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Strategies Female Small Business Owners Use to Succeed in Business

Mere Sovick
Walden University

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Walden University

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Mere Sovick

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Dr. Dorothy Hanson, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

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Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University

2017

Abstract

Strategies Female Small Business Owners Use to Succeed in Business

by

Mere Vauhi-Leo Tari-Sovick

MS, University of Phoenix, 2006

BS, University of Phoenix, 2004

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

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Abstract

Small businesses owned by women cease operations 11% more often than businesses owned by men. Women, who own over 37% of all businesses in the United States, contribute significantly to the 50% small business failure rate. The purpose of this multiple-case study was to explore strategies 5 women who own small businesses use to succeed in business beyond 5 years on Bainbridge Island, Washington. The theory of constraints was the conceptual framework. Data were collected through semistructured face-to-face interviews, websites, company documents, and archival records. Transcript review of interview response data was used to strengthen the credibility of the interview data. Three themes emerged: customer and employee relations, leadership, and strategic management. Customer and employee relations were the most important theme, and strategic management was the second most important. Strategic management was one of the main sources of growth in all the 5 participant's businesses. Participants discussed skills in managerial decisions and strategies to manage the day-to-day business operations that played an active role in entrepreneurship. Female small business owners identified strategies used to eliminate constraints that may have prohibited the business operation to succeed. The findings may inspire entrepreneurs to enhance their leadership skills, increase capacity to expand their small businesses, start new businesses, and explore entrepreneurial options. Social implications include the potential to serve as a guide that encourages female entrepreneurs to enhance their professional practices and to adopt new business strategies to make better strategic decisions.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Half of all small businesses discontinue operations within the first 5 years (U.S. Small Business Administration [SBA], 2012b), and small businesses owned by women cease operations 11% more frequently than businesses owned by men (Al-Mannai et al., 2013). Because of this disparity, revenues of small businesses owned by women continue to lag behind small businesses owned by men, despite dramatic increases in the numbers of small businesses launched by women (Johnson-Lutz, 2014; Q. Wang, 2013). In this study, I examined what skills female small business owners use to succeed beyond the 5-year mark on Bainbridge Island, Washington.

I employed an exploratory multiple case study approach to capture a deeper understanding of the strategies female small business owners use to stay in business longer than 5 years. A selection of women entrepreneurs who have been in business for longer than 5 years were invited to participate in semistructured interviews and answer open-ended questions. Section 1 includes the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the background of the problem, and the types of female-owned businesses explored. This section includes the research questions, the conceptual framework, and the definitions of terms, limitations, and assumptions.

Background of the Problem

Piperopoulos (2012) found that women own 37% of all businesses in the United States; similarly, a report commissioned by American Express (“The 2013 State of Women-Owned Businesses Report,” 2013) indicated women own one-third of firms in

the United States. The number of small businesses owned by women has increased dramatically in the early part of the 21st century, from 5.4 million to 10.4 million (Jiang, Zimmerman, & Guo, 2012).

Acs, Bardasi, Estrin, and Svejnar (2011), Johnson-Lutz (2014), and Q. Wang (2013) noted women-owned businesses created an employment gain of more than 2.3 million jobs. The U.S. Census Bureau (2016) reported that women-owned businesses in 2012 employed more than 8.4 million workers while generating receipts of \$357.9 billion. Despite the number of jobs created in female-owned businesses, small businesses owned by women have higher failure rates than small businesses owned by men (Johnson-Lutz, 2014; Reichard & Sweida, 2013; Q. Wang, 2013).

Dalborg, von Friedrichs, and Wincent (2012), Marlow and McAdam (2013), and Q. Wang (2013) claimed that regardless of the increase in numbers of women-owned businesses, the rate of failure among these businesses is higher than in businesses owned by men. An expected challenge for female small business owners is the lack of skills needed to expand their business knowledge, access to financial resources, and strategies to boost their products or services (Kyrgidou & Petridou, 2013). A gap exists in the literature regarding the skills used by women who have succeeded to maintain small businesses beyond the 5-year mark (Kyrgidou & Petridou, 2013).

Problem Statement

Small businesses owned by women fail at higher rates than small businesses owned by men (Marlow & McAdam, 2013). As many as 50% of women-owned small

businesses fail at or before their fifth anniversary (Dahmen & Rodriguez, 2014). The general business problem was that women embark on small business initiatives without adequate training, which results in premature business failure. The specific business problem was that some women who own small businesses lack the strategies to overcome constraints that prevent them from succeeding in business beyond 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies women who own small businesses use to succeed in business beyond 5 years. The target population consisted of women who have owned and successfully operated small businesses beyond 5 years on Bainbridge Island, Washington. Findings from this study may contribute to social change by revealing new knowledge that promotes understanding of the strategies needed for women to be successful in business for longer than 5 years. Successful entrepreneurs contribute to the local economy by adding jobs for themselves and their employees.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I employed a qualitative research approach. The intent of qualitative researchers is to understand the issue under study within the context of the participants' experiences (Bailey, Hennink, & Hutter, 2011). The study's context was running a business successfully for longer than 5 years on Bainbridge Island, Washington. I emphasized the contextual understanding that participants constructed of events rather than seeking to discover an absolute truth. Quantitative and mixed methods

analysis were not an appropriate fit for this study because the focus of this study was neither to examine relationships between quantitative variables nor to establish whether a relationship existed between known variables by asking closed-ended questions.

A multiple case study design is a qualitative approach that researchers use to capture a perspective of actual activities and situations within the natural context of the case (Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) also asserted that a case study design relies on satisfying three criteria. First, the research questions must address *how* or *why*. Second, the researcher must have little or no control concerning participants' behavior. Finally, the focus of the research must be a contemporary issue.

The study satisfied the three criteria. Ethnographers examine shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language within in a cultural group, and phenomenological researchers focus on the unique lived experiences of individuals around a phenomenon (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). Neither of these two designs satisfies the criteria for this study.

Research Question

To address the purpose of this qualitative multiple explorative case study, I identified a single research question: What strategies do female small business owners use to succeed in business beyond 5 years?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to be successful beyond 5 years? Please give specific examples.

2. How did these business strategies help improve or enhance your business?
3. How did you obtain your business strategies?
4. What external constraints negatively affect your business, and what strategies have helped you address them?
5. What staffing, equipment, or facilities constraints have negatively affected your business, and what strategies have helped you address them?
6. What material constraints have you dealt with to run your business, and what strategies have helped you address them?
7. What supplier constraints have you experienced, and what strategies have helped you address them?
8. What financial constraints exist for your business, and what strategies have helped you address them?
9. What internal policy constraints limit your business, and what strategies have helped you address them?
10. What other recommendations do you have to address any constraints that have not been included in this interview?

Conceptual Framework

The most relevant conceptual management theory for this study was the theory of constraints (TOC). The TOC is a management philosophy introduced by Goldratt (1990). According to the TOC, the job of management is to pay attention to the few constraints that prevent the organization owner from achieving his or her goals (Spector, 2011). The

primary function of the TOC is to the performance of a system (Naor, Bernardes, & Coman, 2013). As Mears, de la Banda, Wallace, and Demoen (2014) explained, the main premise of the TOC is that constraints in the business prevent the business owner from achieving his or her highest goals.

This theory was the best fit to understanding what strategies female small business owners use to succeed beyond 5 years. As explained in the TOC, seven categories of constraints exist. Oglethorpe and Heron (2013) outlined these seven categories of constraint types, detailing each to its origin, its weakness to business, and how to address each constraint: (a) market constraints, (b) resource constraints, (c) material constraints, (d) supplier constraints, (e) financial constraints, (f) policy constraints, and (g) knowledge or competency. The knowledge or competency category fits the specific business problem of this study, which is that female small business owners may lack the skills to succeed in business beyond 5 years.

Operational Definitions

Business success: Business success is any business that has been in continuous operation for at least 5 years and is profitable (SBA, 2012b).

Constraints: For purposes of this study, constraints are performance restricting components of organizations viewed as improvement opportunities (Ribeiro, Schmitz, De Alencar, & Silva, 2017)

Entrepreneur: An entrepreneur is the founder, owner, and manager of a small firm (Kovalainen & Österberg-Högstedt, 2013; Stam, Arzlanian, & Elfring, 2014).

Skills: Hard skills are workplace skills whereas soft skills are interpersonal skills (Robles, 2012).

Small business: A small business is a private or independent business employing fewer than 500 people (SBA, 2012b).

Strategy: Strategy is an entrepreneurship policy in the company creation, competitive advantages, new opportunities, and significant changes (Berman, 2012), and strategy process and support that effect company products and enterprise capabilities and services (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions are beliefs or ideas that researchers accept to be true in a study, often with little or no evidence required (Kies, 2010). Limitations are potential weaknesses that could affect the study (M. L. Mitchell & Jolley, 2010). Delimitations are boundaries that researchers establish to focus the scope of the study (M. L. Mitchell & Jolley, 2010).

Assumptions

One assumption was that participants were truthful and provided thorough responses during the interviews. The second assumption was that participants were knowledgeable about the topic under study.

Limitations

The potential influence of my bias as a researcher may affect the validity of this research. To minimize the effect of bias, I used well-known strategies such as

triangulation and transcript review to validate the study results (Braun & Wainer, 2013).

The data analysis and gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study was an ongoing process, and this presented a limitation to the study results.

Delimitations

I confined this qualitative exploratory multiple case study to interviewing and collecting data from female small business owners on Bainbridge Island, Washington State who have succeeded in business beyond 5 years. The SBA (2012b) defined a business that has been in operation for at least 5 years and is profitable as successful. Female entrepreneurs exist worldwide. A single geographic area was included in this study. Ten female entrepreneurs who owned a small business on Bainbridge Island were invited to participate in the study. I continued collecting data and adding participants until I achieved data saturation, five participants. For purposes of this study, a small business has less than 500 employees (SBA, 2012b). Women who were not small business owners and men who were businesses owners were not included.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

The findings of this study may contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the strategies female small business owners use or lack to succeed in business beyond 5 years. The results of the study may allow female entrepreneurs to recognize the business strategies needed to grow their businesses. The intention of this study was to help female

entrepreneurs recognize the effect of new knowledge and the strategies needed to succeed in business and encourage female entrepreneurs to master new business strategies.

Through using improved business skills, both soft and hard, female entrepreneurs might be encouraged to refine their leadership characteristics and develop high self-efficacy perceptions as business owners (Robles, 2012). The findings of this study may add value to female entrepreneurs' capacity to grow their small businesses, start new businesses, or explore entrepreneurial options. Findings of this study might yield insights into small businesses owned by female entrepreneurs. Despite an increase in the number of female entrepreneurs in the United States, the business survival rate of women-owned small businesses is lower than that of small businesses owned by men (Robinson & Stubberud, 2009).

Implications for Social Change

The U.S. Census Bureau (2016) found that women own 35.7% of all businesses in the United States. In general, the number of small businesses owned by women increased from 5.4 million to 10.4 million from 1992 to 2004 (Jiang et al., 2012). Acs, Bardasi et al. (2011), Johnson-Lutz (2014), and Q. Wang (2013) noted that women-owned businesses created more than 2.3 million jobs. In 2007, women-owned businesses employed more than 7.6 million workers while generating receipts of \$1.2 trillion (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Despite the number of jobs credited to women-owned businesses, women-owned small businesses have higher rates of failure than do businesses owned by men (Johnson-Lutz, 2014; Reichard & Sweida, 2013; Q. Wang, 2013).

Half of all small businesses discontinue operations within the first 5 years (SBA, 2012b). Dalborg et al. (2012), Marlow and McAdam (2013), and Q. Wang (2013) claimed that regardless of increasing numbers of women-owned businesses, the rate of failure of women-owned businesses is troubling. Identifying the hard and soft business skills female owners of successful small businesses use might allow an increasing number of this population to remain operational beyond the 5-year mark, thereby contributing to employment in the locations where these businesses are established.

Another implication for social change is that women entrepreneurs are role models for younger women (Robichaud, Cachon, & McGraw, 2015). Women role models who are successful in business are necessary to inspire future female entrepreneurs. Shepherd and Patzelt (2011) stated that women small business owners who are successful in business can share their experience in financial strategies by creating opportunities to enhance profitability for other women small business owners. Women small business owners had a better chance of financial profitability when they obtained the right financial strategies (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

This section includes a review of the literature to establish a foundation of understanding of the strategies female small business owners use to succeed in business beyond 5 years. The sources included (a) scholarly peer-reviewed articles, (b) small business reviews, (c) publications related to the research topic, (d) and government reports. I searched databases such as ProQuest, Emerald Management Journal, Google

Scholar, and government websites for literature on the topic. Primary terms used in the search included (a) *strategies*, (b) *soft skills*, (c) *hard skills*, (d) *female small business owners*, (e) *small business administration* and *SBA*, (f) *qualitative research*, (g) *business success*, (h) *qualitative multiple explorative case study*, and (i) *TOC*.

I limited the review for this study to articles and reports published after 2009. Materials reviewed provided information to support the research question, method, and design of the study. Searches of the various databases yielded 124 possible sources, of which 114 (92%) were peer-reviewed and published since 2011. This literature review includes six major topics: (a) entrepreneurship and small business, (b) female entrepreneurs and the challenges they face, (c) leadership in small business, (d) the TOC, (e) failure rates of small businesses, and (f) success rates of small businesses.

The objective of this qualitative multiple-case explorative study was to identify the strategies female small business owners use to succeed in business beyond 5 years. The target population was female small business owners who have succeeded beyond 5 years and are in Bainbridge Island, Washington. I invited participants to respond to open-ended questions and thereby share their experiences concerning the strategies they have used to be successful in business (Bell, 2010). Participants' responses were analyzed using software to identify the factors female owners of small businesses perceived as contributing to their operating a small business successfully for more than 5 years.

Findings from this study may promote social change by revealing new knowledge of the strategies women need to be successful in small businesses for longer than 5 years. The results may also contribute new knowledge about the strategies female entrepreneurs can use to achieve increasing success in their small businesses with more confidence (Leskinen, 2011).

Theory of Constraints

Goldratt (1990) established the TOC in manufacturing as a systematic approach to examining systems. A *constraint* is anything that hinders an organization (a *system*) from achieving its purpose (Bernardi & Silvio, 2010). Researchers use the TOC to describe systems-based management philosophies or a management tool that focuses on stable growth and improvement in an organization to achieve the goals of the organization (Pacheco, 2014; Spector, 2011). To be successful, leaders of an organization must excel at identifying the cause of problems and constraints, as opposed to selecting issues randomly.

The TOC, according to Parker, Parsons, and Isharyanto (2015), could add new insights to enhance project management theory. Parker et al. indicated clear evidence that the low success rate of projects is due partly to the mismanagement of resources and recognition of constraints; therefore, Parker et al. recommended that leaders integrate TOC, resources-based theory (RBT), resource advantage theory (RAT), and resource dependence theory (RDT) with traditional project management to increase project

success. Parker et al. stated that integrating TOC, RBTRAT, and RDT is valuable for operational purposes and also for support planning from a strategic level.

Kapsali (2012) and Parker et al. (2015) examined components of a successful project and recognized important implications for improved success of projects by integrating TOC with RBTRAT and RDT theories and acknowledged that they complemented each other. Project success is defined as accomplishing the iron triangle components of time, cost, scope, and quality (Parker, Charlton, Ribeiro, & Pathak, 2013). Cullen and Parker (2015) further explained the TOC focusing on process improvements and management of internal and external constraints. Cullen and Parker described resource advance theory (RBT/RAT) as affirming the development of an organization's resource-base and strategic assets, and RDT as focusing on the external resources and management of environmental dependencies. Similarly, Parker et al. added that while these theories are different by nature, they are all grounded in management theory and can each provide insights into how project managers (and other decision makers) can expand the possibility of project success by successfully managing project constraints, employing resources and strategic assets, and lessening dependencies and uncertainties.

Some researchers have praised the use of TOC within project management; others, such as Johnson, Creasy, and Fan (2015), have taken a more cautious approach by arguing that TOC not be a substantial enough theory and suggested management by constraints to be more fitting instead. A common reoccurring theme presented in the literature was the importance of resources. Resource constraints are internal and occur

because of limitations in staffing, equipment, or facilities needed to complete a task (Oglethorpe & Heron, 2013).

The TOC is a philosophy centered on continuous improvement based on systems thinking and system principles, along with a sequence of steps to make use of the constraint principle (Pretorius, 2014). A company's leadership is challenged continuously by TOC to find one constraint after another to improve business performance (Gupta & Andersen, 2012). The function of the TOC is to boost system performance by leveraging constraints (Naor et al., 2013). Naor et al. (2013) noted that the TOC could be used as a set of tools to help achieve the goal of the organization: the five focusing steps (a method for identifying and eliminating constraints), the thinking process (tools for analyzing and resolving problems), and throughput accounting (a method for measuring performance and guiding management decisions).

The fundamental proposition of the TOC is that every organization includes at least one resource constraint or bottleneck that prevents the organization from achieving its highest goals (Librelato, Lacerda, Rodrigues, & Veit, 2014; Mears et al., 2014). Sadat, Carter, and Golden (2012) explained that leaders who seek to resolve a problem (a constraint) to improve productivity must understand the root cause of the problem (the constraint), as opposed to selecting issues randomly. After the constraint is removed, the organization should achieve improved production or service. The process of identifying constraints and eliminating them must be repeated until all issues have been overcome.

TOC is the result of business managers expressing their management approach to improve manufacturing quality and organizational productivity (Ghorbani, Arabzad, Shirouyehzad, & Shahin, 2014; Wang et al., 2014). Business managers who originally expressed their management preference were from manufacturing and service businesses. The TOC focuses on determining the leader's goals, regulating global performance measures, identifying system constraints, subordinating the system to the constraint, uplifting constraints, and eliminating inertia to overcome the system's constraint (Spector, 2011).

Oglethorpe and Heron (2013) suggested seven categories of constraint types, detailing each to its origin, its weakness to business, and how it might be solved: (a) market constraints, (b) resource constraints, (c) material constraints, (d) supplier constraints, (e) financial constraints, (f) constraints, and policy constraints, and (g) knowledge or competency. Oglethorpe and Heron noted that resource constraints are usually internal and occur because of limitations in staffing, equipment, or facilities necessary to complete a task. Material constraints are external constraints that occur because of the inability to obtain or produce the required material, and supplier constraints, another external constraint, arise when business throughput is disrupted by unreliable suppliers.

In contrast to external constraints, financial constraints, policy constraints, and knowledge or competency are internal constraints that hinder the system in one way or other (Oglethorpe & Heron, 2013). Financial constraints are caused by insufficient cash

flow to meet an operation. Policy constraints result from rules, business practices, regulations, or mindsets that inhibit progress toward the system goal. Knowledge or competency constraints exist when a lack of information, knowledge, or the skills needed to improve business performance exists (Amoroso & Link, 2017).

Knowledge or competency constraints fit the research question of this study regarding understanding what skills female small business owners used to succeed in business beyond 5 years. Female small business owners who understand the relationship between the presence of knowledge or competency constraints and difficulties in improving business performance and maintaining profitability are the focus of the study. Moreira, Castaño, Sousa, and Meneses (2014) and Oglethorpe and Heron (2013) explained that by adapting the TOC, the knowledge base can be expanded regarding female small business owners' gaps in skills and allow female entrepreneurs to enhance their business skills to grow their businesses.

Entrepreneurship and Small Business

Scholars have defined entrepreneurship and small business in many ways. Chowdhury (2011), Chrisman, McMullan, Ring, and Holt (2012), and Idogho and Augustine (2011) proposed that entrepreneurship is the creation of a new organization, such as a small business. Ugoani and Ibeenwo (2015) defined entrepreneurship as the process of creating value from assembling and applying resources to exploit a particular opportunity. Ugoani and Ibeenwo highlighted the common theme in those definitions:

the ability to create. Entrepreneurs should have the skills and capability to create new businesses to take advantage of new opportunities (Amirsardari & Maritz, 2015).

Amirsardari and Maritz (2015) added that these definitions of entrepreneurship suggested that entrepreneurs should have the strategies and capability to create new businesses to take advantage of new opportunities. A typical entrepreneur establishes a firm with the purpose of creating an innovative product or implements a new form of technology (Casson, 2011). Casson (2011) painted the image of an entrepreneur as a risk-taker who would be willing to take risks, knowing that a product's demand would be uncertain, and financial capital could be risky if the project fails. Casson noted that an entrepreneur would have to be a specialist in decision-making and have confidence in their judgment.

Successful entrepreneurs are those who have vision and strategies and can transform their vision into action for the betterment of society (Ramesh, 2013; Watson, McGowan, & Smith, 2015). They must be willing and able to take risks, identify opportunities, and respond creatively (Reddy, Reddy, Basha, & Kumar, 2014). The most competent entrepreneurs are those who, rather than work as an employee, consider an opportunity and take the risk to capitalize on it. These entrepreneurs pursue the objective of improving their lives and those around them (Ceptureanu & Ceptureanu, 2015; Idogho & Augustine, 2011). Individuals who become entrepreneurs are older and possess more financial capital than their peers possess (Amirsardari & Maritz, 2015; Crum, Sherony, & Rayome, 2015; Sevā & Larsson, 2015). Successful entrepreneurs are often educated,

trained, or gained experience in their target field of industry, and are capable of allocating sufficient financial resources for a start-up and the ongoing operation (Amatucci & Crawley, 2011). Amirsardari and Maritz (2015) added that successful entrepreneurs have the strategies and skills to start new businesses and take advantage of new opportunities.

Entrepreneurs are individuals who create employment opportunities for themselves and others by establishing and managing a business firm (Chowdhury, 2011). Individuals with an entrepreneurial spirit create wealth for themselves out of the necessity to meet their needs and those around them (Chowdhury, 2011; Ramesh, 2013; Sestic & Ibrahimagic, 2015). Crum et al. (2015) and Sevã and Larsson (2015) asserted that highly educated individuals tend to become self-employed, in contrast to others with lesser levels of education. Highly educated individuals also tend to possess skills that could be conducive to starting and operating a successful business. Binder and Coad (2013) stated that self-employed individuals find more satisfaction in their job than do individuals employed by others.

Vinothalakshmi and Ganesan (2013) acknowledged that entrepreneurs are catalysts for change because they generate employment opportunities for others by creating a new business. In India, female entrepreneurs become agents of change by implementing different solutions to existing problems (Vinothalakshmi & Ganesan, 2013). Vinothalakshmi and Ganesan asserted that being an entrepreneur is a fundamental component of running a successful business. Qian and Haynes (2014) suggested that at least three central roles new businesses play in the national and regional economies: (a)

job creation and employment growth, (b) expedited market efficiency, and (c) new knowledge creation and innovation. Job creation is the main source of net job growth in the United States. Entrepreneurs take advantage of market inefficiencies and create innovative solutions (Haltiwanger, Jarmin, & Miranda, 2010). Additionally, entrepreneurs commercialize innovations and scientific discoveries. In the United States, the entrepreneurial culture is associated most closely with the dynamic high technology centers of Silicon Valley and Washington, DC (Qian & Haynes, 2014).

Implementation of new businesses is vital to the advancement of the global economy (Cumming & Li, 2013; Galindo & Méndez-Picazo, 2013). Cumming, Johan, and Zhang's (2014) extensive analysis of a report published by the World Bank led to the conclusion that newly formed businesses strongly affect the gross domestic product of the nation and exports and patents per capita as well as reduce unemployment. Baumgartner, Schulz, and Seidl (2013) reviewed the economic effect of new businesses on 1,706 municipalities and found a healthy and vibrant relationship between new businesses and local development.

The government leaders around the world recognize the value of new small businesses and entrepreneurship and work to promote new startups (Dennis, 2011). O'Connor (2013) suggested that leaders of governments and nongovernmental organizations seek to encourage the startup of new small businesses as a way to boost economic development. Potter and Thompson (2011) stated that the U.S. government

increased efforts to promote new small business activities soon after the beginning of the financial crisis of 2007.

In Canada, the *Futurpreneur Program* is an example of the effort and interest taken by the government to promote the development of new small businesses (Potter & Thompson, 2011). The Futurpreneur Program provided support tools in the form of mentoring and financing to entrepreneurs between the ages of 19 and 39 who seek to own and operate small businesses. Since the establishment of the Futurpreneur Program, 6,500 small business owners have generated more than 26,000 new jobs (Futurpreneur Canada, 2014).

A *small business*, as defined by the SBA (2012a), is a private or independent business employing fewer than 500 people. Chrisman et al. (2012) suggested that the creation of a small business is the result of entrepreneurship. Small business owners are entrepreneurs (Dahmen & Rodriguez, 2014). Small businesses make valuable contributions to the economy of both developing and developed countries, particularly regarding job creation (Cant, 2012; Surangi, 2013). Small business owners serve as the building blocks of local and national economies, accounting for more than 60% of all manufacturing enterprises around the world (Surangi, 2013). The United States is home to approximately 27 million small businesses that are responsible for 39% of the gross national product and 99.7% of employer businesses (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011).

Yallapragada and Bhuiyan (2011) and Sestic and Ibrahimagic (2015) stated a distinguishing characteristic of small businesses is their accessibility by under-

represented populations, such as women, into the labor market. Sestic and Ibrahimagic explained that entrepreneurship and small businesses are tools of empowerment that provide women with real-life changes. Entrepreneurship and small business are agents of change for everyone, regardless of the economic or developmental status of a country in which the small business is situated; entrepreneurs and small businesses are an important source of job creation for both women and men (Sestic & Ibrahimagic, 2015). Dahmen and Rodriguez (2014) stated that women comprise 30% of all entrepreneurs in the United States, while 13% of small businesses were minority owned (3.9%, African-American, 2.7% Hispanic, and 1.9% Asian/Pacific).

Entrepreneurship is the creation of a new firm, and small business is the result of that creation. Entrepreneurship is regarded by many definitions as the ability to create, and entrepreneur is defined as an individual who possesses the skills and capacity to make the best of a new opportunity. An entrepreneur is also a specialist in decision-making and has confidence in their judgment (Holland & Garrett, 2013). An entrepreneur is one who has a vision in mind when establishing a new firm, such as creating a new product to market and willing to take risks (Lee-Ross, 2015). An entrepreneur is also one who has a strong customer focus strategy in place (Lo, Wang, Constance, & Ramayah, 2016).

Female Entrepreneurs' Challenges

Female entrepreneurs contribute to the economic development of virtually every country (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Svare, 2014; Sestic & Ibrahimagic, 2015;

Vinothalakshmi & Ganesan, 2013). Through the advancement of entrepreneurship, the creation of small businesses, and women's self-employment, the concept of female entrepreneurship entered the economic vocabulary in the 1980s (Sestic & Ibrahimagic, 2015). Female entrepreneurship is a powerful source of economic development, leading scholars to inquire into the financial performance and growth of women-owned businesses (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Svare, 2014). In the 2010s, research about female entrepreneurship reached maturity (Costin, 2012; Dalborg et al., 2012). Shah and Saurabh (2015) confirmed that investing in women and women's entrepreneurship efforts has become widely accepted, furthering development opportunities for women regarding equity and sustainability.

Despite the popularity of research on female entrepreneurship, increases in the number of women-owned businesses around the world, and the notion that investment in women is worthwhile, women remain underrepresented in entrepreneurial ventures (Pathak, Pandey, & Joshi, 2013; Ramesh, 2013). Neergaard and Thrane (2011) and Mijid (2015) noted that although female entrepreneurs are a thriving segment of the business population in the developed and developing world, female entrepreneurs still lag behind in numbers of businesses created by their male counterparts. Neergaard and Thrane posited that in most Western developed countries, female entrepreneurs represented only 25% to 30% of total entrepreneurs and, in Denmark, the total number of self-employed women has grown slowly, from 23.8% in 1999 to 26.7% in 2009.

Robichaud et al. (2015) disagreed with Neergaard and Thrane's (2011) assertions about the underrepresentation of women entrepreneurs and women-owned businesses, claiming instead that Denmark had experienced an increase in women-owned businesses of 68% in the 10-year period between 1999 and 2009. Similarly, Fazalbhoy (2015) claimed that Canada had experienced an increase as well in women-owned businesses of 208% compared with a 38% increase for men in a 20-year period between 1981 and 2001. Data on new businesses by gender of owner indicated an increase in the ratio of female entrepreneurs and a rapidly closing gender gap; in 2013, for every eight businesses launched by women, 10 businesses started by men (Robichaud et al., 2015). Cini, Cucllari, and Gushi (2014) noted that, in 2012, an estimated 126 million women across 67 countries had established or operated a new business. Placed in the global context, female entrepreneurs own between 25% and 33% of all businesses worldwide (Chinomona & Maziriri, 2015).

In the United States of America, the number of female entrepreneurs grew from a modest 1.5 million in 1972 to 10.1 million in 1999. In 1999, female entrepreneurs constituted 37% of all businesses in the United States and created revenues of \$1.9 trillion (Piperopoulos, 2012). Ahl and Nelson (2015) noted that the most dominating industries owned and operated by female entrepreneurs in the United States were social assistance and healthcare, followed closely by educational services.

Business ownership is challenging, but the challenges faced by women business owners are greater than those faced by men (Adkins & Samaras, 2013; Shah & Saurabh,

2015; Vinothalakshmi & Ganesan, 2013). These challenges continue to undermine and limit women's entrepreneurial progress (Chinomona & Maziriri, 2015). Kondo (2011) stated that work-family and work-life balance issues were part of the issues that restrict women with leadership potential as an entrepreneur or in an organization from carrying out their duties and careers effectively. Kondo conducted a study on birth and marriage rates about employment rates for women in the United States. The result indicated that women who are unemployed tend to have higher marriage rates compared to men but also have lower birth rates. Families seemed to stay intact even when women gain employment after being unemployed (Kondo, 2011).

Misra, Budig, & Boeckmann, (2011) noted in a study about marriage and children that both have an effect on a woman's potential as a leader in her workplace. Misra et al. (2011) researched a sample of 5,000 women from 21 developing nations. The results revealed married women and women with children earn lower wages, on average than unmarried women and women without children. The result also indicated no contrast in wages for married men and men with children and unmarried men and men without children. Likewise, men with children have equal representation in leadership positions, while women with children do not (Misra et al., 2011). In another study, the authors explored the living wage in the United Kingdom, with 21% of the working population struggling to make ends meet, apart from young people being affected, women are also the ones being disproportionately affected (Werner and Lim, 2015).

The gender gap was the result of gender differences in entrepreneurship worldwide as it pertains to individual personality make-up (Bönte & Piegeler, 2013; Obschonka, Schmitt-Rodermund, & Terracciano, 2014). More apparent gender differences, such as family responsibilities, that prevent women from engaging in entrepreneurship are common as well. A much more central aspect of a person's makeup, such as their basic personality contributed to self-image as an entrepreneur (Obschonka et al., 2014). Obschonka et al. stated that women and men differ in their personality characteristics and attributed the men and women's entrepreneurial attitude to some degree to personality. Dempsey and Jennings (2014) claimed that a viable explanation of why women were less likely to engage in venture creation activities was that women, far more often, feel less validated about their entrepreneurial skills than their male counterparts.

A work-life balance study examining gender roles and perceptions indicated that women in professional careers believed their coworkers see them as less committed (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011). Hegewisch and Gornick (2011) conducted interviews, and out of 516 women who held leading roles in their organizations across the United States, the results indicated a majority of women believed their colleagues regarded them as less devoted to their career (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011). The influence of the differences in societal views on gender roles affected the perception of women being less committed greatly, and this view conflicted with the perception that marriage or children were seen as barriers to women's performance on the job (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011).

Although there has been an increase in women's participation in the workforce, society still expects women to continue to be domestic, including rearing the children. The family and gender role stereotypes seemed to create a barrier for women in the workforce (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011).

Treiber and Davis (2012) stated that from the context of the family, work represents a problem and, from the perspective of the employer, family requisites prohibit productivity. Despite the fact that some employers are trying innovative approaches to improve the work-life balance of their employees, these approaches were not accommodating for the employees, especially for individuals who were not willing to change their insights, principles, and mindsets to adjust to their professional lifestyle (Sandhya, Choudary, Kumar, & Reddy, 2011; Sonnentag, Mojza, Demerouti, & Bakker, 2012).

A unique challenge that female entrepreneurs face is the role of gender (Elam & Terjesen, 2010). Elam and Terjesen (2010) posed that gender roles set up barriers to leadership in many different ways and as a consequence, women leaders continued to be confronted with the public beliefs that competence, or gender, incongruous with leadership. Researchers conducted studies on supervisory participants to find out how far women move up in their workplace (Bosak & Sczesny, 2011; Eagly & Wood, 2011). Both studies led to the conclusion that the public often underestimates the number of women in a profession and this, in itself could be a reason for a glass ceiling.

Women are increasing holding leadership positions in middle and senior management (Carnes & Radojevich-Kelley, 2011; Kulich, Trojanowski, Ryan, Alexander Haslam, & Renneboog, 2011). Baker and Cangemi (2016) stated that women make up 51.4% of managerial and professional positions, 46.8% of the U.S. labor force, obtained 57% of all bachelor and 60% of all master's degrees. Despite the rise of women entering the workforce, the number of women who can hold a leadership position in their organization remains stagnant (Carnes & Radojevich-Kelley, 2011)

Virick and Greer (2012) inferred that the prospects of a glass ceiling are lower when leaders in organizations and businesses encourage diversification. Virick and Greer added that the likelihood of managers to share fairly between both men and women resides in organizations that promote diversity. Even though gender inequalities in the workforce have been gradually declining as the number of women entering the workforce occupy leadership roles, women continue to encounter difficult barriers that are the results of gender stereotypes.

One cause that undermines women's leadership was gender stereotyping, which often leads women to limit their full potential on how they choose to lead (Evans, 2011). Latu et al. (2011) conducted a study about the implicit stereotypes of successful managers and that explicit and implicit stereotypical perceptions of women manager differed and noted that the implicit stereotypes were predominantly traditional, which commonly highlighted negative views of women in leadership.

To learn about the differences between women and men in managerial positions, Andersen and Hansson (2011) examined three Swedish groups of public managers to avoid effects of organizational dissimilarity on leadership behavior. Andersen and Hansson concluded no significant differences in behavior between the female and male managers exist. Andersen and Hansson stated that despite a majority of employees being female or male, or managers being female or male, no significant difference in leadership style exists.

In another study by Ruiz-Jiménez, Fuentes-Fuentes, and Ruiz-Arroyo (2014), the researchers looked at the role of gender diversity of top management teams regarding their capability to integrate exchanged information in an organization. Ruiz-Jiménez et al. examined 205 small and medium sized enterprises (SMSs) and found a positive relationship between gender diversity and absorbing and integrating information for organizational performance. Additionally, Ruiz-Jiménez et al. stated that this capability empowers the organization's leaders to broaden their organization's innovative abilities and exceed their rivals as well as creating new knowledge.

Many variables affect female entrepreneurship such as motivations, financial resources, personality traits, education, government policies and marital status, making this a complex subject (Naguib & Jamali, 2015). Naguib and Jamali (2015) found what motivates women to become entrepreneurs and revealed the constraints women face at multiple levels. The motivations were the desire to be able to be financially secure, lack of job opportunities, low income, social status recognition, self-esteem, self-actualization,

independence, and nationalism. The constraints were work-family conflicts, fear of business failure, lack of self-confidence and gender stereotypes (Naguib & Jamali, 2015).

Adkins and Samaras (2013), Ahl and Marlow (2012), Kautonen, van Gelderen, and Fink (2013), Powell and Eddleston (2013) revealed that motivations can anticipate some behaviors of female entrepreneurs. Ahl and Marlow stated that a leader having a clear perspective of leadership motivation could lead to a profitable business. Ahl and Marlow suggested that understanding individuals' motivations could allow for more resources the entrepreneur needs to be successful in business.

Motives of an entrepreneur may be a determining factor in the success or failure of a business (Malebana, 2014). Adom and Williams (2012) suggested that an entrepreneur's motive derives from two perspectives: economic needs and personal fulfillment. For instance, small businesses such as a street hawker and vendors in Ghana could be categorized under economic needs because they are forced to. At the same time, graduates in Ghana find it difficult to gain employment in their specialized areas and as a result turn to entrepreneurship to gain employment and personal fulfillment (Opoku-Mensah & Kyere, 2014).

The lack of education and managerial skills were two variables that linked the skills of female business owners and their motivations, barriers, and performance (Huang, Mas-Tur, & Yu, 2012; Shah & Saurabh, 2015). Furthermore, Huang et al. (2012) added that the lack of education and managerial skills was found to be directly linked to their motivations at venture creation including the barriers they encountered

during the process of business creation. Huarng et al. argued that the lack of education prevents women from becoming successful as entrepreneurs and at the same time adds to the barriers and challenges they faced, while the lack of managerial skills hinders women's motivation toward starting their own businesses.

Amatucci and Crawley (2011) examined self-efficacy in financial management for entrepreneurs, especially women. They found women lacked effective financial knowledge early in their lives and their self-efficacy, especially in mathematics education, went lower as they aged. Amatucci and Crawley added that mathematics and financial management are cornerstones for entrepreneurs starting a business. Self-efficacy in financial management was a determining factor in small business success.

Despite the declining trend on gender pay disparity, wage gender discrimination still exists in both developed and underdeveloped countries (Wolszczak-Derlacz, 2013). For example, in the United States of America, pay disparity between men and women occurred in the federal workforce regardless of professional proficiency, experiences, and educational background (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2012; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], 2014; U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2011).

Women continued to face gender pay disparity by agency discrimination, position discrimination, and invisible barriers such as a glass ceiling and glass wall (Alkadry & Tower, 2014). Despite national and international laws and regulations against gender discrimination that was supposed to ensure pay equality, women still continued to earn

less in wages than men performing the same job (Perry, 2012; Wolszczak-Derlacz, 2013). According to the BLS (2012), women earn 20% less than men, averaging \$380,000 less during a women's career. According to Kulich et al. (2011), male executives earn well more than the women and secure larger bonuses. Additionally, women executives were not as readily paid based on their performance as men (Kulich et al., 2011).

The gender gap is a challenge (Bönte & Piegeler, 2013; Obschonka et al., 2014). Not only have researchers reported gender differences as obstacles to entrepreneurship, but also human and social capital and family responsibilities, which may prevent or discourage women from engaging in entrepreneurship (Obschonka et al., 2014). Women and men differ naturally in their personality characteristics, but personality could be an indicator of entrepreneurial attitude (Obschonka et al., 2014). Dempsey and Jennings (2014) posited women might be less likely to engage in entrepreneurial activities because women tend to feel less validated about their entrepreneurial skills than their male counterparts.

According to Huarng et al. (2012), and Shah and Saurabh (2015), when female business owners are compared to male business owners, the women business owners have less education and managerial skills. These skills are linked to business owners' motivations, barriers, and performance. The lack of education and managerial skills are directly linked to women's motivations to engage in venture creation activity and to counter the barriers they encounter in creating a business (Huarng et al., 2012).

Perceived shortcomings in education prevent women from becoming successful as

entrepreneurs and compound the barriers and challenges they face in the business world, while the lack of managerial skills undermines women's motivation to start their businesses in the first place.

Amatucci and Crawley (2011) elaborated on education, through a study, which examined self-efficacy in financial management for entrepreneurs, especially women. They found women lacked self-efficacy early in their lives and their self-efficacy, especially in mathematics education, went lower as they aged. Amatucci and Crawley added that mathematics and financial management are cornerstones for entrepreneurs starting a business; thus, self-efficacy in financial management was a determining factor in small business success.

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Gender differences exist in competitiveness and risk-taking behavior, and these differences contribute to the gender gap in entrepreneurship (Bönte & Piegeler, 2013). Robichaud et al. (2015) posited that family and company obligations place increased pressure on female business owners, exacerbating the gender gap. Robichaud et al. explained that family responsibilities prevented women from achieving their potential as entrepreneurs in activities that involve setting goals, overcoming financial problems, and fully engaging in social and business networks.

A female entrepreneur is an influential source of economic empowerment and development. As a result, investing in women's entrepreneurship efforts to advance more opportunities for women has become widely accepted. However, despite the countless studies that have been conducted on female entrepreneurship the rise of women-owned businesses globally, and the concept that investing in women is beneficial. Women continue to remain underrepresented in entrepreneurial undertakings.

Leadership in Small Business

Small businesses are essential to national economic growth. Shideler and Badasyan (2012) asserted small businesses represent 99% of total establishments in the United States and members of the European Union, provide employment to more than

50% of U.S. residents, and generate a significant share of the gross domestic product of both the United States and the European Union. The role played by small businesses can lead a nation from a managerial economy to an entrepreneurial economy (Karadakal, Goud, & Thomas, 2015). Karadakal et al. (2015) explained that the success or failure of a small business relies heavily on employees' performance and how the small business owner/leader manages the various aspects of operations of the business.

In a small business, it is the job of the entrepreneur/owner to guide, mentor, and counsel his or her employees to enhance the performance of the organization (Karadakal et al., 2015). The long-term survival and success of an organization depend on whether or not the owner is invested in training his or her employees for sustainability (Ling & Jaw, 2011). When the owner of an organization invests in his or her employees, the organization generates positive employee engagement and allows for an efficient and high-performing organization (Andrew & Sofian, 2012). Andrew and Sofian (2012) also added that employee engagement gives employees an emotional connection and promotes dedication to the organization.

Great leaders obtain the information and skills necessary to examine workplace situations and respond accordingly (Boykins et al., 2015; Friedman, 2011). The most effective leaders are those who direct their employees to achieve outstanding business results through effective communication (Friedman, 2011). Effective leaders lead with a vision in mind and display strong moral attributes (Wang & Hsieh, 2013). Fairfield,

Harmon, and Behson (2011) added that great leaders must exhibit trust and respect toward their employees to maintain a healthy manager-employee relationship.

Leadership and the role of a leader have been defined in many different ways. According to Karkoulian (2015), leadership is the behavior demonstrated by a key player in creating an effective organization and promoting the success of the organization. Tuckey, Bakker, and Dollard (2012), and Nixon, Harrington, and Parker (2012) stated that the definitions and skills of a leader could be traced back more than three decades. Tuckey et al. asserted that one of those definitions is the ability to influence.

Tideman, Arts, and Zandee (2013) expanded on leadership from the concept of creating sustainable organizations. According to the World Bank (2012), sustainable development takes into consideration all aspects of environment, society, economics, and as a result, more businesses have embarked on a transformational process that reflects today's more sustainable demands. Furthermore, Tideman et al. noted that since sustainability has become a business mega-trend, it has created the need for a different type of leadership – sustainable leadership (SL).

Leadership as a subject encompasses many topics, and therefore, theories continue to materialize as leaders face circumstances anatomized by scholars that are seeking to stay up to date with the changes in the leader's experience (Tideman et al., 2013). Tideman et al. (2013) labeled leadership as inclusive and emergent and one that advocates for continuous growth and stability in an organization or business. Tideman et al. stated that measuring leadership performance means creating shareholder value by

managing environmental, social, and economic risks. Khan and Adnan (2014) stated that studies on leadership theories from an organizational performance context had indicated a dependence on collective goals and objectives. Khan and Adnan suggested that the resources currently available have made it possible to obtain those leadership goals and objectives.

The two elements of a business that continue to expand and evolve are leadership and performance (McCann & Sweet, 2014). McCann and Sweet (2014) indicated the findings of a 2011 study regarding the questions surrounding strategies small business leaders used and what constituted a good leader. McCann and Sweet stated that an ethical and long-term leadership apparatus helps, support organizational leaders to improve their performance, and to acknowledge the global and economic changes.

According to Tideman et al. (2013) and Yang (2015), an excellent leader who is engaged in power and control should be able to shift to a more open minded, courageous, and high degree of self-knowledge approach to be successful. Leadership perceptions had to change from celebrating past successes to realizing future challenges by using new thinking and strategies. Findings in Tideman et al. are similar to the findings by McCann and Sweet (2014), and both suggested that business cultures and mindsets have to change to successfully approach and solve future problems.

Abrell-Vogel and Rowold (2014), Mesu, Maarten, and Sanders (2013), and Zacher and Rosing (2015) agreed that a leader's behavior should influence change and understanding, motivate employees to perform beyond expectations, and include

everyone within an organization. Kempster, Jackson, and Conroy (2011) suggested that leaders of organizations should train employees to assume leadership roles resulting from changes in the organization. One way in which contemporary business leaders are developed is through obtaining an education in the best leadership practices possible. The implementation and practice of human resource management functions, such as improving knowledge, capabilities, manager-employee relations, and competency are incremental components of building a successful business leader (Hsiung, 2012; Jantti & Greenhalgh, 2012; Kalyani & Sahoo, 2011; Mohd-Shamsudin & Chuttipattana, 2012).

Leaders make organizations successful by strengthening their competencies in managing services (Hsiung, 2012; Jantti & Greenhalgh, 2012; Kalyani & Sahoo, 2011). As an illustration, Jantti and Greenhalgh (2012) recommended leaders should improve their leadership competencies, particularly those involving how effectively they lead, their self-confidence, and their self-knowledge. Hsiung (2012) argued that to improve a leader's knowledge and capacity to lead, he or she must study how to communicate, collaborate, advocate, apply strategy, and be professional at the job. Kalyani and Sahoo (2011) acknowledged that leaders must recognize the potential of maximizing these behaviors into competencies so that the opportunities for an organization to advance and sustain itself can be realized.

Leaders of organizations must continue to work on improving their competencies (Wilkinson, 2013). For leaders to be competent, they must remain alert to potential problems and learn to solve a problem in various situations (Wilkinson, 2013). Gavrilova

and Andreeva (2012) recommended that leaders learn four types of knowledge management skills to increase their competency: (a) factual, (b) procedural, (c) conceptual, and (d) self. Vlachos, Panagopoulos, and Rapp (2013) and Holzer (2016) noted that leaders of firms that invest in their human capital not only realize high returns on the investment but also build their employees' work ethic and increase the competencies of their leaders.

Armstrong (2013) argued that competence, as a strategy may be imperative to strengthen leadership and organizational success; however, competence alone does not further survival and growth of an organization. Armstrong furthered the argument by stating other internal and external factors such as resources, a stable government, access to the market, and public infrastructure that could influence the success of an organization or small business. Researchers added that the source of business success also included cash flow, technological resources, entrepreneurial skills, human resources, and quality of the entrepreneur (Armstrong, 2013; Bengesi & Roux, 2014; Jasra, Khan, Hunjra, Rehman, & Azam, 2011).

For leaders to continue to be successful, they must adopt a lifelong learning attitude and encourage employees to use lifelong learning tools to build their employee base (Mohd-Shamsudin & Chuttipattana, 2012). Hoffman, Bynum, Piccolo, and Sutton (2011) added that leaders who master self-development, self-management, and self-awareness can lead an organization effectively. Leaders who enhance their knowledge and put that knowledge into practice tend to be skilled at strategizing and resolving

problems that hinder them from embracing a more efficient leadership style (Hoffman et al., 2011).

Mesu et al. (2013) studied the connection between transformational and transactional leadership about organizational citizenship behavior. *Transformational leadership* is exhibited by a leader who inspires and motivates people to function beyond expectations (Mesu et al., 2013). In contrast, *transactional leadership* is represented by a leader who is concerned with standard performance, which is directly linked to organizational citizenship behavior (Mesu et al., 2013). In the context of a small business, transformational leaders must possess leadership behaviors concerning change, particularly organizational change (Lin & Hsiao, 2014; Mesu et al., 2013).

Communication, sensitivity, and preparation are essential leadership behaviors for managing organizational change (Lin & Hsiao, 2014).

The duty of a leader has changed since 2000 (Maynard, Gilson, & Mathieu, 2012; McDermott, Kidney, & Flood, 2011). For instance, Jaoua and Radouche (2014) stated that the role of a small business leader has become more complex as a result of international competition, increasing the difficulty for businesses to survive. Leaders of companies who want their businesses to survive in the international marketplace must master managerial and entrepreneurial skills (Jaoua & Radouche, 2014). McDermott et al. (2011) stated leaders should find their path to success by continuously learning new leadership skills to meet the unique circumstances of their situation.

For a small business to survive, Mesu et al. (2013) stated that a prospective leader must be able to handle diverse challenges and be flexible in a competitive marketplace. Galuska (2014) and Abebe and Angriawan (2011) noted leadership skills essential for success are the ability to manage organizational change efficiently and to maintain stability lasting an extended period. Sakiru, D'Silva, Othman, Silong, and Busayo (2013) and Seo et al. (2012) suggested that small business owners should adopt a leadership style that focuses on employee job satisfaction to secure employees' supportive behavior, especially in advance of and in the midst of organizational change. The best leaders are those who can anticipate the near future and proceed with a plan to meet the challenges of the future (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014; Sakiru et al., 2013).

Similarly, the success or failure of a small business relies primarily on the ability of the manager to lead effectively. The role of a leader in a small business or an organization is to guide, mentor, and advise his or her employees. The role of a leader is to adopt a lifelong learning attitude and encourage employees to use lifelong learning tools to build their employee base. A leader is also responsible for the long-term survival of the organization by investing in his or her employees for sustainability and performance of the business.

Failure Rates in Small Business

The rates of small business failures have been an issue in the United States for 400 years (Schweikart & Doti, 2010). The number of small business startups has been greater than the number of small business failures through the end of the 1900s (SBA,

2014b). Campbell, Heriot, Jauregui, and Mitchell (2012) stated no business failure records before the 1950s were kept. In addition, Campbell et al. stated that the rate of business failures has remained constant. However, the number of actual business failures has doubled during the same period because of the increased number of small businesses (Campbell et al., 2012). Dahmen and Rodriguez (2014) stated that as many as 50% of women-owned small businesses fail at or before their fifth anniversary.

In the United States, small businesses make up a significant portion of general business. Since 2011, small businesses accounted for 39% of the gross national product and created two out of three jobs (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). According to the SBA (2012c), small businesses comprise 99.7% of all organizations in the United States, create 63% of all new private sector jobs, and hire 48.5% of the private sector personnel. Reports prepared by the SBA (2012b) and U.S. Department of Commerce (2011) revealed that despite the rapid growth in the U.S. economy, small business owners still face myriad challenges, primarily high business failure rates. Olaison and Sørensen (2014) advised that the small business failure rate in the United States was 30% to 95%, depending on the industry. Another report by the SBA (2013) indicated that more than 50% of small businesses cease operations within the first year. For example, between 2005 and 2011, the number of new small businesses that failed per year ranged from 409,040 to 644,122 (SBA, 2014b).

Small businesses encounter enormous challenges that prohibit their chance for survival and growth (Mutoko, 2014). Furthermore, Cojocariu and Stanciu (2012) stated

that small businesses fail because of the lack of knowledge in leadership skills and strategies for growth. The elements of failure include access to financial resources, lack of business knowledge, access to the market, unrealistic business plan, lack of management, and poor record-keeping (Mutoko, 2014; Ropega, 2011).

Ropega (2011) stated that failure in business does not occur without any warning signs. Sloan, Klingenberg, and Rider (2013) gave the example of where sustainability and development have proved to be problematic because small businesses in Ghana lacked vision and comprehensible policies. In addition, Ropega noted that small business owners have a hard time identifying risks and challenges and to make provisions for them. Abas-Mastura, Imam, and Osman (2013) suggested that finding the symptoms promptly was important for a business to survive. Abas-Mastura et al. indicated that the indications of business failures were profit reduction, profit loss, drop in market share, high operation costs, liquidation, and high level of debts.

The appropriateness of using the terms *failure*, *closure*, and *exit* is commonly debated about business (Balcaen, Manigart, Buyze, & Ooghe, 2012). Coad (2013) pointed to disparities in the meaning of failure between businesses and academia. The terms *business closure* and *business exit* are meant to convey either voluntary or involuntary cessation of operations (Coad, 2013; Coad, Frankish, Roberts, & Storey, 2013; Jenkins, Wiklund, & Brundin, 2014). Business death and business failure are terms used to convey a financial loss within the business that leads to the bankruptcy, receivership, or liquidation (Coad, 2013; Coad et al., 2013; Ucbasaran, Shepherd,

Lockett, & Lyon, 2013). As for this study, the phrase *business failure* was used to indicate any business that has been in operation for less than 5 years (SBA, 2012b).

Researchers who studied the formations and failures of small businesses found a correlation between national economic conditions and general industry conditions (Cader & Leatherman, 2011). Cader and Leatherman (2011) noted that previous researchers ignored the time interval between small business formations and failures; they argued the weakness of the approach due to the limited amount of information on failed small businesses.

Other researchers have asserted U.S. government regulations and business owners' compliance with regulations as a possible cause of small business failure (Ejrnaes & Hochguertel, 2013). Jost (2012) noted that the Affordable Care Act includes penalties for small businesses whose owners fail to comply with the legislation. The fates of small businesses depend on how state and federal agencies choose to respond to small business issues at large (Jost, 2012).

Some researchers (Bates, Lofstrom, & Servon, 2011; Williams, 2014; Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011) asserted that business owners' multiple challenges prevent businesses from being run efficiently beyond the 5-year mark. Bates et al. (2011) noted one of these challenges is business owners' lack of sufficient management skills. Additionally, Yallapragada and Bhuiyan (2011) noted that the biggest contributors to small business failures in the United States were insufficient access to adequate capital and the lack of requisite skills by small business owners. Arasti, Zandi, and Bahmani

(2014), Urban and Naidoo (2012), and Frazier, Stoel, Niehm, and Eckerson (2013) added that the lack of entrepreneurial knowledge and business management skills are contributing factors to business failure.

According to the SBA (n.d.), many researchers have associated small business failures with size, age, or the location of the business. Parsa, van der Rest, Smith, Parsa, and Bujisic (2014) examined the attributes of failed small restaurants in Boulder, Colorado, and out of 496 small restaurants for which 10 years of data were analyzed, more than 125 failed. Parsa et al. concluded that size and location of the business influenced restaurant failure rate, with larger restaurants having more success than smaller restaurants.

Other scholars, such as Arasti et al. (2014) and Tolba, Seoudi, and Fahmy (2014), argued that studies involving small business failures focused on owners' and managers' behavior and the manager of the business instead of on the causes of business failure, patterns for failure prediction, and strategy for weak business. Arasti et al. added that managers' or owners' lack of sufficient management skills, lack of foresight, inflexibility, unwillingness to take risks, and unwillingness to seek professional help contribute to small business failures

Small business owners' attitude and outlook sometimes contribute to the failure of small businesses (Belás, Bartoš, Habánik, & Novák, 2014). Knörr, Alvarez, and Urbano (2012) suggested that business owners' personality characteristics and motives determine the success and failure of a business. Knörr et al. noted that individuals with the

personality characteristics of risk-taking, creativity, and independence have a higher chance of becoming an entrepreneur. Almeida, Ahmetoglu, and Chamorro-Premuzic (2013) added that the most potent and consistent predictors of entrepreneurial activity were a vision, opportunism, awareness, and creativity.

Milhabet and Verliac (2011) stated that small business owners sometimes perceived other small business owners were more vulnerable to failure than they were themselves. Milhabet and Verliac posited that comparative optimism could be a source of sustainable emotional fortitude and that small business owners who exhibited comparative optimism were more likely to experience failure. To date, no researchers have proven that comparative optimism is a cause of small business failure (Geers, Wellman, & Fowler, 2013).

Small businesses struggled in other areas too such as being innovative to compete in the global market (Heimonen, 2012). Heimonen (2012) noted that most of the small businesses were not as well prepared as they should be to gain productivity and growth and as a result they suffer. They were unwilling to undertake an innovation approach because they were not aware of the value of innovation and what it would cost them if they refused to accept change (Heimonen, 2012). Ocloo, Akaba, and Worwui-Brown (2014) stated that small businesses have no choice but to compete in the 21st-century global market, and often small businesses in developing countries such as Ghana suffer because of stiff global competition for goods and services both national and international market.

Concurrently, the rates of small business failures in the United States have been an ongoing issue, even with the high increase growth in small business. Additionally, more than half of small businesses cease operations within the first 5 years. Despite the rapid growth in the U.S. economy, small business owners continue to encounter countless challenges and as a result, prohibit their chance for survival and growth. The elements of failure include lack of knowledge in leadership, financial resources, lack of business knowledge, access to the market, unrealistic business plan, lack of management, and poor record keeping.

Success Rates in Small Business

Small business survival rates vary between industries by almost 15%, with mining being the most successful industry (51.3%) and construction being the least successful ([36.4%] U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). At the start of the great recession, small businesses have experienced a minimal increase in growth of 0.64% from 2009 to 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). During this period, the number of small businesses that closed was more than the number of small businesses that were opened (BLS, 2014). According to BLS (2014), small businesses with fewer than 20 employees had negative growth from 2009 to 2012, but during the same period, small businesses with fewer than 500 employees had positive growth. Data collected by the BLS revealed net job creation mirrored net entry and exit data for small businesses.

Researchers had studied the success rates of small businesses using various nomenclatures (Sarasvathy, Menon, & Kuechle, 2013). Islam, Khan, Obaidullah, and

Alam (2011) and Katongole, Ahebwa, and Kawere (2013) suggested that the concept of success is subjective, and a universal definition of success is not easy to verify when compared to the terms *business failures, closure, death, or exit*. Marom and Lussier (2014) and Teng, Bhatia, and Anwar (2011) suggested that scholars have tried to quantify business success regarding profitability of an organization equaling the industry average profit margin for the previous 3 years. Alagirisamy (2014) defined business success as year-to-year operations without losses. Others have defined success as long- and short-term survival, sales growth, the number of employees, satisfaction, corporate social responsibility and influence (Alagirisamy, 2014; Hur, Moon, & Jung, 2015; Islam et al., 2011).

Success is determined by either personal satisfaction or by business growth (Gorgievski, Ascalon, & Stephan, 2011). Islam et al. (2011) described success as personal fulfillment, such as making a difference through social contribution, generosity, and good work-life balance. Studies conducted in the United States of America and Europe revealed that male entrepreneurs and female entrepreneurs have different perceptions of business success (Katongole et al., 2013; Manolova, Brush, Edelman, & Shaver, 2012; Shinnar, Giacomini, & Janssen, 2012). For example, male entrepreneurs measure business success largely in economic terms, while their female counterparts measure success in non-economic terms (Katongole et al., 2013).

Success is profit-related and includes innovation, power, achievement, and business growth (Alagirisamy, 2014). Alagirisamy (2014) and Chittithaworn, Islam,

Keawchana, and Yusuf (2011) and Islam et al. (2011) remarked that ultimately, the definition of small business success varies for each business according to the business owner's goals and objectives. For this study, the phrase *success rates in small business* was defined as the continuation of a small business that does not experience regular annual losses spanning a period of 5 years (SBA, 2012b).

Scholars acknowledged entrepreneurship as one of the mechanisms for social mobility and community development, causing them to emphasize understanding of business success and performance (Acs, Boardman, & McNeely, 2011; Haugh & Talwar, 2014). Alagirisamy (2014) and Chittithaworn et al. (2011) stated that success could be measured in many different ways, and researchers have used different ways to measure success in business. Alagirisamy noted that organizational performance is one of many methods used to measure success in an organization because it is regarded as the central indicator of financial performance related financial goals. Katongole et al. (2013) stated that common organizational indicators of success are sales growth, probability, return on investment, and employment.

Non-financial performance success is indicated by intangible values such as customer satisfaction, customer retention, the reputation of the firm, employees' satisfaction, healthy workplace relations, and business owner's self-satisfaction (Katongole et al., 2013). Non-financial performance indicators of success are important in the context of micro small enterprises because these enterprises often do not store historical information, and their accounting records cannot be compared across firms

(Jennings & Brush, 2013). Jennings and Brush (2013) posited that even if a micro small business owner was able to provide historical information, the information could be biased. Given the potential for bias, Jennings and Brush concluded that accurate measures of financial success in micro small businesses were difficult to identify.

Neneh and Vanzyl (2014) posited that growth was the measurable evidence of success among small business. Oyeku, Oduyoye, Asikhia, Kabuoh, and Elemo (2014) acknowledged different meanings and measures to determine small business success are used. Furthermore, Neneh and Vanzyl noted that success factors comprised of goals, qualities, or facets of activities. Growth as regarded by Neneh and Vanzyl and Malebana (2014), as the measure of a business success because on a global level, small business growth developed into job creation and employment for economic development.

In conclusion, success rates in small business fluctuate among different industries, mining being the most successful and construction as the least successful. Furthermore, individuals have different concepts of success; therefore, success is subjective. For this study, the phrase *success rates* in small business is considered as the continuation of a small business that does not experience regular annual losses spanning a period of 5 years.

Transition and Summary

The format of Section 1 outlined the foundation of this proposal, its purpose, the problem statement, background of the study, and significance, the nature of the study, the research questions, and the limitations of the study, assumptions, as well as an overview

of the small business literature that exists. Section 1 also includes the conceptual framework, the definition of terms, the assumptions, the limitations of the study, and review of professional literature. Section 2 includes the restatement of the purpose and my role as the main researcher in the data collecting process, the participants' collection procedure, and the ethical protection process. Section 2 also consists of the description of the methodology and design, population and sample, data collection instrument and data collection technique. Section 2 includes a description of data analysis method, reliability and validity of the study and a transition into Section 3. Section 3 will begin with a restatement of the purpose of the study, a restatement of the research question, an overview of the research findings, the application to the real world setting and implications of social change. Section 3 also contains an overview of the recommendations for action, recommendations for future study, my reflections of the study, and the conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 includes the purpose statement, addresses my role in the research process, and introduces the research method and design. Additionally, I include the research and interview questions and the protocol I used in conducting the study. Issues related to ethics and reliability and validity of data are also explained.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies women who own small businesses used to succeed in business beyond 5 years. The target population consisted of women who have owned and successfully operated a small business beyond 5 years on Bainbridge Island, Washington. Findings from this study may contribute to social change by revealing new knowledge that promotes understanding of the strategies needed for women to be successful in business for longer than 5 years. Successful entrepreneurs contribute to the local economy by adding jobs for themselves and their employees.

Role of the Researcher

I was the primary data collection agent for this research study by conducting semistructured interviews with each of the study participants face-to-face. My role as the researcher was to administer all aspects of the interview to ensure saturation and put aside any bias that may compromise the collection and analysis of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Tufford & Newman, 2012). In addition, I implemented the design, strategies, and data collection techniques in an ethical manner. The participants received

a consent form before the interview to protect their identities. I started the data collection process when all the participants signed their consent forms, and Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) had granted me the permission to carry out the research. Walden University's IRB approval number for this study was 02-14-17-0236718. In addition, I triangulated the data to mitigate occasional biases from the participants due to their experiences and the process of selection of prospective candidates (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012).

During the period of the study, I started a not-for-profit organization to help women in Melanesia (a region in the South Pacific encompassing Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea) to gain empowerment through entrepreneurship by way of mentoring, business networking, and access to financial resources and research. I am a small business owner who conducts business internationally but lives on Bainbridge Island, Washington. For 11 years, as owner and director of a successful tour company, I have had the opportunity to network nationally and internationally with other female small-business owners. My academic background, training, and work experience have been in the area of business and management. Consequently, this research topic was one that has always interested me.

The Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979) consists of a detailed account of ethical values and provides protocols for the protection of humans. Complying with these protocols protects both participants and researchers. Furthermore, the Belmont Report distinguishes between research and practice, including

three basic ethical principles and appropriate function of the principles (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). The three basic ethical principles of human subject research that I used during the process of the study were (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979).

I treated each participant in this study with respect and allowed her the time and opportunity to decide on her own whether to participate in the study (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). The prospective individuals were treated in an ethical manner by valuing their decisions, protecting them from harm, and by making sure that their well-being was secured (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). I was also the only person with the identifiable information from the participants, including their names and their organizations (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). As the keeper of the identifiable information, by way of security and following the Belmont protocol, I maintained confidentiality for the participants by maximizing the benefits of participants engaging in the study and minimizing possible harm to those who participated in the study (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979).

To limit any possible bias, I kept a journal during the research process to help, manage, determine, and limit any bias that could alter the research data collection and data analysis (Anney, 2014). Tufford and Newman (2012) proposed executing a journaling practice to ensure no personal bias, morals, or beliefs during a qualitative study. I asked open-ended questions and avoided questions that could lead interviewees

away from the central question. To keep within the interview protocol, each interview was semistructured to allow the interviewee room to share unlimited information regarding the questions asked without being restrictive.

Participants

A purposive sample of five women participants who have owned and successfully operated their small businesses beyond 5 years on Bainbridge Island, Washington were included. Purposive sampling focuses on a population that fits specific criteria created by the researcher to gain a sample of participants in the case (Salih, 2012). Deodhar, Saxena, Gupta, and Ruohonen (2012) added that purposive sampling allows the researcher to enhance the validity of data from the different parties. In this case study, I used this method to identify participants with relevant experience.

I obtained the participants' contact information from the Bainbridge Island Chamber of Commerce. The participants of this study received an invitation to participate in an initial e-mail message. I followed-up with a phone call to explain the research and asked for their participation. Those who agreed to participate in the study received an informed consent form presented in a following e-mail, and were asked to respond to the e-mail, specifying their consent to participate. This informed consent e-mail assured the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time. No participants withdrew from this study. The participants and I mutually agreed on the locations for the face-to-face interviews. Three of the interviews occurred at local coffee

shops, and I did not buy coffee for any participants. I conducted one interview at a participant's office.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) stated that the key component to establishing a working relationship with the participants is trust. In this study, the participants' office or mutually agreed upon location for a face-to-face interview was used as a way to establish trust with each of the business owners. The strategy that I used to gain access to participants was to visit the local Chamber of Commerce to obtain a list of female-owned businesses on Bainbridge Island, in Washington State.

After completing the interviews, I transcribed the digital recording of each interview into a Microsoft Word document. I e-mailed the complete transcription of the interview to the study participants for their review. Changes to the data were made when I received feedback from the participants per their request. Examples of requested changes were grammar and the spelling of names and products. I then uploaded the transcribed interviews into the MaxQDA software program.

Once I assembled the initial codes, the next step was to execute the axial coding and the theoretical coding to determine emergent themes and relationships. The final step was to organize the data around the central theme. I did not collect any personal identification information from each of the participants.

Research Method and Design

Method

In this study, I employed a qualitative research approach to determine what strategies female small business owners use to enable their businesses to succeed beyond 5 years. The intent of qualitative researchers is to understand the issue under study within the context of the participants' experiences (Bailey et al., 2011; Davis, 2013). In this study, that context was running a business successfully for longer than 5 years on Bainbridge Island, Washington.

I emphasized the contextual understanding that participants construct of events rather than seeking to discover an absolute truth. This approach enabled me to gain a firm understanding of the cases in their natural contexts, as opposed to obtaining data via mail, on the Internet, or on the phone (Bansal & Corley, 2012; Elingsson & Brysiewicz, 2012). Quantitative researchers test a theory and examine relationships through statistical analysis to verify whether a relationship exists between a set of known variables by asking closed-ended questions (Bryman, 2012; Gerring, 2011; Petty et al., 2012). Quantitative and mixed methods analysis were not an appropriate fit for this research because the focus of this study was neither to examine relationships between quantitative variables nor to establish whether a relationship existed between known variables by asking closed-ended questions. I chose a qualitative method for this study as opposed to mixed methods and quantitative methods to enable flexibility and documentation of pertinent findings (Myers, 2013; Yin, 2014). The mixed-methods approach requires the

researcher to use a combination of deductive and inductive methods (Bansal & Corley, 2012).

Research Design

A multiple-case study design is a qualitative approach that researchers use to capture the perspective of actual activities and situations within the natural context of the case (Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) also asserted that a case study design relies on satisfying three criteria. First, the research questions must address *how* or *why*. Second, the researcher must have little or no control concerning participants' behavior. Finally, the focus of the research must be a contemporary issue. The study satisfied all three criteria.

Ethnographers examine shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language within a cultural group, and phenomenological researchers focus on the unique lived experiences of individuals around a phenomenon (Petty et al., 2012). Neither of these two designs satisfied the criteria for this study. Additionally, I used semistructured interviews to ensure data saturation. Data saturation happens when no new information can be obtained or collected (Kolb, 2012; Walker, 2012).

Population and Sampling

This study involved a purposive sample of five female participants who own and have successfully operated their small businesses beyond 5 years on Bainbridge Island, Washington. Verner and Abdullah (2012) noted that a case study focuses on in-depth exploration on a small number of multiple cases or a single case. Purposive sampling

allows the researcher to select participants that fit the specific criteria created by the researcher.

Purposive sampling enabled participants to produce detail-rich responses as they pertained to knowledge, experience, and relevance to the research question (Masso, McCarthy, & Kitson, 2014). Purposive sampling allowed me to gather information from diverse perspectives. Purposive sampling heightens the validity of a study by generating rich and relevant data for triangulation (Robinson, 2014).

The purposive sample for this study was represented by five women who owned and successfully operated their small businesses beyond 5 years on Bainbridge Island, Washington. Each business had no more than 50 employees. I developed the sample from available public data from the Bainbridge Island Chamber of Commerce. After compiling the participant list and gaining approval from the IRB, the participants were e-mailed an invitation to participate, which was the consent form. I waited one week for a response, and if I had not received a response, I called the participants to ask for a response. Interviews were then scheduled to collect data.

A follow-up call was made to explain the research and request their participation. The participants who agreed to be a participant in the study received an informed consent form presented in a following e-mail. Potential participants also were asked to reply to the e-mail, indicating their consent to participate. A total of 10 potential participants were sent e-mails, and five agreed to participate.

I used semistructured interviews to ensure data saturation. Data saturation results occur when no new data can be obtained that was not already noted and when further coding is no longer attainable (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Walker, 2012). One participant allowed me to conduct the interview in her office; the remaining participants agreed to meet me at a local coffee shop for a face-to-face interview.

Ethical Research

To establish an ethical approach in this study, I executed the design, strategies, and data collecting techniques in an ethical manner by providing the participant's confidentiality, accountability, and guarantee of free-will participation. Aluwihare-Samaranayake (2012) posited that it is critical that the participants be treated with respect and their well-being and safety are at the forefront of all research decision and consideration. Before the interview, each participant received a consent form to ensure her identity was protected. Participants received an e-mail that included the informed consent form and a framework of the nature of the study.

Included in the consent form, I also noted that participation was 100% voluntary; therefore, if any participants wished to withdraw at any stage from being a participant, they could do so without any penalty and further commitment to the study. Once all the participants had signed their consent forms, the forms were collected personally from their office. After the Walden University's IRB granted me the permission to carry out the research, I proceeded with the interviews. I also requested that if a participant

decided to withdraw, the participant could call me or inform me with a note stating their decision why they no longer wanted to participate in the study.

Each participant of this study was issued a number to protect their identity by using Participant #1 or Participant #2 as an alternative to the name of their business or the individual. For participant confidentiality purposes, all information regarding the participants is locked in a secure filing cabinet for 5 years and after that will be destroyed (K. R. Mitchell & Wellings, 2013). K. R. Mitchell and Wellings (2013) also noted that the only person in charge of the participants' personal information should be the researcher.

Data Collection

Instruments

Leedy and Ormrod (2013) noted that qualitative researchers could serve as an instrument for a study. Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) stated that the researcher is the focal point of data collection in a case study. Researchers can use document analysis, interviews, and participant observations as active channels to ascertain conclusions of the study. As the researcher, I was the main data collection instrument for this study by personally conducting all of the interviews. In a qualitative research study, data collection can be gathered by way of direct interaction with an individual or interaction in a group setting (Petty et al., 2012). In the case of data for case studies, Yin (2012) affirmed six primary sources of data for case studies: (a) interviews, (b) documentation, (c) archival records, (d) participant-observation, (e) direct

observation, and (f) physical artifacts. Within the six primary sources, I collected data from two of these primary sources for this study – through semistructured, face-to-face interviews with five successful female business owners and archival records in the form of business strategic plans and business plans for analysis.

I collected a wide range of business documents. One participant provided a complete business plan which included her strategic business plan, financial forecast, marketing plan, her business vision and goals, and mission statement. I also collected from three other participants' employee handbooks including daily operating procedures. One participant was featured in a local newspaper article and this was included as an archival record. Every participant had a company website and social media accounts. These online resources provided background information about each participants, marketing materials, mission statement, contact information, product information, and business goals. A single participant provided a detailed spreadsheet she used for managing the number of clients she maintained. Yin (2014) noted that a comprehensive analysis of the historical record is necessary for a case study.

I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to assist me during data collection. I used a case study protocol as my guide, which was central to a multi-case study research design. This protocol helped me focus on the topic of my study as well as assisting me with the reliability (Yin, 2014). A case study is comprised of (a) an overview of the case study, (b) data collection action plan, (c) a template for the case study report (Yin, 2014).

Interview Protocol and Questions

1. Introduce self to the participant(s).
2. Present consent form, review the contents, answer questions and concerns of participant(s).
3. Give participant copy of consent form.
4. Turn on the audio recording device.
5. Follow procedure to introduce participant(s) with pseudonym and coded identification; note the date and time.
6. Begin interview with Question #1; follow through to the final question.
7. Follow up with additional questions and collect company documents.
8. End interview sequence and discuss transcript review with participant(s).
9. Thank the participant(s) for their part in the study. Reiterate contact numbers for follow up questions and concerns from participants.

Data Collection Technique

In this qualitative multi-case study, I was the main data collection instrument. Rowley (2012) noted that researchers executing qualitative research assume the role of data collection instrument; their knowledge and skills are crucial to the quality of the knowledge composed. Data collection through interviews has advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of using interviews to collect data are that researchers are able to conduct a semistructured face-to-face interview with the participants and an opportunity to explore the topic in depth. Yin (2014) stated that the purpose of interview

data is to bring a clear and transparent perspective of an individual's experiences and viewpoint around a specific topic. Analysis of documentation and interviews contribute to a thorough collection of data for triangulation (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Bell (2013) also noted that interviews are a process of compiling data from the people participating in a research study by asking questions and having them respond verbally.

The disadvantages of using interviews to obtain data are that participants can control the responses; participants can alter information by making a mistake, show bias, or engage in a desire to please the interviewer (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014), none of which occurred during this study. Yin (2012) suggested that in a qualitative approach, researchers have the choice to use three types of interviews: formal surveys, focused interviews, and in-depth interviews. Moustakas (1994) noted that in a qualitative approach, the three types of interviews are: structured, unstructured, and semistructured.

Structured interviews, also known as standardized interviews, comprise questions that limit the range of participants' answers (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Researchers conduct structured interviews within a time constraint and with a series of pre-established questions to ask the participants without follow-up questions. Unstructured interviews consist of only a few interview questions topics (Moustakas, 1994).

The lack of structure and interview question topics structure can produce an unsatisfactory breadth of the interview questions (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The unstructured approach was not suitable for this study. The semistructured interviews consist of

prepared questions governed by identified themes in a logical and organized manner designed to bring out more detailed responses (Moustakas, 1994).

Document review has both advantages and disadvantages. Yin (2012) proposed that using documents for data collection allows for a more stable process, and researchers can review them several times to glean data. In addition, documents hold detailed information of events and are unobtrusive (Yin, 2012). Examples of documents collected from the participants were copies of their strategic business plan and business plan.

Another advantage of using documents to collect data was that it allowed for the expansion of findings. The researcher can use more than one data sources to obtain relevant information and crosscheck data for consistency and strength (Turner & Danks, 2014; Wahyuni, 2012; Yin, 2012). Myers (2013) and Yin (2012) noted that the disadvantages of using documentation are that researchers can experience difficulties retrieving incomplete documents.

I used a face-to-face semistructured interview with an open-ended question process and examination of firm documentation such as a business plan and strategic plans as the data collection technique for this qualitative multiple-case study. Participants were asked what place for an interview was preferable, and the location was agreed upon by both parties. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and backed up using an application on my iPhone. This approach allowed the participants to express their viewpoints freely and give direction to the discussion (Wahyuni, 2012). The interview process also allowed me to collect information relating to the strategies

small business owners use to stay in business beyond 5 years. I used the opened-ended questions and firm documents to explore the strategies female small business owners used to enable them to stay in operation for longer than 5 years (Holt & Goulding, 2014).

I collected business documents such as business strategic plans, business plans, newspaper clippings, administrative documents, financial documents, and from company websites, I obtained vision statements, mission statement, background information, marketing materials, by requesting the permission of participants. Wahyuni (2012) and Yin (2012) noted that it is important that researchers inquire of relevant documentation from the participants to answer the research questions. Yin stated that documents include letters, memoranda, agendas, minutes, administrative documents, formal studies, and newspaper clippings. I collected business documents such as business strategic plans, business plans, newspaper clippings, administrative documents, financial documents, and from company websites, I obtained vision statements, mission statement, background information, marketing materials, by requesting the permission of participants. Wahyuni, Yin, and Turner and Danks (2014) also stated that any additional information helps raise the clarity and understanding of a case study. Other documents that I collected were the documents made available to the public through the firm's website even though this information could be inaccurate (Yin, 2012).

The face-to-face interviews I conducted took place at times most convenient to each of the participants and free from disruption. I started by making an appointment with each of the participants to pick a date, time, and place of participant's choice of

preference to conduct the interviews (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012; Yin, 2014). During the interviews, I maintained rapport at all and allocated time for follow-up questions to help guide the participants to respond to each question fully (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Wahyuni, 2012). I listened to each participant carefully with the understanding that participants can and will show conflicts in their memories, attitudes, and reasons (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Yin, 2012, 2014).

I captured each participant interview in a notebook and with a Sony PX33 digital voice recorder, which I then transferred the digital files to my computer. I imported the files into MaxQDA software and then transcribed the digital recordings of each interview (Clifford, 2012; Patton, 2015; Wahyuni, 2012). The location of the interviews and the associated background noise affected the quality of the recordings resulting in longer transcribing time. The four interviews that were held at a coffee shop had background noise such as people talking very loudly and employees making espresso, which was recorded along with the interview.

I triangulated the data sources by contrasting the transcribed data with the interview notes from my notebook to improve the accuracy of the transcribed interview data (Oleinik, 2011; Wahyuni, 2012; Yin, 2012). To improve the quality of data reliability, I asked the participants to review and verify the transcript of their interview. I personally delivered a printed copy of a transcript to each participants and I returned one week later to discuss and to collect the transcript along with any changes. I did not

perform a pilot study; however, I encouraged the participants to ask questions during the interview to make sure they understand the questions, resulting in no confusion.

Data Organization Techniques

Data organization was the final step in the data collection techniques and starts after I recorded the interviews. It is important to organize the data in a fashion as to prepare it for data analysis (Altheide, 2013). I transferred the audio files from my digital voice recorder to my computer, and labeled each file as follows: Participant1.mp3, Participant2.mp3, Participant3.mp3, Participant4.mp3, and Participant5.mp3. The next step involved importing the audio files into MaxQDA software. I labeled each file using the same labeling scheme.

I transcribed the interviews using MaxQDA software's built in transcribing tool and kept the same naming convention. I also collected business plans, strategic plans, vision statements, marketing information, and my own notes, which I added to MaxQDA and labeled each document using the following scheme: P1D1 for Participant 1 Document 1, P1D2 for Participant 1 Document 2 etc. (Gilbert, 2013).

I did not collect any personal identification information from each of the participants. Each participant of this study was issued a number to protect their identity by using Participant #1 or Participant #2 as an alternative to the name of their business or the individual. For confidentiality purposes, I locked all information regarding the participants in a secure filing cabinet, all electronic data was encrypted on my computer,

and after 5-years, they will be destroyed. The only person in charge of the participants' personal information was the researcher (K. R. Mitchell & Wellings, 2013).

Data Analysis Technique

The technique of analyzing data from a case study to identify patterns is *structured analysis* (Reynolds, 2014). Triangulation was used in this study to obtain accurate analysis of data. I used the five-step process as described by Yin (2014) for analysis of data I collected. Yin described the process as (1) determining and defining the research questions, (2) selecting the cases and determining data gathering and analysis techniques, (3) preparing to collect the data, (4) collecting the data in the field, and (5) evaluating and analyzing the data.

I approached the data analysis process for this case study research design involving the triangulation of data from multiple informants and multiple sources, which allowed me to identify the main themes with the conceptual framework, the TOC, as my guide. The TOC also allowed me to determine constraints the participants faced, and identify how they overcame them and stayed in business for longer than five years. In this qualitative research study, data analysis involved the determination and interpretation of patterns, uncovering major themes to determine the answer to the research question.

The researcher makes sense of the information gathered, analyzes and interprets data to gain an understanding of the responses (Wahyuni, 2012; Yin, 2014). I interpreted the themes according to the strategies used by female-owned businesses that have stayed in business more than 5 years (Reynolds, 2014; Yin, 2014). Once I interviewed the

participants, I analyzed the data to determine the findings and synthesize a result to capture the implication of the study (Wahyuni, 2012; Yin, 2014).

The next process of the data analysis in this study consisted of formulating and coding of data (Glaser & Laudel, 2013). During this procedure, I organized the materials into categories and label each category into themes (Wahyuni, 2012; Yin, 2012). Yin (2014) stated that data analysis administered concurrently with data collection allows for a more comprehensive analysis as themes become clearer in the data.

Rowley (2012) stated that researchers (a) formulate the dataset; (b) familiarize themselves with the data; (c) organize, code, and interpret the data; and (d) present and write up the results. I used the MaxQDA software program to assist in the interpretation and analysis of the interview and the document review data. I chose the MaxQDA software program because it offers multiple functions, coding, document review, analysis, theme identification, text organization, text coding and interpretation, and keyword search execution not available in a manual qualitative analysis (Rowley, 2012). When compared to other software packages such as NVivo, MaxQDA has the best support options to help me use the application as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Reynolds (2014) and Yin (2014) stated that applying qualitative method involves transparency in interpretation, analysis, and various possibilities of presentation. MaxQDA allowed me to identify themes that I might miss if I used manual codification and categorization (Reynolds, 2014; Yin, 2014). The interview questions and the business documents I collected from the participants allowed me to identify themes about

the conceptual framework of the study. The business documents included administrative documents, business strategic plans, newspaper clipping, financial documents, business plans, and company vision statements, background information, mission statement and marketing materials from that I retrieved from the company website.

Interview Questions:

1. What strategies did you use to be successful beyond 5 years? Please give specific examples.
2. How did these business strategies help improve or enhance your business?
3. How did you obtain your business strategies?
4. What external constraints negatively affect your business and what strategies have helped you address them?
5. What staffing, equipment, or facilities constraints have negatively affected your business and what strategies have helped you address them?
6. What material constraints have you dealt with to run and what strategies have helped you address them?
7. What supplier constraints have you experience and what strategies have helped you address them?
8. What financial constraints exist for your business and what strategies have helped you address them?
9. What internal policy constraints limit your business and what strategies have helped you address them?

10. What other recommendations do you have to address any constraints that have not been included in this interview?

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability is the standard by which researchers measure the trustworthiness of a study (Elingsson & Brysiewicz, 2012). It is the ability of other researchers to replicate the study in a similar fashion (Anney, 2014; Aravamudhan & Krishnaveni, 2015). To achieve quality in this study, I planned to meet each of the following criteria (a) reliability, (b) validity, (c) credibility, (d) transferability, (e) dependability, (f) conformability, and (g) data saturation (Houghton et al., 2013).

Validity

Validity indicates the measure of trust, with precision; researchers can conduct their study to represent the phenomenon that is under study (Anney, 2014; Aravamudhan & Krishnaveni, 2015). The multiple data sources used to gather data and the data collecting techniques added validity to the study. Another way to ensure validity was to allow the participants to validate the accuracy of their interview transcript to ensure that my interpretations show accuracy in the meaning of their perceptions and the documents that I reviewed. The participants did not find any misinterpretation in the transcripts; therefore, no immediate changes were made.

Credibility

Credibility is the degree to which the participants can trust and believe the results of the study (Harper & Cole, 2012; Petty et al., 2012). To ensure the credibility of this study, I used a transcript review approach requesting participants to review their correct responses as well adding more information that has not been provided before proceeding with the analysis. Transcript review is a participant validation technique to gain accuracy, assist in improving validity, and enhance the reliability of the research study (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). To ensure credibility of this study, I used the transcript review method by taking the result of the study back to the participants for revision (Houghton et al., 2013; Mero-Jaffe, 2011; Petty et al., 2012).

Transferability

Transferability is the capacity of the results of a study to be useful in similar, but separate contexts (Ali & Yusof, 2011; Anney, 2014; Aravamudhan & Krishnaveni, 2015). To boost the transferability of my study, I provided detailed descriptions of my rationale for the choice of study populations and case study context and a detailed presentation of the findings, that included direct quotes from the participants. I gave detailed descriptions to allow for conclusions about extrapolating the findings to other settings (Petty et al., 2012; Wahyuni, 2012).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the ability to adapt to the changing degree of stability in the research project (Petty et al., 2012; Wahyuni, 2012). Researchers involved in

qualitative studies understand that differences exist in context and people; therefore, replicating a study elsewhere is not possible (Petty et al., 2012). To enhance the dependability in this study, I reviewed the interview transcripts with participants in person immediately after the interview to assure response accuracy, emergent perception, and topic accuracy (Mero-Jaffe, 2011; Petty et al., 2012). To boost dependability, I presented a detailed and systematic description of the research process in person on the phone before the interview occurred (Wahyuni, 2012).

Conformability

Conformability is the ability for researchers to carry out the study and reach a similar conclusion (Petty et al., 2012; Wahyuni, 2012). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that conformability occurs when the results of the research study can echo the focus of the inquiry and not the preference of the researcher. To establish conformability in this study, I triangulated the data gathered from the participants during the interviews and the company's document such as the business plan and business strategies (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Wahyuni, 2012).

Data Saturation

Data saturation refers to the process of conducting numerous interviews until no new data emerges (Petty et al., 2012; Wahyuni, 2012; Yin, 2014). To achieve data saturation, I continued to interview until similar or same answers emerged with little or no variation. I also reviewed additional documents until all the data collected showed no new information emerging. The recognition of data saturation could prove difficult and

is dependent upon the researcher's experience (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013; Walker, 2012; Yin, 2014). I monitored and reviewed data continuously in order to establish the point at which no new information emerged from the data collection.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, the purpose statement was restated and, in addition, a detailed description of the role of the researcher, particularly in the data collection process was provided. All the fundamentals of the design, validity, and reliability of the study were covered. The purpose of the qualitative multiple-case study to explore the strategies women, who own small businesses, used to succeed in business beyond 5 years was provided. The findings of this study may contribute to the body of knowledge and positive social change by allowing female entrepreneurs to recognize the business strategies needed to grow their businesses and stay in business longer than 5 years.

In this section, my role as a researcher and my background with the topic of the study was detailed. The population of the study which consisted of a purposive sample of five women participants who have owned and successfully operated their small businesses beyond 5 years on Bainbridge Island, Washington was described. In Section 3, an overview of the findings of this qualitative multi-case study, the employment of professional practices, and implications for social change are presented. In addition, recommendations for further research studies, my opinions, reflections, and conclusion are found. The findings of the study are included in Section 3, which will include the conceptual framework, research question, which will enhance the study's conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 3 includes a detailed narrative of the results of the study's findings. In Section 3, (a) findings, (b) application to professional practice, (c) implications for social change, (d) recommendations for actions and further research, and (e) reflections on my experiences of the research are presented.

Overview of Study

In this multiple-case study, I explored the strategies female small business owners used to succeed in business beyond 5 years. The problem was the lack of strategies to sustain a business beyond 5 years by some women who are small business owners. To understand the issue under study, I conducted semistructured face-to-face interviews with five women who owned and operated small businesses on Bainbridge Island, Washington.

Data for the study were obtained from face-to-face interviews and company documents. Company documents included business plans, strategic business plans, company policies, company websites, and company social media sites. The semistructured interviews and acquisition of company documents allowed for the triangulation of the data. Once I completed reviewing and transcribing the data from each interview session, I uploaded each participant's responses and documents into MAXQDA12 software, which allowed me to produce and categorize themes. I then began coding the documents using MAXQDA12 software. I derived the codes by looking for repeated patterns in the text. I then applied the codes across all the documents

collected. The analysis of data using MAXQDA12 software indicated three strategies that women who are small business owners in this study used to stay in business beyond 5 years. The first strategy was being focused on customer and employee relations, with a strong emphasis on serving the customers' needs with all aspects of the business oriented to put its customers' satisfaction first. The second strategy focused on leadership, and the third centered on strategies.

Presentation of the Findings

The study had one central research question: What strategies do female small business owners use to succeed in business beyond 5 years? To gain a full understanding of strategies female small business owners used to succeed beyond 5 years, I conducted semistructured interviews with five female participants who have successfully operated their businesses beyond 5 years on Bainbridge Island, Washington. Five female small business owners were selected via a purposive sample, which was possible from available public data from the Bainbridge Island Chamber of Commerce. After compiling the participation list and gaining approval from the IRB, I contacted the owners about participating in the study. Purposive sampling allows for an increase in the validity of the study and can generate rich and relevant triangulation (Robinson, 2014).

After personally explaining the study to each of the selected participants and getting their verbal consent to participate, I e-mailed a copy of the consent form to each of them. After I had received an e-mail response stating, *I consent*, from the participants, I contacted each one of them by phone to arrange the interview location and time. The

five female participants also agreed to have the interviews recorded. I conducted the face-to-face interviews spanning a period of 2 days, in which I asked each participant 10 interview questions (see Appendix A) and conducted transcript review after the interview to strengthen the validity of the interpretations. Each participant selected the interview locations and appropriate times.

Three of the interviews were conducted at local coffee shops, and one interview was conducted at a participant's office and each lasted for approximately 1 hour. After completing each interview, I collected business documents such as business strategic plans, business plans, newspaper clippings, administrative documents, and financial documents, and from company websites, I obtained vision statements, mission statements, background information, and marketing materials. Participants offered explanations of documents they felt needed clarification, which I took note of.

Transcript review was conducted with each of the five participants during a follow-up interview to check the interpretations of the original interview. The follow-up interviews were face-to-face with a printed copy of the interview transcript and lasted approximately 30 minutes. Four of the follow-up interviews were held at a local coffee shop, and I did not pay for coffee; the fifth follow-up interview was held at the participant's office. Participants wrote comments on the printed transcript to make corrections to any discrepancies. I then updated the interview transcripts to ensure the data were accurate and up to date.

I transcribed the recorded interview data and changed each participant name to the codes P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5. I completed the transcriptions and called each participant. I shared and reviewed the compiled transcript with each participant at their choice of location to review, clarify, and verify the responses. The company documents were assigned codes to link to each participant. The documents were numbered in the order they were received: P1D1, P1D2, P1D3, P1D4, and P1D5. The use of additional company documents enhanced methodical triangulation of data (Walsh, 2013). The next stage involved manual coding by uploading the interview data and all the company documents into MAXQDA12 software and to assist with analyzing themes. The company documents helped strengthen the identified themes from the interviews. Once a pattern emerged from the interview data, it was reinforced through the analysis of the company document data. Three consistent themes emerged during data analysis: (a) customer and employee relations, (b) leadership, and (c) strategic management.

The TOC guided this study; during data collection, I concentrated on process improvements, management of internal and external constraints, and the ability of the female small business owners to identify the cause of problems and constraints, as opposed to selecting issues randomly – to manage a business with the intent to succeed in business beyond 5 years (Alsmadi, Almani, & Khan, 2014; Cullen & Parker, 2015; Naor et al., 2013). TOC was also founded on the premise that every organization will encounter at least one constraint, and, as a result, the leader of the organization has to be able to achieve his or her goals, make money, and still maintain certain basic conditions

such as customer and employee relations, leadership, and business management (Alsmadi et al., 2014). Participants in this study applied their knowledge and skills to their product to grow their business. The five female small business owners understood the relationship between knowledge constraints and difficulties in enhancing business performance and maintaining profitability. They also understood the importance of using strategies to overcome constraints that could prevent them from succeeding in business beyond 5 years. The findings revealed three main strategies that female small business owners used to succeed in business beyond 5 years: (a) customer and employee relations, (b) leadership, and (c) strategic management.

Theme 1: Customer and Employee Relations

All participants in this study revealed customer and employee relations as the first emerging strategy for successfully being in business for more than 5 years. Barnes, Collier, and Robinson (2014) found that employees' behavior remained a significant indicator of customer satisfactions. The participants all agreed that focusing on customer and employee relations was important because it contributes to profitability and success. P1 asserted that employees and customers are the key components of what makes the business grow; therefore, employee relations are essential for business success and the strategy to do that is to be present alongside the employees on a continual basis.

P1's strategy to encourage customer and employee relations was to manage her employees side-by-side daily until they are fully trained to work on their own, which in turn gave her the chance to get to know her employees better and build trust with them.

She also created her products based on her customers' preference and made sure her business provided the best quality service to keep the customers satisfied. P1D1, on the company website, confirmed,

We baked the things we loved and made coffee the way we thought it should be made. As it turned out lots of people agreed with us, and we have been blessed over the years with an amazing parade of talented and inspired bakers, cooks, and baristas each bringing something of themselves to the table.

The findings align with Axelrod (2015), who found that successful managers (a) are mindful of their employees' talents, (b) could advance employees' self-awareness, (c) promote breakthrough of blind spots, and (d) build trusting relationship with each employee, which can lead to employee commitment, loyalty to the company, and customer satisfaction. P1 also discussed the importance of managing side-by-side with her employees and showing them that she cared as well as paying attention to her customers' needs. These were some of the key strategies to staying in business beyond 5 years. P1 added,

It's important to show; it's important for your staff to see you working as well. And working with them, and communicating with them, because it makes them feel like you're invested and therefore, they care more and I think that your customers see that care and therefore, I just feel like you see it in all aspects of the business.

The participant's response concurs with Chang, O'Neill, and Travaglione's (2016) findings that employee trust in managers is known as an essential aspect influencing business performance, and the constructs of trust are based on social interaction described as an exchange of something in return for something else. P1D4 documentation, customer relations feedback from company website, helped to determine the level of customer satisfaction received as a result of good employee and customer relations. One reviewer noted, "We enjoy the store atmosphere (sometimes bustling, sometimes quieter depending on when we go), the customer service (high level of friendliness/courteousness), and of course the variety of foods and beverages available" (P1D4). P2 indicated that building meaningful relationships with employees and customers contributed to satisfied repeat customers as well as loyal employees.

To help employees better understand how to meet the needs of their customers and any internal work grievances, P2 strategically scheduled monthly group discussions to resolve any concerns that the employees might have and how they can address those concerns as a team. An example from P2D1 documentation, the company policies, reaffirmed how the employees receive guidance from their manager to provide the best maximum services to customers, especially for a large group: "Large classes (35 or more) will require teacher direction to make most space. The student will need to be guided on in math placement." Additionally, P2 scheduled her calendar to meet with each employee to discuss any personal concerns they might have that could affect their job by doing things like going for a walk together after work.

P2D4 described the company's mission, as "to provide yoga and meditation classes for all, in an inclusive, nurturing friendly community setting to help cultivate awareness, increase holistic health, and to make this world a better place." During the interview, P2 ascertained that "the more that we are a strong core team, then that just ripples out into the greater community. And that if we are all kind of supporting one another then that just helps teachers to support the larger community." P2 acknowledged that to be successful in business, a business owner must build a strong relationship with her employees and make time to get to know them and hear them out. P2 added that

so much of the work is about the relationship with self, relationship with each other in community, and the more that I nurture that relationship, it helps me accomplish that. I think that not only I nurture that relationship, but that others in the community nurture each other, sort of like holds its own.

Employee job satisfaction is directly linked to customer satisfaction, and customers repurchase intention (Hur et al., 2015). P4D1 documentation, the company website, confirmed customer satisfaction in the way of customer feedback as one customer described it as "great shopping and such a lovely shop owner! She went out of her way to help connect me to my dropped smartphone and debit card. Will definitely be returning with my 17-year-old daughter for clothes! Thank you!"

P4 expressed during the interview the feedback she received from customers and the locals stating their appreciation for her products as

I get these locals who come in and remind me all the time like, I'm so glad you're here because I can actually afford a shirt today or you know, I needed something. I remind myself that it's not just about January-February and the tourists.

P4D2 contained the business mission, “Friendly, Fashion Forward, and Affordable,” and this coincided with the interview findings in that the relationship or interaction between the customer and the frontline service employee is paramount to customer satisfaction and ultimately firm profit. P1, P2, P3, and P4 enlarged their customer relations to the wider community of Bainbridge Island by participating in community festivities, holidays, special occasions, and promotions of other annual events. All participants made sure to communicate with their customers regularly to understand their needs and concerns.

A review of the mission statement, contained in P3D1, explicitly stated, “To supply superior customer service” with first-hand knowledge of the product and a customer service focused staff. P3 credited customer service as the key strategy for her success in business beyond 5 years and stated,

I think just customer service being number one. Being consistent and really striving for customer service. I always really train my employees about how important it is to have good customer service because it alone is my biggest thing and I don't ever want one customer ever leaving the store unhappy.

Customer satisfaction mediates the effect of employee action (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). P3D5 documentation, the company website, affirmed customer satisfaction

stating, “We were so impressed with you and your store in all that you offer the customer service and quality, texture, and taste of the fudge.”

P5 stressed the importance of building healthy customer and employee relations to be effective and as a strategy. P5D1 was a client criterion plan with the main focus on customer relations by helping customers narrowly define success for their business. The client criteria come in handy when selecting new clients. One of the client criteria stated the need to “treat staff well” (P5D1). P5 asserted, “It gave me time to consider exactly what type of client, I wanted.” P5 also noted that any time she gets a client with a fee for service, she made sure she does not price her service above their rate. That way, the customer does not pay her more than what they bill for themselves.

P5D2 documentation, the business project criteria plan, echoed the significance of selecting clients by building a good trusting relationship with customers as a stated “3 to 5-year long term relationship possibility” is required. The participants indicated that customer and employee relations were vital strategies to the growth and sustainability of their business. Previous research aligned with the findings that encouraging customer and employee relations was critical to business sustainability and success.

The findings from the interview data indicated that customer and employee relations take first preference. Consequently, in the course of the ability of an entrepreneur to lead a successful small business, the entrepreneur strives to reach his or her goal through effectuation. Effectuation is a strategic approach based on the inherent

understanding of who they know (relationship and networking), their own expertise (knowledge and skills), and their personal value and virtue (Watson et al., 2015).

Each participant in this multiple-case study noted a strong need for continually updating their knowledge and skills, customer relations and networking with the wider community, and reliance on expertise. The prevalent theme considered most important to the participants was the process of creating a positive customer experience at the point of sale and post-sale. In the literature review of this study, Karadakal et al. (2015) stated that the success or failure of a company depends entirely on how the small business owner manages the different facets of operations of the business as well as the employees' performance. Additionally, Karadakal et al. noted that a critical aspect of the owner's responsibility involved training and mentoring his or her employees to improve business performance. Lo et al. (2016) added that to respond to the rapidly changing demands of 21st-century customers, an entrepreneur should have a strong customer focus strategy in place.

The results of a study conducted by Patel, Guedes, and Pearce (2017) are in line with the results of this study in that besides engaging employees with empowerment, the need for continuous education and training are a vital part of sustainability of the employee's growth, as well as the organization's growth. Lau, Tong, Lien, Hsu, and Chong (2017) also expressed the importance of having customer and employee relations and noted that strong customer and employee relations contribute to a business's profitability, competitive advantage, and an indication of a successful business.

Theme 2: Leadership

The second theme to emerge from the participants' responses was leadership. Boykins et al. (2015) noted that small businesses need leadership to survive and prosper. P1, P2, P3, and P5 all used their knowledge and passion about their products to tap into their community at large and strategize a plan to lead and market their products, as well as services, to their customers. P5 stated during the interview, "I love leadership. I had taken some leadership development courses during that time." P5D1 was a client criteria plan that she used as a guide to make sure that the clients she selected meet her criteria for her to lead effectively and achieve the optimum result she had planned.

One of the criteria for P5D1 was the client criteria plan was "willing to learn." Yang (2015) submitted that leaders may alter their leadership styles to different situations to meet organizational goals. P5 noted that building strong relationships with her clients is vital for the growth of her business as well as for the success of her clients. Therefore, any projects she took on had to meet certain criteria so she could manage the project successfully and at the same time, maintain a healthy working relationship with her clients. A project criteria plan contained in P5D2 specifically stated a "3 to 5-year long term relationship possibility" is required.

Another example of leadership was demonstrated by P2D1, a business policy handbook created specifically by P2 that outlined protocols to help assist her employees while at work, so they maintain a level of customer satisfaction. P2 also exemplified leadership in P2D2, the business website, as "ongoing education through our regular

classes, meditation, chanting, workshops, retreats, visiting teachers, and community gathering” for both her employees and customers. Additionally, P2 demonstrated leadership in P2D3, a monthly motivational blog that she used as a tool to inspire her employees and customers to reach their goals. In one of her monthly newsletters, she stated; “As a yoga teacher and general fan of the breath, I say on any given day many many times out loud, “just breathe.” I try to say it in novel ways. Inhale light, exhale cloudiness” (P2D3). Inyang (2013) made reference to leadership as a way of compelling employees to work toward the accomplishment of organizational goals.

P3D4 was a strategic business plan, which incorporates P3’s intention to continuously provide educational development to her employees about products and services they provide. P3 trained her employees to stand behind the products they sell and make sure their customers are satisfied with their service and products. P3D2 was an internal policy handbook, which P3 developed, as a handbook guide on products for her employees to familiarize themselves with and to encourage her employees to ask for her help when they are not sure about a product. P3 indicated during the interview, “I always really trained my employees to know how important customer service is.” P3D3 was strategic business objectives, that embodied four objectives in conducting a successful business, and one of them was to “to build a successful, profitable, women-owned small business.”

To create a highly motivated and passionate workforce, P1, P2, and P5 invested in their employees by working or managing side-by-side with them as well as clients to

ensure that their employees and clients have clear, meaningful goals, as well as considerable autonomy in meeting those goals. Zacher, Pearce, Rooney, and McKenna (2014) maintained that leadership is showing interest in employees, and their goals, aspirations, and development, while inspirational motivation involves motivating and encouraging followers to gain organizational goals. P1 insisted on the importance of the owner and manager leading by example to grow the business:

It's important to show; it's important for your staff to see you working as well. And working with them, and communicating with them because it makes them feel like you're invested, and therefore they care more and I think that your customers see that care.

P1's primary focus in running a successful business and being a good example was making sure that her employees, customers, and those in the community, like the suppliers and distributors who contributed to the production of the business, are appreciated and acknowledged. Contained in P1D1, the business' main website, P2 acknowledged the employees for their artistry and talents as

We have been blessed over the years with an amazing parade of talented and inspired bakers, cooks, and baristas each bringing something of themselves to the table. We wouldn't have become the bakery we are without all of them, and they continue to help us achieve our vision every day.

P1D2 was a business mission statement with the focus on being the "source of comfort and happiness to our community with products and services that are the result of

artistry in both heart and mind.” Similarly, P1 explained that to manage the internal and external constraints of a business effectively, one has to pay close attention to the details of the overall production of a business operation daily and stated, “It’s just attention, really. Paying attention to your customers, your employees and your community.” P1 also emphasized the significance for hiring qualified employees who can bring to the business new talents and skills of artistry. P1D3 was a newspaper article published in the local paper highlighting the business philosophy stating, “We’re always trying to use the best stuff we can get.” Featured in the article as well was a longtime customer turned staff that was quoted saying, “It’s the center of the community” (P1D3).

Participants revealed leadership as another strategy for business success beyond 5 years. The findings confirmed the literature review about the importance of an effective leader and the success of a small business (Andrew & Sofian, 2012). Furthermore, Andrew and Sofian (2012) added that business success could only be achieved when the owner of the organization invests and is engaged with, his or her employees to create dedication and emotional connection. S. Holt, Marques, Hu, and Wood (2017) expanded on leadership from the concept of creating leadership for quality as a strategy to enhance the efficiency and performance of an organization as well as the growth and well-being of the employees which leads to business success.

S. Holt et al. and Rego, Cunha, and Polónia (2015) noted that for an organization to maintain a desired level of quality in their service or product, certain characteristics or roles should be expected in a leader: (a) setting strategic and visionary leadership; (b)

effectively communicating and defining strategic roles to maintain and achieve quality; (c) sanction a system to allow employees to be self-accountable for quality; (d) build a trusting atmosphere in the workplace for open communication and empathy; (e) honesty; (f) promote creativity, innovation and continual growth; and (g) recognizing employee contributions.

Theme 3: Strategic Management

The third theme that emerged from the data was strategic management. Strategic management was one of the main sources of growth in all the 5 participant's businesses. Participants showed skills in managerial decisions and strategy to manage the day-to-day business operations and played an active role in entrepreneurship. The five participants used different strategies to grow and manage their business.

Business leaders face many difficulties in comparison to large enterprises when seeking to acquire financial assistance from a bank (Belanova, 2015). P2, P3, and P4 used strategic management to overcome difficulties in accessing financing. P4 explained during the interview that "I tried to get a loan through my bank but I couldn't do it." P4 demonstrated strategic management in overcoming this financial constraint by relying on credit cards to gain access to capital. P3 also experienced the same constraint when trying to access capital as she noted in the interview "I went to one bank, it was a woman loan officer and she looked at my business plan and she goes, I don't think it is going to work." P3 overcame this financial constraint through perseverance. She continued applying for loans at different banks until she encountered a business loan officer with

experience in working with small businesses and she was able to be approved. P2 explained during the interview that “I have a really good relationship with my bank and I have a long relationship with them.” P2 demonstrated strategic management in mitigating this financial constraint by networking and establishing a long-term relationship with her financial institution.

To improve business performance and maintain profit, P1 encouraged a manager-employee work relationship with her employees so they could engage in good customer service. The strategy was to develop strong manager-employee relations to show that she cares; not only for the quality of the product but also for the well-being of her employees, along with the customer service they provide. P1 noted during the interview that “So there is a lot of strategies but in terms of being successful, with our customers and with our staff, we generally just were present all the time in the kitchen.” P1 demonstrated strategic management in P1D2, a business mission statement strategically designed to provide customers with a sense of comfort, best quality assurance, and satisfaction with the product and service provided as noted, “source of comfort and happiness to our community with products and services that are the result of artistry in both heart and mind.” To create and maintain competitive advantages and stay profitable, P1 made sure she stayed proactive, continued to anticipate change, and continually refine, and when necessary, made significant changes to her strategies.

As a manager and owner, P1 had to strategically analyze all the internal and external constraints to meet the mission of the business and decide what strategies to use

and finally, implement those strategies. For instance, P1 explained during the interview how she strategically managed one of the internal constraints by making the decision on the price of products stating, “You have to decide is your customer going to be willing to pay that? Do they recognize what they are paying for? Paying attention to your customers and paying attention to your employees” (P1).

P1D3 documentation, a newspaper article, confirmed strategic management in the way of analyzing all internal and external constraints to meet the mission of the business and making the decision on what action to take and implementing that action to meet the mission of the business by hiring the best possible staff and embracing the community where they served as, “We’re always trying to use the best stuff we can get. We become such a part of people’s lives” (P1D3). P5’s passion for helping small businesses succeed financially gave her the opportunity to use her wealth of financial knowledge and background as a CFO to conduct financial consulting on a small scale. To create a customer-focused service, P5 strategically designed her business model with a baseline number of clients so she can manage and not overly exhaust herself, she explained during the interview,

I had to really pay attention to know my own personality, and how I would react if I had 10 clients and plenty of work. Would that make me happy? No. It would make me stressed out because it's too many. So, I had to plan that in my numbers.

Strategic management was demonstrated in P5D3, a strategic business plan specifically designed by P5 as a protocol to help by assisting her in managing her hours

and the number of clients she takes on to meet her goal as indicated, “take home 75 percent” in which she calculated her breakeven point so she can work and still make a profit. She also took inventory of what she was capable of handling, and what she would not be able to accomplish along with setting goals. Furthermore, P5 exhibited strategic management in P5D1; a client criteria plan that P5 used as a guide to strategically help her assess, analyze, and implement an action plan for the clients she selected to work with and the clients she trusts would be most effective in obtaining their goals and objectives. Two of the criteria for the client criteria plan were for clients to be (a) “willing to grow business” and (b) “willing to learn” (P5D1).

P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 all applied their mission statement as a strategy to stay in business beyond five years or more. P2 kept her business operation simple as possible by strategically offering services that aligned with her business mission and vision as she explained during the interview:

Keeping it simple and keeping it small and not franchising it. The business is super simple, and I decided not to complicate it. So, I didn't start getting all this like merchandise and start selling clothes and juice bar. That wouldn't align me with the vision. I just kept it really simple. Basically, it is just teaching and offering classes and workshops. And I think having a vision and a mission statement helped. I think really simplicity has been part of the success.

To keep her business operation consistent with her business mission and vision statement, P2 introduced P2D1, a business policy handbook strategically designed to help

P2 in assisting her employees, monitoring the overall business operation, and help guide her employees to do their job effectively as noted in the 'Good to Know' section of the policy handbook stated, "Subbing: Sometimes teachers need subs. Once you have substitute teacher arranged, please be sure to change the teacher's name on MBO. It is the regular teacher's responsibility to ensure that sub's name is entered on class list" (P2D1). The P2D4 documentation contains a monthly motivational blog that P2 used as a strategy to stay connected with her employees and customers and also as a tool to motivate them to reach their goals in keeping with the business motto, "Our aim is growth Your growth" (P2D4).

P3 used strategic management as a strategy to set the future direction of her business and to gain a competitive edge by marketing her product and service as stated in documentation P3D1, the company business plan, "the only retail store on the island that caters exclusively customer confectionary needs and be known for their topnotch product and customer service." P3D4, a business strategy objectives document reflects the owner's long-term goal approach to improving her business as follows, "To build a successful, profitable, woman-owned small business, to build a substantial revenue stream through the business website, and to repay original bank loans by the end of the fourth year of operation." To meet her long and short terms goals and objectives, P3 made sure she kept stock of her inventories, continuously planned, and took an assessment of her products and customers.

P3 described how she used strategic management to overcome an external constraint that negatively affected her business during the interview as

I think online business right now I know is hurting a lot of clothing stores. So, I started online maybe 2 years after I opened my business so that was really nice.

That's busier during November and December. In the summer, it's not so much because it's hot and it's hard to ship things.

P4 used strategic management as a strategy to make the decision on the direction of her business and to gain a competitive advantage by marketing her product and service presented in documentation P4D2, a business mission statement as, "Friendly, Fashion Forward, and Affordable." P4's used her business plan as a strategy to plan, monitor, analysis and do an assessment of all inventories of the clothes she purchased and sold, both in her store and online, monitoring her retail purchase and for being a small clothing business, she made sure her purchases were strategically planned, and any external constraints she felt was necessary to resolve for her business to meet its goals and objectives as she discussed during the interview:

I would say the strategy was always to keep the prices down. To be the one store that is affordable on the island. It was easy to get swayed into when you're at market like, oh I want to buy that and I would make so much more money off of buying this item and selling it at a higher price. And I know the demographics might support it. But I had to stick with my business plan. I wanted friendly, fashion forward, and affordable clothes. And that's my mission. (P4D2)

P4 also displayed the use of strategic management in the P4D1 documentation, a social media site used as an online platform for online shoppers interested in affordable fashion and accessories gathered toward women of all age groups and all demography. P4's decision to use social media was to build on a long-range direction of her business presence toward a wider market group that exists online. It is in effect, an attempt to cope more effectively with the growing demands emerging from both outside and inside the business and the same time, allowing her to formulate and apply a complete image of her business as it strives to accomplish its mission, goals, and objectives and help it staying on-course.

These three themes presented in this study reflect common business management traits that successful female small business owners have in common. These common management traits could be useful tools that could assist other women in the development of successful business operations that remain in operation for 5 years or more. In a reflection of this study, a central focus of the literature review was on entrepreneurship and the creation of small businesses; focusing on the potential for growth of the organization through the ability of an entrepreneur to lead and grow a successful small business beyond 5 years using strategies.

Strategic management emerged as the third and final theme during the data collection process of this study. The literature review affirmed the findings that an entrepreneur should have the strategies and skills to create new businesses and take advantage of new opportunities (Amirsardari & Maritz, 2015). Another peer-reviewed

study confirmed that entrepreneurs who are successful in their endeavors are those who have vision and strategies, and can initiate activities and transform their vision into reality for the advancement of society (Ramesh, 2013). Further studies noted that entrepreneurs are risk takers; however, according to Dey and Lehner (2016), entrepreneur's innovative abilities and accumulated experience can compensate for the lack of planning. Dey and Lehner explained that entrepreneurs are constantly involved in self-assessment and improvement of their abilities. Table 1 shows the number of references from each source and types of resources collected.

Table 1

Number of References From Each Source

	Participants	Business documents	Strategic plans	Web/archival documents
Theme 1	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5	3	3	4
Theme 2	P1, P2, P3, P5	2	5	5
Theme 3	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5	6	3	1

Applications to Professional Practice

Applications to professional practice are the response of applying acquired knowledge or skills in a realistic setting (Anbumathi & Sivasubramanian, 2016). The findings in this study provided insight on the strategies female owned businesses used to succeed in business beyond 5 years. The study was significant to understanding the reasons why half of women-owned small businesses fail at or before their fifth anniversary. The specific problem was that some women who owned small business lack the strategies to overcome constraints that restrict them from succeeding in business beyond 5 years. The purpose of the study was to explore strategies female small business owners used to sustain business beyond the 5-year mark and to analyze the findings of the strategies that influenced success and sustainability.

The findings and recommendations of this study could serve as the groundwork for female entrepreneurs who desire to attain business success and growth by understanding the effect of new knowledge and the strategies required to succeed in

business. The findings from this study led to the following recommendations: (a) implement a strong customer focus strategy, (b) encourage creativity, innovation, continual growth and recognize employee contributions, (c) build a trusting atmosphere in the workplace for open communication and (d) be strategic toward the business vision and mitigate all business constraints by implementing strategies with a realistic course of action.

Implementing a strong customer focus strategy allowed for the business owners and their employees to get to know their customers well in order to better serve them. To forge a deeper relationship with the customers, the business owners and employees would let the customer know that they are there to help, make their shopping comfortable and pleasant. Building strong customer employee relationships was a common strategy that all five female business owners implemented not only for short-term sales goals, but long-term partnerships.

All five participants stressed the importance of creating a positive customer experience at the point of sale and post-sale in order to keep the customers coming back. This is especially important in smaller communities where there is a smaller customer base. They also emphasized customer retention, because it is the foundation of business success and, they understood that repeat customers help generate the recurring income it takes to keep their business financially stable month after month. Additionally, a loyal customer base spreads the good word, and generates referral sales that are easy to close.

The leadership role for business success requires good strategic planning that aims to accomplish the vision of the business. Furthermore, leadership for quality as a strategy to improve the efficiency and performance of the business, as well as the growth and well-being of the employees, led to business success. All the participants of this study noted that the need for continuous education and training was critical to the employee's growth, as well as the business's growth.

Encouraging creativity, innovation, and professional development in an organization was also a strategy that each participant agreed helped, enabled their employees to show dedication to their work and to the organization and for what the organization represents. Consequently, the owners in this study acknowledged that they needed to recognize the contributions made by their employees to keep them motivated and engaged, and to make sure an encouraging and innovative organizational climate exists. P2 stated, "I really like working with people and I want people to feel good about who they are as a teacher and so I try to encourage and give them feedback on their job." P3 noted, "I like to tell my employees to consider yourself as owners, they feel empowered when I recognize their contributions."

Fostering a culture of open communication and trust allowed for a workplace atmosphere that was conducive to open and honest communication. The five female business owners found that by creating an open communication climate, their employees felt free to give their inputs so that ideas or conflicts were openly discussed and worked

through. The owners also understood that for being a small business, they needed complete commitment and participation from all their employees. P2 stated that

I try to do like every month or two get together and check in with the employees and we do that as a whole group but I also make a point to go out for coffee or like this morning I went for a walk with one of the teachers and just, hey what's going on? I think that the more that we are strong core team then that just ripples out into the greater community. And that if we are all kind of supporting one another then that just helps as teachers to support the larger community and cultivate an atmosphere of open communication.

Therefore, cultivating an atmosphere of open communication and trust in their business allowed for a more vibrant creative workforce where all their employees had a deep appreciation of their work and goals of the business, and what needed to be done to accomplish those goals. Open communication in an organization also gave everyone equal participation in the success of their businesses.

Meeting the business goals and objectives required continuous planning, monitoring, analyzing, and assessment of all that is necessary for the operation of a successful small business. An entrepreneur should have the strategies and skills to create new businesses and take advantage of new opportunities (Angelsberger, Kraus, Mas-Tur, & Roig-Tierno, 2017). Each business owner used strategies to lead and focus on process improvements to meet set goals, constant management review of the internal and external constraints of their business, and the course of action to mitigate constraints.

The results of this study could also serve as a guide to encourage female entrepreneurs to improve their professional practices that could lead to adopting new business strategies and making better strategic decision making. The results of the study could inspire female entrepreneurs to master new and improved business skills, improve their leadership skills, boost motivation, and gain new confidence as business owners. The findings and recommendations might also add value to female entrepreneurs' capacity to expand their small businesses, start new businesses, or explore entrepreneurial options.

The results of this study supported the TOC. The results indicated that female small business owners identified constraints and used strategies to overcome those constraints. Aguilar-Escobar, Garrido-Vega, and González-Zamora (2016) noted that the TOC is based on eliminating constraints of the system (bottlenecks) that restrict profitable operation in an organization. Aguilar-Escobar et al., also noted that one of the key strengths of TOC is that it is grounded in systemic thinking as opposed to other improvement approaches and it focuses improvement efforts on critical components of a system.

Entrepreneurs and managers can use TOC in business to identify constraints and apply strategies to overcome constraints to remain successful by developing project timelines and identify the main constraints that stops the project from performing better instead of breaking the process down and enhancing the efficiency of each step (Parker et al., 2015). The findings were significant to professional practice, and this study would

provide an extensive review of the inner workings of the female small business owners to ascertain what strategies these business owners used to succeed beyond 5 years. Female small business owners would use key strategies such as customer and employee relations, leadership, and strategic management to improve sustainability and growth.

Implications for Social Change

Women-owned businesses represent an increasing population in the United States (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013). Jiang et al. (2012) noted that the number of women-owned businesses more than doubled from 1992 to 2004. Women business owners accounted for 35.7% of all businesses in the United States, employed more than 8 million employees and had revenues of more than \$3.5 billion that help individual workers, the financial well-being of the family, community, and the nation (Sarasvathy et al., 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Additionally, small businesses rebounded more quickly during the economic crisis, and female small business owners were able to hire, while larger companies were not (Geho & Frakes, 2013; McGowan, Redeker, Cooper, & Greenan, 2012; Moscarini & Postel-Vinay, 2012). Female entrepreneurs who are successful in business are needed to inspire future female entrepreneurs and are also great role models for younger women (Robichaud et al., 2015). Similarly, women small business owners who are successful in business could share their experience with strategies, such as financial strategies, by providing opportunities to enhance profitability for other women small business owners. Female entrepreneurs also had a higher

probability of financial profitability when they access the right financial strategies (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013).

Small businesses are key to the vitality of communities in the United States and are the drivers of innovation and growth (Gili, Roca, Basu, McKee, & Stuckler, 2013). One out of every two small businesses discontinued within the first 5 years of operations (SBA, 2012b). Consequently, small businesses are a vital part of a healthy economy (Phillips & Land, 2012; SBA, 2014a). Correspondingly, Phillips and Land (2012), explained that when small businesses discontinue, the unemployment rate could rise, causing economic instability.

Barrett (2015) pointed out that continuing education and training programs in entrepreneurship could assist in obtaining knowledge and skills for future small business owners. Administering business strategies used by successful female small business owners could enhance business performance, profitability, and sustainability. The findings from this study could be implemented into professional small business development programs and training materials. The strategies might effectively affect new female small business owners who aspire to create and maintain a business. The findings could also influence social behavior.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies female small business owners have used to gain success beyond 5 years. Women-owned businesses are responsible for job creation in the United States; they employed more than

8.4 million workers in 2012, while revenue was greater than \$350 billion (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Prospective female entrepreneurs and existing female small business owners would benefit from the study's results by learning how other female small business owners have remained successful beyond 5 years. Three recommended strategies that could benefit current and future small business owners from this study were (a) customer and employee relations, (b) leadership, (c) developed strategies that will enhance and sustain the business beyond 5 years.

The first recommendation to potential business owners who aim to be successful in the business operation is to pay attention to customer and employee relations, which were two strong contributors to the success of the business. Customer and employee relations were central to the success and sustainability of the businesses for the participants of this study. The participants focused on creating a positive customer experience at the point of sale and post-sale by providing high-quality products and services. The participants also focused on happy and satisfied employees who were highly skilled and committed to providing top quality services to customers and employees.

The second recommendation was to be strategic in obtaining the business vision. The leadership role for a successful business depends on sound, practical strategic planning that focuses on accomplishing the vision of the business. Leadership for quality as a strategy to enhance the efficiency and performance of a business, as well as the growth and well-being of the employees, leads to business success. In addition to being

strategic in achieving business goals and objects, the female entrepreneurs in this study noted that the need for continuous education and training was also a critical part of employee's growth and business's growth. Investing and engaging with business employees help create emotional connection and dedication to the business.

The third recommendation was to develop strategies that will enhance and sustain the business beyond 5 years. Obtaining the business goals and objectives involves on going planning, monitoring, analyzing, and assessment of all the necessary requirements for running a successful business operation. An entrepreneur needs to have the strategies and skills to create new businesses and take advantage of new opportunities.

After data collection, most of the participants expressed that they did not start their business with a business plan or a clear business strategic plan. Further analysis of the data revealed that the critical findings of this study did not apply directly to a business plan, but toward how each business owner used strategies to lead and focus on process improvements to meet set goals, constant management review of the internal and external constraints of their business, and the course of action to mitigate constraints.

The results of this study could be disseminated to small business organizations that catered toward women for training purposes for current and future female entrepreneurs. I would disseminate the findings of the study by presenting the information at business organizations, colleges, workshops, conventions, nonprofit organizations that work with women, and through journals and conferences. I would also

disseminate the findings with the participants of this study as a group to discuss the findings and recommendations.

Recommendations for Further Study

The purpose of this study was to explore strategies women small business owners have used to be successful in business operation beyond 5 years. The findings indicated the strategies that were used to be successful in business for longer than 5 years. In this study, the limitations were the number of participants, geographic location, and the participants' differing years of experience.

Further researchers should include a larger number of participants, alternate geographic locations, and control the variable of the number of the participants' years of experience. This research study includes five female-owned small businesses in one city in Western Washington State. I would recommend further studies with participants from other states. I would also recommend expanding this study internationally to explore and learn about the effect of culture and strategies women use to be successful.

Reflections

I had the privilege of interviewing successful female small business owners on Bainbridge Island, Washington, who had been in business for more than 5 years. During this doctoral research process, I acquired new knowledge that enhanced my understanding of their world of owning and running a successful business. Each business owner interviewed shared a similar passion in providing the best possible products, quality services, and the desire to succeed in business. The level of their commitment,

leadership, and passion has proven to be valuable attributes in the successful running of their businesses.

I gained a greater appreciation and respect for those interested in the undertaking of entrepreneurial ventures, especially women, who compared to men, face difficulties gaining access to financial capital for starting a new business because of their lack of experience. Before carrying out this research study, I had a preconceived notion that having a formal written business plan was an essential aspect of being successful in running a small business. It turned out that this preconceived idea of the formality of a business plan was not as important as I had anticipated.

Summary and Study Conclusions

The United States has about 27 million small businesses, which account for 39% of the gross national product (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). The U.S. Census Bureau (2016) found that women own 35.7% of all businesses in the United States. This means more than 9 million women-owned businesses in operation, employing approximately 8 million workers and generating nearly \$1.5 trillion in revenues (SBA, 2014a). Despite the number of jobs credited by women-owned businesses, they still have a higher failing rate than do businesses owned by men (Johnson-Lutz, 2014; Reichard & Sweida, 2013; Q. Wang, 2013).

The main problem of businesses owned by women was that 50% fail to continue operating beyond 5 years. The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies female small business owners have used to be successful beyond 5

years. The findings of this study might help in strengthening business success and survival rates, which can lead to more stable and better economic security. Using semistructured face-to-face interviews, I was able to gain insight into the strategies that female small business owners used to stay in business for longer than 5 years.

Five female small business owners on Bainbridge Island, Washington participated in semistructured face-to-face interviews to answer the research question: What strategies do female small business owners use to succeed in business beyond 5 years? Data were collected using semistructured face-to-face interviews and triangulated through interviews, and business documents such as business plans, business policies, strategic business plans, company websites, and company social media sites. The semistructured interviews and acquisition of company documents allowed for the triangulation of the data.

Three themes emerged during the data collection process and document review of the research study that related to strategies used by small business owners to remain in business operation longer than 5 years (a) customer and employee relations, (b) leadership, and (c) strategic management. Braunerhjelm and Henrekson (2013) noted that the successful business owner develops new ideas that enhance business growth and opportunities by creating and implementing strategies focused on success. The results of this study indicate that business owners increase the business chances of success beyond 5 years when they can identify the constraints and use key strategies to overcome the constraints.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions

1. Introduce self to the participant(s).
2. Present consent form, go over contents, answer questions and concerns of participant(s).
3. Give participant copy of consent form.
4. Turn on the audio recording device.
5. Follow procedure to introduce participant(s) with pseudonym and coded identification; note the date and time.
6. Begin interview with question #1; follow through to the final question.
7. Follow up with additional questions and collect company documents.
8. End interview sequence; discuss transcript review with participant(s).
9. Thank the participant(s) for their part in the study. Reiterate contact numbers for follow up questions and concerns from participants.
10. End protocol.

Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to be successful beyond 5 years? Please give specific examples.
2. How did these business strategies help improve or enhance your business?
3. How did you obtain your business strategies?
4. What external constraints negatively affect your business and what strategies have helped you address them?

5. What staffing, equipment, or facilities constraints have negatively affected your business and what strategies have helped you address them?
6. What material constraints have you dealt with to run and what strategies have helped you address them?
7. What supplier constraints have you experience and what strategies have helped you address them?
8. What financial constraints exist for your business and what strategies have helped you address them?
9. What internal policy constraints limit your business and what strategies have helped you address them?
10. What other recommendations do you have to address any constraints that have not been included in this interview?

Appendix B: Certificate of Training Completion for Conducting Ethical Research on
Human Subjects

