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Strategies for Improving Rural Small Startup Business Owners Success to Prevent Closures

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Hector Lora

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Strategies for Improving Rural Small Startup Business Owners Success to Prevent
Closures

by

Hector Lora

MBA, University of North Alabama, 2013

BS, Martin Methodist College, 2010

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2020

Abstract

Small business owners with unsuccessful startup strategies can negatively impact business sustainability. Small business owners are concerned about startup strategies because 50% of new, small business owners fail within the first 5 years of operation. Grounded in the systems theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies 4 rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee used to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation. The participants selected successfully implemented strategies to avoid business closures. Data were collected using semistructured face-to-face interviews and revised reports published by the Center for Rural Affairs, U.S. Economic Development Administration, U.S. Small Business Administration, and Service Corps of Retired Executives. The 3 themes that emerged from the thematic analysis were business owners' skills and knowledge of marketing, sales and inventory, and employee retention. A key recommendation for small business owners is to implement continuous marketing training, set sales metrics, create inventory goals, and provide employees a positive work environment to remain open beyond the first 5 years of operation. The implications for positive social change include the potential to create new jobs, increase employee job security, enhance living standards, and increase property value and government tax revenue to provide better services to the community.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to my parents, my brother and sister, my wife and my children. If you do not prepare, you prepare to fail.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank our Lord, who died for us. To my family, the most important institution in the world. To my wife, Johana Bravo, my children, Hector, Kimberly, Miguel, and Gabriel, who forfeited time to allow me to pursue my dream to complete my doctoral studies. My chair, faculty, and peers who day in and out encourage me to be the best version of myself.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Rural, small businesses are the stepping stones of social and economic development in rural areas (U.S. Small Business Administration [SBA], 2019). The closing of many small businesses in rural areas may increase the unemployment rate, discourage investors, and cause the loss of social and economic stability of the region. The riches of a region is the result of economic development and growth (Ang, 2018), and in rural communities, small business owners employ 48% of the private sector (U.S. SBA, 2019). However, one of every two small businesses closes before the fifth year of operation (Turner & Endres, 2017). According to the U.S. SBA (2019), the rate of success of small businesses will likely continue to decrease throughout the years. Possible economic and social stability of rural communities may be negatively or positively affected by the failure or success of preventing rural, small startup business owners' closures.

Background of the Problem

Regardless of the prospering economy, some rural, small startup businesses will close. One out of two rural, small startup businesses will close their businesses before 5 years of operation (U.S. SBA, 2019). Technology, communication improvements, and globalization create new opportunities but also threats to small businesses (Block, Colombo, Cumming, & Vismara, 2018). Thus, small business owners in rural communities must gain knowledge about the resources necessary to overcome market demands to avoid closures (Davis, 2017). For instance, continuous innovation is an important tool to prevent closures (Berezoni, 2014). Among the lack of resources to

mitigate closures are inadequate leadership, excessive optimism, inability to delegate, nepotism, inability to understand the business itself, and underestimation of economics (Jansson, Nilsson, Modig, & Hed Vall, 2015). My study may reveal successful business strategies to prevent rural, small startup business closures.

The findings of this study show the strategies that rural, small startup business owners used to minimize the risk of failure and avoid closure. Understanding prior practices, applied theories, and failure processes assist in the revamp of systems (Wolke, 2017). Rural, small startup business owners possibly minimize the risk of business closures by improving dynamic capabilities (Block et al., 2018). For example, improvement in technology and communication has increased market competition for small businesses (Harris, 2015). Changes in the market could lead to new regulations and processes (Davis, 2017). Small business owners could become channels to decrease unemployment rates, motivate people to increase their knowledge, and decrease social and economic issues in the rural communities (Pryor, 2014). To remain in business and avoid closure, rural small business owners must continue to discover new business strategies.

Problem Statement

Small business startup owners face many challenges at the time to enter the highly competitive marketplace, leading to failed startup within a short period (Turner & Endres, 2017). Fifty percent of new, small business owners fail within the first 5 years of operation (U.S. SBA, 2019). The general business problem is that small, startup business owners lack strategies needed to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation. The

specific business problem is that some rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee lack strategies to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies some rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee used to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation. The target population consisted of rural, small startup business owners in the Tennessee region who successfully used strategies to prevent closure. The implications for positive change included the possibility to create new jobs, motivate investors, and increase property values and government tax revenue to provide better services.

Nature of the Study

I used the qualitative method to explore strategies that some rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee used to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation. Researchers use the qualitative method to explain the phenomenon with an interpretive philosophy by analyzing nonnumeric data to assist the subjective and socially created significance expressed about the phenomenon (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015). In contrast, researchers use the quantitative method to assess numeric data to test hypotheses, and mixed-methods researchers combine both qualitative and quantitative methods (Saunders et al., 2015). I did not examine numerical data or test hypotheses; therefore, the quantitative method was not appropriate. I explored the strategies used by rural, small startup business owners using a qualitative method of open-ended questions

to attain meaningful data (Barnham, 2015). Because there were no quantitative elements in this research, mixed methods methodology was not applicable.

The qualitative designs considered were ethnography, phenomenology, and case study. Researchers who use ethnography address who, what, where, how many, and how much of the problem existed (Saunders et al., 2015). The purpose of this study was to explore strategies that some rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee used to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation rather than explain how much of the problem existed. Therefore, ethnography was not suitable to the purpose of my study. I did not use the phenomenological design because I focused on identifying strategies to avoid closure rather than the lived experiences of an event, which is the focus of phenomenology (Yin, 2018). Finally, researchers use a case study to describe and understand the *how* and *why* of a phenomenon, focusing on contemporary issues, and the researcher has no control over the behavioral events linked to the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). I used multiple case studies to explore the strategies used by rural, small startup business owners to prevent closure within the 5 years of operation because of the focus of the case study.

Research Question

What successful strategies do rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee use to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation?

2. What strategies did you use to overcome the difficulties you encountered to prevent closure?
3. What strategies did you use to attract and retain customers to prevent closure?
4. How did you use strategies to improve your relationship with your customers?
5. How did you use strategies to align your main business services?
6. How did you use strategies to anticipate and address market changes?
7. How did you use strategies to retain employees?
8. How did you assess the effectiveness of your strategies to prevent closure?
9. What additional information can you provide to help me better comprehend the strategies you use to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation?

Conceptual Framework

I used the systems theory to explore strategies that some rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee used to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation. Von Bertalanffy (1950) introduced the systems theory concept to evaluate how the overlapping parts of a system function. Researchers use the systems theory to classify organisms and the effects of the social environment, which is, to some degree, similar context to what exists in small business (von Bertalanffy, 1950). Researchers also use systems theory to identify interdependent parts and the interrelationships in the system instead of addressing only individual trends (Turner & Endres, 2017). Further, researchers use systems theory to analyze information in areas in which limited information is available (Rousseau, 2015). Researchers apply systems theory to assess the interrelation, mutual influence, and dynamics of the relationship among the operations

functions of a business (Cross & Barnes, 2014). I used systems theory to address the purpose of this study in identifying business strategies. The finding of the study may add to the theory a different systematic approach to implement strategies to avoid business closures.

Operational Definitions

Coding: Coding is a technique to identify trends by assigning letters and code numbers to identify contestants and trends during data collection (Saunders et al., 2015).

Economic sustainability: Economic sustainability is the business administration competency to efficiently use the business's internal and external capabilities to generate profit and maintain business growth (Oberoi, 2014).

Servitization: A servitization is an owner strategy to incorporate various products and services in one retail shop (Foss & Saebi, 2017).

Sustainability: Sustainability is the state of the operation of a business in which the company enhances the capability to create and maintain profitability for the long term (Aragon-Correa, Marcus, Rivera, & Kenworthy, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

I chose a topic in which some assumptions exist. Assumptions are views influenced by a social, historical, political, and cultural background requiring evidence (Wolgemuth, Hicks, & Agosto, 2017). During the case study, my first assumption was that each participant would give reliable, trustworthy, and realistic responses. The second assumption was business owners prevented closures within the first 5 years of operation.

The third assumption was how small startup business owners in rural communities faced the limitation of technology to prevent closure. The fourth assumption was how the relationship between successful businesses and generalization, financial, technology, and marketing training prevented business closures. The fifth assumption was the influence of successful rural, small startup business owners on the social and economic development of rural communities. The assumptions provide significant and positive effects on all stakeholders while promoting social responsibility (Wolgemuth et al., 2017).

Limitations

Limitations are threats to the integrity of the research, which could mislead findings during a study (Greener, 2018). I encountered some limitations to conduct the study outside of my control because of the region of the study. The first limitation was the sample size and the limitation of the Southern, middle Tennessee region. The second limitation was the lack of information from other stakeholders. A third limitation was the internal limitation of the study design and external validity of the data output.

Delimitations

Delimitations are margins selected by researchers to delimitate the range of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). I narrowed this case study to explore strategies that some rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee used to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation. The study encompassed the investigation of strategies used by rural, small startup business owners from rural communities preventing the closure of businesses within the first 5 years of operation. Fifty percent of new, small business owners are unsuccessful within the first 5 years of operation (U.S. SBA, 2019). I only

selected small startup businesses from rural communities and rural owners who employed fewer than 30 workers. Another delimitation was the geographic site of Tennessee.

The Significance of the Study

Rural, small startup business owners could benefit from the study by identifying effective strategies to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation. One of every two small businesses closes before owners achieve 5 years of operation (Turner & Endres, 2017). Other rural, small startup business owners could use the findings of this study to improve their current business models to avoid closure. The implication for positive social change includes the possibility to increase jobs, motivate investors, and increase property values and government tax revenue to provide better services.

Contribution to Business Practice

The findings of this study can contribute to rural, small startup business practices by providing additional information about strategies used by other business owners to avoid closure. Small business owners utilize successful business strategies to remedy to prevent business closures (Laaksonen & Peltoniemi, 2016). Managers of small businesses may make changes to current strategies to retain existing customers, recruit new customers, and avoid closure.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study could contribute to positive social change by helping rural, small startup business owners to prevent closures, which would positively affect rural communities. According to the U.S. SBA (2019), rural, small business are the stepping stones of social and economic development in rural areas. Small business

owners can decrease unemployment rates, improve people's working skills, and influence investors to invest in the community (Pryor, 2014). Successful businesses may also have a positive effect on local communities by increasing tax revenue, creating new jobs, providing role models to the communities, and other activities. Thus, my findings could help rural, small startup business owners determine helpful strategies needed to avoid closure within the first 5 years of operation and positively affect society.

Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The review of the literature and resources is regarding the research topic and the conceptual framework. Scholars use literature reviews to provide a critical examination of published research to describe, study, and display subject matter (Jefferies et al., 2018). Most of the sources came from Walden University's online library within the business database. Another search engine included Google Scholar. The primary keywords included *small business*, *small, rural business*, *small, rural business owners*, *small enterprise*, *entrepreneurship*, *leadership*, *rural communities*, *small business failure*, and *small business sustainability*. I used Ulrich's Periodical Directory to determine the peer-review status of the journals.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies some rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee used to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation. Because rural, small startup business owners rely on planning, managers need to identify strategies to address the interrelated parts of the businesses to prevent closures. I used systems theory as the conceptual framework to explore strategies from the essential parts of the business owners used to prevent closures. The review

includes an overview of systems theory and continued with the essential parts of a business, followed by an overview of corporate governance, employee satisfaction, leadership, and business sustainability.

I evaluated a total of 219 sources. For this case study, 85% of the sources have a publication date no later than 5 years old at graduation. One hundred eighty-eight (85%) are peer-reviewed articles. There were 85% of the sources used are peer-reviewed sources published less than 5 years old at graduation date. Twenty-one books in which two published more than 5 years at graduation date were also use. I used eight periodicals and six periodicals published within the past 5 years.

Conceptual Framework

I used the systems theory to explore strategies that some rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee used to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation. In general, systems theory helps explain a phenomenon (Dominici & Levanti, 2011). Systems theory explains how the overlapping parts of a system function as a whole (von Bertalanffy, 1950), which researchers use to identify interdependent parts and the interrelationships in the system instead of addressing only individual trends (Turner & Endres, 2017) as well as analyze information when limited information is available (Rousseua, 2015). For business, researchers use systems theory to assess the interrelation, mutual influence, and dynamics of the relationship among the operations functions of a business (Cross & Barnes, 2014). Systems theory provides the means to analyze the cause and effect by analyzing the principles, concepts, laws, regulations, and behaviors as complex interdependent parts of the business as a whole (Katrina, 2015). Understanding

the interrelated parts of a business helped examine different strategies that rural, small startup business owners implemented to prevent closures.

Researchers also use systems theory to explain how the environmental aspect surrounding a business affects business profitability (Schneider, Wickert, & Marti, 2016), as administrators manage different internal and external environmental circumstances. It is important for business owners to gain knowledge of the organizational resources and dynamic resources to develop successful strategies (Del Giudice, 2017). With systems theory, small, rural business managers can have a better understanding of how to assess external and internal factors affecting businesses from long-term commerce (Del Giudice, 2017). Considering all the aspects of a businesses such as understanding stakeholders could contribute effective strategies to help rural, small startup business owners prevent closure.

Sustainability Development Theory

Brundtland (1987) is considered the founder of sustainable development theory. Sustainability development theory is a theory to address the needs and wants of generations without taking into consideration how the needs and wants will affect future generations (Desjardins, 2016). Sustainability development theory differs from systems theory because researchers use sustainability development theory to concentrate on isolated elements of the systems instead of the system as a whole. Business managers use sustainability development theory to develop the primary characteristics of the business to attain sustainability (Darcy, Hill, McCabe, & McGovern, 2014). Small business owners use sustainability development theory to improve performance (Mcphee, 2014).

Complexity theory

Hartmanis and Stearns (1965) developed the complexity theory. Complexity theory is a theory in which scholars focus on different parts of many systems (Axelrod, 1999). Applying complex systems' models to strategic management leads to efficient sustainability solutions, and complexity theory integrated with small businesses improves business trust and promoted accountability (Hand & Mckelvey, 2016). Creating a culture of confidence with organizations' stakeholders becomes an indicator of the business owners' capability to operate effectively, efficiently, and prepare for sustainability (Hand & Mckelvey, 2016). In the same manner of systems theory, complexity theory can assists researchers in understanding how the systems work and the importance to understand each part of the business's capabilities.

Stakeholder theory

Freeman (1984) is considered the founder of the stakeholder theory. Stakeholders can be any person or business affected by the firm's operations (Fernandez-Feijoo, Romero, & Ruiz, 2014). Freeman argued how the connection between stakeholders of a firm gives firms better use of the firm's capabilities. Researchers use stakeholder theory to determine how behaviors of direct or indirect stakeholders affect the organization (Bottenberg, Tuschke, & Flickinger, 2017). Unlike complexity theory, researchers may use the stakeholder theory to understand and improve organizations' stakeholders' behaviors.

Chaos Theory

Lorenz (1963), who is considered the founder of chaos theory, explained the important effects of small changes input in productivity. Researchers use chaos theory's mathematical capability to evaluate trends and systems under complex situations (Lorenz, 1963). Yas, Ali Termizi, Talif, and Kaur (2017) also noted how chaos theory uses the butterfly effect to illustrate the phenomenon. The butterfly effect is a representation that demonstrates how minor parts of a system spread evenly can cause a major effect within an organization (Yas et al., 2017). Similar to the stakeholder theory, chaos theory is used to evaluate the behaviors of a difficult interaction of parts of a system instead of the problems of a system (Freeman, 1984; Hartmanis & Stearns, 1965). Small business owners may use chaos theory to make organizational decisions for internal and external situations affecting the organization.

Definition of Small, Rural Business Owners

Throughout the case study, the definition of rural, small startup business owner could be a person who does business in a rural community area, who employs less than 50 people, takes on financial risk for profit, and privately owns a business. According to the U.S. SBA (2019), owners of a firm who employ from one up to 500 employees have a small business. However, there is not one singular definition for the small business owner.

Additionally, the population size of a region determines the status of rural, micropolitan, and metropolitan cities (Brown, Goodin, & Talbert, 2017). For instance, population increases in suburban areas may affect small businesses, as future small, rural

business owners will be in a declining trend (U.S. SBA, 2019). Rural areas are the result of the boundaries of urban areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). According to the U.S. Census Administration (2019), population increases in urban areas have decreased the population in rural areas and minimized opportunities for future small, rural business owners. However, rural, small startup business owners provide necessary goods, services, and new opportunities for employment, economic development, and social development for rural communities (Eschker, Gold, & Lane, 2017)

Typical, Rural, Small Business Owners

Small business owners' personalities are important for businesses to prevent closures. Small, rural startup business owners need to possess the charisma to influence others to achieve the common goal of success (Griffin & Moorhead, 2014). Leadership is a common process to assist groups or individuals toward a common purpose (Northouse, 2016). Therefore, small, rural startup business owners should understand the location of the business, the population of the area, employees, and maintain a diverse representation of the business within the rural community (Bosworth & Turner, 2018). Additionally, a leader's actions are important to determine the success of a business (Glaub, Frese, Fischer, & Hoppe, 2014). An organization must have a strong leader to prevent closure.

Stakeholders and organizational behaviors can also play a significant role in small businesses. Organizational behavior assists in managing in organizations, and the environment plays a role in human behavior and organizational settings (Griffin & Moorhead, 2014). Managers need to look at the employees' skills accordingly to the organization's needs (Griffin & Moorhead, 2014). Business owners who overlook

employees' talents make the success of the institution vulnerable (Glaub et al., 2014).

Small business owners who continuously maintain considerations to the stakeholders may succeed in a volatile market.

Management may also need to understand how changes in the market require new business model strategies. Small business owners must have a good understanding of marketing strategies to address consumer wants and needs and avoid closures. Small business management needs to be conscious of forthcoming situations preventing the business from achieving profits (Northouse, 2016). In the same context, a business's success is essential to understanding employee and community needs and wants, and owners must align capabilities with the organizational purpose (Griffin & Moorhead, 2014). Further, the relation to collectivism is important among stakeholders and successful businesses (Yan & Yan, 2015) in addition to the relationship between success and the increase of personal initiative (Glaub et al., 2014). Business owners have conducted an effective marketing campaign by understanding consumer consumption behavior and influence behavior (Sarkar, Kundu, & Roy Chaudhuri, 2016).

In rural areas, it is important for managers to recognize the lifestyle characteristics of communities to understand business and to recruit properly talented staff (Oluwatayo & Rachoene, 2017). Rural community residents' primary market identification characteristic is the lack of educational opportunities and the low-income population (Sadler, Akister, & Burch, 2014). Businesspersons should understand purchasing power and the possibilities to identify needs affordable for rural consumers' regions (Sarkar et al., 2016). Small business administrators' marketing knowledge deficiency affects the

opportunity to develop advertising to encourage consumers within the community and address consumers' desires (Alford & Page, 2015).

Understanding Business

The goal of business is to achieve and maintain profitability to avoid closures. But small business owners in rural areas are struggling with solvency (Goetz, Partridge, & Stephens, 2018). The lack of knowledge of commerce strategies has affected the success of small business owners; to compete in a globalized market, small, rural business owners should increase their knowledge in understanding business capabilities' strategies (Davis, 2017). Management understanding of firm capabilities' strategies allow the implementation of strategies to respond to changing market circumstances (Inan & Bititci, 2015). Capabilities are a firm's ability to position business resources, tangible or intangible, to accomplish a job or action (Inan & Bititci, 2015). Organizational capabilities are also functions of the business to perform basic functional activities to address contemporary issues and dynamic capabilities as the ability to develop a mechanism to address future problems (Laaksonen & Peltoniemi, 2016).

With better understanding of strategies, business owners can become capable of understanding environmental indications and utilize the resources to solve problems (Dosi, Faillo, Marengo, Moschella, & Cecchini Manara, 2018). Similarly, business owners must be aware of how to overcome and foresee upcoming changes in laws and regulations that can affect business (Davis, 2017). To address forthcoming matters, owners have to identify, assess, and organize resources to take advantage of the occasion as well as transform the business process (Inan & Bititci, 2015). To sustain the business,

small business owners should also anticipate changes, provide innovation, add value creation, and create new methods to do business (Ceptureanu, Ceptureanu, & Popescu, 2017). It is important to prepare for changes to maximize the probability to maintain profitability to avoid closures.

Another important aspect of conducting business is strategies to attain sustainability, adaptability, and improve the global economy. Without these strategies, psychological, social, and financial devastation can guide enterprise owners to closures (Church & Truit, 2017). But all small business owners plays a vital role in the world economy (Inan & Bititci, 2015). Small business owners and entrepreneurs help grow the economy and promote positive social changes in communities (Ang, 2018). Emerging economies contribute approximately 50% of the global domestic product (Peng, 2015). Additionally, small business owners' success leads to the development of new supply chains, attracting investors, creating wealth, and promoting social mobility (Ang, 2018). Therefore, small business owners can help enhance the global economy.

Training and Research

Stakeholder training and research may play a role in understanding the market and assisting with strategies to prevent business closures. Maintaining passion alongside training can help prepare for long-term business (Gielnik, Uy, Funken, & Bischoff, 2017). Providing the training and research necessary to small business employees promotes understanding of market changes and allows the generating of processes to address future issues (Gielnik et al., 2017). Additionally, personal initiative can lead to a positive outcome in small businesses (Solesvik, 2017). Personal initiative training

strategies can maintain proactive behavior (Mensmann & Frese, 2018). Personal initiative strategies, rather than traditional business training, focus on developing psychological training in business for small business owners (Campos et al., 2017). Understanding accounting, finances, human resources, and marketing is not enough to assist business owners in avoiding closures (Campos et al., 2017). Business owners must attain the best training possible to improve future business efficiency and employee performances (Gielnik et al., 2017). The human capital in business may be an important aspect of success in preventing business closures.

Small business owners who have human capital training and research have taken an additional step by including personal initiative training as part of the training model to maximize efficiency (Mensmann & Frese, 2018). Business owners who are proficient enough to focus on human capital will likely have an important strategy to avoid closures. Knowledge increase in dynamic capabilities prepares future small business owners to identify, take advantages, and revamp business models to increase profitability (Campos et al., 2018). Business leaders should gain knowledge of the business strategies while obtaining the knowledge to maintain businesses long term (Inan & Bititci, 2015). Business owners often create a business plan with the purpose to generate profit without taking into consideration future threats (Gielnik et al., 2017). Further, lack of motivation and changes deter small business owners from preventing closures (Campos et al., 2017).

Another consideration for leaders' future learning is that business owners who make employees feel welcome can increase employee performance. Employees who feel appreciated by their managers want to perform better. Small business owners have a

direct implication on employees' job performances (Beltrán-Martín, Bou-Llugar, Roca-Puig, & Escrig-Tena, 2017). Positive relationships between learning-oriented management and employees leads to a career initiative, which means management should promote the personal initiative in employees by providing performance management orientation (Van Veldhoven, Dorenbosch, Breugelmans, & Van De Voorde, 2017). Beltrán-Martín et al. (2017) provided empirical evidence on how management's positive encouragement enhanced employee behavior to perform roles that go beyond the technical skills required to perform a job. Therefore, small, rural business owners who spur employees' proactive behavior may create an organizational culture, which may leads to preventing closures (Griffin & Moorhead, 2014). The emphasis relies on the capability to engage employee to accept the organizational culture and goals to avoid closures.

Increasing Personal Initiative among Small Business Owners

Small business owners could consider personal initiative strategy as part of strategic planning. The personal initiative strategy is the ability of an organization to maximize employees' strengths and increase personal growth initiatives (Van Woerkom, & Meyers, 2019). Furthermore, evidence suggest that suitable training to increase personal initiative among small business owners can also leads to prosperous businesses (Glaub et al., 2014). Thus, assisting managers to identify personal initiative and increasing personal initiative among employees can help small, rural business owners in creating an improving business culture (Glaub et al., 2014). Additionally, management support encourages employees' initiative in favor of the organization (Çemberci &

Civelek, 2018). Future small, rural business owners might train in personal initiative growth to assist employees in taking self-initiative and increase creativity (Van Woerkom & Meyers, 2019). It is critical for small, rural business owners to increase employee productivity and motivation (Glaub et al., 2014). Employee satisfaction could greatly affect the success of a business to prevent closures.

The leader of the organization sets the standards to increase personal initiative. A valuable resource for business leaders is the alignment of ethics, morality, society, and the organization (Northouse, 2016). Leaders motivate and encourage others to follow the path to success (Çemberci & Civelek, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to improve and alert managers to the importance of business ethics strategies to rebuild business trust (Trevino & Nelson, 2016). In doing so, a positive relationship can exist among employees' initiatives, creativity, and management support (Çemberci & Civelek, 2018). Understanding employees' needs may help leaders align employees' personal goals with organizational goals to maintain the business operation.

Because employees have a choice on how to respond to organizational commitment, organizational leaders should demonstrate managerial commitment. The Piperopoulos and Dimov (2014) study illustrates the high progressive connection between real-world oriented courses and self-initiative. Entrepreneurs should demonstrate their commitment to support and value employees' opinions and initiative (Çemberci & Civelek, 2018; Tur-Porcar, Roig-Tierno, & Llorca Mestre, 2018). As a leader, the small, rural business owner should create a strategy for business culture, evaluate communication channel, describe the job, fit the employees to a job, increase the

employee's knowledge, manage stress, strengthen decision making and problem-solving skills, management skills, and negotiation skills (Griffin & Moorhead, 2014). Thus, empowering employees builds commitment to the organization (Tur-Porcar et al., 2018).

Managers should motivate and train employees to increase employee performance. Workforce empowerment and personal growth within the organization increase engagement and stabilize the work environment for personnel (Gawke, Gorgievski, & Bakker, 2017). Consequently, organizational success relies on the ability of the staff to work effectively and efficiently as a team (Zubanov, Katić, Grubić Nešić, & Berber, 2017). Therefore, small business managers should support employees' desires for growth and build good personal relationships for the benefit of the organization (Tur-Porcar et al., 2018). Additionally, proprietors who reward the length of employment services to the institution, creative ideas, and employees' good actions implement some of the tools to improve organizational relationships (Gawke et al., 2017). In short, the personal initiative strategy is vital to assist small, rural business owners in understanding employees and sustaining and revamping business culture (Campos et al., 2017). Therefore, increasing employee personal initiative may reduce turnover, maximize productivity, and increase profitability over the long-term to prevent business closures.

IT Demographic and Geographic Data

Managers may utilize demographic and geographic data to prevent business closures. Winn and Assarian (2016) suggested the importance of having reliable software to generate demographic and geographic data of consumers. Whether positive or negative, the geographic location will have an impact on innovation and strategy

development (Wilkins, Morris, Radley, & Griffiths, 2017). For example, small, rural business owners capable of understanding supply and demand while addressing the needs of customers have a better likelihood to maintain sustainability (Mehra, Bishop, & Partee, 2017). Hoffman, Bechtold, Murphy, and Snyman (2016) analyzed the connection between the new tendency of finances, supply, and demand of the markets. A geographic information system provides market segmentation, consumer demographics, consumer expenditures, and other report collections to inform small business owners of business viability (Mehra et al., 2017). Therefore, analyzing data, both geographic and demographic, may minimize the risk of poor decisions that could lead to business failures and closures.

The geographic and demographic data may help managers identify customer needs, which is an essential part of every business. Understanding and addressing customers' needs and wants to gain profit is the focus of any business (Peng, 2015). However, small, rural business owners struggle to identify rural customers and to address their needs and wants if they do not understand the demographic and geographic regions (Winn & Assarian, 2016). Geographic location has become a prominent factor in a retail location (Chen, Xu, Wang, Du, & Li, 2017). For instance, proprietors of businesses can also use geographic location information to obtain a better understanding of the footprint for supply chains, business logistics, and area competition (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2018). Similarly, business persons make use of a geographic database to determine the possibility of entering a market and to evaluate possible resources and competitors (Chen et al., 2017). Because of geographic data, some business owners may have the

opportunity to come across talented employees with transferable knowledge of certain regions (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2018). Therefore, small business owners should be aware of the geographic strategies and resources available before entering a market.

Along with geographic data, business owners could also utilize demographics data to assist in appraising possibilities and avoiding closures. Demographics is the process to gather a region's consumer identification by populating the database based on age, occupation, social classification, and consumer preferences (Sloan, Morgan, Burnap, & Williams, 2015). It is important to understand a market before formulating a strategy in order to prevent closure (Dyer, Godfrey, Jensen, & Bryce, 2016). Similarly, managers intend to use demographic information to understand consumers' habits while developing business plans (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2018). Additionally, opportunity and necessity progress during the development of a business (Fairlie & Fossen, 2018). Clients' consumption and purchasing power habits support small, rural business owners and help identify the best business and consumer exchange practices (Chen et al., 2017). Strategizing and monitoring consumer demographics may help small business owners identify future business variations before competitors and prevent closures.

Business Planning

Business owners' planning strategies will be essential to prevent business closures. Sustainability is a business owner's capability to generate profitability over time to avoid closures (Jackson & Jackson, 2016). The small, rural business owners' challenge is to create new strategies to sustain long-term growth (Adams, Kauffman, Khoja, & Coy, 2016). Furthermore, developing a strategy to cope with volatile market fluctuations will

allow small, rural business owners to anticipate upcoming changes and trends (Suomalainen, Kuusela, & Tihinen, 2015). Business planning, for instances, provides the opportunity to alert management and allocate resources effectively and efficiently to address any matter and prevent closures (Grimmer, Miles, & Grimmer, 2016). Another quality of business planning is providing business owners with the capability to enhance strategic communication processes among organizational stakeholders (Barraket, Furneaux, Barth, & Mason, 2016). Therefore, stakeholders' involvement in business planning strategies could rapidly address upcoming market changes to prevent closures.

When business planning, managers must consider the possible ramification of each strategy. Frequently, business owners engage in a decision process without considering the unintended consequences (Bagella, 2018). Thus, lack of financial principles, market research, technology, and supply chains are detrimental to businesses (Jansson et al., 2015). That is why planning, in business, is vital to develop a strategy to maintain sustainability (Suomalainen et al., 2015). Business level strategy directs company resources and capabilities to a particular business or market; corporate level strategy utilizes business resources and capabilities to identify which industries company management should compete in, which value creation company management should perform, and how company management should enter or leave an industry to maximize organizational long-run profitability (Dyer et al., 2016). With that, management that does not strategize and make decisions appropriately may cause a loss in customer base.

Small business owners will have some factors in their strategies to consider regarding an implementation process. The 7S model, which stands for strategy, structure,

system, staffing, shared values, style, and skills is important for the implementation process (Dyer et al., 2016). Executives use the 7S model to assist in the structuring of strategic and organizational factors (Channon & Caldart, 2015). Resources, organizational culture, organizational system, innovative capabilities, and strategies should work harmoniously to support a business (Sheheryar Khan, 2015). Therefore, understanding resources, organizational cultures, organizational systems, innovative capabilities, and strategies are necessary steps to make positive changes in an organization and promote adaptability to future changes (Sheheryar Khan, 2015); Suomalainen et al., 2015). Considering all factors that may come up when implementing strategies should guide business owners toward efficient strategies to avoid closures.

In business planning, effective management will forecast and design strategies to mitigate the risk of losing profitability to prevent closures. Entrepreneurs identify changes to address a forthcoming deficiency in organizational resources and capabilities by using the 7S model (Guenzi & Storbacka, 2015). Similarly, the small, rural business owners who utilize the 7S model quickly recognize resources to acclimate to market fluctuation (Channon & Caldart, 2015). Therefore, the 7S model provided awareness to the strategic business processing procedure needed by small, rural business owners to maximize organizational resources to prepare for long-term business (Gamayanto & Christian, 2018). Identifying strategies may assist in utilizing organizational resources to prevent business closures.

Financial Challenges

Small business owners may struggle with strategies to obtain investor funds to avoid closures. Small business owners represent a higher risk for financial investors (Cheng, 2015). Furthermore, local banks, credit unions, and private lenders' requirements and interest rates to lend to small business owners in rural communities are irrational (Ang, 2018). It would become a challenge for investors to provide capital to develop small, rural businesses (Van Klyton & Rutabayiro-Ngoga, 2018). Therefore, investors choose among the type of debts, investment approaches, investment goals, and investment targets to invest in small business (Block et al., 2018). Consequently, the difficulties in providing a business valuation limit the funds available for new small business owners (Van Klyton & Rutabayiro-Ngoga, 2018). Because of this, small business owners must have accurate financial strategies with financial information to convince an investor to support the business idea to prevent closures.

However, business owners may face challenges when deciding the strategy and form of debt to obtain the funds necessary to avoid closures. Enterprises' management incurs equity or debt type of finances (Bellavitis, Filatotchev, Kamuriwo, & Vanacker, 2017). In that case, business owners who choose equity gives lenders business shares and the opportunity to participate in the business decision process (Bellavitis et al., 2017). New ventures' leaders, however, decide between the desire for wealth or control (Ang, 2018). Therefore, small, rural business owners may use different forms of debt information to address which type of debt or equity financing the owners are willing to

take (Bellavitis et al., 2017). Once business owners decide the type of debt, the next step may be to prepare a strategy to address the valuation questions of the targeted investor.

Small business owners may struggle to identify the investor's valuation methods to provide funds for business operation. Investors should create a different theory of corporate finance to address startups' evaluations (Ang, 2018). Businesses' valuations, for example, based on the net present value are not feasible for startups (Ang, 2018). Thus, owners of startups will face difficulty to provide accurate information of cash flow, debt-to-equity ratio, and other important data to corroborate lender requests (Burns, 2017). For an investor to agree to invest funds in businesses, startup owners need to explain how the investments can add value to the businesses and information about the business founders' investment, evaluating the risk of investment, the rate of return, and the methods to withdraw from the business (Burns, 2017). Therefore, managers should have a clear understating of the financial constraints and resource allocation.

Small business owners should create new strategies for resource allocation. Small business owners use different resources and strategies to address business financial needs (Malmström, 2014). Small business owners' financing comes primarily from business owners' equity (Wille, Hoffer, & Miller, 2017). Consequently, business owners will engage in personal financial responsibility (Wille et al., 2017). Mitigating business risks and reaching out to firms for advice are some of the tools employed by entrepreneurs to improve the possibility to obtain financial means (Rostamkalaei & Freel, 2016). Moreover, changes in technology opened new doors to new strategies, evaluating them by debt or equity, investment goals, investment approaches, and targets (Block et al.,

2018). Therefore, business owners should take advantages of the improving technological strategies to attain funds and avoid closures.

Business owners' abilities to analyze market trends and develop business strategies may increase the opportunities to prevent closures. The practice of management accounting is defined as the process to produce management accounting reports to identify trends that will assist during the decision-making process (Nair & Soon Nian, 2017). Furthermore, finance, innovations, and investments are the relationships to sustained market economies (Bagella, 2018). Small business owners use cost accounting, budgeting, and cash flows as management accounting strategies to operate businesses, ignoring the importance of benchmarking strategy and performance reporting of financial indicators (Cuzdriorean, 2017). Because of this, small, rural business owners must research different forms of the management accounting process and find affordable and efficient accounting software (Cuzdriorean, 2017). Additionally, business owners' commitments and business sizes have a relationship with the type of management accounting practices chosen to operate the businesses (Ahmad & Mohamed Zabri, 2015). Therefore, each small business management may have to determine which management accounting practice best fits the business.

While working toward the most suitable accounting practices, small business owners may understand and forecast different financial strategies to meet investors' guidelines and avoid closures. However, financial institutions and investors minimize the risk taken at the time to lend resources by analyzing markets and the organizational risks, not just the organization (Block et al., 2018). Small organizations' management internal

processes and market performances are vital parameters evaluated at the time to mitigate business risk (Falkner & Hiebl, 2015). Thus, small business owners face difficulties to obtain loans comparable to offers to corporations (Block et al., 2018). Due to the higher risk of failure of small organizations, lenders opt to increase the rate to compensate for the risks taken to do business with small business owners (Rostamkalaei & Freel, 2015). Therefore, administrators should be aware of all potential risks involving the business and offer alternative plans to mitigate investor risk.

Government Incentives for Small Businesses

The U. S. government offers incentives to many businesses to prevent closures. Government funds affect large and small businesses (Zeuli & O'Shea, 2017). For example, large corporations receive large incentives: tax break in properties, incentives in infrastructure, streamlined permitting processes, support of energy industries, and concierge relocation services (Obicci, 2017). The government emphasis is to minimize the unemployment rate and encourage new businesses (Littlewood & Holt, 2018); however, according to the U.S. SBA (2019), small business owners employ 48% of the private sector. The owners of rural, small businesses need to understand the limitations of receiving government aid due to geographic location (Zeuli & O'Shea, 2017). Thus, business owners may need to construct strategies to attain government aid and avoid closures by demonstrating the impact on the economics of local communities.

Small businesses receiving government aid could prevent closures and may help develop the economies of local communities. The nation's prosperity has a direct relation to economic development, and economic development has a relation to business

development (Ang, 2018). Comparatively, the pioneering entrepreneur becomes a force for opening new markets, creating jobs, and improving economic growth (Kuratko & Hornsby, 2018). For instance, the world has changed from 5 years ago, referencing the influences Amazon, Google, and Facebook have on human behavior and on the approach to enjoy free time (Parker, 2018). While on a smaller scale, the effect of the small, rural business owner pioneers will lead to the growth of new supply chains to attract investors, create wealth, and promote social mobility (Kuratko & Hornsby, 2018). Furthermore, small business owners' success assisted communities in lowering the unemployment rate, promoting education, decreasing crime, and mitigating the health issues in the region (Littlewood & Holt, 2018). Government official support of business owners may improve business operation, avoiding closures, and may create other benefits in local communities such as new employment.

Government officials, local, and federal, should support all businesses to avoid closures. Government responsibility is to do what is best for all stakeholders to ensure businesses, private, or public, act according to government regulations (Jiang, Aldewereld, Dignum, Wang, & Baida, 2015). It is important for a business owner to understand regulatory norms and how changes in the market will appeal to new regulations, strategies, and processes (Girgenti & Hedley, 2016). Understanding prior practices, applied theories, and failure processes may assist rural business owners in constructing future strategies to prevent closures (Girgenti & Hedley, 2016). However, government officials should create flexible rules, without compromising business integrity and creating restrictions on business creativity (Hallward-Driemeier & Pritchett,

2015). Similarly, it is important that the government creates laws to act in liaison with businesses to promote innovation and creativity (Voegtlin & Scherer, 2015). Because small businesses are vital to rural economies, government officials should strive to promote and assist business owners with strategies and funds to maintain business operation.

Government assistance to businesses may link to economic success. It is important to understand the relationship between government financial assistance and region development (Doh & Kim, 2014). For example, significant amount of funds granted by the government assists agriculture bypassing different types of businesses and industry (Zhang, 2018). Furthermore, the government provided supplementary resources to public and nonprofit entities in disproportion to the private sector, while all segments revealed similar changes and growth in the market (Bromley & Meyer, 2014). Therefore, future, small business owners should be aware of law changes and lack of subsidies from the government (Girgenti & Hedley, 2016). The emphasis may rely on the possible challenges to request government support.

Because of the challenges involving government funding, small business owners may compete in global markets and may need new strategies to prevent closures. Globalization allows other markets to enter into the competitive marketplace (Harris, 2015), and globalization does affect domestic business owners (Peng, 2015). The government uses a public-private partnership strategy to assist private industries in different markets to create projects to benefit the region (Burke & Demirag, 2015), and the government and private sector share the risk of the project while working toward the

common goal of a community need (Morgan, 2017). Evaluating the opportunities of public-private partnership strategy for rural, small business owners may strengthen the possibilities to adapt to changes and be profitable at the end (Burke & Demirag, 2015). The importance will rely on the business owner's ability to adapt to global markets changes to possibly prevent business closures.

Marketing Plan

Small, rural startup business owners may encounter some concerns understanding marketing strategies to improve business operation and avoid closures. Marketing is defined as the researchers capability to evaluate organizational resources, value propositions, customer needs, the client wants, and the strategic allocation of the capabilities to maximize profits (Kumar, 2015). The cost and time needed to create a marketing plan may become a challenge for rural, small business owners (Perry, 2014). With that, there's often a power shift toward customers due to the increase in product availability (Perry, 2014). To accommodate this, small business owners will need to make use of marketing to maintain the product value proposition throughout different periods (Richmond, Rader, & Lanier, 2017). An example of effective business marketing would be when business owners use a marketing plan to create networking, relationships, and interaction strategies to add value to products or services to create a competitive advantage (Gummesson, 2017). Furthermore, an effective marketing strategy may help business owners compete in the global market and prevent closures.

Managers' effective marketing strategies may assist with the increase of competitors in a globalization market. Globalization is driving companies out of markets

(Harris, 2015). Giant retailers and corporations minimize opportunities for small business owners to remain sustainable (Dyer et al., 2016). As of result, rural, small startup business owners will constantly search for new patterns, trends, and strategies to strive in a volatile market (Harris, 2015). Entrepreneurs need to understand consumers as well as where, when, and to whom managers are competing within a specific market (Peng, 2015). It is important to identify markets in which business owners generate profits (Dyer et al., 2016). For example, market innovator advantage was the first step toward Wal-Mart's competitive advantage, which lead to Sam Walton becoming the first retailer to promote the lowest prices in the industry by adopting cost differentiation strategy (Dyer et al., 2016). Small business owners marketing strategies and technology improvement may reduce the risk of business closures.

Along with crafting marketing strategies centered around globalization, managers' technological strategies and improvements may also become an important factor to avoid business closures. A significant drawback for small business owners is the resistance to adopt technology and make use of social media tools to promote their businesses (Dahnil, Marzuki, Langgat, & Fabeil, 2014). Furthermore, small business owners do not make complete use of social media, refraining from taking full advantage of the benefits and opportunities available in social media communication channel strategies (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). To add, small family business owners' marketing relies on personal approaches and building personal relationships between customers and businesses (Chepureenko, 2018). Therefore, small business owners should build networks utilizing social media to promote businesses (Hassan, Nadzim, &

Shiratuddin, 2015). Social media and websites allowed small business owners to improve relationships with customers, gain new customers, and promote their businesses to other regions (Jones, Borgman, & Ulusoy, 2015). Thus, small business owners should take advantage of the free social media marketing tools and apply new strategies to improve business conditions and avoid closures.

Resources and Capabilities

Small business owners should incorporate all resources and strategies available during the company's long term planning decision process to prevent closures. Organizational capabilities are functions of the business owners to perform basic functional activities to address contemporary issues and dynamic capabilities as the ability to develop mechanisms to address future problems (Laaksonen & Peltoniemi, 2016). To address forthcoming matters, owners must identify, assess, and strategize organizational resources to benefit from the occasion and transform the business process (Peng, 2015). Furthermore, organizational capability strategies enhance the relationship between middle management responsibility and involvement in the process to obtain business goals (Ouakouak, Ouedraogo, & Mbengue, 2014). Business owners who improve organizational capabilities promote innovation and better performance (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014), and small business owners who educated and trained their employees improved the opportunities to maximize performances (Altinay, Madanoglu, De Vita, Arasli, & Ekinici, 2015). Managers can create new strategies to allocate resources, value employees, and identify future market changes to avoid closures.

Small business owners may identify new, dynamic capability strategies to address future changes in market trends and maintain business operation. Management's use of dynamic capabilities enhances business owners' opportunities to address market changes and volatile markets (Laaksonen & Peltoniemi, 2016). Small business owners who understand the functionalities of dynamic capabilities and who understand the importance of increasing employee awareness of dynamic capabilities possess better chances to prevent closures during market deviations (Campos et al., 2018). Additionally, comprehending dynamic capabilities may provide business owners with another tool to avoid closures (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014). For instance, promotion of a common goals, shared values, cross-functional integration, and decision-making decentralization lead to competitive advantage (Leonidou, Leonidou, Fotiadis, & Aykol, 2015). Business owners use their business-level strategies to direct company resources and capabilities to a particular business or market; corporate owners' level strategies utilized resources and capabilities to identify which businesses and industries company owners' should compete with, which value creation management should perform, and how owners should enter or leave an industry to maximize long-run profitability (Dyer et al., 2016). Thus, is important to utilize the dynamic capability strategies to create competitive advantage.

Competitive advantage will probably change for small business owners over time. Small enterprise owners use tangible and intangible resources to operate businesses and obtain competitive advantages (Taneja, Pryor, & Hayek, 2016). Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analyses can increase an organizational owner's competitive advantage by identifying the strategy which best fits the institution's capabilities and

resources (Peng, 2015). However, Pearson, Pitfield, and Ryley (2015) use another form of analysis to evaluate the valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable to explore organizational resources. Administrators need to identify the characteristics to allow movement from a competitive advantage to sustainable advantage (Taneja et al., 2016). Therefore, the emphasis will rely on developing strategies that may maintain a competitive advantage over time.

Small business owners' competitive advantage may require new strategies to prevent business closures during market changes. Management that understands tangible resources as financial, physical, technological, and organizational strategies can lead an organization to understand what to do and how to achieve a goal (Orth et al., 2015). A mature, small business owner develops the internal resources to avoid closures, whereas new, small business owners exploit exterior resources to maintain business operation (McDowell, Harris, & Geho, 2016). For instance, differentiation marketing strategies assisted mature, small business owners in Ghana to prevent closures (Agyapong, Osei, & Akomea, 2015). There is a concept of innovation through tradition in which business owners evaluated innovation, resources, dynamic capabilities, and organizational capabilities to effectively reinterpret past actions (De Massis, Frattini, Kotlar, Petruzzelli, & Wright, 2016). Thus, taking past practice processes and adding technology and innovation permits small business owners to adopt new models while maintaining the same traditional form of doing business (De Massis et al., 2016). Small, rural business owners may avoid closures by using established and new businesses processes.

Corporate Governance

Corporate governance refers to the set of rules and processes created by the management of firms, by the owners, or by a board of directors who controlled the organization (Griffin & Moorhead, 2014). Therefore, managers may need new regulation and procedure strategies to prevent closures. A knowledgeable board of directors, the firm owner, and the management yield higher expectations for business success and mitigate the risk of closures (Arora & Sharma, 2016). With that, all members of an organization play a vital roles in corporate governance, and organizational leaders' positive or negative attitudes impact corporate governance (Levit & Malenko, 2016). In rural communities, business owners set the organizational code of ethics and need to set good examples for the employees (Lawton & Páez, 2015). Without leaders setting examples for employees, the workers may not follow the organization standards, roles, and thus, run the risk of closures.

Recognizing management roles will assists business owners in appointing a candidate to meet the organization's job description and in enhancing business goals to prevent closures. In a small family business, the family performs like a board of directors of an organization, controlling and changing the rules and methods of the business as they see fit (Ponomareva, Nordqvist, & Umans, 2018). Family business participants of the business need the knowledge, skills, and ability to perform the work assigned (Daspit, Chrisman, Sharma, Pearson, & Mahto, 2018). If doubling as a family business, rural, small business owners should understand the importance of appointing qualified family members to the business who help build trust and the desired business culture to

management positions (Chepurensko, 2018). The owner or board of directors wants to ensure management decisions are made in the best interest of the stakeholders (Griffin & Moorhead, 2014). Therefore, small business owners should consider employee feedback before a business decision to avoid closures.

Employees may provide small business owners with beneficial information regarding the businesses due to the direct interaction between employee, product, and customers. Furthermore, a valuable management strategy for small business owners is the ability to identify employees with high emotional intelligence to help with the process of identifying problems and selecting appropriate solutions (Griffin & Moorhead, 2014). For example, people who possess high emotional intelligence evaluate matters and make better decision-making process (Niță, 2015). Emotional intelligence is the ability in which people are self-aware, can manage their emotions, can motivate themselves, possess social skills, and can express empathy for others (Niță, 2015). Management members who score high in emotional intelligence are more self-aware and self-motivated, and they influence to maximize performance by increasing employees' job satisfaction (Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2016). To add, a significant relationship occurs among a leader's emotional intelligence, business culture, innovation, job satisfaction, performance maximization, and business opportunities to adapt to changes in a volatile market (Altındağ & Köseadağı, 2015). Small, rural business owners should make emphasis in emotional intelligence training to avoid closures.

Employee Satisfaction

Employee job satisfaction can reduce the risk of business closures. Employees who do work effectively and efficiently for the organization enhance organizational success (Zubanov et al., 2017). Furthermore, motivated employees become creative and self-aware of the needs of the organization, and they set their goals based on organizational goals (Çemberci & Civelek, 2018). Similarly, employee empowerment improves employee satisfaction, leading to quality customer service (Ukil, 2016). Employee who scored high in engagement, job motivation, and job satisfaction improves job performance (Tampubolon, 2016). In rural community environments in which customer service plays a key role, satisfaction tends to give employees the motivation necessary to provide quality customer service (Çemberci & Civelek, 2018). A staff's excellent customer services may affect consumers' decisions at the time to obtain a good or service, which, in turn, can avoid closures.

While employee job satisfaction strategies are crucial to a business, they should not solely link to pay or work conditions because job happiness is important to avoid closures. Continuous work, opportunities to move up in the organization, social relationships, leadership, and organizational commitment to business goals represent variables to influence job satisfaction (Bastida, Marimon, & Carreras, 2017). With that, the lack of skilled workers decreases the chances of owners to obtain qualified employees (Joubert, Madau, & Grobler, 2017). Therefore, continuous employee training will connects to employee retention to employee performance (Joubert et al., 2017). To add, disproportionate working hours decreases employee job satisfaction; however, overtime

work in an organization has a relationship with positive organizational performance (Ko & Choi, 2018). Therefore, it's important for managers to identify organizational stressors, which decrease job satisfaction (Griffin & Moorhead, 2014). Though it's unlikely that business owners are able to address all employee grievances, they should strive to create a positive work environment that promotes teamwork to reduce turnover and avoid closures.

To support the common goal of preventing closure, management should encourage teamwork among all employee. It is important for organizational teams to increase effectiveness and efficiency across the organization (Northouse, 2016). Winkler, Busch, Clasen, and Vowinkel (2014) explained that there is a relationship between leadership behavior, job satisfaction, and employee performance. Furthermore, an ethical leader's decision reflects the morality of a leader and organization, and its sets an example for workers (Lawton & Páez, 2015). Therefore, there is a positive value that comes from a director who listen to the staffs' needs (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016). But some management leadership styles, like *laissez-faire*, could negatively impact employee satisfaction; however, transformational leadership can promote positive employee satisfaction (Asrar-ul-Haq & Kuchinke, 2016). Management may emphasize developing the leadership style and strategies to yields the greatest benefits in order to strengthen the organization and prevent business closure.

Leadership Ethics

Maintaining an ethical business could be, at times, difficult for business owners, a challenge that may make it hard to avoid closures. Since the beginning of human history,

organizational management has faced issues with administration leadership, and ethics, and making certain decisions reflects the bad choices that surface under challenging circumstances (Cosans & Reina, 2017). Small business owners use leadership ethics to build morale among employees (Northouse, 2016). The principles of ethical leadership encompass respect for others, serve others, show justice, manifest honesty, and builds community (Den Hartog, 2015). For small businesses, the owner is the face of an organization (Ponomareva et al., 2018), so it's important that employees perceive their leader as an ethical leader to promote positive influence and strong employee performance (Ahn, Lee, & Yun, 2016). Some employees may prefer to work for business owners who possess and maintain strong ethics, specially during possible closure circumstances.

To remedy closures concern, small business owners should provide an ethical work environment to promote employees' ethical behavior. The prevailing of more than one framework to address corruption emphasize the important of studying past practice and developing leadership ethics awareness among managers (Tunley, Button, Shepherd, & Blackburn, 2017). Administrators looking to meet unrealistic goals fall behind and dwell in the necessity to take shortcuts, leading to major consequences in which one misleading decision results in fraud under management acknowledgment (Edwards, Hawkins, & Schedlitzki, 2018). For business owners its important to identify people who recruit others to engage in corruption (Button et al., 2018). Hess and Cottrell (2016) clarified how fragile the small business environment is to fraud because of rapid changes and the lack of capability to address market changes. Leaders who avoid procedures and

protocols under any circumstances misrepresent the company and jeopardize the integrity of the organizational processes (Cosans & Reina, 2017). If managers are unwilling to follow company rules, the employee is likely to not follow the regulations, leading to process failures and jeopardizing the business operation.

Small business owners' ethical decisions may prevent closures. Organizational management members who identify the positive actions of their decisions for the well being of society have a higher tendency to make ethical decisions (Nunn & Avella, 2015). Furthermore, owner's ethical behavior improves the ethical climate among employees that is perceived as a positive influence on job performance, reduces turnovers, and embraces the organizational culture (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2014). Managers use ethical leadership strategy as a tool to strengthen and enhance group members, improve group behaviors, and improve group climate within the organization (Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Misati, 2017). Small business owners that cultivate personal values within the organizational framework mitigate the risk of unethical behaviors and decisions to avoid closures (Robinson & Jonker, 2017). Managers' ethical actions may influence personnel to improve customer services and prevent closures.

Personnel's unethical behavior may result in loss of customers for small businesses. Employees' and management's unethical behavior result in employment losses, life and health issues, social prejudice, mistreatment of staff, and, in some cases, environmental damages (Lindebaum, Geddes, & Gabriel, 2016). Therefore, rural, small business owners should be aware of the repercussions of unethical behavior to prevent closures (Caldwell & Hayes, 2016). Leadership ethics is a method to improve workplace

culture and promote commitment, energy, and engagement among employees (Mitonga-Monga, Flotman, & Cilliers, 2016). With that, employee and management training in leadership ethics improves management and employee capability to perform work and make good decisions to improve the ability to identify unethical decisions and to promote an ethical framework at the time to make decisions (Caldwell & Hayes, 2016).

Small Business Sustainability

Sustainability is the ability to sustain a business over the long term (Aragon-Correa et al., 2017). Rural, small startup business owners may perhaps struggle in identifying strategies to prevent closures before the first 5 years of operation. Small business sustainability enhances the stability of the environment, and it enhances the social, and economic objectives of the business to minimize closures (Hansen & Schaltegger, 2016). Similarly, a business that remains profitable long-term avoids potential closures (Chakravorty & Hales, 2017). Therefore, successful business owners constantly reinvent business models to adopt new consumers' demands (Kraus, 2017). Organization leaders who may not differentiate from competitors may minimize closures risk and increase market share.

Management may reinvent strategies to operate a business long term. For example, business owners could adopt a differentiation strategy to avoid closures (Peng, 2015). In this case, a differentiation strategy approach evaluates what competitors have done to reproduce a better product or process (Carayannis, Sindakis, & Walter, 2015). To illustrate, organization leaders address customer needs while addressing stakeholders' interests to maintain profitability (Hörisch, Freeman, & Schaltegger, 2014). Small, rural

business owners may need to evaluate the relationship between the organization and the industry to develop sustainable strategies and avoid closures.

Understanding the industry, competitors, and stakeholder behavior may provide a sustainable advantage to business owners, thus preventing closures. It is important to understand direct and indirect competition behaviors (Biggemann, Williams, & Kro, 2014). Under direct competition, business owners work under the same laws, regulations, and market competition (Herremans, Nazari, & Mahmoudian, 2016). The barrier to enter the business increases or decreases the opportunity to dominate market shares (Chen & Uzelac, 2015). Therefore, small, rural business owners' level of business entry may increase the risk of product imitation. To remain competitive in the market and avoid closures, organization leaders may evaluate internal and external business capabilities.

Evaluating business capability may allow business owners to make informative decisions to continue business operation. Managers analyze and measure internal activities during different intervals of time to evaluate processes to attain organization goals (Tee, 2015). Understanding business internal capabilities minimizes cost, reduces turnover, and promotes business efficiency (Riverbark, Roenigk, & Fasiello, 2017). Furthermore, constant assessment of the market assisted owners in the process of incorporating new ideas and in meeting consumers' demands (Chen & Uzelac, 2015). Business owners may develop parameters to measure internal capabilities and measure customer services to prevent closures.

Business owners may incorporate other strategies to avoid business closures, such as servitization. Servitization is an alternative business strategy in which products and

services are in alignment to meet consumers' demands (Foss & Saebi, 2017). Some scholars agree in how servitization provides a rare advantage that is difficult to imitate, and it bypassed the typical manufacturing and delivery process by adding customer service satisfaction (Sharma & Singh, 2017). Contemporary servitization strategies are often found in retail stores, incorporating convenience shops such as banks and coffee shops as an alternative to the products offered at retail stores (Rashmi & Dangi, 2016). Small, rural customer service departments that utilize servitization may increase the barriers to duplicate or reproduce a product. In the next paragraphs, I will introduce economic sustainability challenges to prevent closures.

Economic sustainability is the business management's competency to use the business's internal and external capabilities efficiently to generate profit and maintain business growth (Oberoi, 2014). Therefore, business owners must become aware of the different methods to address economic sustainability challenges to avoid closures. Maintaining business profitability over the long run is one of the major problems business owners encounter before closures (Gupta, 2017). One example of remedying the issue is to minimize the cost of goods sold or services provided to increased net revenue (Dyllick & Muff, 2016). Business owners who increased net revenue and promoted savings enhanced the opportunity to attain profitability over time, avoiding closures (Davila, Foster, He, & Shimizu, 2015). Educating small business owners about economic sustainability can result in an additional cost to the institution that is necessary to prevent closures.

Small business owners may need to become aware of the costs and benefits of economic sustainability to avoid closures. The cost to attain training surpassed the financial feasibility of the business (Peng, 2015). Conversely, the process to achieve economic sustainability requires cost to modify the business model into an efficient methodology to do business (Wang, Hawkins, & Berman, 2014). Some of the costs consist of a new supply chain, enterprise system, marketing, and restructuring of the business processes (Visconti, Minowa, & Maclaran, 2014). Business costs that address environmental regulation changes may reduce profitability.

With that, the cost of maintaining organization compliance with environmental regulations may decrease business profitability and the probability to avoid closures. The cost of environmentally friendly equipment, low emission equipment, zero emission vehicles, business certifications, recycling requirements, insurance policies, payment card industry compliances, and cybersecurity are some of the added expenses affecting small business owners' economic sustainability and preventing closures (Rivera-Torres, Garcés-Ayerbe, Scarpellini, & Valero-Gil, 2015). The International Organization for Standardization provided regulations and helped business owners adopt different resources to minimize costs on excess materials and workplace injuries (Zobel, 2015). To implement International Organization for Standardization processes, business owners evaluated the cost of training, researchers, audits, mentoring, and consulting, and meeting new environmental regulations represented a financial barrier for small business owners (Roome & Louche, 2016). Without the proper training to recognize how stakeholders

affect the organization, small business owners may continue to struggle to identify different methods to accomplish sustainability.

Transition

Section 1 contained the foundation for this study. The background of the problem addresses the fact that rural, small startup business owners in the United States are continuously closing. Also, included within the problem statement is the purpose of the study, a justification of the use of qualitative multiple case studies and suitable, strategic research methods and designs to answer the research question. I provided a list of the interview questions to explore the strategies some small, startup business owners in Tennessee, specifically, used to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation. My conceptual framework focused on systems theory. The literature review provided a comprehensive review of prior research over the strategies to address interrelated parts of the business to avoid closures.

Sections 2 and 3 of the research study note how I conducted the research and illustrate the results of the research. Section 2 contains specific information about the purpose statement, the process to select and recruit the participants, research methods and designs, data collection process and evaluation, and strategies to provide reliability and validity of the data. Section 3 provides information about the findings, implications for social changes, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 includes specific information on the rationale for this case study process and key techniques on how I conducted the research. Section 2 also includes information about the purpose of the qualitative multiple case study, the role of the researcher, and description of the research participants, population, sampling, and justification of the method and design. Section 2 concludes with a discussion on how I addressed the data collection mechanism, process, and technique and the reliability and validity in the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies some rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee used to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation. The target population consisted of rural, small startup business owners in the Tennessee region who successfully employed strategies to prevent closure. The implications for positive change included the possibility to create new jobs, motivate investors, and increase property values and government tax revenue to provide better services.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative study, a researcher has a personal connection with the data collection process (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The role of a researcher is an important part of the qualitative study because the scholar serves as the primary data collection instrument (Saldaña, 2018). I collected and interpreted data for this research in my role as a researcher, making me the primary data collection instrument. A researcher's responsibility during the qualitative data collection process is to observe the selected

phenomenon with ethics and maintain unbiased personal values from the research study (Doody & Doody, 2015). My responsibility was to establish confidence with the participants, listen carefully, express my understanding of participants answers by using member checking, understand the ethical principles to conduct the research, and properly secure the qualitative data.

Another important role of the researcher is to act ethically during the interview. Researchers use the Belmont Report as an ethical framework to protect the human rights of the participants, and the major components of the report encompass respect for individuals, benevolence, and righteousness or justice (Adashi, Walters, & Menikoff, 2018; Miracle, 2016). I completed a collaborative institutional training initiative that provided detailed information of the Belmont Report and specific information about the importance of protecting the human subject. The participants in my study did not fall under the protected classes of the Belmont Report; however, I took the following measures to protect participants: (a) provided autonomy, (b) gained informed consent, (c) did not expose participants to harm or risk, and (d) protected the data collected and used ethical steps to obtain participants' involvement and mitigate biases.

As a researcher, I also needed to implement strategies to minimize the risk of personal biases during the research. Researcher bias is difficult to recognize and is a risk capable of minimizing study trustworthiness (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). I had the opportunity to work at a rural, small startup business that experienced a decline in profitability and ultimately closure of the business before the first 5 years of operation. To moderate my personal biases, I used the same open-ended questions during each

interview and transcribed the answers as the participant described (see Saunders et al., 2015). Researchers also use reflective journalism to identify bias during the interview process (Morse, 2015). I mitigated research bias by elaborating a protocol to ask participants the same questions, apply member checking, and use data triangulation and reflexive journaling.

I also used an interview protocol (see Appendix) to stay focused and ask the participants the same questions in an orderly process to attain data quality. For a researcher, an interview protocol permits to follow a suitable procedure to mitigate the risk of bias error and promote credibility (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Yin, 2018). I followed the interview protocol, recorded the answers, and applied member checking to validate the description of the participant responses and experiences.

Participants

Researchers select participants who will provide a researcher with the ability to answer the main research questions (Benoot, Hannes, & Bilsen, 2016; Yin, 2018). I purposefully chose rural, small startup business owners who used strategies to prevent closures within the first 5 years of operation. Participants were over 18 years old and owned a rural small businesses located in Tennessee. I also sought participants who successfully implemented strategies to avoid closures.

Researchers select participants who are suitable to the region, the purpose of the research, and capable of adequately providing reliable information relevant to the phenomenon (Yazan, 2015). I gained participant information by contacting the owners of rural small startup businesses in Tennessee. I called the potential participants to discuss

the study, my background, purpose, and the option to participate in the study. The potential participants had the option to accept or decline the study participation invitation. The participants selected a suitable location for the interview. I provided the eligible participants the consent form, which showed the eligibility criteria, the purpose of the study, the data collection procedures, voluntary participation, risk and benefits, compensation, and assured the confidentiality and willingness to participate in the study.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

I used a qualitative method for my study to attain data regarding the experiences of rural, small startup business owners who implemented strategies to avoid closures within 5 years of operation. Researchers who attain data by using narrative data collection technique instead of structured numeric method use a qualitative method (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Conversely, a researcher uses a quantitative method to examine the problem using statistics (Barham, 2015). I did not use a quantitative method because there was no calculation of how many strategies rural, small startup business owner used to prevent closures. I wanted to know what strategies rural, small startup business owners used to avoid closures, the effectiveness of the strategies, and how the employees and customers reacted to the strategies. I also sought to attain an understanding of the strategies rural, small startup business owners used, which did not involve statistically computable data.

Additionally, I did not select the mixed methods for the study because there was not an assessment of the variables. Researchers utilizing mixed methods combine the

qualitative and quantitative method into a single process to answer a research question (Rittichainuwat & Rattanaphinanchai, 2015). If I were to compare the strategies and determine how many strategies owners used, the mixed methods design would be appropriate for the study. Instead, I used the qualitative method using interviews to attain the data because I wanted to explore strategies rural, small startup business owners used to prevent closure.

Research Design

Researchers use a case study to describe and understand the *how* and *why* of a phenomenon, such as a problem that needs to be evaluated, with no control over the phenomenon (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2018). Researchers use single data collection to focus on a critical, unusual, common, revelatory, or longitudinal case (Yin, 2018). With this case study, I gathered information from multiple participants from multiple organizations to explore strategies used by rural, small startup business owners to prevent closures (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). To understand the experiences of the owners and collect the data on successful strategies to prevent closures, a case study was the appropriate design.

Other designs considered but not chosen were ethnography and phenomenology. Researchers use ethnography to address who, what, where, how many, and how much of the problem is existing (Saunders et al., 2015; Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). Researchers who focus on ethnography usually expend a significant amount of time in the field and require extensive scrutiny (Yin, 2018). I did not use ethnography because I explored diverse and not precise specifics strategies among different groups and cultures

of rural, small startup business owners. Additionally, researchers use a phenomenological approach to study lived experiences and focus on historical events (Fazli, Imani, & Abedini, 2018), but my purpose was to explore the strategies some rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee used to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation. Considering the focus of the study, I chose case study provide answers to the semistructured research questions on denoting strategies to help rural, small startup business owners exceed the fifth year of business operations.

My approach to reach data saturation was to analyze data using interviews, document reviews, and data evaluation until attaining more data would no longer provide new information to answer the research question. Researchers using case studies reach data saturation when the data repeat, or no additional information, topic, or additional theme emerged during data collection or analysis (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I interviewed and compiled documents from participants until the data became repetitive and no new topics emerged.

Population and Sampling

I obtained qualified participants through purposeful sampling. Researchers develop purposeful sampling to select a population related to the phenomenon to provide significant and comprehensive information about the matter (Tyrrer & Heyman, 2016). I used purposeful sampling to select the population for this study to attain the knowledge from a subset of rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee who successfully used strategies to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation. Regarding sample size, researchers can compile data from three organizations meeting the specific research

criteria in a multiple case study to deliver an effective evaluation of the investigation and study (Singh, 2014). The sample size of the study included four rural, small startup businesses in Tennessee from one rural area.

To ensure data saturation, I selected an appropriated population to interview and continued to interview until the investigation reached saturation (see Fusch & Ness, 2015). In my study, I achieved data saturation by using a purposeful sampling technique, conducting interviews, and reviewing prominent reports from organizations such as the Center for Rural Affairs (CFRA), U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), U.S. U.S. SBA, and Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE). I also performed methodological triangulation until data became repetitive and no new topics emerged.

The criteria I used to select the participants included individuals with direct experiences in implementing the strategies noted in the problem statement and research question (see Yin, 2018). I used the Internet to search for rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee to choose the participants. I contacted the participants via telephone to determine if the owners met the criteria to share successful strategies to prevent closures within the first 5 years of operation. Each interview site was in a relaxed, convenient place at a beneficial time, so participants were free to answer the semistructured questions.

Ethical Research

I conducted Walden University doctoral research according to ethical standards, principally through the informed consent process. The researcher informs participants about potential harm as a result of the participation in the study (Kawar, Pugh, & Scruth,

2016). Thus, a researcher is responsible for protecting participants from the potential harm of the study (Kawar et al., 2016). The Belmont Report principles are respect for persons, justice, and beneficence (Adashi et al., 2018). The participants in my study did not fall under the protected classes of the Belmont Report; however, I gained their informed consent, provided them with autonomy, did not expose them to harm, and protected the data. Additionally, to moderate my personal biases, I used the same open-ended questions during each interview and transcribed the answers as the participant described.

To start the informative process and protect the participants, I attained institutional review board approval (Number 09-16-19-0739109) to conduct the research. I gained participant information by contacting the owners of rural small startup businesses in Tennessee and requested permission from owners for interviews. I obtained a sample population of qualified participants through purposeful sampling to provide valid and reliable answers to the research question. I called the potential participants to provide detailed information about the study, my background, purpose, and the option to participate in the study. I provided participants with a consent form via e-mail or in-person that included the purpose, outline of responsibilities of participants, the option to withdraw at any point during the study without any repercussion, and a statement of confidentiality. The participant returned the statement of consent in person or via e-mail before participating in the interview.

After participants provided their consent, they selected a suitable location for the interview. The interview protocol (see Appendix) ensured that I asked all participants the

same questions in the same order. I used my Microsoft Surface Pro and cellphone to record and created an audio record of the interview to facilitate the transcription. I observed the participant to provide detailed explanations to questions if needed. The interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. After the interview, I requested documentation, such as financial statements, employment training, technology certification, and strategic planning information. I completed the interview to determine if I reached saturation and did not interview any other participants after reaching saturation. Once the interview concluded, I thanked the participant and requested a telephone or in-person member checking's interview to take additional notes and make any changes necessary. There was no monetary compensation to participate in the study. However, I provided a thank you card with the final research study to each participant.

Researchers protect participants by securing the data and coding the information (Eisenhauer, Tait, Rieh, & Arslanian-Engoren, 2017). During the research process, I followed Walden University's protocol to maintain all used or not used data and participant identifiable information in a USB drive and all physical documentation in a fireproof security box for 5 years. To protect participants' identities, I used the following pseudonyms: rural, small business owners (RSBO) one through four (RSBO1, RSBO2, RSBO3, and RSBO4) and date. I did not list company names or any published document. After 5 years from the date of study completion, I will destroy all data by utilizing a certified disposal company.

Data Collection Instruments

For this study, I was the principal data collection instrument (see Yin, 2018). I used a protocol (see Appendix) as the second instrument to capture the data. Researchers have a role in collecting data by employing different methods such as an interview, focus group, and documentation (Leech, Collins, & Onwuegbuzie, 2017). A case study researcher utilizes semistructured interviews to permit the participant to describe the job experiences and the researcher to observe participant behaviors during the process (Saunders et al., 2015). I conducted semistructured interviews to explore successful strategies used by rural, small startup business owners to prevent closures.

For the study, I included nine open-ended questions in face-to-face, semistructured interviews. I used my Microsoft Surface Pro and cellphone to record and created an audio record of the interview to document the interview for exactness and clarity. I used Nvivo software to transcribe the data. I looked for key topics and organized the data to identify themes and similar expressions collected from the interviews.

I also used a case study protocol. According to Yin (2018) case study protocol assists researchers in creating a case study design and enhance reliability by providing (a) outline of the case study, (b) data collection processes, (c) data collection, and (d) a guide for the case study report. Following the IRB approval, the procedures to collect the data followed the interview protocol (see Appendix). Researchers follow a systematic interview protocol to attain reliable and valid data (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Researchers who use semistructured interviews and follow a protocol deliver reliable and trustworthy information to the study (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). I gained

participant information by contacting the owners of rural, small startup businesses in Tennessee and requesting permission from owners for interviews.

I obtained a sample population of qualified participants through purposeful sampling to provide valid and reliable answers to the research question. I also provided participants with a consent form via email or in-person that includes the purpose, the outline of participant responsibilities, the option to withdraw at any point during the study without any repercussion, and a statement of confidentiality. After, the participant returned the statement of consent in person or via email before participating in the interview. I asked the participants to make sure the information was correct.

For this case, I developed reliability and validity by using member checking. Researchers use member checking to verify the researcher's interpretation of the participants' answers and permit corrections (Birt et al., 2016). During the researcher process, researchers use member checking to validate the correct understanding of the data and to provide a valid and reliable representation of the participants' answers (Dikko, 2016). Researchers reach member checking by (a) leading the interview, (b) interpreting what the participant shares, and (c) Sharing the interpretation with the participant for validation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Additionally, participants' data validation enhances credibility in research (Connelly, 2016). For my case study, I recorded the interviews, evaluated the responses, and asked participants to validate the interpretation of the answers.

Data Collection Technique

I gained approval from Walden University's IRB to conduct the interviews. With the approval, I collected data about successful strategies to avoid business closures using face-to-face, semistructured interviews with open-ended questioning. Researchers use semistructured interviews to enhance consistency and to collect data during the interview (Singh, 2014). I piloted my interview questions when I submitted the questions to the committee for a panel review. A researcher pilot tests the questionnaire by initially submitting the interview questions to a group of experts with the purpose to (a) enhance validity, (b) enhance reliability, and (c) assure that participants will not have issues with answering the interview questions (Saunders et al., 2015). I conducted the pilot study to ensure the data collected would minimize the risk of problems, record the data, and answer the research question.

I used semistructured, open-ended questions so that participants attained an opportunity to gain clarification during the interviews. Researchers use the face-to-face, semistructured interviews to enhance verbal and nonverbal communication with the participant (Kallio et al., 2016). Using an interview protocol, I collected data about successful strategies to avoid business closures using these face-to-face, semistructured interviews containing nine questions and archival data. Researchers who use semistructured interviews and follow a protocol deliver reliable and trustworthy information to the study (Kallio et al., 2016). I used archival data as my other source of data.

For my secondary data, I retrieved data from the reports published by prominent organizations like the CFRA, EDA, U.S. SBA and SCORE . I sought the literature related to the research topic on the World Wide Web. A Researcher uses a wide range of data available on the internet for about the case study (Saunders et al., 2015). For example, any researcher can visit a search engine like Google Scholar to retrieve data about a research topic. Scholars often use literature reviews to provide a critical examination of published research to describe, study, and display subject matter (Jefferies et al., 2018). Researchers also use archival data as another instrument to collect data during the case study (Yin, 2018). While semistructured interviews were a primary source of data collection for the case study, there are some advantages and disadvantages that I will describe in the next section.

Researchers using face-to-face semistructured interviews may encounter advantages and disadvantages. Some advantages of using semistructured interview include (a) descriptive information, (b) quick data, (c) clarity data collection, and (d) flexibility and location (Weller et al., 2018). With that, a researcher uses the semistructured interview to minimize the risk of communication issues with the participant (Kellio et al., 2016). I used the advantages by attaining instant data, direct communication, and clarity during the collection process. The disadvantages, however, using a semistructured interviews include (a) time constraints, (b) lack of statistically data validation, (c) partiality from the participants about the actual problem, and (d) overemphasizing the research problem (Yin, 2018). To minimize the risk of the

disadvantages, I allowed participants to select the time for the interviews, followed the protocol, and anticipated possible questions from participants.

To start the informative process and protect the participants, I attained IRB approval to conduct the research. I sought out individuals who met the criteria to participate, and then I phoned the potential participants to provide detailed information about the study, my background and purpose, and to offer option to participate in the study. After, I met with the participants to review the consent form, outline of the responsibilities of participants, discuss the option to withdraw at any point during the study without any repercussions, provide a statement of confidentiality, and gained their signature. I scheduled a convenient day with the participants to conduct the interview.

Conversely, the participants selected a suitable location for the interview. Using the interview protocol (see Appendix), I asked all participants the same questions in the same order, providing detailed explanations to questions if needed. I used my Microsoft Surface Pro and cellphone to record and create an audio record of the interview to facilitate the transcription. I provided detailed explanations to questions if needed. The interview took approximately 45 minutes, and after the interview, I requested documentation, such as financial statements, employment training certification, technology certification, and strategic planning information. I completed the interview to determine if I have reached saturation and did not interview any other participants after reaching saturation. Once the interview concluded, I thanked the participant and requested a telephone or in-person member checking's interview to take additional notes and make any changes necessary.

After the interview, I conducted member checking. Researchers use member checking to share the interpretation of the data with the participants, and check for any misinterpretation (Dikko, 2016). I shared the interpreted data with the participants by following the procedure suggested by Fusch and Ness that includes (a) conducting the interview, (b) interpreting participants answers, and (c) attaining participants validation of the interpretation. Additionally, participants' data validation enhances credibility in research (Connelly, 2016). Following the interview, I typed the participants' answers from each question to a Word document and shared the interpretation to the participant via email, asking that they read and verify that the information is a clear representation of the participant answers. I repeated this process in case the participants shared additional information, and I concluded with the member checking process if no new information, modifications, or suggestions occurred.

Data Organization Technique

To begin organizing my data, I used my Microsoft Surface Pro and cellphone to record and created an audio record of the interviews to enhance the organization of data sources. Scholars' formal structure data enhancement leads to better data analysis and quality research (Doody & Doody, 2015). The classification of the data organization consists of coding the participants as rural, small business owners (RSBO) one through four (RSBO1, RSBO2, RSBO3, and RSBO4). Researchers use coding as a procedure to identify trends by assigning letters and code numbers to identify contestants and trends during data collection while keeping the names of participants confidential (Saunders et al., 2015). For my case study, I utilized color-coding to identify and represent any themes

emerging from the data in a file, and I kept all my research log usernames and passwords in an excel file. Following these coding and storing techniques enhances confidentiality .

To analyze my data, I used NVivo computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to analyze the data. Researchers indicated how qualitative data analysis software like NVivo aids the researcher to identify patterns by organizing, coding, and evaluating the data (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016). For security, I followed Walden University's protocol to maintain all used or not used data and identifiable participant information in a USB drive and all physical documentation in a fireproof security box for 5 years. Researchers must protect the participants by maintaining all information securely (Kawar et al., 2016). After 5 years from the date of study completion, Walden University's protocol states researchers should destroy all data through a certified disposal company.

Data Analysis

I analyzed data collected from multiple sources following Yin's 5 steps of data analysis. According to Yin (2018), the steps for data analysis include (a) compiling data, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling the data, (d) interpreting the data, and (e) reporting the findings. Data collection from multiple sources is imperative in qualitative research. A Researcher uses multiple sources of data to enhance understanding and interpretation to develop accuracy (Yin, 2018). For my case, I collected data about successful strategies to avoid business closures using face-to-face, semistructured interviews with open-ended questions.

I compiled the data during participant interviews following the interview protocol (see Appendix). For my interviews, I encouraged the participants to select their interview location, and during the interviews, I used my Microsoft Pro and cellphone to record and create audio records of the interviews to facilitate the transcription. While my interviewees answered questions, I observed closely, prepared to explain questions if needed. The interviews took approximately 45 minutes, and upon completion, I requested documentation, such as financial statements, employment training, technology certification, and strategic planning information. Additionally, I completed the interviews to determine if I had reached saturation, and I did not interview any other participants after reaching saturation. At the end of each interview session, I thanked each participant and requested a telephone or in-person member-checking interview to take additional notes and make any changes. Researchers use member checking to share the interpretation of the data with the participants and check for any misinterpretation (Dikko, 2016).

I disassembled the data by organizing and coding the participants as rural, small business owners (RSBO) one through four (RSBO1, RSBO2, RSBO3, and RSBO4). The participants included 3 retail stores and 1 construction company, and I attained the participant's information from the interview and organized it using Nvivo software, Word, and Excel. Researchers consider NVivo software to be a beneficial system for coding and elaborating groups and sources (Woods et al., 2016). I uploaded the participants' interviews with Nvivo, and I saved all information under the codes RSBO1, RSBO2, RSBO3, and RSBO4.

To reassemble the data, I used a systematic approach to analyze the data collected from the participants. The data was collected and organized using qualitative data organizing software. I used the NVivo computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to analyze the data. Regarding the software, researchers performing qualitative data analysis use software such as NVivo to identify patterns by organizing, coding, and evaluating the data (Woods et al., 2016). Following the data collection from the rural, small business owners, I used Word and Excel to organize the information to become familiar with the data, and I searched for codes and common phrases throughout the sources.

I obtained the primary data by conducting interviews with rural, small business owners, and I collected secondary data by reviewing reports such as publications from the CFRA, articles from the SCORE, guidelines developed by the U. S. EDA, and courses designed by the U.S. U.S. SBA to reach triangulation. A researcher attain triangulation by using more than one source of data and instrument of collection to gain validity, credibility, authenticity of research data, analysis, and interpretation (Saunders et al., 2015). Furthermore, a researcher applies methodological triangulation to understand a phenomenon with multiple sources (Yin, 2018). The researcher's triangulation includes (a) data source triangulation, (b) researcher triangulation, (c) methodological triangulation, and (d) theory triangulation (Woods et al., 2016). Conversely, the use of triangulation assures validity and understanding through multiple sources of confirmation. I utilized data source triangulation as a part of my data analysis structure.

With that, the results of the primary data analysis correlate with the contents of the secondary data, the literature review, and the tenets of the conceptual framework.

After the initial analysis, I shared the interpretation of the data with the corresponding participant via email to member check, requesting that the participant read and verify that the information was a clear representation of the participant's answer. A researcher uses member checking to share the interpretation of the data with the participants and check for any misinterpretation (Dikko, 2016). I then transcribed and interpreted the information to dismiss any potential irrelevant material.

I created a master file in Excel to identify the codes used during the study. I became familiar with the data by reading the interview transcripts several times, listening to the audio on numerous occasions, and repeatedly reviewing observation notes, web pages, and reading articles. I manually color labelled significant words and phrases identified while reading each participant's answer to each question. A researcher uses a priori codes to develop codes from terms used in the literature and the existing theory (Saunders et al., 2015). I coded the data from the literature common concepts. I also copied and pasted the recurrent used phrases and words in Excel to identify similarities and patterns. The themes that came from the recurring phrases and words derived from grouping the categories. I uploaded the interviews word document transcriptions into Nvivo software to validate the manual codes and group the themes into main and subthemes.

I evaluated the information to determine similitudes in the data and to present the findings of the study. After the evaluation, I analyzed and coded the data from the case

study to search for themes. Researchers evaluate codes and patterns from the data using the process of thematic analysis (Saunders et al., 2015). I used a thematic analysis process to examine the data. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to (a) interpret the data, (b) use deductive and inductive methods, (c) analyze different processes, and (d) identify codes and themes (Yin, 2018). I identified the themes using the thematic analysis, and I devised the themes by establishing a manual data analysis process and utilizing Nvivo software to develop a well-structured analytical framework to pursue the analysis. Afterward, I corroborated the themes identified with the literature and the conceptual framework of systems theory for the case study.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

As a researcher, I measured and ensured reliability to interpret the findings of the qualitative research. Researchers who follow formal structure ensure data analysis and reliability in qualitative researcher project (Doody & Doody, 2015). Furthermore, a researcher's ability to apply methods in which a different person can track, analyze, and emit a similar and positive report about the study promotes dependability and reliability (Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams, & Blackman, 2016). During the study, I identified and used consistent processes and procedures in this study to the extent that other researchers could potentially obtain similar results.

I provided reliability and uniformity in the procedures and in the authentication of the interpretation for dependability in the results. Researchers' findings during a qualitative study should be dependable, and the procedures and processes must be

consistent (Moon et al., 2016). I also addressed dependability by directing a field test of two questions with two business experts to validate the understanding and relevance of the research questions. I used the field test to enhance the reliability of the methods to attain consistent data for my case study while ascertaining dependability. Similarly, I followed an interview protocol (see Appendix) to maintain identical data collecting procedures. Further, following the protocol, I also involved member checking to certify that the research interpretation reflects the participants' answers. Thus, I provided truthful and significant reflections of participants' answers by following the data collection and analysis steps provided in the proposal.

Validity

I established credibility, transferability, and confirmability to validate the data. Connelly (2016) denoted the following criteria (a) credibility, (b) confirmability, (c) dependability, and (d) transferability as the primary criteria to ensure validity. Credibility is the appropriate representation of the data gathered in the study and the interpretation of the information (Moon et al., 2016). I was the primary data collection instrument in this qualitative study; therefore, I collected information from four rural business owners to enhance credibility.

I collected data using face-to-face interviews with four rural, small business owners, in Tennessee from one rural area and archival data. The four rural, small business owners included 3 retail stores and 1 construction company providing four different sources of data collection. Researchers use methodological triangulation to gather various data sources, illustrated the different evaluation of the problems to

improve the validity of the data, and providing an unprejudiced result (Joslin & Müller, 2016). I used member checking and reflective journaling to ensure the interpretations of my study truly represent the participants' opinions.

Following the interview process, I conducted member checking to ensure accuracy. Researchers reach member checking by (a) leading the interview, (b) interpreting what the participant shares, and (c) sharing the interpretation with the participant for validation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Also, researchers use member checking to confirm and certify the researcher's interpretations of the findings represent participants' answers (Dikko, 2016). Following the interview, I typed participants' answers from each question onto a Word document and shared the interpretation of what the participant shared via email, asking to read and verify if the information is a clear representation of the participant answers. I repeated this process in case the participants shared additional information, and I concluded with the member checking process if no new information, modifications, or suggestions occurred. Confirmability is similar to dependability in the methods and refers to the degree that the findings are a suitable representations of the respondents; unbiased methodology, on the other hand, demonstrates the relationship between the participant's data collected and the subject (Moon et al., 2016). Therefore, I ensured confirmability and dependability by indicating the occurrences of words and themes using Nvivo software for the organization.

I reached transferability by providing a detailed explanation of the procedures and processes conducted to collect the findings. Researchers obtain external validity and transferability by applying the findings described in one study to another context (Moon

et al., 2016). For a person, transferability states that the use of the findings in different settings turn into the main condition (Connelly, 2016). In this section, I provided a detailed explanation of the processes and procedures used to conduct the research. I believe that the result of my study could transfer to other rural, small business owners facing closures. Thus, the information from this case study should motivate researchers to conduct future research in strategies some rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee used to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation.

I conducted open-ended, semistructured interviews with the participants until no new answers or data developed. Researchers enhance saturation through the identification of repetitive topics to the extent that no new themes emerged during the research process (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Joslin & Müller, 2016). I ended with data collection when no new topics or classes developed and when the data analysis did not benefit from additional information.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I explained the specific details of the research project. This section included the purpose study, the role of the researcher, research method and design, participant population and sampling, reflections in ethical research, facts on the collection and organization of data, data analysis techniques, and the process to enhance reliability and validity of this study. In Section 3, I presented an evaluation of the findings collected from the study and the of the application for professional practice, implications of social changes, and recommendations for future research.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies some rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee used to prevent closures within the first 5 years of operation. I used semistructured interviews to uncover the findings from a qualitative data analysis. The target population consisted of rural, small business owners from four different types of rural businesses who implemented successful strategies to prevent closures within the first 5 years of operation in the middle Tennessee region.

Section 3 presents the results of data collection and an explanation of the three thematic findings of the study. I conducted interviews with rural, small business owners; collected secondary data by reviewing reports from prominent organizations involved in developing small businesses such as the CFRA, SCORE, U.S. EDA, and the U.S. SBA; and sought literature related to the research topic to reach methodological triangulation. I also used member checking and reflective journaling to ensure the interpretation of the findings represented participants' opinions. I used thematic analysis to devise themes. The next section consists of the presentation of the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, personal reflections, and a conclusion.

Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this multiple case study was to identify successful strategies to prevent closures. The research question for the study was “What successful strategies do

rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee use to prevent closures within the first 5 years of operation?” Three main themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) business owners’ skills and knowledge; (b) marketing, sales and inventory; and (c) employee retention.

Emergent Theme 1: Business owners’ Skills and Knowledge

I identified the theme of business owners’ skills and knowledge from Interview Questions 1, 2, 5, 6, and 9. All four participants denoted the importance of business skills and knowledge to prevent closure. The business owners improved their skills and knowledge by earning a college degree, participating in conferences, and on the job experiences. RSBO1 described, “earning a degree granted the ability to gain business knowledge about the different function of a business.” RSBO2 explained, “starting in the business as an employee improve my business skills.” RSBO3 also stated, “I started working in this business as another one of the guys on the floor. I had the opportunity to learn about the business operation while working.” Finally, RSBO4 stated, “Having a college degree provided the foundation of knowledge to manage a business. On the job experience enhance my business skills.”

All four participants also denoted the strategy of enhancing skills and knowledge by taking on different business functions within the company. Small business owners’ knowledge and skills assisted in identifying and adjusting future issues to maintain profitability. RSBO1 stated,

When I first opened the store, I only had one employee, me. I was doing the inventory manually, reconciling receipts, making business payments, developing

marketing, maintaining technology, and providing services to the customers. In other words, I was doing everything related to the functions of my business.

RSBO2 commented,

I improved my knowledge by doing as much as possible within the company. I recall a time when the financial situation limited me short in staff. I had to take upon different responsibilities other than just managing the store.

RSBO3 stated,

I managed the daily operation of the business. When an employee call sick, I'm able to take upon their duties. Without the working experience, I would not be able to take upon their duties.

RSBO4 stated,

you must remain knowledgeable of all parts of the business. Working on the field improve your business knowledge and skills... In my case, the skills gained from prior on the job experiences, help me guide my employee during a technical difficulty.

Further, RSBO3 explained the importance of working from the bottom of the chain and become an owner. Prior business owner experiences yield positive outcomes as a business owner. RSBO3 stated, "I believe that working in the business as an employee helped me to be a better owner. I understand some situations my employees go through, and I'm able to satisfy their needs."

RSBO4 and RSBO3 also noted how business knowledge and skills comes from continuing education, participating in professional study groups, and conferences.

RSBO4 stated, “I get to participate in courses to enhance my knowledge and skills constantly... The market change rapidly and I want to make sure we are up today in compliance.” RSBO4 commented, “business owners must improve their knowledge and skills constantly.” RSBO3 explained,

all my staff and myself participate in training and continuous education. I want to make sure we are up today in the latest technology changes. New equipment and tools simplify the workload... It does save me time, and time is money.

Further, RSBO1 discussed getting a college degree, going to industry conferences, talking to other business owners, and reading business articles, which contributed to RSBO1’s business knowledge and skills:

the college degree provided significant theory about the business...talking to other business owners had been crucial in turning the knowledge into the skills... Business owners sharing their past experiences during a meeting can help me in solving some problems. The marketing strategies that I learn while attending college were instrumental in outlining my initial marketing plan.

RSBO2 also mentioned the importance of peer relationships to improve business knowledge and skills:

life is about relationship... I had learned so much from others business owners... As a former employee, now an owner I can communicate better to my employees... I ask a lot of questions to my peers and suppliers during business groups meeting. Did you have this situation ?... how do you handle it...? It’s always good to see how others worked around similar problems.

Additionally, RSBO2, RSBO3, RSBO4 discussed the importance of having the skills and knowledge of focusing on the business goals to adapt to changes and overcome adversities. RSBO2 stated, “You must dedicate all your energies to make a successful business. Maintain your mind in your business goal... Adversity will require extra work and will test your business skills and knowledge.” Similarly, RSBO3 noted,

Everyday I’m the first one to get to the store and the last one to leave the store. As an owner, you have to be willing to put the extra work at any day or time. I love what I do. I had been in business for 47 years. I stay focus on my business goal.

RSBO4 and RSBO1 discussed how their knowledge and skills allowed them to have confidence in their business model. RSBO4 stated, “We went the extra miles... there will be up and down in the business...You cannot be afraid of failure. You need to continue developing your business goal.” RSBO1 explained, “you have to remain focus... I don’t have a specific difficult time...When the hardest time comes, it is when you need to put in the most work to attain your business goal.”

The participants’ responses provided valuable information about the difficulties and benefits derived from owning a small business. Rural, small business owners can prevent closure by incorporating strategies to improve their knowledge and skills. RSBO1 and RSBO4 display their bachelor’s degrees in their offices. Similarly, all four participants are part of the local Chamber of Commerce. I noticed RSBO2 and RSBO3 several certifications on customer services, leadership, and continuing education. These findings support how the participants attained knowledge and skills that contributed to business success.

Emergent Theme 2: Marketing, Sales and Inventory

Data on marketing, sales, and inventory resulted from Questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9. Business owners use marketing as a tool to inform and convince consumers about the value proposition of products and services. Management makes use of sales and inventory to analyze customers' purchasing behaviors and identify patterns.

Marketing refers to the action management incur to promote and sell products or services. All four participants noted how marketing contributes to business success. Participant RSBO1 stated, "marketing is the key to identify what customers want... If I have what the customer wants, they are going to purchase." RSBO2 discussed, "I rely heavily on marketing to attract my clients to the store... I want to let them know that I have what they want and need." RSBO3 explained the relevance of having an effective marketing strategy: "I always want to use the traditional marketing tools like radio and newspaper to attract my customers... You will be surprised at how people learn about your business." Finally, RSBO4 explained, "In this industry marketing is imperative to showcase our talent...Let the customer know that we can do the work and are affordable."

RSBO1 and RSBO2 also noted how media platforms became marketing strategies to communicate with customers, attract new customers, and encourage purchases. RSBO1 explained how a post in social media can be shared to many others and bring customers to the store. Business owners embed ecommerce into social media platforms to maximize sales. There are also social media packages to target specific groups. RSBO2

stated, “We use surveys, the internet, and the current social media platforms like Facebook, and Instagram as a marketing tool.” RSBO1 explained,

We use different outlets on social media to capture customers' preferences on services and products. I use Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and a mass text message alert system to market our products. I can get significant information from our followers.

In contrast to using new media, RSBO3 and RSBO4 make use of the traditional forms of communication to reach out to their customers, as business owners may use a marketing strategy that best fits their targeted population. RSBO4 stated, “we build our company page, send emails and newsletters via a newspaper to market products and services. RSBO3 explained, “I use the newspaper, radio station, and donations to community events to market our products and promote sales.”

Similarly, all four participants discussed direct personal interaction with customers to understand consumers and market their product. In small businesses, business owners can talk directly to customers and enhance customers’ experiences. Some major retailers lack the sense of personal interaction among top executives and customers. RSBO3 stated,

I have a direct relationship with my customer, which helps me to get instant feedback about our jobs and address any issue. My customers know how I will go past my obligation to make sure the services are further than their expectations... They communicate the information to other customers. I always get referrals from my clients.

RSBO4 stated,

A happy customer is a great marketing tool. We ask the clients immediately feedback at the time to deliver the services or products. Providing accurate information about datelines is imperative for our business success. We want customers' feedback when the client receives the goods and services. We had to start when we said we would, finish when we said we would, and you had to produce quality workmanship. In the circumstance when the warranty expires, we stand by our work and fixed at no cost to the customer.

RSBO2 stated,

You need to have a positive direct relationship with your customers. Your customers are a strong advocate to use as a marketing tool. You must listen to the customers. Customers will tell you their needs and you must fulfil those needs.

RSBO1 stated,

I want to build a direct relationship with my customers. I must know what my customers want in order to provide what they need. I want my customers to leave the store happy. A happy customer is more than likely returning to your business. Happy customers will bring other customers to the store.

All participants recognized how sales and inventory enhance their understanding of customers. The business owners analyzed sales and inventory to determine marketing strategies' effectiveness. Management evaluation of sales and inventory may increase profitability and prevent closures. RSBO1 stated,

I analyze daily sales to identify what customers are purchasing in relation to what they like according to our database. I invested in my inventory; however, I watch my inventory constantly with the help of a point of sale system to make sure I don't over buy. I must be profitable.

RSBO2 stated,

I compare year-end sales to the prior year to identify if our marketing strategies are effective and if our sales are growing. Be careful with your inventory. Do not buy too much inventory, it can limit the possibility to bring new products and provide what customers want. If you don't provide what customers want profits decrease.

RSBO3 stated,

I compare sales and competitors' pricing. However, I have a markup to cover the cost of doing business to be profitable. Customers are willing to pay the extra for the premium service if you provide good customer service. I normally reach out to customers if we must perform any additional work in order to provide safe products to our customers. Keep an eye on the inventory. Make sure that the inventory turnover is how we want it. Have enough inventory but do not over buy.

RSBO4 stated,

We identify what goods or services are making money by evaluating our sales and net revenue. Then, we align our business with what is profitable. For the inventory, we buy as we need it.

The participants' responses provided greater insight into how rural, small business owners enhance marketing, sales and inventory. By assessing marketing, sales and inventory, small business owners may identify profitable markets, keep a variety of fresh products, provide new services, and determine the financial strength of the business. After reviewing RSBO1's social media, I gained an understanding of RSBO1's commitments to marketing. RSBO4 also provided a newsletter that showed a strong commitment to alert the community on their successes. Additionally, RSBO2's social media is updated every day with new products and services. RSBO3's radio and newspaper ads are on the radio every week. If business owners want to growth and achieve success, the business owners should adapt marketing strategies, maximize sales, and efficiently use the inventory.

Emergent Theme 3: Employee Retention

The data analysis of Questions 2, 3, 7, and 9 resulted in the significance of employee retention to prevent closures. Business owners focus on employee retention to minimize employee turnover. Management makes use of employee retention as the skills to keep employees. All the participants indicated how employee retention is a vital part of business success. RSBO1 stated, "I want to make sure my employees stay with me as long as possible... I dedicated significant time to my employees, and they become an asset to my company...My business cannot afford to change employees every month." RSBO2 also stated,

I want to make sure I take care of my employees. By improving employee retention I'm able to help minimize errors. I had been blessed with a group of

people that had been with me for more than 15 years. They know what is the right thing to do when I'm not around.

RSBO3 stated,

I have the same staff for 30 years, which makes a world of different in my business. By retaining the same staff, we build a culture and each employee feels part of the business. I could not be in business for 47 years without my employees.

RSBO4 stated,

In my type of business retaining employees is important. I learn to hire slow in order to bring quality employees to the team. You must hire the right people.

Further, RSBO2 discussed the importance in having a positive environment to retain employees. RSBO2 denoted, "When employees don't feel important to the company, they will not do a good job for you." RSBO3 explained, "I call all my employees by their names. I want to make sure the employees and their families are doing well. If they need anything and I can help, I will be the first one to offer my help." To emphasize, RSBO4 also stated, "You have to show that you care about the employee beyond the pay check."

RSBO1 also explained how to retain employees is important to celebrate small victories and success. RSBO1 added, "We celebrate birthdays, new family members." RSBO4 stated, "Every year we have a celebration with all my employees and families. We want them to feel that we are grateful for their jobs." Additionally, RSBO2 said, "Everything is not just working... Celebrate good action."

Along with compassion, RSBO4 denoted, “Good communication is important to retain employees.” To elaborate, RSBO3 said, “My doors are always open to my employees. They can come in and discuss any situation at any time.” RSBO1 also expressed, “I met regularly with my employee. I listen to their suggestion and incorporate their ideas. They know they are part of the company.”

RSBO4 explained how disengaged employees are not productive, stating “I found training as an aid to build positive employees’ engagement behaviour.” RSBO3 indicated, “I don’t want my employees to get behind. They stay engaged in constantly training... Training is another means to enhance employee retention.” Participant RSBO1 indicated how they train all employees on how to greet customers: “I want my employees to walk by the door happy to be part of my business.” RSBO4 also denoted, “It is imperative to write the job description and have the right person doing the job they like.” Additionally, RSBO1 also explained, “An employee that can’t do a job is more likely to feel unhappy, less important, and leave the company.”

Responses for all the participants noted the significance of employee retention to prevent closure. To increase success, rural, small business owners should incorporate strategies to maximize employee retention. RSBO1 and RSBO2 provided business meeting minutes, training evaluation reports, and proof of webinars participation. Similarly, RSBO3 and RSBO4 provided training certifications completed by employees and employers.

Findings Related to Literature

The findings from Theme 1 concur with Davis (2017) as well as Bereznoi (2014) on the importance of business skills and knowledge of the business. The result of Theme 1 also aligns with Inan and Bitici (2015), Laaksonen and Peltoniemi (2016), and Ceptureanu et al. (2017) on how the management knowledge and skills provide the ability to identify and prevent future business problems. The findings of Theme 1 also supported the statements of Sheheryar Khan (2015) and Suomalainen et al. (2015) on understanding resources, organizational cultures, organizational systems, innovative capabilities, and strategies necessary to make positive changes in an organization and promote adaptability to future changes.

Another finding denoted how rural, small business owners strategically used marketing, sales, and inventory to identify customers, measure the effectiveness of strategies, and prevent closures. Furthermore, the findings from Theme 2 resonate with the statements of Chen and Uzelac (2015), Chepurenko (2018), Davila et al. 2015, Dyllick and Muff (2016), Jones et al. (2015), and Mehra et al. (2017) over the importance of marketing, sales, and inventory for a small businesses. Additionally, business owners obtain competitive advantages by understating marketing, sales, and inventory (Gummesson, 2017; EDA, 2016; and SCORE, 2019). Rural, small businesses rely on direct contact with customers and social media to conduct marketing strategies (CFRA, 2012; Chepurenko, 2018; Jones et al., 2015; and U.S. SBA, 2016). Business owners build marketing plans to reach, connect, and displays goods and services to customers (U.S. SBA, 2016).

Additionally, the finding from Theme 3 aligns with the statement of Joubert et al. (2017) about high employee retention and high employee performance. Zubanov et al. (2017) denoted how employees who do work effectively and efficiently for the organization enhance organizational success. The results of Theme 3 also substantiate the statement of Bosworth and Turner (2018), CFRA (2012), EDA (2016), Griffin and Moorhead (2014), U.S. SBA (2016), and SCORE (2019) on how small, rural startup business owners need to understand the location of the business and the population area, and they need to identify positions, write job descriptions, and identify qualified employees to enhance employee retention. The finding from Theme 3 also agrees with the assertions of Griffin and Moorhead (2014) on how business success is essential to increase employee retention by aligning employee capabilities with the organization's needs.

Findings in Relations to Systems Theory

The conceptual framework for this study is systems theory. Systems theory provides the lens to explore strategies that some rural, small business owners use to prevent closures. Researchers use the systems theory to classify organisms and the effects of the social environment, which is, to some degree, similar context to what exists in small businesses (Von Bertalanffy, 1950). Additionally, researchers make use of systems theory to identify interdependent parts and the interrelationships in the system instead of addressing only individual trends (Turner & Endres, 2017). This study focused on strategies identified using system theory concept of understanding how the interrelated part of business assists rural, small business owners to prevent closure.

The findings of Theme 1 align with the conceptual framework of the systems theory. Business owners' skills and knowledge of the interrelation, mutual influence, and dynamic of the relationship among the operations' functions of a business are consistent with von Bertalanffy (1950) general systems theory, in which he denotes how the parts of the system affect the entire system. Furthermore, Inan and Bititci (2015) explained how business owners' skills and knowledge of the business improve owners' abilities to position business resources, tangible or intangible, to accomplish a job or action. The results from Theme 1 align with the reports of CFRA (2012), EDA (2016) U.S. SBA (2016) and SCORE (2019) on how management skills and knowledge of understanding customers, employees, finances, marketing, technology, and continuous training enhance the probability to prevent closures. CFRA (2012), EDA (2016), U.S. SBA (2016) and SCORE (2019) denoted how business owners' skills and knowledge are derived from a college degree as well as conference, work experience, networking, and mentoring.

The results from Theme 2 also aligns with the conceptual framework of the systems theory. von Bertalanffy (1950) introduced the systems theory concept to explain how the overlapping parts of a system function as a whole. Cross and Barnes (2014) explained how researchers apply systems theory to assess the interrelation, mutual influence, and dynamics of the relationship among the operations functions of a business. Owner's capability to evaluate the interrelation among marketing, sales, and inventory assists in maintaining the product value proposition throughout different periods, which in turn, prevent closures (Richmond et al., 2017).

Similar to Themes 1 and 2, the findings under Theme 3 also align with the conceptual framework of the systems theory. Researchers use the systems theory to classify organisms and the effects of the social environment, which is, to some degree, a similar context to what exists in small businesses (von Bertalanffy, 1950). Rural, small business owners' understanding of how the owner and employees' relationships affect employee retention as a function of the business is important. The results from Theme 3 resonate with the statement of Katina (2015) which explains how systems theory analyzes the cause and effect by evaluating the principles, concepts, laws, regulations, and behaviors as complex interdependent parts of the business.

Triangulation of Data Sources

Methodological triangulation is a method to evaluate various data sources to add unprejudiced results (Joslin & Müller, 2016). I used methodological triangulation to explore the strategies some rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee used to prevent closures within the first 5 years of operation. I utilized methodological triangulation by following the interview protocol and collecting information from the semistructured interviews with the participants; furthermore, I collected secondary data by reviewing reports such as publications from the CFRA, articles from the SCORE, guidelines developed by the U.S. EDA, courses designed by the U.S. SBA; and company documentation such as business owners' college diplomas, certifications of continuing education, business meeting minutes, training evaluation reports, social media, newsletter advertisements, and training certifications.

In my study, three themes derived from using methodological triangulation. Specifically, through thematic analysis, 3 themes emerged from the data analysis. Participants' interviews answers, secondary data, and company documents converging in the importance of business owners' skills and knowledge, marketing, sales and inventory, and employee retention to prevent closures. The strategies implemented by rural, small business owners increase the probability of preventing closures.

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings of my study denoted the strategies some rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee used to prevent closures within the first 5 years of operation. Three main themes emerged from the data analysis. The results of this study may help existing and future rural, small business owners on developing strategies to make informative decisions to prevent closures. It is important for small, rural business owners to improve their skills and knowledge of business capabilities strategies to compete in a globalized market (Davis, 2017). The application to professional practice could consist of motivating small business owners to take upon new strategies that facilitate personal development, effective marketing, sales and inventory, and employee retention. To add, Van Woerkom and Meyers (2019) found that small business owners can prevent closures by increasing personal growth.

Successful small business owners recognize the need for effective and efficient marketing, sales, and inventory plans (SCORE 2019; U.S. SBA, 2016). The practical application of the research findings may influence small business owners to embrace the idea of developing comprehensive marketing, sales, and inventory structures. Business

owners ensure competitive advantages by undertaking successfully marketing, sales, and inventory strategies (Gummesson, 2017; EDA, 2016; and SCORE, 2019).

Current and future small business owners could use the strategies shared by the participants to retain employees. The final study results indicated how participants build relationships with employees. Conversely, participants promoted employees personal growth and good communication. Continuous work, opportunities to move up in the organization as well as strong social relationships, leadership roles, and organizational commitment to business goals decrease employee turnover (Bastida et al., 2017). It is critical and vital for small, rural business owners to find the means to increase employee productivity and motivation (Glaub et al., 2014). Thus, rural, small business owners can use the information from the research as a strategy to prevent closures.

Implications for Social Change

Successful businesses improve the social and economic development of rural communities. Rural small businesses employ 48% of the private sector in rural communities (U.S. SBA, 2019). The riches of a region are the result of economic development and growth (Ang, 2018). Thus, small business owners and entrepreneurs help grow the economy and promote positive social changes in communities (Ang, 2018). Rural, small business owners who successfully operate a sustained business could positively enhance the economic and social stability of rural communities. The participants in this study employed residents and contractors to maintain and upgrade the facilities, enhancing the local economy. Conversely, offering new employment promotes

people's willingness to invest in other forms of activities to develop better lifestyles and enhance social mobility.

The implementation of these strategies could serve as a benefit for rural, small business owners to affect social change by increasing the possibilities to retain future leaders in the communities. Conversely, this study could improve social change by demonstrating to other rural, small business owners the necessary strategies to create a strategic plan to prevent closures. Similarly, small business owners could improve the community's overall working skills by creating new jobs, enhancing training, developing new analytical and research abilities, promoting flexibility and adaptability, and strengthening interpersonal skills. Increased knowledge in dynamic capabilities does prepares future, small, business owners to identify, take advantage, and revamp business models to increase profitability (Campos et al., 2018). A rural, small business owner who prevents closures can create an association with other future owners, which could result in a better business process to enhance rural communities' economic and social development.

Recommendations for Action

The findings of this study may help rural, small business owners to prevent closure by conducting specific strategies. I recommend the rural startup business owners to use strategies to improve business owner's skills and knowledge, marketing, sales and inventory, and employee retention. Also, small business owners from different regions should pay attention to those strategies implemented to minimize the risk of failures.

The first recommendation stemmed from this study is to participate in seminars, conventions and business debates, and to take college courses to improve business owners' skills and knowledge. Second, I would recommend researching webinars, enterprise systems, and artificial intelligent tools to improve marketing, sales and inventory strategies. Dyer et al. (2016) denotes the value of adopting current marketing, sales and inventory strategies to identify markets in which business owners may be profitable. The local Chambers of Commerce, CFRA, U.S. EDA, U.S. U.S. SBA, and SCORE provide a variety of information to enhance business capability strategies. Continuing, the third recommendation is to evaluate employee satisfaction to improve employee retention, which includes assessments in engagement, job motivation, job satisfaction, empowerment, social relationship, leadership, and organizational commitment to business goals.

After completion of the study publication, I would like to disseminate via conferences, training, writings, and small business association workshops. Conversely, I would like to present the study through lectures, business debates, and seminars in rural communities. I would also like to join other peers by submitting this study to professional journals. Students across the globe may consider the study beneficial for academic purposes.

Recommendations for Further Research

Research exists about small businesses; however, limited research is available on successful strategies for rural, small business owners to prevent closures. The literature denoted how a lack of owners' understanding of business capabilities, dynamic

capabilities, customers, marketing, technology, social media, employee job satisfaction, and increased global competition cause rural, small businesses to fail within the first 5 years of operation. Therefore, I conducted this study to provide strategies to prevent closures. In the next paragraphs, I present recommendations for further research concerning strategies to prevent closures.

One limitation within my study was the sample size of four rural, small business owners. To obtain a broader view of the phenomenon, researchers could conduct research on corporation strategies to prevent closures in rural communities. Another recommendation is to study each one of the emergent themes as individual phenomenon. In addition, researchers can also study which theme is predominant to prevent closures. While my study was limited to a smaller spectrum of businesses, researchers may consider incorporating larger sample sizes to obtain further information.

Another limitation was the geographical location of southern, middle Tennessee. A researcher could expand the region and encompass other areas of Tennessee or throughout the United States to broaden the strategies used to sustain a business. Another recommendation is to consider the effect of government aid in strategies to prevent closures.

A further limitation was the research method and design. I used a qualitative method of open-ended questions to conduct the case study. Researchers could conduct research study using others research methods or designs to uncover strategies to prevent closures. Future researchers could also expand on this research to assists rural, small

business owners in identifying strategies to prevent closures within the first 5 years of operation.

Reflections

During this study, I recognized personal biases, reactions to participants, and new information that emerged from the research process. After conducting this study, I realized how important rural, small businesses are for the economic and social mobility development of rural communities. Therefore, this study allowed me to explain to future rural, small business owners the importance of their businesses to rural communities.

A bias I had regarding the participants was how owners would have little understanding of technology, especially in social media. However, after conducting the research, I learned how some owners relied on social media to understand what consumers like or dislike in terms of goods and services. The participants exhibited vast experience and strong reliability in social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and text messaging software to capture consumers' behaviors and trends.

Another unexpected outcome was regarding the participants' skills and knowledge. The participants mentioned how they trained and analyzed each aspect of the business, including employees. In addition, owners maintain the business vision during any situation that compromises the business operation.

While conducting this study, I developed my critical thinking skills, learned how to sustain my findings with valid and reliable data, and how to deliver a doctoral opinion on the topic. During my research, I improved my interview method, learned about different business strategies, and strengthened my skills to become a problem solver. The

D.B.A program at Walden University provided me with the necessary tools to possibly mentor other scholars who wish to pursue a doctoral degree.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies some rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee used to prevent closures within the first 5 years of operation. I used the systems theory framework to develop the conceptual framework. The research method and design determined the research scope and guided the data collection and analysis. I interviewed four rural, small business owners of Southern, middle Tennessee. Moreover, I collected data from archival documents, sought the literature related to the research topic on the World Wide Web, and triangulated the data to validate the evidence emerged from the different sources. From the data analysis, three themes emerged: (a) business owners' skills and knowledge, (b) marketing, sales and inventory, and (c) employee retention.

To prevent closures, rural, small business owners must implement strategies to enhance business owners' and employees' skills and knowledge. Small business owners should develop strategic plans in marketing, sales, and inventory to identify customers' likes and dislikes and increase profitability. Conversely, business owners should positively enhance employees' job experiences to improve employee retention. I encourage those current and future business owners to use these findings, conclusions, and recommendations to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol and Questions

I will introduce myself to the participants and explain the purpose and scope of the research study. I will assure participants how all information collected during the interview will be confidential. I will inform the participants of the right to stop the interview at any time.

Topic of the Study. Strategies for Improving Rural Small Business Owners Success

Research Question. What successful strategies do rural, small startup business owners in Tennessee use to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation?

Inform Consent. Prior to the interview, I will provide the consent form to each participant and provide a copy for their records.

Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation?
2. What strategies did you use to overcome the difficulties you encounter to prevent closure?
3. What strategies did you use to attract and retain customers to prevent closure?
4. How did you use strategies to improve your relationship with your customers?
5. How did you use strategies to align with your main business services?
6. How did you use strategies to anticipate and address market changes?

7. How did you use strategies to retain employees?
8. How did you assess the effectiveness of your strategies to prevent closure?
9. What additional information can you provide to help me better comprehend the strategies you use to prevent closure within the first 5 years of operation?

Upon completing the interview, I will thank the participant. I will gather any additional document, take note for on-field observation. I will request a follow-up meeting for member checking.

Member Checking

Conduct the follow-up interview in person.

Provide a copy of the transcript for the interview.

Examine with the participant each question answered during the past interview.

After the evaluation, I will ask: Did I misunderstand anything? Or, is there any information you would like to change or add?

Conclude the follow-up section. I want to thank you for taking the time to complete the interview and follow-up section.