

# **KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND GROWTH OF SME'S IN WA MUNICIPALITY: THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEE TRAINING**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) contribute immensely to job creation, economic growth, and poverty reduction in our economy. Despite these contributions most SMEs are collapsing due to inadequate employee training and knowledge management. This study investigated the impact of employee training and knowledge management in small and medium enterprises in Wa Municipality. The survey research design was adopted as the methodology. Questionnaires were used as the data collection instrument. Data gathered were presented using tables and figures. The study revealed that training and knowledge management have helped to reduce staff turnover, increase efficiency and overall cost of production and increase customer satisfaction. The audience, staff responsible for training and knowledge management, types of training and knowledge management, funds for training job security as factors affecting training and knowledge management in the SMEs. It is recommended that steps be taken to improve training and knowledge management programmes in the SMEs.*

**Key words:** *Employee Training, knowledge management, economic growth, cost reduction, job security, job creation, poverty reduction, customer satisfaction*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Small and medium enterprises serve as an integral part of our collective effort towards the developmental goals in an economy. Although there are many other factors that play a key role, an organisation must have effective employees in order to stay financially solvent and competitive. Whichever training and knowledge management programs offered to employees will be very essential to them in that, it will help in building their career positioning and will prepare them for greater challenges. However, the employers' failure to train employees effectively is due to the fear of revealing their trade secret that will help them to maintain their market share to maximize their wealth. Despite potential drawbacks, employee training and knowledge management provides both the organisation and individual employees with benefits that make cost and time a worthwhile investment. This study will therefore seek to examine employee training and knowledge management in small and medium enterprises in Wa Municipality.

## **1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The SMEs sector has been characterized as having fewer dedicated training departments and budget (Kitching and Blackburn 2002), inferior levels of work based training provision (Hoque and Bacon, 2006), and lower number of qualified employees and limited participation in training schemes (Matlay, 2007). Furthermore, owners/managers do not appreciate the role employee training offer to business productivity and profitability.

## **1.2 OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the study are to ascertain the impact of training and knowledge management on employees in the SMEs in Wa Municipality, identify factors that affect employee training and knowledge management in the SMEs in Wa Municipality and to recommend measures that could help improve employee training and knowledge management in the SMEs in Wa Municipality.

### **1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Employee Training is essential to improving business performance through enhanced profitability and productivity (Reid and Harris, 2002). This study will add up to the already known facts in the field of knowledge management and training of SMEs. The recommendations will also serve as reference material for organisations to use and improve performance in the area of knowledge management and employee training.

### **1.4 SCOPE**

Specifically the study was concerned with knowledge management and growth in SMEs as a whole, it was restricted to SMEs in Wa Municipality and not the entire region.

### **1.5 LIMITATION**

The study was not representing the whole Upper West Region because it will be expensive and time-consuming. As the study did not cover the whole region, it lacked the general applicability to other districts in Upper West Region.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 THE CONCEPT OF TRAINING**

Training is basically a learning experience which seeks a relatively permanent change in an individual's skills, knowledge, attitudes or social behaviour (De Cenzo and Robbins, 2012). It involves learning and educating employee to do something to result in things being done differently (Brimleys 2008). Training programmes offered by a business might include a variety of educational techniques and programmes that can be attended on a compulsory or voluntary basis by staff. Rainey (2006) opined that training may be described as an endeavor aimed to improve or develop additional competency or skills in an employee on the job one currently holds in order to increase the performance or productivity.

The need for training is more prominent given today's business climate and the growth in technology which affects the economy and society at large. Employees are trained to ensure that current or future needs of an organization can be met. Effective training is paramount for survival and growth of a business (Armstrong 2010). In designing the training programmes both the individual goals and organisational goals are kept in mind. Although it may not be entirely possible to ensure a sync, but competencies are chosen in a way that a win-win is created for the employee and the organisation.

### **2.2 THE CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

Knowledge Management (KM) is not a new concept. It has been defined differently based on the situation it is used. However, many people including entrepreneurs have built on it through reading its literature. Michael (2012) pointed out that KM is a term that arose approximately two decades ago roughly in 1990. Very early in the KM movement, Davenport (1994) offered the still widely quoted definition: "Knowledge management is the process of capturing, distributing, and effectively using knowledge." This definition has the virtue of being simple, and straight to the point. A few years later, the Gartner Group created another second definition of KM, as "Knowledge management is a discipline that promotes an integrated approach in identifying, capturing, evaluating, retrieving, and sharing all of an enterprise's information assets. These assets may

include databases, documents, policies, procedures, and previously un-captured expertise and experience in individual workers."

The operational origin of KM, as the term is understood today, arose within the consulting community and from there the principles of KM were rather rapidly spread by the consulting organisations to other disciplines. The consulting firms quickly realised the potential of the Intranet flavor of the Internet for linking together their own

geographically dispersed and knowledge-based organisations. Also, once having gained expertise in how to take advantage of intranets to connect across their organisations and to share and manage information and knowledge, they then understood that the expertise they had gained was a product that could be sold to other organisations. A new product of course needed a name, and the name chosen, or at least arrived at, was Knowledge Management and the timing was propitious, as the enthusiasm for intellectual capital in the 1980s, had primed the pump for the recognition of information and knowledge as essential assets for any organisation.

Another way to view and define Knowledge management is as the movement to replicate the information environment known to be conducive to successful R&D. We are in the post-industrial information age and that large percentage of the working population consists of information workers. Koenig (1990) pointed out that confidential part of information workers have been studied with a focus on identifying environmental aspects that lead to successful research and the strongest relationship by far is with information and knowledge access and communication. It is quite logical then to attempt to apply those same successful environmental aspects to knowledge workers at large, and that is what in fact KM attempts to do. In terms of sharing tacit knowledge, most SMEs sector is not strong compared to large established firms (Hutchinson & Quintas, 2008), with managers of SMEs trying to avoid outflow of knowledge for the business, hence, blocking knowledge sharing (Bozbura, 2007)

### **2.3 TRAINING AND PROMOTION OF SMES**

Panagiotakopoulos (2010) reported that SME owners do not understand the roles of worker training play in an employee skills improvement. Also provision of sufficient training, health and welfare facilities to employees are resisted by most SMEs due to the resulting increase in costs (Shafeek, 2016). Shafeek also pointed out that management of SMEs are less likely to receive management training compared to larger firms due to financial problems and information gaps making few SMEs to see training as a strategic tool. Formal training according to Macphersonet (2011) is the corner stone for developing firms. Vuuren and Botha (2010) revealed that the performance and skills of employees improved after going through training programmes.

### **2.4 PRACTICES ADOPTED BY SMES IN TRAINING EMPLOYEE**

Papadakis, Kyridis, Projopis and Christos (2013) emphasised that best practice is the instructions, techniques and methodologies of training that have proven to help bring efficiency in an organisation. Creating a competitive advantage, small and medium enterprises sees their customers as an essential ingredient in service provision, so recruiting and training the right staff is required. Eaglen et al. (2000) contended that formal and informal training are some of the activities adopted to enhance skills and knowledge of employees. These practices improve employees' interpersonal skills, attitudes and service knowledge in order to deliver a quality service to increase productivity (Rainbird, 1994). Chan, (2010) also elucidated that promoting knowledge

acquisition and accomplishing the training objectives, textbooks, handouts, manuals, films and videos are fundamental.

## **2.5 IMPACT OF TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT ON EMPLOYEES**

Training and knowledge management plays a key role in employee commitment. Constance, (2006) indicated that, a well-trained employee is likely to have greater morale and confidence when the employee feels sufficiently prepared to meet the job demands. The more prepared employees feel to meet the demand of their jobs, the more likely they are to stay in the role rather than becoming frustrated and looking for other employment. Hence Enoch, (2003) commented that, training and knowledge management of staff helps reduce rates of boredom amongst workers.

Joseph, (2002) also highlighted that, a well-trained and managed employee has skills and knowledge that could potentially be transferred to others, better-paid positions in other organisations or in other firms that offer better pay and better prospects.

Quincey, (2004) opined that, lack of training often leads to frustration within the workplace and frustrated employees are often unhappy and he added that, adequate employee training can help reduce employee frustration by preparing them to handle the responsibilities of the job effectively. Foster, (2003) also indicated that, ample job training and knowledge management of employees' results in employees who perform their jobs more efficiently and employees who are effective in their jobs are less likely to become dissatisfied is in a position to contribute more.

Bolden (2003) posited that, most employers consider employee training as costly and an unimportant expense to their companies. However, imparting workers with the skills necessary to get the job done will boost their job morale and fewer mistakes will be made. Personnel who are untrained may be more costly than even the wages paid to them due to the mistakes they could easily make. Employees knowing that they are cared for will tend to work harder in order to reciprocate the favour. Hard work eventually leads to more returns, and this might be in terms of production or even profit margins. Also, trained personnel will also ask for less help, ultimately improving their own efficiency further. Craig, (2001) highlighted that, employee training and knowledge management gives the workforce a good chance to realise their potential and eventually work at their highest level.

Stein, (2001) indicated that, imparting skills to employees is also another tactic of retaining skilled workforce. He explained that, a workforce that has been trained by the company will feel as part of the company family. They will feel happier in their jobs and valued by their employer, and therefore will be more likely to stay within the firm. Finally, the retention of trained and well managed staff will not only reduce the high cost of recruiting new staff but also have a positive impact on production. For Alexander, (2003); trained and well managed employees do not require tight control and supervision as they are well aware of how to perform a job which can show higher performance by making optimum and best utilisation of the materials, tools, equipment's and other resources provided to them. Training and knowledge management develops a line of proficient and skilled managers as it prepares employees for complex and higher level tasks while employees also adjust to the job better with fewer rates of absenteeism and turnover, which will enable the employees to produce quality and quantity output, be able to respond and adapt to the changing technology well.

Training and knowledge management is often initiated for an employee or a group of employees in order to build a more efficient, effective and highly motivated team, which enhances the company's competitive

position and improves employee morale; ensure adequate human resources for expansion into new programs, test the operation of a new performance management system to increase job satisfaction, employee motivation and employees morale thereby reducing employee turnover (Spencer, 2001).

## **2.6 FACTORS AFFECTING TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN SMES**

Robert, (2005) indicated that, training and knowledge management is a crucial component in preparing new the factors that influence training and knowledge management programmes enables SMEs to develop or change their employees for their positions and keeping existing employees current on critical information. He indicated also that, understanding current employee education to make it fit the needs of SMEs operations and their employees. Below are reviews on some factors that affect training and knowledge management in SMEs.

## **2.7 PURPOSE OF THE TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

Gurthar, (2003) indicated that, the purpose or goal of the training and knowledge management is a major factor in the planning and execution. In order to develop the right material, SMEs need a clear understanding of the skills or information they want the employees to have after completing the training. In addition, the scope of the training and knowledge management also affects whether SMEs handle the programmes internally or send employees to programme sessions through another firm or college.

## **2.8 RESOURCES AVAILABLE**

According to Tanene, (2001), the resources available to the SMEs training and knowledge management department affect the type and depth of the training and knowledge management. She added that, the available budget affects the amount and type of training and knowledge management. For example, sending employees to a local college for a training course may not fit into the budget. Training and knowledge management materials are also relevant when developing strong programmes and lack of resources limits the possibilities for training and knowledge management.

## **2.9 STAFF IN CHARGE OF TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

George, (2006) stated that, the staff members in charge of training and knowledge management play a role in the effectiveness of the programme. The trainers with education and experience in teaching adults are better equipped to develop sessions that align with the desired goals. It is concluded that, SMEs want trainers with an understanding of their values and goals, as well as enthusiasm for teaching the employees.

## **2.10 TIME FRAME**

Kotler, (2004) highlighted that, a focus on training and knowledge management for a small business or other size organisation is generally the most beneficial when it is ongoing. He added that, whether SMEs present formal workshops or courses to employees or offer hands-on daily training opportunities, they can increase the skill and work product level of their employees by implementing ongoing training efforts. Also, it helps individual employees to increase productivity and advance their personal careers while contributing to boost of the bottom line at the same time.

## **2.11 TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT TYPES**

Training employees and managers is a key element of the strategy for building business successful service encounters (Heskett et al., 1990) and the method use to provide training and knowledge management can influence how employees use them (Cole, 2004). Online training and knowledge management, hands-on training and knowledge management or formal training and knowledge management classes or courses are all options for improving employees skills and knowledge. Since each employee learns at a different pace, and in different ways, it is typically best to offer different formats for training and knowledge management, so employees can choose the format that allows them to learn.

## **2.12 FUNDS FOR TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

Cleren, (2000) opined that, adequate funding continues to be a concern. While the need to use resources to provide employee training and knowledge management increases, the resources to do so may not be available. Most managers play a central role in the activities of SMEs (Bright-O'Neerill and Cromie, 2003), so management control tend to be based on the owners supervision with formal policies tends to be absent (Daft, 2007). One of the first items to be eliminated in times of financial uncertainty is funding for training and knowledge management.

## **2.13 LESS JOB SECURITY**

Roland, (2005) opined that, employees in general have less job security than they used to. He added that, people constantly hear that they can expect to have many different employers and even different careers during their work life. But given this message and its reality, employees are looking for employers who will provide them with opportunities to develop transferable skills.

## **2.14 IMPROVING EMPLOYEE TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN SMES**

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) can reap the rewards of providing training for their employees because well-trained workers help increase productivity and performance from employee training and knowledge management can reduce staff turnover, lower maintenance costs, reduce equipment breakdowns, and can also result in fewer customer complaints (Arnold, 2003), training and knowledge management help to reduce turnover costs in SMEs (Ambrose, 2005).

A positive relationship exist between training and knowledge management and the performance of SMEs because, training and knowledge management helped to increase efficiencies in processes, resulting in financial gain, to increase capacity to adopt new technologies and methods, innovation in strategies and products and to reduce employee turnover to enhance SMEs image (Anoh, 2003), and maximizing the potential of the workforce has a direct positive impact on SMEs' profit levels because a trained employee can handle more responsibilities than before due to the newly acquired know-how, which in-turn, improves their versatility (Gertrude 2001). Basten, (2003) postulated that the business industry is very competitive and this is partly due to the advancements in technology. He added that, employee training and knowledge management also helps the business profit margins as well as customer satisfaction.

Angelus (2001) indicated that one of the benefits of training and knowledge management for SMEs is the provision of skills inside the firms which reduce overall cost of an SME's operations. Better training and Knowledge management also help to reduce waste and machine down time which directly increases the

productivity of SMEs(Amin, (2000), increase communication between different levels of SMEs and any deficiency in processes and jobs are eliminated and those close to production processes become involve in the management (Prince, 2001). The main source of an SME's income is its staff expertise and skills (Mark, 2005). Training and knowledge management is a key requirement for new recruits and proper training helps them to understand the job with its requirements and responsibilities.

### **3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Quantitative research designs was used as the main research approach. Data obtained from the study was organised and presented in frequency tables for easy understanding. Interpretation and analysis of data was carried out using simple statistical techniques like percentages.

### **4.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS**

The major issues discussed here include the gender, age, educational background of respondents and the number of years they have worked as SMEs in relation to the research topic.

#### **4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS**

Reading from table 4.1, revealed that males had the highest number of SMEs of 29 representing 75% with 24 females SMEs representing 45% in the distribution of gender engaged in SMEs in Wa Municipality. Also the study explored that majority 96% representing 51 respondents of the SMEs in the Municipality were between the 20-49 ages with only 4% representing 2 respondents within 50 years and above. This is an indication that, Wa Municipal has a youthful labour force making the it more attractive for investors since most of them require skilled and energetic labour.

Again, the results show that majority of the respondents 43 (81%) of the respondent have had qualifications up to SSSCE/WASSCE, whilst only 10 (19%) of the respondents had education up to the Junior High School level. The findings showed that respondents have generally high educational background which is a good sign for development. Education has been described as one of the factors that promote sound financial management and promotion of investment. The high level of education among the respondents may affect the ability to use the facilities that have been obtained from the institutions for the purpose for which they were taken. The results from table 4.1 further shows that majority 38 (72%) have work experience between 1 – 5 years, whilst 13 (24%) of the respondents had worked between 6 – 20 and then only 2 (4%) have worked as SMEs for 21 years and above. This indicates that majority of the respondents have not had enough experience to manage businesses, and this poses a threat to the sustenance and survival of SME's in Wa Municipality.



**Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentages (%)</b>	<b>Cumulative (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	29	55	55
	Female	24	45	100
	<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>	
<b>Age</b>	20-29	38	72	72
	30-39	11	20	92
	40-49	2	4	96
	50- above	2	4	100
	<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>	
<b>Educational Background</b>	JHS	10	19	19
	SSSCE/WASSCE	18	34	53
	O' Level	1	2	55
	A' Level	1	2	57
	Diploma	6	11	68
	First Degree	15	28	96
	Second Degree	2	4	100
	<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>	
<b>Experience (years)</b>	1-5 years	38	72	72
	6-10 years	6	11	83
	11-15 years	5	9	92
	16-20 years	2	4	96
	21years-above	2	4	100
	<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>	

**Source: Field Study, 2016**

**4.2 IMPACTS OF TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT OF EMPLOYEES IN SMES**

The researchers sought to find out from the respondents whether they had any idea about the impacts of training and knowledge management on employees in the selected SMEs in Wa Municipality and if so what they thought were the various impacts. On whether they had any idea about the impacts of training and knowledge management on employees in the selected SMEs in Wa Municipality, a hundred percent (100%) response was recorded. When asked to indicate the various impacts, the following responses were made.

Table 4.7 shows that, 6 (11.3%) respondents opined that, training and knowledge management updates employees on new and enhanced skills,5 (9.4%) respondents responded that increase in employees' commitment impact training and knowledge management. Another 5 (9.4%) stated that training and knowledge management helped employees to perform their work more efficiently, then 5 (9.4%) also opined that, training and knowledge management helps employees to adjust their jobs better. Also, 3 (5.7%) respondents were of the view that, increase in employees morale and confidence was an impact of training and knowledge management on employees in the SMEs in Wa Municipality. In addition 3 respondents representing 5.7% indicated that, training and knowledge management gave the workforce a good chance to

realise their potential. Twenty-six (49.1%) respondents however indicated that, all the other options impact training and knowledge management on employees in the selected SMEs in Wa Municipality. This implies that training helps employees to perform their work more efficiently, given the workforce a good chance to realize their potential, helped employees to adjust their job better and update employees on new and enhanced skills.

**Table 4.7: Impact of Training and Knowledge Management on Employees in WA**

<b>Impact</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Increases employees commitment	5	9.4
Increases employees morale and confidence	3	5.7
Helps employee to perform their job more efficiently.	5	9.4
Gives the work force a good chance to realize their potentials	3	5.7
Helps employees to adjust their job better	5	9.4
Updates employees on new and enhanced skills	6	11.3
All the above	26	49.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2016**

#### **4.3 FACTORS AFFECTING TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN SMES**

In finding out from the respondents whether they had any idea about the factors that affects training and knowledge management in the selected SMEs, a hundred percent (100%) response rate was recorded in the affirmative.

From Table 4.8 it could be deduced that, funds for training and knowledge management 14 (26.4%) respondents and less job security 14 (26.4%) respondents respectively were the factors that affect training and knowledge management most. The third factor in the SMEs in Wa Municipality was time frame 4 (7.5%) respondents out of the 53 respondents. This was followed by availability of resources 2 (3.8%) and the audience 2 (3.8%) respondents respectively. Out of the 53 respondents only 1 respondent representing 1.9% viewed purpose of training and knowledge management as the least factor affecting training and management in SMEs in Wa Municipality. The study revealed that the major constraint to training and knowledge management was availability of funds and job security both recording about 53%.

**Table 4.8: Factors Affecting Training and Knowledge Management in SMEs**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Purpose of training and knowledge management	1	1.9
Resource available	2	3.8
The audience	2	3.8
Staff in charge of training and knowledge management	1	1.9
Time frame	4	7.5
Funds for training and knowledge management	14	26.4
Less job security	14	26.4
All the above	15	28.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2016**

#### **4.4 MEASURES THAT CAN IMPROVE EMPLOYEE TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

The researchers wanted to establish from the respondents whether they had any idea about the measures that can improve employee training and knowledge management in the selected SMEs in Wa Municipality and if so what they thought were the various impacts. A hundred percent (100%) responses were recorded. When asked to indicate the various measures, the following responses were made.

Reading from table 4.9, 7 (13.2%) respondents indicated proper supervision, 3 (5.7%) respondents indicated availability of resource personnel. Also 11(20.8%) respondents indicated financial capacity, while 9 (17.0%) respondent indicated healthy environment and then 23 43.4% respondent indicated all the above. The results from the data indicated that proper supervision, availability of resource personnel, financial capacity and healthy environment were measures that can improve employee training and knowledge management in the selected SMEs in WA Municipality.

**Table 4.9: Measures that can Improve Employee Training and Knowledge Management**

<b>Measures</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Proper supervision	7	13.2
Availability of resource personnel	3	5.7
Financial capability	11	20.8
Healthy environment	9	17.0
All the above	23	43.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Field survey, 2016**

## **5.0 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

The study revealed that, the practices adopted by SMEs in training their employees were workshops, in-service training, formal and informal training and also training and knowledge management impacted on employees in the selected SMEs because, it increased employees commitment, morale and confidence, helped employees to perform their jobs more efficiently, gave the workforce a good chance to realize their potential, helped employees to adjust their job better and updated employees on new and enhanced skills.

The study also revealed that, reduction in staff turnover, lowering maintenance costs, helping to increase efficiencies in processes, helping employee to increase capacity, increasing innovation in strategies and products, enhancing SMEs image leading to a more experienced workforce, establishing a good reputation, improving SMEs' strength in market presence, reducing overall cost of SMEs' operations and increasing customer satisfaction and quality of service, increasing communication between different levels in the SMEs and helping them understand their job better were impacts of training and knowledge management on the performance of SMEs in Wa Municipality.

Finally, the study revealed that resources available, the audience, staff in charge of training and knowledge management, the time frame, training and knowledge management types, funds for training and knowledge management and less job security as the factors that affected training and knowledge management in the SMEs.

## **6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings authorities should allow:

- SMEs and employees to decide on the format that allows them to learn with ease.
- employees and SMEs need to be encouraged to active participate in workshops to improve upon their skills and knowledge
- competent staff should be responsible for training and knowledge management in the SMEs
- more funds should be allocated for knowledge management and improving job security.
- more attention should be paid on financial capability and then available resources

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

Knowledge management and growth in SMEs cannot be over emphasised. Training and knowledge management programs offered to employees and SMEs is a significant tool for employee development in that, they help SMEs and employees to adjust their job better, update SMEs and employees on new and enhanced skills, build SMEs and employees confidence and prepare them for greater challenges.

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