry) that is always changing (due to rapid growth). For leaders to make effective decisions, there are several essential elements involved in the shared leadership strategic decision- making process. One aspect is the leaders' skills and knowledge (Avolio et al., 2003). Team leaders' knowledge, skills and abilities are the main fundamental requirements to the shared leadership practice. Shared leadership has

the potential to solve complicated situations where the current leader does not know specific tasks. In these situations, leaders with the required knowledge will step in and be able to solve the problem (Pearce et al., 2009). Leaders expertise and competencies in specific areas are more crucial compared to the formal position or role of individuals (Goksoy, 2016). The final decision is derived as a team effort (Pearce et al. 2010).

During the strategic- decision making process, Drescher et al., (2014) pointed out that trust is an essential element for the concept of shared leadership. When leaders in shared leadership have an accurate understanding of each other in terms of skills and abilities, this promotes trust among leaders and respect for the competency of others (Small and Rentsch, 2010). Shared leadership includes the process of shared commitments, beliefs and values (Goksoy, 2016).

It is essential to clearly distinguish the level of trust that the leaders have to oblige while performing the given responsibilities. The authors in the literature referenced above did not specifically mention how it is done. They also did not explain the leaders' arrangement when it comes to strategic decision- making process. Moreover, there was no specific description of the leaders' learning to lead scenario during the SDM process.

Manz et al. (2010) proposed that shared leadership can bring continuous performance to organisations through a commitment by each of the team leaders and constant encouragement. Bergman et al. (2012) also agreed that shared leadership promotes higher cohesion, intragroup trust and less conflict. Thus, the process of strategic decision making within this high growth SMEs requires leaders to equip themselves with the required knowledge and skills to make sound decisions.

Another critical element in the strategic decision-making process is the understanding of the roles of each leader. Ulhoi & Muller, 2014 highlighted that three things shared leadership leaders need to look into during a decision-making process. They are clarity of defined roles, responsibilities and authority. The authors suggested that failure to do so can slow down the SDM process.

It is still vague how the shared leadership practice benefits leaders of high technology SME startups during the strategic leadership process as there is a lack of empirical evidence to support the theory that shared leadership promotes less conflict in SDM process. Pearce et al. (2010) suggested that shared leadership should not be seen as the ultimate solution to leadership obstacles in organisations as this type of leadership has several flaws too, and cultural resistance is regarded as one of the biggest challenges to it. The authors also pointed out that the success of shared leadership depends on the support of the organisational members.

Although many scholars have highlighted an effective decision- making process as one of the advantages of shared leadership (Kocolowski 2010), studies in the field of shared leadership have only focused on the elements involved during the decision- making process (Boies et al. 2010; Zhu et al. 2013; Fitzsimons 2016). These prior studies tend to overlook the fact that the strategic decision- making process is complicated and not a straightforward process. Conflict during the decision-making process is not clearly explained, and leaders' response is not discussed further. They have failed to capture the involvement of leaders during this process, especially within a shared leadership setting. Therefore, an in-depth study would give a better understanding of the SDM process within the shared leadership perspective.

As discussed above, these are the crucial element leaders have to acknowledge during the strategic decision- making process so that they can make sound decisions. The main limitation of the studies mentioned above is the inability to show how the leaders integrated thee elements of trust, shared commitments and continual interactions throughout the strategic decision- making process. One of the three objectives of this research is to get a better understanding of the SDM process within the shared leadership environment. At the same, it is interesting to investigate further the SDM process through the implementation of shared leadership within this high growth organisation as its experience continually changes due to the nature of its business environment.

2.7 Conclusion

In an organization where the environment is stable, directive leadership prove to work well because leaders can guide their employees in the safest environment (Hmieleski, 2007). But in an organic or flexible organization, things are different. Many authors suggest that team- based leadership style is more effective and efficient in this kind of environment (Pearce and Manz, 2005; Bolden 2011; Thorpe et al. 2011).

Integrated leadership has obvious differences when compared to the earlier types of leadership: shared and distributed leadership. Both distributed and shared leadership generally occur within a single organization and does not involve collaboration from other organizations. Another similar element between these two is that it involves collectivism in leadership. These styles of leadership normally have an organic or flexible organizational structure which is quite different from the traditional ‘top- down’ organizational structure. These leadership approaches are more suitable for high growth organizations that require a fast and effective decision- making process.

Distributed leadership is all about having multiple leaders with overlapping functions and different set of responsibilities while collectively performing the responsibilities at the same time. Leadership is distributed among members but it does not require every member to take on leading responsibilities (Gronn, 2002).

On the contrary, shared leadership involves an interactive influence process among team leaders where each of them leads one another in order to attain organizational goals. These differing characteristics in distributed and shared leadership show that they are indeed distinct. Other authors believe that distributed leadership and shared leadership have significant differences between both even though many have used the terms interchangeably in the discussion of group based leadership (Avolio et al., 2009; Fitzsimons et al., 2011). It is likely, that statement above is totally against to what (Avolio et al., 2009) suggested that both styles of leadership are the same.

Hence as the discussion illustrates, it is suggested that each of the leadership style is distinct. They might be similar but fundamentally they are different to each other. A summary of the leadership styles discussed above is given in the following table:

Table 5: Leadership Styles Comparison

Type of leadership	Authors	Leader and roles	
	Characteristics of the leadership	Who leads	Leader's role
Directive	<p>a) Clear instructions and guidelines are given to subordinates with intention for them to follow. Involve scheduling and coordination of the tasks (House, 1996)</p> <p>b) Strong characteristics including task-oriented, high control, dominance, and monitoring the outcomes (Cruz et al., 1999)</p> <p>c) Leaders are directly involved and lead the management activities which include planning, organizing and controlling (Dubrin, 2001)</p>	<p>a) Leader</p> <p>b) Leader</p> <p>c) Leader</p>	<p>a) Gives guidance and direction to subordinates</p> <p>b) task- oriented behaviour, controlling and dominating</p> <p>c) planning, organizing and controlling</p>
Integrated	<p>a) An integration process made by a group of leaders with different interests; and yet creating and working together towards a common vision to create public value (Morse, 2010)</p> <p>b) A formation process where a group of leaders with different characteristics coming from different sector boundaries get together with main intention to</p>	<p>a) multiple leaders from different organizations that work together</p> <p>b) multiple leaders from different organizations</p>	<p>b) sharing leadership functions and work as a group in order to achieve shared goals</p> <p>b) sharing leadership functions and work as a group in order to achieve shared goals</p>

	solve the complex public challenges (Crosby and Bryson, 2010)	that work together	
Distributed	a) A leadership process exists when a group of leaders interact among each other freely within the organization. These leaders are highly skilled and knowledgeable and their expertise are distributed within the group (Bennet et al., 2003)	a) group members	a) Responsibilities are being distributed among members of the group. Each member has been assigned with leadership function.
Shared	a) A dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both. This influence process often involves peers, or lateral, influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence' (Pearce and Conger, 2003, p.1)	a)group members	a) leading each other in order to achieve ultimate objectives

Source: Researcher

This is necessary since the natures of new ventures are often related to the lack of formality within the organization and unclear rules (House and Mitchell, 1974). Leader's directive behaviours will give guidance and clear direction to subordinates for better performance. In this scenario, directive leadership gives an advantage to an organization when a leader steps in and monitors closely actions taken by employees. Through directive behaviour, productivity at the individual and team level is achieved (Burke et al., 2006). Leaders will give clear and better goals to employees as to what to achieve. Based on the evidence, it can be concluded that this leadership style gives comfort and

sense of safety to employees and high dependency on the leaders. From the leadership context, it is effective because the organization's target can be achieved because of the constant monitoring activities by the leaders. On the other hand, this leadership approach creates high level of dependency on the leaders to initiate the first step before being followed by the employees. Another setback is during growth phase, leadership crisis arises.

Most researchers seem to agree that human resource is a key component to the success of a firm (Jain and Tabak, 2008; Avolio et al., 2009; Bryman et al., 2011). It was discussed that a firm needs to change the style of leadership in order for organization to grow effectively. As new ventures grow, the entrepreneurs/founders will frequently require support to undertake all new tasks. This is the point during the business cycle where the organizations experience leadership crisis which needs to be attended too (Mazzarol, 2003; Winklund et al., 2009).

When the business experiences expansion and growth, founders face leadership challenges in the form of monitoring and supervising the firm's activities (Deakins and Freel, 2003). During the growth phase in new start-ups, there is imbalances between leadership skills and organizational needs which causes management and leadership crisis (Kao, 1991). The new leaders are called into the organization to help the current founders to lead the business to deal with other strategic decision of the business for instance finance, marketing or human resource.

During the growth phase, maturity of employees should also progress in parallel with exposure and experience which they have gained from their leaders' guidance. They should be more independent whilst performing their tasks. At this stage, leaders must give space for employees to perform their tasks confidently and freely in order to create a positive working environment. By doing so would free up the leader to concentrate on other aspects especially in leadership approach. Same goes with style of leadership that leaders need to employ to meet up with the business challenges.

Numerous papers have stressed the importance of leadership during the early stage of new ventures (Vecchio, 2003; Congliser and Brigham, 2004; Kempster and Cope, 2010). Leader behaviour plays a crucial part in shaping employee attitude and belief (Chiaburu

et al., 2011) so as to lead the organization towards success. But, it is unclear which form of leadership behaviour is the most effective in new start-ups (Hmieleski and Ensley, 2007). Therefore, should leaders of new ventures look into these leadership approaches in order to ensure that the growth and survival of the enterprises are preserved and maintained? Or should they just maintain the current leadership style?

It is a crucial step for founders to be able to delegate their authorities and responsibilities to others. During the growth phase, founders also need to equip themselves with the necessary tools to deal with the expansion of the firm. However, most studies on shared leadership fail to explicate the process of transition in leadership style experienced by founders from being a sole leader entrepreneur into sharing the leadership responsibilities with others as the firm grows. How the concept of shared leadership happens within the high growth SME start-ups? There is a learning process involved in effectively leading the organization. However, there is no direct indication on how those founders learn to become an effective leader from other leaders during this learning process. It will be interesting to investigate the process where the leaders learn to lead their enterprises during the growth phase with the implementation of shared leadership. Having multiple leaders gives the added advantage of remaining competitive in terms of quicker response and being able to adapt well to rapid changes (Mehra et al., 2006; Northouse, 2010).

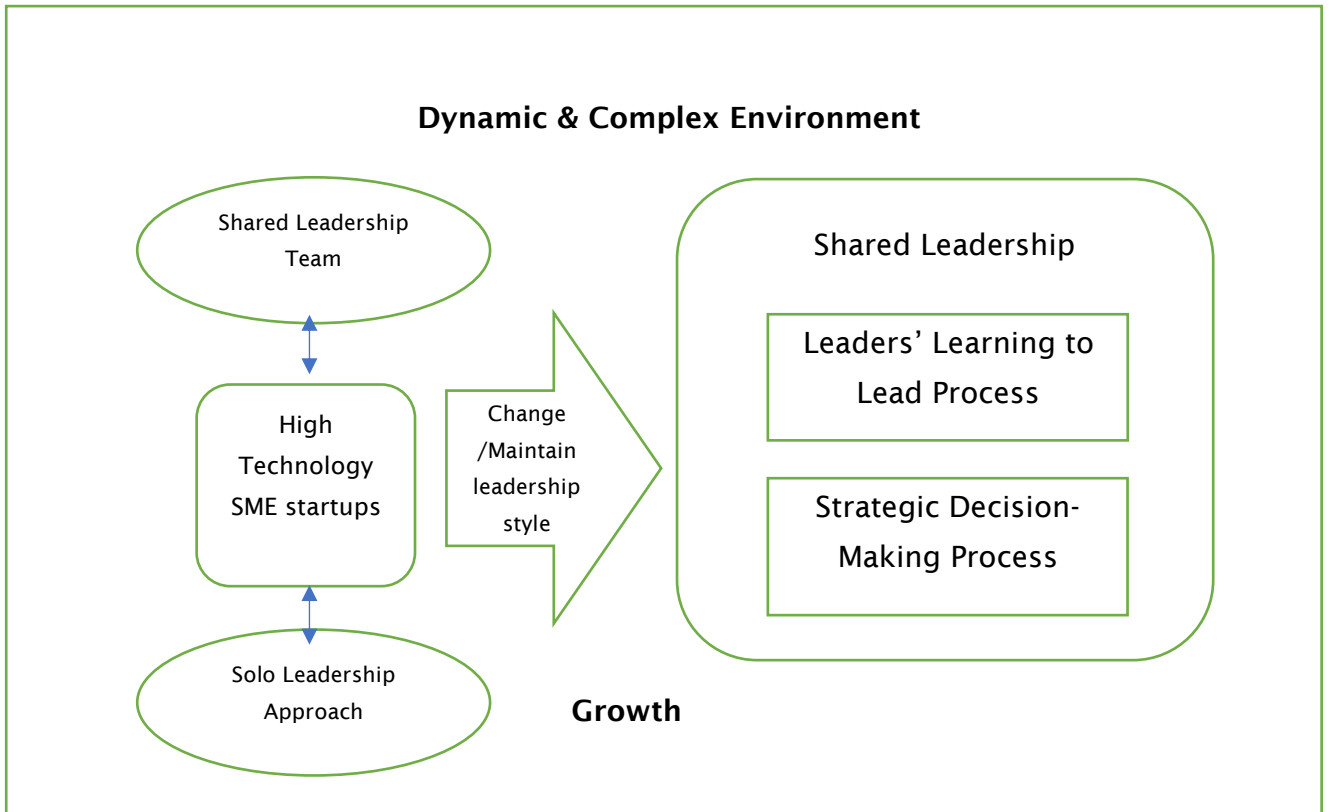
Therefore, the underpinning theoretical viewpoint of this research, based on the literature reviews, it can be concluded that the shared leadership concept offers added advantages to the high growth SMEs startup due to its flexibility and faster response compared to the other leadership styles. Among the reasons is these types of organisations require innovation, competitiveness and rapid response to changing environments which are highly suitable to the shared leadership concept (Pearce and Manz, 2005).

But, Pearce et al. (2010) suggested that shared leadership should not be seen as the ultimate solutions to leadership obstacles in organisations as this type of leadership has several flaws too and cultural resistance is regarded as one of the biggest challenges to it. The authors also pointed out that the success of shared leadership depends on the organisational members' support.

Based on this notion, this concept of leadership has a massive opportunity for researchers to investigate the process empirically as there is a lack of empirical evidence on the shared leadership process. Thus, this current study explores three scopes within the shared leadership implementation which are the leadership approach, leaders' learning to lead and strategic decision- making process.

2.8 The Conceptual Framework of the Study

The current research literature review had been extensively discussed in the earlier sections within this chapter. Therefore, Figure 2 summarizes the conceptual of the research study.



The conceptual framework above represents the overall literature flow of the research study, which has been discussed lengthily in the previous chapter. It starts with the dynamic and complex environment of the business world (the big square represents the environment where organizations in). The high technology SME startups experience growth phase at certain points of the business life cycle and among the possible challenges face by these organizations include leadership crisis. These organizations have different approaches to leadership. Some of the startups opted for solo leadership style, and the rest employed shared leadership practice. Along the way, these SME startups have decided to maintain the shared leadership, and some of startups decided to change their leadership style from solo to shared leadership (the arrow in the middle).

The next phase in the conceptual framework represents the phenomenon of shared leadership implementation experienced by these SME startups. The research study aims to investigate the leaders' learning to lead and the strategic decision-making process of these shared leadership organizations within the business complex environment.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodological approaches employed in this study. It summarizes the philosophical stance of the study that comprises ontology, epistemology and axiology. The methodology section discusses the selected research design; sampling frame; data collection and analysis tool employed in this study. This chapter also discusses validity, and reliability of the selected research design.

Next is discussion on the robustness and trustworthiness of data collected for the current research study. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the ethical and integrity issues that potentially impinge upon the research process. The study aims to explore shared leadership implementation within the high growth SME startups in Malaysia. These are the three areas this recent study covers which are the shared leadership style; the process of learning to lead among the leaders from shared leadership context; and the strategic decision- making process of shared leadership.

3.2 **Research Paradigms and Philosophy**

Research philosophy is the term that relates “to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge” (Saunders et al., 2007, p.107). It is essential that researchers have an adequate understanding of philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the research design prior to the work (Robson, 2011).

Meanwhile, paradigm is “a way of examining social phenomena from which particular understandings of these phenomena can be gained and explanations attempted” (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 112). In principle, it is all about getting access to the knowledge of the social phenomenon that the researcher wants to explore and how the phenomenon can be identified in order to demonstrate the knowledge (Mason, 2002). The decision on the research design is based on the researchers’ comprehension and understanding on the nature of reality in their studies and how this knowledge can be captured. Therefore, next sections will discuss the ontology, epistemology and research design for this current study.

3.2.1 **Positivism, Interpretivism and Critical Realism**

In general, there are three basic philosophical foundations that researchers need to understand before a decision on the research design can be made. Snape and Spencer (2003, p.1) listed the foundations as follows:

- a. Their beliefs about the nature of the social world and what can be known about it (ontology)
- b. The nature of the knowledge and how it can be acquired (epistemology)
- c. The purpose(s) and the goal(s) of the research

Ontology Assumptions

Ontology questions arise when researchers intend to investigate certain areas, with main interest given to the objects of the study (Porta and Keating, 2008). Other ontological perspective that researchers wish to investigate include the nature of the phenomena, entities or social reality (Mason, 2002). Therefore, from the beginning of the study, researchers have to have a clear idea about the nature of social entities that they wish to

delve into. The questions that they need to ask are whether social entities are independent from the social actor behavior or whether it requires interpretation based on the social actors' actions.

Two aspects of ontology are objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism believes that the existence of social entities and its meanings are separate from its actors (Bryman, 2012). Because of the social reality of objectivism is straightforward, it does not require social interpretation. Oppositely, social reality for subjectivism is constructed and demands interpretation by people (Denscombe, 2002). Subjectivism requires a continual process of social interactions between actors because the social phenomena are always changing (Saunders et al., 2012).

Based on this notion, the ontology of the current study is subjective, so as to understand the perception of the leaders who are directly involved within the socially constructed settings of the social reality; high growth SME start-ups. Through their perception which lead to their actions or behaviors. The type of organization selected for this study is high growth SME startups specifically the Biotechnology sector of Malaysia. The phenomena of investigation for this current study are the process of the leaders learn to lead and strategic decision making from the shared leadership context within these high growth small and medium startups.

Therefore, the social phenomena for this study is said to be socially constructed. The current study focuses into two different scenarios where the high technology SME startups experience high growth that lead to leadership crisis. The first scenario is when the leaders maintain their current leadership style and later change to shared leadership approach. In the second scenario, the organizations from the beginning have employed the concept of shared leadership. Therefore, the intention of the current study is to investigate the details and factors contributing to the social reality of shared leadership that the organizations currently practice.

Epistemology Assumptions

Once the social reality of the entities of the study has been identified, the next thing to look at is how the study should be conducted and how to acquire the knowledge. These questions are known as epistemology questions. The research epistemology foundation is

also known as the research paradigm. Though there are many research paradigms, the positivist and interpretivist paradigms are the most differentiated (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997; Jupp, 2006; Saunders et al., 2007). Based on this reason, they are considered in more depth to form the basis of selecting a research method. When researchers are clear on these aspects of research foundations, it will serve as a basis for research methods selection process for the study they intend to investigate.

Natural sciences research approaches suit the philosophical stance of positivism. This is because a positivist research strategy deals with quantifiable observations (Corbetta, 2003) which leads to statistical analysis (Saunders et al., 2012). In addition, the outcome and the findings from the positivism approach are mostly evidence generated by statistics (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997). The approach is rather straight forward in comparison to interpretivism approach.

Business and management studies give attention to human aspects and the impact of human behavior on the social world. The concept of interpretivism is more adaptable and applicable in the business and management field (Mason, 2002). Interpretivism acquires the interpreted answers from those who are directly involved in that social context (Robson, 2011).

The interpretivism approach is also known as an inductive approach. An inductive approach involves the process of topic exploration and requires the researcher to develop a theoretical explanation as the data are collected and analyzed (Saunders et al., 2012). The authors emphasized that this type of research study will be data driven in nature. The inductive approach allows the researcher to identify patterns and relationships that emerge from the collected data that gives better understanding about the theory. The research questions are initially derived from the current literature reviews of the study (Lewis, 2003).

On the other hand, a deductive approach is theory-driven, where researchers develop the research questions from existing theories and hypotheses are set up to test it (Saunders et al., 2007). The deductive approach is suitable for studies that involve theory confirmation and is experiment based. This approach is suitable for the positivist type of study.

Based on the extant of literature above, the researcher takes up the interpretivism stance, as it will shed light on how leaders in the high growth SME startups perceive, behave and react during the shared leadership practice. By employing interpretivism approach, it allows researchers to capture what is happening in the social phenomenon that is in constant change (Saunders et al., 2012).

Axiology Assumptions

Another branch of research philosophy is axiology; it studies judgements about the value of the research process. In relation to a research topic, it establishes the researcher personal value (Saunders et al., 2012). In the interpretivism approach, the researcher believes that the research process is value bound, whereby, the researcher is part of the objects being studied and cannot be separated. Thus, the researcher's activities are affected by the researcher's values, and it will be subjective (Saunders et al., 2009). In contrast, the positivist approach, researcher regards that the research process is value-free and unbiased. Thus, the objects of the study are unaffected by their activities. This research is closer to the value bound approach by which the researcher is highly engaged in the research process, and it requires ethical considerations in all the steps of the research process.

3.3 Justification of the Research Paradigm and the Research Methodology

Based on the philosophical underpinnings and nature of the study, a qualitative approach was chosen as the research design for this study. A qualitative approach is “unscientific, or only exploratory, or subjective” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p.10). The current study falls under the category of a qualitative study due to the fact that the processes are complex and exploratory in nature. Moreover, the research subject is relatively new and need further exploration.

The main differences between qualitative and quantitative methods can be seen from the experiential engagement involved, communication with the subjects and physical interaction within the research study setting (Everet and Louis, 1981). In this current study, the complexity of the shared leadership practice specifically on these two areas;

the process of leaders learning to lead and strategic decision making, requires a research approach that is able to capture the details of the phenomena. Qualitative methods can help researchers understand the social phenomena and their context better (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008).

In contrast, a quantitative approach is interested in analyzing the causal relationship between variables and not the processes. This is not suitable for this current study's main objective, which is to investigate the shared leadership approach from the leaders' learning to lead context and process of making the strategic plans because it involves human perception. Another point is that the quantitative approach also has minimal human contact and lack of experiential engagement by comparison to qualitative. The quantitative approach deals more with numbers and statistical analysis whereas the qualitative approach is interested in words (Saunders et al., 2012).

Qualitative research has become a popular choice in leadership studies because this type of research approach is able to capture human perception, experience and behavior (Ospina, 2004). According to Conger (1998), due to the complexity of data in the study of leadership, quantitative research alone would not be able to deliver a good understanding of the subjects, especially in terms of the human life experience. The phenomena cannot be fully understood from numerical or statistical analysis only, because it involves human factors such as behaviors and experience. Therefore, the author suggests that the best research method to use is the qualitative approach.

Studies done by Hulpia and Devos, (2010) and; Kempster and Cope, (2010) discuss that qualitative data collection was more suitable for leadership undertaken in groups, as opposed to quantitative data collection. According to them, leadership is a complex process and involves in-depth information. The nature of a qualitative approach is suitable for this study. Furthermore, Kirton, (2011) points out that the qualitative approach is widely used to investigate processes and patterns in the field of social sciences.

Though there are advantages in employing a qualitative approach, one must not ignore several of its weaknesses. It involves more complex and exhausting tasks which require well-planned actions from the beginning of the study and towards the end (Mason, 2002). However, these disadvantages should not be seen as a deterrent for researchers to use this

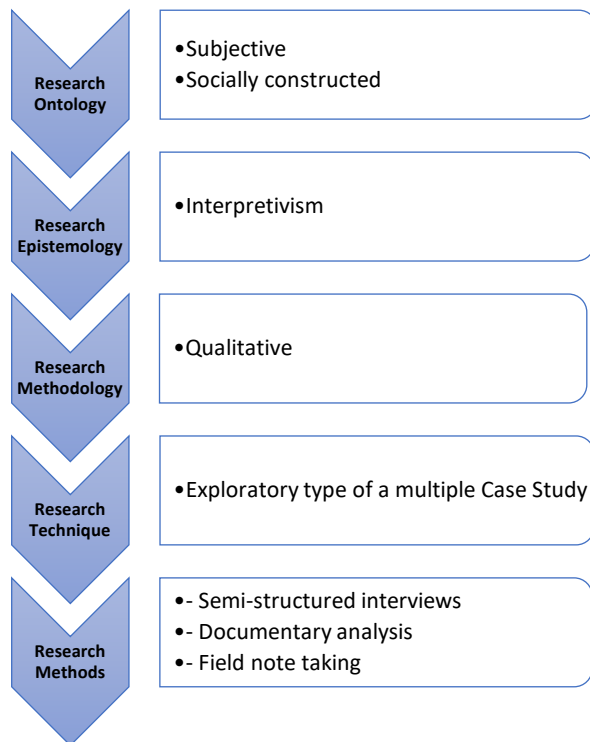
approach, because it gives the opportunity “to engage with things that matter, in ways that matter” (Mason, 2002, p.1).

The qualitative inquiry can be done through several data collection techniques such as case study, ethnography and life history (Schwandt, 1997). The data collection technique for this current study is a multiple case study. Meanwhile, the data collection methods involved are in- depth interviews, document analysis and field note- taking. Figure 3 summarizes the research study.

This research study falls under the category of an exploratory study because the phenomenon is not clearly stated and understood, which necessitates further investigation. The research topic has lots of vague areas which requires further empirical investigations in order to get better understanding on the shared leadership practice (Avolio et al., 2009).

Another reason that this is an exploratory study is because the results cannot be quantified using statistical analysis. The nature and the richness of the data make it difficult to quantify. It is subjective to quantify human aspects such as behavior, perception and experience. Saunders et al., (2012) have suggested that there are three principal ways of conducting exploratory study that include literature research, ‘experts’ of the subject interviewed, and focus group interviews. For this study, semi structured in-depth interviews are chosen to investigate the phenomena by getting the information from the high growth SMEs start-ups leaders.

Last but not least, the decision of the research design should be based on the purpose(s) and the goal(s) of the research. After taking into account the ontology and epistemology positions of the current study, a qualitative approach is seen as the most appropriate method for research design, data collection and analysis. It is an exploratory study which will use an inductive data collection approach to obtain data and information from the selected respondents.



(Source: Researcher)

Figure 3: The Research Paradigm and Design employed from the Research Study.

3.4 Research Design

The research design plays a crucial role, especially during the data collection and analysis phase, as it serves as an overall framework for the study (Bryman and Bell 2011). Before obtaining research data, a systematic and carefully planned data collection strategy is required. This is to ensure the information received from the respondents is sufficient for the researcher to derive a conclusion.

For this study, the case studies are chosen for the data collection strategy due to the research paradigm and philosophical viewpoint which had been discussed in the earlier subsections of this chapter. The research methods employed for this study are in depth interviews, documents analysis and field note-taking. In this study, there are two types of data used. The primary data is collected during the interviews: the high growth SME leaders' feedback and the employees' feedback. As for the secondary data, it is derived from the selected high growth SME startups' documents such as the company's annual

report, meeting minutes, company's website, charts and related online information. In parallel, the field note taking took place at the same time as the interviews.

3.4.1 Case Studies

For this current study, a multiple case studies approach is employed. The case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13). In general, case studies can be categorized in terms of their nature, which are exploratory, descriptive and explanatory (Yin, 1994). The author emphasized that the exploratory approach is a popular choice among business-based research studies.

When a study involves an investigation into a phenomenon that is set in its natural surroundings, it is recommended to use case study as a research data collection method (Velde et al., 2004; Maylor and Blackmon, 2005; Robson, 2011). It gives the opportunity for the researcher to get an idea of what is really happening in the subjects' world. This data collection approach is said to be the best way to study processes within companies, because this research strategy gives the opportunity to acquire an overall view of the specific phenomena of the events (Gummesson, 2000).

However, there are several downsides to the case study method that researchers need to consider before choosing this type of data collection approach. One of them is that case studies are time-consuming. Due to time constraints, the sample tends to be smaller and more selective in comparison to a quantitative approach where the numbers are bigger (Gummesson, 2000).

As for the current research study, the research aims to investigate the shared leadership practice concerning leadership implementation, leaders' learning to lead the process and the strategic decision-making process. Exploratory case studies are chosen in this work due to the nature of the investigation, which is to understand the process of leadership that happens within these six high growth SME startups. Due to time constraint involves in the recent study, six cases are considered adequate due to the nature of the study; in-depth investigation of the selected high growth SME startups. According to Yin (2009),

the typical criteria regarding sample size are irrelevant because a sampling logic is not applicable for multiple-case design. The author suggested that it is a researcher's decision for the number of case replications (literal and theoretical) required or preferred to be in the study. This section provides the justifications on the choice of samples as well as the selection of the cases. Finally, discussion on the research setting and context of the study.

3.4.2 **Sampling**

Sampling and selection can be defined as “principles and procedures used to identify, choose, and gain access to relevant units which will be used for data generation by any method” (Mason, 1998, p.83). The strength of this sort of investigation lies in its “authentic, case-specific detail” (Kirton, 2011). This is due to the fact that information received is potentially richer and deeper compared to numbers and statistics. Therefore, purposive sampling is employed for this research study, because the study's aim is to investigate the phenomena of shared leadership within these Malaysian high growth SME startups in biotechnology sector. These organizations are selected accordingly (refer to the Case Selection section below) to answer the research questions and to get in-depth understanding on the given phenomenon; i.e shared leadership practice.

Another downside to the case study is that the final results cannot be statistically generalized to the whole population (Velde et al., 2004). This is because from the beginning of the research, the sample covers a minority of the population and specific groups only. According to Lewis and Ritchie (2003), it can be done through clarification of the context in the framework where the phenomena occurs. The authors also point out that the approach of generalization is different from quantitative methods that are based on statistical findings. These findings are based on the knowledge that it relates to a theoretical domain which is known as analytical generalization (Velde et al., 2004). The concept of generalization is more towards the positivism belief which is the aim of the science research (Thorpe et al., 2011). For the current research study, it is an interpretivism approach. The intentions are to explore the phenomenon of shared leadership practice, rich in data and, the outputs are unquantified. Therefore, the concept of generalization is inadequate for this study.

3.4.3 Cases Selection

The number of cases selected for this study is six high growth SME start-ups from the biotechnology sector in Malaysia, with a total of twenty-five subject respondents. All leaders in the selected six companies are the research subjects, including two of the employees from each case study for the triangulation purpose. Respondents are carefully selected in order to maximize the richness of information corresponding to the research questions.

The aim of the recent study is to investigate the implementation of shared leadership in these cases, from the perspective of the leadership itself. Further, to understand the leadership practice during the leaders' learning to lead process and strategic decision-making process. Multiple case studies help the researcher to investigate the phenomena within and across each environment, and to understand and explore the similarities and differences (Baxter and Jack 2008).

The selected case studies are chosen according to certain characteristics (refer to the Cases Selection section below), with main attention paid to answering the research questions and to further understanding the given phenomenon; i.e. the learning to lead and strategic decision-making process from the shared leadership context during growth period.

The selection of the companies is made by looking through the company list prepared by SME Corporation Malaysia (2015), a government agency that is in charge of the national's SME policies. Hence, as the discussion illustrates, the research subjects were selected based on a set of characteristics:

- a. The organization is classified as an SME organization, based on the Malaysian SME definition
- b. The venture is from a high technology sector; the biotechnology sector.
- c. The age of the organization must be less than 10 years old.
- d. The organization is led by at least two leaders.
- e. In the first of its five years of operation, the organization had experienced rapid growth.

Table 6 : Case Studies Summary

Case Study	Number of Leaders	Numbers of Employees	Total number of subject respondents
Case 1	2	2	4
Case 2	2	2	4
Case 3	2	2	4
Case 4	3	2	5
Case 5	2	2	4
Case 6	2	2	4
Total number of respondents	13	12	25

Due to the nature of the study, which requires in-depth inquiries, it is practical to have a smaller sample size compared to a quantitative study with a bigger sample size. As there has been debate about the minimum number of samples that is acceptable in conducting interviews for a qualitative study (Bryman, 2004), the author argued that the size of the sample should vary from situation to situation, depending on the theoretical sampling approach. This sampling type makes a generalization on the theory, rather than a population (Kumar, 1999; Saunders et al., 2007). Table 6 summarizes the selected subject respondents for this research study:

3.4.4 Research setting/context

The parameters of the research define the sample boundaries/coverage for the study. It specifies who, where, how many and what characteristics the sample should have. Before the data collection process, setting a clear guideline about the research sample helps in finding a suitable and precise sample that is required for the study. This is due to the fact

that the research sample plays an important part as it is the main source of data for the research questions (Mason, 2002).

As the case study approach is being employed it is crucial to stick to the main characteristic of a case study, which is the importance of systematically describing the unit of analysis (Vangen and Huxham, 2006). In this study, the focus is on the shared leadership aspect of the organization, therefore the main source of the information is the leaders. The main reason for this selection is to emphasize that the study focuses on personnel rather than the entire firm. The next step is to narrow down the type of sampling that is appropriate for the study. This step is better known as the subject selection.

For this research study, a group of six biotechnology high growth SME startups were chosen. Interestingly, this type of organization is small in size, and it gives easier access to the leaders' experience and captures the leadership phenomenon. In comparison to the established and bigger organization, the leadership practice and culture are already set in and more bureaucratic. An established organization according to Kao (1991) is reflected in terms of its characteristics of size, duration of its existence, a long organizational history and established shared values in comparison to new start-ups.

A study suggested that small firms enjoy the benefit of being seen as innovators in embryonic industries (Deakins and Freel, 2003). Other ways of looking into what determines a small business are through the characteristics of the organization itself. These characteristics can be used to depict small businesses. According to Kao (1991), entrepreneurial start-ups have certain features such as face-to-face relationships, informal communication and management. This type of organization has a small market share, flat management structures and the owners control the whole business operation (Deakins and Freel, 2003).

The characteristics of a high technology firm include highly educated employees, lack of capital intensive investment and a huge proportion of asset investment in intellectual human capital (Milkovich et al., 1991). The authors also identify characteristics of high technology firms' employees to be highly educated and some of the firm's assets are in the form of intellectual human capital. A similar view is taken by (Balkin and Swift, 2006)

where they presented that most founders of high technology based ventures have a background in scientific disciplines.

According to Ensley et al.,(2002), successful management of new ventures does not rely solely on individuals but often involves a team effort, where members of the organization have different backgrounds, skills and expertise (Ensley et al., 2002). In brief, a conclusion can be made that founders of the high technology start-ups are those who are familiar with the technology itself when the business is set up.

Other features include central decision-making, informal organizational structure, and founders who are familiar with the business (Leung et al., 2006). The selection of the small organizations for this study was based on a mixture of approaches previously discussed. In terms of geographic location, the sample of the study is located in several states in Peninsular Malaysia, including Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Pahang.

3.5 Data Collection Technique

In this research study, the researcher employed several data collection techniques in the process of understanding the process of shared leadership in high growth SME start-ups in Malaysia. These techniques are seen appropriate due to the nature of the data involved; rich and a phenomenon of the leadership process. The techniques include in-depth interviews and critical incident interview techniques, documents analysis and field notes.

3.5.1 Semi Structured In- Depth Interviews

For this exploratory study, semi-structured interviews were employed as suitable techniques to gather information and feedback from the leaders of the selected companies. This data collection technique is more appropriate when complex situations are involved, for instance when the research study is to focus on the process of social world phenomena (Kumar, 1999). Semi-structured interviews give further attention to the specific subject and its meaning (Flick, 2006). It gives the opportunity for the researcher to gather in-depth information from the research subjects. This type of data collection technique generates a huge amount of information in a relatively short amount of time (Velde et al., 2004).

The selection of this type of data collection technique is based on several advantages of interviews. First, it gives the opportunity for researchers to get first-hand information from the respondents (Creswell, 2009). The technique is able to capture the respondents' reasons for the decisions, actions, attitudes and opinions taken by them in their social world (Saunders et al., 2003). In this current study, concerns are about the subjects' perception of the shared leadership practice that they have experienced.

Second, the interview session can be used as an instrument for the acquisition of reliable and valid data (Adams and Schvaneveldt, 1991). It can be achieved when researchers clarify and explain any misunderstanding of questions to the respondents during the interview session (Kumar, 1999). Next, through communication with the research respondents, researchers are able to extract historical information from them (Creswell, 2009). The beauty of this interview technique is flexibility (Berg, 2004).

Semi-structured interviews are not as strict as structured interviews. Researchers have the freedom and flexibility to adjust and deviate from the prepared research questions if they feel the need to probe further into the issue (Berg, 2004; Bryman, 2004). This technique allows the researcher to acquire further explanation from the research subjects, which is not possible in the quantitative approach.

The richness of the data can be captured through an open-ended communication event that happens "outside the stream of everyday life" of the respondents (Miller and Crabtree, 1999a). It can be created by giving space to respondents to express their views in a candid manner during the interview sessions. They are, however, more guided compared to the unstructured interview. Generally, the semi-structured interview format can be a combination of planned questions and open-ended questions.

Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaire

The researcher prepared two versions of semi-structured interview questions, one is for the leaders and another is for the employees. The main reason for this is to acquire the information according to the research subjects' criteria. As for the leaders, the questions cover the leadership aspect, the leaders' learning to lead process and the organization's strategic decision-making process. Meanwhile, the interview questions for the employees are for triangulation purposes and conformity.

For this exploratory study, the research questions are divided into three different time phases of the research phenomena; shared leadership within the case studies. The question flow is shown in Figure 4:

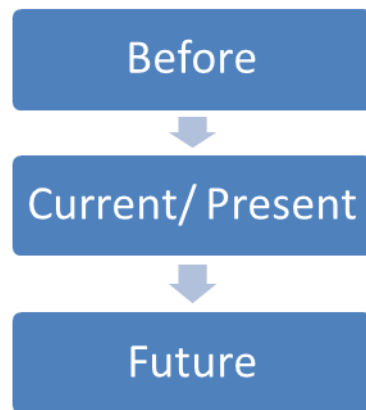


Figure 4: Phases of incorporation of shared and styles

Source: Researcher

The time frames indicate the process of shared leadership within the selected high growth SME startups with the main focus on leadership approach concerning the leaders' learning to lead process and strategic decision- making process. The three different periods give an understanding of the leadership phenomenon.

The first phase represents the beginning of the leadership set up within the case studies. Next, the current situation represents the shared leadership practice taking place within the organization (current/present). The final phase (future) describes the possible changes which occur within the case study from a leadership perspective. But, this research study is not a longitudinal study as the data collection process took place only within that interview sessions.

3.5.2 **Organisational Document Analysis**

Another data collection method employed in this research study is document analysis. Documents are known as secondary data and can be in the form of public documents, for instance minutes of the meetings, newspapers (Creswell, 2009) or in the form of private documents such as journals, diaries or letters. These documents can be used to verify and clarify the information derived from other data collection methods, for instance

interviewing (Mason, 2002). This process will validate that both sources are concurrent with each other. This research study uses document analysis whenever possible to support research findings but it is recognized that confidentiality may limit what is made available by the firm.

In this recent study, the researcher had analysed the companies' documents include the company profiles and company administrative related documents. Some of the documents are obtained from the organizations upon request made by the researcher and some are self-obtained through internet search engines. There are several issues associated with this type of data collection. First, it may involve protected information or restricted access to the documents. Second, it requires extra effort from researchers to search out the information in hard- to- find places (Creswell, 2009).

Any documents that are related to the companies will also be the source of information for this current study. According to Bryman (2004), there are two types of company documents. First, documents available in the public domain such as annual reports, mission statements, press releases, advertisements, and company's public materials produced on the internet. Second, other documents that are internally available within the company, for instance company newsletters, organizational charts, minutes of the meetings, memos, and so on.

Among the advantages of documents analysis is that it helps researchers to grasp the language and words of the research subjects. Also, the information can be accessed easily from time to time for future reference. Apart from that, the documents may have been laid down with careful thought during compilation. Lastly, document analysis helps researchers save time and cost since the information is ready to use (Creswell, 2009).

Finally, the information within the documents may not be accurate and depends on the sources it comes from, especially the digitized form of documents that can be accessed through the internet. Therefore, it is crucial to establish the authenticity and reliability of the information available, by tracing the origin of the sources and authors before beginning the analysis process.

Based on the document analysis, it helps the researcher gain general information on the performance and history of the selected companies. The information helps the researcher

to understand the history and background of the companies, from the beginning of the formation up to the current state.

3.5.3 **Field Note Taking**

For this study, the researcher employed another data collection technique which is field note-taking. The field note-taking technique is equally important as using a recorder during the interviews is note-taking, which was engaged in this research study. The researcher takes note of the observation of the surroundings, physical setting, location and people where the interviews take place. Kocolowski (2010) highlights the fact that this type of data collection technique is the written record, and comes from observation. All the essential answers and information given by the interviewees are written down in the interview log book. The field notes, or research diaries, help to document the data collection process in context protocols (Bryman, 2012). Both data collection techniques; recording via digital recorder and field note-taking were employed concurrently during the interview sessions. It is advisable to write notes immediately, or as soon as possible, to preserve the information gained from the interviews (Fitzsimons et al., 2011).

3.6 **Data Collection Procedure**

This section explains and justifies the data collection procedure for this study. There are two stages of data collection, the preliminary stage and the secondary stage.

The Preliminary Stage

During the preliminary stage of data collection, two different sets of pilot interview questions are prepared for the respondents of the study. One set is for the leaders of high growth SME startups, and the other set is for the organisational employees. The interview questions were distributed to three groups; business leaders, employees and academicians. The total number of respondents for this preliminary stage is thirteen; encompassed of five business leaders, five employees and three academicians.

The interview questions were sent to respective respondents' emails after approval granted. They were requested to answer the research interview questions and gave the feedbacks on the overall content of the interview questions. The duration of the

preliminary stage is three months, including the process of invitation to the pilot interview questionnaires, receiving and analysing the feedback and improvising the research interview questions.

The aims of the preliminary stage for this study is to ensure that the designed research interview questions are capable of capturing the research objectives. The initial stage gave the researcher a clear direction on how to construct and display two sets of research questions for the research interviewees. The feedback from the preliminary stage is valuable in the sense that helps researcher to improve the research interview questionnaires for the next step which the second stage of data collection involving the leaders and employees of the selected high growth SME startups.

The Secondary Stage

This research study's secondary stage of data was performed from September to December 2014. In the beginning, twenty companies have been short listed and only six companies gave their consent to be part of the research subjects. The targeted sample size for this study is between four to ten companies. In the end, only six companies were willing to participate in this research study, with a total number of twenty- five research subjects who gave their interviews. This figure is seen as feasible, realistic and appropriate for this study, after taking into consideration the nature of the data, research objectives, number of respondents and time factors.

At this stage, the intention mails and emails were sent to the shortlisted companies. Upon receiving feedback from the companies, intention e-mails were sent. The content of the e-mail includes an invitation to participate, basic background questionnaires, and a brief explanation of the research subject and request for their participation in the study. Once the selected companies agree to participate, the next step is to arrange interview sessions.

Another email was sent to give further details on the research subject and a general personality questionnaire (subject's personal details; age, gender, education, business experience). An appointment is made through the email's communication. The potential questions which will be asked during the interview were given earlier during the earlier contact with the subject respondents; i.e. email communications. This is to give them a general idea of the issues that will be discussed during the session.

Up front, before the interview process begins, the researcher had prepared a checklist. The checklist includes the interview guide, interview forms and semi- structured research questions. Prepared questions were used as a guideline throughout the session as guidance for the researcher to get the relevant feedback from the subjects.

The researcher used a digital dictaphone as the main source to capture the information during the interview. Recording helps the researcher to give full concentration during the session while taking notes, without worrying about missing potentially vital information since the interview could be replayed at a later time. While recording the interview, the researcher also wrote down the information in the interview log book throughout the session. In the event of recorder failure, the researcher can take comfort that a backup of information will have been gathered from the written notes (Davies, 2007).

The researcher follows the general rules of conducting an in-depth interview. The respondent's permission was sought prior to the commencement of the interview. The respondents need to fill a consent form to acknowledge their willingness to participate. Their approval to participate is known as informed consent (Oliver, 2003).

The researcher followed the general practice of conducting the qualitative interviews as below. Prior to the interview session, it is advisable to make an introduction to the research subjects (Hennink et al., 2011). The authors suggested that the essential points to be included are self-introductory, brief explanations on the purpose of the study, the significant impact of the data collected from the study, research outcome and research ethical issues.

The duration of an interview session per respondent varies, depending on their response, as there is no fixed length of time set to complete the process (Saunders et al., 2003). Therefore, the duration of interviews for this research study ranged from 45 minutes to a maximum of two hours.

Once the interview session ended, the researcher immediately wrote down all the information gained into the interview log book. This is to secure fresh information obtained right after the interview sessions. The recorded interviews were transferred onto the computer using relevant application software. Then, the researcher labelled the saved recording according to sample, date and location of the interviews for reference.

The summarization of the data collection procedure time is in the table below:

Data Collection Activities	Duration/ Time Period
Research interview questions preparation	September- December, 2013
<u>1st stage of data collection:</u> Pilot interview questions distribution	January- March, 2014
<u>2nd Stage of Data Collection:</u> Actual data collection commenced	September- December 2014
Transcribing Process	January- September 2015
Data Analysis	January – September 2016
Thesis Writing	November 2016- July 2017

Resource: Researcher

3.7 The Data Analysis Process

Yin (2009) identifies numerous sources of evidence in the data collection techniques in case study methodology, which include documents, archival records, interviews and through observation. The methods adopted by this study to examine the practice of shared leadership in the high growth SME startups include in-depth interviews and critical incident technique, document analysis and field notes. Content analysis is employed as a means to analyse these documents.

Once the data collection process is accomplished, a transcribing session takes place as soon as possible before the data analysis process takes place. The transcribing process is “reproduction of the audio-recorded information as a written (word- processed) account using the actual words” (Saunders et al. 2003, p.475). The transcribing process is a very time-consuming task as there is a need for a full ‘verbatim’ (i.e. word for word) account of all verbal utterances (Robson, 2011).

3.7.1 **Transcribing of Data**

The interviews were conducted in Malay language and English were recorded using a digital voice recorder. The digital device helps researcher to store, archive and transmit the data electronically. Later, all the recorded interviews were transferred into the computer for transcribing process. The duration of the transcribing process for all the interviews was approximately nine months which is between January to September 2015, and on average recorded interviews required seven to nine hours of transcribing. The transcriptions length varied from six to thirty pages. All of the transcriptions were translated in English and it required one to two months of translation.

The researcher opted for self-proofreading, and for the accuracy and consistency purposes she acquired assistance from two qualitative researchers from the government university to employ random proofreading and checking of the transcriptions. The process involved random proofreading, transcriptions checking by listening to the audio version, and compared it to the written form. In the process, from twenty- five transcriptions, only ten were randomly checked. The transcribing process is a time- consuming process, somehow, it helps in the comprehension of each case study (Bryman et al., 2007)

3.7.2 **Analysis of Data**

This study employed content analysis whereby it involves identification of emergent themes from the raw data collected during interview sessions. This is the first step in interpreting interview findings. Data analysis of a qualitative study is considered complex and time consuming, yet it covers the in-depth, and gives a better understanding of the complex phenomena such as leadership (Conger, 1998). Therefore, it is crucial to employ systematic, transparency and consistency approaches in the data analysis procedure in

order to validate the qualitative results. Based on the purposes of the recent research study, Miles and Huberman's (1994) linear but iterative flows of analysis activity are chosen for guidance to the data analysis process. The three interactive activities are data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification. This is shown in Figure 5:

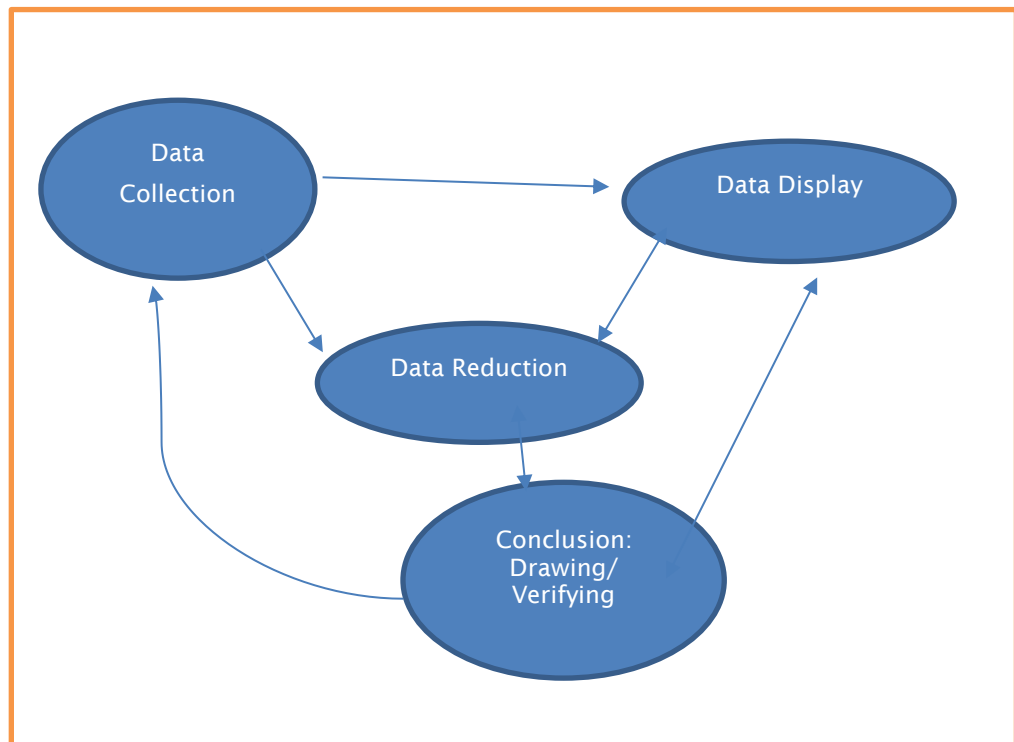


Figure 5: Flows of Analysis Activity (Miles and Huberman, 1994)

3.7.2.1 Data Reduction

There are several activities involved in data reduction; selecting, segmenting, editing and summarizing the data (Miles et al. 2014). According to the authors, it is a continuous process throughout the analysis in order to make the data of the transcriptions meaningful and workable, without losing the original context of the data. Among the data reduction documents employed in the recent study are summaries of cases, respondents' general summary sheet, memos, interview log book and coding strategies.

The respondent's general summary sheet was summarized for each interview. All the important information regarding the respondent was written in the sheet to help the researcher to gather the crucial content of the interview. At the same time, the sheet helps the researcher to plan for the next interview.

Next, the summary for each case is a combination, the write up gained from the interview session and related organizational documents review which includes company newsletters, organizational charts, minutes of the meetings, memos and others. Overall, it helps the researcher in explaining the case studies business development and gives an in-depth report of the cases under this recent study. For each emerging idea, the researcher wrote it down, together with the date in the memos, and linked it to the summary of the case. These documents were then kept together with the interview transcriptions for future reference.

3.7.2.2 Data Display and Drawing Conclusion

Qualitative data are typically comprehensive and scattered. Therefore, there is a need to organize, compress and assemble the information collected during fieldwork, as it allows the researcher to make conclusions (Miles & Huberman 1994) and to validate the analysis. In general, the data display is in the form of graphs, charts and tables.

In this current study, the timeline of each case was tabulated to display the business progression and history. The tabulated table for each case informs the organization's business development, growth, strategic decision process and the leadership practice based on the codes that were developed earlier. It covers the history of the organization setup, present and future plan. Then, the summary of each case was explained in the written form to further elaborate the organization's details.

The final step in data analysis is conclusion drawing. The researcher did follow-up interviews with the respondents due to missing information which is needed to integrate and finalise the final conclusions. Then, the final conclusion was made after going through the data integration, comparison, and analytical content review processes.

3.7.3 Data Coding

Due to the nature of richness in a qualitative study, data coding is done to discover regularities in the data. Coding helps the researcher to systematically organise and sort the data into meaningful information that summarises and synthesises each case. It is part of an iterative process in data analysis. In this recent study, coding is done manually by following the researcher, and it takes a month to finalise the codes.

3.7.3.1 Deciding on Sampling and Design Issues

It is important for qualitative researchers to justify and clarify the logic of sampling and the selection procedure for a study (Symon and Cassell, 2012). This current study employs purposeful sampling as a data collection technique in identifying the subjects of the investigation. This study requires richness and in-depth information from the high growth SMEs startups leaders in order to understand the phenomena of the shared leadership practice within the selected organizations.

Therefore, it is impossible and impractical to get information from the whole population of the research subject which will represent the whole range of the population (Bryman, 2004). Sampling is used as a representative for the whole population where the subjects of investigation are the leaders of the chosen organizations. Bias can also be reduced through consistency during the criteria selection, involving research aims and the epistemological basis (Jupp, 2006).

The current study uses purposive sampling to select the suitable cases that met all the criteria to highlight the subject under study. Among the criteria for the sampling is the high growth organizations which specifically comes from the Biotechnology sector. The organizations fall under the definition of Malaysian SMEs startups and the age of the organization is less than ten years. The unit of analysis is the individual leaders. The selection criteria of the samples were thoroughly explained in the previous section.

The scope of the sampling for this study is bounded by sector (Biotechnology) and sub-sector (agricultural and healthcare); the organizations' size (small and medium businesses with less than 200 employees); and annual sales (less than Ringgit Malaysia 10 million); and the locality (region). Hence, the selected cases have similar characteristics and

therefore are conclusive for comparison. There are several reasons why purposive sampling is chosen for the study. First, sampling purposely can avoid the selection bias problem. Sampling purposely “reveals the selection criteria which reduces the vulnerability to criticism for not being sufficiently rigorous” (Neegard, 2007, p. 256).

3.7.3.2 Developing Themes and Codes

For this research study, the researcher followed the coding process to reduce, sort and organise the raw data into several code categories and subcategories. According to Miles and Huberman (1994, p.56) "Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are attached to 'chunks' of varying size—words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting. They can take the form of a straightforward category label".

During the transcribing process, the researcher had made the interview transcript into three columns; the numbering system for each conversation column, the interview conversation column, and the notes column. This is part of the preparation for the data coding process. Each conversation in the interview was labelled with a number, and the sequence followed throughout all the interview transcripts. The labelling process was intended for future reference, in case there is a need to get back to the specific phrases during the writing-up process. As for the third column (notes column), this is to highlight the recurrent themes, new insights, examples and others.

Before the coding, every interview transcript and note were systematically reviewed by the researcher and all the related keywords, phrases or numbers were indexed and marked. First, the researcher identified the primary topics from the data, for example, shared leadership. Then the identified emerging themes were listed separately under each interview heading; this is to manage its source and context. Next, these themes were then grouped according to batch, for example, team cohesiveness, trust, leaders' background and SDM process. Later, the batches are compared with other data sets. Due to the small but richness of data set, it is feasible to manually code the research data as the researcher did not miss the valuable insights contains within data

Concurrently, she wrote down any new possible coding categories and subcategories on a different sheet. The iterative process happened by comparing the main code categories and the new potential code categories as to ensure that the critical information from the interview is captured and preserved in its setting (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Later, all these codes were revisited and revised carefully. By the end of this process, a list of coding categories and subcategories was established. The accuracy of the category codes is crucial. Therefore, the researcher requested one of her friends, who is a senior qualitative lecturer from the local university to go through the final coding outputs. Randomly, four interview transcripts were done by the researcher's friend to determine the level of agreement between both coding outputs.

Next, the main themes emerged when summaries from each case were compared to regulate the existence of similarities which led to the main themes. Mason (2002) suggested that it could be done either chronologically or thematically (themes based). For this study, the subjects of the interviews are classified into three themes: the shared leadership process, learning to lead process and strategic decision-making process.

3.7.4 **Writing Up**

This thesis is written by following several steps. The first step is to get into details of each case, and it is called within-case analysis. Within-case analysis requires further exploration of the single unit/case study (Gerring, 2007). For each case study; details, in-depth analysis, description and explanation of leadership phenomena is done by answering research questions of the current study. The researcher identified and interpreted critical issues within the research scope in each case. The process is known as a continual referral between research documents; transcripts, business profile document and related documents. Each case was analysed extensively by the researcher.

Once the within-case analysis is done, the next step is the cross-case analysis. Cross- case analysis of these six case studies covers analytical and critical discussions and findings of the current research. The cross-case analysis is: "grouping together answers from different people to common questions or analysing different perspectives on central

issues” (Patton, 1990, p.376). The summarization of the research findings is being discussed in the final chapter of the thesis; The Conclusions and Recommendations.

3.8 Research Credibility

There are several crucial elements that qualitative researchers must address in their studies which are the importance of reflecting and producing evidence body, arguments, explanations and make critical assessments of respondents’ statements (Mason, 2002). All these steps are important to ensure the credibility, reliability and accuracy of the research methods and techniques employed in the research study. This section explains the methodology design used in this study in order to ensure the validity and reliability of research findings.

3.8.1 Validity and the Robustness of the Data

The issue of the validity of the interpretation of the collected data poses a challenge to the researchers (Bryman, 2012). The researcher must ensure the accuracy of the research findings. According to Bryman (2004, p.545) validity is “a concern with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research”.

For this study, the researcher employed internal and external validity approaches. For the internal validity, various methods of data collection are used to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the current study. Those are the in-depth interview, documentary analysis and field notes/notes taking. For external validity, interviews were conducted not only with the company’s leaders but also the company’s employees. External validity facilitates the triangulation of different sources enhances research credibility.

Further, this study employed respondent validation once the findings are finalised. Respondent validation is a process of getting confirmation and validation of the conclusions of the subjects of the investigation (Bryman, 2012). The respondents were given the final account of what they have said during the interviews and conversations. This is to make sure of the accuracy of the findings that the study has arrived at (Bryman, 2012).

3.8.1.1 Generalisability of the Research Findings

In qualitative research, the concept of statistical generalisability to a broader population is subjective (Yin 2003). The author highlighted that the idea of generalizability is interested in the theories applicability, which is developed in one environment, are to other situations. In general, the qualitative research objective is to ensure an appropriate embodiment of the study's events and to understand the critical issues under inquiry. Nonetheless, some of the findings are anticipated to be transferable to other organisations. For this current study, the settings are cases of six high growth SME startups from the biotechnology sector in Malaysia. The researcher has carefully given a credible explanation based on the empirical findings for the concept of shared leadership practice within these cases. Albeit, the outcomes can be interchangeable beyond the circumstances; the issue of generalisation should not a crucial point for this study.

3.8.2 Reliability

For qualitative research study, the reliability approach is a bit different from quantitative study. Based on the fact that the nature of data is rich and human factors are included during that specific time of interviews, and it is not repeatable (Saunders et al., 2012); unlike reliability considerations for quantitative study, where the finding and the designs can be replicated by another. This is because each case study is unique and the phenomenon is taking place in its natural settings. Therefore, qualitative reliability signifies the data analysing approach taken is consistent throughout the study (Gibbs, 2008). This current study used two approaches for reliability purposes; audit trail and providing examples and quotations.

3.8.2.1 Audit trail

Firstly, this study exercised practice of transparency, as part of reflexivity to interpret the researcher's philosophical position of the research process (Finlay and Ballinger, 2006). As the case study approach is being employed it is crucial to stick to the main characteristic of a case study, which is the importance of systematically describing the unit of analysis (Vangen and Huxham, 2006). To ensure the credibility of the findings,

constant comparisons and replication of logic help researcher to achieve the consistency (Eisenhardt, 1989).

3.8.2.2 Providing Examples and Quotations

Examples and quotations from the literature supported the discussion and finding of the current study.

3.8.3 Triangulation

To ensure the issues of validity and reliability of this qualitative based study, the researcher applied three different data collection techniques; in-depth interviews, documents and field note-taking. This approach is known as triangulation. Triangulation is done by examining evidence from the sources of information, and the technique is used to build a meaningful justification for the research study (Creswell, 2009). This cross-checked process helps to ensure the data is accurate and reliable. It also allows the researcher to get a better understanding of the research area that is being investigated. The technique gives a clear understanding of the processes involved which, in this current study, is to understand the leadership process; shared leadership practice within high growth SMEs startups in the Malaysian biotechnology sector.

In-depth interviews are meant to gather information directly from the research respondents; leaders and employees. Concurrently, an observation of the company environment/setting, for instance, the layout of the office, or the employees' seating were included in research field notes. Field notes acted as the second strategy, by jotting down all the information gained during the interview session, the records were referred while listening to the decoder during the transcription process. The notes allowed the researcher to take note of any information gap between both techniques.

Next, the researcher analysed related documents to give further information about the research subjects through companies' records, for instance, yearly financial reports, will provide the necessary information on the companies' current financial condition. By employing different sets of research methods to the study, researchers may acquire a better understanding of the research subject through a clearer picture of reality, more

valuable information and the better sight of symbols and theoretical concepts (Berg and Lune, 2012).

3.8.4 **Ethical Considerations**

Ethics play a crucial part in any research study design (Saunders et al., 2012). One cannot ignore the facts that ethical considerations exist throughout the whole process of the research study. By adhering to sets of principles for ethical professional practice, it shows that researchers take the integrity and morality aspects seriously while conducting their investigations. The above precaution steps taken is to inform the readers that the methods employed are ethically justifiable.

Before the interviews, the researcher obtained informed consent from the human subjects before interviews take place. Emails were sent, and that included a letter of intent, a general introduction of the research subject is sent to the research subjects. This is according to the principle of informed consent; subjects of an investigation have the right to accept or refuse to participate in a study (Homan, 1991). During the interviews, the researcher gave the possible effects of the research towards the respondents briefly, especially on privacy, confidentiality and their rights throughout the data collection process. For instance, there might be specific issues they have discussed during interviews that they do not want to be recorded or written down.

3.8.5 **Limitations**

One of the limitations of this current study is selective samples of six high growth SME startups in the biotechnology sector in Malaysia. Thus, it is not certain convinced that the results can be generalized to mature and larger organizations. Future studies may depict the current research approach with slight modifications. Moreover, this study investigated three specific elements concerning shared leadership concept, which covers context of leaders' learning to lead and the strategic decision-making process. Thus, other variables within the concept of shared leadership were not significantly explained. Wherever possible, further work is required to establish these variables.

4. IN- CASE ANALYSIS

This section discusses empirical evidence of the study. The in- depth information from six cases are further discuss in this chapter.

4.1 Case 1

The primary sources for Case 1 are namely: two founders/leaders and two employees. The one- to- one interview sessions took place at the company's main office in Balakong, Selangor. The other sources of secondary data that have been referred are organization documents, business profile, the case study reports, and the company's web page.

4.1.1 The Description of the Case Background

Case 1 started off its journey in 2010. The company was co-founded by two leaders, namely Miss N and Dr T. The original relationship between both were the student and supervisor's relationship. It started in 2002, when Miss N was a PhD student. The business idea was originally Miss N's PhD project and it became a business venture when both of them saw a huge business potential in it.

The distribution of ownership was made based on the individual's capital contribution and level of commitment. In 2010, the allocation between the two founders were eighty-five percent (Miss N) and fifteen percent (Dr T). During that period, Dr T was still working and he was unable to give full business commitment. Therefore, Miss N handled most of the company's affairs and Dr T's contribution was mainly on consultation of the technical and R&D areas. In 2015, there was a slight change in the distribution of ownership where Miss N's allocation was reduced to sixty-five percent and Dr T 's allocation increased to thirty-five percent. This was due to the change of circumstance, Dr T retired from his prior full- time job and he gives his full commitment toward the business.

Until 2015, overall set up cost spent by Case 1 was nearly four million Ringgit Malaysia. The cost covered the facilities, laboratories and operating cost. The money came from

many sources such as government loans, personal funds and friends' loans. The business operates from a two- story SMEs building within the industrial area of Balakong, Selangor. They have occupied the rented premise since 2010. The two- story building is equipped with laboratories facilities and office facilities including meeting room, lounge, pantry, staff cubicles, leaders' rooms, storage rooms, and restrooms.

When Case 1 started off in 2010, there were only three members of organization including the two founders/leaders. By 2014, the current number has risen to six including the general workers. Four of the employees are directly involved in the company's research and development activities and hold important posts in Case 1's research and development activities.

The tiger milk mushrooms are Case 1's main products. For more than a century, the mushrooms are being widely used as an alternative medication especially in the Chinese population. It is used to treat asthma, prolonged cough and said to have general health benefits. Naturally, the mushrooms grow in the forest and are difficult to get. Case 1 has found a special method of mushroom cultivation in and hold the pattern right. They are the first company in Malaysia to use the cultivation method to grow that kind of mushrooms within the control environment (labs). In 2011, their efforts received recognition from the Malaysia Guinness Book of Record as the first organization to be able to grow Tiger Milk Mushrooms in the laboratories. Within five years, Case 1 has managed to obtain product registrations, pattern rights, halal certification, organic certifications, government grants and awards. These boost the company's image and reputation.

There were several challenges faced by Case 1 in their first two years of operation. First, difficulty to get hold of funds due to the new ideas being put forth. At the same time, it was a costly and risky project. Second, public awareness about the benefits of the mushroom (ethnics other than Chinese) was lacking. Last but not least, the difficulty in marketing their product due to the founders' scientific backgrounds. Less than three years, the leaders managed to tackle the problems through continuous learning especially in the marketing area, continuous products awareness and hard work.

Since 2013, they managed to produce their own finished product; the tiger milk mushroom health products. Among their local customers are the multi-level marketing (MLM) companies, pharmacy stores chain, organic shops, manufacturers and individuals. They also export their products to Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. They are looking to expand their market worldwide within the next ten years as it is part of their strategic plan.

On average, the company has experienced a yearly revenue growth of between thirty to forty percent since 2011. This is because in the first year, they had difficulties to create their own market and reach potential customers. Between 2013- 2015, Case 1's sales had shown significant increase and last year sales recorded RM1.2m. The number is expected to increase when their collaboration with their international partners materializes in 2016.

4.1.2 Leadership Style/ Approach

Case 1 is being led by a team of leaders from the beginning. Shared leadership is part of its strategic plan to face the growth challenges in the future. Leaders in Case 1 believed that their decisions to lead the organization as a team gives added advantages during the growth phase in term of stability and minimizing future leadership crisis. Even though in the first two years of operation, Miss N hold most of the responsibilities to run the business because Dr T was still working in the government agency. They must have anticipated that at a certain point of their business life cycle, growth brings challenges to the organizations, especially from the leadership aspect. Based on the comments given by Miss N below:

“We have intentionally set up the team-based leadership from the beginning to prepare ourselves ahead when the company proliferate shortly. Although I am taking most of the responsibilities at the moment. We want to ensure a strong foundation of leadership to begin with” (Case 1).

The company experienced growth after the third year of operation. Yet, the growth does not have a significant impact on their leadership as there is no drastic change happened to the organizations' leadership. It seems that Case 1 has taken the pro-active growth measure since the business started-off through shared leadership practice. The possible explanation for Case 1 is to have two leaders, to begin with, shared leadership practice

helps to minimize the impact of growth through leaders' collaboration. Wiklund et al. (2009) suggest a broad integrative model of small firm growth appraise different aspects that are important to business growth. One of the five elements that have been adopted by Case 1 is growth attitude. As the authors highlighted, it is rather pro-active where the owners or the leaders have a general idea of what awaits their businesses during the growth process.

It is evident that the growth factor does bring impact on Case 1's business operation but not on its leadership aspect; the leaders took a traditional management human resource approach. The main focus is on the other issue of human resource; the number of employees. The leaders keep on increasing the amount of the employees parallel with the growing demand, and the number of leaders is maintained. This indicates Case 1's leadership is not profoundly affected by the growth factor. Dr T gave his comments on the issue of growth experienced by Case 1:

“For the time being, we experienced a growth at a steady pace. So far, we are coping well... We are currently hiring new employees according to the business demand” (Case 1).

In the first two years of the establishment of Case 1, there were no distinctive post/responsibilities for both leaders. Miss N was responsible for Case 1 business affairs during that period because Dr T was unable to give his full commitment to the company as he was a government servant. As one of the leaders highlighted:

“But in the first two years, we are just doing almost everything without having clear and proper tasks. Thou, my main responsibilities are in R&D, and Miss N runs the company affairs” (Case 1).

After two years of operation, the leaders decided to distribute the responsibilities among themselves based on an individual's knowledge, skills and expertise. Another aspect that distinguishes shared leadership from traditional leadership is that there is a broad sharing of power and influence among team members (Pearce et al., 2009). Miss N is given CEO post, and her responsibilities cover the company's daily operating tasks, especially on the management aspects of the company; including finance, human resource, marketing etc. While Dr T is directly in charge of the technical issue of Case 1, his responsibilities include R&D, staff training etc. He is Case 1's Chief Technical Officer (CTO). The step

is seen as part of the leaders' strategies to solidify the leadership practice within the organization to reduce leadership burdens and conflict avoidance. The issues were highlighted by Dr T, as he mentioned:

“Most of the time, we just stick to what we are good. I mean the given responsibilities that are being held since the business started... But in the third years, when the company experienced an increase in the sales volume. We think it is the time, to properly assign the responsibilities according to our expertise” (Case 1).

Though, it can be said that the decision is a bit late and should have been done earlier. There is a big possibility that if the action were taken more previously, Case 1 would experience growth and success within its first two years of operation. Somewhat, the leaders had to make do with all the resources and support they had during that time. Luckily, Miss N is willing to make a sacrifice for the organization. Shared leadership is based on voluntary team cooperation and effective interaction through leaders' competencies and a sense of responsibility (Goksoy 2016). A possible explanation for this is both leaders shared the same vision and this the element that holds them together as a team. The strength of shared leadership team stemmed from shared vision (Pearce & Conger, 2002).

The changes within the leadership arrangement had brought a positive impact to the organization. Distribution of responsibilities has created a positive working atmosphere in Case 1 to the leaders and the rest organization members. They become highly motivated, able to give full concentration on their specific tasks, and indirectly boost the employees' morale. As Miss N put forward:

“So far, we are pretty clear what are we supposed to do, and we believe that each of us has our responsibilities that we need to follow. But it doesn't mean that we cannot discuss if there is a problem arise” (Case 1).

Shared leadership practice is visible after Dr T's is no longer part-time leader in Case 1. To be able to share leadership responsibilities, it does have positive impacts on the organization. For instance, the distribution of leadership allows leaders to perform the designated tasks according to their judgement made based on expertise, skills and knowledge. It also allows leaders to be creative and feel comfort. Comfort is in the sense

that, they are confident that at the back of their minds, they have someone they can fall back if they are in difficulties because this kind of leadership exercises a sound support system to the leaders. As has been mentioned by Miss N:

“From my point of view, it helps to reduce the burden in the sense that it can be shared among the two of us. We can specifically focus on our strengths and be able to gear up our resources in the right place. We also have the opportunity to come out with better decision with help from everyone in this company” (Case 1).

The leaders’ actions demonstrated their commitment toward each other as a team. The new arrangement implied that the leaders are serious about ensuring that they can effectively lead the organization and improve the overall performance of Case 1. Earlier, the multi-tasking tasks led to redundancy and responsibilities overburden, especially on Miss N. There was no clarity of authorities between the leaders as both were multi-tasking. Plus, there was an imbalance of leadership responsibilities between both leaders. Shared leadership can cause responsibilities overload, which leads to organizational conflict due to ambiguity in responsibilities (Wood and Fields 2007). The situation has created several setbacks to the leadership practice in Case 1, due to a lack of communication between the leaders. Among the impediments are confusion, waste of resources and employees’ motivation.

Most of the time, leaders’ responsibilities remain the same unless in emergencies. To protect Case 1’s interest, the leaders agreed to be flexible when it comes to ad hoc circumstances. For instance, the latest R&D project on bird nest innovation. The project is a collaboration between Case 1 and a research government agency. It is a huge and complicated project which require both leaders’ to be directly involved. R&D activities fall under Dr T’s responsibility. In this scenario, it would be impossible for Dr T to handle the project solely. Therefore, Miss N’s participation is mandatory. This cooperation exists between the leaders reflects a strong team spirit and mutual understanding between them. The trust exists when leaders in shared leadership have an accurate understanding of each other’s skills and abilities and respect each other’s competencies (Small & Rentsch, 2010). As one of the leaders mentioned:

“But sometimes, when something is coming up and require prompt action and one of us was not there. One had to respond and deal with the situation. After all, we are on the same team. The survival and the success of the business is our main priority” (Case 1).

For shared leadership practice to be effective, leaders need to understand several issues related to leadership implementation. The leaders must give each other space and authority to act within the given scope of responsibilities. If one of the leaders is absent during decision- making session, the other leader is liable to act on behalf of others. This delicate situation sometimes brings the conflict in leadership practice if leaders do not have consideration towards each other. Thus, it takes a high level of trust between the leaders to be able to let them make this kind of action. As Dr T put forward:

“We know our responsibilities, and we trust each other with what we are doing too. This applies to the rest of the organization too” (Case 1).

Communication element is one of the fundamental variables in shared leadership concept. During the early years, both leaders did not have the opportunity to regularly seat and discuss business matters together because of Dr T’s circumstance. In average, they met each other less than five times in a month. Most of the time, Miss N made the company’s decision by herself. Based on the new leadership scenario in Case 1, it can be said that Case 1’s leaders did not practice shared leadership effectively in the first two years as only one leader was actively leading the organization while another leader was in a passive mode.

Effective communication practice has a direct impact on the organization’s future direction because the interaction is a crucial element in leadership influence process. Shared leadership supports continual team interactions and social exchange (Klimoski & Mohammed, 1994). In Case 1, the medium of communication varies from conventional face to face interaction to latest technology application such WhatsApp messenger are intensively in used. This is because both leaders encourage transparent communication across the organization. As has been mentioned by one of the leaders:

“We communicate every day either through face to face, emails or by phone, texting messages. It can either be updating each other with our progress or discussing problems” (Case 1).

Another crucial key to effective communication is the organization setting. There is a significant relationship between leaders' interaction and organizational structure during the shared leadership practice Case 1. For a small firm with several employees is less than twenty, Case 1 adopted non-structural and flat organization in which the leaders deal directly with their employees, unlike the traditional hierarchical type of organization. The organizational structure of Case 1 initiates faster responses, speeds up decision-making process, transparency and encourages positive interaction among the team members. As one of the leaders mentioned, she believed that less structured type of organization has a positive impact on the organization:

“That is the reason we are implementing a non-hierarchical type of organization because we do not want to restrict ourselves to the system. Furthermore, we are a small company, and there are only a few people in it” (Case 1).

This finding supports the ideas of Avolio et al., (2009), who suggested that shared leadership exist in the less structured or non-existent hierarchical levels type of organization. It is practical and suitable for the concept of shared leadership to be implemented in SMEs startup, because of the organizational structure encourages transparent communication among the organizational members.

Another disadvantage of shared leadership is an overburden. The leaders of Case 1 found that the current number of leaders they had, which is two and it was insufficient and may cause responsibilities overload in the future. There are some setbacks where shared leadership can cause responsibilities overload, which leads to organizational conflict (Wood and Fields 2007). This scenario might outweigh all the advantages of the approach is not carefully planned, and no check and balance mechanism is placed from the team members as the authors highlighted. Miss T in the quotation below has highlighted the possibility of overburden:

“I feel a bit overwhelming, to be frank. That is the reason why I am willing to share the burden with them in the future. Both of us are a bit handful nowadays” (Case 1).

The leaders have the intention to promote their senior staff as the organizational leader(s). They believe that it is essential to bring in new leaders into the organization, parallel with companies' rapid growth. They are slowly grooming one of the current staff to be the

potential company's leader. They have the option to bring in an outsider into the company, but they are not keen on the idea. There are many issues involved such as trust, loyalty, companies' visions, and it takes time to blend into the company's environment. Based on this notion, it is practical to promote the current staff to the leader's post because he/she understands the company's operation and philosophies.

4.1.3 **Leaders' Learning to Lead**

Both leaders believed that in order for them to be excellent leaders, they have to keep on upgrading their knowledge and skills. Dr. T and Miss N are both in pure science backgrounds and they acknowledged their weaknesses in the business matters. Most likely, the selection has to do with the type of business they are involved; high technology basis. It requires the leaders to understand the business products and services for the business to thrive. At the same time, the leaders need to occupy the business knowledge and enhance leadership skills in order to be better leaders. Miss N clearly stated it in the comments below:

“In order to be better leaders, we believe that continuous learning is a must. Therefore, we give special attention in upgrading ourselves with business knowledge and leadership skills from time to time” (Case 1).

For instance, in the early of the establishment, the two founders decided to appoint new leader into the company with the marketing background. They acknowledged their weaknesses in marketing area. The plan did not work well because the person quitted after three months. It was a waste of time and cause the leaders to think that the plan is not a good decision. For this reason, they decided to learn it by themselves. As has been pointed out by Dr. T:

“During that time, we felt that we needed someone who has strong background in marketing. Because both of us are scientists and have very few knowledges in marketing.... Therefore, we believed that this type of person is very important for the company in order to deal with the market. But, it was not a fruitful effort... Because of that, we just stick with the two of us and Miss N has been given the responsibilities to learn the required skills because she is the main person in charge for the company's operation. As for my part, I give support” (Case 1).

There are certain critical areas in business that require the leaders to get hold of it by themselves. For Case 1, the leaders realized the important of marketing to Case 1. They tried many methods to overcome it, until they decided to learn it by hard. The responsibilities to learn within that particular area was given to Miss N. Miss N willingly learnt the knowledge and skills for the benefits of the company through formal classes, reading through networking. In the later stage, Miss N shared her knowledge and skills with Dr T through discussions and meetings.

Upon negotiation, they have decided for leader number 2 to take up the learning responsibilities specifically on particular business knowledge; marketing and finance because these are their main weaknesses and they have little knowledge and experience. As he mentioned:

“Miss N has been given the responsibilities to learn the required skills because she is the main person in charge for the company’s operation” (Case 1).

The decision is made based on reasons such as the commitment/constraints of time from leader number 1, the important of marketing and financial aspects in a business. They impart the knowledge and skills they gained from the courses while performing designated tasks. Along the way, they benefit from each other.

Their efforts indicate that the team spirit, support, benevolence and cooperation are important elements in the leadership practice implemented within Case 1. Their actions confirmed Goksoy’s (2016) views that the concept of shared leadership transpires team voluntary cooperation and effective interaction through leaders’ competencies and a sense of responsibility (Goksoy 2016). Therefore, the voluntary cooperation between leaders is a strong foundation for team cohesiveness as shown in Case 1.

The combination of the leaders within this study indicates the importance of leaders’ knowledge in leadership context, together with the knowledge in business to bring success into the organizations. Especially in the small size organizations, leadership aspect holds the critical key factor in determining the future path of the business. This leadership style gives more flexibility and an effective method to deliver a decision within a time constraint resulting from a complex business environment (Pearce and Manz, 2005).

To conclude, the leaders' learning process of Case 1 occurred within and outside of the organization due to the fact that both leaders are scientists and they acknowledged their weaknesses in certain aspect of business and the need to learn more about those issues in order to lead the business. Majority of the leaders do believe that apart from the informal learning process, formal courses and classes help them to improve themselves.

4.1.4 **Strategic Decision- Making Process**

In term of strategic decision- making approach, Case 1 takes similar path like other organizations, by taking into account long term and short- term strategic plans. Part of the Case 1's strategic planning is to obtain extra funds for their next project and business expansion in the future. Basically, both leaders make the strategic decisions as a team through knowledge and experience collaboration. The responsibility of making the decision is shared and distributed between both leaders (Thorpe et al., 2011). Miss T shared her views from the quotation below:

“Both of us want to bring this company forward as one of the major players in producing tiger milk mushroom in Asia by taking advantage of high technology advancement. In order to do so, we need to have short- term and long- term strategic plans to help us to achieve the targets” (Case 1).

Other than their assigned posts and responsibilities, both leaders are involved in the strategic decisions making process for Case 1. When leaders in shared leadership have an accurate understanding of each other's skills and abilities, this promote trust among leaders and respect each other's competencies (Small & Rentsch, 2010). Shared leadership is seen as a medium for the team leaders to balance their strengths and weaknesses within a different area of knowledge and experience, in delivering relevant strategic decisions for the organization. The statement given by Miss T below supported the matter:

“To be in a team means we complete each other and we can achieve more. It is more like looking at the mirror and we know our own capabilities and strengths” (Case 1).

In the earlier section, it has been clearly explained the scenario faced by Case 1 on leaders' knowledge and skills which is purely science background. Therefore, it is justifiable for

the leaders to invite the appointed industrial experts into company's strategic meeting. The experts' selection is based on their expertise within the required area as in Case 1, business experts to aid the leaders to make sound decisions. Nevertheless, the experts did not participate during final decision process, as their presence is to provide views and expert advises. It is a team consensus decision by both leaders. The responsibility of making the decision is shared and distributed between both leaders (Thorpe et al., 2011). As one of the leaders highlighted in his comments below:

“During strategic meeting, we usually invite industrial experts. The final decisions will be made by both of us” (Case 1).

This implied that leaders recognised their weaknesses in certain area and to make effective decisions, experts' views are taken into consideration and their presence are meant to provide views and knowledge. Shared leadership practice encourages continuous innovation within organization (Pearce & Manz 2005). The leaders reckon that the experts' presence make the strategic decision- making process smoother in the sense that the leaders get an immediate response from the reliable resources (the experts).

“There are times, we do invite industrial experts into our strategic meetings. Reason for this is to help us to get experts' views in the area which we are lacking of. They are here to assist us to make sound decisions. Nevertheless, the final decisions will be made by both of us” (Case 1).

The Case 1's strategic planning meeting is held every three months or at least four times a year for monitoring purposes. Both leaders use the platform to monitor the progress of the company. Case 1's strategic planning process starts with the current organizational overall performance. The leaders adopt the SWOT analysis as the strategic tool by analyse company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The strategic plans are based on the current company's capabilities, including the financial aspects, knowledge and expertise, and human factors.

Prior, information gathering process takes place and it is done by the management team under Miss N's supervision. The source of information is obtained both internally and externally. The external sources normally come from the current economic situations, market trends, competitors and others. Both leaders regard a well- prepared meeting lead to a successful meeting outcome. Dr T gave his opinions below:

“In order for us to deliver and make effective decisions, we need to have sufficient and reliable information during meeting. Thus, our administrative team is responsible to gather the information prior to the meeting” (Case 1).

Only relevant information will be discussed during the meeting, based on agenda of the meeting. General practice in Case 1, Miss N will re-arrange the information and simplified into diagrams, tables, graphs or point forms. The main intention is to highlight the issue during the meeting, so the session is short. Normally, the duration of the meeting is less than two hours. The leaders want to speed up the process because of the time factor, time is crucial and represent money. Miss N mentioned it in the quotation below:

“I always reorganized all the information in a simplest and easiest forms for example diagrams prior to the meeting. I want everyone in the meeting understand once they see it. It would be helpful to reduce the meeting duration” (Case 1).

The leaders highlighted that conflict during strategic meeting is a norm. Typically, because of the clashes of views between the leaders. Anyhow, the leaders do not take the arguments personally because they are used to this scenario. They would normally debate the issue if there is a need for them to justify the points. One of the leaders explained the above scenario, his quotations:

“It is normal to have disagreements and clashes of ideas during the meeting. We perceive it as a booster to make us think further and take into consideration all possible outcomes that we can choose from. It is a healthy discussion” (Case 1).

At the end of the meeting, the leaders come out from the meeting room as if nothing happen. Regardless of disagreement the leaders have during the leadership implementation, both leaders showed a strong ties and team cohesiveness during good and bad times. For them, the main priority is the organization. In order to achieve organizational targets, leaders must acknowledge one another in order for shared leadership positive outcomes (McIntyre & Foti 2013). Conflict is part of the learning process for both leaders to understand each other under complicated scenario. If they manage to get through it, this gives added advantage to them in term of positive team spirit.

4.2 Case 2

The interviews were carried out with four respondents; namely two leaders of the company and two employees. The secondary data sources that have been referred to are business related documents, the case study reports, and the company's web page.

4.2.1 The Description of the Case Background

The company was co-founded by Mr. Y and Miss A in 2010. The distribution of ownership was decided based on the individual's contribution to the company's capital. Since Mr. Y is the major contributor, he owns sixty – six percent of the company's shares and the rest is owned by Miss. A. Until 2015, the start- up cost incurred by the company was more than Ringgit Malaysia (RM) two million and it came from the leaders' funds. The expenses covered the infrastructure, equipment and operating cost.

Case 2 started its business operation in a double storey factory, located in an industrial area for small businesses in Pantai Kelebang, Malacca. The business premise is complete with its own compound, car park and a guard house. It was bought with the intention to start their operation at the premise from day one. Currently, the number of organizational members has increased from three to six, including the leaders. Apart from the two leaders, there is one manager, two general workers and a security guard. The leaders plan to employ three workers next year (2016) as part of the company's expansion plan.

Case 2 is concerned with the environment and natural resources usage in their products. They literally implemented the ideology into their products and also their daily operations. This approach to business, particularly in Malaysia is considered new. Case 2 implements traditional fermentation approaches with high technology equipment in production. They do not use artificial colourings and preservatives in their ingredients. Only local fruits are used in the products, which are harvested from the company's organic natural farms.

Currently, Case 2 produces three ranges of nutritional and health beverages which includes "Ready- to drink" range, concentrate enzyme and vinegar range. The products have been tested for safety and received approval from government bodies and have Halal certificates. The process requires at least one year before the mature finished drinks can

be harvested. Due to the nature of the natural fermentation process, Case 2 had to wait until the next year (2011) to sell their first beverage batch. In that sense, in the first year of its operation they had to bear the operating cost without income generation.

In its early years Case 2 faced several issues, such as the production and marketing aspects. It was reflected in the company's growth, whereby the company's growth between 2010 to 2013 was less than 20% due to the issues above. Through heavy marketing activities, networking and involvement in local business fairs, it seems that their efforts have paid off because their products have sold more than two hundred thousand units in Malaysia at the end of 2014. Partly, the current trends within Malaysian society also plays an important role in creating demand for Case 2's products.

Once the products launched and received positive feedback from the public, the tables had been turned around. The sales had increased and Case 2 managed to secure a few lucrative deals with local distributors. By the end of year 2015, growth was predicted to increase up to 45% and the sales increase would be more than 3.5 million Ringgit Malaysia (RM).

Currently, their products are on the shelves of a major key- chain pharmacy, natural products shops and hypermarkets. Their customers are local individuals, main distributors, various shops and outlets. For the international market, they have penetrated Singapore and certain areas of China. One of their strategic plans is to expand the market. The leaders are currently in negotiations with potential partners in the middle east, the potential partners are based in Jordan.

4.2.2 Leadership Style/ Approach

From the beginning, Case 2 is practising shared leadership and the evidence will be discussed in this subsection. Case 2 is led by both leaders and founders; Mr Y (CTO) and Miss A (CEO). Mr. Y is in his fifties and has business experience of nearly three decades. He sees the market niche for natural products and it is in trend now with health- conscious customers.

He met Miss A at one local business expo in 2002 and their friendship continued until he invited Miss A to be the co-founder of Case 2 in 2009. Miss A on the other hand is in her

mid- thirties and previously worked as a financial executive at an established business organization in Malaysia. She left the company when she was the company's Head of Financial Department. She wanted to pursue her passion in business and was attracted to Mr. Y's business proposition. The combination between the leaders/founders is interesting, because the two leaders come from different backgrounds and business experience. Interestingly, the age difference between them is quite big and there is a possibility that conflicts may happen in the future due to the generation gap. Nonetheless, both leaders strongly believe that the collaboration between them is to bring strength into Case 2's leadership context. This point has been highlighted by Miss A in the quotation below:

“The age difference between us is not a big deal because we are professional. We are business partners and this is our business. The elements of respect and trust play important roles in bringing the gap closer” (Case 2).

Miss A's presence as one of the Case 2's leaders is seen as an effort made by Mr. Y to instil a 'fresh' leadership approach in Case 2. Mr. Y could have simply practiced the conventional leadership approach he learnt from previous businesses, yet he saw the importance of a team- based leadership approach in Case 2. Clearly, Mr. Y was willing to change his business practice in order for Case 2 to flourish and succeed in the future. It seems that the strategy was a success since the company has grown significantly in less than five years. As he mentioned:

“Miss A's expertise on the financial and administrative aspect had bring huge impact on the company's performance. Frankly speaking, I don't have the expertise and in- depth knowledge in these particular areas. Both of us lead the company but at the same time, we have our own specific tasks” (Case 2).

In the first two years, there were no distinctive posts and responsibilities between the leaders. The leaders performed the responsibilities and tasks based on the tasks' requirement. In a way, both were performing multitasking jobs. This was partly due to the small number (four) of members in Case 2, including the leaders. Indirectly they were forced to perform according to the circumstances at that particular time. Comments given by Miss A reflected this:

“In the beginning, we do not separate the responsibilities with distinctive functions among us. We just lead the company paralleled. We looked at the scenarios and then we will do it together during that time” (Case 2).

As time passed and the number of employees increased, the leaders decided to distribute and clearly distinguish each of their posts and responsibilities in 2013, three years after Case 2 started off. Mr Y is directly in charge of Case 2’s technical aspects including research and development activities. Meanwhile, Miss A is responsible for the administrative and financial aspects of the company. Both leaders decided that it is crucial to clearly distinguish and distribute the leadership responsibilities according to the leaders’ knowledge, capabilities and experience. In his comments below, Mr. Y clearly stated the point:

“Later, we see the importance of delegating the responsibilities between the two of us. By doing so, we can focus on our strengths and reduce the redundancy. We agreed that it will be done based on our expertise” (Case 2).

This indicates the leaders wanted to focus on each other strengths in order to deliver excellent outcomes. By doing so, they can also reduce the leadership conflicts due to clashes of responsibilities. When the leaders know each other’s authorities and responsibilities, they would know the boundaries of interference and respect each other. The clarity in the distribution of responsibilities also encourages leaders to give their full commitment and stay focused. At the same time, the level of stress is reduced because the leaders can anticipate within the given job scope. But it does not mean that they are separate entities because they work as a team. As has been mentioned by Miss A in the quotation below:

“As the company grows, we start to differentiate the job functions among us. However, we still deal with each other if anything that is need to be done. For example, let’s says that customers need the products urgently and it is beyond our normal production. We will basically sit and get together and plan how to deal with it. We would not be pointing to a person for instance the factory manager to handle this matter on his own...We will sit together and come out with the best solution that we can possibly think off” (Case 2).

Another advantage of the shared leadership practice seen in Case 2 is flexibility. In terms of the distribution of responsibilities, the leaders’ tasks and responsibilities remain the

same, unless there is a need for them to act beyond their normal tasks. For instance, if one of them is absent the other person will take over the tasks. Flexibility exists in certain situations especially when it involves the company's interest. It would not be a problem because both leaders are alert on each other's tasks. One of the leaders gave his views below:

“We are able to focus on our strengths and at the same time getting support from each other. I used to work on my own without having anyone to support me. I can say that it was tiring.....” (Case2).

Another distinctive characteristic for shared leadership implementation is organizational structure. Case 2's organizational structure is a flat type of organization, horizontal structural and there is no bureaucracy element between leaders and employees. Case 2 purposely imposed this type of structure in order to encourage effective communication throughout the organization. At the same time, it is easier to monitor and to take prompt actions. It goes without saying, it gives flexibility to the leaders to practice their leadership within Case 2. The leaders have the perk of communicating among themselves and the employees anytime they wish. Mr. Y highlighted the point in his quotation below:

“We are maintaining this organizational structure because it is easier to monitor and at the same time, it gives opportunity to everyone in the organization to contribute and participate. It is more like an open organization. Whereby staff can come and see us directly to discuss with us” (Case 2).

This finding implies that the size of the organization gives flexibility to the leaders to communicate anytime, and they have the opportunity to discuss the business matter in a relaxed environment. Plus, it gives access to the leaders to arrive at a faster decision-making process.

The leaders have a good relationship between them and also between the employees because of the effective communication which exists between them. Their preference of method of communication is the face to face method because it is direct and easier to read each other's facial expression. As a matter of fact, the leaders do not practice formal meetings between them as they prefer to have regular informal meetings/discussions between them. The leaders feel comfortable to express their views in a relaxed

environment. This signifies that the leaders believe that the communication aspect is important for the leadership style to work. One of the senior employees highlighted this:

“Yes, it is obvious that they work as a team. They always discuss and communicate between themselves. Regardless if only one of them is working in the factory at that time. They keep on updating each other and consulting each other in most circumstances...” (Case 2)

The leaders have the intention to promote one of the senior staff as the organizational leader. They believe that it is important to bring new leaders into the organization, in parallel with Case 2’s rapid growth. Among the reasons include the overburden leadership responsibilities, strengthen the company’s leadership aspect and growth factor. Miss A gave her comments below on the issue:

“At the moment, we feel the pressure due to surge in market demand for our beverages. If we want to achieve the long- term plans, we have to have a strong leadership team. We decided to groom one of the senior staff because she has the potentials” (Case 2).

They have the option to bring in an outsider into the company, but they are not keen on the idea. Obviously, the outsider needs to adhere with Case 2’s philosophies and it takes time to blend into the company’s environment. Based on this notion, it is practical to promote the current staff to the leader’s post because the potential leader understands the company’s operation and philosophies. The leaders must have given deep thought to the decision because it involves the organization’s leadership and company’s shares as a whole. Mr. Y mentioned the following:

“In order for our company to grow and expand, we need extra hands. After all, future expansion is part of our long- term plan... By making them part of the stakeholders, it will make them feel that the ups and downs of the company fall on their shoulders” (Case 2).

Miss A also agreed with the idea and she gave her comments below:

“We have identified one of the staff to be part of our shareholder in the future. We had spoken to her, what we want and how we can grow together....Currently, we are nurturing her towards that goal” (Case 2).

The leaders admitted that they faced conflicts during the leadership implementation such as disagreements on certain issues due to leaders’ backgrounds’ differences and

generation gaps between them. Mr. Y is senior in terms of age and experience. The ego exists. Miss A is a newbie in the business and used to take orders. In order for her to shine, she needed to be pro-active and show high self- confidence. Especially during conflicts, the leaders tried to be rational and tried to exercise tolerance. The best way to deal with the disagreement is to stay calm and settle it professionally in a peaceful discussion. As Miss A commented relating to conflicts:

“Yes, definitely that this thing happened (laughed). When there is a conflict, we try to sit and solve it. Before that, we need to ensure both of us are already cooled down and in a better state of mind. No matter what happen, we made a mutual promise that we need to solve it as soon as possible” (Case 2).

4.2.3 **Leaders’ Learning to Lead**

The existence of learning to lead process in Case 2 is clearly shown from the leaders’ inputs during the interview session. The leaders highlighted that the process happens in two scenarios, through direct and indirect actions and it comes naturally most of the time. The example for a direct scenario of learning to lead process occurs through discussion and consultation between the leaders. One of the leaders gave his comments below:

“To stay strong in the business, among the skills that you need to grasp is observation skills. You must be alert and see through the details surrounding you...Never shy to ask questions” (Case 2).

The collaboration between both leaders gives added advantages to the leaders due to the sharing of the knowledge and skills. For instance, Mr. Y has vast experience in the production area and he has been in the business line more than thirty years. He transfers his related knowledge and skills to Miss A. Miss A does the same action too by sharing her knowledge and skills to Mr. Y. The continuous learning process between the leaders benefits them and helps them to be better leaders. It is seen as a teamwork support system for Case 2. For Miss A, she felt that the experience makes her a better leader. Based on her comments below:

“In my point of view, it gives us opportunity to gain knowledge and experience from each other...We learn from each other and we also get feedbacks too...In that sense, two heads

are better than one. It is interesting for me that I come here every day and I have learnt so many things....” (Case 2)

The indirect scenario of the learning to lead process comprises of informal interaction and external sources. Among the examples of informal interaction are during the coffee break in the meeting, or casual conversation in the office. The leaders learnt it through observation and implement the new knowledge and skills within Case 2’s business routine when there is a need to do so. Miss A clearly mentioned it in the quotation below:

“I can say, I have learnt it through my business experience. From the people that I have worked with including the business networking that we have with other companies, organizations, suppliers and others’ (Case 2).

The learning process requires the leaders’ willingness to absorb and open up toward changes. It is not an easy process when the person is used to the routines. In order for both leaders in Case 2 to become excellent leaders, they have to cooperate and support each other. During the process, conflict arises and there were times when leaders faced heated discussions between them. It is not an easy task to convince the other party to agree to ones’ view when the other party has his or her own views. Miss A has pointed out the issue they faced during the learning to lead process:

“Any issue that we have, we will refer back to the core value. How we rectify, and how do we go along the issue. We feel that with the core value, everybody will be on the same page. In comparison to previous time when we don’t have it. This core value gives significant impacts to all us as a guideline in this business” (Case 2).

Therefore, in order for the learning process to succeed, both leaders need to be positive and supportive towards each other. For instance, Mr. Y also has to possess a positive mind towards Miss A, in case she delivers something new to him. Miss A also needs to be confident in throwing out her views too as this action can develop her confidence level. She must not feel intimidated by Mr. Y’s experience. Mr. Y acknowledged the situation and gave his comments below:

“From that point, I learnt how other leaders lead their companies. Never shy to ask questions. This method helps me a lot.... But I do believe that learning should never stop.

It's a continuous process, a process that we need in order to improve what we are having now" (Case 2).

This finding suggests that shared leadership practice in Case 2 has initiated the learning to lead process between the leaders because the leaders feel the need to upgrade their leadership skills and knowledge through team support. A possible explanation for this is that continuous leadership development brings benefits to the leaders and to the organization as a whole.

4.2.4 **Strategic Decision- Making Process**

Through shared leadership, Case 2's leaders get the support and the encouragement from each other. Apart from this, they are able to infuse creativity either in their tasks or for the decision- making process (Pearce and Manz, 2005). For instance, their approach towards problem solving is rather casual whereby they would normally discuss it in a relaxed environment and preferably outside of the business premises, such as a café or restaurant.

Both leaders are directly involved in the company's strategic decision making (SDM) process and together, they make the crucial decisions. Among the company's current strategic planning are market expansion and appointing a new company leader among its senior staff. The period of implementation of the strategic plans is three years and starts from 2015. The given targets are made based due to the company's rapid growth and the need to keep up with the current demand in production. Miss A quoted below:

"I do believe that it is crucial for us to set the business target. It makes us strive and plan properly, in order to ensure that we meet the targets" (Case 2).

Similar to most organizations, the process of making strategic decision making in Case 2 starts with information assembling prior to the meeting. Miss A gets help from the administrative staff to gather the information needed for the meeting. The company has an internal database system. Among information available include minutes of meetings, reports etc.

For the external resources, sources include information from the suppliers, distributors and business networking. The information is compiled, saved and updated on a monthly

basis. All relevant and latest information are gathered and organized according to the meeting agenda. Miss A simplifies it into charts, table and slides. This helps the leaders to make sound decisions, speed up the decision time and at the same time minimize the risks. Generally, the agenda is set by the leaders and Mr. Y chairs the meeting which involves every member of Case 2. The important of reliable information arrangement in strategic decision meeting has been addressed in Miss A's statement below:

“Since I am in charge directly in admin and financial aspects of this company, I can get direct access to the required information. I can get it internally and externally. Internally, we have our database systems where from time to time being updated...It helps us to make sound decisions” (Case 2).

The leaders decide to have the strategic decision meeting at least twice in a year. In terms of time period of making strategic decisions, it varies from hours, days and weeks. There are several factors which contribute to it, such as the availability of the information, market evaluation and others. The leaders highlighted the importance of making fast decisions in the business world. Miss A highlighted the point on a consensus decision below:

“It is still both of us because we are the main shareholders for this company. After we discuss, we will come out with decision that will benefit the business. The decision must be a consensus decision before it can be implemented” (Case 2).

Another essential aspect in Case 2's SDM process is monitoring. The monitoring process is meant to keep track of the company's progress from time to time. It is normally done in the SDM meeting prior to the current meeting agenda. The meeting starts with the review session. As has been mentioned by Mr. Y below:

“We normally revised our achievement at least twice a year. From there, we will come out with our next year target and also review on our 3-5 years' targets” (Case 2).

The leaders admit that they often face conflicts during the meeting proceedings. Regardless of whether they try to minimize the conflicts, it happens. But the leaders do not regard this scenario as something negative. The possible explanation for the scenario is due to the differences in leaders background and generation gap. Both leaders have strong personalities too which contributed to clashes of ideas. Therefore, it is necessary

for both leaders to stay focus on the company's objectives in order to make effective decisions and do not prolong the disagreements. Mr. Y noted the point in his statement below:

“There is a time when we have disagreement and clashes of ideas during meeting. For us, it is normal and we consider it part of creativity exploration. From heated discussions, we sometimes forcing ourselves to think out of box. But, do not let the situation escalated and it must be handled in a professional manner” (Case 2).

This shows the leaders have openly accepted the need to openly express each other's views sincerely for the benefits of the organization. At the same time, they trust each other judgement and before the final decision is attained, there is a need to confirm the justification of the chosen decision. Drescher et al., (2014) pointed out that trust is a must element for the concept of shared leadership. Miss A confirmed the above statement, her comments:

“We do have disagreement during meeting because it is normal to have different set of ideas and views. Meeting is a platform to discuss and to solve problems” (Case 2).

Based on the inputs given during the interviews, shared leadership promotes a positive strategic decision- making practice in Case 2 through team collaboration in term of knowledge, skills and experience. Conflicts happen and the response from both leaders helps to minimize the negative impacts. In one way or another, conflicts also help to boost the creativity of the leaders in delivering feasible decisions.

4.3 Case 3

The interviews were done in two different locations due to Case 3's different business premises. One was done at the office headquarters in Pahang and another one was at the company's laboratories site in Negeri Sembilan. The in-depth interviews involved four participants from Case 3. They are the two leaders and two employees. The secondary data sources that have been referred to are the business profile, the case study reports, and the company's web page.

4.3.1 **The Description of the Case Background**

Case 3 history begins when Mr. P did his own initial market research and survey on the pineapple industry. The findings show that the conventional farming of pineapples faced several issues, such as difficulties in producing high quality pineapples, and fluctuation in productivity and stiff competition from overseas markets due to lack of knowledge and illiteracy problems. Therefore, Mr. P believed that through acquisition of related knowledge, skills and technologies, the business would flourish and give a high return in the future compared to the conventional approach.

The company was founded in 2010 by Mr. P. For nearly three years, he ran the business alone. Due to the company's rapid growth, Mr. D was invited to be one of the leaders for the company in 2014. The distribution of the company's ownership is sixty- five percent to Mr. P and thirty- five percent to Mr. D. The distribution is made based on the individual's capital contribution to the company and as for Mr. D, it is part of the reward for his commitment to the company.

Case 3 is a fast- growing biotech company and its business operation covers both the downstream and upstream processes of pineapple production. The processes include preparing high quality pineapple seeds, cultivating the pineapple seeds, growing pineapples, processing the pineapples, as well as distributing and supplying the fresh and processed pineapples directly into the market without the interference of middlemen. Since Case 3 is an environmental friendly organization, they practice a waste efficient programme within their daily operation.

Initially they sold fresh produce and since 2014 they have started to produce downstream products, such as dried pineapples. They also supply high quality seeds to local and overseas growers. These are the sources of revenue for the company. The hotel chains and premium hyper markets such as Cold Storage chains and Jaya Grocers chains are among their customers for the fresh produce.

Case 3 started its operation with only five staff, including the founder, Mr. P. In less than six years, the number of employees has risen to more than two hundred, which signals high growth. The employees are distributed in different business locations and activities such as the plantation, nursery and laboratories. Mr. P and Mr. D currently actively lead

the organization and have a total of fifteen managers to assist them at different business locations and operations.

The company has several business premises in different locations. Each premise has its own distinctive business operations. Their headquarters is in Rompin, Pahang which consists of a thousand acres of pineapple plantation, the main office, the factory and the employees' quarters. The laboratories are located in Gemenchih, Negeri Sembilan. It is the centre of Case 3's research and development activities. The laboratories are equipped with the latest technology and equipment. The cultivated seeds from the laboratories are planted in the company's nursery in Gemas, Negeri Sembilan. Once the seeds reach a certain maturity stage, they will be transferred to Rompin's plantation to grow.

The company's main target is to be the largest pineapple producer in Malaysia and the Asian region by the year 2020. Therefore, research and development activities are their top priorities. Case 3 is taking advantage of technology and new knowledge in their business approach. They do research on cultivation of higher quality pineapple seeds in order to grow high resistance pineapple breeds without compromising the sweetness and nutrition levels of the pineapple.

The company started the first cultivation project by doing a feasibility study in 2011. In the same year, they managed to obtain Ringgit Malaysia 3 million in funding from the Malaysian government. It was used for the setup of laboratories in 2012. In 2013, the first batch of cultivated seeds was successfully produced. After the success of their first project, they received another grant from the government for Rompin's plantation project, which took off in 2013.

Case 3's main challenge is the financial constraint that restricted them from reaching the maximum usage of the land (nearly two thousand acres). They have to do it step by step according to their budget and master plan. The under- utilization of land resources has directly impacted the company's revenue. It will take years before the whole land will reach its maximum usage.

All in all, Case 3 has grown rapidly from being a small- scale SME company of five employees to more than two hundred employees including part timers. Other indications

of growth include the company's infrastructure and increase of revenue by forty five percent (RM450 thousand) for the year 2015.

4.3.2 Leadership Style/ Approach

The business started off with Mr. P as the solo leader for the company. Later, Mr. D joined in and together they lead the company as a team. Mr. P and Mr. D were college friends and have known each other for more than a decade. Among the criteria for Mr. D's selection were his knowledge, skills and trust. The transition from a solo leadership style to a team- based leadership style was anticipated, as indicated by the original founder, Mr. P:

"I built the company from scratch, but it also my dream to see the company prosperous in the future and doing well... Therefore, I do not have any intention of stopping here where we are now and I am willing to give it all for this business to succeed" (Case 3).

Mr. P has foreseen the importance of the team leadership approach in order to ensure the organization growth goes smoothly in the future. Another strategic action includes early delegation of administrative team to manage daily company's administrative tasks. So that Mr. P can concentrate on his leadership aspect, leading Case 3 to success. Regardless of his earlier involvement of the being a solo leader, it can be concluded that Mr. P's concern is highly concern about the future of the organization. Case 3 has reached its growth phase where it is unlikely to maintain a solo style of leadership. In term of leadership responsibilities, overburden issue is one of the main reason for the founder to opt for the team based leadership practice.

Together as a team, the leaders agreed to distribute the leadership responsibilities according to individuals' expertise and skills. Mr. P retains his current post as the company's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and he is responsible for Case 3's resources and the sales aspect. Meanwhile, Mr. D's responsibilities are to make sure the company's operations flow smoothly and economically as he is the company's Chief Operation Officer (COO). It is apparent that both leaders understand their roles within the assigned posts. They perform their tasks based on their strengths, capabilities, knowledge and skills. Leaders knowledge and competencies in specific area are more crucial compared

to the formal position or role of individuals (Goksoy 2016). Statement given by Mr. P confirm the basis of responsibilities distribution in Case 3:

“We decided to allocate responsibilities between us based on our expertise and experience. The main intention distributing the responsibilities is to ensure the business operation smoothness” (Case 3).

For most of the time, the leaders’ specific responsibilities remain the same and there is no overlapping of responsibilities. In order for the leadership to work effectively, both leaders in Case 3 have mutually agreed on the authority of the other within their specific scopes. This arrangement is meant to bring in faster decisions and actions to the company. For example, when it comes to the project which is directly under Mr. P’s responsibilities, he has the authority to make decisions without consultation from Mr. D. Unless, there is a bigger issue involved which requires feedback from both. In his statements, Mr. D highlighted the point below:

“We are sharing the responsibilities as leaders for this company. I do my part and he does his part...Each of us have strengths in certain areas and by combining both, we are capable of becoming a strong organization” (Case 3).

But, there are certain conditions that require flexibility in performing the assigned tasks specifically during ad hoc situations. For instance, when the company decided to purchase a high technology processing machine for factory usage, both leaders gave a high priority on this matter. Both leaders were directly engaged throughout the process from the beginning till the end. Another ad hoc scenario is when one of the leader is absent, another leader has to take action on behalf of the person. The teamwork shown by the leaders has been noticed by one of the employees:

“Both leaders were immensely working together for the processing machine project. They are working back to back in order to ensure that the machine will delivered on time...” (Case 3).

Basically, both leaders do not restrict themselves to their appointed responsibilities only. The flexibility shown by the leaders indicates that the leaders need to combine forces in handling the business challenges for the organization’s interest. At the same time, it gives them an opportunity to explore beyond their daily leadership routine and the exposure

helps them to be better leaders. There are two important elements which exist in Case 3's leadership practice. The first element is respect. The leaders must understand and respect each other's space and authority. There should be no interference at any cost. Interference is seen as the trigger to conflict and brings harm to the existing team based leadership style. However, it does not restrict the leaders from voicing out their views and opinions. As one of the leaders highlighted the scenario:

“There are certain documents that requires both our signatures to validate it. But most of the time, we have our authority to sign certain amount of figure that is within our responsibilities without consulting the other party. That is among the flexibility that we try to maintain” (Case 3).

Another important element for the leadership practice is trust. Both leaders are always on the move between the three strategic business locations. Therefore, the leaders delegate a certain level of authority to certain employees to act on their behalf. The managers and head of laboratories are responsible for the daily business operations and they are given certain authority to make decisions. The leaders monitor from a higher level and from time to time pay a visit to the business premises. One of the leaders, Mr. P pointed out the important of trust in the leadership practice in Case 3:

“Yes, both of us lead this company based on the posts that we are holding at the moment. We do what we are best at, at the same time, it does not stop us of from give support toward each other. We always consult and give review toward each other” (Case 3).

At the moment, the arrangement seems to be suitable and applicable for Case 3. When the production line reaches its maximum, it would be a great challenge to the leaders to monitor all business levels. Indirectly, their leadership responsibilities increase. They need to consider bringing in human resources either by adding new company leader(s) or hiring extra managers.

Shared leadership implementation has had a direct relationship on the organization's structure. Case 3 has a proper organizational chart and they have also laid down sets of written structural instructions on certain job scopes to ensure safety and operation smoothness, especially in plantation areas, production lines and research activities in laboratories.

The daily business operations are handled by their appointed managers, assistant manager and head of laboratories. The leaders' responsibilities are specifically on the higher-level type of operations which involve thinking, monitoring, checking and balancing activities. In Case 3, it would be a challenge for leaders to maintain the flexibility in its operation due to its business locations and variety of business activities involved. In this situation, the leaders are relying on their employees to run the business operation but the leaders give high priority to coordination and constantly monitor the overall business operation. Delegation is a must for Case 3 and leaders need to put trust in their employees because it would be impossible for the two leaders to get hold of everything. Churchill and Lewis (1983) suggest that during growth phase, delegation of responsibilities helps the organization to flourish. As this ensures the operations' smoothness and quality compliance. As one of the leaders put it:

“Basically, I want this company to be flexible in the sense that it is not too rigid” (Case 3).

An interdependency level between the leaders is clearly shown in Case 3 through leaders' actions. It is seen through the communication aspect, teamwork and acceptance in individual's differences. In some way, this situation can lead to task overburden as has been highlighted by Groon (2002), mutual dependence between leaders can create unfavourable scenario of overlapping responsibilities.

Another characteristic of shared leadership implementation is the existence of effective communication. The leaders communicate and interact with each other through formal and informal methods of conversation and interaction. For example, formal discussions and meetings. They also regularly have informal chats and coffee sessions to discuss Case 3's affairs.

The leaders prefer the face to face method of communication because it promotes creativity and individual readiness because it is easier to read the partner's facial expression. Phone calls, text messages and emails are also a popular choice. The intensive interactive communication provides prompt replies and actions from the organization members.

Like most organizations, conflicts between leaders do happen in Case 3. Conflicts inflict disharmony and a discomforting atmosphere among the members which can disturb the

overall performance of the organization. It can happen in many ways, such as disagreement of ideas, or defence of ideas. In Case 3, tolerance and cooperation are important components in conflict solving. Case 3's leaders take this matter seriously and attempt to solve it in a professional way through face to face discussions. Perhaps, long term friendship plays important role in minimizing conflicts. As one of the leaders mentioned:

“Since both of us know each other for a long time, we understand each other personalities very well. So far, we try to minimize the possibility of conflicts either during strategic decision making process or in daily operations. If we have some disagreements between us. We will try to solve it professionally” (Case 3).

Among the advantages of this style of leadership include the ability of leaders to give full concentration on the company's development, strengths as a team and efficiency in performing leader responsibilities. The founder highlighted the following points:

“The burden on me has been tremendously lessened because of him. Now I can give more concentration on the preparation for the company's public listing project” (Case 3).

Based on the feedback given by the employees, they are comfortable working in the company because of the leadership practice in Case 3. The employees respect their leaders because the leaders have shown positive attitudes and credibility. The employees felt that the leaders '*listen*' to them because they are given the space to come and see the leaders without any restriction. Among the platforms they can use; face to face sessions, email or WhatsApp messenger. The attention given by the leaders makes them feel safe and happy. This signifies the strong leadership practice in Case 3. One of the staff commented:

“Previously before the three working shifts system is implemented, we worked like normal office hours from 8.00 am to 5.30 am. But that type of working hours is not suitable for lab based experiments where there are certain times that we have to move the cultures to different environments for it to grow..... Therefore, we went to the leaders and told them about this issue. They accepted it really well and went to have the discussion with us until the new system was materialized” (Case 3).

To conclude, the concept of shared leadership brings positive outcomes in Case 3 in the sense that it infuses positive working environment, increase level of motivation of organizational members, team support and team cohesiveness.

4.3.3 **Leaders' Learning to Lead**

The process of learning to lead between the leaders happened within Case 3. The leaders' actions implied that they understand the importance of knowledge upgrading in order to be better leaders. The leaders regularly learn to lead from each other by exchanging their knowledge and skills through conversation, discussions and meetings. The process takes place either through formal (meetings) or informal methods. The formal session involves formal meetings and business networking (business conferences). Meanwhile, informal sessions include discussion during lunch hours or tea break without formality.

Occasionally, the leaders attend related short business courses and business events. It should not be limited to business knowledge only, but it covers every aspect of leadership skills and capabilities too. The existence of shared leadership is significant in complex working environment (Wang et al. 2014). The exposure and knowledge gained from the sessions are shared between them. For instance, one of them attended a short course on internet marketing. The person will share the inputs with his business partner and vice versa. It is a continuous learning process and both leaders benefit most from shared leadership practice. Mr. P clearly stated the point in his quotations below:

“The learning process happens most of the time. It does not have to be restricted within the business organization only. It takes place within the company itself and external surroundings. The source can be internally and externally. As long as we have the drive to keep on improving ourselves. There will always opportunity for us to do so” (Case 3).

Another platform for the leaders to improve their leadership skills and abilities is through business networking. In the business world, networking holds important keys to business success. Both leaders acknowledged the facts that they have learnt new leadership knowledge from their business contacts; suppliers and customers. Mostly in informal ways while having business transactions which are through informal discussion and conversation. Later, the knowledge and skill gain from the external sources are delivered and shared while performing the assigned responsibilities at the company.

Another scenario which depicts the learning to lead process exists in Case 3, the cooperation shown by both leaders. Through continuous observation and knowledge sharing, both leaders subconsciously learnt each other's tasks and they work as a team. It would be impossible for them to take over ones' duty if they do not have the required knowledge and skills. They are confident enough to take each other's responsibilities during ad hoc circumstances. Regardless of whether both hold different posts, they are alert and acknowledge each other's responsibilities. As one of the leaders explained:

“Though, we have been in the business for quite sometimes. It does not mean that we know everything about the business but try our best to cover each other back in all situations” (Case 3).

The sharing session between them indirectly led to leadership enhancement in terms of their skills and capabilities. Through this teamwork support system, the leaders' confidence level is boosted and it is reflected in their leadership performance. Mr. D's explanation:

“He needs someone to help him lead the company together as a team. This project is too big for him to handle it alone. Through our combined expertise and experience, I have a good feeling that we can achieve our targets by 2018” (Case 3).

It seems that the differences in background and experience of both leaders have indirectly created the learning atmosphere between them. The exchange process indirectly gives new ideas, knowledge and experience to the leaders. One of the leaders gave his comments below:

“From the administrative aspect, Mr. P is an organized person. He always does any task given to him accordingly and he always organized it ahead. To be honest, I am impressed by the way Mr. P prepared the funding paperwork.... I am impressed with his calm manners and well- organized approach in business. It can be implemented into my daily routines too” (Case 3).

But, at the same time, it can also bring chaos to the leadership practice. In spite of the fact that conflict brings chaos to the organization, it can also bring an added advantage to the leadership perspective. Conflict creates opportunity for the leaders to learn and accept the differences between them. Whenever conflict arises, the leaders try to sit together and

find the solution to the problem. They will try their best to get the best solution that both agreed on, this situation helps them to understand each other better. Comments given by one of the leaders:

“During the process, sometimes we have different views and sometimes heated conversation. But it does not mean that we need to argue and stubbornly stick to our views till the end. We would normally listen to each other points and later try to discuss it in positive attitudes” (Case 3).

It can be concluded that Case 3 benefited from the implementation of shared leadership especially in leadership growth aspect. The process of leader’s learning to lead occurs on an ongoing basis where both leaders have the opportunity to enhance their knowledge and skills through team collaboration and team effort.

4.3.4 **Strategic Decision- Making Process**

In Case 3, there are two types of decision making involved. First, daily and routine types of decisions. This falls under the responsibilities of the managers and head of laboratories. The second type of decision making involves strategic decisions for the organization. This type of decision is under the responsibility of Mr. P and Mr. D as the leaders of Case 3. This type of decision concerns the company’s future directions. One of the leaders, Mr. P gave an example of the company’s strategic decision:

“This is because our company’s direction is to expand about eight times of the current size. In order to achieve our targets, in the next two or three years, we have to make this company a public listed company in order to grow bigger and getting in more funding for that purpose. That is our strategic plan and our future direction for this company” (Case 3).

Prior to the meeting, both leaders will list down targets/agendas for the meeting. For instance, short term targets for Case 3. Next, information gathering takes place and it focuses on the meeting agendas. The process is done by the managers with Mr. D helps. The information gathering process is essential because it will pre-determine the final decisions. The information must be up-to-date and relevant to the current situation. The sources of information are retrieved internally (company’s database) and externally (current business information from electronic media and printed materials). Once the process completes, the leaders will look through it prior to the meeting. The information

is arranged into an easy to understand format (charts, important points and mind- mapping format). A possible explanation for this action is to make the strategic meeting session short and effective. Mr. P gave his comments regarding this matter in the quotations below:

“If we want to do something big and to secure the success, then we have to be prepared in many ways. In this situation, to have proper information before important decisions can be made. We have to know our strengths and capabilities in the first place” (Case 3).

Case 3’s strategic decision meeting is held at least twice a year. Mr. P will chair the meeting, the managers and the head of laboratories are also invited. Usually, the meeting discusses the company’s current progress and the strategic plans. A discussion is held based on the feasibility study prepared by the administrative team. The duration of the meeting will normally be less than three hours. Both leaders make the final decisions as a team. Once the decisions are made, the internal announcement is made for the acknowledgement of the members of the organization.

Basically, the leadership style contributes positively to the company’s strategic decision making through the combination of strength and knowledge from both leaders. The process requires creativity and the ability to think things through, more brains mean more ideas. The responsibilities of making decisions are shared between them and the risks are reduced too. The founder gave his views below:

“In terms of strategic decision making process, each of us have strengths in certain areas and by combining both the decision- making process seems easier than before” (Case3).

Teamwork support holds the keys to the leadership practice in Case 3, especially during the strategic decision making process. This includes the situation where the decision made did not turn out as well as planned. Both leaders shown a great teamwork spirit by positively backing up each other even in unfavourable situations. The finding within this case study is in line with Small & Rentsch (2010), the authors highlight that when leaders in shared leadership have an accurate understanding of each other’s skills and abilities, trust and respect exist between leaders. For instance, one of them made a decision that made the business lose its business opportunity to market their pineapples in one of the biggest hotel chains in Malaysia. This scenario can lead to a conflict if the other leader

cannot accept the outcome with an open heart. Yet, they accept the scenario as part of business misfortune. As has been mentioned by one of the leaders, Mr. P in his comments below:

“But in term of making decision, we both agreed to make the process simple and accessible. Whenever there is a decision to be made, we try our best to make it faster and effective during that particular of time” (Case 3).

Conflict is unavoidable, especially during strategic meetings due to differences in background and experience of the leaders. The leaders admitted that they always have arguments due to clashes of ideas and views. When the meeting is getting heated with arguments, the leaders will temporarily halt the meeting until they regain their composure. A tea break usually cools down the session. At the end of the day, the argument brings the leaders closer as the session gives them the opportunity to open up and share their intrepidity.

4.4 Case 4

The in- depth interviews took place in Case 4’s corporate office in Kuala Lumpur. Five participants were interviewed and three of them are the leaders. The interview sessions were done based on one to one person per session. The other two participants are the company’s employees. The other sources of secondary data included the business profile, the case study reports, and the company’s web page.

4.4.1 The Description of the Case Background

Case 4 was founded solely by Mr. N in 2009 and he has business experience of thirty years. The company was set-up using the founder’s personal funds without any loans. The start-up capital was Ringgit Malaysia one million. Until today (2015), the company is sufficiently financed using its own funds.

In the fourth year of its operation, Mr. N promoted two of his senior employees to be the company’s leaders and they were given company shares. The two leaders (Mr. S and Mr. Z) were originally employed as fresh graduates. Both leaders have been working closely with the founder since Case 4 started off. They held the company’s technical manager

posts during that period. In other words, they are his right hands and have been through ups and downs of the business together. The new leaders were offered promotion packages; company shares and leadership responsibilities. Both of them received a fifteen percent company share each and the founder held seventy percent ownership himself.

Case 4 focuses on soil improvement and bio fertilizers for agricultural crops such as paddy and palm oil trees. The company manufactures their own bio fertilizers which are environmental friendly, effective and affordable. They also provide professional consultation on the technology know-how to their customers. These products and services are Case 4's sources of revenue from the very first day they started until now. Case 4 has two type of customers; local and overseas customers. In the early days, the customers were the local farmers and wholesalers. In the past two years, they were able to penetrate the overseas market and export their products to countries such as Japan, China and Indonesia.

The company's journey began with seven management members, including the founder and the other two current leaders. The total number of employees including factory workers and plantation workers were nearly fifty when the company started off. Currently, the company's management team consists of twelve members. They comprise of three leaders and nine management staff. Currently, Case 4 has more than three hundred employees working in different locations including in Java (plantation), where two thirds of the employees are stationed.

Presently, the company is one of the major players in manufacturing bio fertilizer in Malaysia with an eighteen percent of the market share. Their technology know-how also gives them an advantage of becoming the reference point regarding bio fertilizer to many parties including individuals (farmers), commercial organizations and government bodies. The technology know-how that they possess is currently in demand and is becoming popular among farmers and manufacturers. Their technology is exclusively kept secret within the company which gives them bargaining leverage in the sector.

The company has several business logistics in two different states in Malaysia. The original office which serves as the headquarters is based in Bandar Tenggara, Johor. It is the main factory and the warehouse. The corporate office on the other hand is located in

the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. The three leaders travel on a weekly basis between Kuala Lumpur and Johor. The daily business operations are run by their trusted administrative team from their headquarters.

In the first five years of the company's establishment, Case 4 faced the difficulty of convincing the Malaysian farmers (who are used to conventional fertilizers) about their products which were new and considered foreign. They faced endless rejections before the public realized the benefits of the products to their crops. The leaders called those years the 'gloomy period' of their business journey.

They worked hard to promote and sell their ideas and products. Gradually, they started to build up the company's reputation because of the products' testimony they have received from the public. Once the public started to accept the products and the ideas, the sales trend increased tremendously from less than ten thousand ringgits in the first year to nearly one million RM (Ringgit Malaysia) in the third year of operation. Among the recognition received by Case 4 are achievement awards for the top 100 Malaysia SMEs best performance for three years in a row, project leader in a few government projects, invitations for project collaboration from several local and overseas manufacturers, and product patents. In 2013, they won a bio- commercial grant from the Malaysian government which they are planning to use for their next product innovation launch in 2016.

4.4.2 Leadership Style/ Approach

Case 4 experienced the transition from a solo leadership style to a shared leadership style. The change in leadership approach is due to the company's rapid growth and expansion in their business operations. Shared leadership practice is implemented in order to reduce the founder's leadership burdens, to meet the business challenges and to bring the business forward. Comments given by the founder below:

“But now, our company direction has changed and we want to bring this company to a totally different level...We want this company to reach the highest corporate level in the business...That is our aims” (Case 4).

The appointment of the new leaders brought a breath of fresh air into the organization because both leaders are young and ambitious. Clearly, the promotion was intended to secure the know how knowledge embedded within these two leaders, who started working in Case 4 as senior employees. At the same time, it is also intended to seal the founder's position within the company too. The combination of leaders in Case 4 is quite interesting due to a huge age gap and there is a possibility that this arrangement can cause conflicts in the future. Comments given by Mr. N indirectly highlighted the point above:

“In 2012, I made a decision to add in new leaders to this company. I decided to give promotion to Mr. Zakri and Mr. Syaffudin as my business partners and directly becoming the leaders to this company. The main reason of promoting them is to bring this company to the higher level. I am pretty ambitious and from the beginning, I want this company to be a major player in the fertilizer industry” (Case 4).

In order for the leadership to work, the leaders agreed to distribute the responsibilities among themselves based on individual strengths and capabilities. Mr. N holds the Chief Executive Officer post. Meanwhile, Mr. S is Case 4's Chief Operating Officer and Mr. Z holds the Chief Technical Officer post. Regardless of holding a designated post, the leaders handle the company's affairs together as a team. For instance, they are transparent with their actions and decisions. Sharing and exchange of information is a practice between the leaders. Leaders are encouraged to give ideas and views. This has been a practice in Case 4, way before they were promoted. According to one of the leaders:

“We are a team and we help each other. In term of sensitivity, we respect each other and we treasure our friendship. For me, the beauty of being in this team is the friendship element that we have” (Case4).

The responsibilities between the leaders remain the same for most of the time, unless there are certain circumstances that require the leaders to hold the ad hoc responsibilities within a specific period of time. For instance, short term collaboration projects with government agencies or private sectors. It is done through team consensus and will be decided upon based on the person's availability, skills and knowledge. One of the leaders, Mr. Z gave the indication through his comments below:

“For our official post, the tasks remain the same. But for certain circumstances like we have to handle temporary projects. Then sometimes, we tend to distribute the temporary tasks according to each capabilities and skills. It ends when the project ended” (Case 4).

There is no overlapping of responsibilities between the leaders because each post comes with specific instructions and clear job specifications. The intention is to avoid redundancy of responsibilities and to create a harmonic atmosphere between the leaders. This has been highlighted by Wood and Fields (2007), conflict arises in shared leadership due to ambiguity in responsibilities. Mr. N highlighted the point in the quotations below:

“There is no overlapping in responsibilities between us because we understand our own roles and the roles of others too... The assigned post comes together with specific responsibilities and authorities. It is crucial to have a clear list of responsibilities among the leaders to avoid redundancy. Then, each of us can focus on the given tasks.” (Case 4).

Through respect and cooperation, it seems that each leader understands their roles within the leadership team. Earlier, Mr. N would normally get the new leaders to get involved in his project either through direct or indirect involvement. He guided and let the leaders learn through their mistakes. Once he is confident, he would let them take over the projects as he stepped aside. It is hands on experience with less intervention from the founder. The practice continues and nowadays, the leaders are given freedom to perform their designated projects accordingly.

The difference in leaders' background and personalities are among the interesting elements in Case 4. Mr. N is in his mid- forties and has been in the business more than thirty years. Meanwhile, both new leaders are in their early thirties and when they first joined Case 4, they were the employees. The scenario has created an indirect subconscious mind set for the new leaders to oblige with the founder's views. Indirectly they have to suppress their thoughts in order to maintain a good relationship among the leadership team. It can be seen as a means of conflict avoidance. It goes without saying that Mr. N's presence is still strong as the Case 4's founder and he instils strong influence on the Case 4's leadership team. As has been mentioned by one of the new leaders:

“To be honest, when I was appointed as the technical officer for this company. I am having a bit of insecurity because I am considered a newbie and I am holding an important post in this company. On the other hands, Mr. Nasarudin is someone with vast experience. But as

the time passed, through endless encouragement, guidance and supports from both of them” (Case 4).

It is obvious that Mr. N plays the role of a mentor to the new leaders. His actions are justified since he needs to ensure that they receive support, encouragement and motivation for their new responsibilities. It is done through implicit and explicit forms of communication between the team leaders, such as during meetings where Mr. N directly gives his guidance to them. During informal discussions, he indirectly imparts his business knowledge and leadership skills. It shows that the founder is sincere in preparing both leaders to be the successors of Case 4. At the same time, he is trying to indirectly seal his exclusive post as the founder of Case 4. As has been mentioned by one of the leaders:

“It takes time to adjust to the new role. Luckily, we have a very supportive mentor and Mr. N guided us into our new roles. He showed us through his actions, words and wisdom” (Case 4).

The founder’s acts are seen as an attempt to infuse leadership confidence in his team members as well as try to reduce the gaps among them. He needs to give some space to the leaders, to be independent and slowly develop their leadership capabilities. At the moment, the new leaders are a bit reserved in expressing their views to him because of his dominance. It takes time to change the mindset of the new leaders to realize that the founder is no longer their boss and that they are a part of the leadership team. Both leaders have to change their mindset, as only then do they get to show their true leadership potential and capabilities as better leaders. The founder gave his views:

“I cannot do this big job alone. I need a team. A group of reliable individuals with similar mindsets. From being a solo rider, now this company has a group of leaders and we call it a team...I am so lucky that I employed them in the first place. I groomed them until they are becoming leaders themselves” (Case 4).

When it comes to conflicts, the team leaders prefer to solve it in a professional manner. They open up their minds and are willing to accept constructive criticisms, especially from the founder’s side. Sometimes his confidence level causes insecurity among his leadership team members and can be misunderstood as a presence of authority. He needs

to tone down and give them the opportunity to express their views, to balance the harmony in leadership practice. One of the leaders, Mr. Z pointed out:

“We would normally discuss it professionally and try to be a matured adult. There is no point to stubbornly defend your views if others are better and practical. If it happened, we have to calm down and focus.... At the end of the day, arguing mindlessly does not bring benefit to any of us. We are wasting time and energy” (Case 4).

The communication aspect plays a crucial role in Case 4’s leadership practice. The leaders communicate regularly with each other either through face to face conversations or using technology such as phone calls, text messages or video conferencing. The leaders prefer the face to face type of communication; conversations and discussions. It happens in a formal or informal scenario. But the leaders are in favour of the informal communication between them because of the atmosphere. It helps to reduce the formality between the team leaders and they are able to discuss it in a calmer manner. It is done through one to one sessions or in a group. Mr. Z gave his comments below in relation to communication aspects:

“I can say that we do it regularly whenever we have the opportunity to do so, be it informal or formal meetings. We do it both ways with no restrictions. We do not want to drag and prolong the issues and try to solve it the soonest because in the business world, every minute count” (Case 4).

Due to Case 4’ business logistics, it is a challenge to gather three of the leaders at the same time. An initiative has been made to arrange weekly meetings either in Kuala Lumpur’s office or the headquarters office in Johor. They try to make the meeting short and the maximum time is two hours only. The company’s popular catchphrase is “*less meetings, more productivity*’. This indicates that the leaders recognized the importance of the communication of shared leadership practice in Case 4.

4.4.3 **Leaders’ Learning to Lead**

In the earlier subsections, Case 4’s leaders highlighted that their leadership abilities and business knowledge are gradually improved through the shared leadership practice. They have learnt through a different set of channels such as within the organization environment, formal short courses and business networking. The continuous learning to

lead process displayed by the leaders indicates the leaders' realization of the enhancement of leadership skills and abilities in order to lead the organization effectively. As has been mentioned by Mr. Z in his views below:

“Learning process is a continuous process and we should never stop the process. To be an excellent leader, we need to upgrade our knowledge and skills from time to time” (Case 4).

Mostly in Case 4, the learning to lead process takes place in natural ways, such as through conversations, observations and interactions. The process of dissemination of knowledge and skills occurred indirectly between the leaders and their employees while the learning process takes place. The leaders concluded that observation and interaction help them to absorb and learn new knowledge and skills while performing their duties. The scenario happens in an explicit manner, for instance during the mind mapping session in the meeting or while making daily business decisions. As has been mentioned by Mr. S in his interviews:

“We do it indirectly maybe during discussion or maybe during meeting. Or we have done it while having informal gathering such as during lunch time and so on. During conversation, we might have indirectly disseminated our skills and knowledge between us” (Case 4).

It involves team effort to bring together the learning process as it requires commitment and support from each of the individuals. The leaders should always be receptive and cooperative during the learning process in order to take advantage of it. It does not mean that they need to absorb everything they have seen or heard. They need to be selective in acquiring related and beneficial knowledge and skills relevant to them in order to avoid overwhelming themselves with information. The founder Mr. N also agreed with this view, as he mentioned in his interviews:

“When we work as a team, there are opportunities to learn from each other. Name it life, business or leadership skills. In this case, I am like a mentor to both of them especially on the business aspects and leadership perspective. I can also learn from them too. They are young and their passion for life is something that makes me highly motivated” (Case 4).

Conflict does happen during the learning to lead process in Case 4. Similar to other cases in this study, among the factors which contributed to the conflict are the differences in

the leaders' background, personalities and experience. Since three of them came into Case 4 with differences, the clash of ideas and opinions is unavoidable. The leaders are quite outspoken when it comes to conveying their ideas, especially during the strategic planning meetings. But, when conflict arises, the leaders would normally try to minimize the after effects through a short break. They normally take a tea break to cool down the atmosphere. Once they are calm, they continue the session. Conflict is seen as a medium for the Case 4's leaders to learn about each individual in a positive and safe environment. The comments given by Mr. S indicated the existence of conflicts during the strategic decision making process:

“In the first place, we try our best to minimize conflicts especially between us. Based on trust, cooperation, sensitivity and respects we build this company. We perceived conflicts as a medium to understand each other better” (Case 4).

Based on the scenario in Case 4, it can be seen that the founder has to be more open up to the learning ideas regardless of his vast knowledge and experience. He needs to put aside his ego and self- esteem if he wants to encourage the learning process to happen between the team leaders, including himself. The new leaders must also bring themselves forward soonest in the sense that they need to be confident and get into their new leadership roles in Case 4.

They need to adjust quickly if they want to participate actively in the leadership practice, so that this boosts their confidence level as a leader. There should not be a huge gap between the leaders while they are carrying out the learning to lead process. Or else, the learning process would not be effective and would not bring benefits to the leadership practice in Case 4.

4.4.4 **Strategic Decision- Making Process**

Case 4's leaders are directly involved in making crucial decisions for the company and decisions are made collectively. It is long- term planning for the company and has a great impact on the company's business direction. Among the strategic decisions are drastic movement from being a trader to a manufacturer, market expansion, and to be a public listed company by the year 2019. Mr. S highlighted the existence of collective decision making in his quotations below:

“The final decision will be made by three of us through the collective team effort. In meeting, clashes of ideas is a norm due to each of us has different stands. The best approach during the heated session is through positive mindset. We never prolonged the uncomfortable scenario because it might escalate to an uncontrollable situation that is not good for our team” (Case 4).

The leadership style implemented in Case 4 has brought positive effects to the organizational strategic decision- making process through collaboration of knowledge, skills enhancement, experience and ideas from the team leaders. Shared leadership is seen as a medium for the team leaders to balance their strengths and weaknesses within a different area of knowledge and experience, in delivering relevant strategic decisions for the organization. The team collaboration scenario gives different perspectives of ideas and views that helps the organization made reliable and effective decisions. As has been highlighted by the founder, Mr. N in his comments below:

“Now that we have more brains in the company, strategic decision- making process is fewer burdens for one single person to think off....We have advantages in term of collective knowledge, skills and experience in delivering effective decisions ” (Case 4).

The process can sometimes lead to conflict due to disagreement between the leaders, due to clashes of views. It is not an easy process to get everyone to agree on one’s views and sometimes it takes a longer time to get the right decisions. Therefore, leaders in Case 4 choose to open up and listen to each other’s views. They believe that it helps to reduce tensions during the heated session. During the strategic decision- making process, the leaders try to be professional and try their best to control their emotions. It is done by focusing on the main priority of making a decision that is best for the company.

The leaders practice straight forward conversations during the meeting. If the ideas are not well accepted by the other leaders, one should openly accept it without having any grudges. They believe that by minimizing conflicts during the meeting, more jobs are done and reduce the waiting time. One of the leaders, Mr. Z has mentioned about the Case 4’s practice:

“We do not have problem in expressing ourselves to each other. In fact, we do encourage our staff to do the same thing too. Please come forward and tell us your views. We appreciate that kind of actions” (Case 4).

There are a few steps involved prior, present and after the meetings in Case 4's strategic decision-making process. The prior step of the strategic meeting is to identify the main agenda that will be discussed in the meeting. Informal discussion is held to discuss the future direction of the company. Then, reviews take place of the current company's performance and capabilities in line with the type of strategic planning. For instance, if the focus is on market expansion then the current reports on the current performance of the company is the main topic of discussion.

Next is the information gathering process. The information plays an important part in making strategic decisions for the company by reducing risks and increasing the successful rate of the actions. The period of information gathering depends on the decision-making deadlines. The period varies from day to months. But, once the information is in the leaders' hands, the process of making the decision is normally fast and the decisions are made during the meeting. The meeting commences when everything is prepared. The followed steps involve during the strategic decision meetings indicate that the leaders are meticulous and understand the impact of outcomes from the meetings. Mr. N highlighted it in the comments below:

“Every time before the strategic decision meeting, we will ensure that all the required information is gathered prior to the meeting. We also have an informal discussion to brainstorm the information, in order for us to get the thorough ideas on the issues involved. This will save us a lot of time. The practice helps us to generate effective decisions within a short time period” (Case 4).

Mr. N will chair the meeting and apart from the team leaders, the managers are present in order for them to deliver the company's current information. The duration of the meeting varies, similar to the decision-making period. Overall, it is subject to urgency, availability of the information and creativity during the meeting. The final decision must be agreed by all team leaders. Once the decisions are made, the implementation takes place promptly. The employees get emails or memos on the decisions that the leaders have made. Mr. S comments below:

“For the top-level decision making, it would definitely us. Hmmm, regarding the final decision. We do not make it compulsory for a particular person to take the responsibility to do so. We as a team will make the decision as a team. Team consensus is a must” (Case 4).

Case 4 has clearly shown the advantages of the implementation of shared leadership practice through effective decision-making process and leaders' leadership improvement from the leadership learning process. It is made possible due to team collaboration and maximization of each team leader's knowledge, skills and experience. Leaders' better understanding of the organization's goals has helped the shared leadership process achievable regardless of conflicts face by the leaders.

4.5 Case 5

The primary sources for Case 5 are namely: two founders/leaders and two employees. The interviews took place at the company's main office in Kuala Lumpur. The secondary data sources are the business profile and the company's website information.

4.5.1 The Description of the Case Background

Both founders/leaders (Mr. S and Mr. N) of Case 5 foresee a big business potential in waste management treatment, specifically in the Malaysian agricultural sector. The niche opportunities exist within this specialized industry has given the ideas to both leaders to endeavour into the business. First, there is less competition because of the high entrance cost and the complexity of the technology involved. Next, the set-up cost for one biogas is huge (between RM three to six million). Furthermore, the Malaysian government recently announced a new ruling regarding palm oil waste. The new rules will strictly be implemented by the year 2019. This has caused panic among mill owners since many do not have the facilities.

Lastly, there are existing demands for palm oil waste from the agricultural industry. After a series of discussions, several market surveys were done by both leaders, the business was established in 2011. The ownership of the organization is equally divided between both leaders with fifty percent of shares each. The agreement was made based on the capital invested by both of them.

The company is based in Damansara, Kuala Lumpur. They started with being on one floor of a shop lot, and currently occupy three floors of the shop lot. Originally, there were nine organizational members including the two leaders. The rest were the management team

members. Later, the number increased to fifteen. One of the unique attributes of the company is the fact that the management team were specially handpicked by the leaders, and they have known each other for more than five years.

The focus of the business is on industrial waste treatment in the agricultural sector. The products and services rendered by Case 5 include the biogas plant set- up in palm oil plantations, and consultation. Their main customers are local manufacturers and local plantation companies. Since 2014, Case 5 ventured into the international market, they have projects in several ASEAN countries, such as Indonesia and Philippines, as well as in Europe.

Currently, they are among the major players of the agricultural waste treatment sector in Malaysia. The company's revenue comes from two types of sources: direct power generated from the biogas plant; and collaboration between the company and the mill owner. Revenue is generated from the amount of electricity produced by the gas in the biogas plant. It is known as the filling tariff system. In addition to the recent development in the Malaysian palm oil industry, Case 5 has managed to secure long- term collaboration projects with Malaysia's main palm oil plantation bodies such as FELCRA and FELDA. The collaboration projects will generate steady income to the company for at least the next five years. They predict that in the coming years the company's income would be doubled because of the customers that they have now, due to their strategic collaborations with the major producers in the palm oil industry.

From time to time, Case 5 tries to improve their products and services through continuous research and development activities. This is in conjunction with the company's targets, which is to be the best provider in the waste management treatment industry by providing high quality products and services at affordable rates without neglecting the environmental issues.

Another interesting fact about Case 5 is that they do not have their own laboratory facilities for their research and development activities. Instead, they have a commercial collaboration with one of the government's higher learning institutions, University of Technology Malaysia in Johor. Supported by local bodies and government agencies, Case 5 is able to make a profitable deal with the chosen higher learning institution. All research

and development activities take place in the university's laboratories and the university gets incentives from the company for their involvement. It is a win- win situation for both organizations.

It is a strategic move made by the leaders since they have access to the institution's state of the art laboratory facilities and expertise. It would have been too costly to acquire expertise and set up a high technology laboratory themselves. Their creative thinking has saved them money and time. They are capable of fully utilized the benefits of research and development facilities and experts from the selected university. Consequently, the leaders can concentrate on the company's development instead.

Overall, in a short period of time, Case 5 has experienced growth in many business aspects such as size of the organization, revenues, recognitions, patents, markets expansion and human resources. The company's profits in the year 2014 was nearly three million ringgits compared to 2012, where they made less than a million ringgits of profits. In March 2016, the SME company has changed its status to a public listed company in AIM, London Stock Exchange (LSE)'s international market for smaller growing companies. The company has successfully hit another milestone.

4.5.2 Leadership Style/ Approach

Both founders/leaders were in their late 30's when the business started off and they built the business based on the friendship of more than fifteen years old. Both leaders have business experience of nearly ten years. Mr. S's previous tenancy was in Biotech Corporation Malaysia, a semi-government body which gave him exposure to the Malaysian business environment especially in procedure and procurement. Meanwhile, Mr. N's hands- on experience in the industry gave him a better understanding of the technical part of the business. The combination of both leaders' experience, knowledge and skills are some of the added advantages to Case 5's team leadership.

In the beginning of the business, leaders had difficulties adjusting with each other due to personality differences and backgrounds. This has sometimes led to conflict between the leaders due to clashes of views. It has not changed much since then, there are times when leaders disagreed with the other. As mentioned by Mr. S:

“Well, there is no such thing as a perfect leadership style in this reality of business world. In my honest view, this team leadership style is not easy unless you have team leaders who have the same brainwaves, visions and determination” (Case 5).

When conflict arises, both leaders prefer to solve it quickly and have no intention to drag it out. During this situation, both leaders willing to put aside their egos for the company’s sake. Through each stage of team development, they will learn to tolerate each other. Obviously, the leaders’ act indicated that they do not want the conflicts to create discomfort and restrain their precious friendship. After all, whatever happens in a small organization, news spreads fast. It can tarnish the leaders’ credibility as well as the organizational leaders’ too. It is also not a favourable situation for the leaders and the staff. One of the leaders gave his comments:

“Well it is normal sometimes we have disagreements between us. But knowing each other for a long time since our college time, we tend to give and take. We step back a little bit then continue with the discussion and try our best to convince each other with solidify points. It is a positive and healthy discussions” (Case 5).

For an organization to achieve huge success within a short time from the leadership context, leaders need to inspire and motivate the organization’s members. It would be impossible for the leaders to maintain a good relationship between them if they did not have effective communication. The leaders always resort to discussions and conversations. They took this matter seriously by literally implementing it via office renovation. Case 5’s office setting is an open plan type of office to encourage face- to – face interactions among organization members. It shows that the leaders prefer to have discussions in an informal manner. The office setting can create a relaxed working atmosphere and encourage people to express their opinions freely. At the same time, it infuses creative atmosphere. The combination of organic organizational structure and leadership practice contributes to good and transparent communication practices in Case 5. Mr. S emphasized the issue as below:

“If there is need to discuss, just straight away do it. That is the reason too for our latest office renovation....There are many space for discussion within the relaxing environment” (Case 5).

Next is the delegation practice in Case 5. From the beginning, the leaders main focus was on Case 5's strategic aspect. Both leaders have decided to delegate the responsibilities to the appointed management team as soon as the company is established. Case 5 demonstrated the delegation of administration to its general employees right after the business started off. The decision is chosen by the leaders to ensure that the company is on the right track. Whereby it is being administered by the right key individuals from the beginning. This special group of handpicked people is the backbone of the company and they are empowered to run Case 5's daily operations. As has been highlighted by Mr. S:

“Both of us have agreed to delegate daily operations to our trusted staff while we focus on the higher- level matters for the company. We are the think tankers for this business. We felt that if we directly involved in the daily operations, we are unable to give our 100% concentration on the bigger issue on bringing the company forward” (Case 5).

This group of people was chosen by the leaders for several reasons. It is easier for the leaders to give instructions to them and less monitoring and control is involved because mutual trust exists between them. Plus, the tendency for the staff to resist has been minimized because of the existing friendship between the leaders and the staff. One of the leaders gave his views:

“Personally, I have known them for years. At least more than five years. They have been of us since day one. They understand the company directions and they want to be part of it. In the sense that they are really working hard in parallel with us from the beginning. So far, they are the best” (Case 5).

Basically, the leaders have taken a pro- active measure in creating a harmonious working environment by selecting individuals they are familiar with and this has led to a strong fundamental structure for Case 5. Actions taken by these leaders indirectly shows that they are willing to take risk and give their trust into these group of people to admin the organization's daily operation. The leaders' action signalled that they understand the impact of business growth from the strategic fit and resources aspects to Case 5 in the future. These leaders have a general idea of what awaits their businesses during the growth process specifically on the conflicts of leadership. At the same time, this eases the leaders' burdens during the leadership process by having no direct involvement with the company's daily operations.

From the beginning, both leaders decided to distribute and share certain responsibilities in the organization. It is done based on the individual's knowledge, skills and capabilities. Mr. S holds the Managing Director position and he is responsible for the company's financial aspects, especially on securing funds, and financial plans. Mr. N on the other hand is the company's Executive Director and he is in charge of the technical aspect of the company's projects. The responsibilities remain the same for most of the time. But, apart from the designated responsibilities, both leaders are responsible for the company's affairs, networking and public relations. In other words, both are involved in multifunctional activities within the organization. One of the leaders has validated this, Mr. S mentioned it in the quotation below:

“In general, the responsibilities that both of us had agreed on remain the same for most of the time. I can say that, the possibility of the responsibilities to be overlapped is very low (laughed). We agreed on the given posts and responsibilities and had clearly stamped it down to avoid overlapping and confusion in the later days” (Case 5).

A clear distribution of responsibilities helps leaders to understand the specific authorities each other hold. The element of respect and trust take place while performing the appointed tasks. Hence, leadership crises and conflicts can be minimized. The arrangement also suggested that, despite the fact that the leaders have their own specific responsibilities, they still want to impose their authority within the overall organization's operations. Comments given by one of the leaders:

“We had decided to distribute the responsibilities in term of our expertise, skills and knowledge. But, in general both of us are directly involve in monitoring the overall business operation” (Case 5).

Sometimes, unforeseen circumstances occurred. Such as issues in the set-up of the biogas plant in Perak State that required both leaders to take charge of the project from beginning to end, regardless of the current responsibilities they were holding. In order to ensure that the leadership is effectively implemented, both leaders coordinated the tasks according to each other's capabilities and skills. Team cohesiveness has helped leaders to accomplish the ad hoc tasks.

The example above demonstrates that both leaders are supportive in order to strengthen team cohesiveness. They are willing to share the leadership burdens and take the responsibilities together for the ad hoc projects. However, the scenario does have an adverse effect if the leaders ignore the impact of ad hoc responsibilities. This can be an early sign to responsibilities overload and causes of leadership crisis due to stress and exhaustion. Case 5 is experiencing rapid growth and it means extra responsibilities awaits both leaders. Both leaders should have future strategic plans to avoid the above situations from happening too often. One of possible suggestion is to bring in new leaders into Case 5 due to its rapid growth and expansion of business. Case 5 is currently in the process of becoming an Initial Public Offering (IPO) company.

Once the company's status changes, the leaders have to let go of a certain percentage of their shares to the public. They have decided to release thirty percent of the company's shares to the public and retain the rest. Inevitably, the new scenario will have an impact on the company's leadership because the company is no longer a private limited company (Sdn. Bhd).

Another major change for Case 5 is the number of directors on the Board, there will be new leaders joining in. Obviously, the leaders anticipated these circumstances coming in and yet they are willing to let go of some authority to ensure the company's targets are achieved. One of the leaders mentioned this issue during the interviews. Future challenges await the current founders in the new company's leadership arrangement. His comments are as below:

“Since both of us are the founders of this company, we have decided to distribute the ownership between us equally. It means 50-50. For the time being, the percentage between us will remain the same. But when this company is converted into a public listing company, I believe that there will be significant changes especially in leadership department” (Case 5).

Next element that is related to shared leadership practice is the design or structure of the organization. Organizational structure implemented within Case 5 has a direct impact on the shared leadership practice. Case 5 is an open and less structural type of organization, which is a norm in many of shared leadership's organizations. The organizational chart is simple and straight forward. The structure was purposely made to foster faster

decisions, effective communication and encourage creativity among members. They practice the concept of sharing of ideas, knowledge, resources, and skills across Case 5. This is done through the brain storming session. Whenever the company faces new business challenges, for instance in the new Case 5's product development project which requires vast inputs from the organizational members, the session helps.

However, Case 5's practice organizational structure is not reflected on paper because it is part of an IPO company's requirement to have a written organizational chart. Basically, Case 5 only has an organizational chart on paper as part of the company's profile and images purposes. Clearly, the leaders wanted the organic type of organizational structure because they wanted to be an IPO company by 2016. They have huge ambitions within a short time period and this type of structure is ideal for Case 5. This has been confirmed by one of the leaders during the interviews. His comments are as below:

“To be honest, we are trying our best to minimize the rigidness in our organization. Since we are planning to make this company as a public listing company, we have to display a proper organizational chart. By right, we have a flexible organization where the communication between the organization members are transparent and open” (Case 5).

From the inputs given by the Case 5's leaders, the existence of shared leadership practice is clearly shown through few of its distinctive elements such as distribution of responsibilities, team cohesiveness, trust, respect, effective communication and organizational structure (less structural).

4.5.3 Leaders' Learning to Lead

Knowledge sharing is a powerful tool in business. Case 5's leaders understand the importance of continuous learning specifically from a leadership context if they want to excel. Small businesses need to address certain aspects including leaders' attitude towards goals, tasks and consequences of growth during growth phase in order to stay competitive in business (Wiklund et al., 2009).

The platforms of leaders' learning can be categorized into two, which are the internal source and external source. The internal source happens within Case 5 itself, between both leaders and their employees. Both leaders suggested that the learning to lead process

occurred in Case 5 and the ongoing process happens through leaders' observation toward each other action while performing leadership responsibilities.

Mr. S and Mr. N agreed the facts that they give full commitment on sharing and exchanging their knowledge on leadership skills, business knowledge and experience among themselves regularly that both leaders have gained from their previous jobs and current leadership positions. As has been highlighted by Mr. S below:

“Based on my previous consultancy experience I had with this type of business during my days in Biotech Corp Malaysia. Meanwhile, on Mr. N's side where he used to work with his uncle whom owned this type of business. From our regular meetings, we exchanged views, experience and stories. There is no such thing as I am better than you because I know a lot. We are here to support each other” (Case 5).

Based on the statements given by the leaders, in order for the leaders' learning to lead process to happen effectively, both leaders must actively engage during the process. Other important elements during the execution are humbleness and respect toward each other. Conflicts do happen regardless of years of friendship. But both leaders place high priority on the business rather than on small matter which cause distraction to them. Mr. N has pointed out :

“We never put ourselves first, we put others first. In the sense that, what is important for the company is our main priority” (Case 5).

Next is the external sources such as customers, suppliers, business counterparts and business expertise. Occasionally, both leaders learn new inputs through observation and guidance from the experts that are brought into the organization. The experts in their respective fields are invited to the company's strategic meetings. The experts play the role of giving insights from the industry, especially from the technical aspect of developing the biogas plant and waste treatment. The experts' involvement helps the leaders to make decisions, especially in the areas where they are not an expert.

The leaders admit that business networking helps to improve their leadership skills and knowledge too. Indirectly, it sent a clear message that the leaders acknowledge their weaknesses in certain aspects of business and that they are willing to learn from others. As has been mentioned by Mr. S:

“We have an advisory team that gives advice in specific technical areas. They are Dr. S, an expert in composite fields. He is a government pensioner and has vast experience in the fields. He has been helping us since we started our first business. Meanwhile, Dr. L is from India. He is the person who knows well on the tanks aspects for the plantation including reactors and everything related to that” (Case 5).

His views are supported by his business partner:

“It is through observations and discussions that we have between us....Maybe he sees things in different angles and he has hands- on experience in the industry that we are in now. He’s experience as an engineer for quite sometimes gives him added advantage to the extent that he knows what is happening in the industry...I can say that we complement each other (laughed)” (Case 5)

In terms of the knowledge and skills dissemination process, it happened through direct interactions, for instance during meetings or in an implicit manner, such as during informal discussions at the office pantry. For the rest of the organization’s members, it takes place in meetings or through one to one session.

At the end of the day, the organization benefits from the excellent leadership shown by both leaders. Great leadership inspires the rest of the organization’s members. Definition given by Campbell (2000) stated that leadership involves process of influencing among members in organization in order to achieve main organizational goal. The purpose of having a different background and skills is seen as part of the strategic plan for Case 5. Both leaders complement one another through the differences that they possess.

Their selfless acts demonstrate their trust and loyalty towards one another. Through the leadership style practiced by the leaders, their leadership skills and capabilities have improved continuously. It is shown through Case 5’s achievements in less than five years. Below are the comments given by one of the leaders:

“Since we are a team. There are many things that we can learn and exchange between us. ..We complement each other with our diversity of skills, knowledge and expertise” (Case 5).

It seems that both leaders are on the same page in a mission to improve their leadership skills and abilities through continuous learning. Through shared leadership, both leaders

learn to support and give encouragement. They are willing to put aside their differences and egos in order for the leadership style to work; to maintain the organizational balance and for the overall organizational performance. Conclusively, organization's objectives are their main priority.

4.5.4 Strategic Decision- Making Process

Strategic planning is an important factor that will determine the company's direction in the future. In the early establishment of Case 5, both leaders had set up the company's strategic plans that they wanted to achieve within the given time period. The leaders have meticulously laid down the company's short term and long- term plans. One of the examples of short- term strategic planning is to secure at least three biogas plant projects in the first two years of operation, with the given fund they currently had. The leaders and the management team were absolutely ecstatic when they successfully achieved the target in less than two years. This has proven that a proper strategic plan with great execution leads to great outcomes.

Long term strategic plans involve a longer time period. For instance, Case 5's long term strategic plan is to secure funds for their future project. The best alternative that they have thought of is to become a public listed company by 2017, and they have succeeded. As has been mentioned by Mr. N:

“That is why we came in with the strategic plan to get extra funds by planning ahead to be a public listing company. The faster we get it, the better. It means that the business can move forward and flourish” (Case 5).

Case 5's strategic planning process starts with the current organizational overall performance. The strategic plans are based on the current company's capabilities, including the financial aspects, knowledge and expertise, and human factors. From this point, both leaders will decide on the future targets they wish to set for Case 5. Normally, they have series of informal discussion prior to a formal meeting which will be attended by administrative members.

Next is the information gathering process, which is the responsibility of the management team. The source of information is obtained both internally and externally. The external

sources normally come from the current economic situations, market trends, competitors and others. Internal sources come from information available within Case 5 such as reports on financial, facilities, human factors and others.

Prior to the meeting, the leaders look through the gathered information in order for them to simplify the information. They prefer to tabulate the information as this method is easier to understand. Another method of preference is to simplify it in diagram and chart form. This illustrates the leaders' intention to maximize the meeting outcome and to make the meeting session shorter. As one of the leaders mentioned:

“Meeting is the best place where we are free to express and exchange our views and get the best outcome out of it. In order to do so, extensive preparation is one of the important element” (Case 5).

Case 5's strategic planning meeting is held every three months, or at least four times a year, for monitoring purposes. To them, it is a must in order to keep up to date with the current performance of the company. The leaders want to ensure that the company is on the right track. The duration of the meeting is less than two hours. The leaders want to speed up the process because of the time factor, time is crucial and represents money.

Both leaders and the managers will sit together in the meetings and sometimes the company's special appointed industrial advisors are also present. The advisory boards will give their views based on their specific knowledge and skills and in return they receive monetary tokens for their participation. In the meeting, Mr. N will be the chairperson. As has been mentioned by Mr. N:

“I normally chair the meeting and the agenda is based on the previous minutes. But if we have new issue to discuss, we will inform Miss S because she is the person in charge for taking minutes and the meeting's secretary. About the final decision, it will be decided by me and Mr. N” (Case 5).

During the meeting, the leaders prefer to achieve this through a brainstorming session, they believe it fosters creativity and stimulates effective communication between the members. The combination and collaboration of both leaders, managers and the experts (sometimes), resulted in making sound and reliable decisions at that particular time, because they are taking advantage of the shared leadership practice: knowledge and skills

sharing. Since everyone comes from different backgrounds, experience and education, this sometimes led to conflict, as shown in the quotation below:

“Well it is normal sometimes we have disagreements between us. But knowing each other for a long time since our college time, we tend to give and take. We step back a little bit then continue with the discussion and try our best to convince each other with solidify points. It is a positive and healthy discussions” (Case 5).

The leaders of Case 5 acknowledged the existence of the conflict, especially during the strategic decision- making process due to different views that lead to disagreement. It does affect the flow of the discussion, but indirectly demonstrates the courage and honesty of the leaders to speak out their ideas. The leaders view the scenario as part of a knowledge and experience sharing session. One has the knowledge that another does not have. When the session starts to heat, the leaders try to tone down the argument or sometimes they stop the session for a short break. During this gap, they will reflect upon the situation and discuss it in professional manner. Mr. S clearly stated the conflict scenario:

“There is a certain time that we have to be bold in expressing our views. It is not about who is right or his wrong. But we try to get the best possible decision by the end of the day” (Case 5).

The decisions made during the meeting will be announced to the rest of the employees by the manager once it is finalized through emails or the company’s bulletins. Eventually, the main objective of a strategic decision meeting is to deliver effective decisions for the organization. This can be seen as a major platform for the organization to achieve its targets.

4.6 Case 6

One- to- one in depth interviews are conducted at Case 6’s main business premises in Sepang, Selangor. The primary sources for Case 6 are namely: two leaders and two employees. The secondary data sources include organization documents, business profile from Biotech Corp. Bhd., and the company's website information.

4.6.1 **The Description of the Case Background**

The company was founded in 2007. The business idea was originally initiated by one of the founders, Mr O. He saw a huge potential in the mushrooming business, especially in Malaysia. Before the business kicked off, Mr. O tried to approach a few individuals who he thought could be business partners and leaders of the organization. He succeeded in acquiring a business partner when an individual by the name of Mrs. C agreed to his offer.

Mrs. C had more than twenty years' experience in business. Apart from her full-time job as a teacher, she was also involved in part time businesses. She quit her full-time job at the age of 45 years old in order to concentrate on her business projects. She then agreed to combine forces for Case 6's project. Both leaders have known each other for more than fifteen years.

Prior to this, both leaders have agreed on certain issues upon the establishment of Case 6. Among the issue is the distribution of the ownership. It was agreed that the distribution of ownership was based on the capital invested by the individuals. The set- up cost was 1.5 million Ringgit Malaysia (RM) using the leaders' funds. The cost covered the business operations and infrastructure facilities. It was divided sixty percent to Mr. O and forty percent to Mrs. C. They agreed on the terms that both should directly and actively participate in leading the company.

In 2007, the company started its business operations. The main focus at that time was on mushroom farming and the supply of fresh mushrooms to local markets. Case 6's business operation involved both upstream and downstream production processes, from farming the mushrooms, manufacturing the finished products and all the way down to waste management. All these activities were systematically operating under one roof.

Case 6's vision is to be the leader in mushroom production in Malaysia through the application of technology in growing mushrooms. Therefore, a huge amount of capital was spent on high technology equipment, laboratories and knowhow. The intention was to grow high quality mushrooms within a controlled environment. Through continuous research and development activities, Case 6 has been successful in producing high quality mushrooms.

At the moment, Case 6 is one of the major fresh mushroom suppliers in Malaysia, covering nearly twenty percent of the market. For the local market, they supply the mushrooms to individuals, hypermarket chains, supermarket links, manufacturers, restaurants and hotels. Case 6 concentrates on the international market, especially the Asian market. They managed to export their health and supplement products to Korea, Japan and China. In their effort to grow the business, they plan to enter the Middle East markets, and then the rest of the world by the year 2020.

In the first five years of its operation, Case 6's growth was between ten to fifteen percent. But the company's sales for the past three years (2014- 2015) has shown a significant growth of between forty- five and fifty- five percent, due to the revised marketing strategies plan. The company's five-year strategic plan (2012- 2016) is considered a successful project.

Throughout the years, the company experienced significant growth in every aspect of the business. In terms of human resource, the company first started with twenty workers and two leaders. There were only two management members, which then steadily increased to ten. Currently, they are employing up to nearly two hundred staff. The increase in the number of employees indicates that the company is experiencing growth over the years. However, the number of leaders remains the same.

The company's business infrastructure also grew over the years. The farm houses they own has increased from forty to more than one hundred, which are located in Sepang, Selangor. The farm size also grew to one hundred acres in different locations within the Selangor State. The modest office in the current location (Sepang) where they operate from has become a business complex comprising of a main business office, production factory, sales gallery, exhibition gallery and homestay. The company also have other business premises in Puchong, Selangor.

Since 2013, the company has been exploring potential business opportunities for expansion. The company has expanded its business segments by producing its own range of mushroom finished products. This is in conjunction with the public consciousness of healthy living, especially among the younger generation. This group is more concerned with their daily food consumption.

In 2015, Case 6 used internet marketing to boost their sales. Previously, they only relied on the networking that they had with customers and the sales gallery within the business premises in Sepang, Selangor. A special team was created to boost the company's sales and one of the strategic plans was to sell it online.

They evolved from being a mushroom farmer to become a manufacturer and expert in the industry. Due to their success and reputation in the mushroom industry, they have become the reference point for new growers, higher learning institutions and individuals. The leaders have turned into consultants whereby they organize talks, seminars and consultations to the public. They also receive visits from local and international tourists. The company's main office in Sepang, Selangor has become an ecotourism destination. In less than ten years, Case 6 has experienced high growth and achieved many successes.

4.6.2 **Leadership Style/ Approach**

The leadership practice in Case 6 is inclined towards the shared leadership approach. Both leaders are directly involved in leading the organization and distribute leadership responsibilities accordingly among themselves. Mr. O holds the Technical Executive Officer's post where he is mainly responsible for the technical aspects, technology and R&D. Mrs. C on the other hand is the company's Financial Executive Officer and is responsible for the company's financial and administrative aspects. The distribution of responsibilities is created based on the individual's skills, knowledge and capabilities. The other aspects of business such as operations, sales and marketing are under the responsibility of the management team. Comments given by one of the leaders below highlights this notion:

“We have decided to distribute tasks between us prior to the establishment of this business...One of the reasons is when we have clear tasks to do, it is a lot easier to start exercising it...I do my part and Mr. O can focus on his. For example, I have the authority to make decisions on the financial matter, which is directly related to the factory's operation. Especially in a situation where there is an urgency of making a prompt decision” (Case 6).

It is apparent in Case 6 that the distribution of responsibilities is meant to set up a clear guideline between the leaders that their responsibilities fall within the given scopes. This

is done with the main purpose of maintaining harmony environment within the organization. At the same time, it is to exercise empowerment to each individual to perform the tasks with less or no interference.

The practice allows the leaders to concentrate on their strengths, as the given tasks are created based on their knowledge and skills. This type of leadership gives independence to the leaders to be creative in executing their tasks. But at the same time, they have support if they struggle to accomplish the given task through the team support system. One of the leaders commented below:

“Yes, distribution of tasks is important because it is clearly stated in our job scopes. Each of us know our own responsibilities and know responsibilities of others too...I can focus on my capabilities and work hard on it. While Mrs. C focuses on the other aspects of business such as administrative aspect, teaching and learning aspect” (Case 6).

Another distinctive characteristic of the leadership style practiced in Case 6 is that both leaders have been holding the same posts and responsibilities until today. There are no significant changes and no overlapping responsibilities between the leaders. Their preferences signal that the leaders wish for stability within the organization to avoid confusion. There is a clear evidence that respect and trust are the essential elements to ensure that leaders can perform the tasks effectively. The following comment was made by one of the leaders:

“I do not think that there is any overlapping in responsibilities between both of us. We know our own responsibilities and our strengths in that specific area of responsibilities that we are responsible for. We do believe that each of us understand the commitment as a team” (Case 6).

However, there are times when the leaders need to perform duties outside of their given responsibilities when it is related to the company’s priorities. The leaders will discuss the matter, make a decision based on the individual’s current capacity such as allocation of time, projects in hand, and confidence levels. The decision must be agreed by both parties. An example of this scenario was given by Mr. O as below:

“Yes, and no for both questions. Yes, the tasks remain the same if it is our specific job scopes like I told you earlier. But when it comes to certain circumstances such as when

we started to produce our own products, we had been assigned with certain responsibilities which are beyond our normal job scope” (Case 6).

Respect means freedom for the leaders to perform their tasks in their preferable methods. It also means that the leaders have to be open minded too when it comes to criticisms and ideas. Through in depth understanding of these elements, the leaders can minimize leadership conflicts. This point also was emphasized by Mrs. C during the interview:

“We have to give each other some space to perform tasks. At the same time, it means respect. But it doesn’t imply that we are not allowed to give suggestions or opinions towards each other. After all we are a team, we help and support each other in every aspect of business operation” (Case 6).

Distribution of responsibilities is seen as a good practice to maintain the stability in the organization, but it would not stay stagnant for a long time due to the nature of the Case 6’s high growth industry. In the long term, leaders will be burdened with the appointed responsibilities. Another crisis that they may face is a dependency toward each other because each leader is performing the specialized tasks for a long period. This might indirectly make leaders give concentration on the appointed responsibilities and give lesser attention to others. Ad hoc scenarios do not occur occasionally that give these leaders opportunities to perform tasks beyond the normal responsibilities. Leaders should foretell this matter soonest if they want to avoid the overburden issue.

At the employee level, task delegation is practiced earlier within Case 6 to ensure that the leaders can stay focused on the company’s strategic plans. Both leaders give flexibility and empowerment to their employees, especially the administrative team, due to the fact that both leaders want to give high concentration on company’s targets of becoming the top mushroom producer in Asia by 2020. Another reason is that the leaders are always on the move between the company’s business premises. Mrs. C highlighted below:

“We started off the company by appointing an administrative team, selected individuals with administrative skills in financial, marketing and procurement operation. Why? We want to be able to give a concentration on becoming think tanker to this company and bring it forward in term of materialize it” (Case 6).

Another aspect of shared leadership implementation is effective communication among the team members. Among the reasons for this are to give better understanding of the procedures, to create a harmonic working environment, and to minimize conflicts. The leaders of Case 6 are taking pro- active measures in ensuring the communication aspect between them is maintained and preserved. One of the senior employees highlighted in the interview:

“I believe that they have no problem in term of communicating with each other. Either face to face or through the technology. They use both approaches. Same goes for us too, we can either see them face to face or if they are not around, we can call them or text them” (Case 6).

In terms of communication method, the leaders prefer the conventional method, which is face to face. This type of communication gives leaders a better understanding of a person’s facial expression and gives a clear indication of self- emotional expressions. For instance, sadness, happiness, and anger. However, they are also in touch with the latest communication technologies. As one of the leaders pointed out, Mrs. C gave her comments below:

“I would prefer the face to face method because it would be easier to digest and to discuss. We normally try to discuss important issues by doing it this way unless we cannot, technology would be a big help” (Case 6)

The leaders have a continuous check and balance mechanism between them to ensure that they are alert toward their responsibilities and the company’s internal affairs. It is done through interactions and discussions, either formally (meetings) or informally (coffee breaks). They constantly refer to each other if there are any arising issues. One of the senior employees pointed out the following:

“I think that they are leading this company as a team regardless of both of them holding different posts and responsibilities. It is shown from their actions, for instance that they always discuss and consult with each other especially on the high impact issues of this company such as operations and costing aspect among the examples” (Case 6)

When both leaders display effective communication to the organizational members, indirectly it gives a positive impression and exhibits excellent leadership practice. This is

a positive boost to the staff confidence level when they see both leaders having a good relationship and effective leadership.

Still, there are certain times where conflicts create tension between the leaders. The leaders try to tackle it in a professional manner. Among the steps they take are to cool down, come back and discuss and try to solve it calmly. They try to put aside their egos and differences for the company's sake. It is also considered as part of the learning process because this kind of situation reflects the individual's true colours. The leaders acknowledged the matter and Mr. O gave his response below:

“We try to settle is as adults. Communication is important aspects in any relationship and this applies to business matters too. From the beginning of the business, we made a pack between us. Among the highlighted issue is to solve any conflicts or issues in a proper way” (Case 6).

If the leaders can handle it diligently, it means that they are open to the strengths and weaknesses of others. Transparent and effective communication would minimize any internal issues within the organization and brings the organization forward, because an organizational crisis always brings harm unless proper measure taken.

Another important element that relates to Case 6 leadership practice is the organizational structure. Case 6 has practiced less structure since 2007. Mainly because it is seen as an effective mechanism for Case 6 to make faster decisions in achieving its targets. It is also meant to foster effective communication among the members. As one of the leaders commented below:

“We do not have a proper organizational chart. This is based on our belief that we want this organization to be flexible and transparent but we planned it in a such way that everyone knows their responsibilities” (Case 6).

On top of all the benefits of shared leadership practice experienced by Case 6. There is issue regarding to the size of the organization. When the organization is small and experiences rapid growth, inevitably human resources will be limited past a certain point. Currently, Case 6 manufactures their own supplements and health products. With only two leaders to lead the company, the new aspects of product development require direct involvement from both leaders.

Mrs. C is the company CFO but during this critical time, she has had to get involved in the project. The leaders are overburdened with the current activities because apart from the designated tasks they are also responsible for the company's upscaling project. The leaders should take some preventative measures, especially from the human resources perspective. Among the possible alternative that the leaders can consider is to bringing in new leaders into Case 5. Failure to acknowledge this issue will result in a leadership crisis. As was mentioned by Mrs. C:

"Hmm. If you are referring to particular project or short- term project. I think that there are certain tasks, we assigned between us for that certain duration only. We have to plan it properly because we have our current responsibilities and at the same time, we have extra projects to look forward too" (Case 6).

Through shared leadership, both leaders believe it brings better results to the overall organizational performance and leadership development. A possible explanation for this is that the elements of trust and respect exist due to the leaders' friendship. It is risky to appoint a new person with little or no information about that particular person especially when it involves the most important post in the company. It can be said that it was a wise decision made by Mr. O to appoint a person he was familiar with. Mr. O stressed the point below:

"If we are talking about the team leadership between me and Mrs. C. I can summarize that I have extra hands (laughed). To have someone to discuss, to give ideas and to be there whenever you need extra hands. I can say it is a great thing. Plus, that someone is the person you can work comfortably with and you can trust too. It is a double bonus!" (Case 6).

Mrs. C also believed in the same ideas too:

"Oh, well. Yes, we are. We just continue performing the assigned tasks that we had decided earlier. Respect is important when we work as a team. We respect each other ways of handling matters. It did not deter us from giving opinions and views" (Case 6).

4.6.3 **Leaders' Learning to Lead**

From the beginning, Mr. O had the special intention to find a business partner who could help him lead the company. He must have foreseen that to be a good leader, it requires special assistance from other individuals. He explicitly acknowledged the fact that he is lacking in expertise in certain areas. Therefore, there is a need bring in another leader with the required expertise and knowledge into Case 6. This action brings benefits to his leadership specifically and the organization performance generally. Below were his comments:

“I am looking for an active business partner who is willing to give his or her full commitment and effort. I want a team that can help me to lead this company until the success is ours. I can open the business only for myself, but I want more for this business” (Case 6).

Through discussion and observation, indirectly the leaders learn new knowledge and skills. This approach is rather an informal way of the learning to lead process. For instance, Mr. O has better understanding of the latest finance application programme after Mrs. C indirectly explained it to him regarding Case 6's latest software in use. The same goes with Mrs. C, when she learnt about the new German high- tech machine, they have invested for the laboratory usage. Both leaders are constantly updating their projects progress for the benefit of each other. As has been mentioned by Mrs. C in her comments below:

“I will give the latest update on my behalf and he will do the same thing too. We just want to make sure that each of us is alert with what is happening within this company. But it is more like an informal meeting” (Case 6).

The learning to lead process does happen in an informal and formal manner. Occasionally, the leaders attend related short business courses that are organized by government institutions or the private sector. It is apparent that both leaders wish to upgrade their business knowledge and leadership skills from time to time. Simultaneously, they try to keep up with the current changes in the business world. They attend the courses based on their job requirement and leadership development. For instance, Mr. O had attended a short course for mushroom production, organized by a government agriculture institution.

He went to the course prior to Case 6's strategic plan to produce its own finished products. The knowledge is then shared with Mrs. S.

At the same time, both leaders agree that their differences make them a good team in the sense that they complement each other. Both leaders have strong traits of leadership and have different personalities and backgrounds. Ultimately, the company's visions and missions brought both of them together as a team. It can thus be suggested that leaders need to gradually improve their leadership skills and knowledge from time to time. Based on the comments given by Mr. O below:

“In the business world, there will always something new to learn. Name it from your business partner, networks, customers and even your staff. There are plenty of room for us to learn if only we pay attention to it... With her strong goodwill, we take the risk by expanding our businesses and aim higher than we first started” (Case 6).

Therefore, they have opportunities to learn from each other in terms of knowledge, skills and experience. The leaders confessed that they have learnt from each other to be a better leader, for instance through improvement in personalities, improvement in leadership skills and problem solving. It is supported by Mrs. O. Her comments indicate that the learning process has occurred and is practiced for Case 6:

“I have learned many things from Mr. O especially on how to be an excellent leader. When we are planning to implement something new in this company, he will always call our staff and ask their views first. After listening to their feedback or outputs, then both of us will have a discussion. Then we make the decision together.” (Case 6).

It is like a continuous learning process for the leaders. It is possible that the learning process takes place through observations, discussions and communication. In a way, the learning process happens in a subtle way and is unforced. The selfless acts shown by both leaders has helped leaders to understand each other better. It also gives them added advantages of improving their leadership skills through the learning to lead process. The leadership practice in Case 6 has created a positive learning environment, especially for both leaders because it requires them to support each other, notably from the leadership context. The learning process transpires in a spontaneous nature while the leadership is being practiced. As for the informal manner, interaction and communication between the leaders helps them to understand each other's task.

4.6.4 Strategic Decision- Making Process

Leaders of Case 6 understand the importance of strategic planning for the organization's benefits because it sets a clear direction for Case 6. In order for the plans to work, the leaders will gather all company's sources including human, financial, and marketing resources. The leaders believed that to succeed in business, it is important to set achievable strategic plans. It gives motivation to them to keep on bringing the organization forward.

In general, Case 6's strategic meetings are held at least four times a year. The company has laid down a strategic meeting schedule for one whole year. The tentative schedule serves as a reminder to the leaders to keep up with the previous strategic plans progress. The meeting is a platform for the company to revise the current status of the on- going strategic projects. Meanwhile, discussion for Case 6's future strategic plans is held at the end of the company's annual strategic meeting. During this particular meeting, the leaders set targets for Case 6 either for the short- term or long- term targets. It depends on the current situation of the organization before they laid down the specific plans. Mr. O's comments recorded below:

“We decided to have at least four times in a year for this purpose. It is crucial for us to sit together and discussing the strategic plans progress. We even set up the tentative schedule meetings in January since the company started off. The main intention is to ensure we can plan ahead the agendas for the next meeting” (Case 6).

The process of strategic decision making involves several steps. The general practice is to make a decision within a week, starting from the information gathering phase prior to the actual meeting itself. Prior to the SDM process, the leaders view the current progress of the company. The method they normally use is a SWOT analysis. They will look into the company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats before they proceed with the SDM process. This illustrates that the leaders take serious effort in preparation for the company's strategic meeting. Mr O gave his comments below:

“We normally use the SWOT analysis. We look at our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Once we are satisfied with what we see, we can see the direction

that we are going to take. The next step is to get the appropriate information before decisions can be made” (Case 6).

The next step is an information gathering process, Case 6 has a systematic database system that consists of the company’s information, dated from the company’s start up days. The information is in hard and soft copy versions. Sometimes they also do market surveys to get the latest feedback from customers and the public. The information is safely stored in a special room, known as the library within Case 6’s headquarter office. The actions speak of the importance of information to the organization, in order for Case 6 to stay competitive in the business world. The abilities to make use of the information available help leaders deduce reliable strategic plans within the given timeline. One of the leaders, Mrs. C’s comments emphasized the important of information in making decision:

“We use both sources i.e internal and external sources. The information can come from our company’s information database, from the internet, business partners, customers and related bodies. While gathering the information, you need to focus on the important points only because surely lots of information out there” (Case 6).

Case 6’s strategic meetings involves the leaders and the whole management team. The reason for the presence of the management team in the meeting is to get direct feedback from them. The leaders prefer the meeting session to be conducted in a formal manner by following the typical meeting practice. It starts off with reflection of the previous agenda and following the meeting minutes. Indirectly, this signals the leaders want it to be a serious session.

During the session, leaders share their views based on individual expertise and knowledge. In order for the meeting to be a fruitful session in a serious atmosphere, leaders need to have the ability to encourage the members to express their views without fear. This applies to both leaders too as they have to be open and transparent during discussions. Typically, in every meeting, disagreements between the leaders happen due to personality differences. Nevertheless, the process of making decision continues to stimulate creativity among the members due to the in- depth discussions. Both leaders exchange their ideas and share their opinions. The leaders professionally handle

disagreements well through effective communication and interaction. The points above is in the comments below, made by Mrs. C:

“Communication is important aspects in any relationship and this applies to business matters too. From the beginning of the business, we made a pack between us. Among the highlighted issue is to solve any conflicts or issues in a proper way. We agreed to discuss it nicely on any issue or conflict between us” (Case 6).

In the end, both leaders make and agree on the final decisions. The decisions made are based on the benefits it brings to the company and realistic to be implemented within the Case 6’s capacities and capabilities. One of the leaders highlighted this point:

“Again, it would be both of us who make the decisions after taking into consideration of all aspects during the meeting” (Case 6).

The duration of the meeting varies, but the leaders try to make the session short and effective. Normally, the session duration is less than three hours, except for the end of the year special strategic meeting. That particular session takes nearly half a day due to the agenda: Case 6’s future strategic plans. In the meeting, Mr O is the chairperson and one of the managers takes the responsibility of writing down the minutes.

Once the decisions were made, the management team will make it known to the rest of Case 6’s members through memo and email.

5. CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4, the within-case analysis was discussed thoroughly, and this chapter discusses the cross-case analysis based on the empirical findings and discussions from the existing literature. The themes from the literature and the practice themes identified from the primary data are grouped into three main components which are the leadership style/approach; leaders’ learning to lead, and strategic decision- making process.

For the leadership style, this chapter discusses in depth the team-based leadership process which encapsulates the characteristics of shared leadership, growth effect, communication, and conflicts to understand better the effectiveness of implementing shared leadership in organizations. The leaders' learning to lead process covers the impact on the leaders' leadership capabilities and skills. Meanwhile, discussion on the strategic decision-making process investigates the process from the shared leadership perspective.

The discussion part of this chapter demonstrates the analysis of findings against themes identified in those three main components earlier. This subsection also highlights the emergent themes appeared from the primary data, which provides exciting inputs to shared leadership literature perspective. The emergent themes include the early delegation of the administrative team, friendship element in the team-based setup, additional new leaders as part of plans and the dominance issue.

5.2 Leadership Approach/Style

This study probes into the practice of shared leadership within the six selected case studies of high technology startups. The main intention is to further explore the basis of shared leadership practice of the extent of current literature. As mentioned in Chapter 2: literature review, a disparity of findings on shared leadership practice and lack of empirical evidence need to be investigated further to provide a better understanding of the leading implementation.

In Chapter 2 of this study, scholars have laid down several distinctive features of shared leadership practice that need to be addressed during the leadership discussion. Among the related elements are the growth impact, distribution of responsibilities, interaction and communication aspect of it. Last but not least, conflicts encounter during the leadership implementation. These features will be explained further in the next subsection of this thesis. Based on the empirical evidence gained during the data collection, shared leadership variables presence appeared in most of the case studies. The subsections below discuss the practical themes for this study.

5.2.1. Shared Leadership Style

This research study set out to determine how shared leadership is implemented within high growth SME startups. Theoretically, shared leadership works efficiently in the high growth type of organization (Manz et al. 2015) and yet very little explanation has been given about the atmosphere in which it occurs. Comments provided by the leaders of Case 4, Mr S:

"But now, our company direction has changed, and we want to bring this company to a different level...We want this company to reach the highest corporate level in the business...That is our aims" (Case 4).

Two out of six case studies in this study started their businesses by practising a solo type of leadership. The founders of Case 3 and 4 preferred this type of leadership during the early years of business operation. Later, they decided to call in new leaders into the organizations and experienced changes in leadership style from solo to team leadership style, which is shared leadership. These companies decided to switch into team leadership practice after two to three years of business operation. Among the factors for the leadership, change includes growth effects, leadership overburden and complexity of the business. In the next subsections, each element will be discussed further.

In Case 3, both leaders are males and have known each other since their university years. After experiencing rapid growth, the founder contacted his friend Mr D to lead the company together. On the other hand, the founder of Case 4 decided to promote two of his senior employees to be part of his leadership team. Based on the three case studies, the selection of the new additional leaders is made on a friendship basis. As has been stated by Mr D, leader of Case 3 regarding his appointment:

"I was called to this company by Mr Patrick because of my experience in management and human resource aspects. We have known each other since our university days" (Case 3).

Meanwhile, the other four case studies have been practising shared leadership from the beginning of the business operation. Case 1, Case 2, Case 5 and Case 6 started their business with a composition of two leaders. Although these four companies commenced their business as a team leadership approach, the basis of leaders' selection is similar to the other two companies earlier, which is a friendship basis. The possible explanation of this scenario is the trust issue. One of the leaders in Case 2, Mr Y made a point that trust is one of the criteria for team leadership set up:

"We started the company with three of us, including our production manager Mr T and all of us have a long history before the business embarked. I prefer to work with individuals that I am familiar with, and on top of that, they have the knowledge, skills and experience" (Case 2).

Another reason for early team leadership practice for these four case studies includes the anticipation of the leadership crisis due to growth factor. The leaders of these high technology companies believe that the business will face leadership challenges at certain phases of its operation. To minimize the growth impact, these leaders resolved to shared leadership practice. The anticipation of problems and crisis during the evolving processes in the new start-ups help leaders to manage the challenges effectively (Wendt et al., 2009). Leadership overburden is one of the challenges faced by high growth organizations. This issue has been highlighted by Mr S, one of the leaders in Case 5. In his quotations below, team leadership is one of the company's strategic plan to minimize the leadership crisis in the years to come:

"We are here to support each other. We started this company as a team. Two is better than one. In the sense that the burden is split between two" (Case 5).

The main reasons for the shift in leadership style in those cases are growth, knowledge and skills acquisition, reduce leadership burdens and improvements in leaders' leadership skills and capabilities. All these factors are in line with the antecedents of shared leadership practice (Fitzsimons, 2016).

5.2.2 Growth

Growth has a massive impact on high technology SMEs due to its constraints, such as size and resources. Among the significant indications of growth are the increase in profits, sales, number of employees, and market expansion. The above scenarios do have an impact on the organizations, especially from the leadership context. There is a need for leaders and owners to attend to this matter meticulously for the survival and prosperity of the businesses (Martinez, 2009). Comments made by Mr Y of Case 2 indicated that the leader gives high priority on growth factor by planning:

"We have planned in the next two year (2016-2018), to increase the number of staff and the possibility of adding new leaders too into our team. We had already invested quite a sum of money for the factory facilities and production equipment" (Case 2).

It is apparent from the findings that all six cases experience growth between one to five years of the business' existence. The majority of the leaders from the sample admitted that their organizations experienced growth once their business successfully entered the market, and the volume of sale increased by more than fifty per cent. One of the leaders from Case 5, Mr S emphasized the growth indicator in his comments below:

"In the past two years, the company's growth is between thirty- five to fifty- five per cent. We can achieve this because of the business contract that we have secured in our first year, which I have told you earlier" (Case 5).

As in Case 3 and Case 4, they experienced growth in less than three years of their operation. Four out of six companies (Case 1, 2, 5 and 6) highlighted that their organization had experienced growth after the third year of business operation. These four cases share a similar leadership background; they are being led by a team of leaders from the beginning as part of its strategic plan to face the growing challenges in the future. While the other two companies (Case 3 and 4) started with solo leadership and later changed into a team of leaders due to the growth impact. Growth brings a significant effect on the organization's leadership. As has been mentioned by the founder of Case 3, Mr P, in his comments below:

"Yes, that is true that I have to give up my right as the founder of this company. I built the company from scratch, but it also my dream to see the company prosperous in the future and doing well. That is the reason we have got more funds for the company to grow and bring in an additional leader. It is a big project with calculated risks, high returns with high expectations in the future" (Case 3).

This study is in agreement with the Greiner's growth model (1972), a business will encounter a crisis of leadership in Phase 1 due to business workload hold by the leader. The leader is responsible for almost every aspect of business operation, and once the business starts to expand, a leadership crisis emerges and therefore needs intervention through leadership assistance. The practice has been applied by Case 4, whereby the strategic interference is through changes in leadership approach from solo to shared leadership.

In Case 3, a newly appointed leader joined the organization when the organization experienced growth because the original leader required extra hands to lead Case 3. The expansion of the company's size was so sudden, and the innovative leader wanted to find a trusted business partner to run the business successfully. As has been mentioned by Bolden (2011), an organization evolves for survival in parallel with the environment changes. The founder acknowledged the issue, as he said it:

"I ran the business alone, and I had to make the decisions all by myself. It was a tiring period for me to be honest" (Case 3).

In Case 3, the original leader prepared a list of leadership responsibilities within the organization. Once the newly appointed leader joined in, both of them had a discussion specifically on the leadership responsibilities issue and a certain percentage of company shares. The decisions are; the original leader maintains his current responsibilities (Technical and R&D) and the second leader takes the Finance and Marketing aspect. At the same time, both are involved in the company's management matters and monitor it from the higher-level position and leave the rest to the management team. Both leaders

understand the importance of team collaboration to achieve organizational targets. Mr P, leader of Case 3, explained the scenario in his comments below:

"We have assigned a specific post to each of us to represent the scope of responsibilities. I am holding the chief technical officer (CPO) post, and I am involved in the technical aspects of this company, which covers production line, research and product development as a whole. While M D holds the chief executive officer post and focusing on administrative aspects of the company" (Case 3).

The present finding seems to be consistent with other researchers who found leaders' attitude towards goals, tasks and consequences of growth are crucial factors need to be addressed by the leaders during the growth phase (Wiklund et al. 2009). Meanwhile, in Case 4, the leadership change from solo to team leadership style is done on similar reason which is due to the growth factor. Another reason for Case 4's change in leadership approach is to secure the crucial know-how embedded in the senior employees at that time. The decision made by Case 4 confirms that shared leadership practice plays a pivotal role in an organization that gives priority on its products/services continuous innovation (Pearce and Manz 2005).

Case 4 approach is a bit different from Case 3; the leadership change aims to bring the company forward through the strengths formed by the three leaders, including the founder. The three leaders have been working together since Case 4 started, and they hold a certain percentage of company ownership. The leaders are transparent with each other tasks, and they understand the company's objective by heart because of their involvement in Case 4 since the beginning of the business. One of the leaders, Mr S, clearly stated the importance of understanding the company's objective as part of team commitment:

"Fundamental to a strong team spirit is to understand the company's targets. The company's target will serve as the basis for team commitment while performing the assigned responsibilities. Whenever there is a conflict, we need to see through it as to whether it is in line with the company's targets or not" (Case 4).

This scenario explains that these leaders agreed that growth brings significant changes to the leadership aspect, and at the same time, it brings positive results to the company's future progress. The findings from the cases are parallel with the study done by Churchill and Lewis (1983) that it is essential to have a clear growth strategy as it helps the organization to prepare during the rapid growth phase in later years.

In Case 1 and 6, the growth does not have a significant impact on their leadership as there is no drastic change which happened to the organizations' leadership. Despite this, Case 1 and Case 6 took a contra approach concerning the growth impact. The main focus is on the other aspect of human resource is the number of employees. The number of leaders maintain the leaders keep on increasing the number of employees in parallel with the growing demand; that in response to growth factor, the number of employees will be increased accordingly:

"All in all, we have six staff apart from me and Dr T.....The number stays the same till today. But in the future, the number will be increased depending on the needs. As for the team leaders, we do not have any plan for an additional leader since the first attempt of acquiring a new leader failed" (Case 1).

A similar approach is being implemented by Case 2 and 5, as these two organizations started their businesses with more than five employees, excluding the leaders. Midway, the number of employees increased to suit the business operation demands. The approach taken by the leaders illustrated that during the growth phase, organizations could have another alternative to deal with the matter and it does not need to change the leadership approach to suit the growth crisis drastically. They need to act fast, and as has been mentioned by Lester and Parnell (2008), in a fast-growing industry such as technology-based businesses, growth periods are rather brief.

5.2.3 Distribution of Responsibilities

One of the most distinctive features of shared leadership is that the process involves the whole team leading the organization. It is a team effort and a dynamic and interactive process among individuals in the groups (Pearce and Conger, 2003). Shared leadership

emphasizes the urgency of having all leaders working together as a team and share the same directions in leading their organization. Findings show that all leaders are actively performing leadership responsibilities within their organizations based on individually assigned duties. Team leadership gives an advantage to the organization because they share common goals and have the motivation to coordinate and accomplish these goals (Hill, 2010).

The majority of the SMEs in this research study has shown that the leaders intentionally distribute the leadership responsibilities between them according to the individual's competency, based on knowledge, skills and experience. The leaders believe that the selection based on the criteria above helps them to perform effectively within their strengths and capabilities. At the same time, it helps them to make the best decisions within their job scopes. Mr S, one of the leaders from Case 5, highlighted the criteria for distribution of responsibilities below:

"We had decided to distribute the responsibilities in term of our expertise, skills and knowledge. In general, both of us are directly involved in monitoring the overall business operation" (Case 5).

These SME leaders hold a post that is within their expertise. Shared leadership believes that leadership is more effective if it is shared and distributed among members of a group or team (Bligh et al., 2006; Thorpe et al., 2011). In Case 5, the two additional leaders are considered experts in the job scope that makes the founder upgraded their post from employees to the company's leaders. Indirectly, the scenario indicates that leaders in high technology SMEs need to have the required knowledge and skills as part of the vital requirement to be the leaders. Mr N, in his comments regarding this matter, mentioned that he intended to secure the know-how knowledge embedded in these two leaders through leadership promotion:

"Together, we work into the areas of marketing, technology know-how, product development and strategic planning for the next five years. Now that we have more brains in the company, strategic decision- making process is fewer burdens for one single person to think off" (Case 5).

All of the case studies have shown a similar practice in distributing leaders' responsibilities. The main rule for the distribution of responsibilities is to understand individual strengths and use them to benefit the organization. Since the leaders have the required knowledge and skills to perform the tasks, the leaders can make effective decisions by themselves. But the majority of the leaders prefer to share and exchange the information among themselves for second opinions. Many authors highlighted the feature as a medium by which to exercise the leader's authority and expertise. Among the highlighted element in shared leadership implementation is the knowledge factor (Locke, 2003). Knowledge plays a crucial role in shared leadership practice, and this has been mentioned by Case 3's leader, Mr D, in his comments below:

"I was called to this company by Mr P because of my experience in management and human resource aspects.... He needs someone to help him leading this company. Through our combined expertise, knowledge and experience, I have a good feeling that we can achieve our targets by 2018" (Case 3).

Based on the feedback from these leaders, there are three main criteria involved in the implementation of leadership distribution of responsibilities. First, it is done based on the leaders' consensus. Second, most of the time, they will stick to the given responsibilities and posts. Last but not least, there are times when leaders need to respond diligently to ad hoc matters. In this exceptional circumstance, leaders are expected to perform duties or responsibilities that are beyond the assigned tasks. As has been said by Miss A of Case 2, she explained the ad hoc scenario in the distribution of responsibilities:

"So far, the tasks remain the same. Unless there is a certain time when one of us is not present, and there is an urgency to handle the ad hoc matter. The selected person will take over the tasks for that particular period only. There was one time when I feel sick for a long time, and Mr Ye had to take in charge of my tasks during the absence period" (Case 2).

Regardless of specific responsibilities hold by these leaders, when it comes to ad hoc assignment. There are times when the leader in charge is away, and another leader needs

to take over the unfamiliar tasks. It is possible if both leaders are previously alert with each other tasks. Groon (2002), highlights concern on mutual interdependence within the concept of shared leadership that lead to mutual dependence between leaders can carry overlapping responsibilities. Since each of the leaders holds the same position and authority for quite some time, in emergency cases, such as death or sickness, it can cause chaos to the organization because the person is an expert in his job. Other leaders can take over the position, but their knowledge and skills will take time to develop. For examples in Case 6, Mrs C pointed out two scenarios that help leaders to perform the ad hoc tasks:

"How do we manage to perform other tasks? Through observation and sharing session, we get to grasp the knowledge of each other tasks" (Case 6).

The majority of the leaders in all six case studies agreed that the specific tasks and responsibilities give the leaders authority and flexibility. Flexibility means the leaders' decisions and actions are based on organizational needs. The authority means the leaders can use the power within the given scope in making decisions and taking actions without interference from others. This point has been highlighted by one of the leaders in Case 4, Mr N clarified, in his comments on the flexibility matter:

"Through the distribution of responsibilities, we have the flexibility to perform according to the needs of the situation. At the same time, we can make a fast and effective decision within own authority" (Case 4).

Apart from all the positive feedback that this type of leadership brings to an organization, there are some setbacks where shared leadership can cause responsibility overload which leads to organizational conflict (Wood and Fields, 2007). The authors also pointed out that due to ambiguity in responsibilities, this leadership approach can cause job stress to team members. This scenario might outweigh all the advantages of the method is not carefully planned, and no check and balance mechanism is in place from the team members. Effective communication plays an essential role to avoid conflict among team members. This issue has been highlighted by leaders of Case 1, 5 and 6. They pointed out that responsibility overload due to leadership distribution happens because of the same

leader is given the same task for a long run. Mrs C, leader of Case 6, raised the issue in her comments below:

"My concern, in the long run, there is a possibility of leadership overburden due to high concentration responsibilities. They are only two of us to look after this company. The organization has evolved through time, meaning that the company grows and slowly, we as leaders will feel the burden. I don't think that we can cope with this situation in five to ten years to come" (Case 6).

The leaders' concern indicates that they acknowledge the side effect of leadership distribution in the long run. Overburden issue should be tackled diligently by the team leaders if they want to ensure the smoothness of leadership. Failure to address this issue will lead to a leadership crisis. The view is shared by Mr S from Case 6, in his comments below, he shared his concern on this matter:

"I have a feeling that in the future there will be responsibilities overload due to rapid growth in our company. Currently, it is manageable for both of us. Once this company achieves PLO title, things will not be the same anymore. We need to prepare ourselves with this challenge" (Case 5).

Among challenges due to the distribution of responsibilities, in the long run, are the dependency issue and overlapping responsibilities. These issues have been addressed by Case 3 and Case 6. Despite the positive impact that shared leadership brings to leaders and organizations, the distribution of leadership practice can lead to higher dependency on one person in the long run. One of the leaders from Case 6 expressed her concern on this issue. In her comments below, Mrs C stated that:

"I cannot guarantee that this situation continues forever since the business evolves from time to time. Over the long run, we need to think of something when the time comes, and we tend to depend toward each other and lead to high dependency issue. To think of it, it is a scary situation if things do not flow as we wish for, right? Perhaps, we should consider a plan for this situation" (Case 6).

In the long run, leaders need to tackle the dependency issue carefully as this will ensure the smoothness of shared leadership practice. Among the alternative suggested by the leaders include additional new leaders and rearrangement of leadership responsibilities. It shows that leaders acknowledged the issue and willing to make the necessary adjustment. These suggestions were given by Mr P, leader of Case 3. In his comments below, he suggested the possible actions to the dependency issue:

"We have foreseen that the issue of dependency will escalate in the future due to rapid growth. Something needs to be done before it will cause disturbance to our team cohesiveness. Among the alternative, we can think of at the time being is to bring in new leaders in the team. Next is to do a little bit of rearranging on the leadership responsibilities" (Case 3).

To conclude, every leader in the case studies has been given leadership responsibilities in their respective organizations. The distribution of leadership responsibilities among leaders is done in a clear and structured manner according to their individual skills and knowledge. They are all collectively responsible for the organization

5.2.4 Interaction and Communication

In general, shared leadership takes place through a collaborative process, and the communication aspect plays a huge role in delivering the effectiveness of the process. The element of the collaborative process exists in all six cases. Another significant feature of this leadership concept is it involves multi-directional influence processes (Pearce et al., 2008b). These two processes occur through the organizational structure.

Out of six case studies in this study, five cases opted for a flat structural type of organizations. Case 1, Case 2, Case 4, Case 5 and Case 6 prefer this type of organization because it encourages creativity flow through effective communication. But, Case 4 will be changing its organizational structure once they manage to upgrade to PLO (public listed organization). A flat organization is an organization with no distinctive hierarchy levels that are no levels of management between top leaders and employees. This type of organization suits small startups because it reduces operating costs and encourages

effective communication among the members. One of the leaders from Case 5, Mr S has pointed this matter in his comments below:

"Our organization is an open flat organization. We prefer our organization to be flexible and less structural because it gives us flexibility and creativity to be honest" (Case 5).

On the contrary, only Case 3 chooses a basic type of organization. The main reason for the selection is due to the logistic aspect and future strategic plan. Case 3 operates in three different states which require a different set of administrative teams. Therefore, it requires proper systematic operating procedures for the business operation within these three business premises. As has been highlighted by Mr P in his quotations below:

"We have to have a formal chart for easier administrative monitoring plus our preparation for public listings. For labs, we assigned a lab manager to monitor the labs. Miss A is being assisted by Miss S, and we have eight staff working in the labs. While at the nursery, we appointed one manager, and we have thirty- five general workers over there. But the rest of our employees work in our Rompin, Pahang plantation. We have a manager and a team of administrative employees, plus the general workers" (Case 3).

This finding supports the ideas of Avolio et al., (2009), who suggested that shared leadership exists in the less structured or non-existent hierarchical level types of organization. To be more precise, it is practical and suitable for shared leadership to be implemented in SME startups, due to its organizational structure which encourages transparent communication among its members. The leaders take this matter seriously and believe that it brings a positive impact to the company. For example, one of the leaders in Case 5, Mr S has expressed the point in his comments below:

"If there is a need to discuss, just straight away do it. That is the reason for our latest office renovation. As you can see today, we just finished the renovation last month. There are many spaces for discussion within the relaxing environment" (Case 5).

The conventional type of organization structure does not support this type of leadership. This type of organization creates barriers between members of the organization and does not encourage fast decisions and restricts communication flow. Shared leadership

requires dynamic interaction among the organization members, especially in the SME start-ups. This study confirmed that effective communication and faster decision-making processes are among the critical elements in shared leadership implementation.

Interestingly, Case 3 can practice shared leadership within the conventional structural type of organization. A possible explanation for this scenario relates to leaders' capabilities in promoting a positive and productive communication mechanism in the company. These leaders give their utmost trust and flexibility to the administrative support team in three different business locations to perform the daily operation tasks with less or no supervision at all from both leaders. As has been mentioned by Mr P in his interview:

"I am not fancy to know every day daily operation outcomes because I am focusing on the major issues, which is the company's overall performance and strategic planning. I leave the routine tasks to our managers to handle it" (Case 3).

The study revealed that majority of the SMEs practice transparency interaction throughout the organization. The leaders are engaged continuously in communication between themselves and the employees. Weekly meetings are used as a platform for all members to discuss progress and problems. Employees are encouraged to see the leaders whenever there is a necessity to do so. For change to take place, leaders' cooperation, willingness and influence are needed during the learning to lead process. Without these three essential elements, it would be impossible to transmit knowledge between them. Many authors highlighted that one of the characteristics of leadership is to be able to influence others to achieve organizational targets (Avery, 2004).

Most leaders from the case studies preferred face-to-face interaction. They preferred to do it during formal meetings or informal discussions. During these sessions, they sit together, discuss and try to find solutions or make the decisions as a team. They rely heavily on the high technology methods of communication, such as the telephone and the internet in their business. From time to time, the second method of communication plays a significant role in connecting the team members. For Case 4 and Case 5, this communication method is a priority due to the companies' business logistics. The

companies' premises are located in different locations. The leaders regularly hold Skype meetings with their management team because the leaders are always on the move. Besides, mandatory monthly meetings are held at each location, and the leaders attend it. Technology helps these organizations to communicate effectively, and locations is no longer an issue. Mr S of Case 4 gave his comments on this matter in the quotations below:

"I preferred face to face communication because for me, this is the most effective method of communication. If we are not in the same location, we interact through phone calls and text messages. Thanks to the current technology, we can do it through Face Time apps or Skype, for instance" (Case 4).

The face to face method of communication delivers prompt decisions, actions and is transparent. When it comes to facial expressions, face to face interaction gives an added advantage. A similar practice is adopted when it comes to communication between leaders and their employees. As the office set up plays an important part, all of the five case studies practised an open space office on their business premises. The employees have the freedom to come and see the leaders discuss their ideas, problems etc.

To conclude, organizational structure helps to boost effective interaction in the shared leadership practice as this type of leadership depends on trust element existence among the leadership to foster team cohesiveness. It is clear evidence revealed by all case studies in this study that these antecedent variables of shared leadership are a must as this element determines the leaders' success in this rapid change type of business environment. Nevertheless, technology helps to foster leadership by connecting people from various locations. Furthermore, the conflict will always be there for leaders to challenge themselves during the leadership approach. These high growth SMEs need to act faster, and the dynamic structure of the organizations assist the leaders to interact effectively. From the finding too, leaders prefer conventional communication medium: face to face conversation, and at the same time, the latest communication technology is undeniable effective also.

5.2.5 Conflicts

It will be impossible to discuss shared leadership practice without highlighting conflicts concerning leadership implementation. A study was done by Nicolaides et al. (2014), findings of the study indicate that in order shared leadership practice to last longer, leaders must embrace the possibility of power struggles and conflicts happen during the process. Anyhow, the authors recommended that it can be controlled through strategic planning, check and balance mechanism between leaders. The majority of the six cases did experience conflicts during the shared leadership implementation.

Conflicts take place during the early implementation, such as the difference in personalities, the age gap between the founder and newly appointed leaders. For example, in Case 4, two senior employees have been promoted to the leadership post. The age gap between these two new leaders and the founder is a bit wide with an age gap of nearly twenty years. In Case 4, the transition process required the two newly appointed leaders to follow the founder's anticipations and aspirations. He mentored them carefully, and it gave them fewer opportunities to perform their responsibilities according to their creativity. He continuously provided them with his support, encouragement and motivation. He also guided them through various occasions and events before he let them settle into their new positions.

The founder wanted to endorse his steady presence in the organization and to maintain his authority as the company's founder. At the same time, the new leaders felt obliged due to their promotions, but have low self-confidence to hold the new positions because they started as company employees. Most of the time, they followed the founders. It took some time before the new leaders gained their confidence and started to perform their leadership responsibilities effectively. The findings supported the study made by Scheer (2009) that the new entrepreneurs will eventually pick up business and leadership skills from hands-on experience. Mr S of Case 4 in his comments regarding his new role as one of the leaders in the organization:

"But now, the roles are switched. We have to give orders and directly responsible for the actions we take because we are the leaders. It takes time to adjust the new roles. Luckily,

we have a very supportive mentor, and Mr N guided us into our new roles. He showed us through his actions, words and wisdom" (Case 4).

It is part of the learning process too because it teaches the leaders how to tackle the conflicts and to maintain balance and harmony in the team. Either conflict brings strengths to the team, or it can bring chaos and disharmony to the organization. As one of the leaders in Case 4 mentioned:

"I perceived it as challenges" (Case 4).

At the beginning of shared leadership exercise, conflict occurred when founder tends to guide them carefully. Though the behaviour helps the two leaders develop the business understanding, it should be carried subtly. The founder should step back a little bit from his mentoring spot and give the new leaders some space to explore their new leaders' roles. Comments were given by one of the new leaders, Mr S:

"I have learned through observation. I watched closely what the others are doing, and through observation, I can learn lots.....From time to time, he is mentoring us closely" (Case 4).

A similar scenario happened in Case 2 due to the vast age gap between the two leaders. In Case 2; leader number 1 is mature and has extensive experience in the business world, and leader number 2 is younger and has less experience in the business. Mr Y is fifteen years older than Miss A. However, and leader number 2 has specific knowledge and skills in Finance and Marketing areas in which leader number 1 is lacking. Thus, he is indirectly played a dominant leadership character in the team. Miss A indirectly admitted the fact that the dominant trait showed by Mr Y caused discomfort for her:

"I am glad that Mr Y always guides me on becoming a better leader. He always there to guide and help me to understand the business operation. I hope that one day I will be able to meet his expectations" (Case 2).

In the beginning, it was a difficult phase for Miss A to adjust. The conflict happened because of the ego clashes during discussions. McIntyre & Foti (2013) point out that leaders must acknowledge one another for shared leadership positive outcomes. As in this case study, conflict is resolved through understanding and acknowledgement of each other effort in bringing in positive results to the organization. As has been mentioned by one of the leaders in Case 2:

"We will sit together and come out with the best solution that we can think off regardless of differences in our views and preferences" (Case 2).

She persistently delivered her ideas during discussions and meetings. She did it through her words and actions. Her effort had paid off when the company's products were being sold by two of the most significant health chain stores in Malaysia; Caring and Guardian. Along the way, the persistence and commitment shown by leader number 2 in delivering her knowledge and skills had eventually made leader number 1 realize the importance of accepting other's ideas. Especially when it involves an individual's ego and the need to 'listen' to or learn from someone who is considered less experienced or younger. It can thus be suggested, and leader number 2 has influenced the other leader to change his attitude for the better. Slowly, he began to open up and accept the fact there are certain areas in which he is lacking and comes back to the earlier decision to combine his and her expertise. In his comments, Mr Y is pleased with Miss A's determination:

"I learnt a lot from Miss A is on how she deals with money matters and administrative aspects. She taught me the latest software and IT application. I am not into it (laughs). I am an old school in term of having to use the latest gadgets. She has strong willpower, and I am impressed with her determination" (Case 20).

Regardless of the dominant leadership exercise shown in Case 2 and Case 4. The scenario did not last long when the two senior leaders acknowledged the side effect of the dominant exercise on the team. In a way, they are slowly embracing their roles as a team. The junior leaders have the authority to make their own decisions without consultation from the founder. They have the freedom to express their views and ideas during meetings and discussions, even with the presence of the senior leader.

If the leaders work together to solve the issues and try to get the best solution that benefits everyone, it shows that they have overcome their differences and have team spirit. On the other hand, failure to overcome the obstacles as a team means that they have ego problems and less tolerance. The attitudes make a distinguishing characteristic that separates leaders from non-leaders.

5.3 Leaders' Learning to Lead

This current study discovered significance evidence leaders' learning to lead process in the SMEs through shared leadership practice. In the tipping points theory introduced by Phelps et al. (2007), it is a must for business leaders to keep on improving their leadership skills and knowledge parallel to business progress. The learning process helps leaders to strengthen their leadership position. The leaders from the six selected SMEs admitted that they are continuously improving their leadership knowledge and skills. This matter has been mentioned by Mr N of Case 4 in his quotations below:

"When we work as a team, there are opportunities to learn from each other. Name it life, business or leadership skills. It is an ongoing process. If we want to be a better leader, we have to keep on improving ourselves" (Case 4).

The majority of the leaders directly expressed the existence of the element of learning to lead while they performed their leadership responsibilities. Out of thirteen leaders, eight leaders had at least fifteen years of business experience. The other five had less than ten years of business experience. However, they all believe in the importance of leadership enhancement as part of continuous life learning. Through constant learning and feedback among the leaders have resulted in improvement in shared leadership teamwork (McIntyre & Foti 2013). Together as a team, these leaders combine force through knowledge and skills in leading the organizations. Mrs C, one of the leaders in Case 6, has highlighted the combination of leaders' knowledge and abilities boost the team performance:

"I have learned a lot from Mr O, especially on how to be an excellent leader. When we are planning to implement something new in this company, he will always call our staff and ask their views first. After listening to their feedback or outputs, then both of us will have a discussion. We exchange knowledge in many ways, either during the meetings or while having a tea session at the pantry. We call it as brainstorming sessions" (Case 6).

Leaders' learning to lead within this current study is executed via formal and informal mechanisms. The formal situation is during the company's official meetings. In most cases in the study, the learning process between leaders takes place during company meetings by which the process of knowledge transfer occurs indirectly through discussions, business paperwork and documentation. Shared leadership supports continual team interactions and social exchanges (Klimoski & Mohammed, 1994). One of the examples of the learning scenario is when one of the leaders has come out with new knowledge, and it is directly delivered to the other leader. This technique is straight forward and easy to digest. If there is any confusion, it can be discussed and debated there and then. But the process can be a bit tricky sometimes. As has been mentioned by one of the leaders in Case 6, Mrs C, in his comments below, pointed out the importance of knowledge sharing between leaders:

"Whenever one of us learnt new knowledge, we will make sure that it will be shared between us. The sharing session takes place either in subtle ways. For instance, during coffee breaks. Sometimes during meetings" (Case 6).

5.3.1 Settings, Sources and the Process

Next important element in the leadership learning process is the setting or surroundings of where it takes place. The majority of the leaders do believe that apart from the informal learning process, formal courses and classes help them to improve themselves. As in Case 1, leader number 2 clearly stated that she enrolled herself into related short courses for further perceptiveness. She specifically attended finance and marketing courses on behalf of the organization to strengthen her understanding of these specific areas of business. The classes are held by local further academic institutions and business management

organizations. The study finding revealed that in most cases, interaction takes place within the organization.

The other three cases take similar actions in knowledge and skills enhancement via a formal mechanism. Leaders in Case 2, 4 and 6 believe that leadership knowledge and skills should always be upgraded and polished regularly. Through the initiative of short courses, it helps them to improve. The preferred courses are business-related such as leadership, management, IT and marketing. They found this helpful, and it helped them to make better business decisions. They share the knowledge with their team leaders as part of general practice in their organizations. As has been mentioned by one of the leaders in Case 2:

"From time to time, both of us will take turns to attend required courses that are related to a company's needs. The business world rushes, same goes to related knowledge and skills. For us to lead the company effectively, we have to be well prepared" (Case 2).

The combination of both leaders in Case 2 represents; one of the leaders had business experience of more than twenty years, and the other had less than ten years of experience. The senior leader's strengths are in the management, technical and production fields. Though he has experience of more than twenty years in the business, his approach to the business is instead an old styled approach without the use of information technology and up to date marketing skills. He acknowledged his weaknesses within these areas and realized that to compete in this current business world, those specific skills hold a crucial key to success.

For him to learn these skills while leading the organization would be time-consuming, and the rapid business growth does not allow him to sit and absorb the knowledge at his own pace. Based on this notion, it had prompted him to collaborate with his current business partner, and in return, he can learn from his business partner, Miss A. As has been mentioned by the leader, Mr Y:

"Frankly speaking, I don't have the expertise and in-depth knowledge in that particular area...That is the reason that we both agreed that Miss A handles the matters...For my

part, I am keen on developing and improving the current products and operation aspects" (Case 2).

The second leader has a different approach to the business, whereby she is IT savvy and used to working in an established international accountancy firm for nearly ten years. Her expertise covers IT, Finance, Marketing and Management. On top of that, she is in her mid-thirties, and her business mindset is a fresh and energetic parallel to the current business trend. Through collaboration between both leaders, they believe that it benefits the organization in terms of upgrading each other's knowledge and skills. The implicit evidence can be seen through the leaders' actions in most of the cases where the learning to lead process happens in two surroundings; which are within the organization and beyond. Miss A in her quotations below indicate that the learning process occurs in every aspect of Case 2's business operation:

"Every day is a learning process as long as we are willing to learn and try to become better. It can happen in a formal setting such as in a short business course, or it can happen in an informal setting, for instance, daily interaction among us in the company. I am evolving from time to time to become a better leader if I can say (smiles)" (Case 2).

In Case 1, the learning process occurred within and outside of the organization. Due to the fact, both leaders are scientists and acknowledged their weaknesses in a particular aspect of the business. They need to learn more about those issues to lead the business. Upon negotiation, they have decided that leader number 2 should take up the learning responsibilities, specifically on particular business knowledge, i.e. marketing and finance, because these are their main weaknesses and they have little knowledge and experience. As he mentioned:

"Miss N has been given the responsibilities to learn the required skills because she is the main person in charge of the company's operation" (Case 1).

The decision is made based on reasons such as the commitment/constraints of time from leader number 1, and the importance of marketing and financial aspects in a business. Their knowledge of the business is minimal because both leaders are scientists, and their

expertise is in the research and development area when the business started. In the beginning, leader number 1 was still working full time with a government research agency, and his business involvement was on a part-time basis. Therefore, leader number 2 took full responsibility to lead the business operation from day one. But since 2014, both leaders have led the organization together because leader number 1 no longer works as a government servant and gives full concentration to the business.

This scenario above shows that the leaders put their trust in each other. Trust plays a significant role in cementing the bond between the leaders. As has been highlighted by Bergman et al. (2012), shared leadership promotes higher cohesion, intragroup trust and less conflict. Without the element of trust, it would be impossible for knowledge and skills transmission to commence, through which the learning to lead process would then fail. Thus, the leaders must instil trust before they can embark into the learning to lead journey. As such, the information and knowledge are delivered to the other party, and indirectly the learning process transpires. Trust is an intangible entity, and it is hard to measure. As has been mentioned by one of the leaders in Case 3, trust plays a vital role in the learning process:

"I was called to this company by Mr P because of my experience in management and human resource aspects... He mentioned, he does not have time to perform every task under this company roof by himself. He needs someone to help him leading the company together as a team and at the same time to collaborate in knowledge sharing" (Case 3).

Apart from the formal learning environment, it was also shown that the majority of the leaders in the study obtained knowledge and skills from external sources through business networking and events. Most of the leaders keep in touch with their business networking regularly and attend the business event at least once a year. Naturally, the learning process takes effect every day in the leaders' working environment, either within the organization or in an external setting. As one of the leaders from Case 2 highlighted:

"We learnt from each other in many ways. It is an ongoing process whereby, from day to day business operation that we are dealing with. It is possible hands-on ways of learning" (Case2).

Leader number 1 admitted that it was a long process for herself to understand the concepts in the beginning. She acknowledged that the learning process takes place within the organization in the form of self-learning, through reading materials from related finance and marketing books, and the internet. In the meantime, she is actively engaged with a small group of seven Biotechnology SMEs, as this group is a close-knit leadership community whose primary intention is to support each other. The group helps her to learn further business aspects, due to the exchange of views and experience among the organization's leaders which occur during their fortnightly informal meetings. Below are the leader's quotations regarding the matter:

"There are informal meetings among our SMEs peers. We have four to five companies that we considered them friends and comfortable with. Our fields are quite similar, for instance biotech, health care and mainly on health care. The meeting is held at least twice a month to discuss issues relating to our businesses. We sit together to share our problems, and we also share resources. Discussions involved the founders and the leaders of the companies. This group is meant to give support to each other" (Case 1).

Later, she shares the new business inputs with leader number 1 within Case 1's business surroundings, either during the company's formal meetings or during informal discussions. The learning to lead process materializes through communication and actions of the leaders. Leaders get to enhance their knowledge and skills through short courses and management classes (Atwood et al., 2010).

As for leader number 1, his expertise is in the research and development area, and he conveys his ideas to leader number 2 through similar methods; discussions and conversations. Both leaders, from time to time, exchange their knowledge and skills among themselves. Along the way, the process encourages the leaders to help each other in improving their leadership skills and capabilities. The process has indirectly boosted their confidence levels in leading their organizations.

Another source of knowledge input is from the outsiders. These leaders learn through observation and guidance from experts that are brought into the organization. This method

is practised in Case 1 and Case 5, where the industrial experts are brought in during the companies' strategic decision meetings. Still, their presence is mainly to provide related technology and technical advice to the leaders. The company paid their contribution.

The industrial experts help the leaders to get appropriate advice in technical issues, especially issues relating to technology. They help the leaders in providing vital information so that the leaders can make the best decision for their company. The views and knowledge of the experts are taken into consideration while making the decisions, but the final decisions made by the leaders. The experts' contribution is not limited to the meeting sessions, but the leaders regularly communicate with them to get second opinions. Mr S from Case 5 pointed out that the experts help the company to get in touch with the latest business updates. Below are his comments:

"We have an advisory team that advises in specific technical areas. Dr S, an expert in composite fields. He is a government pensioner and has vast experience in the fields. He has been helping us since we started our first business before we started this business. Meanwhile, Dr L is from India. He is the person who knows well on the tanks aspects for the plantation, including reactors and everything related to that" (Case 5).

The initiative taken by the leaders is seen as a part of the learning process, which involved the external parties. There are several possible explanations for this action. Among the reasons are to gain the latest knowledge and skills, to strengthen their understanding of the subject matter, and to make impeccable decisions. The practice is in line with the theories suggested by Spillane (2005), he proposed that the success of shared leadership practice lies on effective interaction between leaders, the keys to the success include leaders' input and output, observation and active participation.

Among the evidence that shows the existence of leaders' learning to lead process is in Case 2. A project related to the promotion of the products and leader number 2 is responsible for it. But during a brainstorming meeting, both leaders are present, and leader number 2 proposes her marketing ideas and explains further, while leader number 1 listens and gives his feedback on the matter. The discussion opens up the transfer of knowledge process between the leaders and indirectly the learning to lead process

transpires. A similar situation occurs when it comes to issues related to production and technical areas, proposed by leader number 1. The learning process is not limited to business matters only, and it also covers leadership aspects such as direction, communication and consistency.

The number 1 leader has vast previous experience in leading his company, and he brings together his experience and knowledge into Case 2 and shares them with leader number 2. First, both have agreed that a successful organization needs a clear business direction. Since day one, the leaders have set a goal to make Case 2 a thriving environment-friendly organization and to spread public awareness on organic products which benefit human health. The leaders' behaviours are in line with Pearce & Conger (2002)'s view that the strength of a shared leadership team stemmed from shared visions. The organizational visions bring leaders cohesiveness in Case 2. The leaders share their experience and knowledge between them through informal developmental processes such as during discussions, conversations and observations between the leaders. As leader number 1 expressed:

"But there are times, and I learnt it from her through observation" (Case 2).

Within five years, Case 2 has experienced significant growth in sales of nearly 45% due to the company's successful marketing approach, such as the online website. There were times when things did not turn out well as they had planned because of a clash of opinions. It is unavoidable since both leaders have their views and individual egos. Through negotiations and discussions, the leaders try to solve it professionally. Again, conflict does exist during leaders' learning to lead process due to differences in leaders' background. It is crucial to take this matter diligently to avoid prolonged conflict.

The result of the study shows that the leaders enhance their leadership capabilities through direct involvement in leading their organizations, from the beginning of the business. Comments were given by one of the leaders in Case 4, in his quotations below:

"But now, our company direction has changed, and we want to bring this company to a different level...We want this company to reach the highest corporate level in the business...That is our aims" (Case 4).

From the empirical evidence from the case studies, it can be concluded that leaders are directly engaged with their surroundings while performing their leadership responsibilities. The leaders highlighted the significant contribution these events can have on their learning process, due to the notion of keeping up to date with the latest knowledge, trends and ideas of the business. The leaders recognize the importance of continuously upgrading their leadership knowledge and skills to be better leaders. Their efforts have an immediate impact on the overall organizational performance and its members. Among the positive effects on the leaders' leadership abilities are seen from the decision-making abilities, skills and leadership capabilities. This is parallel to Deakins and Freel (2003), the entrepreneurs can adjust to their surroundings when the situation required them to do so.

5.3.2 Conflicts

The majority of the case studies in this study faced conflicts during the leaders' learning to lead process. It is not a smooth process, to begin with when it involves a group of leaders with different backgrounds and personalities. Especially during the early years of the business operation, whereby these leaders have many tasks parallel to the business growth. At the same time, they need to lead the organizations as a team.

One of the conflicts is the dominant presence by one of the leaders in the team. For example, the transition process required the two newly appointed leaders of Case 4 to follow the founder's anticipations and aspirations. He mentored them carefully, and it gave them fewer opportunities to perform their responsibilities according to their creativity. He continuously provided them with his support, encouragement and motivation. He also guided them through various occasions and events before he let them settle into their new positions. The founder wanted to endorse his steady presence in the organization and to maintain his authority as the company's founder.

In the time, the new leaders felt obliged to follow the founder's suggestions due to their promotions. It took some time before both new leaders gained their confidence and started to perform their leadership responsibilities effectively. The findings supported the study made by Scheer (2009) that the new entrepreneurs will eventually pick up business and leadership skills from hands-on experience. As has been mentioned by one of the new leaders, Mr S explained the scenario in the quotations below:

"But now, the roles are switched. We have to give orders and directly responsible for the actions we take because we are the leaders. It takes time to adjust the new roles. Luckily, we have a very supportive mentor, and Mr N guided us into our new roles. He showed us through his actions, words and wisdom" (Case 4).

The majority of the leaders explicitly believed that the learning process continuously takes place through the exchange of knowledge and skills between them, as long as they cooperate and are willing to put aside their egos. However, conflicts do exist during the learning process due to clashes of ideas and views. As has been mentioned by Mrs C, one of the leaders in Case 6. She acknowledged the fact that conflicts happen, but it can be solved professionally:

"It can be a heated session sometimes because we try to convince each other ideas (laughed), but at the end of the day, it is all about our company" (Case 6).

In Case 6, the general practice when the discussion started to heat between the leaders was to take a break and have a tea break outside of the meeting room, where they discuss a non-related meeting issue as a method of diversion. They believe that the informal discussion will reduce the tension between them and divert their attention from the debated topic. Once the anxiety subsided, they get back into the room and continue the session. The majority of the case studies have a similar practice to Case 6. All leaders agreed that conflicts need to be taken care of in a diligent manner to avoid the chaos that brings harm to a company's leadership.

The current study found that leaders faced conflict during the learning process, especially when leaders try to convey their knowledge which they feel important and which needs

to be implemented. Although the messages are not readily accepted due to disagreements in views by the other leaders. The argument brings interference to the learning process, and the other parties will not get the benefit of the transfer of knowledge. Partly this is because of the element of ego possessed by the leaders, which sometimes without their realization will hinder the knowledge transition process. Unless the leaders are willing to put aside the differences and open up to the learning process, then the success rate of them gaining knowledge is higher.

Therefore, from the study, the leaders claim that they try to refer back to organizational aims when they face conflicts. The strength of shared leadership team stemmed from shared vision (Pearce & Conger, 2002). However, Bergman et al. (2012) point out that shared leadership promotes higher cohesion, intragroup trust and less conflict. But the authors highlight less conflict issue based on the general overview of shared leadership implementation. This finding has an important implication for developing a better understanding of the conflict issue through shared leadership practice.

In conclusion, the leaders learning to lead process is a continuous process within these high growth SMEs ventures as the leaders want to be better leaders. Together as a team, these leaders see the importance of the learning process towards practical leadership approach, especially when the business environment experience constant changes. Firms rapid growth appear to have a greater need for new sets of managerial and professional skills that the founders may not possess (Boeker and Karichalil, 2002).

Shared leadership encouraged this process due to team cohesiveness and shared visions. The learning process takes place in the formal and informal environment, but relaxed is the preferred surrounding because leaders feel calmer in a familiar setting: the organizations. Conflict does exist during shared leadership implementation due to differences in leaders' background, but the intensity of the conflict can be reduced if leaders take a reasonable solution through discussions.

5.4 Strategic Decision- Making Process

The finding of the study revealed the leaders understand the importance of setting up long term strategic planning in the organizations earlier, right after their start-up. The short-term strategic planning is also crucial for the company's performance too. The SMEs' size, especially in the high technology sector, does have a significant impact on its strategic decisions (O'Regan et al. 2012).

For instance, Case 5's strategic plan is to secure funds for their future project due to the high capital cost to set- up a biogas plant for palm oil plantations. The leaders have strategically laid down a plan to overcome this situation specifically from the financial aspect. The best alternative that they have thought of is to become a public listed company by 2017. For this reason, Case 5 is aggressively working hard to achieve this strategic plan by implementing early delegation.

The leaders from the beginning have given the daily management responsibilities to their management team, which comprises of a group of trusted employees to carry out the duties. While the leaders monitor the team, the leaders give high priority on the planning and implementation of the strategic plans. The strategic planning approach is similar to the general practice made by the majority of the cases in this study. The approach taken by Case 5 is in line with the finding in the study done by Siddique (2015). The study highlights SMEs are known to react to the emerging business issues through short term business strategies based on the current situation they faced, instead of planning which gives them advantages that can lead to better performance outcomes. Mr S, leader of Case 5 in his comments below:

"Both of us have agreed to delegate daily operations to our trusted staff while we focus on the higher-level matters for the company. We are think tankers for this business. We felt that if we directly involved in the daily operations, we are unable to give our 100% concentration on the bigger issue of bringing the company forward" (Case 5).

In general, the majority of the respondents mentioned that there are two stages of the strategic decision- making process; preceding and subsequent. The other process covers the information gathering process and the meeting. During the execution, it involves monitoring procedures, and towards the accomplishment of the task, the evaluation

process takes place. The majority of the case studies in this study practice similar stages, as mentioned in the earlier statement. For example, in Case 2. One of the leaders, Mr Y, laid down essential factors to look through before the strategy meeting:

"We need relevant information for us to make an effective decision. Surely, before the decision is made, there are a few things that we need to consider based on the company's current situation. Factors to consider are current growth, sales, profits, production capacity, human resources and marketing aspects. Then, we can come to a feasible decision that will bring benefits to this company" (Case 2).

Before the meetings, information gathering takes place, and the sources come from internal and external resources. The internal sources include the company's database that covers business operations such as finance, personnel, manufacturing, sales, purchasing, customers and administration information. The external resources help the organization to analyse and understand the current environment of the business. The sources include print information, online information and contacts.

The information plays a crucial part during the meetings because it will determine the outcomes of the decisions. The information-gathering responsibility is handed down to the company's administrative team. They are given a list of required information beforehand and a specific timeline to accomplish the task. Overall, the period varies depending on the task. Mr Z from Case 4 has mentioned:

"In this company, we normally set a deadline for information gathering, for instance, a day, weeks and sometimes month depending on the type of strategic planning we are working at that particular moment" (Case 4).

Once the information is ready, the leaders will go through the information beforehand, and only relevant information will be discussed during the meeting. The leaders' abilities to analyse and organize the data plays a significant role in determining the success of the meeting and avoiding time-wasting. As has been mentioned by one of the leaders in Case 3:

"If we want to do something big and to secure success, then we have to be prepared in many ways. In this situation, to have proper information before important decisions can be made is a must. We have to know our strengths and capabilities in the first place" (Case 5).

For the information sorting process, the regular practice for Case 2, Case 3 and Case 5 is to organize it in mind-mapping order. The leaders prefer this method because it is easier to understand and covers the holistic view of the discussion and transparency. The other three cases prefer the conventional approach, which is documents. The leaders use the method that they feel fits well with the company's culture and which is easier to deliver during the meeting. The main intention is to provide the information productively during the session for the best strategic decisions.

Next is the strategic planning meeting where the majority of the leaders of the case studies are directly involved. Apart from the leaders, team management is also present in the meetings. But in Case 1 and Case 4, they invite the appointed field experts into the sessions. The experts' selection is based on their expertise within the required area as in Case 1 and Case 4, the biotechnology field specifically on the technical background. According to Miss N, one of Case 1's leaders. She believed the expert presence in the company's strategic meeting helps the leaders to make practical decisions based on their vast knowledge in the area. In her quotations below:

"Apart from both of us, we have an advisor. The person has a vast knowledge and experience in the business world. We are lucky enough to have him to assist us. But his involvement only happens when it involves crucial and huge decision to make for the company. He will be invited, and we will sit and discuss the strategic planning for the company" (Case 1).

The leaders reckon that the experts' presence makes the strategic decision- making the process smoother in the sense that the leaders get an immediate response from the reliable resources which the experts. The experts are only involved in providing their views and knowledge because the leaders make the final decisions. It is a team consensus decision.

The responsibility of making the decision is shared and distributed between both leaders (Thorpe et al., 2011).

During the meeting, one of the leaders will chair the meeting. Based on the interviews, the selected chairperson is decided upon based on the person's business experience. This scenario happened in all the cases, and the same person continues to chair a series of meetings. For instance, one of the leaders in Case 4, Mr Z has mentioned:

"Mr N will chair the meeting since he has been doing it from the beginning" (Case 4).

A possible explanation for this the selected person has vast experience in handling business matters, and it would be an added advantage for them to chair the meeting because they understand the business process and the essential criteria required for the strategic decision- making the process. Another possible explanation for this scenario is the trust element shown by the other leaders towards the chairperson's ability to preside over the meeting.

Anyway, there is an adverse effect to this practice where it can lead to power conformity, and this practice continues unless the selected chairperson does not impose his/her position as an authority. In the long term, this scenario will also make other leaders feel the need to oblige to the chairperson's command during the meeting and daily business matters. Later, there is the possibility of a leadership crisis in the future. As has been mentioned by Mr O from Case 6:

"I always chair the meeting on day one. Mrs C does not mind with the arrangement" (Case 6).

To avoid this scenario from happening, rotation on the chairperson's post is a good move. The rotation will also allow the other leaders to preside over the meeting and improve their leadership skills. If the leaders are open and flexible on the distribution of leadership practice, rotation on chairing the meeting is seen as a good leadership practice too. According to Burke et al. (2003), leadership responsibilities are shared among the leaders.

During the meeting proceedings, most of the companies follow the general meeting practice; introduction, previous agenda, and current agenda of the meeting. It is revealed from this study that these SMEs start-ups prefer generic strategic tools such as SWOT analysis, PEST analysis, Porter's Five Forces Model (FFM), and so on. The approach towards the process varies depending on the organizations' internal and external circumstances, as there are a variety of tools and methods (Siddique, 2015). The possible explanation for this is the size of organizations which is small and medium enterprises, and the strategic plans involve less complicated and straightforward. For instance, the strategic plans for this type of organizations include product development, financial assistance and market expansion.

The outcomes of the meeting are documented for future reference. The duration of the meeting is dependent on the agenda and the complexity of the decision involved. The majority of the leaders highlighted the importance of cutting short the meeting session rather than prolonging it unless there is a need for it. For them, time is money and every minute counts. Therefore, there is a definite period for strategic meetings. Most of the time, there will be a heated session where there are clashes of ideas and opinions among the leaders. As has been mentioned by Mr D from Case 3:

"It is undeniable that along the process, sometimes we have different views and sometimes heated conversation. But it does not mean that we need to argue and stubbornly stick to our views till the end" (Case 3).

Due to leaders' differences in background and experience, this inevitably leads to arguments and clashes of views during the meeting proceedings. As has been mentioned by one of the leaders of Case 2:

"We do disagree during a meeting because it is normal to have a different set of ideas and views. The meeting is a platform to discuss and to solve problems" (Case 2).

Ideally, this situation is good for the meeting because it means that the leaders try to come out with their best ideas and views. They are confident enough to propose and share their ideas with the rest of the meeting's members. All of the leaders admitted that they

regularly had clashes of ideas and views during the meeting. The scenario happens in many forms, and it can either be verbally or through facial expressions. For instance, the leaders in Case 4 raised their voices to emphasise their ideas. In Case 2, leader number 2 signalled her disagreement through her facial expression and kept silent. Therefore, these leaders clearly expressed their disagreement with each other in different tones.

The leaders need to 'read' the situation well, and their ability to support and discuss the issue in a calmer manner is key to a practical decision-making process. The majority of business organizations, especially the larger ones, believe in the importance of strategic planning in bringing out the organizations' internal strengths as a fundamental tool for success and in sustaining a competitive advantage.

Sometimes, it takes a longer time before a final decision can be made due to disagreement. Prolonging conflict resolution means future chaos in the organization. If the leaders work together to solve the issues and try to get the best solution that benefits everyone, it shows that they have overcome their differences and have team spirit. On the other hand, failure to overcome the obstacles as a team means that they have ego problems and less tolerance. The attitudes make a distinguishing characteristic that separates leaders from non-leaders.

It is part of the learning process too because it teaches the leaders how to tackle the conflicts and to maintain balance and harmony in the team. As one of the leaders in Case 4 mentioned in his comments below:

"I perceived it as challenges. Conflicts help us to understand better about the scenario we are dealing with while understanding each other at the same time. It is crucial for us to handle it diligently and not to be emotionally attached to it" (Case 4).

Therefore, effective communication is the key to conflict solving. Effective communication is also part of the vital element in preparation for the SDM process. Effective communication ensures the process runs smoothly as part of a monitoring process. The majority of the leaders from the cases agreed during the strategic decision implementation process, the leaders and the employees are regularly communicating to ensure the implementation stage is carried out according to the strategic plans. It is done

through formal meetings and informal discussions. At the same time, excellent communication technology is regularly used, such as email, WhatsApp messenger and phone calls. One of the leaders in Case 4, Mr S explained:

"Communication in each of every level of organization is utterly important to assure that everyone understands each other's duties in bringing in success to the plan. If there is a problem or obstacle, we get to solve it before it got worst" (Case 4).

The next phase is to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategic plans after the implementation took place. This stage is known as the evaluation process. The majority of the cases do have a meeting that is specifically held for this purpose. The formal meeting aims to revise the current progress of the implemented plans and take the necessary action if the ideas did not turn out well. The check and balance mechanism help leaders to observe the current situation of the company, either the plan works as they intended it or it should be revised for better outcomes. Mr S from Case 5 gave his comments on this practice in the quotations below:

"It is a normal practice for this company to hold a meeting after the strategic plans took place. The main purpose is to review the progress of the plans. The session helps us to learn more about the execution aspect of our future strategic plans" (Case 5).

Based on the empirical evidence shown in cases studies, practical and reasonable strategic decisions contribute to the company's future growth. All cases took the strategic decision seriously- making the process, whereby they tried their best to come out with the best strategic decisions that they can make by taking into consideration the internal and external factors. Shared leadership style is said to be beneficial during the decision-making process (Avolio et al., 2009; Kramer and Crespy, 2011). This is due to the notion that this leadership style gives more flexibility and is an effective method to deliver a decision within a time constraint resulting from a complex business environment (Pearce and Manz, 2005). In other words, the leaders have the opportunity to react and tackle the challenges within a short period because the strategic decision can be made urgently.

Furthermore, the leaders try to make the decision-making process more manageable and less complicated so that they can make faster decisions. Mostly, all leaders encourage creativity and innovation during the decision-making process through a variety of discussion methods; mind-mapping, interactive technology approaches, and so on. These practices are also inclined towards the existence of shared leadership, as has been mentioned by Pearce and Manz (2005).

5.5 Cross- Case Analysis: Discussion

Discussion of the within-case analysis is done in Chapter 4 thoroughly. This chapter discusses the cross-case analysis based on the empirical findings and reviews from the existing literature. The themes from the research and the practice themes identified from the primary data are grouped into three main components which are the leadership style/approach; leaders' learning to lead, and strategic decision-making process.

For the leadership style, this chapter discusses in depth the team-based leadership process encapsulates the practice themes identified from the cases. Among the themes identified, the research study is the characteristics of shared leadership, growth effect, distribution of responsibilities, interaction and communication, and conflicts to understand better the effectiveness of implementing shared leadership in organizations. The leaders' learning to lead process covers the impact on the leaders' leadership capabilities and skills. Meanwhile, discussion on the strategic decision-making process investigates the process from the shared leadership perspective.

The discussion part of this chapter demonstrates the analysis of findings against themes identified in those three main components earlier. This subsection also highlights the emergent themes appeared from the primary data, which provides exciting inputs to shared leadership literature perspective. The emergent topics include the early delegation of the administrative team, friendship element in the team-based setup, additional new leaders as part of plans and the dominance issue.

5.5.1 Leadership Approach/ Style

This section discusses the shared leadership implementation within the selected case studies. In addition, this section probes into these two processes concerning shared leadership exercise, which are leaders' learning to lead and strategic decision making. Based on the empirical evidence retrieved from data collection, all six cases practice shared leadership in their organizations. Out of six cases, Case 3 and Case 4 began with a solo leader, and in the later stage, shared leadership is implemented as a reaction to growth factor.

Later, there have been changes in leadership approach in Case 3 and Case 4. The leadership changes occurred within these two case studies further support the idea of tackling the leadership crisis during a rapid growth phase is to co-leading, team leadership helps the organization through shared goals, motivation and accomplishment of those goals (Hill, 2010). In many classical cases, this involved leadership transition; the process did not turn out well and led to a leadership crisis within the organizations (Pearce, 2006). But in these two cases, the transition went smoothly as the leaders appointed the new leaders who understand the company's direction and share the same inspirations. Furthermore, the leaders feel a sense of belonging as the organization is theirs.

Whereas, Case 4 decided to promote two of its senior employees into team leaders. These two newly appointed leaders joined the organization since day one. In Case 4, the founder believed that the transition brings many benefits to the company, especially from the leadership perspective. Among the benefits are that the leaders' self- confidence elevates, there are group support and an exchange of knowledge and skills. This scenario has been highlighted by the founder of Case 4, in his comments below:

"I am so lucky that I employed them in the first place. I groomed them until they are becoming leaders themselves. They understand the company's objectives, and they were there from day one" (Case 4).

Contrary to the earlier discussion that shared leadership helps the organizations to confront the leadership crisis during the growth phase. A possible explanation for this is

the nature of the business, and high technology organization is prone to changes due to technology orientation. They need to act fast as has been mentioned by Lester and Parnell (2008), in the fast-growing industry such as technology-based businesses, growth periods are rather brief. Therefore, it can be said that the leaders of high technology-based SMEs must stay alert and adapt to changes accordingly.

The finding is a classic case for organizations that experience business growth, the earliest phase growth in Greiner's (1983) is the leadership crisis as he explained due to creativity factor. He suggested it is essential for a change in leadership as the business reached a sophisticated level. Somehow, in these SME startups, the leaders have strategically placed a plan ahead through the adoption of shared leadership practice within the organizations before establishment, which give them added advantages to future business challenges.

In different circumstances, the founder of Case 3's reason for opting shared leadership is because of the leadership overload. Case 3 experienced significant growth in less than three years. The organization expand tremendously from one business operating premise to three premises at three different states. Thus, the founder needed leadership assistance to lead Case 3 efficiently. He decided to call in his university's friend, whom he has known more than ten years. Apart from the trust issue, the newly appointed leader is a competent leader who has the required business knowledge and skills. In his comments below, the founder highlighted the reason for leadership change:

"At the end of 2012, after my company was getting stronger and survived. I went to him and offered him one more time because the company is growing, and I can't handle it alone. This time around, he agreed to it and in early 2013. He joined us, and I am so glad that he did. The burden on me has been tremendously lessened because of him. Now I can give more concentration on the preparation for public listing company's project" (Case 3).

As for the other four cases, they have elected the proactive growth measure since the business started. From the beginning, the leaders had purposely established a group of leaders to lead the organizations, and the shared leadership style is chosen. They anticipated that at a certain point of their business life cycle, growth brings challenges to

the organizations, especially from the leadership aspect. Leaders in Case 1, 2, 5 and 6 believed that their decisions to lead the organization as a team gives added advantages during the growth phase in terms of stability and minimizing future leadership crises.

This finding produced results which validate the findings of a great deal of the previous work in this field as has been suggested by Drucker (1986) the leadership crisis can be avoided if organizations set up a group of leaders during the early stage of the business before it hits the maturity stage. An empirical study made by Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven (1990) support the theory. Contrary to the arguments above, the current research shows that these organizations experience a leadership crisis during the growth phase regardless of having more than one leader upon the startup. The leadership crisis can occur anytime and more than one time during the organisation's life cycle. This finding was unexpected, as has been mentioned in Greiner's Model, a business will generally encounter a crisis of leadership in phase 1. In this start-up stage, entrepreneurs are usually busy managing the company, focusing on distributing products and creating new markets. It can thus be suggested that the high growth technology-based SMEs ventures is prone to leadership crisis due to its dynamism nature of business; rapid change and continuous innovation.

It is apparent in all case studies, the growth phase experienced by business organizations can vary. The impact of growth on the organization's leadership is different for each organization. The way the leaders reacted is also different from each other. Regardless of being new and small, the majority of the leaders in this study do not see it as a barrier to achieving their business targets. It depends on the leaders' action to take appropriate growth measures and strategies to ensure that the leadership crisis can be minimized. The research findings further support the idea of Conger's (2011), that the leaders will consider many factors in making growth decisions, such as the company's resources and severity of the growth impact to the company.

Therefore, it can be said that growth brings significant impact to these organizations, especially on the leadership facet. As the leaders try to adjust with the internal and external surroundings, the leadership style is used to acquire the internal strengths of the organization. These types of the organization require innovation, competitiveness and fast

response to changing environments, and they are highly suitable to the shared leadership concept (Pearce and Manz, 2005). Particularly for the high growth SME startups, timing and strategic growth planning play crucial roles to ensure the organizations are competitive and successful when facing future tests. Based on all the evidence above, it can be concluded that team-based styles of leadership can be seen as an alternative style of leadership from the much traditional top-down leadership approaches of the earlier days (Kramer and Crespy, 2011).

5.5.1.1 Distribution of Responsibilities

Distribution of responsibilities has been mentioned clearly in the majority of shared leadership literature, but according to Wang et al. (2014), there is limited empirical evidence on the topic itself. Shared leadership is unique in term of distribution of responsibilities. Each leader is assigned with specific responsibilities according to individual strength, knowledge and skills (Burke et al., 2003). Simultaneously, they work together as a team in leading their organizations. Their involvement includes making strategic decisions, coordinating the company's strategic plans and monitoring the overall company's performance.

In the recent study, it shows that leaders' knowledge and skills hold the crucial critical factor in determining the future path of the high technology SMEs startups. As has been expected, the majority of the cases revealed, the leaders have specific expertise, skills and knowledge about the business background. It is exciting findings from all six cases in term of leaders' expertise, and the leaders have a different set of knowledge and skills. It seems that it is intentionally done so that each leader can hold specific responsibilities according to the individual's competency.

For instance, one of the team leaders has the technical and scientific expertise, and the other leader is an expert in business affairs; Finance, Marketing and Management. Only one case standout, both leaders in Case 1 have similar expertise; pure science background and they acknowledged their weaknesses in business matters. The leaders take the flaws as a challenge, whereby they enrolled in related business courses from time to time. This

is in line with the arguments of Pearce et al., (2009) that distribution of responsibilities has a positive impact on self- efficacy.

Next, the distribution of responsibilities topic, all six cases exercised this essential element within shared leadership. Among the reasons for the decision to distribute leadership responsibilities between the team, leaders include leadership burden, conflicts avoidance and increase efficiency. These leaders acknowledged individual strengths and weaknesses.

From this point, three aspects are taken into consideration for the basis of leadership delegation, which includes knowledge, skills and experience. The foundation of the delegation of responsibilities is parallel to a study by Burke et al. (2003), the authors illustrated that shared leadership involves three elements of duty sharing, which are knowledge, skill and ability. Then, each leader is assigned to specific responsibilities, and the appointment is almost permanent. Unless under certain circumstances which require flexibility in performing ad hoc tasks. For instance, leaders are expected to take over their team members' responsibilities due to absence.

Regardless of the leaders' readiness onto leadership distribution, two out of six cases in the study opted for multitasking and redundancy leadership responsibilities due to lack of understanding of the importance of the distribution of responsibilities. Leaders of Case 2 at that time wanted to have flexibility in performing tasks. A year later, both leaders decided to distribute leadership responsibilities between them. Among the reasons include responsibilities, clarity, focus, increase efficiency and conflicts reduction. These leaders have seen the importance of boundary of interference in performing individual responsibilities. One of the leaders, Miss A, mentioned the advantages of distribution of responsibilities to leadership:

"Nope. During that time, there is no specific chart or posts. But since I was appointed as a CEO. I am in charge of almost everything in this company. Especially in administrative, finance, marketing, purchasing, HR are all within my responsibilities. While Mr Y is focusing more on R&D and production. But now, we can see the distribution of

responsibilities among us. It helps us to plan properly, perform well and helps to improve our leadership skills" (Case 2).

As in Case 1, ambiguity in responsibilities happened at the beginning of the establishment of Case 1. The leaders did not distribute the leadership responsibilities among themselves. Non-distribution of responsibilities had led to the redundancy of responsibilities and multitasking. Thus, the finding confirms the theory that shared leadership cause responsibilities overload. As has been mentioned by Wood and Fields (2007), among the setback of the leadership is organizational conflict due to responsibilities overload.

When it comes to deliberately giving essential positions within the organization to someone else, indirectly, the trust element is necessary. This is one of the many examples where trust occurs within the leadership practice. Based on the study finding, the SMEs leaders proved that they are willing to let go of their authority in the organizations to another leader, where the trust element is needed. Another example of trust is the ability to refrain oneself from stepping into the tasks of others also involves an element of trust. The boundary of assigned responsibilities is drawn; therefore, leaders need to respect each other obligations. When leaders in shared leadership have an accurate understanding of each other's skills and abilities, this promotes trust among leaders and appreciate each other's competencies (Small & Rentsch, 2010). As one of the leaders in Case 5 mentioned:

"The way we lead, that both of us are responsible for the company. We believe that to have two heads are much better than one".

From the findings of the study, the evidence shows that conflicts happened during the distribution of responsibilities process. For instance, leader number 1 in Case 5 has been given responsibility to lead a big project involving collaboration with one of the government research agencies. At the same time, leader number 2 is in charge of a project in Indonesia. Due to busy schedules, both leaders worked independently on the projects but still acknowledged each project. It happened that one of the decisions made by leader number 1 has led to the delay in the operation of the customer's biomass waste machine.

During that period, he was sick, and leader number 2 temporarily took over the responsibilities of the project. When he dealt with the delay, due to problems faced by one of the component providers of the machine, leader number 2 backed strongly the decision made earlier by his business partner. His action indicated his support for his team's decision. This finding is in line with the study done by Pearce and Conger (2003), as shared leadership creates team loyalty. But in their research, they do not clearly state the scenario the team loyalty exists.

All of the cases agreed on the conflicts that exist during the implementation of the distribution of responsibilities. Due to the high concentration assigned responsibilities, conflicts arise including high dependency, overburden and tasks monotonous due to high focus on assigned tasks. In the long run, it will make the shared leadership ineffective. Thus, leaders sometimes need to employ a check and balance mechanism so that all those conflicts will not cause future leadership crisis.

5.5.1.2 Interaction and Communication

Another significant feature of this leadership concept is it involves multi-directional influence processes (Pearce et al., 2008b). For a small and new organization, leader actions have a direct effect on the overall organizational performance. Hence, the leaders purposely want to deliver a positive message to the organizational members through effective interaction. Efficient communication channel plays a vital aspect to the whole organization that leaders committed to their leader's post. The action helps to boost the employees' motivation.

All of the leaders involved in the in-depth interviews highlighted the essence of effective interaction and communication in leadership practice. For Case 3, an interdependence level between the leaders exists in Case 3, through leaders' actions such as through communication, ability to work effectively and valuing the differences. Another aspect that distinguishes shared leadership from traditional leadership is that there is a broad sharing of power and influence among team members (Pearce et al., 2009). The authors also indicated that shared leadership involves duty sharing with three elements involved. They are knowledge, skills and abilities. Those elements existed in all six cases, and the

leaders work in parallel regardless of the different leadership responsibilities they hold, to achieve the organizational targets and bring the companies forward.

Within the case studies, there are two types of cooperation that are significantly shown concerning shared leadership practice. The first scenario is when the leaders accept each other's weaknesses and strengths from the point where they are ready to learn from each other to be better leaders. The second scenario is to keep on supporting each other during stressful situations, especially when the decisions made did not turn out well. In other words, cooperation exists in both scenarios, whether it is during good times or during bad times. The finding agreed with Goksoy (2016), as the author mentions that shared leadership involved voluntary team cooperation and effective interaction through leaders' competencies and a sense of responsibility.

Based on the finding of the current study, the majority of the case studies pointed out that there is a significant relationship between leaders' interaction and organizational structure during the shared leadership practice. The rest of five case studies practised a less structured, open, flat and less hierarchical system. Only one case study opted for the conventional and structural type of organization within their organizations. Among the reasons for the less structural organizational structure are to speed up the decision-making process, to foster effective communication and to encourage positive interaction among the team members, especially from the leadership perspective. As was highlighted by leader number 1 of Case 1, Miss N believed that a less structured type of organization has a positive impact on the organization:

"That is the reason we are implementing a non-hierarchal kind of organization because we do not want to restrict ourselves to the system. Furthermore, we are a small company, and there are only a few people in it.But in the future, when the company grows more significant, I am not sure what it would be. Just have to wait until the time comes" (Case 1).

This less restricted structure of the decision-making process gives an added advantage to organizations by being able to come out with faster and effective decisions within a required timeframe. Shared leadership encourages a high level of interdependence which

leads to speedier decision-making (Pearce and Manz, 2005). At the same time, team leadership gives an advantage to the organization because they share common goals and have the motivation to coordinate and accomplish these goals (Hill, 2010).

Another outcome from the case studies, leaders prefer to have face- to – face communications. Regardless of the location issue that many of the case studies experienced, it is possible nowadays to have interactive meetings due to high technological advancement in communication. Leaders can interact and communicate without any restrictions. However, there is a potential area in the shared leadership study about how shared leadership facilitates the influence process specifically on the employees' motivation. It helps to understand the employees' motivation under the shared leadership practice.

5.5.1.3 Conflicts

The majority of the leaders acknowledged the fact that conflicts arise during the leadership practice, due to differences in background, personality and generation gaps between them. The leaders admitted that they faced conflicts during the leadership implementation, such as disagreement on specific issues. Sometimes, it takes a long time before a final decision can be made due to dispute. Prolonging conflict resolution means future chaos in the organization. Pearce et al. (2008) highlighted that shared leadership should not be seen as the ultimate solutions to leadership challenges in organisations because shared leadership has several weaknesses too, and cultural resistance is regarded as one of the biggest challenges to it.

There is a situation where conflicts occur due to the age gap between the leaders. In Case 2, leader number 1 is more senior in terms of age and experience. Meanwhile, leader number 2 is new to the business and is used to taking orders. In this scenario, the senior leader can either choose to seal his top position or use his strengths to help the second leader to be a better leader like himself. He prefers the second option. Indirectly, he gives an excellent example of leadership to the second leader for her to follow. In reality, there is a significant gap between both leaders in term of age, knowledge and experience. The scenario can create discomfort between the leaders unless leader number 1 reduces the

difference through support. For the second leader to shine, she needs to be pro-active and shows high self- confidence. This scenario requires the leader's involvement, and they need to support each other to become excellent leaders. One of the leaders acknowledged the scenario, she gave her comments below:

“It can be helped that there is a time I felt I am not up to Mr Y’s expectations. He is quite vocal in his communication. Possibility due to his vast experience in the business that makes him confident. In the beginning, I had difficulties adjusting to his leadership style. It took me almost a year to boost my self-confidence and be who I am today. After all, I made a wrong assumption on Mr Y’s personalities. He is a great business partner and thought me well” (Case 2).

This similar scenario was also experienced by Case 4 due to the combination of the leaders' mixture of experienced and inexperienced leaders, which led to conflicts identical to Case 2. Inevitably, due to the gap in business experience, this scenario involves an individual's ego and self- esteem. For the senior leader, he is used to being the centre of attention because of his knowledge and experience. Suddenly, he needs to co-lead an organization with another leader.

Inevitably, it creates uncomfortable feelings and uncertainty, which leads to conflicts. The second leader also faced a similar dilemma because she realised the notion that she is not as good as the first leader in terms of knowledge and experience. To conclude, conflicts do exist during the implementation of shared leadership, but it should be taken positively. Conflicts should be seen as a check and balance mechanism in bringing positive outcomes to the leadership practice and the organization as a whole.

To summarize, below is the table of themes and subthemes of leadership style/ approach compiled from the recent study data.

'A Priori' Themes	Sub-themes
Shared Leadership	1 Direct Involvement 2 Team Cohesiveness

	3 Trust
Growth	1 Leadership Assistance 2 Leadership Crisis 3 Overburden Issue
Distribution of Responsibilities	1 Individual Competency 2 Leaders' Consensus 3 Focus 4 Flexibility 5 Trust 6 Dependency Issue
Interaction and Communication	1 Influence process 2 Organizational Structure 3 Transparency 4 Direct Interaction 5 High Tech Communication
Conflicts	1 Leaders' Background and Personalities 2 Power Struggles 3 Check and Balance Mechanism
Emerging Theme	Sub-themes
Early Delegation	1 Strategic Planning 2 Administrative Duties 3 Independent Employees

(Source: Researcher)

5.5.2 Leaders' Learning to Lead

Based on the data retrieved from six case studies, the existence of learning process occurred in these organizations. The combination of leaders with different background and experience is the critical element to the leaders' learning to lead. Half of the leaders from the cases are equipped with business experience of more than ten years. The rest are considered novice in the business world. Case 2, Case 4 and Case 6 have one of the leaders

with a strong business background. While in the other three cases, leaders are newcomers in the business world. Nevertheless, the findings of the study demonstrate that all of the leaders commit to the learning process and acknowledged the essence of self-improvement to be better leaders. The current findings support the study made by Boeker and Karichalil (2002), leaders of high technology companies with less business knowledge and skills, need to equip themselves with the relevant sets of leadership skills.

Most likely, the selection has to do with the type of business they are involved in, i.e. high technology. It requires the leaders to understand the business products and services for the business to thrive. Apart from the specific technical knowledge, business management knowledge and skills are a must in the business world. The combination of the leaders within this study indicates the importance of leaders' knowledge in a leadership context. Together as a team, these leaders with the expertise in business to bring success into the organizations. At the same time, the leaders need to absorb the business knowledge to bring the organization forward. This is parallel with Pearce and Manz's (2005) views, that shared leadership practice involves duty sharing with three elements: are knowledge, skills and abilities.

Another important discovery was the knowledge and lived experience shared between the leaders have made a significant contribution towards each other's understanding and enhancement of business knowledge, especially in the areas where they are lacking. Through teamwork efforts, the leaders help each other to upgrade their knowledge and skills. For instance, during project management, regardless of different job specifications, the project meetings are the medium through which they share ideas and exchange views. At the same time, the learning process occurs indirectly between the leaders. This continuous practice has boosted the leaders' confidence level in handling business matters, where previously they were not good at it. The indirectly learning process allows the leaders to learn from their team members. The organisation's success depends on the leaders' behaviour, which is cooperation, delegation and sharing responsibilities (Houvinen and Tihula 2008).

From the majority of the cases within this study, the leaders are supportive of each other's development. The influence process involved when the leaders encourage each other through continual interaction and feedback. Team support and commitment help leaders to grasp the leadership knowledge and skills effectively. This is parallel with Ensley et al. (2006), the authors highlighted that shared leadership involves a collaborative influence process. The combination of senior and young leaders has changed the leadership atmosphere within the organization, in the way the learning to lead process has transpired has helped the leaders to become better leaders.

It can be assumed that individuals learn entrepreneurial abilities through directly performing the roles and tasks associated with starting-up and leading entrepreneurial activities (Kempster and Cope, 2010). From the current study, collaborative influence process between the SMEs leaders has brought a significant impact on the leaders learning to lead process as they received support and encouragement from each other.

For example, in Case 1, leaders have been continuously developing their knowledge and skills in leadership and business. The impacts are presented in their business performance, through which their sales increased up to sixty per cent in less than three years. On top of that, Case 1 has become one of the top significant suppliers in the tiger milk mushroom industry by the year 2014. One of the leaders mentioned the positive outcomes due to leaders' learning to lead in the quotations below:

"We have been attending different business courses from time to time. We decided to make a rotation between us to attend those courses. Earlier, I have mentioned that the marketing aspect is one of our weaknesses. After a series of marketing courses and conferences, we can see a major improvement in this area. One of the significant indicators is our sale rose more than fifty per cent in the third years. We are over the moon with the achievement" (Case 1).

Another critical aspect of the shared leadership learning process is organizational structure. As has been mentioned by several shared leadership scholars, less structural type of organizations is a powerful medium to effective interaction and communication between leaders and also members of the organization (Avolio et al. 2009). Majority of

the case studies opted for less structural of organization with reasons include flexibility, transparent and fast response.

Anyway, three cases decided to change their organizational structure to the hierarchical type of organization structure due to business expansion. Among the reason change in company status from limited to public listed company (PLO). Based on the scenario above, it can be said that organization structure helps to foster the learning process during the shared leadership implementation. Still, shared leadership organization doesn't need to opt for less structure organizations to promote effective interaction and communication. As long as leaders understand the concept of effective interaction and communication, the organization as a whole can benefit from shared leadership practice.

Last but not least is a discussion on conflicts issue during the leaders' learning to lead process. Majority of the cases in this study highlighted that conflicts happened and they tried to handle it professionally. Conflicts arise because of the clashes of views due to differences in leaders' background and personalities. Through effective communication, leaders decided to solve the disputes before it brings disturbance to team harmony. Majority of leaders mentioned that by understanding the company's main objectives, it helps them to reconcile. Team cooperation and commitment hold the keys to shared leadership practice (Manz et al. 2015).

Three important points are revealed from the data. First, the majority of the leaders believe and emphasize the need for continuous learning to develop their leadership capabilities over time. The leaders understand that leadership improvement has a direct, significant effect on their business success. They need to adjust to business needs, regardless of the constraints they faced due to the size and nature of the organizations.

Next, the medium of learning can take place either through formal mechanisms such as the classroom, formal meetings or short courses or informal arrangements, for instance, informal conversations within or outside the workplace. Leaders can also learn through short classes and management classes (Atwood et al., 2010). It can also take place in terms of interaction from people within the organization or outsiders. There should be no

restriction on learning new skills or knowledge. The leaders should always be open and flexible during the learning process.

Finally, the combination of senior and young leaders within the study finding has changed the leadership atmosphere within the organization, in the way the learning to lead process has transpired the leaders to become better leaders. This scenario showed in Case 1, Case 2 and Case 4. Kempster and Cope (2010) assumed that individuals learn entrepreneurial abilities through directly performing the roles and tasks associated with starting-up and leading entrepreneurial activities. This finding confirms the statement above that leadership learning is more effective through directly performing the leadership roles and responsibilities on a daily basis as evidence showed in these three cases. The table below represent the themes and subthemes of leaders' learning to lead process, a compilation from the recent study data.

'A Priori' Themes	Sub-themes
Leaders' learning to lead	1 Leader's capabilities 2 Team support 3 Continuous learning
Settings, Sources and Process	1 Organizational structure 2 Transparency 3 Effective interaction and communication
Conflicts	1 Leaders' background 2 Check and Balance Mechanism

(Source: Researcher)

5.5.3 Strategic decision- making process

Overall, the empirical findings from the case studies show the leaders direct involvement in making a strategic decision for the organization. From the shared leadership perspective, all leaders in the case studies are accountable to make the strategic decisions. Shared leadership acquired each leader in the team to take an active role during the decision-making process (Thorpe et al., 2011). The leaders combined their expertise and

knowledge during the decision making regardless of conflicts arising among them. The main target was to deliver the most effective strategic decisions that benefit the organizations. They made the decisions based on the collection of knowledge or through a collaborative process (Ensley et al., 2006b). Both elements exist in the shared leadership style.

In general, the majority of the research case studies give high priority for the organization strategic decision making (SDM) meeting, and the process is similar between each other. The leaders will decide the meeting agenda ahead, and the next step is to gather relevant information. The information-gathering process involves internal and external sources. Majority of the cases developed a systematic database for easy future reference. As has been mentioned by one of the leaders in Case 5:

"All of our company's data is kept in the company's database system. We believe in data empowerment because almost every aspect of business operation depends on the information that we have in hands. The decision is made based on current business trends and also the company's current performance. By having an up to date database system, life is easier" (Case 5).

Strategic planning helps leaders to plan the company's direction in the future. It allows leaders to analyse the company's current situation, strengths and weaknesses, business current trends and opportunities. The strategic plans serve as guidance and benchmarks for the companies. With every milestone they reached, a meeting is a platform to discuss the progress, challenges and improvement plan. Most of the cases documented the development of the strategic plans and iteratively referred to these documents: mind mapping draft, minutes meeting, graphs and charts. Flexibility helps the organization to respond effectively and reduce precious time through leaders' fast decision making. Shared leadership practice encourages continuous innovation within an organization through leaders' cohesiveness (Pearce & Manz 2005).

All leaders and administrative employees are present in SDM meeting. But in Case 1 and Case 4, the appointed field experts are also present. The experts' presence is to help the organizations in getting the current and latest information in the respective fields, but they

have no authority to make decisions. The leaders from these two cases believed that the field experts' presence infuses creativity in the SDM process. One of the leaders in Case 5 explained the presence of field experts during the SDM meeting in the quotations below:

"No, they do not have shares in this company. They are here to provide us with their expertise and knowledge. Since they are the experts within their specific fields, their opinions are valuable for us. We give them monetary rewards for their involvement. Basically, they give us the inputs such as their views on the projects, and we will take into accounts on their views during our decision- making process. In the sense that, they are our external sources of information" (Case 5).

Next important discovery in this research study concerning the SDM process is team cooperation. Majority of the leaders appeared to support each other's decisions, even when sometimes the decisions made did not turn out well. Not only that, they should give cooperation and support each other during both circumstances; good and bad. Among essential elements that leaders need to give attention in shared leadership include the process of shared commitments, beliefs and values (Goksoy 2016). This finding revealed a different side of team cohesiveness within shared leadership implementation. A further study with more focus on leaders supporting each other decisions regardless of the outcomes is therefore suggested.

This study confirms that cooperation plays a vital role in shared leadership practice. The cooperation spirit that exists in shared leadership forces leader(s) with the required knowledge to step in and help solve the problem (Pearce et al., 2009). Without an in-depth understanding of the importance of cooperation, it is a difficult task to execute the learning process effectively. The rest of the team and the organization get the shared leadership benefits through observation and sharing of knowledge between the leaders. The findings are in line with the study done by Yulk (2002) and suggest that leaders can be groomed and the process of learning to lead helps the leaders, through team effort, to enhance their leadership skills and become better leaders.

To conclude, all leaders in the research study agreed that the advantage of the shared leadership style in making strategic decision process is; it encourages creative activity

because of the knowledge and skills sharing between the leaders. All of the above elements help the leaders to make feasible strategic decisions for organizations. Regardless of each leader has a different personality and background, when they combine their views during the meeting or discussions, it sparks creativity. Conflict is considered normal as these leaders perceived and called it as 'thinking out of the box' sessions. In shared leadership practice, trust and respect come from the understanding of each other's skills and abilities (Small & Rentsch, 2010). The leadership style also gives flexibility in performing ones' tasks and give extra focus on the leaders' capabilities and strengths.

Below is the table of the strategic decision- making process themes, a compilation from the recent study data.

'A Priori' Themes	Sub-themes
Strategic Decision- Making Process	1 Collaborative process 2 Knowledge, skills and experience 3 Creativity 4 Team's consensus
Conflicts	1 Leaders' background 2 Organizational objectives

(Source: Researcher)

5.5.4 New emergent theme: Early Delegation

Pearce et al. (2008) mentioned delegation in the distribution of responsibilities in term of to facilitate shared leadership execution to help the followers understand the organization's vision, goals and core values. But it is unclear on how leaders execute delegation in organizations.

Two types of delegation exist in these research cases. First, delegation involving the leaders, which is one of the characteristics of shared leadership practises, which is the distribution of responsibilities. Other types of delegation emerged from the data is early delegation to the administrative team, which is a group of selected employees. This current study found a new emergent theme in the data, which is the early delegation of the administrative team. There is a tendency for high technology SMEs startup in the Malaysian Biotechnology sector to employ initial delegation, through the establishment of team management before the business takes off.

Plus, the leaders were selective and critical during the team management selection. The purpose of these actions is to ensure the leaders picked the right individuals with the right attitudes, knowledge and skills to be in the management team. The decision is made to ensure that the individuals chosen can perform their responsibilities without constant monitoring from the leaders. The action suggests that the leaders had foreseen and predicted the challenges from the leadership context.

Based on the findings of this study, the majority of the cases have assigned the administrative team to execute the company's daily operations. Despite the existence of the administrative team, the leaders prefer to exercise their authority as leaders through explicit actions, by being present in the office regularly. As one of the leaders in Case 5 mentioned:

"In general, both of us are directly involved in monitoring the overall business operation. We come to the office every day, and we believe that our presence is important to the company's spirit. We concentrate on our duties; at the same time, our staff can come and see us for discussion" (Case 5).

It is somewhat surprising that these SMEs decided to set up the management team from day one of business operation. The early delegation to the employees allows the leaders to concentrate on achieving the targets. The distractions caused by daily management affairs can hinder the leaders' concentration on higher-level issues such as marketing, finance and research and development activities. The findings agreed with the suggestion made by Cope et al. (2011), he suggested that leaders need help in leading the business

and not managing the business. But the authors did not indicate when is the appropriate time to implement it.

As has been suggested by previous scholars, most organizations experience leadership challenges during their early phase of the business cycle due to growth (Churchill and Lewis 1983), these elements of complexity and dynamism encountered by organizations (Lester and Parnell 2008). So, the action was taken by the leaders in parallel with today's business practice for survival and prosperity only it is done earlier than standard practice in SMEs ventures which is known to have the limitation of resources. Wendt et al., (2009) point out that evolving process within new start-ups affects business performance; leaders need to attend it effectively.

In three cases, the leaders have decided to set up an administrative team from the beginning of the start-up. In Case 5, the leaders have formed the company's management team from the first day of the establishment, and the leaders have specially handpicked the group. This team is given specific responsibilities to run the daily business operation on behalf of the leaders.

As for Case 2, the leaders were in charge of the whole organization's management and operations in the first two years of establishment. In the second year, they have decided to form a management team to handle the matters, and the leaders can concentrate on the higher level of the business matters, especially on the strategic aspects of the organization. They give full empowerment to their staff to perform with minimal supervision from them. They trust their employees and the staff appreciate the leaders' trust by giving their loyalty to the organization. The current administrative team they have today are the same individuals who worked in the company from day one. The company's performance increased significantly upon the set-up of the management team. One of the leaders of Case 2, Mr Y, highlighted the trust issue:

"On top of that, we decided to delegate administrative tasks to our employees. The ideas came in, right after three months we opened the business. The decision is seen brilliant at that time because both of us were busy developing the products and setting up networking. We have been in and out to meet people. Trust plays an essential role because

we are not able to monitor constantly. Therefore, our employees' selection process was quite stringent. Lucky enough, they are reliable" (Case 2).

When businesses start to experience growth in size, eventually there will be an increase in the number of employees and sales, and this has led to leaders' workload burden. For the leaders to focus on strategic aspects, it is crucial to delegate daily operations to the management during the growth phase. Shared leadership gives attention to delegation, team-building and even transfer of authority to a professional management team. Churchill and Lewis (1983) shared the same opinions on the owner's managerial and willingness to be able to delegate responsibility to others. Other scholars suggested similar views on this issue (Phelps et al. 2007, Wu and Cormican 2016).

Hatten (2016) has recommended that when the business experiences crisis, the way it is managed should also be changed. He suggested that through delegation of responsibilities from the management to others, it helps leaders to concentrate in a leadership context. The emerging findings of the study indicated a different approach whereby the sooner the leaders delegate the management affairs to others (management team), the sooner they get the opportunity to focus on the company's strategic plans. Leaders' decision of the early delegation has resulted in a positive performance, and the companies achieved success within a short period.

The above action signalled the importance of distributing the tasks among employees at an early stage as a method to achieve the organizational targets because the leaders have a clear vision as to what awaits them, especially conflicts. The leaders need to carefully execute this plan because they are putting their ultimate trust in a group of people to run the business's daily operation with less intervention. It is crucial to choose individuals who can execute the tasks, work independently, efficiently and boldly. Failure to address this issue could lead to a management crisis in the future.

Therefore, the result from this study also indicated that an important initiative by the leaders is to be proactive in assigning a group of management team members from the beginning of the company, as this action allows leaders to concentrate on the company's

central development. The scenario discussed earlier is different from the study made by Greiner (1998), as he only suggested the importance of hiring managers during the organizational growth phase, as leaders are in a better position to lead the companies efficiently. But he suggested implementing it during the growth phase only, not at the beginning of the setup. Therefore, it is interesting to get a different perspective of early delegation for employees of the organizations. The initial delegation helps leaders to focus on their essential tasks which leadership responsibilities.

5.5.5 New emergent theme: Set up a shared leadership team based on friendship

There is a striking trend presented in the research data concerning business partners' selection in all cases which have a connection with trust. Trust issue is seen as a main reason for these leaders to have friends whom they knew into the team leadership. The emergent theme directed to the criteria of selection pointed out that the long-term friendship is the primary basis for the team leadership selection. In five out of six cases, the leaders chose individuals they have known for quite some time, or their close friends, to be their business partner. Case 4 is the exception, where the newly appointed business partners came from the organization itself. They started as general workers before their statuses were promoted into the organization leadership team. The newly elected leaders have been working together with the founder since the business took off. Still, the element of friendship exists in team leaders' selection.

In Case 4, the leadership style plays as a support system to the leaders, especially the newly appointed leaders. In the sense that they can confide in each other to make them feel secure and boost their confidence levels while performing their responsibilities. Three of the leaders directly support each other through their actions, for instance, when one of the leader's faces difficulties while completing his tasks. The rest of the team leaders show their support, either through actions or words of encouragement. Indirectly, it gives self-assurance to their teammate that they have a good support system. As for the employees, the leadership shown by the leaders has a direct impact on them. Compared

to the larger and more established organizations, the behaviour of leaders in smaller businesses has a more significant and more direct effect on the organization's performance (Ensley et al., 2006b).

However, with small sample size, caution must be applied, as the findings did not represent the whole population. However, more research on this topic needs to be undertaken before the association between SME leader's selection and individual preference for new leader appointment is more clearly understood.

5.5.6 New emergent theme: Additional leaders in the existing shared leadership team

Shared leadership is known to promote a broad sharing of power and influence among team members (Pearce et al., 2009). According to the authors, three essential elements needed are knowledge, skills and abilities. The combination of leaders with a different set of experience and expertise bring positive outcomes to the organizations. Earlier in the cross-case analysis discussion, two cases studies changed from solo to shared leadership style due to growth impact that leads to leadership overburden. The additional leaders help founders to lead the organizations as a team. The collaboration between leaders brings positive effects on the leadership aspect and organizational performance.

In the long run, there is a possibility that distribution of leadership lead to another episode of overburden which is the responsibilities overload. Majority of the cases have the chances of responsibilities overload due to the rapid growth experienced by the organizations. Interestingly, there is an emergent theme from the study regarding additional leaders' scenario after the shared leadership is formed. The other leaders are meant to join the current team leaders. For example, Case 2, two leaders believed that they needed to add another leader into their team leaders due to the growth factor. The leaders plan to promote one of their senior employees in Case 2's leadership team. The decision was made after the third years of operation. As one of the leaders in Case 2 highlighted:

"That is the reason we are grooming them slowly as preparation for this. This is part of our strategic planning for this company to grow" (Case 2).

This scenario has been highlighted by the leaders in Case 2 and Case 1. The leaders have the intention to promote their senior staff as an organizational leader(s). They believe that it is crucial to bring new leaders into the organization, in parallel with the companies' rapid growth. They are slowly grooming one of the current staff to be the potential company leader. The scenario above indicates that the number of current leaders in both cases is insufficient, and leaders' responsibilities have escalated.

They have the option to bring an outsider into the company, but they are not keen on the idea. There are many issues involved, such as loyalty and companies' visions, and it takes time to blend into the company's environment. Based on this notion, it is practical to promote the current staff to the leader's post because he/she understands the company's operation and philosophies. This finding is in agreement with Wiklund et al. (2009) that during the small firm growth process, there are different aspects of business growth that the leaders have to look through and which need proactive actions. The growth factor has been mentioned by Mr N, founder of Case 4 in his interview:

"In the third year of operation, I have decided to add in new leaders to this company. I decided to give promotion to Mr Z and Mr S as my business partners and directly to become the leaders of this company. The main reason for promoting them is due to the company's rapid growth. At the same time, to bring the company forward" (Case 4).

It is apparent from the cases that the growth factor brings leadership challenges to the organizations, which led to a change of leadership approach from solo to a shared leadership approach. Kocolowski (2010) mentions the alternative to lead an organization is to a group of leaders. Thou, the author focuses on the advantage of shared leadership, but there is no further explanation of the scenario of additional leaders during the shared leadership take place.

Another scenario which makes leaders decided to add in new leaders into the organization is changes of the company status. In Case 5, the company is moving toward the PLO (public listed organization). Case 5 is another example of the impact growth has on the company's leadership aspect. The leaders anticipate changes in the company's leadership structure once the company changes its status to a public listed company, in terms of the incoming of new leaders into Case 5's current team leaders. They also acknowledge the fact that when the time comes, it involves sacrifice and willingness to give away a certain percentage of their leadership authority to the new leaders.

The key to business success is based on the owner's willingness and ability to learn to delegate authority and responsibility in various ways. The key to business success is based on the owner's willingness and ability to learn to delegate authority and responsibility in multiple ways (Mazzarol, 2003). Mr S from Case 5 has mentioned the delegation aspect, below are the related quotations:

"We have decided to distribute the ownership between us equally. It means that 50-50. For the time being, the percentage between us remains the same. But when this company is converted into a public listing company, I believe that there will be changes" (Case 5).

A proper selection process is a must, for the new additional leaders' strategy to work. The leaders need to plan on how to employ suitable new team leaders into the organization. Or else, it will be a waste of time and costly too. For examples in Case 2, earlier, there were three leaders and one left. He was responsible for the marketing aspect of the business. His presence in Case 2 was for less than a year, but when he left it created chaos because the responsibilities were explicitly given to that person. The dependency issue is one of the challenges in the distribution of leadership. In some way, this situation can lead to task overburden as has been highlighted by Groon (2002), the mutual dependence between leaders can cause an adverse condition of overlapping responsibilities. Both leaders had to take over his position, and they needed to brush up their marketing knowledge and skills accordingly. The number 1 leader showed his concern in the quotations below:

"We are open to the notion of having a new member in the company. For our company to grow and expand, we need extra hands. After all, future expansion is part of our long-term plan" (Case 2).

Ideally, it is interesting and intriguing idea to expand the current team leadership because leadership responsibilities can be shared and at the same time, reduces the leadership burden. But, when it comes to the implementation process, it gives a different perspective to leaders. Two out of six companies are not willing to let go of their leadership authority to others. These cases try to cope with the company's growth through other human resource options, such as hiring managers or by increasing the number of employees.

The other four companies took a courageous approach to summon new leaders into their current team leadership. In Case 2 and Case 4, the new leaders are from internal sources, and senior employees get the promotion to the organizations' leader level. In Case 3, the newly appointed leader is someone from outside of the organization. Similar to Case 5, the newly elected leaders will be the outsiders because the company's status has changed to a public listed company. The scenario indicates the leaders are willing to take a further step, even by losing a certain percentage of their leadership ownership in the name of success. It does not mean that letting go of a certain percentage of the leadership authority makes them less of a leader. The act shows that they are willing to make a sacrifice for the visions to be enacted. One of the leaders of Case 5 understand the need to sacrifice when the company status change:

"For the time being, the percentage between us remains the same. But when this company is converted into a public listing company, I believe that there will be significant changes, especially in the leadership department. There will be new leaders in the existing team" (Case 5).

Regardless of having a team leadership set-up initially, the growth factor does have an impact on Case 2's leadership context, especially on the workload and leadership responsibilities. The leadership responsibilities held by them both are becoming overburdened. This scenario brings challenges to the leaders, and it would be difficult for them to take control of everything. They need someone they can trust and rely on to sit

together with them in the company's team leaders. The best candidate for the leader's position is someone who has been with the company from the beginning. The potential leaders are well versed of the business philosophies and its operation. The leaders have chosen one of their senior employees to fill in the post. The chosen person will be given a certain percentage of a company's share.

5.5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has cross-examined all six case studies involved in the in-depth interviews. In total, twenty- five respondents participated, which consist of thirteen leaders and twelve employees. With the conceptual research framework as the reference, the findings conferred notable evidence concerning Malaysian high technology SMEs shared leadership practice with intention given the leadership practise itself and into these two areas; leaders' learning to lead process and the strategic decision- making implementation.

Interesting findings from the cases show that two out of the six cases (Case 3 and Case 4) made a bold transition from being a solo type of leadership to shared leadership. The main reasons for the shift in leadership style in both cases are growth, to assemble knowledge and skills, reduce leadership burdens and make improvements in leaders' leadership skills and capabilities. In Case 4, the founder believed that the transition brings many benefits to the company, especially from the leadership perspective. Among the benefits are that the leaders' self- confidence elevates, there are group support and an exchange of knowledge and skills (Burke et al., 2003).

One of the most distinctive features of shared leadership is that the process involves the whole team leading the organization. It is a team effort and a dynamic and interactive process among individuals in the groups (Pearce and Conger, 2003). Findings show that all leaders are actively performing leadership responsibilities within their organizations based on individually assigned duties. Simultaneously, they work together as a team in leading their organizations. Their involvement includes making strategic decisions, coordinating the company's strategic plans and monitoring the overall company's

performance. Team leadership gives an advantage to the organization because they share common goals and have the motivation to coordinate and accomplish these goals (Hill, 2010).

Anyway, these leaders acknowledged the fact that during the shared leadership process, conflicts happen. Conflicts should be seen as opportunities for the leaders to improve and should not be taken as something negative. For instance, the differences in leaders' background which cause disagreements between leaders. As has been mentioned by one of the leaders in Case 4, Mr S, on the issue:

"There are times, and we can feel the tension due to our clashes of views and ideas. We come from different background, and there is a vast difference in age between the three of us. I cannot ignore the fact that sometimes this creates conflicts. This scenario allows us to review the flaws and try to improve it for the better" (Case 4).

The leaders of the cases faced conflicts during the implementation of shared leadership in these two areas; leaders' learning to lead and strategic decision- making process. Conflicts should be regarded as a check and balance mechanism that helps leaders to reflect the effectiveness of shared leadership implementation. Effective interaction and communication between leaders will bring harmony to the team.

Based on the empirical evidence shown by all six case studies, it can be said that the shared leadership practice exists and has brought benefits to the leaders and organizations as a whole. Leaders benefit most from the leadership perspective whereby they managed to develop further the leadership skills and becoming better leaders. Among distinctive features of shared leadership practice are enhancing business knowledge and interpersonal skills, self- confident, loyalty, and team cohesiveness. As for the organizations, it is clearly shown in term of business performance, such as growth, financial indicators and human resources. Thus, all of the above discussion is parallel to the findings shown in the study done by Pearce and Ensley (2004). The authors pointed out the positive outcomes of the shared leadership style to the team dynamics and team performance.

The recent finding revealed the majority of the leaders acknowledged the fact that conflicts arise during the leadership practice, due to differences in background, personality and generation gaps between them. The leaders admitted that they faced conflicts during the leadership implementation, such as disagreement on specific issues. Sometimes, it takes a long time before a final decision can be made due to dispute. Prolonging conflict resolution means future chaos in the organization. The finding is against the suggested views made by Berman et al. (2012) that shared leadership means less conflict.

Still, the conflict exists during shared leadership implementation. A possible explanation is that these leaders come from different background in term of experience, skills and knowledge. Thus, it is a norm to have clashes of ideas and views, and primarily leaders are known to have strong traits. Leaders from high-growth and middle-size businesses are better known as 'professional entrepreneurs' as they are well-equipped with skills, experience and professionalism acquired from previous organizations. The exposure, training, skills and expertise has made them more than ready to deal with the complexity and challenges of the business world (Harrison et al., 1996).

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have presented the main findings of the study. This chapter advances the discussion of the results, critiques are made with other related studies, with the debate on shared leadership practice and its implementation. In the first subsection is

the restatement of the objectives and key outcomes of the study. Next is the summary of theoretical, methodological and practical contributions. It is followed by the managerial and policy implications of the study and finally, the limitations of the research and recommendations for future research.

6.2 Restatement of the Research Objectives and Key Outcomes

6.1.1 Shared Leadership Approach

Research Objective 1:

To explore shared leadership practise in high technology SME startups in Malaysia (biotechnology sector).

To conclude, this study explored the shared leadership implementation in Malaysian high technology SMEs startups which effected by the growth factor. Based on the research study data, there is significant evidence that the six selected organisations experienced growth between two to five years of its operation, and the growth factor has a significant impact on organisations' leadership practice. The implementation of shared leadership helped the organisations face the business challenges through practical leadership approach. These SMEs startups benefited from the leadership approach through its team dynamics and team performance (Pearce and Ensley, 2004) and positive organisational performance (Ensley et al. 2006).

There were two leadership scenarios which existed due to the growth factor within these cases. First is when the leader decided to change the style of leadership from solo to team-based leadership (shared leadership). Second, when the leaders of shared leadership determined to bring a new leader(s) into the existing team. It is somewhat surprising that the second scenario occurred, as the organisations opted for this type of leadership from the beginning of the startup as a pro-active measure towards the leadership crisis.

One of the characteristics of shared leadership is the distribution of leadership. In all six cases, there is significant evidence that leaders distribute leadership responsibilities among themselves. The reasons for the distribution are to avoid ambiguity in leadership

responsibilities and promotes effectiveness. Each leader is assigned to specific management post according to the individual's abilities and expertise. For example, in Case 2, Miss A has a strong background in administrative aspects of her previous employment. The other leader Mr Y has business experience of more than ten years and has been assigned the Chief Technical Officer (CTO). Based on the team consensus, Miss A holds Chief Executive Officer post. The process of distributing leaders in these cases verified the findings that knowledge, skills and experience is the fundamental of distribution of responsibilities practise of shared leadership (Burke et al., 2003).

One unanticipated finding was that the leaders sometimes did not stick to the given scope of responsibilities when it involved ad-hoc matters, for instance, a temporary project. This scenario provides two options for leaders to either take up the additional tasks or stick to the assigned tasks. But all leaders took the first option without hassle. The leaders' action substantiated Goksoy's (2016), that shared leadership is based on voluntary team cooperation and effective interaction through leaders' competencies and a sense of responsibility (Goksoy 2016).

Next vital element of shared leadership practice is interaction and communication. The significant indicator lies in the organisational structure of the case studies. Majority of the cases opt for less structural organisations for flexibility and promotes creativity. Based on the empirical evidence from the research data, the organisational structure supports adequate communication flow within these cases. The above statement verifies Avolio et al., (2009)'s findings that shared leadership is popular nowadays due to its flexible structure which helps faster decisions and effective communication.

The study also exposed that the majority of the SMEs practice transparency interaction throughout the organisation. The learning to lead process materialises through communication and leaders' actions. Trust plays a significant role in cementing the bond between the leaders. As has been highlighted by Bergman et al. (2012), shared leadership promotes higher cohesion, intragroup trust and less conflict. Though there are few studies which have covered the trust element in shared leadership implementation, future studies on the current topic are therefore recommended.

Review on research study established advantages of shared leadership practice include higher cohesion, intragroup trust and fewer conflicts (Bergman et al., 2012). Yet, at a particular phase of the business cycle (growth), these organisations faced a leadership crisis due to responsibilities overload. A possible explanation for this scenario is because the high technology environment experiences complexity and dynamism.

Therefore, leaders need to plan and be aware of the issue to avoid a leadership crisis. The shared leadership within this type of leadership helps leaders to focus on each other's expertise. Still, heavy reliance on the individual's knowledge might lead to future leadership conflicts in situations where one of the leaders leaves the organisation. There are prolonged conflicts between the leaders, where there are new incoming leaders or changes in responsibilities due to changes in business requirements. Delegation is seen as one of the best alternatives to minimise conflict due to the burden of responsibilities while adding new leaders into the team is another option.

6.1.2 Leaders' Learning to Lead

Research Objective 2:

To investigate the leaders' learning to lead process in high technology SME startups in Malaysia (biotechnology sector).

The findings from the case studies confirm the theories that shared leaderships help leaders to develop further their knowledge and skills through the leadership practice. The leaders' engagement and their willingness to collaborate holds the primary keys to the effectiveness of the shared leadership practice. This study confirms that cooperation plays a vital role in shared leadership practice. The cooperative spirit that exists in shared leadership forces leader(s) with the required knowledge to step in and help solve the problem (Pearce et al., 2009). Without an in-depth understanding of the importance of cooperation, it is a difficult task to execute the learning process effectively.

The study revealed that majority of the SMEs leaders have specific expertise and knowledge concerning the business ventures, especially on the technical aspect, while,

the other team leader has the business management knowledge and skills. The finding confirmed the suggestion made by Goksoy (2016) that leaders' expertise and competencies in specific areas are more crucial compared to the formal position or role of individuals (Goksoy, 2016).

The shared leadership process within this type of organization indicates the benefits of leadership practice in terms of knowledge and skills collaboration between the leaders, which had made a significant contribution to the enhancement of leadership skills and knowledge. The combination of knowledge and expertise between the leaders infuses the leaders' learning process during the shared leadership practice in both formal and informal interactions. The leaders emphasize the importance of leadership enhancement through a continuous initiative of learning, via formal (short courses) and informal sessions (communication between leaders).

Other than that, these leaders verified that observation helps them to absorb knowledge while performing their duties. Leaders' learning process requires leaders' observation skills and knowledge sharing between the leaders. Through continuous learning, it is proven within these SME startups that the leaders' leadership performance improved. The findings are in line with the study done by Yulk (2002) and suggest that leaders can be groomed, and the process of learning to lead helps the leaders, through team effort, to enhance their leadership skills and become better leaders.

From the study, leaders admitted the existence of conflict during leaders' learning to lead process due to differences in leaders' backgrounds and experience. Dispute arose due to the burden of responsibilities (Wood and Fields, 2007). But the impact is manageable as a result of leaders' openness and understanding. These two elements play a crucial role in ensuring the implementation of shared leadership, as these SME leaders stated that they try to refer back to organizational aims when they face conflicts. The strength of a shared leadership team stemmed from a shared vision (Pearce & Conger, 2002). However, most studies did not specifically focus on the conflict which arose during leaders' learning to lead process, especially in high growth SME startups which provide an opportunity for future investigation.

6.1.3 Strategic Decision- Making Process

Research Objective 3:

To analyse the strategic decision- making process during the implementation of shared leadership within biotechnology SME startups in Malaysia.

A shared leadership style is said to be beneficial during the decision- making process (Avolio et al., 2009; Kramer and Crespy, 2011). Regardless of the organisation size, the need to plan is crucial. The SMEs' capacity, especially in the high technology sector, has a significant impact on its strategic decisions (O'Regan et al., 2012). The findings of the study revealed that the leaders understand the importance of setting up long term strategic planning in the organisations earlier, right after their startup. This includes the importance of short- term strategic planning, too. The leaders had precisely listed companies' strategic plans to give a clear direction for the companies to pursue. Strategic plans serve as a guideline to a company's success when it involves high risk and costly business ventures.

The empirical findings from the case studies clearly show the significant existence of shared leadership aspect concerning strategic planning practice. The leaders obviously combined their expertise and knowledge during decision making regardless of conflicts arising among them. Another aspect of shared leadership which appeared in this current study is that leadership style promotes creativity during the SDM process because of knowledge and skills sharing between the leaders. According to Wang et al. (20014), shared leadership practice helps infuse creativity in the decision-making process, thus encouraging continuous innovation within an organisation. The possible explanation to the above scenario lies within the leaders' background. Each leader has a different personality and history; when they combine their views during the meeting or discussions, it sparks creativity. This is in parallel with Pearce et al.'s (2008) opinions, decisions in shared leadership are made from a collection of knowledge. The main target was to deliver the most effective strategic decisions that benefit the organisations. They made decisions based on the selection of knowledge or through a collaborative process (Ensley et al., 2006b). Both elements exist in the shared leadership style.

In general, the majority of the respondents mentioned that there are two stages of the strategic decision-making process; preceding and subsequent. The other process covers the information gathering process and the meeting. The internal sources include the company's database, and the external resources help the organisation to analyse and understand the current environment of the business. The analysis is done using several critical analytical tools, and designs include SWOT analysis, PEST analysis, Porter's Five Forces Model (FFM), and brainstorming technique. During the execution, it involves monitoring processes, and towards the accomplishment of the task, the evaluation process takes place. These steps are taken to maximise the results at the end of the strategic meeting.

Another interesting approach to SDM process is shown by two cases whereby the leaders invite external individuals who are field experts to attend companies' strategic meetings. In Case 1 and Case 4, they invite the appointed field experts into the meetings. The experts' selection is based on their expertise within the required area as in Case 1 and Case 4, the biotechnology field specifically on the technical background. Among the reasons to have field experts in the SDM meeting is to get an immediate response from reliable resources (the experts). Shared leadership practice encourages continuous innovation within organisations (Pearce & Manz, 2005). This implied that leaders recognised their weaknesses in certain areas, and to make effective decisions experts' views are taken into consideration, and their presence is meant to provide opinions and knowledge. But the final decisions are made by the leaders, and it is a team consensus decision. The responsibility of making the decision is shared and distributed between both leaders (Thorpe et al., 2011).

Similar to the other two antecedents of shared leadership: the implementation and leaders' learning to lead, leaders faced conflicts during the SDM process. Among the reasons are differences in leaders' background, personalities and generation gaps between leaders in these SMEs. The leaders admitted that conflicts arose during this process, such as disagreement on specific issues. Sometimes, it takes a long time before a final decision can be made due to disagreement. Prolonging conflict resolution means future chaos in the organisation. Based on research findings done by Nicolaidis et al. (2014), shared leadership cannot last long because there is a likely emergence of power struggles and

conflicts arising during the process. Therefore, the leaders approach the conflicts through negotiation and discussion, with priority given to companies' benefits. The evolving processes affect business performance, and in every turning point problems and crises have to be managed effectively (Harrison et al., 1996; Wendt et al., 2009).

6.1.4 The New Emergent Themes

There are three new emergent themes merged from the research data, which can be further explored in the future shared leadership research. First, early delegation on the formation of the administrative team. Next theme is the basis of leaders' selection to the shared leadership team is friendship element. Finally, the additional leaders, after post shared leadership formation.

6.1.4.1 Early Delegation

The study highlights the proactive action taken by the leaders of the high growth SME startups through early delegation practice; the administrative team set up before the business started. This emergent theme from the case studies gives a new perspective of shared leadership implementation within these high growth organisations. The administrative team primary responsibility is to assist the leaders in handling daily business routines such as documentations on marketing, financing, sales etc. The decision is made based on the leaders' priority on achieving the organisation's strategic plans.

Therefore, leaders can concentrate on the organisation's higher-level management tasks. In their point of views, early delegation to the employees helps them to focus on the bigger agenda which is the strategic plans. By setting up an administrative team, employees can assist the leaders to handle the daily business tasks. Their priority laid down on the organisation's targets rather than to directly in charge of the regular business operation. The pro-active action taken by the leaders is most likely due to the nature of the organisation; the rapid growth experienced by this type of organisation makes the leaders anticipate the growth challenges they will face. Complicated and rapid changes which surround the current organisations have forced a shift from classical to more

contemporary approaches in leadership (Hersey and Blanchard 1988; Avolio et al., 2009; Derue et al., 2011).

The findings revealed that the organisations that opted for early delegation through team management set-up experienced lesser impact on its leadership practice during the growth phase. The leaders can give full concentration to the leading aspect of organisations and the management team who run the daily operation of the business. Delegation of responsibilities helps to ease the leadership crisis by hiring functional managers (Greiner, 1998). These cases have created a strict selective process of the members of the team management.

These findings are in line with the suggestions made by Pearce et al. (2008), the authors suggested delegation to facilitate shared leadership enactment, provided the followers understand and act accordingly towards the organisation's vision, goals and core values with the study. The author suggested the leaders take these actions as precautionary measures during a leadership crisis. However, these authors did not give a clear explanation of the appropriate time for leaders to execute delegation to their employees, or highlight the importance of setting up the management team as early as possible to assist leaders. Further research should be done to investigate the essence of delegation towards shared leadership practice.

6.1.4.2 Friendship Basis for the Shared Leadership Team Set Up

Majority of the cases are inclined towards choosing someone they knew to be their business partner. The new emergent theme from the cases shows that friendship is the basis in business partner selection process. The possible interpretation for the above scenario is the trust issue. These high growth organisations leaders want to ensure the survival of the business by choosing reliable business partners to run the business together as a team. According to tipping points theory proposed by Phelps et al. (2007), people management is one of the challenges faced by growing organisations. The theory suggested that team effort holds the key to organisational survival.

Since its small and medium organisations, due to limitation of resources, leaders face leadership challenges. Before they embarked into the business journey, leaders with the intention to employed team leadership- based style, which is the shared leadership, must search for someone with specific criteria. These intangible criteria include knowledge, skills, experience, trust and others. As has been highlighted by Pearce et al. (2009), one of the outstanding characteristics of shared leadership in comparison to traditional leadership is a broad power-sharing and influence among team members.

Therefore, these leaders decided to invite someone they knew more than ten years to set up the business together. Why? The trust issue is one of the vital fundamentals in shared leadership practice. The leaders possibly have predicted the business challenges that await the business since the organisation is new and highly dependent on the leaders to bring the organisation forward. Therefore, it is essential to set a team comprises of individuals that can work together. As has been mentioned by Leitch et al. (2009), in their study, trust is part of the essential element within the social interaction, leads to transparency communication between the leaders. They further explained that failure in upholding the trust element within the team could result to miscommunication issue.

6.1.4.3 Additional Leaders in the Existing Shared Leadership Team

One of the flaws in the shared leadership approach is the possibility of responsibilities overburden (Wood and Fields, 2007). The overburden episode happens when leaders are assigned with specific leadership responsibilities which can cause dependency issue in the long run. These high growth SME startups tend to encounter the overload issue due to the rapid growth factor. Thus, there is an emergent theme from this research study about the invitation to additional leaders in the current shared leadership team, meaning that the number of leaders increases in these organisations.

This scenario has been highlighted by the leaders in Case 2 and Case 1. The leaders emphasised the reasons for bringing in additional leaders into the organisation due to growth factor, in need of leadership assistance and changes in organisation status. Rather than opting for increase numbers of employees, these leaders are willing to share leadership responsibilities with new leaders. The leaders's action is in line with Mazzarol (2003), the leaders' willingness and delegation of authority is the keys to business

success. The possible excuse for the above scenario is part of organisational strategic planning.

6.2 Summary and Recommendations of the Study

6.2.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several contributions to the theoretical aspect of the field of study. First of all, this research provides comprehensive, in-depth empirical evidence and analysis of shared leadership literature. The extant literature shows that these types of organisations require innovation, competitiveness and fast response to changing environments which are highly suitable to the shared leadership concept (Pearce and Manz, 2005). However, it overlooks an issue on early delegation through administrative team consist of a group of reliable employees, helps leaders to focus on their leadership responsibilities and organisational strategic plans. Phelps et al. (2007) suggested that there are a set of crucial issues that all growing firms have to face at some point during the growth process. The model uses a different approach from conventional linear models. These critical issues are known as tipping points. One of them is the human management issue. However, these authors did not give in-depth explanations on the early delegation issue specifically on employees to handle daily administrative tasks with less supervision from leaders.

The empirical findings in this study provide a new understanding of early delegation to facilitate shared leadership practice within high growth organisations. Previously, many scholars suggested delegation theories faced by organisations during the business life cycle. For instance, Churchill and Lewis, (1983) gave more emphasis on startup phases involving activities in raising business funding and product delivery. The model points out that the startup phase is defined as the inception and survival stages of the firm, and the transition to the growth phase is signified by the emergence of a clear growth strategy, followed by consecutive years of rapid growth.

Interestingly, the recent findings show that the leaders from high growth SMEs had clearly anticipated the events. From the beginning of the startups, the majority of them appointed an administrative team and had been entrusted to run the company's daily

operation with less supervision. The leaders are willing to put their trust into a group of individuals to run the companies' regular operation as they focus on strategic plans.

Secondly, this research reveals conflict exists during the leadership process due to differences in leaders' backgrounds. Specifically, during the leaders' learning to lead process and strategic decision-making process while leaders employed a shared leadership approach. This study also provides empirical evidence on the conflict solving approach taken by these leaders. As these SME leaders highlighted, organisational objectives served as the vital point to conflict solving. This is in line with suggestions made by Pearce & Conger (2002) that the strength of shared leadership team stemmed from a shared vision.

Thirdly, the current study gives a better understanding of the strategic decision-making process within these SME startups from the shared leadership context. According to Molloy and Johnson (2016), strategic plans served as a guideline for new startups, as it gives a clear business direction for these leaders to pursue the organisation's future targets. O'Regan (2012) suggested that shared leadership leaders need to prepare organisational short and long-term strategic plans to achieve organisation success. Through the shared leadership practise, the current research case studies experienced positive outcomes, including faster decisions making the process, increase in creativity and innovation. The combination of leaders' knowledge and skills play an essential role during the SDM process, and team consensus leads to feasible decisions.

Furthermore, the study has confirmed several antecedent variables of shared leadership practice that are crucial to the leadership exercise: team cohesiveness ((Kozlowski et al. 2009), trust (Small & Rentsch, 2010), team support (Carson et al., 2007), delegation (Pearce et al., 2008), interaction (Hoch et al., 2010), influence (Mathieu et al., 2015) and team effectiveness (Pearce and Conger, 2003). All these variables are visible during the leadership process.

Concerning the Malaysian context, this study initiates an investigation into shared leadership as there is a shortage of studies within this field. To date, no empirical evidence has been produced, in specific studies on shared leadership, that focuses on high growth

SMEs. Nevertheless, most studies within the shared leadership scope are done in the education sector.

Thus, this in-depth study is predicted to contribute to the development of shared leadership literature in the Malaysian context. This recent finding is extension to shared leadership theories. Provides new insight into three issues: shared leadership practice and two of its vital elements which are the leaders' learning process and strategic decision-making process in Malaysian high technology SME startups. The research findings provide implications for leaders, founders and entrepreneurs to consider the benefits of shared leadership practice.

6.2.2 Methodological Contributions

This study contributes to existing qualitative studies of shared leadership which is dominated by quantitative studies, and thus fails to grasp the richness and complex nature of shared leadership practice. Therefore, this study employed qualitative research to advance an in-depth understanding of a shared leadership nature within high technology Malaysian SME startups.

This study investigated the phenomenon of shared leadership within the setting of high growth SME startups in Malaysia. There are series of meta-analysis studies which have been done on the concept of shared leadership studies, which covered topics on the correlation of shared leadership and team effectiveness (Wang et al., 2014). However, exploratory work has not been initiated to understand leaders' learning to lead process and strategic decision-making process specifically through the growth phase. This remains an under-researched area that requires in-depth investigation, and this current study contributes to filling the gap.

Next, two types of triangulation were employed in this research study. Initially, a method of triangulation is exercised through various methods during data collection, including in-depth interviews, field notes and documentary analysis. Subsequently, triangulation of data sources was executed where not only leaders of the organisations were interviewed, but also the employees in the organisations. It is carried out through an in-depth

qualitative interview technique, thus increasing the validity and showing triangulation of data.

6.2.3 Contribution to Practice

Understanding of the concept of shared leadership practice in small and medium enterprises is vital for business owners and leaders so that they can lead their organisations effectively. This current study gives insights into how the execution of shared leadership benefits the organisations, especially in the high technology business sector. The exploratory evidence revealed in this study illustrates the challenges and advantages of the leadership approach, as the leadership practice transpires that the learning culture between the leaders enhanced their skills and knowledge through team efforts. In the strategic decision-making section, shared leadership helps leaders to strategically plan the success of the organisations through the leaders' collective of knowledge and skills.

6.2.4 Limitations and Areas for Further Research

This study has investigated through the shared leadership implementation in the high growth SME startups, in-depth review of the process of leaders' learning to lead and SDM processes on these organisations. The main objective of this current study is to get a further understanding of how the concept of shared leadership facilitates these leaders, especially during a growth phase. However, this study focuses explicitly on those three elements of shared leadership. There is a need to set a boundary to this study as there is a time constraint involved. It is highly recommended for further studies on the other elements of shared leadership practice.

From the findings, the conflicts regularly appeared, and leaders tried to handle the issue by integrated several variables into the process of conflict solving, including trust, shared vision and team cohesiveness. The current study was unable to analyse these variables as the focus is on the process of leadership. It is suggested that the association of these factors is investigated in future studies.

This study is limited to Malaysia's business environment. Further research should be done in different countries to examine shared leadership in the biotechnology sector. Moreover,

based on the study findings, the concept of shared leadership can be tested in various sectors and different contexts. Nevertheless, this current study is among the pioneers to investigate shared leadership practice in high growth organisations in Malaysia by focusing on three issues; shared leadership approach, leaders' learning to lead and strategic decision- making process.

The findings of this study established that shared leadership practice helps organisations to perform better and the leaders to improve their leadership skills and abilities. There is a shortage of studies on this, and the findings are not decisive about the correlation of shared leadership between three issues; leadership approach, leaders' learning to lead the process, and strategic decision- making process. As this study used selective samples from a specific sector, the findings do not represent the whole population due to the primary intention of this study being to investigate the leadership process, which is complex in nature.

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Appendix

Annex 1. Semi- structured questionnaires

Q2L (for leaders/founders/leadership)

Basic information	Responsibilities
Business experience	Leadership style
Education	Prior and current
Position	

Continuation from Q1B (Question on business)

Me: Now, can we discuss further about you as one of the leaders in this company.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Question(s)</i>	<i>Potential answers</i>
1.	Could you please tell me a little bit about yourself -name -education -business experience -age	Respondent's general demographic - education - business background in general
2.	How many years have you been in the field of business ? - Current company, how long have you been with this company? - Previous companies, list down companies and years of involvement.	Respondent's business experience - years in current company - previous business experience
3.	What kind of responsibilities do you hold in this company? -How long have you been holding this current position ? - (if only short time) Next question: Previously, what position did you hold?	Respondent's position/responsibilities/authorities - current -previous
4.	How do you enhance your leadership skills and capabilities in order to cope with the current business environment? Can you explain the importance of doing so?.	Continual improvement to be a better leader from different sources which include people, formal or informal education, and experience. Leaders need to enhance their leadership skills from time to time for the survival and prosperity of the businesses (Martinez, 2009)

Me: Next, I would like to discuss about the leadership aspect of this company starting from the beginning of the company's existence to the current state.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Question(s)</i>	<i>Potential answers</i>
1.	-Leadership style Could you please describe a little bit about how you lead your company? (by giving certain examples related to the leadership style, to confirm the mentioned leadership given by the respondent(s))	History: Leadership style Leaders Ownership within the organization Organizational chart Dynamism and complexity Growth Leadership crisis

			<p>When small ventures grow rapidly, leadership crisis could emerge (Wiklund et al., 2009)</p> <p>Note: For each question, I will ask respondents to explain the current situation experienced by the company. This will reflect their current situation, changes and development faced by the company.</p>
2.	<p>What are the major changes between your previous organizational chart and the current one? Could you explain, how all these/ it is changing? Why? How is this happening? Could you please explain it a little bit further?</p>		Organizational chart- to compare the current and previous leadership and hierarchy of the organization
3.	<p>How was the distribution of the ownership within the company in the early days of your business? Are there any changes compared to the current situation? Do the owners lead the organization too? Or not?</p>		Ownership- to compare the current and previous distribution of leadership of the organization
4.	<p>Could you explain the allocation of responsibilities among the leaders?</p>		<p>Leaders' responsibilities</p> <p>Shared or distributed leadership</p>
5.	<p>How many leaders were there when the business started?</p> <p>Currently, how many leaders are there? What are their positions in this company?</p> <p>Can you please elaborate a little bit on the evolution of leadership.</p>		
6.	<p>In comparison to the early days of the company, what significant changes happened especially from leadership style?</p> <p>In case there is CHANGE...please direct to question NO.8</p>		Change in leadership perspective
7.	<p>If there is NO CHANGE in leadership style</p> <p>Proceed to Question No.14</p>	<p>What are the advantages of this leadership style?</p>	<p>Advantages of the selected traditional leadership style</p> <p>To understand the decision of maintaining the traditional leadership style.</p>
8.	<p>If a NEW leader joins the company</p> <p>If NOT, proceed to the Question No. 12</p>	<p>When advertising for new leaders to join the company, what selection criteria do you use to make a decision on which candidates fit best with</p>	<p>New leader(s)</p> <p>Selection criteria</p> <p>Is it based on skills, experts, knowledge, or experience? Or the combination of most of the criteria?</p> <p>Structure of the organization</p>

		the company?	
9.	What are the advantages of having new addition of leaders to the company especially in strategic decision making process?		<p>New leader(s)</p> <p>Strategic decision making process</p> <p>Team based leadership</p> <p>Apart from leadership skills and knowledge enhancement, this will contribute towards strategic decision making process due to their knowledge and expertise they bring in into the organization.</p> <p>Entrepreneurs have the ability to continuously learn as their surroundings evolve (Gordon et al., 2012)</p>
10.	In terms of communication and interaction between leaders, what are the preferred methods of communication?		Communication and interactions among leaders
11.	How often do you actually consult each other? For instance team meetings, formal or informal, etc		Communication and interactions among leaders
12.	With the current leadership style, how do you learn to lead from each other?		<p>Learning to lead process</p> <p>Process of acquiring the leadership skills from each other (skills, previous experience and others)</p> <p>Others' previous experience has strengthened entrepreneurial knowledge and contributed to the team members cohesiveness (Houvinen and Tahula, 2006)</p>
13.	In comparison to the current leadership style, what were difficulties encountered in previous leadership style?		<p>Previous leadership style</p> <p>Challenges faced</p>
14.	What are the difficulties encountered during the implementation of the current leadership style?		<p>Challenges</p> <p>Resistance from the leaders because of the differences in their background</p>
15.	Could you explain what the impacts of the leadership style are on your leadership skills and capabilities?		Enhancement of leadership skills and abilities
16.	What are the advantages that you can see from the current leadership style you are practicing within your organization?		<p>Advantages of the leadership style</p> <p>(The outputs can be used to confirm and emphasize the advantages of the shared or distributed leadership)</p>

Annex 2. Participation Consent Form



CONSENT FORM

Full title of project:

The impacts of leadership style on organizational strategic decision making process in SMEs in Malaysia.

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Please Initial Here

<p>I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.</p>	
<p>I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up to the point of (i.e. anonymisation, transcripts are anonymised, etc), without giving reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question(s), complete a test or give a sample, I am free to decline.</p>	
<p>I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.</p> <p><i>OR (only use one of these statements and delete the other)</i></p> <p>I give permission for members of the research team to use my identifiable information for the purposes of this research project.</p>	

I agree to take part in the above research project.	
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Name of Participant	Date	Signature
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Name of Researcher	Date	Signature
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Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the participant information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.

Annex 3. Interview Transcript.

Participant Research Code: C5/L10/P19

Participant Name: Mr. Saravanan Rasaratnam

Organization: Smart & Green Sdn. Bhd

Company code: C5

Participant within the company: 01/04

Location: Kota Damansara, Kuala Lumpur

Time: 11.05- 12.10

Date: 19/09/2015 (Tuesday)

Language: English/Bahasa Malaysia

Demographic:

1. Gender: Male
2. Age: 40 years old
3. Ethnicity: Indian
4. Position: Managing Director/Founder
5. Highest education: Masters
6. Business background: More than 15 years

Conversation unit: 1103- 1165

		Session 1	
Unit	R/P	Texts	Coding
1103	R	<p>First and foremost, thank you very much for your willingness to participate in my PhD study. It is an honour that someone who is as busy as you, willing to allocate time for this purpose. I am Durra and earlier I have explained to you the objective of my study and generally it is about entrepreneurial leadership in SMEs from the strategic decision making perspective.</p> <p>Could you please sign in the consent and participative forms? You have the right to stop the conversation anytime, or if you have any questions to ask. Please do so. For your information, the information wouldn't be disclosed to public. It is for the purpose of my study only. If you are ok with everything, we can start this session.</p> <p>Could you please tell me about the history of the company?</p>	<p>Introductory</p> <p>Ethics</p>
1104	P19	<p>This company was founded three years ago. Before this, I was involved in the consultation fields in the semi government agency. While Mr. Navin worked in a company which involved in biomass waste energy- based company. We know each other for quite sometimes since the university days and always communicate with each other regularly. Then we decided one day to start this business, which is on the palm oil waste aspects.</p>	<p>History of the business</p> <p>Setting up</p> <p>Leaders consolidation/business partners</p>

	<p>I can see the niche market in this business, based on my previous consultancy experience I had with this type of business during my days in Biotech Corp Malaysia. Meanwhile, on Mr. Navin's side where he used to work with his uncle whom owned this type of business. From our regular meetings, we exchanged views, experience and stories. There is no such thing as I am better than you because I know a lot. We are here to support each other. We started off this company as a team. Two is better than one, right? The burden is split between two.</p> <p>Until the day that we decided to come out with the business plan, where we believe that there are business opportunities await to be explored. This is the turning point where we decided to venture into this business.</p> <p>There are different types of natural type of energy. For instance, solar where it is famous in Europe. Then we have Biogas and then Biomass. Biogas is where not many people are looking at this area. Because the model is not accurate in the first place. Most of the Biogas companies here in Malaysia are mill owners. Mill owners who are basically the big players such as GLC plantation companies or such as small local companies. GLC for instance FELDA and FELCRA.</p> <p>There is regulation for these players to adhere which involving waste. They have to treat the waste. The way of doing it, is to set up a Biogas plant. But most of the people, they don't want to do it because they don't want to spend that amount of money. Or in another word, costly. At least 15 million ringgits just to set up the plant. But the effects of non-treatable waste are hazardous to environment. Therefore, Malaysia Palm Oil Board (MPOB) has come out with new legislation to impose on palm oil plantations whereby 2019, they must have Biogas plant. Failure to do so, will resulted that they licence would not be renewed for the next cycle.</p> <p>So everyone got panicked because the set-up cost is high. That is where we took strategic decisions in a way that this is a problem matters. How can we resolve this problem? The only way to resolve is you go in as a player. You fund the project. We get in as a Biogas player. We will come to your plantation, set up the plant for you and we will run the plant and everything. Then, we will make a deal where you will get certain amounts of revenue sharing. So, the mill owners got excited with this plan because this a new way of looking at it. That is the crucial point, where we came out with the business idea.</p>	<p>Relationship between the leaders/founders</p> <p>Challenges in business</p>
1105	R When is exactly the time you came out with this idea?	

1106	P19	<p>I thought about in year 2011, because I saw the behaviours of the mill people. They are not willing to spend money on this and they are looking for someone else to do it for them. At the same time, they want something in return. Because it is normal behaviour for human to do so especially for business people.</p> <p>But how are we going to generate our revenue? We don't mind putting up front the money for this project, but how are we going to generate the money? Our revenue comes from the filling tariff system. Nobody has thought about it. What we did, we did proper calculation. Based on amount of fruits that the factory has processed, amount of waste produced can lead to certain amount of gas. This amount of gas can be converted into this X amount of electricity. When we connect to tariff, it gives you forty- six cent per kilowatt.</p> <p>Average we calculated sixty matrix tonnes mills would be able to process two megawatt power. That was a good revenue stream for us already. That's when we took over the plant. But not all mill owners are open to this plan. They want to set up the plant by themselves, but they want us to help them set up the Biogas plant. So currently we have two types of revenue. The first revenue is from the continuous revenue income from the feeding tariff and the second one is from the sharing partnership from the mill owners.</p>	<p>Company's history of start- up</p> <p>Business opportunity/idea</p> <p>Company's revenue</p> <p>Income generated</p>
1107	R	Does this mean that you already know the direction of this company when you first start- up the business?	
1108	P19	Yes, we do. We know what we want to do. Straight away once the company is set up in 2012, we went to apply for feeding tariff and our 1 st customer was one plant from FELDA. FELDA has 73 palm oil mills. During that time, we believed that if we manage to get one or two mills it would be enough for us. After a while, we saw the demand going up. Then FELCRA came in. They asked us whether we want to it for them or not. But there was an issue. I might be able to raise one or two mills because of our company's status as SMEs. We got the funding from MDB (Multilateral Development Banks) for the FELDA mills. Then we were stuck. Because of the system is a bit slow. The thing is that, we can market our services but the market is very slow.	<p>Business direction</p> <p>Type of customers</p> <p>Financial aspects</p>
1109	R	Is that another strategic decision that is needed to be done?	
1110	P19	Hahaha (laughed). That is correct. We need to think fast on this aspect on how are we going to tackle this issue. Because I am familiar with the system in Malaysia based on my previous working experience. For you to get a loan, to get approval and by the time you get the money. It will take you almost a year. For us to do the project also would be a year. The picture	<p>Strategic decision</p> <p>The process</p>

		<p>they are telling us; in real life it doesn't happened that way. It is more towards conventional approach. We have to come out with all sort of collateral and so on.</p> <p>This process has dragged the time for us. As we know in business, time is important. The funding is also important. If you are able to raise enough funds, means that you can start the project. It all been tied up to the feeding tariff quota. Every year, they will release at least 15 megawatt quota. So far, Smart and Green has secured 45 megawatts. To be able to do this, we came out with ideas to have collaboration with promoters and the body (FELCRA). From which we separate it by the third party having it 70 percent, FELCRA 15 percent and for us is 15 percent. By doing this, we went to FELCRA for the paperwork and once we got the approvals. We got the projects which include five mills. We got the loans from RHB bank.</p>	Challenges in getting funds
1111	R	Could you please tell me a little bit about the company's visions and missions?	
1112	P19	Our vision is to be the best player in the renewable energy industry sector and our mission is to ensure that our products and services are safe and efficient. While, our mission to ensure that we deliver the best services with the best prices without neglecting the environmental issues. In the sense that we want our services and products to be efficient and environmental friendly.	Vision and missions
1113	R	So, briefly what are your products and services?	
1114	P19	This company focuses on the palm oil industry specifically on the waste treatment aspects. I can say that we supply products in which to set up Biogas mills within the palm oil plantations. These include our patented tank technologies, facilities and also consultation. We are maintaining the waste plant to be honest. We set up, we maintain and we also give consultation to our customers. But it all depends on the package that they are signed for. At the end of the day, our purpose is to treat the waste in the most efficient way and environmental safety.	Products and services- brief intro and info
1115	R	May I know before the current products and services you had mentioned just now, what products and services did the company provide when the business started?	
1116	P19	Well, since we started our business three years ago. It seems that our products and services are rather the same until today. We give priority on the development aspects of the products and services that we have to the extent that we want to deliver the most efficient and energy saving products to our customers. I do believe that in this current business world, it is not	Products and services- current and past

		all about getting big and fat profits only. Many business organizations are concern with the environmental issues and corporate responsibilities. In here, we have the same views too.	
1117	R	How about future products and services? Do you have any plan for this?	
1118	P19	Yeah, we have strategic planning for this. But like I have mentioned to you earlier. At the moment, we would love to give priority on improving the current products and services that we have. Due to the fact that, we want our products and services to be the best in this industry.	Products and services- future
1119	R	In term of the location of the business? I believe that this is your operating office, correct me if I am wrong. There are few things that I would like to know. When you started, where is your office? Do you have your own labs?	
1120	P19	<p>This is our operating office since we started our business in year 2012. But during that time, we only occupied one level which is this level. Later, we occupied another two levels. We just made some renovation for this level for more corporate looks.</p> <p>We don't have our own labs facilities and we have no intention of doing so to be honest. We got support from Biotech Corp and Johor Corporation, Johor Biotech and UTM (University Technology Malaysia). We don't want to spend money on labs because there are so many labs in Malaysia which are underutilised. So we decided and told our team, to use the labs that are already been set up by related institutions. Because of our main project is in Johor, we contacted those bodies to be our business partners with certain incentives. It is more like a win-win situation between us. Specifically, on micro bio works. What we did, we sent the microbes from the ponds to the labs. They will culture it and grow the microbes. Later, they will put it in the reactors. That is how it works.</p> <p>In that sense, we leave it to the experts and at the same time they gain some incentives from us. At the end of the day, all of us get the benefits from this collaboration. On our side, we can focus on what we are strong at from the business perspective.</p>	<p>Office/location/history.</p> <p>High technologies labs.</p> <p>Cutting cost</p> <p>Collaboration and support from others</p>
1121	R	Strategic decision making in relation to future funding? What do you mean by that?	
1122	P19	Earlier I have pointed out the issue on funding. It is a bit restricted for us to move forward without having appropriate funds. As this type of business acquire high set up cost. For each waste Biogas plant, we need millions.	Future plan

		<p>Then, we decided to come out with the strategic plans with the main intention is to secure our funds for future projects. We plan for IPO (Initial Public Offerings) a way out for getting more funds. Because the business requires huge capital and we do not have the capabilities to produce it from our own pockets. Just imagine that for one Biogas plantation, it costs RM (Ringgit Malaysia) three to five millions roughly.</p> <p>It is going to take time for this to materialize. But we do believe that this strategic plan that we have decided for this company will makes the company moves forward and becoming big player in this industry. For the time being, we are preparing ourselves towards this strategic planning. We are doing the market research, paperwork and all sort of thing in relation to this big plan. We are targeting in two- year time; we will get there. Hopefully by the year of 2017 or might be earlier than that. We are really working hard for this.</p>	<p>Strategic planning process</p> <p>Aims</p> <p>Information gathering</p> <p>Action plan</p>
1123	R	<p>How do you normally decide on the strategic planning for the company? And how do you do it?</p>	
1124	P19	<p>First, we have to know the current standing of the company. Among the scopes that we are looking at are our resources which include financial aspects, human resources and current progress. As for the external aspects are the potential markets, competitors and trends. We have to gather sufficient information in relation to what we want to pursue. Are we planning for the internal expansion for instance? There is a need to clearly state what are we planning to do in the future, right?</p> <p>Once, we know exactly our strategic plan. Then we move to the next step which is the planning section. With the information in our hands, we can do the brainstorming to begin with. All of our company's data is kept in company's data base system. We believe in data empowerment because almost every aspect of business operation depends on the information that we have in hands. Decision is made based on the business current trends and also company's current performance. By having an up to date data base system, life is easier. During the brainstorming session, what we normally do is we try to debates and discuss the important points in relation to the future planning. Until we come to the point that a decision is finalised, then we are done.</p>	<p>Strategic planning</p> <p>Process</p> <p>Factors to consider</p>
1125	R	<p>Can you tell me a little bit about the SDM? When do you normally have it? Who chair the meetings? The agenda? And who make the final decision?</p>	

1126	P19	Normally, for this specific type of meeting. We will have it every three months or what I can say is we have at least four times a year. I normally chair the meeting and the agenda is based on the previous minutes. But if we have new issue to discuss, we will inform Miss Syarela because she is the person in charge for taking minutes and the meeting's secretary. About the final decision, it will be decided by me and Navin.	
1127	R	Can I have a look at your organizational chart please?	
1128	P19	Basically, the Board of Directors include Mr. Navin and me. He is the Executive Director while I am the Managing Director. Both of us are actively involved in running the business. We have our management team which help us in running the organization's daily operations. Four of them have been with this company since day one. Miss Punitha is our Financial Officer and Mr. Siva is Executive Officer. While Mr. Thani is the Operation Officer and last but not least is Miss Syarela. She is our Administrative Officer. Since we have a plan to be an IPO company in the near future. We purposely formalized the company's organizational structure in such a way. But to be honest, we are not keen on having a formal structure within our small organization. Our organization is an open flat organization. We prefer our organization to be flexible and less structural because it gives us flexibility and creativity to be honest.	Organizational chart Present
1129	R	Are there any major changes between the current and the previous one?	
1130	P19	Nope, there is no significant change has occurred since the business started.	Changes in organizational chart- No.
1131	R	So in total, how many original staff that you have and currently, how many staff do you have? How about leaders, how many are there?	
1132	P19	As for leaders, it would both of us. Me and Navin. When we first started, we have seven staff. That doesn't count me and Navin. All in all, we started off with nine people. Personally, I have known them for years. At least more than five years. They have been of us since day one. They understand the company directions and they want to be part of it. In the sense that they are really working hard in parallel with us from the beginning. So far, they are the best. Now we have additional six people. In total we have thirteen staff working for this company.	Staff/original Number of new staff Leaders

1133	R	Who are your customers? In the early days and the current?	
1134	P19	We have the local customers which are the local mills and we have several overseas projects too which cover few ASIAN countries such as Indonesia and Philippines and Europe. For overseas projects, it is more on the consultation services. The overseas market we just started last year.	Current and previous customers
1135	R	How about the company's growth?	
1136	P19	<p>For the past two years, I can conclude that we grow really fast. So far everything goes as planned. We met the target and we are eventually looking forward to be a public listing company in the future. In the past two years, company's growth is between thirty- five to fifty- five percent. We are able to achieve this because of the business contract that we have secured in our first year which I have told you earlier. We are able to get more, but because of the funding restrictions. We are maintaining the figure at the moments plus we are being tied with our financial constraints to acquire further funding for the next potential customers.</p> <p>That is why we decided that our strategic plan is to get extra funds by planning ahead to be a public listing company. The soonest we get it, the better. It means that the business can move forward and flourish. The demand is there for our products and services. But we have limited resources. In another word, we are stuck. But for the next two years after we becoming a public listing company. It would be a different game. The direction remains the same where we want to get more mills into our project</p>	<p>Company growth</p> <p>Rapid growth</p>
1137	R	Back to the distribution of ownership between you and Mr. Navin. How was the distribution of the ownership within the company in the early days of your business and current?	
1138	P19	Since both of us are the founders of this company. We have decided to distribute the ownership between us equally. It means that 50-50. For the time being, the percentage between us remain the same. But when this company is converted into a public listing company, I believe that there will be significant changes especially in leadership department. There will be new leaders in the existing team.	Distribution of the ownership

1139	R	How's the decision been made to split it equally between both of you?	
1140	P19	This is due to the fact that we started this business after we sold our first company that we had earlier. The company that we sold before we venture into this business. I have told you about this, didn't I? We started this company based on the capital that we gained from the business transaction. Both of us invested quite amount of money in our first company. That is how we decided on the distribution of ownership between me and Navin.	Distribution of the ownership
1141	R	Could you explain the allocation of responsibilities between both of you?	
1142	P19	<p>We had decided to distribute the responsibilities in term of our expertise, skills and knowledge. But, in general both of us are directly involve in monitoring the overall business operation. I am responsible for the certain aspects of the organization such as paperwork, financial and operation. I get help from our trusted employees such as Mr. Thani, Miss Syarela and many more. They are given the responsibilities to handle the daily tasks for this organization.</p> <p>My part is to become the think tanker for the whole operation. Similar to Mr. Navin, his responsibilities are within the technical aspects of the business especially on the research and development context. He also has few people who run the daily tasks on behalf of the company similar to mine. Both of us have agreed to delegate daily operations to our trusted staff while we focus on the higher- level matters for the company. We are the think tankers for this business. We felt that if we directly involved in the daily operations, we are unable to give our 100% concentration on the bigger issue on bringing the company forward. That is the reason on why we are very selective in choosing our staff. Luckily that we found this highly motivated and reliable group of people. They are our right hands to be honest.</p> <p>To be honest, we are trying our best to minimize the rigidness in our organization. Since we are planning to make this company as a public listing company, we have to display a proper organizational chart. By right, we have a flexible organization where the communication between the organization members are transparent and open. If there is need to discuss, just straight away do it. That is the reason too for our latest office renovation. As you can see today, we just finished the renovation last</p>	

		month. There are many spaces for discussion within the relaxing environment. We can have it here in this meeting room, at the main lobby or even at the pantry. We have acquired three floors of within this building.	
1143	R	Now, we are going to discuss further about you as one of the leaders in this company. Could you please tell me a little bit about yourself? Your education background and business experience.	
1144	P19	My previous employment was with Biotech Corp as business consultant for the SMEs. I worked under Biotech Corp for nearly a decade. I graduated from the local university and specialization in Chemistry. But I took MBA five years ago. My involvement in the business is more than ten years.	
1145	R	How do you lead this company?	
1146	P19	<p>The way we lead in which is between me and Navin, that both of us are responsible for the company. We believe that to have more brain is much better than having a single brain. In another word, we work as a team. We do delegate each other with distinctive responsibilities, the need to do that is to ensure that everything is in place and the person is responsible for his actions. But, at the end of the day we help each other and co-operate with each other too.</p> <p>In term of the structure, it is more decentralised type of organization. I don't want this company to have conventional hierarchy type of organization. Main reason is because it will make us less creative and slowing down the decision- making process. Every decision counts. At the same time, we want to be more transparent with each other. By doing that, it would be lots easier for us to have effective communication and easier to work with each other too. It is more like an open type of organization.</p> <p>We don't restrict them to work at one place. As long as they come out with the targeted outputs, that is matter to us. That is the reason we make the office setting like you have seen today. There are many places for them to sit, discuss and do their work too. We are taking example from companies from United States in term of office setting. We want to create positive vibes and at the same time, we want them to work in a very high motivation.</p>	<p>Leadership style</p> <p>Team based leadership</p> <p>Staff</p> <p>Responsibilities</p>

		<p>Before we do the renovation, we asked their opinions and while doing the renovation, we took into consideration of their opinions.</p> <p>If there is need to discuss, just straight away do it. That is the reason too for our latest office renovation – the open plan type of office. People are encouraged to have face- to -face interactions and feeling less restricted with this type of office set up. There are many spaces for discussion within the relaxing environment</p> <p>But the way we look at it is a bit different. We decided to focus on the strategic planning of this company. Rather than focusing on the daily administrative part of the company. We give the responsibilities to our manager Mr. Srivota to handle the daily operation affairs together with the financial manager. We trust these guys.</p> <p>Why are we doing this? We trust them and we personally handpicked them from the beginning of this business. We used to know them for a long time from our previous jobs. So we are pretty confident with their skills, knowledge and expertise. Let them focus on their works, while for both of us, we have extra time and energy to handle bigger issues for the company such as on strategic implementation.</p>	
1147	R	<p>Earlier, we have discussed on the distribution of responsibilities aspects between both of you. May I know, does the responsibilities remains the same for most of the time? Are there any responsibilities overlapping?</p>	
1148	P19	<p>In general, the responsibilities that both of us had agreed on remain the same for most of the time. I can say that, the possibility of the responsibilities to be overlapped is very low (laughed). We agreed on the given posts and responsibilities and had clearly stamped it down to avoid overlapping and confusion in the later days. Unless, there are certain circumstances that we cannot avoid that require one of us to get the tasks done even though it is not ours in the first place. For instance, I have to make a decision one day on the technical aspects because Mr. Navin was on vacation and on behalf of him. I had to make the decision. Later, I consulted him on the decision that I had made. He understands it and we have agreed on it too.</p>	
1149	R	<p>Do you find any difficulty in practicing this type of leadership?</p>	

1150	P19	<p>Well, there is no such thing as a perfect leadership style in this reality of business world. In my honest view, this team leadership style is not easy unless you have team leaders who have the same brainwaves, visions and determination. In our situation, we have worked together before this, we have overcome the difficult times in the earlier stage where we sorted out our strong differences and personalities by focusing on the overall benefits of the organization. I am very determined type of person and strict that sometime bring discomfort to my staff. On the other hands, Mr. Navin is rather laid back and chatty and his approaches are more acceptable among our staff. I have learnt from him on how to be a better leader by indirectly implemented his approaches in leading this company.</p> <p>But, I can feel that in the future there will be responsibilities overload due to rapid growth in our company. Currently, it is manageable for both of us. Once this company achieves PLO title, things will not be the same anymore. We need to prepare ourselves with this challenge.</p>	
1151	R	How do you learn the leadership skills and knowledge from Mr. Navin?	
1152	P19	It is through observations and discussions that we have between us. There are times where I can see it only within the limited context and when we had discussions, his ideas were totally different from mine. He is a bit junior than I am. Maybe he sees things in different angles and he has hands- on experience in the industry that we are in now. He's experience as an engineer for quite sometimes gives him added advantage to the extent that he knows what is happening in the industry. In my case, I am more into the paperwork because of my previous consultancy jobs. I can say that we complement each other (laughed)	
1153	R	Now, we are going to discuss on the strategic decision- making aspect of the company. When it comes to strategic decision- making process, how do you do it?	
1154	P19	Apart from both of us, we have an advisory team that gives advice in specific technical areas. They are Dr. Suhaimi, an expert in composite fields. He is a government pensioner and has vast experience in the fields. He has been helping us since we started our first business before we started this business. Meanwhile, Dr. Lakshimi is from India. He is the person who knows well on the tanks aspects for the plantation including reactors and everything related to that.	

1155	R	Do they have shares in the company? What is their involvement in the company's decision- making process?	
1156	P19	No, they do not have shares in this company. They are here to provide us with their expertise and knowledge. Since they are the experts within their specific fields, their opinions are valuable for us. We give them monetary rewards for their involvement. Basically, they give us the inputs such as their views on the projects and we will take into accounts on their views during our decision- making process. In the sense that, they are our external sources of information.	
1157	R	How long does it take to make strategic decisions for the company?	
1158	P19	Normally, it won't take too long during the meeting. I can say that we take few hours before we come to our final decisions.	
1159	R	How about the implementation of the decision made and what happened after the plans implemented?	
1160	P19	We will give the responsibilities to Mr. Thani to deliver it to our staff. Normally, he will call them for meeting and inform them about the decision. It is a normal practice for this company to hold a meeting after the strategic plans took place. The main purpose is to review the progress of the plans. The session helps us to learn more on the execution aspect of our future strategic plans.	
1161	R	When you mentioned earlier about the process of strategic decision making of the company, what guidelines or methods do you have for information gathering?	
1162	P19	Basically, we do not have special methods of doing it. Like others, if we need to make crucial decisions on certain issues. The nearest example that I can give is when we decided to make this company a public listed company. Main reason is for business expansion. First, we will gather the required information from internal and external sources. Internal sources would be	

		from our own database and external would involve information from third parties. This include information from our appointed experts that I have told you earlier. When all the information is within our hands, then we set the meeting and the information is used for making the most appropriate decision that we can possibly think off.	
1163	R	How does the leadership style help during the strategic decision making process?	
1164	P19	I feel that the burden of making important decision is being shared by others. Same goes to responsibilities to lead this company too. I believe in the power of teamwork. Things that seems impossible to achieve would have been easier when we work in a team. The ideas and inspirations are better in comparison to a single person. When it comes to make decisions for the company, I am glad that I have other person who can help me with.	
1164	R	With that question, I think that this session come to an end. Thank you very much Mr. Saravanan for your time and support. You have been a big help to me. I hope that your company will stay successful and achieve the dreams.	
1165	P19	Not a big deal Durra. Thank you very much to you too. I hope that you can successfully completed your study and become Dr. Durra when the next time we meet. All the best!	