2020

Small Business Strategies for Outstanding Overall Business Performance

Lidia Elizabeth Pinzon Rincon
Walden University

Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Lidia Elizabeth Pinzon Rincón

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Patsy Kasen, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Cheryl Lentz, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Richard Johnson, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2020

Abstract

Small Business Strategies for Outstanding Overall Business Performance

by

Lidia Elizabeth Pinzon Rincón

MBA, Devry University, 2016

MSc., Universidad del Zulia, 1995

BS, Universidad de América, 1985

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2020

Abstract

Some small business (SB) are exiting their markets because their managers used

ineffective strategies to improve business performance. Providing SB managers with an

integrative view to identify effective strategies could enhance overall business

performance (OBP), minimizing the risk of closing permanently. Grounded in the general

system theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore

strategies that SB managers who received the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award

between 2007 and 2018 in the United States used to achieve outstanding OBP. The

participants were 6 high-level managers who participated in setting the strategies to

improve OBP. Data were collected using semistructured interviews, the company's 5-

year performance analysis report, and member checking. Initial data were categorized in

codes, and themes were identified, refined, and evaluated. Three major strategies SBs

should use to secure outstanding OBP are: identify the reasons for a business to exist,

identify the internal and external elements impacting the business performance, and

understand the dynamic interaction among those elements for improvement. A

recommendation for SB managers is to apply a systems approach, set plans, and identify

effective strategies by considering the most impactful elements and their interaction for

continuous improvement in line with the business mission realization. The implications

for positive social change include the potential to help SB managers sustain their business

to provide stable employment, develop local economies, and enhance families' and

communities' lifestyle level.

Small Business Strategies for Outstanding Overall Business Performance

by

Lidia Elizabeth Pinzon Rincón

MBA, Devry University, 2016

MSc., Universidad del Zulia, 1995

BS, Universidad de América, 1985

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2020

Dedication

I dedicate this study to my parents Tadeo (RIP) and Carmen, who gave me the foundations and the necessary support for me to succeed in any goal I pursue in my life. I also dedicate this doctoral study to my daughter Pamela (RIP), my nieces, M. Paula, Natalia, and Milagros S., my brothers Tadeo and Fernando, and my sister Alba.

I also dedicate this study to those who want to start a business, those who already started one but struggling with barriers and limited knowledge, and those who wish to have a broader view of ways to improve business management practices.

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

ii

List of Tables

List of Figures

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small businesses (SBs) generate 63% of all jobs in the United States (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). In trying to keep their business open, some SB managers use strategies that lead them to succeed, but others close permanently. Campbell and Park (2017) indicated that SBs contribute up to 48% of U.S. sales, although they continue to close (U.S. Small Business Administration [SBA], 2018a). Dawidowicz (2012), Ross and Wade (2015), Sturmberg, Martin, and Katerndahl (2014), and Von Bertalanffy (1969, 1972/2017) have all argued that with a deep comprehension of business complexities, SB managers could identify and apply adequate strategies for outstanding overall business performance (OBP).

Background of the Problem

In globalized and changing markets, SB managers must identify innovative strategies constantly to be competitive (Ahmed, 2017). SB managers who recognize factors driving business failure (Hyder & Lussier, 2016) and use strategies to enhance skills collectively to increase operational performance and customer retention (Shin et al., 2015) can establish, grow, and sustain their business. Understanding business dynamics is critical to identify strategies to manage business performance (Aryanasl, Ghodousy, Arhmandi, & Mansouri, 2017; Cosic, Shanks, & Maynard, 2015, D'Agostini et al., 2017; Esmaeel, Zakuan, Jamal, & Taherdoost, 2018; Haggege, Gauthier, & Ruling, 2017; Lucjmann & Feldmann, (2017). The U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC, 2017c) stated that SB managers who use integrative strategies to improve the OBP accomplish their organization's mission.

From the previous paragraph, SB managers could improve OBP when they understand business dynamics using a holistic approach. Nevertheless, the SBA (2018b) reported that the most common reason 15,395 SBs ceased to exist by the third quarter of 2016 was their use of ineffective strategies to improve business performance. My goal in this study was to help SB managers to acquire new knowledge to identify effective strategies to improve the OBP. The knowledge base of this study showed that most of the authors recommended strategies to improve business performance using something other than a holistic approach. Providing SB managers with an integrative view to identify effective strategies could help them enhance OBP, as done by those SB managers who received the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA).

Problem Statement

Outstanding OBP is the effective and efficient accomplishment of an organization's mission by the use of strategies to maximize results in all areas of the company, driving SBs' success (DOC, 2017c). The Baldrige Foundation (2019) indicated that businesses with outstanding OBP contributed $181 billion to the U.S. economy between 2010 and 2019. The general business problem addressed in this study is that SBs continue to close because SB managers do not use effective strategies for achieving outstanding OBP (SBA, 2018a). The specific business problem is that some SB managers lack strategies to achieve OBP.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies SB managers use to achieve OBP. For this study, the population included six SBs in the

United States that used strategies for achieving OBP, existed for more than 5-years, and received the MBNQA between the years 2007 and 2018. An implication for positive social change is the potential for SB managers to contribute to stable employment, developing the local economies, and enhancing the lifestyle level of families and communities.

Nature of the Study

Before starting a study, researchers should identify the proper research method among the three existing methods: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). Researchers using qualitative studies identify themes that reveal the meaning of a phenomenon looking at underlying motivations, interpretations, and sentiments involving peoples' experiences (Degen, 2017). Qualitative study researchers evaluate physical environments and use questions to understand phenomena (Degen, 2017). Saunders et al. (2016) noted that researchers using a quantitative method acquire generalized knowledge about variables' characteristics, relationships, or groups' differences and draw statistical inferences to a large population. Saunders et al. also indicated that, for complex research questions, researchers use a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods or mixed methods.

An example of using the qualitative method is the study done by Murphy and Leonard (2016), who explored how and why SBs should engage in quality management for outstanding OBP. I proposed to research strategies to enhance OBP, seeking neither to draw statistical inferences nor to develop a deep theoretical understanding but to explore the views of managers of successful companies to identify their strategies for

achieving outstanding OBP. Hence, the qualitative method was most appropriate to the study's purpose.

For this qualitative study, I used a case study design. Researchers use case studies to perform holistic research on a phenomenon (Ridder, 2017) and to understand in depth the actual conditions of a phenomenon occurring in specific cases, which could be individuals, organizations, or events within a particular environment (Atmowardoyo, 2018). Using case studies and first-hand information on the business reality, researchers seek to answer what, how, or why questions to investigate decision-making processes in business management (Villarreal Larrinaga, 2017). Case studies have two principal designs: multiple case studies and single case studies (Yin, 2018). Saunders et al. (2016) noted that researchers using a case study design, analyze and evaluate rare phenomena. A case study is a correct choice for research studies with a revelatory or longitudinal purpose, or to test existing theories, with extreme or unusual circumstances (Yin, 2018). Researchers using a multiple case study with two or three cases would have outcomes that confirm similarities of results across cases (Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). An example of using a case study to explore business strategies is the research performed by Williams (2017). He collected information from SB owners in Arkansas to explore strategies used to sustain their business beyond 5-years. Since my goal was to identify and compare the effective strategies that SB managers who were MBNQA recipients used to ensure outstanding OBP, a multiple case study design was the appropriate design for this study.

Research Question

What effective strategies do SB managers use to achieve OBP?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you used to achieve outstanding OBP?

2. How did leadership contribute to the successful implementation of the strategies for achieving outstanding OBP?

3. How did you implement your organization's strategies for achieving OBP?

4. What did you do to motivate your workforce to ensure outstanding OBP?

5. How did you identify and address business risks and uncertainties to ensure outstanding OBP in an evolving and globalized market?

6. What, if any, innovations and technologies did you use to ensure outstanding OBP?

7. What factors did you identify as critical to ensure outstanding OBP?

8. How did you manage customer satisfaction and loyalty to ensure outstanding OBP?

9. What, if any, measurement and control strategies did you use to ensure outstanding OBP?

10. What other information would you like to share with me we did not address so far?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the general system theory (GST). Von Bertalanffy introduced the GST in 1949 to scientifically explore any organized

entities as a holistic system for underlining the dynamic interactions among different system levels that produce a more complex system referred to as parallelism of the biological notions and laws (Von Bertalanffy, 1950). The DOC (2017b) posited that to ensure outstanding OBP in a globalized market, business managers of any business size operating in any industry worldwide must develop a holistic business transformation. In a system, business managers manage all components influencing the OBP as a whole (DOC, 2017b). Under GST, managers apply knowledge, experience, and social maturity holistically and simultaneously. Managers learn what and how critical factors influence the OBP by observing the interactions among those factors (Porvaznik & Ljudvigov, 2016). The DOC (2017b) proposed using GST to promote the integration of fundamental processes that influence OBP improvement, innovation, and long-term success through the implementation of the Baldrige Framework and Criteria. Firms demonstrating substantial improvement in critical business aspects to achieve outstanding OBP against the rigorous Baldrige Framework and Criteria receive the MBNQA (DOC, 2017b). I explored the strategies used by some SB managers who received the MBNQA to manage their business as a system with internal and external factors influencing OBP. Hence GST was an appropriate lens for understanding my study's findings.

Operational Definitions

Element: Under the GST, a part of the business that can be simplified into subcomponents or characteristics and must interact with other factors, actively generating feedback and/or modifying the system performance (Von Bertalanffy, 1972/2017).

Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA): The U.S. government uses this award for businesses that demonstrated using integrative strategies to reach a high-level quality and outstanding business performance (DOC, 2017b).

Mission statement: A statement to summarize the claim of what SBs represent, their reason to exist, and what they believe in and defines the product or services offered to the community (Gavric, Kirin, Fedajev, & Tolavic, 2018).

Performance excellence: The integrated approach to organizational performance management that results in adding value to stakeholders, contributing to ongoing organizational success, improvement of organizations' overall effectiveness and capabilities, and growth of learning for the organization and people in the workforce (DOC, 2019).

Small business: SBs are manufacturing companies with no more than 500 employees. Much of the nonmanufacturing enterprises that average annual receipts under $7.5 million. Other restrictions apply, according to the North American Industry Classification System (SBA, 2018).

Systems: Systems are organizations or social groups with subcomponents or subdivisions identified as a whole (Von Bertalanffy, 1972/2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Researchers using qualitative studies set the basis of their conclusions, making some assumptions (Yin, 2018), considered valid for the study (Akaeze, 2016). Assumptions for this study included that each interviewee was honest and willing to help

in this research study and provided enough information to support the assertion that the OBP improved after applying some strategies. I also assumed that interviewees understood the process and challenge to use the process and criteria of the Baldrige Framework and Criteria. Another assumption was that research participants knew and understood the procedure followed by their company to get the MBNQA. A final assumption was that participants in this research were professionals and had high ethical standards.

Limitations

A limitation is a threat to a study, a condition that researchers cannot control, affecting the internal validity of the study (Akaeze, 2016). With limitations, researchers describe the dependability of the study results (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This study included four limitations. The first limitation was the availability of SB managers involved in the process the company followed to receive the MBNQA. The second limitation was the limited number of small companies that received the award annually between 2007 and 2018. Since 1987, only 8% out of the 382 SBs that applied to the prize succeeded (DOC, 2019). The third limitation was the interview format. The unavailability of participants for face-to-face interviews with reasonable access was a limitation, and some of them did not like to participate in online interviews. The fourth limitation identified was that, when performing online interviews, people could not provide enough information and probably would not share their corporate information using fax or email for security purposes. An online interview can affect the flow and purpose of the

interview (Salmons, 2015). Research participants' availability and the interview format were the main limitations of this study.

Delimitations

Yin (2018) wrote that delimitations are the limits set to the overall scope of the study. Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated that delimitations contribute to having a more manageable scope of the research study. For this study, one delimitation was the SB current location because participants may be geographically distant for face-to-face interaction. A second delimitation was the interview questions. The study included asking questions to understand how participants identified strategies to improve OBP. The third delimitation was the participants' requirements. I interviewed six managers in the United States who used strategies to achieve OBP, who have worked for at least 2-years in their SBs, and whose companies received the MBNQA between the years 2007 and 2018 and existed in the market for more than 5-years.

<div style="text-align:center">

Significance of the Study

</div>

The study included the identification of effective strategies SB managers used to achieve an outstanding OBP. Thus, SB managers looking for strategies to be more competitive, add value to their stakeholders, sustain their business, and contribute to their community could find the conclusions from this research study useful. SB managers should, therefore, be able to find additional information to overcome the common barriers that prevent SB managers from achieving their missions for achieving OBP.

Results from this research might contribute to the business practice by providing SB managers with a holistic view of their business to identify effective strategies to

realize their business mission and to reduce business failure rates. Managers of stable

businesses could contribute to other SBs' development of outstanding OBP. Helping

other SB managers includes the potential to create a knowledge network. Consequently,

the creation of a local knowledge network and stable businesses could positively affect

communities' economies by creating steady employment for increasing and sustaining

tax revenues for benefiting families and citizens.

<div align="center">**Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**</div>

I consulted more than 500 documents in the process of selecting literature to

include in this review from the following categories: books, dissertations, government

publications, and journals. Included in this section is the process followed to find

literature to support my study, the literature selected, and a synthesis of the literature

reviewed. Included within the synthesis is a summary of the findings from the literature.

Literature Selection Process

The professional and academic literature included government and peer-reviewed

sources, as well as published dissertations. The selection consisted of documentation

from more than 500 publications reviewed. The keywords used individually, or in

combination with other words, to find related literature included *small, business,*

performance, improvement, increase, factors, mechanisms, actors, subsystems,

outstanding, sustainable, excellence, success, best, practices, strategies, general, exit,

system, theory, Baldrige, framework, criteria, Malcolm, award, overall, and

performance. Databases used included ProQuest, Emerald Insight, EBSCO from Walden

University, and Google Scholar. The Walden rubric for doctoral studies recommends that

dissertations and peer-reviewed journals account for 85% of total literature reviewed, and sources used must be 5-years old or less from the expected completion date. To verify this section has the percentages recommended, I used Ulrich's Periodical Directory through the Walden Library website and an Excel spreadsheet. Researchers cited in this section totaled 110 publications. Table 1 shows the statistics calculated for the literature reviewed according to the rubric requirements.

Table 1

Literature Review Section Statistics

References cited	Oct. 2015 or later	Within date %	Older count	Older %	Total count	Total %
Peer-reviewed	88	80.00	9	8.18	97	88.18
Not peer-reviewed	10	9.09	3	2.73	13	11.82
Total literature	98	89.09	12	10.91	110	100.00

Of the 110 references cited, 97 (88.18%) are peer-reviewed. Peer-reviewed references published in October 2015 or later accounted for 80.00%, and those references published before October 2015 accounted for 8.18%. The 13 non-peer-reviewed references accounted for 11.82% of the total and included four journals, three books, three dissertations, and three references from government publications; 10 of these references were published since October 2015, and three before that date.

Literature Review

This subsection consists of four parts: (a) a brief introduction, (b) an explanation of GST theory, (c) a discussion of references supporting the use of GST to enhance the OBP, and (d) a discussion of those authors who used other approaches to analyze the

OBP. Within this study, the goal was to explore the strategies some SB managers used to enhance OBP. The literature reviewed and presented in this section has an in-depth analysis of elements that some researchers considered to be the most relevant to improve the OBP. The evaluation includes the examination of the GST constructs, the supporting studies, and what other researchers found influencing OBP using different theories. In Kato and Charoenrat's (2018) opinion, few SB managers use adequate strategies to ensure business continuity. Contrasting, Tani, Papaluca, and Sasso (2018) wrote that successful managers acknowledge that they operate in a network of relationships, and businesses are active systems that result from the interaction of various actors. SBs confront several barriers in any economy that their ability to have sustained operations due to several factors, decisions, or environments that contribute to SB failure (Bouwari, 2015). SBA (2018a) noted that poor business performance was the top reason that 15,395 SBs ceased to exist by the third quarter of 2016.

Nonetheless, Santoso (2017) indicated that small and independent businesses still grow in quality and quantity and are relevant to the local and national economic growth. The Baldrige Foundation (2019) stated that, between 2010 and 2019, SBs with outstanding OBP contributed $181 billion to the U.S. economy. Within this study, through the lens of GST, the goal was to provide SB managers with additional information to help them to understand better how to improve the strategies used to ensure outstanding OBP.

General system theory. Outstanding OBP is the effective and efficient accomplishment of organizations' mission statements using strategies that improve the

outcome from all areas of the company, leading to SBs' success (DOC, 2017c). Von

Bertalanffy (1950) introduced the GST in 1949 to scientifically and holistically explore

systems or organized entities. Von Bertalanffy used biological notions and laws to show

the meaning of complex systems produced by the dynamic interactions among different

levels of a system (Von Bertalanffy, 1950). GST is an interdisciplinary approach to

understand how complex systems provide outputs (Von Bertalanffy, 1969). A system is

the active interaction of the related business components in which one affects the other

(Von Bertalanffy, 1950, 1972/2017). Businesses are systems operating by the dynamic

interrelation of their subsystems (Von Bertalanffy, 1950, 1972/2017).

Environments associated with a company (the system) could influence the OBP

positively or negatively (Von Bertalanffy, 1972/2017). Senge, Smith, Kruschwitts, Laur,

and Scheley (2010) confirmed what Von Bertalanffy(1972/2017) stated; GST is systems

thinking, which implies that one factor modifies or influences the behavior of another

factor or element. Also, Van Lier (2013) stated that GST applies to organizations. The

environments referred to by Von Bertalanffy are internal factors such as process,

procedures, policies, people, to mention few, and any external factors that interact with

the business.

Three characteristics distinguish business-system elements under the GST: (a) the

adjacency and interaction of subsystems in the environment of a business, (b) the effects

a decision has on a particular subsystem to improve its performance, and its impact on the

entire organization's performance, and (c) the intrinsic characteristics of subsystems

inherent to a business system (Dawidowicz, 2012). GST constructors include complexity

science, self-organization, emergence, dynamic systems, the science of network, and evolution and adaptation, being evolution what driving the development of subsystems with new characteristics and dynamics (Sturmberg et al., 2014). In 2015, Ross and Wade published that SBs are a system if (a) they have a well-defined purpose, (b) they have elements identified, and (c) the existing interaction among the components is clear. Later, in 2017, Grimes indicated that other theories such as world-system theory and complexity could be close to GST based on their approach to systems complexity. Hence, the interaction among the elements of subsystems is the fundament of GST. Using GST, the researcher must interpret SBs as systems with an objective, productive components, and in continuous interaction, evolution, and with a high degree of complexity.

SBs objectives. Companies, or dynamic systems, have the objective to change the status quo of the society and to satisfy the demand for products and services (Vityaev & Demin, 2018). SBs are entities created to deliver services or products that fulfill community needs (Jackson & Jackson, 2016). To consider SBs as a system, SBs must have a definite purpose (Ross & Wade, 2015). SBs following the GST approach should have a clear understanding of their business objectives (Ross & Wade, 2015). Gurley, Peters, Collins, and Fifolt (2015) concluded that guiding principles and business goals must be clear and internalized by stakeholders to achieve the SBs mission. Adams, Kauffman, Khoja, and Coy's (2016) opinion was that SB managers struggle to find strategies to sustain their businesses in a long-term plan. Esi's (2016) view was that SB managers start identifying and adapting the mission statement when SB managers use an adequate strategy oriented to the socio-economic-politic context. An SB's publicly

declared mission statement influences the long-term goals and is a critical element to

identify the strategic business plan (Esi, 2016). Mission statements could affect how

stakeholders see SBs (Spear, 2017), which encourages SB managers to find strategies to

ensure alignment between business objectives and the OBP. Stephenson, Rothlisberger,

and Westover (2017) stated that mission statements impact SBs performance positively.

Turner and Endres (2017) recommended that to address challenges and changes during

the business life, SB managers should have business plans aligned with the business

objective they declared in the mission statement.

Within the mission statement, SB managers declare not only the business purpose

but define what products or services will deliver to satisfy their selected customers

(Kirkpatrick, 2017). In this regard, Göbel et al. (2017) wrote that SB managers must write

mission statements to reflect the present status of the business and to work as an

integrating and guiding element. Esi (2017) noted that managerial strategies and mission

statement formulation could be associated; the mission guides SB managers' decisions to

implement strategies oriented to social and economic environments. At the basis of the

organizational model and the change and adaptability implications, decision-makers must

address the pretended strategy and the formulation of the business mission (Esi, 2017).

Under the GST, an SB's decision processes include the organization's mission statement

to identify an objective that is easy to reach (Esi, 2017). One approach to link the mission

statement with the OBP successfully is that the mission statement must have clarity,

abstractedness and challenge, brevity, and uniqueness and success definition (Gavric et

al., 2018). Also, SB managers must ensure that all people in an organization who are

involved in the process of attaining outstanding business performance understand and

internalize the statement and align their performance with it (Gavric et al., 2018). Allen,

Kern, Vella-Brodrick, and Waters' (2018) argued that a well-articulated mission

statement helps SB managers to set and share why businesses exist and represent an

implicit contract with their stakeholders. Gavric et al. (2018) shared this opinion, stating

that the mission statement defines the SB's identity, indicates the direction of actions, and

is an essential factor of business cohesion.

   SBs elements and characteristics. The factors that support business operations

are part of the environments that influence SB management and outcomes. SBs are

systems if they have parts, and the existing interaction among them is clear (Ross &

Wade, 2015). For McDonald (2017), from the GST perspective, business elements

include organization strategies, appropriate technology, and effective internal and

external system interaction management. The active interaction of the components

influencing SBs produces complex systems that could increase business uncertainty and

risks (Belov & Novikov, 2017). In line with that, to help SBs understand their businesses

and the factors affecting their OBP with the purpose to get a competitive advantage, in

1987, the DOC (2019) utilized GST to create the rigorous Baldrige Framework and

Criteria. With that framework, the DOC evaluates firms applying to receive the MBNQA.

   Performing the Baldrige Excellence Builder self-assessment, SB managers

pursuing to improve OBP could identify the status of their products and processes also

could act with a focus on customers and workforce, leadership, and governance (DOC,

2017a). Also, SB managers could identify the financial and market situation and identify

strategies to accomplish the organization's mission and vision (DOC, 2017a). SB

managers using the Baldrige Framework and Criteria could identify all the possible

subsystems required to ensure adequate strategies to manage and develop their business

for outstanding OBP (Kapp, Simoes, DeBiasi, & Kravet, 2017). The DOC (2019) stated

that business managers pursuing high business performance should use repeatable

processes and interested parties should evaluate those processes regularly. SB managers

should analyze, innovate, and share information and knowledge and track the

improvement of critical strategic and operational goals (DOC, 2019). Hence, SB

managers could identify appropriate strategies to enhance OBP successfully if they know

the degree of complexity of their business and if they understand the dynamic internal

and external interaction of the internal and external environments associated with their

business success. And mainly, if SB managers can identify how those interactions could

increase the risks of business failure.

From this point forward, to avoid repetitiveness, when talking about the GST and

OBP, the words *factor(s)*, *actor(s)*, *component(s)*, or *mechanism(s)* are the synonyms of

an *element(s)* of a system. The words a system view, OBP, business performance, holistic

view, and integrative approach are interchangeable, indicating a system view approach.

The words *groups of any nature, environment(s), process(es), and procedures are the*

synonyms of a subsystem(s). SB(s), organization(s), company(s), organization(s),

enterprise(s), and business(es) are synonyms with a system.

OBP under general system theory. Market globalization increases the need for

businesses to be competitive, forcing managers of all size businesses to identify

innovative strategies continuously (Ahmed, 2017). GST facilitates complex decision-making (Lezak & Tibodeau, 2016). Rusu (2016) indicated that any decision made at one subdivision of SBs would impact other subdivisions; an example is an interaction between employees, clients, and their influence on the OBP. Hence, the approach SB managers use to integrate their business subsystems impacts their long-term business results. Holistic integration of business climate, intellectual honesty, the decision-making process, the integrity of services, and the quality of the products into the decision-making process would help SB managers improve OBP (Rusu, 2016). Even though entrepreneurs do not see the drivers of business performance as an integrated system (Haggege et al., 2017), companies performing under GST reach outstanding OBP remaining in the market for a long time (Thompson & Blazey, 2017).

Bandyopadhyay and Leonard (2016) concluded that SB managers benefit from the application of GST when they focus the approach for their specific industry needs and using strategies to ensure each employee understand that approach. As per Thompson and Blazey (2017), SBs must focus on enhancing business performance using strategies to improve an integrated system. SB managers should orient their business' strategy to increase efficiency in processes, products, and services, and focused on the measurement of work process effectiveness, customer satisfaction, workforce, leadership and governance, and finance and market (Thompson & Blazey, 2017). The static and mechanistic business environment is a system of relationships, processes, and patterns that corresponds with the continuous and fast-changing business environment (Vargo et

al., 2017). Recognizing specific industry and business processes factors impacting OBP, SB managers could identify effective strategies to extend their operations long-term.

A strategy to distribute the available resources using a system approach is to consider not only the function of each asset, how it interacts and influence other assets, and the impact of the living environment (external and internal) and the financing environment (Baifang, Li, & Xinyu, 2017). SB managers should keep in their minds the effect that the systems external market, internal management, and financing business have on the OBP (Baifang et al., 2017). The interaction of customer relationships and consistent quality of products and services drive outstanding business performance (Williams, 2017). Performance improvements for SBs depend on how managers address both quality and productivity (Prakash, Jha, Prasad, & Singh, 2017). SB managers should keep close attention to how the business assets interact and the impact of the living environment (Baifang et al., 2017).

Different authors contextualize GST in different ways. The DOC (2019) and Ross and Wade (2015) contextualized GST constructs in a clear and organized way. Both of them with different approaches. On one side, identifying the elements and its interaction from a business standpoint was the purpose of creating the Baldrige Framework and Criteria (DOC, 2019). By contrast, Ross and Wade contextualized GST in terms of what SB managers have as their system-thinking processes. In the following paragraphs is the explanation of each of the two authors' approaches.

The first approach of a business under the GST is the DOC (2019) approach, which includes identifying an interactive process of two general subsystems embedded

into a more general subsystem. That process helped SB managers to evaluate and

improve the OBP, increasing competitiveness in the still evolving and globalized marker

(DOC, 2019). Figure 1 shows how the three subsystems are expected to interact when

operating SBs under GST.
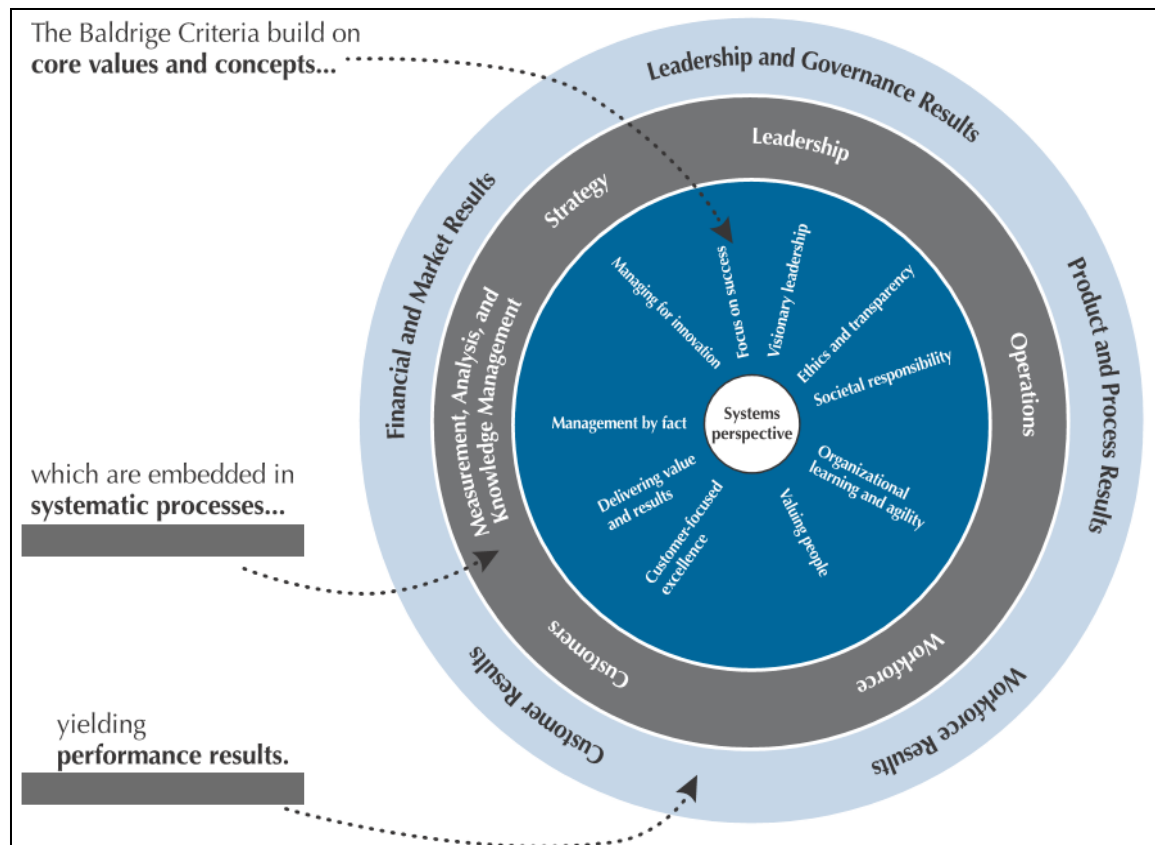
Figure 1. Baldrige Framework - Core values and concepts. Foundation for business performance based on the integration of action, feedback, and success. From Baldrige performance excellence program: Core values and concepts by the DOC, 2020. https://www.nist.gov/baldrige/core-values-and-concepts. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix A).

The DOC (2019) suggested that SB managers should manage the interaction of its

elements in the first level to set strategies to manage and integrate the interplay of six

categories included in the second level of subsystems. The effective management of the

interaction of elements in the first and second levels improves the third level or the major subsystem category. In that third level, SB managers should perform a constant review of overall results to identify new or improved strategies. When SB managers integrate those core values and concepts is possible to observe an improvement in the subsystems of the second and third level of the Baldrige Framework (DOC, 2019).

The DOC (2019) identified elements for each of the three levels as follows. Ten core values compose the first level of this system: (a) visionary leadership, b) ethics and transparency, (c) social responsibility, (d) organizational learning and agility, (e) valuing people, (f) customer excellence orientation, (g) delivering value, and results, (h) management by fact, (i) managing for innovation, and (j) focus on success. Six categories compose the second level or systematic process level: (a) leadership, (b) strategy, (c) customers, (d) measurement, analysis, and knowledge management, (e) employees or workforce, and (f) operations. Five elements compose the highest level of those three subsystems to measure results of (a) leadership and governance, (b) product and process, (c) workforce, (d) customer relations, and (e) financial and market outcomes (DOC, 2019).

Description of the six categories of the second level as follows:

1. Leadership includes vision and values, communication, mission, and organizational performance, organizational governance, legal and ethical behavior, and societal responsibility.

2. The strategy consists of development processes for innovation in the work system, core competencies, and strategic objectives, strategy implementation

with action plan development, deployment, and modification.

3. Customers category includes strategies to engage customers for long-term business success. Strategies include approaches to listen to the voice of customers, customer satisfaction and engagement, strategies to engage customers through products and support, and long-term relationships.

4. Measurement, analysis, and knowledge management category, evaluators review the plan used to collect, analyze, manage, and use the information and the organization's knowledge asset to improve OBP; it is a cross-functional and transdisciplinary criterion.

5. The workforce category is for people designated to evaluate strategies SB managers used to assess workforce capability and capacity, to create a high-performance environment, and to manage and engage the workforce in line with the OBP requirements.

6. The operations category relates to work processes and operational effectiveness (DOC, 2019).

A total of 21 elements compose the Baldrige Framework. The Baldrige Framework could help SB managers understand their businesses' complexity by applying GST. Understanding business complexity, manager of companies from any industry could identify adequate strategies to improve OBP and increase competitiveness in the still evolving and globalized market (DOC, 2019).

The second approach under GST is the approach presented by Ross and Wade (2015), which defines the systems thinking as the skills developed to apply logical

thinking in the analysis, identification, and understanding of systems. Understanding

systems include having the ability to predict future behavior and to visualize appropriate

strategies and or solutions to make changes required to improve OBP (Ross & Wade,

2015). Ross and Wade (2015) used the map in Figure 2 to show their perspective on how

business elements are interdependent, interact among them, and transform each other

based on the degree of their interaction and connectivity (feedback). To show that, Ross

and Wade included dotted and continuous lines connecting the main subsystems.

Continuous lines indicate stronger interaction, feedback, and dependence than the dotted

lines. Constant interaction creates continuous feedback leading to ongoing evolutions that

start when the business opens doors and ends when the company exits the market. That

could mean that under the GST perspective applied to human beings, SB managers with

systems thinking skills have clear objectives with new ideas (elements) interacting

continuously to create effective strategies for outstanding OBP.
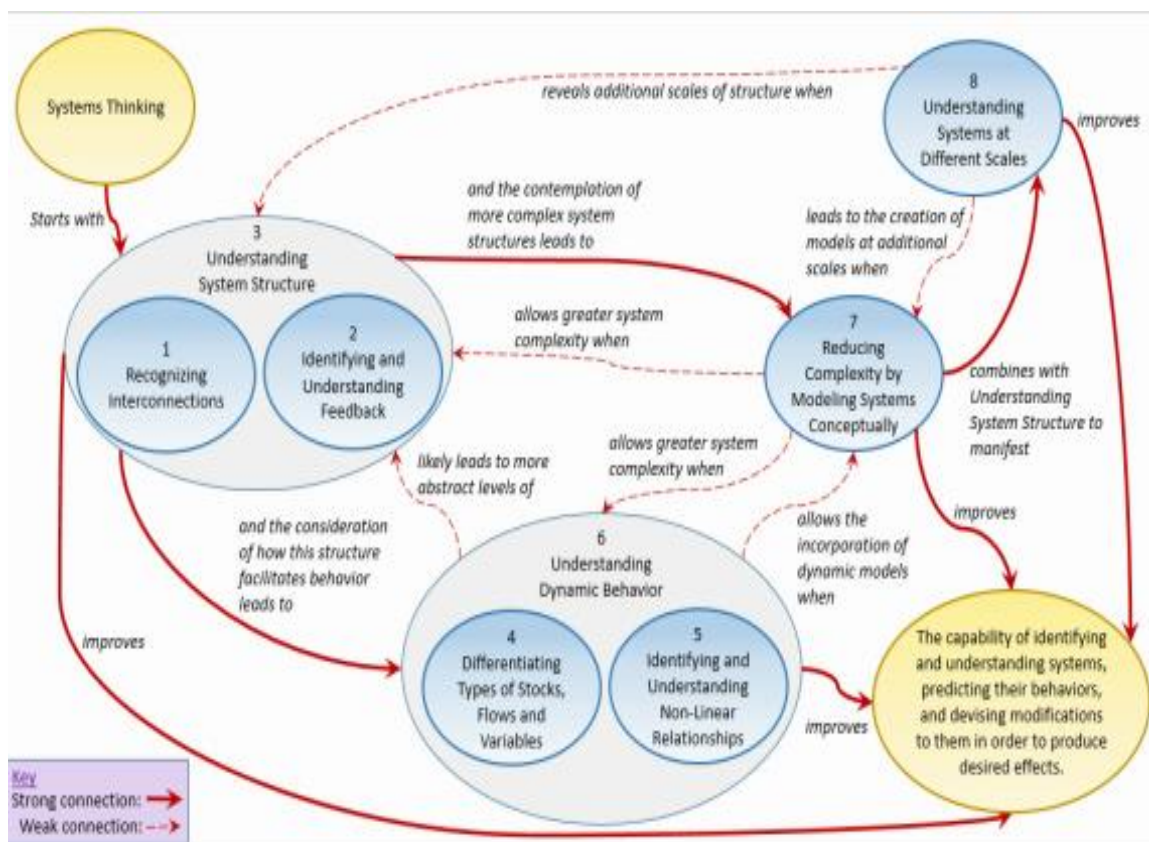
Figure 2. Systemigram. Dotted and continuous lines indicate the direction of the interaction and feedback; continuous lines indicate strong interaction, dependency, and feedback; dotted lines indicate still interaction and feedback but not as strong as indicated by continuous lines. From "A definition of systems thinking: A systems approach," by D. A. Ross and J. P. Wade, 2015. *Procedia Computer Science, 44*, 669-678. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix A).

Ross and Wade (2015) stated that when applying GST, SBs are complex systems; SB managers should identify goals achievable, easy to understand, and well defined and use them to create the systemigram map. To successfully implement the systemigram, those authors indicated that the elements of the system must have a detailed description. The systemigram map must show a clear explanation of those interactions, dependencies, and feedback among parts and its sources (Ross & Wade, 2015). Following the four main

elements identified to simplify the description of Ross and Wade's (2015) systems

thinking model, keeping the authors' fundamentals:

- understanding the system structure, which includes (a) interconnection
  awareness and (b) feedback interpretation;

- understanding the dynamic performance, which consists of (a) stocks, flows,
  and variables differentiation and (b) visualization and analysis of nonlinear
  relationships;

- a conceptualized model of the system to identify ways to reduce complexity;
  and

- understanding each level in the system (Ross & Wade, 2015).

To understand the first element, the business structure (internal and external

interactive factors), and to be able to interpret how that structure influences the OBP, SB

managers should be skilled enough (Ross & Wade, 2015). The ability to identify not only

the connectivity among critical elements of the system but the crucial connection in the

system is a skill that forms the necessary level of a manager (Ross & Wade, 2015). SB

managers must have the ability to understand feedbacks or the cause-effect cycle created

by the interconnection of the elements and how those feedbacks force the system to

change.

To understand the dynamic performance of SBs (second element), managers must

understand the stocks, flows, and variables meaning. Stocks are any kind of resources

tangibles or intangibles available in that system; flows are the changes on those

resources, and the level or degree of interconnection among those resources; and

variables are those factors that impact flows and stocks (Ross & Wade, 2015). Hence, SB managers should have the ability to differentiate, classify, and recognize what stock, flow, or a variable is (Ross & Wade, 2015). Also, SB managers must understand linear and nonlinear relationships among elements (Ross & Wade, 2015).

Managers must have the ability to reduce the system complexity (third element), dividing the system into small sections, and the ability to create the simplest conceptual models to evaluate the system in different ways (Ross & Wade, 2015). Finally, the fourth element, understanding the system. SB managers should have the ability to visualize and assess their business at various levels. SB managers must have the ability to identify systems, their subsystems, and their elements (Ross & Wade, 2015).

Based on how the DOC (2019) and Ross and Wade (2015) contextualized the GST, one could conclude that GST is a general approach applicable to different situations facilitating the identification of strategies to improve the OBP. Those authors suggest that GST applies to the SBs components (DOC, 2019) and applies to SB managers skills as well (Ross & Wade, 2015). GST constructs use to assess how business subsystems, elements, and complex interactions among them influence the OBP (DOC, 2019). For Ross and Wade (2015), GST applies to the processes SB managers use to analyze business complexity and the decision-making process they use to evaluate strategies to manage and reduce the business complexity successfully. SB managers utilizing a combination of those approaches could identify effective strategies to improve OBP (Jaaron & Backhouse, 2018).

The Baldrige Framework proposed by the DOC (2019) has support on Weaver, Crossan, Tan, and Paxton (2018), who indicated that managers operating a business under the lenses of GST could put together several subsystems in an open system to address the whole business problem. With similar results, Tani et al. (2018) reported that SB managers pursuing outstanding OBP must create and manage a dynamic competitive process. That process should be modular and lean and should include a smart approach to innovation for products and or services development (Tani et al., 2018).

Also, supporting what Ross and Wade (2015) proposed, later, Akhtar, Awan, Naveed, and Ismail (2018) wrote that to achieve outstanding OBP, companies must hire skilled individuals with systems thinking capabilities. Systems thinking capabilities include employees' desire for continuous learning, the ability to think dynamically, demonstrate logical reasoning, show process-oriented skills, be able to identify and evaluate data patters, and can understand and interpreted mental models (Jaaron & Backhouse, 2018). Improving the way organizations manage the interaction between all the elements influencing business systems leads to sustainable practices improvement (Jaaron & Backhouse, 2018). Implementing systems thinking approach in SBs operations, SB managers could facilitate the identification of customer demands, operational processes improvement, and operational efficiency, energy use improvement, and better waste management; systems thinking application could improve OBP (Jaaron & Backhouse, 2018). SB managers must be aware that some employees could sabotage SBs' change processes. SB managers applying systems thinking principles could understand and deal with the complexity raised when business transformation requires

the inclusion of the evolving market requirements in the business system (Abollado & Shehab, 2018).

Business transformation requirements include dealing with all the relevant business processes and the existing connection among critical functions used to understand how companies distribute information and data among employees and other stakeholders (Abollado & Shehab, 2018). Onalaja, Cheung, and Samwinga's (2018) opinioned that using the systems thinking approach enables top-level stakeholders to identify and manage uncertainties and to minimize its associated risks. Weaver et al. (2018) stated that managers using GST could understand the importance of investing in the social capital system in an early stage of a business to unlock and release more resources into the community, establish long-term relationships, and understand the nature and dynamics of responsible business practices. Wehner (2018) supported the position of those authors. Wehner wrote that early and proper control and monitoring of market needs and business capacities would contribute to outstanding OBP. The active interaction of elements forming a business influences the OBP (Brokowski & Mazhar, 2018; Wehner, 2018).

From the studies reviewed in previous paragraphs, under GST, SB managers consider business as complex systems integrating interactive external and internal subsystems to achieve outstanding OBP. SB managers applying GST consider business complexity to identify adequate strategies for its management. The following paragraphs include additional studies showing results from researchers using other than the GST to evaluate elements influencing the strategy identification process for outstanding OBP.

OBP under other theories: Because businesses are systems influenced by several internal and external elements/subsystems, SB managers should adjust the way of doing business, adapt the company to the changing conditions, and use business strategies with an external focus for business sustainability (Baumgartner & Rauter, 2016; Chittithaworn, Islam, Keawchana, Hasliza, & Muhd Yusuf, 2011; Fjeldstad & Snow, 2018). In this section, the researchers cited used different approaches than GST to evaluate strategies to improve OBP, such as resource view, institutional view, entrepreneurial theory, custom-developed frameworks, and grounded theories, and the Lussier Model of business success and failure, among others. Some of the researchers studying strategies for OBP improvement, cited in this part, dedicate special attention to a few elements, and others include more.

Some researchers focus their attention on strategies to manage the financial crisis, the risks of external mechanisms, and or the importance of managing internal operations. Myšková and Doupalová (2015) indicated that because of the uncertainty associated with the future of any business activity, SB managers make decisions under a degree of risk that could not be managed or controlled, such as in the case of external threats. Significant risks for the OBP include a decrease in the population's purchasing power, an increase in charges of transportation with a small volume of supplies, and loss of suppliers with a high range of specialized products (Myšková & Doupalová, 2015). Also, information systems, organizational structure, change in the tax system, legislative barriers, political instability, funds unavailability, and stock management (Myšková & Doupalová, 2015). Cosic et al. (2015) stated that governance, culture, people, and

technology are the main business mechanisms that could increase the risk of failure to improve the OBP. Also, and high-quality business analytics capabilities could lead to competitive advantage (Cosic et al., 2015). OBP improves when SB managers use strategies for operations agility, which could enhance skills collectively and increase SBs' operational performance and customer retention (Shin, Lee, Kim, & Rhim, 2015).

Also, risk management influence OBP. Hyder and Lussier (2016) noted that recognizing and understanding of potential risks associated with business failure in the early stages of business would help managers to establish, grow, and sustain their businesses. Mohhamed and Knapkova (2016) concluded that risk management includes strategies to protect the company from a turndown or hazards only. High risk of business failure is associated with the sabotage to the efforts that some companies make to improve OBP (Taher & Krotov, 2016). Sabotage is a consequence of lack of organizational maturity, internal conflicts between traditions and ideologies, lack of strategies for effective communication and technical skills, lack of perceived benefits, fear of losing power, and ineffective leadership practice (Taher & Krotov, 2016).

Similarly, the legal form of the business adds risk for business performance, as well as IT, market watch, and corporate governance. Business size, high perceived quality, investment/research, and development capability, significant technology change, application of formal IP protection, and new export markets could increase SBs risk to fail (Hong, Oxley, McCann, & Le, 2016). Al-Surmi, Cao, and Duan (2019) wrote that aligning business, IT, and marketing impacts a firm's performance positively. Chen and Qi (2016) found that SB managers will improve their OBP when operating under C

corporate legal form of business because they will have better opportunities to get external financing and could get government contracts. Consequently, SB managers could minimize the risk of exit from their markets.

Another element to consider when identifying strategies to improve OBP is corporate governance; it is necessary for firms' performance (Di Berardino, 2016). Good governance increases profitability and improves corporate social performance; the CEO/board of directors is responsible for organizational social performance enhancement, for increasing profit, and to protect the shareholders' interest (Syed Fuzi, Abdul Halim, Julizaerma, 2016). Additionally, the manager's performance, education, compensation, knowledge, experience, ownership, size of the board of directors, and independence could impact OBP.

High managerial direction performance and entrepreneurial performance influence innovation, and its efficacy influence the OBP (Cooper, Peake, & Watson, 2016). Hallak, Assaker, Lee, and O'Connor (2018) found that industry-related experience is essential for SBs performance; applying training programs drives innovation and influences creative self-efficacy leading to outstanding OBP. Perez-Luño, Saparito, and Gapalakrishnan (2016) agree on that statement, SB managers' knowledge of business management contributes to improving the OBP, especially in changing and hostile environments. Also, Plotnikova, Romero, and Martinez-Roman (2016) concluded that SB managers with secondary higher professional education, previous experience as a worker in any sector, autonomy and opportunity, motivation, and entrepreneurial orientation improve the OBP. SB managers' education and industry knowledge are additional

components that could interact and or impact other elements SB managers could identify to improve OBP.

Syed Fuzi et al. (2016) stated that the director's independence influences the company's financial performance, and a higher number of nonexecutive directors drives to low firm performance. In contrast, Raithatha and Komera (2016) stated that firms' performance depends on executive compensation practices. In line with that, Aslam, Haron, and Tahir (2019) observed that CEOs and or board of directors paid based on the prior market-based performance increase the firm performance. Although Rashif (2018) indicated that the size of the board of directors could influence business performance, Ciftci, Tatoglu, Wood, Domirbag, and Zaim (2019) noted that concentrated ownership is essential for SB managers to increase business performance. Hence CEOs / board of directors have high responsibility, and their knowledge, experience, and compensation could impact the SBs success. In the following paragraphs cited are some authors to show how stakeholders also could influence the OBP.

Some researchers evaluated the importance of stakeholders on OBP under the theory of constraints, resource-based view, control system, and customer satisfaction index, among others. McGrath and Whitty (2017) indicated that stakeholders have four classifications: (a) investing stakeholders (control the business activity), (b) primary stakeholders (contribute business activities continuity - employees), (c) secondary stakeholders (support business activities - providers), and (d) customers (receive and use the services or products offered). Service quality and customer's satisfaction influence customer loyalty and vice versa (Ngo & Nguyen, 2016). Gupta and Sharma (2016) and

Kumar and Pansari (2016) agreed that employees are critical factors in improving business performance. Any stakeholder could impact the OBP at different levels.

Mazzei, Flynn, and Haynie (2016) stated that adjusting the high-performance work practices (HPWP) to SBs requirements could contribute to motivating their employees to generate innovative ideas consistently to keep SBs high performance. Improving employee empowerment performance and perceived employer branding could help SB managers to increase a company's performance (Maurya & Agarwal, 2018). Also, managers' involvement, motivation, teamwork, support to employees, and commitment could help SB managers keeping outstanding performance (Lodgaard, Ingvaldsen, Aschehoug, & Gamme, 2016). Employees are elements SB manager should consider setting strategies for business success.

OBP could improve when the employee's commitment to change improve, which depends on formal and informal communication intensity, adaptive organizational systems availability, and the role of transformational leadership during the change process (Appelbaum et al., 2017). Ceptureanu, Ceptureanu, Popescu, and Vlad (2017) supported what Appelbaum et al. concluded; successful change processes in operating systems depend on the employees' knowledge and their motivation, which improves with formal and on-the-job training. Managing employees' performance and improving managers' leadership could contribute to improving OBP.

Managing customer satisfaction and loyalty could contribute to improving OBP depend on service quality, customer perceptions of quality and value, customer service, access to information, and understanding of customers and their perception of quality

(Appelbaum et al., 2017). Customer satisfaction depends on access to information and customer service provided by employees (Shaefer, 2017). Managers' knowledge of customer needs and their perception of quality drives customer satisfaction (Hult, Morgeson III, Morgan, Mithas, & Fornell, 2017); the customer's perceived quality and value help measure client satisfaction (Rajendran & Suresh, 2017). Strategies used to manage customer's and employee's performance management and implementation of strategies to manage their interactions could drive the OBP to a positive or negative result.

Additionally, other researchers investigated the external environment of a company and its effects on the OBP. Strategies to address social, economic, and environmental constraints could align the business model to the plan to enhance OBP and gain competitive advantage (Baumgartner & Rauter, 2016; Lloret, 2016). Aryanasl et al. (2017) stated that for green and successful businesses, SB managers must consider stakeholders, financial resources, design and processes improvement, policy, and strategy for clean production, and leadership. On their side, Haggege et al. (2017) indicated the critical factors that SBs with high-performance include in their plan; those SBs include two main factors, static drivers and dynamic drivers.

Static drivers include three elements: (a) customer engagement, which consists of the customer cost, loyalty and commitment, and user-driven innovation; (b) external factors including core competencies, strategic partnerships, lock-in effects, network-based innovation, and knowledge links; and (c) internal processes which consist of time and cost-efficiency and reducing tie to market. Dynamic drivers also include three

elements: (a) opportunity sensing, (b) uncertain environments and organizational learning, and (c) business model portfolios (Haggege et al., 2017).

On their side, Campbell and Park (2017) indicated that the strategic management of communities and social capital help SB managers to improve performance. Green business strategies are crucial to get a competitive advantage and become strong under high regulated and dynamic markets (Leonideu, Christodoulides, Kyrgidou, & Palihawadana, 2017). Managers should consider that environmental performance and waste reduction could influence the influence of practices for sustainable operations on OBP (D'Agostini et al., 2017). Environmental knowledge base and the use of adequate strategies to manage it could improve business performance (Martinez-Martinez, Cegarra-Navarro, Perez-Garcia, & Wensley, 2019). SB managers could enhance OBP by improving business growth performance, profitability, market performance, environment and community's performance, and social capital (D'Agostini et al., 2017; Esmaeel et al., 2018; Leonideu et al., 2017; Martinez-Martinez et al., 2019).

Some SB managers prefer to evaluate the security risk associated with implementing strategies to improve performance than the performance improvement opportunity (Kim, Jang, & Yang, 2017). Naude and Chiweshe (2017) stated that SBs experience operational vulnerabilities because of the evolving and competitive characteristics of business environments. SB managers should use operational risk management frameworks to monitor business vulnerabilities (Naude & Chiweshe, 2017). Risk management includes risk identification, risk assessment, risk response, and risk monitoring and control (Naude & Chiweshe, 2017). Several SB factors could increase

business vulnerability, and not being aware of them could increase risks of business failure.

Esmaeel et al. (2018) stated that SB managers could measure business performance through three elements: (a) business growth, (b) profitability, and (c) market performance. Kato and Charoenrat (2018) indicated that SBs' success depends on the vulnerability of their external factors, business continuity knowledge, and business continuity management strategies. Management of business vulnerability and business process efficiency is critical for the process of identifying strategies for business continuity (Esmaeel et al., 2018). SBs managers pursue enhancing OBP should consider internal and internal factors increasing vulnerability and risks (Esmaeel et al., 2018; Kato & Charoenrat, 2018; Kim et al., 2017; Naude & Chiweshe, 2017; Zeininger, Irimie, & Mihai, 2017).

Other factors that could put on risk the OBP include low consultant's cost, contracts, employees, and business ethics. Zeininger et al. (2017) stated that the fear of employees' resistance to change, not getting contracts after the investment for some certifications, and the poor implementation of strategies to improve business performance due to lower consultants' costs are risks which could increase SBs vulnerability. For Sroka and Szanto (2018), business ethics is critical for corporate image and, consequently, for outstanding OBP. Weak, or no ethic, could drive to corruption, impacting the OBP negatively (Ugochukwu & Fasola, 2018). Corruption is present in most nations and deteriorates every value, moral, drop of human compassion, as wells as

the organization's security, companies' image and performance, and citizens' human

rights (Ugochukwu & Fasola, 2018).

Valentine, Hanson, and Fleischman (2018) indicated that the internal company's

ethics reach more internal locus of control and stronger employees' ethical judgment

implementing a code of conduct. The competition for capital would be fair and based on

the governance of compliance and ethics risks when investors know the firm's

compliance and ethical management in making investment decisions (Ramirez, 2018).

Business ethics codes could help SB managers to enhance decision-making processes in a

situation that compromises reasoning and incivility (Valentine et al., 2018). SB managers

developing a code of conduct could improve their ethical decision-making processes,

which could impact the OBP positively.

The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission disclosure guidance of ethical and

compliance structures within public firms contribute to that fairness (Ramirez, 2018). It is

crucial to emphasize that ethics are essential for SBs to get market participation and

social recognition, which leads to business growth (Valentine et al., 2018). But,

researchers in business ethics are interested only in corporate social responsibility and

social performance, marketing ethics, and consumer behavior, and sustainability (Yin &

Quazi, 2018). Business ethics could help SB managers to overcome the changing

environment of the current globalized economy (Berkey & Orts, 2019). Ethics is an

element that could impact OBP negatively, increasing the risk SB managers exit their

market if SB managers use inadequate strategies to manage it.

Another element that could influence OBP is the decision made by SB managers to implement and use quality management systems (QMS). Related to that, although Willar, Trigunarsyah, and Coffy (2016) showed no significant relationship between the QMS implementation and the company's business performance, Lodgaard et al. (2016) found that SB managers consider information systems and improvement methods relevant to the OBP enhancement. Also, Murphy and Leonard (2016) noted that OBP improves with the implementation of strategies to identify and implement a business plan using QMS. Business managers could use the application of QMS as a tool to analyze data collected on suppliers, customers, market performance, and business operations performance pursuing to improve business performance strategies, keep the focus on the business plan, and identify strength and opportunities for improvement (Garza-Reyes, 2018). Rusu (2016) stated that SB managers could achieve outstanding OBP when they decide to implement strategies, including integrated systems.

Contrary, some SB managers associated business performance with management support better than their capacity to adopt integrated systems or with improving business processes more than to control product quality or to control costs (Kim et al., 2017). Sustainability control systems (SCS) and corporate sustainability performance (CSP) are proactive strategies for sustained businesses; SCS influences corporations' permanent outstanding OBP (Wijethilake, 2017).

SB managers enhance OBP defining the company's QMS maturity level, identifying the strengths and opportunities of improvement, and performing auditory on the QMS compliance with customer requirements, suppliers, and the industry or

government standards (Garza-Reyes, 2018). Also, the adoption of business analytics (Aydinerm Tatoglu, Bayraktar, Zaim, & Delen, 2019), and lean, agile, and sustainable strategies could influence business process performance and the OBP as well as the companies' survival in a competitive and continuously changing market environments (Esmaeel et al., 2018). SB managers could have a better understanding of their business complexity to improve their OBP by implementing systems and or proved processes, methodologies, or strategies.

SB managers could classify factors impacting or affecting the OBP in subsystems or areas for a better business complexity analysis. Some authors identified up to 64 elements, others less, as showed with the following two paragraphs. Similar to the results revealed by Aryanasl et al. (2017), Cosic et al. (2015), D'Agostini et al. (2017), Esmaeel et al. (2018), and Haggege et al. (2017), cited early in this subsection, Lucjmann and Feldmann (2017) identified six areas to group 64 critical OBP success factors as follows: (a) SBs factors integration, (b) SBs control, (c) stakeholder management, (d) risk management, (e) human resources management (HRM), and (f) organizational culture. Those results show how complex a business could be and the importance of understanding the business dynamics.

Similarly, Amornpinyo (2018) revealed that sustainable success in SBs performance has six dimensions: (a) business spirit, (b) proactiveness, (c) competitive advantage, (d) sustainability, (e) human capital, and (f) firm performance. Those dimensions integrate 12 components, which include business nature and intelligence,

learning, technology, flexibility, innovativeness and opportunity, interfunctional management, among others.

In the same line of thoughts, Ayub Ghouri, Hussain, Kanwal, Afzal, and Rasheed (2018) revealed that the overall performance of successful SBs with a market in e-commerce depends on six business major sections: (a) market value, (b) privacy, (c) trust, (d) IT security, (e) social and ethical issues, and (f) cost. And, Gimmer, Grimmer, and Mortimer (2018) identified as critical components for SBs performance information systems, financial capital, and planning. Also, materials, storage, emissions, technology, and equipment. SBs are complex entities that demand SB managers have a clear understanding of internal and external components impacting the decision taken to identify effective strategies to improve OBP (Amornpinyo, 2018; Ghouri et al., 2018; Gimmer et al., 2018; Lucjmann & Feldmann, 2017).

Synthesis

In this section, the synthesis of findings and opinions of researches cited in the literature review section. SBs responds to the specific needs of a community, offering products and services (Jackson & Jackson, 2016). Mission statements serve to define the purpose of SBs (Allen et al., 2018; Gavric et al., 2018; Göbel et al., 2017) and is an essential factor in business cohesion (Gavric et al., 2018). Successful SB managers adjust their business decision to better compete in their current changing market conditions using business strategies with an external focus for business sustainability (Baumgartner & Rauter, 2016; Chittithaworn et al., 2011; Fjeldstad & Snow, 2018).

SB managers could establish, grow, and sustain their businesses if they can recognize and understand the potential risks associated with their business failure in the early stages of business life (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). The uncertainty related to the changing market environment and the future of any business activity lead to SB managers decide under a degree of risk that could not be managed or controlled (Myšková & Doupalová, 2015). OBP improves when SB managers use strategies to enhance skills collectively and increase SBs' operational performance and customer retention (Shin et al., 2015). The degree of complexity of SBs also varies as well as the process to evaluate effective strategies for successful SBs. Knowing the factors influencing the performance of SBs could help managers enhance the OBP.

SBs managers pursue enhancing OBP should consider internal and internal factors increasing business vulnerability and risks when identifying effective strategies (Esmaeel et al., 2018; Kato & Charoenrat, 2018; Kim et al., 2017; Naude & Chiweshe, 2017; Zeininger et al., 2017) aligned to the business model. To identify those internal and external factors, SB managers first identify strategies to address social, economic, and environmental constraints (Baumgartner & Rauter, 2016; D'Agostini et al., 2017; Leonideu et al., 2017; Lloret, 2016; Martinez-Martinez et al., 2019). Second, consider stakeholders, financial resources, design and processes improvement, policy, and strategy for clean production, and leadership (Aryanasl et al., 2017). Third, measure business growth, profitability, and market performance (Esmaeel et al., 2018). SBs managers should identify the essential factors impacting their business results. SB managers understanding the variety of internal and external factors influencing the internal and

external business environment could identify effective business strategies to improve OBP (Aryanasl et al., 2017; Cosic et al., 2015; D'Agostini et al., 2017; Esmael et al., 2018; Ghouri et al., 2018; Gimmer et al., 2018; Haggege et al., 2017; Lucjmann & Feldmann, 2017).

From the literature reviewed, the number of factors affecting SBs could be significant, critical, and depend on the industry and the business characteristics. Successful identification of effective strategies to enhance SBs performance depends on more than 10 aspects; in some cases, 64 business aspects or more in other cases (Amornpinyo, 2018; Ghouri et al., 2018; Gimmer et al., 2018; Lucjmann & Feldmann, 2017). A holistic evaluation of those factors could help SB managers identify effective strategies to improve OBP. Although Willar et al. (2016) showed that application of QMS for holistic evaluation of SB performance is not practical, Aydinerm et al. (2019), Garza-Reyes (2018), Kim et al. (2017), Lodgaard et al. (2016), Murphy and Leonard (2016), Rusu (2016), and Wijethilake (2017) showed that QMS is critical to understand businesses dynamics holistically and to improve OBP. A holistic or systematic evaluation of SBs could enhance the effectiveness of the strategies SB managers identify to improve OBP.

SBs are systems if they have a clear purpose, well-identified elements, and there exists a clear interaction among those elements (Ross & Wade, 2015). Also, the business components' characteristics are adjacency and interaction, impact over the entire organization, and subsystems have specific features (Dawidowicz, 2012). The active interaction of business components is a typical relationship in which the degree to which

one element affects another could increase the system complexity (Von Bertalanffy,

1972/2017). Using GST, researchers could perceive relationships and links among all the

factors composing a business, forming a unique system (Porvaznik & Ljudvigova, 2016).

Systems theory is an interdisciplinary approach (Von Bertalanffy, 1972/2017). To reach

an outstanding OBP Business component, SB managers should not only include a

systematic analysis of business elements and processes but human resources with systems

thinking skills (Kordova et al., 2018; Porvaznik & Ljudvigova, 2016; Ross & Wade,

2015; DOC, 2019; Von Bertalanffy, 1972/2017)

Combining four approaches could help SB managers identifying effective

strategies for outstanding OBP. First, using the DOC (2019) approach, SB managers

could focus on the assessment of how business subsystems, elements, and complex

interactions among them influence the OBP (DOC, 2019). Second, applying the approach

presented by Ross and Wade (2015), SB managers could apply GST to evaluate strategies

to manage and reduce the business complexity successfully to improve OBP (Ross &

Wade, 2015). Third, implementing QMS SB managers could understand business

dynamics holistically (Aydinerm, et al., 2019; Garza-Reyes, 2018; Kim et al., 2017;

Lodgaard et al., 2016; Murphy & Leonard, 2016; Rusu, 2016; Wijethilake, 2017). And

fourth, developing analytic skills in managers and employees contributes to having a

broader visualization of what composes a business and the potential vulnerabilities,

which could drive to business success and sustainability. Integrating those four

approaches, SB managers could set effective strategies to enhance OBP.

In sum, SB managers pursue enhancing OBP must have a mission statement to clarify the business objectives and to identify the main elements producing services or products (Allen et al., 2018; Gavric et al., 2018; Göbel et al., 2017). SB managers could understand the interaction of the components on each subsystem of their business using a framework and criteria approach (DOC, 2019). With the application of the systems thinking approach, using a conceptual map or systemigram (Ross & Wade, 2015) and implementing QMS (Aydinerm et al., 2019; Garza-Reyes, 2018; Kim et al., 2017; Lodgaard et al., 2016; Murphy & Leonard, 2016; Rusu, 2016; Wijethilake, 2017) SB managers could have a deep comprehension of their business complexity and could identify and apply adequate strategies for outstanding OBP (Dawidowicz, 2012; Ross & Wade, 2015; Sturmberg et al., 2014; Von Bertalanffy, 1969,1972/2017).

Despite the advantages of applying GST to determine all the possible dimensions impacting OBP and the process to identify strategies for business success, the summary of the literature reviewed based on theories and design showed that few are the authors who studied the application of the GST to improve the OBP. Fewer researchers used both the GST and the qualitative (QLT) design in the same study to research on strategies to enhance OBP. Table 2 shows a summary of the publications included in the literature review section (LRS).

Table 2

Framework and Research Design Used

Theory	Count	%	QTT	%	QLT	%	Mixed	%
GST	34	30.91	9	8.18	24	21.82	1	0.91
Other	76	69.09	44	40.00	30	27.27	2	1.82
LRS	110	100.00	53	48.18	54	49.09	3	2.73

From the information compiled in Table 2, there was a gap in the research to observe and evaluate businesses' performance as interactive and complicated systems using GST and or QLT design to assess and identify strategies for outstanding overall SBs performance. Of the total 110 researchers cited in this section, 30.91% applied or explained GST, and 49.09% used QLT design. Those percentages revealed a gap in researching using GST for OBP improvement and the QLT design to explain what SB managers could include when identifying strategies for outstanding OBP. Only 21.82% of researchers combined QLT design and GST, and 27.27% combined other theories and QLT design. From the same table, few authors used mixed methods to research OBP strategies, using either GST or different approaches.

The goal of my study was to help SB managers understand how to apply GST to identify effective strategies to enhance their OBP. SB managers could see the complexity of their business and could minimize the business exit rate seeing their business as a system. SB managers could understand their business system easily, could identify all the elements composing their companies and the influence of the interaction among those elements on the OBP, could recognize the systems thinking approach as a tool to identify

strategies and find the best way to apply them to reach an outstanding OBP. Another

potential contribution of this research study is in the academy. The current number of

research studies involving GST in conjunction with the QLT is less than 25% of the

literature reviewed. Hence, the findings of this study may contribute to increasing

knowledge about GST and its application on business management in qualitative

research. The hope is for future researchers to use the information provided within this

document to seed their research studies

Transition

The organization of this document includes three main sections. The first section

is the foundation of this study, the second section consists of the project description, and

the last section contains results and the implication for a change within the results of this

study. The following paragraphs contain a brief description of each section.

In Section 1, I supported the use of a qualitative multiple case study as the design

for this research, including presenting the problem statement, purpose statement, the

nature of the stud, and the research questions aligned with the research question. Finally,

explained is the conceptual framework, delimitations, and limitations for the research

study. At the end of that section included the synthesis and summary of the literature

reviewed.

In Section 2, the goal is to explain the instruments to collect the data required to

analyze the effective strategies SB managers used under the GST approach to improve

OBP. Also included are the sample selection and interview protocol, an in-depth

explanation of the research method and design chosen, and the support for the study's reliability and validity.

Section 3 is the last section to finalize this research. Within the results, the discussion includes the applicability of the study findings, the contribution to social change, the conclusions from outcomes, and some recommendations for further research.

Section 2: The Project

In this qualitative multiple case study, the goal was to explore the effective strategies some SB managers use to achieve outstanding OBP. For this study, the population included SBs in the United States. The plan to collect information to develop this research topic was to use semistructured interviews and review documents provided by the SBs participants, the company's public Baldrige results, and the public company's reports.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies SB managers use to achieve outstanding OBP. The population for this study included SBs in the United States that used strategies for achieving OBP had existed for more than 5-years and received the MBNQA between the years 2007 and 2018. An implication for positive social change is the potential for SB managers to contribute to stable employment, development of local economies, and enhance the lifestyle level of families and the communities.

Role of the Researcher

Researchers applying qualitative design use the knowledge they gained from previous studies (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). As an entrepreneur, I also experienced similar management circumstances as SB managers. Bias could have affected the collection and data analysis. To avoid bias, Yin (2018) indicated that researchers could make comparisons, use rival explanations, and keep alert to adverse factors. I kept reviewing my behavior and using rival explanations to ensure that I remained objective

while collecting data, during observations, and analysis processes. Also, to gain more insight into interviewees' organizations, I reviewed participants' available public documents. To better understand the research topic, included is literature related to OBP under GST and other theories. Phillippi and Lauderdale (2017) recommended that researchers using qualitative design to use information collected from participants with the unique purpose to investigate the object of the research topic ethically and ensure they store the data collected appropriately and treat all data collected as a core component of a rigorous research study. I kept the information collected in a password-protected external drive stored in a locked cabinet under my control.

To deal with the impact of a research endeavor, a researcher should understand the audience for the research results (Tsey et al., 2016). A researcher could identify gaps in the existing evidence or information available, information uncertainties, and whether narrowing that gap will add value to the audience in their decision process to get better general life conditions (Tsey et al., 2016). Qualitative researcher bias could affect the interpretation of verbal information while performing the interview to understand the nature of business phenomena (Mykhalovskiy, 2018). As the researcher, I had the responsibility to understand the research topic, collect data following ethical standards, and follow ethical analysis processes to evaluate how SB managers identified and applied strategies to improve OBP.

Research participants are an essential source of information (Park, Caine, McConnell, & Minaker, 2016). Researchers and interviewees should ensure that no conflict of interest could affect the interview process and outcomes (Karagiozis, 2018).

To ensure no conflicts, I reviewed with the research participants potential opportunities to minimize any situation that could impact the research outcomes negatively. Karagiozis (2018) stated that researchers must understand the influence of their home culture to avoid that their perceptions, points of view, and values influence research participants' responses and the process to review data collected and its analysis (Karagiozis, 2018). To minimize bias, I asked the research participants to review the interview transcripts, the analysis results, and used the available company documentation.

Cragoe (2019) indicated that researchers must consider the basic ethical principles established on the Belmont Report published by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Those principles are respect, beneficence, and justice. A researcher must respect the rights interviewees have for their autonomy (Cragoe, 2019). According to Cragoe, researchers must also ensure the confidentiality of the information provided and consider the risks and benefits that interviewees, their family, their job environment, communities, and the society, in general, get from the research outcomes.

I ensured confidentiality for information and identity of participants by following the protocol established to handle and store interview information. I supported the security requirements research participants requested not only about the information handling but about publishing the research results. Additionally, I ensured the protection of their rights for confidentiality, respect, inclusion, and risk measurement following those ethical principles during the first interview session and the information handling process.

Yeong, Ismail, Ismail, and Hamzah (2018) stated that qualitative research should follow a protocol to interview participants, ensuring the quality of data collected. Those authors also indicated that a protocol must cover all study objectives, and researchers should be able to get valid data. Yeong et al. also wrote that an interview protocol aligned with the interview questions and the research topic ensure constructive and exploratory conversations and have realistic inputs to ensure the quality of outcomes.

I ensured correct preparedness for interview sessions by adhering to the interview protocol (see Appendix B), having the research questions aligned with the research objective, and getting feedback from the research participants. The rationale behind the decision to use an interview protocol was to ensure that I could collect substantial information from the SB managers interviewed based on their experiences identifying and using strategies to enhance OBP. Also, following the interview protocol ensured completion of my research study identifying the strategies SB managers used to improve OBP with no bias and with practical information.

Participants

Reichow, Barton, and Maggin (2018) indicated that the selection of participants for research could add bias to the investigation, so it is essential to select adequate and appropriate participants based on an assessment and criteria relative to the research study and the conceptual methodology. Park et al. (2016) stated that researchers actively interact with participants during the interview sessions, which is a golden opportunity to negotiate and agree on several aspects of the process, such as schedules, confidentiality terms, participation consent, interview transcripts review process, and mutual

responsibilities and rights. After satisfying a strict criterion based on GST, the DOC

recognizes SB managers who demonstrated substantial improvement in critical business

aspects to achieve outstanding OBP with the MBNQA (DOC, 2019).

     For this study, six managers participated. Those managers applied strategies to

improve their overall SB performance in the United States. Participating SBs had existed

for more than 5-years and received the MBNQA between the years 2007 and 2018.

Interviewees participated in the process to get the MBNQA, had a deep understanding of

their business, have been with their company for at least 2-years, and are in a high

managerial position.

     To gain access to the research participants, a researcher must have a recruiting

plan, understand the candidates, have appropriate communication tools available,

demonstrate expertise, and utilize gatekeeper management (Marks, Wilkes, Blythe, &

Griffiths, 2017). To identify the SBs who received the MBNQA between the years 2007

and 2018, I used the public database the Baldrige Foundation created using the

information from those SBs recognized nationwide with the MBNQA since 1987. The

Baldrige database shows that one to three SBs per year received the MBNQA between

the years 2007 and 2018.

     The plan was to send the invitation to participate in my study in two groups

starting with the six SBs received the MBNQA recently (between years 2015 and 2018).

Only under the scenario that the first six managers invited to participate accepted

participating in my study and when interviewing the first group data saturation is reached,

the second group (between the years 2007 and 2014) will not receive an invitation. The

strategy to get access to the research participant was using internet communication tools, such as email and Skype, and making phone calls. During the first communication, I provided participants an explanation of the objective and purpose of this research topic and a letter of invitation to read, sign, and return for participation consent. To remain consistent with the process of conducting interviews, I followed the protocol in Appendix B.

Partnership and commitment are challenges researchers overcome with their continuity and enthusiasm (Zych, Berta, & Gagliardi, 2019). To establish a working relationship, I used the database Baldrige created with information from SBs already recognized nationwide with the MBNQA to identify the primary contact, develop a communication plan, and schedule interviews. Each participant decided whether they were comfortable with a virtual connection for the interview or feedback sessions. They reviewed the interview plan proposed and knew in advance about the interview protocol requirements. The goals of this study were to keep continuous verbal and written communication with the people involved in this process.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Astroth and Chung (2018) stated that the researcher's objective is to understand the various methods and to determine whether qualitative research is appropriate to study the phenomenon of interest. Researchers using a quantitative method acquire generalized knowledge about variables' characteristics, relationships, or groups' differences and draw statistical inferences to a large population (Saunders et al., 2016). Researchers use mixed

methods, a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, to answer complex research

questions (Saunders et al., 2016). Qualitative research relates to reporting data analysis

results in simple terms, and the expression of social interactions or experiences (Levitt et

al., 2018). Compared to quantitative research, using qualitative research, researchers

could seek the phenomenon with a holistic perspective and observe the evolution of the

phenomenon over time, linking together multiple factors and levels of analysis (Fletcher,

De Massis, & Nordqvist, 2016). Researchers understand phenomena through the study of

people's experiences, questionnaires, and the evaluation of physical environments

(Degen, 2017). Sovacool, Axsen, and Sorrel (2018) wrote that qualitative researchers

have different inductive and exploratory options to collect and analyze data revealing

research participants' opinions, ways to do things, attitudes, and perceptions in different

contexts or environments.

Researchers use a qualitative method to explore the meaning of social and bodily

phenomena and to answer how and why people act as they do, within their natural

context (Malterud, 2017). Researchers contextualize descriptions from each participant

using qualitative studies (Levitt et al., 2018) and analyze quality, not the quantity, to

understand why a social phenomenon happens using language-based data and visual

representation (Mykhalovskiy, 2018). Qualitative researchers use detailed processes to

interpret actions, languages, signs, expressions, perceptions, and attitudes (González

Macias & Cuevas Contreras, 2019). González Macias and Cuevas Contreras (2019)

stated that qualitative researchers perform flexible and holistic investigations about

persons, organizations, or groups and evaluate them as an integrated system.

Moreover, Allana and Clark (2018) stated that qualitative researchers could understand both the human side of a business and the existing interacting tools, processes, technology, and any environment-related to business performance. Researchers using qualitative studies also include the environment, location, time, and era to analyze, understand, and describe a phenomenon in terms of social dynamics (Levitt et al., 2018). Information collected for this study included interview answers and notes with my introspections, as well as public company reports, and—when provided by managers—business documents such as business financial statements before and after the implementation of the strategies used to improve OBP. Also, participants who agreed to have a phone call or a Skype interview reviewed the interview transcripts to ensure transcriptions reflected their responses.

Hamilton and Finley (2019) wrote that the outcome from qualitative analysis adds value to the intended audience and the scientific field. Researchers can understand many aspects of business complexity using qualitative studies, connecting, understanding, and analyzing the interaction among business structure-related factors and human behaviors (Allana & Clark, 2018). Using a qualitative method, researchers can answer how and why efforts to use strategies for business success could fail or succeed (Hamilton & Finley, 2019). Fletcher et al. (2016) stated that qualitative research implies the use of several research tools, conceptual frameworks, and techniques that benefit the evaluation of some business factors that cannot be qualified or codified in an understandable way using numerical classifications. By using each method and conceptual framework, researchers can explore, examine, be aware of interpretations, relationships, concerns, interactions,

spatial meaning, and sensemaking processes in an environment or context (Fletcher et al.,

2016).

For Matta (2019), using the qualitative method, researchers interpret pieces of

data under one or more conceptual theories and describe properties and characteristics.

Matta also indicated that in qualitative reasoning, researchers use predefined

generalizations and local avoidable implications to have a realistic and manageable

interpretation of the target phenomena. Qualitative researchers use their reference

historic-cultural context to comprehend and interpret what happens with people and their

social life and understand each person or community characteristics (González Macias &

Cuevas Contreras, 2019). Also, qualitative researchers emphasize the experiences; they

do not expect specific outcomes (Levitt et al., 2018). Data generated from qualitative

studies could either convertible in numerical data or not, and the research reports could

have a thematic or chronological organization. (Levitt et al., 2018).

Researchers detail how they arrived at methods, questions, conclusions, and

considerations (Levitt et al., 2018) and must conduct their study with integrity and think

with creativity while conducting data analysis (Sun et al., 2018). Sun et al. (2018) stated

that because researchers needed to create interview questions, analyze and contextualize

interviewees' responses, summarize those responses in themes, and explain and describe

them, qualitative researchers invest more time and effort into their studies. Qualitative

researchers do not realize the difference between finding and interpretation, which makes

researchers write the results and discussion sections in a combined way (Levitt et al.,

2018). The final report length, using qualitative design, tend to be longer than reports of studies using other models (Levitt et al., 2018).

A qualitative model was in line with the conceptual framework used for this research. Lodgaard et al. (2016) used qualitative research to evaluate the perceptions of top managers on barriers to continuous business improvement. McDonald (2017) used a qualitative design to assess customer relationship management strategies under the GST. A researcher should understand both the human side of a business and the business structure (Allana & Clark, 2018), including the environment in terms of social dynamics (Levitt et al., 2018). Using qualitative research and the GST, the goal was to understand better the phenomena of enhancing OBP by looking at SBs as a whole system influenced by the active interaction among and inside the business subsystems and using a qualitative design for this research topic.

Research Design

The main objective a researcher must have to perform an investigation is to have an impact that could transform society (Heyeres, Tsey, Yang, Yan, & Jiang, 2019). Within a case study, researchers evaluate the quality and measure the impact of using qualitative or quantitative methods (Heyeres et al., 2019). Heyeres et al. (2019) indicated that researchers using case studies perform a detailed assessment of single or multiple cases, which could be individuals, companies, groups, or countries, among others. For Sovacool et al. (2018), researchers use a case study to perform an in-depth evaluation of one or more cases and its associated environmental conditions. The case study design is an alternative to the difficulty of quantifying business benefits, such as engagement,

capacity, respect, and reciprocity (Tsey et al., 2016). Gallagher (2019) indicated that

qualitative researchers describe their motivations and why those motivations are essential

to use case studies and answer the what, how, or why questions to investigate the

decision-making processes in business management with first-hand information on the

reality of businesses (Villarreal Larrinaga, 2017). Case study design discovers

knowledge, describe in detail the causal mechanisms and characteristics of a case or cases

(Widdersheim, 2018).

Case studies have two principal designs, multiple case studies, and a single case

study (Yin, 2018). Researchers who evaluate cases with revelatory or longitudinal

purpose use case studies, as well as researchers wanting to test existing theories, with

extreme or unusual circumstances (Yin, 2018). To analyze and evaluate a phenomenon

that rarely occurs, Saunders et al. (2016) noted that a single-case design is adequate. To

assess similarities or differences across cases, researchers use design with more than one

case or multiple cases (Saunders et al., 2016). Multiple cases are cases chosen to compare

or contrast cases (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018). For this research study, a multiple case

study was adequate to identify similarities between the strategy's managers used to

improve the OBP of each of the companies included in this study.

Tsey et al. (2016) wrote that case studies demand a long time and workforce, lack

of neutrality, demand more economic resources, and comparing results with the results

from other studies is difficult. The opinion of Fletcher et al. (2016) is that for multiple

cases, increasing the number of cases increases the difficulty degree to capture, analyze,

and comprehend the phenomenon studied with each case, its context, and the process that

emerges over time. Using case studies, researchers understand holistically the multiple

relationships related to a system (Gallagher, 2019). Researchers perform a holistic study

when use case studies to evaluate the phenomenon complexity (Ridder, 2017). Interviews

with six managers who work for at least 2-years in their current companies and work in

any high managerial position for SBs that received the MBNQA between the years 2007

and 2018 and exist for more than 5-years, provided part of the data required for this

study. Other sources of data included information provided by participants and the

company's Baldrige application. I used NVivo, specialized qualitative analysis software,

to analyze the data collected in this study.

Population and Sampling

Case studies can be helpful or inherent; practical case studies are cases used to

represent a phenomenon of interest, and researchers use intrinsic case studies to describe

a unique or essential situation, making the case itself of primary importance (Guetterman

& Fetters, 2018). Guetterman and Fetters' (2018) opinion is that the unit of analysis for a

case study is holistic or embedded. Holistic case studies refer to a unit analysis at a global

level, such as a program, a school, or a business, which is adequate when subunits cannot

be identified or are not relevant to the research question, and the analysis is more abstract

(Guetterman & Fetters, 2018). For a better understanding of the phenomena studied, with

sub-units identified, an embedded unit of analysis is appropriate. Hence, a holistic group

of analysis is necessary for this multi-case qualitative study because the research focus

was on SBs managers, who usually make an important decision and are those who lived

experiences when finding strategies to improve performance (Woods, Gottschall, & Carsrud, 2017).

Rosental (2016) indicated that it is critical to identify an appropriate sample size for in-depth interviews. Data sampling means having a sufficient amount of data collected to recognize the existence of common themes (Reichow et al., 2018). Chu and Ke (2017) and Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbon (2015) agreed that the use of a case study implies a small number of cases or sampling units. There are three approaches for researchers to select a sampling approach, which depend on the research question: (a) Deviant case sampling method; inquirers identify extreme examples of the study objective, (b) snowball to ask the research participants refer to additional candidates who have similar experiences to participate in the research study, and (c) purposive sampling require to recruit interview participants based on their knowledge about the research topic (Rosental, 2016). For Mark and Wells (2019), convenient sampling is useful for the appropriate selection of participants in qualitative research.

Besides, researchers who use two or three cases for a multiple case study could provide outcomes that confirm similarities of results across cases (Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). The research question of my project was What strategies do SB managers use to achieve OBP? Hence, the purposive approach was adequate for my project. I invited 11 managers working in any business high managerial position, have worked for their company for at least 2-years, and have a deep understanding of their business. The six SBs managers who participated exist in the market for longer than 5-years and received MBNQA between the years 2007 and 2018. Data collection included conducting

independent interviews with each of those managers who demonstrated enough experience applying the system approach by implementing the Baldrige Framework.

Gallagher's (2019) opinion is that data collection using a case study is to research complex real-life phenomena with two purposes, to use it for qualitative or for quantitative research (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018). Chu and Ke (2017) wrote that researches could select any data collection technique for conducting a case study. The use of different methods to gather information help researchers to generate additional information to validate the research results (Zahle, 2018). Case study researchers usually use several techniques and strategies to collect information, including interviews, participant observations, physical descriptions, archive records, and surveys (Gallagher, 2019; Zahle, 2018).

Chu and Ke (2017) stated that research participants answer questions related to a research problem in three different interview forms. One form is using structured interviews, where researchers use a prepared list of questions. The second form is formulating no prepared interview questions on-site or an unstructured interview. And the third form is when researchers perform semistructured interviews, asking some questions from the prepared list, and using follow-up questions. I used the third form. The interview protocol used includes 10 questions. The first nine are open-ended questions; after each question, a follow-up question may follow at the end of the interview; I asked general follow-up questions. The most appropriate technique to collect information for this qualitative multi-case study was a semistructured interview.

During an interview session, researchers observe the participants' nonverbal body language, which provides critical information to evaluate the phenomenon (Chu & Ke, 2017). The advantages of using face-to-face interviews are flexibility, the opportunity for researchers to observe spontaneous interaction, and to have more control over the environment (Heat et al., 2018). The cons include the high cost per participant due to the participant geographical position and associated traveling time (Heat et al., 2018). Rosental (2016) indicated that collecting cost-effective information from geographically separated participants is possible by conducting interviews using phone calls or Internet tools such as Skype, Google Hangouts, and Zoom. The candidates to interview for this study are in different states, and the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their daily business operations. Hence, the cost-efficient option to collect information from participants were using Skype, making phone calls, and using emails. Each participant decided the option that best fitted to their current situation.

The selection of tools to perform real-time conversations depends on the need to record the interview and to ensure the confidentiality of information collected (Rosental, 2016). Heat et al. (2018) recommended that researchers consider how the procedures and different methods of interviewing could affect them. To real-time interviews, some participants attended Skype video chat and/or phone calls. Other participants requested to participate in answering questions via email.

Data saturation means to reach the point when information collected is repetitious, and researchers have little or no contribution from new data collected (Gentles et al., 2015). Triangulation ensures data saturation and validity of results. Researchers

recognize the existence of different approaches for a phenomenon using the triangulation of various sources (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Yin (2018) wrote that the nature of case studies relates to several sources of data and evidence, and the general quality of case studies using the triangulation method to analyze those data sources is high. I ensured that data saturation and triangulated different sources of information from companies who improved the OBP after applying the strategies identified. To ensure interview transcripts reflect the real participant's meaning, researchers and participants review transcripts (Cypress, 2017). The sources included documents that participants provided, the company's 5-year performance evaluation, transcription of interview sessions, and findings member check.

Ethical Research

Research participants must understand the purpose of the research study they are collaborating with, the intended outcomes, the use of the study results, and their rights to withdraw their participation without a penalty (Yin, 2018). To follow an ethical process, before contacting research participants, Walden University issued the IRB approval number 05-11-20-0728454. I reviewed public information that relates to the performance of the companies that follow the study requirements and could participate in my research project.

Upon receiving the IRB number, I sent to the selected participants the objective and purpose of my study. Also, they received information on how I planned to collect information during the interview and what happens while we were in the open-ended questions and answers sessions. They did not verbally agree to participate in this study;

hence they did not receive an official invitation letter and the consent form for them to sign and return. Participants agreed to participate in this study by email. The goal of the consent form was to ensure study participants knew and understood their rights to withdraw the consent to participate in this research project at any time while the study was ongoing. Also, they knew the purpose of this study and what they needed to provide to support their answers for research validation. Interviewees did not receive any remuneration for their participation in this study but a recognition plate for their contribution.

I used alphanumeric codes to identify each company and participant to protect the company and research participant's identity and privacy. Each participant had a code assigned and did not exist a file to connect the company name and the participants' contact information. As an example, I used the code R# for respondents, where # varies from one to six. Once the research study ended, the information provided by each research participant remained in a password-secured external drive in the same place with the physical documentation collected for this study. The documentation stayed in a locked cabinet located in an office under my supervision. After 5-years, I reformatted the external drive and shredded all documents related to the study to ensure personal information and company data is protected.

Data Collection Instruments

Yin (2018) wrote that for qualitative research, the principal instrument to collect information is the researcher. As the primary data collection instrument for this research topic, I included semistructured interviews to collect data from participants. During an

interview session, researchers observe the participants' nonverbal body language, which provides critical information to evaluate the phenomenon (Chu & Ke, 2017). Rosental (2016) indicated that collecting cost-effective information from geographically separated participants is possible by conducting interviews using phone calls or internet tools such as Skype, Google Hangouts, and Zoom. The selection of tools to perform real-time conversations depends on the need to record the interview and to ensure the confidentiality of information collected (Rosental, 2016). Heat et al. (2018) recommended that researchers should consider how the procedures and different methods of interviewing could affect them. To interview participants, I proposed the interviewees use Internet options for the interview sessions as a first option. Some participants agreed to audio record their answers to the research questions via phone calls and others via Skype. A third group decided to participate in this study, answering the research questions and interacting with me via email. The Walden IRB approved the request some participants made to answer the research questions via email, considering the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on SB activities across the country at the time I invited them to participate in this study.

Data Collection Technique

Yin (2018) indicated that researchers could treat an extensive set of themes using different techniques of data collection properly. Palinkas et al. (2015) noted that there are three methods to collect data: (a) participants interview, (b) document review, (c) reports. Yin stated that researchers must have a protocol well identified before interviewing participants. To interview each participant, I used the same interview protocol (see

Appendix B) each time, followed the schedule agreed for the interview, and used the

chosen interview media.

Heat et al. (2018) and Marshall and Rossman (2016) wrote about the pros and

cons of face to face interviews. Heat et al. noted that the advantages of using face-to-face

interviews are flexibility, the opportunity for researchers to observe spontaneous

interaction, and to have more control over the environment. For Marshall and Rossman,

among face-to-face interview advantages is that interviews are personable, researchers

retrieve data faster, there exist immediate opportunities for clarification, and participants

can express their challenges related to the research topic. Heat et al.'s cons include high

cost per participant because of the participant geographical position and associated

traveling time. Marshall and Rossman added that the time to build reliance is short. There

is a high risk that interviewees are uncomfortable, speak using local and understandable

language, and interviewees may lack broad knowledge about the study objective

(Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I performed semistructured interviews using the protocol

included in Appendix B.

Saunders et al. (2016) described pilot tests as small-case studies used to test

whether the respondents struggle to understand and or to answer interview questions,

whether there are data recording problems, and to evaluate whether the collected data is

valid and reliable. However, Yin (2018) clarified that pilot tests are not pretests. Yin

indicated that performing pilot tests, researchers explain the content and procedures

included in the data collection plan. The pilot test decision depends on the study

objective, the research questions, the size of the project, researcher time, and economic

constraints (Saunders et al., 2016). In terms of the size of a project, the minimum number of research participants recommended that supporting pilot tests is 10 (Saunders et al., 2016). Rodela, Perez-Soba, Bregt, and Verweij (2018) performed a pilot test for their case study, interviewing 25 participants. Considering the small size of my project and my economic constraints, a pilot test for this multiple case study was not an option.

In addition to interviews, for Yin (2018), there are five additional sources of evidence. The five significant sources are: (a) documentation, (b) archival records, (c) direct observations, (d) participant observations, (e) physical artifacts. For Saunders et al. (2016), secondary sources of data for case studies include three main groups: (a) documents based, (b) survey-based, and (c) sources compiled from multiple sources.

Yin (2018) described documentation sources as sources that researchers repeatedly access, unobtrusive, specific, and broad. Saunders et al. (2016) indicated that documents are mobilizable in time and space. That characteristic allows researchers to reanalyze documents to find new information. Saunders et al. showed that documents are available online in the form of text such as reports to shareholders, annual company reports, internal and public company's database and archive, transcripts of speech and conversations, meetings minutes, administrative and public records. Another form of document source includes voice and video recording, pictures, and drawings.

The disadvantages of documentation sources include that it can be difficult to retrieve, could have an incomplete collection, reflects the bias of the author, could not be accessed in some circumstances (Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). The Documents review method was appropriate to collect additional information about the company's

decisions and results. I used public documents available and or documents provided by the SB managers participating that reflected how they improved OBP using the strategies identified. Those documents included the company's public performance analysis report, records provided by participants, transcription of interview sessions, and analysis member check.

Baines, Dulku, Jindal, and Papalois (2018) stated that when using semistructured interviews, researchers provide reliable and comparable information. Interviews are considered verbal reports, and interview transcripts are subject to bias, inaccurate remind, and deficient or no logic articulation (Yin, 2018). For researchers to corroborate the meaning and consistency of the responses provided by the interviewee, Yin (2018) recommended to ask the same question in different ways until researchers reach consistent meaning. Taking notes during the interview session could help researchers minimize bias in the final interview transcripts (Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). Asking participants to review the interview transcript will clarify any inconsistency in the meaning of their interview responses (Birt, Scott, Cavers, & Walker, 2016; Marshalls & Rossman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2016).

Member validation should not include changes in participant responses (Saunders et al., 2016). To validate the collected data using interviews, I ensured understanding the responses provided by the research participants, asking the same question in at least one different way, and taking notes of my interpretations of the interviewee's answers. Also, asking participants to check the transcripts ensured accuracy on what they wanted to express with their responses and to check the interpretation done in my analysis.

Related to observations, Yin (2018) indicated that with direct observations, researchers gather real-time actions and can cover the context of the case in the study. Yin wrote that direct observation of the environment of the workspace during interviews would give an idea of the organization culture and the status hold by the interviewee. Saunders et al. (2016) indicated that for business and management research, observations are less used. Saunders et al. reported that observations include the inspection of participants' behavior to discover why interviewees do what they do. Observation means a systematic view, requires recording, description, analysis, and observation interpretation. I did not use observations to collect information for this study but took notes to record my perceptions during the interview to ensure accurate data interpretation.

Data Organization Technique

Documentation for case studies usually includes data or evidence, and researchers' report (Yin, 2018). Evidence is the data collected in narrative and numeric form. To organize and analyze data collected for case studies, Saunders et al. (2016) and Yin (2018) recommended the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to analyze electronic information (CAQDAS) and the use of Word or Excel files (Yin, 2018). The database of case studies increases the reliability of the case in review, which require to have data collected well organized and in a retrievable form (Yin, 2018).

Yin (2018) stated that maintaining the chain of evidence improves the validity of proof in a case study. Keeping a chain of evidence, researchers help study readers connect the case study results with the data collected to answer the research question (Yin. 2018). Researchers select data labels according to the research objective and

research question, and data labels could help researchers to summarize the meaning of a data portion (Saunders et al., 2016). Among others, the codes usually used to organize qualitative data are behaviors, strategies, conditions, beliefs, environments, ideas, interactions, policies (Saunders et al., 2016). Notes written during the interview must be organized and categorized by topic, complete, and available (Yin, 2018). Annotated bibliography of documents included in the research, and its appropriate citation, could serve as a guide for their storage and retrieval. Researchers could compile historical material related to ideas important for data analysis indicating the main point of the narrative (Yin, 2018). The data collected from interviews performed for this study remained for 5-years under a password-protected external drive located in a locked cabinet. Any hard copies of documents provided by interviewees were in the same cabinet for the same period. In year six, I destroyed all types of raw data collected for this study, such as transcripts, interview notes, interview answers, documents, and transcripts.

Data Analysis

Qualitative researchers using interviews to collect data need to transcript participants' answers (Saunders et al., 2016). Guo (2019) indicated that researchers could import raw data in any format to store, manage, and share through the process for research study data analysis using NVivo. I used NVivo to identify relevant themes for the analysis of my research topic and to assign codes to those themes to organize data.

Saunders et al. (2016) wrote that qualitative research studies quality influenced by the interaction between data collection and data analysis. Saunders et al. also indicated that qualitative researchers evaluate, study, synthesize, and transform data collected to be

able to answer the research question and reach the study objective. Data collection and data analysis are interrelated and interactive processes that end on the identification of themes and patterns (Saunders et al., 2016). For Abdalla, Oliveira, Azevedo, and Gonzalez (2018), triangulation is the method most frequently used to analyze data in qualitative research, which requires researchers' creativity and ingenuity when collecting data and accuracy during data interpretation. Although there are not triangulation methodological perspectives (Abdalla et al., 2018), researchers ensure data collection convergence and support by triangulating data from multiple sources (Abdalla et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). Some sources are documents, reports, interviews, observations, researcher notes (Abdalla et al., 2018).

Abdalla et al. (2018) summarize four methods of triangulation: (a) data triangulation, (b) theoretical triangulation, (c) researcher triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation. Those authors also indicated that to increase the validity of data evaluation and study results, data triangulation and methodological triangulation are adequate methods. Data triangulation requires data collected from different sources, different places, and from separate individuals (Abdalla et al., 2018). Using data triangulation, researchers increase case study validity (Yin, 2018). Also, using multiple sources help researchers demonstrate accurate interpretations of different realities of the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Researchers using mixed methods use methodological triangulation (Abdalla et al., 2018). Data triangulation is an adequate method to ensure the validity of this multiple-case research study. Triangulating interview responses from six SB managers, information collected from public company data, from data reported for

each company published in the Baldrige webpage, and documents SB managers

interviewed provided increased my research results validity.

Yin (2018) indicated that generalized strategies are adequate to link case study

data. Yin also noted that no two cases are identical. A researcher uses cross-case

synthesis in the analysis of multiple case studies, especially when using two cases (Yin,

2018). Thematic analysis is a generic approach independent of a philosophical method

used for researchers identifying within case themes or patterns among sizeable qualitative

data sets, such as interviews, observations, documents, or websites (Saunders et al.,

2016).

The procedure indicated by Saunders et al. (2016) requires that: (a) researchers

become familiar with the data collected, (b) categorize data to similar group meaning

under one code, (c) identify themes and the connection among them and related to the

research question, (d) refining themes, and (e) evaluation. I adopted this approach to

organizing the data collected for the phenomenon analysis. The synthesis of cross-case

analysis is a case base; researchers compare within case patterns or themes across the

cases (Saunders et al., 2106). I used the former approach to evaluate the strategies some

SB managers used to reach outstanding OBP.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability or dependability (Bleiker, Morgan-Timmer, Knapp, & Hopkins, 2019)

relates to consistency and care when performing research studies. Researchers

demonstrate study dependability with the evidenced research practices within the analysis

and on the conclusions reached (Bleiker et al., 2019). Researchers imprint reliability on their studies when they are aware of the partiality and limits of the research findings reached (Bleiker et al., 2019). A limitation for phenomenal studies dependability relates to the researcher as the principal instrument to collect data and who performs the analysis (Bleiker et al., 2019). Reliability in quantitative research depends on the researcher as the only instrument of the study, which creates the need for researchers to get training and experience to increase study dependability (Bleiker et al., 2019).

For Bleiker et al. (2019), the support for dependability is on records of the characteristic of the research process such as participant selection, interview and observation notes, privacy, interview transcripts, notes with reflections on each stage of the research study. For Cypress (2017), the researcher could achieve dependability, getting a second look at transcriptions from expert qualitative researchers. The experts' review help validate the themes and descriptors identified (Cypress, 2017).

Researchers should consider and include any new emergent themes and descriptions found by the experts (Cypress, 2017). The goal was to understand the participants' points of view, being objective while observing and taking notes, and getting participants involved in the interview transcriptions and the interpretation of the responses. Also, considering that my notes about participant observations could have many interpretations. Clear understanding and accurate transcription of what participants said during the interview session ensured the dependability of this study.

Validity

Validity trustworthiness includes credibility, dependability, confirmability, authenticity, transferability, and quality assessment (FitzPatrick, 2019). For Saunders et al. (2016), validity is an indication of whether the research findings are what they sustain to be. Study validity relates to the conclusions and methods used to minimize validity threats and depend on the purpose of the research and the context of the phenomena to evaluate (FitzPatrick, 2019). To ensure validity, researchers should ask if they will make inferences and conclusions from their study results (FitzPatrick, 2019). FitzPatrick (2019) stated that to trust in a study conclusion, validity is essential, and Internal validity requires an instrument for validation.

Validation is a continuous process implemented during the study, not at the end of the study, to reconcile the threats of validity (FitzPatrick, 2019). One of the risks to validity is researcher bias (Cypress, 2017), which could contaminate findings and conclusions. Using open-ended questions, participants could tell what they want to express according to their knowledge, perceptions, and experiences (Cypress, 2017), which could help the researcher to understand the phenomenon.

Cypress (2017) indicated that validity during the analysis stage depends on the researcher's skills to articulate decisions on collected data, demonstrate prolonged engagement and persistent observation, interview transcripts, and describe achieved data saturation. To minimize my bias, I listened to what participants responded to learn about their experiences and meanings, took notes, and reviewed information collected from

them with objectivity. Yin (2018) wrote that validity requires four tests, construct, internal and external validity, and reliability.

Internal validity is equivalent to credibility for qualitative research (Bleiker et al., 2019). Cypress (2017) indicated that credibility is an accurate and trustworthy representation of the lived experiences of participants. The credibility test applies to the stage when case-study researchers analyses results (Yin, 2018). Credibility increase with triangulation and member checking (FitzPatrick, 2019). Cypress (2017) indicates that the researchers' effort and ability increase credibility.

Credibility is confirmed assuring quality of literature research, interview protocols, themes identification and coding, the process to simplify items (Buus & Perron, 2019). Research questions ensure credibility if answer the original question (Bleiker et al., 2019). To accomplish that, researchers must collect enough data to support their results and conclusions and must perform a systematic, logical, and well-supported analysis (Bleiker et al., 2019).

Cypress (2017) indicated that researchers ensure credibility with continuous engagement, consistent and continuous participant observations on the phenomenon context. The former helps researchers to minimize deviation and ensure objective crosschecking during the triangulation stage (Cypress, 2017). Member checking is valid if researchers review the collected data, and its interpretation is in line with the real participants' meaning (Cypress, 2017). Keeping daily notes and introspections during the research increase credibility (Cypress, 2017). I kept annotations about my reflexive thinking and introspections during the interviews and used them during the analysis

stage. Also, participants reviewed interview transcripts to ensure they reflected their answers, explanation, and descriptions.

Eternal validity applies to qualitative studies; the analogous term used for qualitative studies is transferability (Bleiker et al., 2019). The objective of the transferability test is for others to evaluate the use of the study results in other research studies (Bleiker et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) indicated that the research question design influences the strategies selected to ensure transferability. To address that, Yin recommended researchers ensure they ask research questions seeking generalizations, and descriptive case studies use *How* questions seeking for the how of a situation, and *What* questions help researchers to document social trends.

Researchers could reach study transferability using purposive sampling (Cypress, 2017). Also, using robust data with an extensive range of information and an in-depth description of participants' experiences (Cypress, 2017). Cypress also indicated that having available the transcripts reviewed by a professional transcriber for future review increase transferability. I made my best effort to document the analysis process; the research question formulated includes how and what questions to understand situations and to record participants' strategies. For this study, purposely sampling was adequate to increase transferability.

One of the four criteria to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative studies is confirmability (Johnson, Adkins, & Chauvin, n.d.). Researchers demonstrate confirmability by demonstrating and communicating that information was collected from research participants, and results are objective. To accomplish confirmability, I ensured

data saturation and ethical research design, triangulation, interview transcripts, and member checking. For member checking, the goal was to review with the research participants the analysis of all the information collected from them and public documents.

The study validation process includes confirmation of data saturation (FitzPatrick, 2019). Researchers reach data saturation when newly collected data does not add new information or information that adds value to the analysis of the study topic (FitzPatrick,2019). For FitzPatrick (2019), researchers do not reach data saturation when valid conclusions are not complete, and for Johnson, Adkins, and Chauvin (2019), when reporting results still add value to the field and further research. For this study, I was transparent in my study and confirmed that no new information was available before the analysis of the collected data started.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included the purpose statement for my research topic. The purpose of this qualitative study was the exploration of strategies SB managers use to achieve outstanding OBP. Also included is my role as a researcher and supports how I reduced bias when collecting data from participants. With the qualitative method and multi-case study design, the population consisted of SBs that received the MBNQA between the years 2007 and 2018 and existed longer than 5-years. The sample consisted of a manager from six companies who participated in the MBNQA application process, has worked at least 2-years for their companies, works in any business high managerial position, and has a deep understanding of their business. Section 2 also contains information about the

research characteristics such as design and methodology, population sampling, and ethical research.

Section 2 also included data collection instruments, data organization techniques, and data analysis. Included are study validity and reliability. Of 110 articles reviewed and analyzed, 88% were peer-reviewed, and 90% were published since October 2015. I corroborated that the literature used was peer-reviewed and within date using Ulrich's Periodical Directory, using filters while searching for information to select only peer-reviewed articles published in and after 2016. Data collection from participants took place after the IRB approved the proposal. The section also includes information about my compromise to perform ethical research and ensure the reliability and validity of the research and its results.

Section 3 refers to the application to the professional practice and implications for change. In this section and after the data collection and analysis stage, I present the research finding, how the results apply to professional practice, the implication for social change, and included some recommendations for future actions. This section also includes my reflections and conclusions.

Section 3: Results

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies SB managers used to achieve OBP. The sources for the collected data include (a) interviewing a manager of each of the six SB participants, (b) the companies' public 5-year business analysis reports used to apply to the MBNQA, (c) interview transcript when applicable, and (d) member checking.

Findings revealed that MBNQA winners used three main strategies (themes). First, to think and act with a system approach to achieve OBP. That means that when managers set strategies, they should have the goal of realizing their business mission, which is the starting point in any decision to improve OBP. The second theme was planning. Interview respondents considered planning critical for SB managers to set efficient strategies. Planning with a focus on the realization of the business mission involves setting strategies to improve performance on four main business components: (a) engagement, (b) processes, (c) risk, and (d) technology. The third major theme identified was improvement. Respondents indicated that SB managers with a willingness to succeed in the operationalization of their business plans regularly should include strategies to improve three major business elements: (a) communication, (b) innovation, (c) measurement, (d) suppliers, and (e) the unexpected element, teams.

This section also confirms the consistency of findings with the GST and the knowledge base. After presenting my findings and a summary, this section includes the application of the finding to professional practice and their implication for positive social

change. At the end of this section, included are some recommendations for action and future research.

Presentation of Findings

This research study answered the overarching question: What effective strategies do SB managers use to achieve OBP? The conceptual framework was the GST, introduced by Von Bertalanffy in 1949. Under GST, managers apply knowledge, experience, and social maturity holistically and simultaneously. To collect data for this study, I sent an invitation to 11 SB managers, who have operated their business for more than 2-years, in different industries across the United States. SBs managers invited to participate in this research won the MBNQA between 2007 and 2018. Their companies had between 200 and 400 employees. Those managers have worked in their business for more than 2-years, have a deep understanding of their business, and manage their business applying a holistic approach.

By the time the Walden IRB approved this study, the world was affected by the pandemic COVID-19, which forced some of the SBs located in the United States to stop operations either permanently or temporarily. Some of the 11 managers invited to participate in this study needed to reinvent the way they operate their businesses, trying to continue getting some income. However, others needed to close permanently or were acquired by a competitor. Of the six candidates invited in the first group, one accepted a Skype interview, two agreed to answer the interview questions by email, one candidate declined my invitation, and two did not respond.

Responding to this requirement, Walden IRB approved the use of multiple formats to collect data for this study, which included email, phone calls, and Skype interviews. Ten candidates, including two candidates from the initial group, received a second email with the revised consent form. In total, four participants interacted with me and responded to the research and follow-up questions by email, and two participants attended an audio-recorded interview. The former participants received and approved the interview transcript. Those who responded to email interviews received an email with additional questions to clarify or to complement their answers to the interview questions. For the member checking purpose, the six participants received an e-mail with the interpretation I did of their responses included in this study findings.

For this qualitative data analysis, I included the answers from six SB managers who agreed to participate, their interview transcript review when applicable, their companies' 5-year business analysis reports, and findings of member checking. With a thematic analytic approach, using NVivo and Microsoft Excel, 12 principal codes emerged from the analysis of the participant's responses. The 12 codes emerged from the first participant's (R1) answers. Then, I compared those codes with the codes that emerged from the other participants' responses. Interviews continued until no new codes or new relevant information emerged. In total, six participants provided answers to the research questions for this study. Figure 3 shows those 12 codes and how the respondents confirmed or did not confirm the codes that emerged from R1's responses. Figure 3 is from the general project created in NVivo and tailored using Microsoft Office.
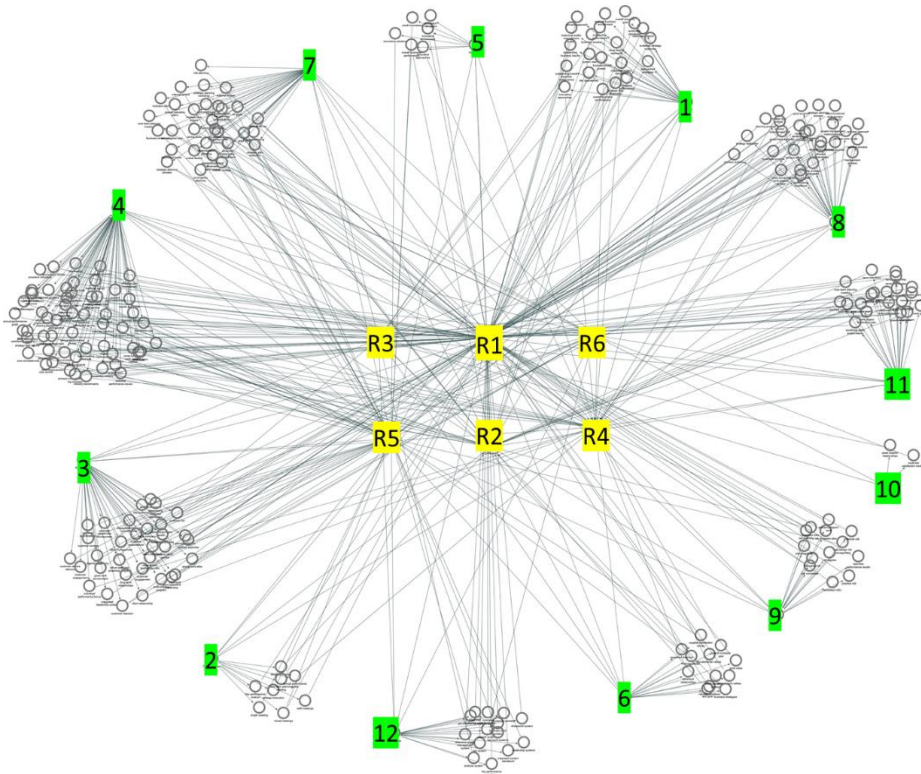
Figure 3. Codes and respondents. Green numbers represent the 12 principal codes, and yellow numbers represent the six study participants. The name of each principal code is in Table 3, below. Lines are connecting sub-codes and principal codes with respondents, and sub-codes with each primary code. Principal codes and some sub-codes are related to more than one participant.

To ensure saturation, the criteria for stopping data collection were, first, to have each code supported by at least two participants and, secondly, to have no new relevant codes or information added by a new participant. Because R6 did not add either new or relevant information, I reached data saturation, and no additional interviews were required. Table 3 shows a summary of the principal codes that emerged from the data collected.

Table 3

*Primary Codes from Interview Respondents*

No.	Main codes/ Respondent (R#)	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6
1	Communication	X	X		X	X	X
2	Engagement	X	X	X	X	X	X
3	Improvement	X	X	X	X	X	X
4	Innovation	X		X		X	X
5	Mission	X	X	X	X	X	X
6	Planning	X	X	X	X	X	X
7	Process	X		X	X	X	X
8	Risk	X	X	X	X	X	X
9	Suppliers			X		X	
10	System Approach	X	X	X	X	X	X
11	Teams	X	X	X	X	X	X
12	Technology	X	X	X	X	X	

I ensured data triangulation using six cases to answer 10 semistructured interview questions, member checking, and the 5-year performance reports for each company. From the analysis, three major themes emerged to answer the overarching research question: (a) approach, (b) planning, and (c) improvement. Those themes include some of the principal codes as minor themes, or in some cases, as secondary themes.

A minor theme is one that supports the major theme, and a secondary theme supports the minor theme. To support a minor theme, included are only the most relevant secondary codes. Figure 4, which is a plot extracted from the NVivo project and tailored using Microsoft Office, shows the major, minor, and secondary themes. In yellow boxes are major themes with their assigned number. The dashed red lines connect major and minor themes. Green filled circles represent the primary codes classified as minor

themes. The small noncolored bubbles are original codes classified as secondary themes.

A solid gray line connects both minor themes and secondary themes.
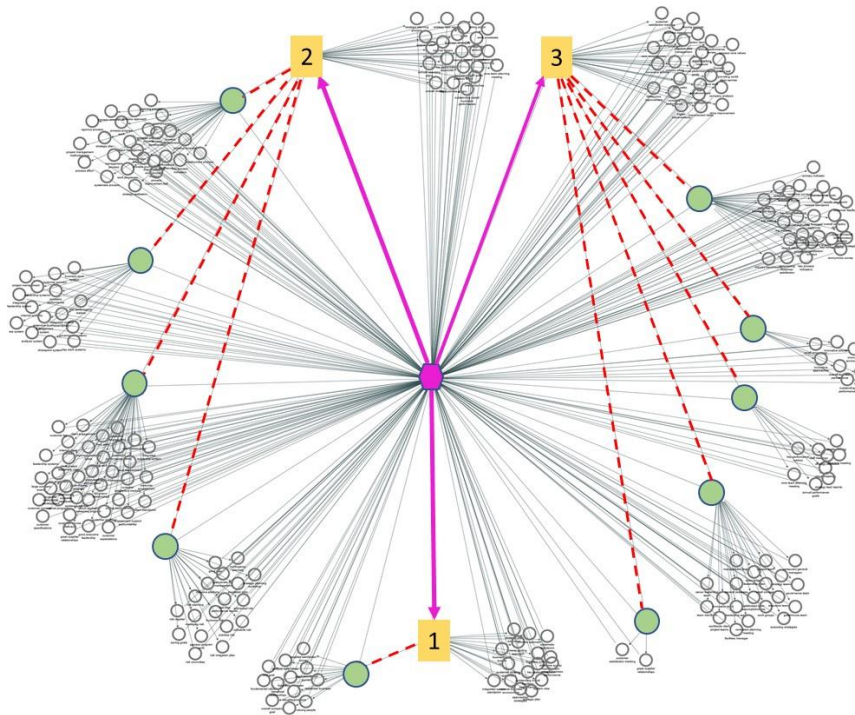
Figure 4. Major themes, NVivo plot. Yellow boxes have de theme number, and each pink arrow connects the theme with the source codes (pink bubble). Green circles indicate minor themes, connected with a dashed red color line to the corresponding major theme. Theme 1, System approach, has one minor theme. Theme 2, Planning, has four minor themes. Theme 3, Improvement, has four supporting minor themes.

The three major themes, nine of the 10 minor themes, and all the secondary themes ware expected as per the knowledge base of this study. The minor theme teams was unexpected. The knowledge base of this research included teamwork as an important element to improve OBP. For the participants of this research, having specialized teams was a strategic element to improve OBP. Figure 5 shows the major and minor themes. The minor theme in the yellow box was unexpected.
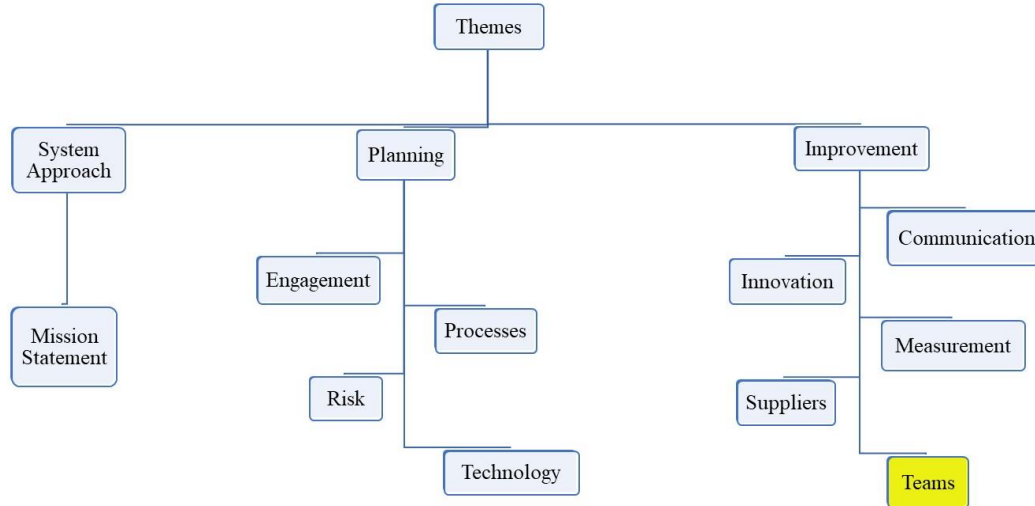
Figure 5. Major and minor themes. Major and minor themes identified from principal codes. Teams, in a yellow box, was an unexpected theme.

Following, the analysis of themes identified. At the beginning of each major theme included is new supporting literature. Then, the organization of the discussion of each minor theme is as follows. First, I include new literature supporting the participants' responses, and second, a new paragraph includes the analysis of additional documents regarding the minor theme. Finally, I include literature reviewed in the knowledge base for this study that supports either the minor theme or the secondary theme when apply. Included at the end of each major theme is how that major theme supports the GST, the conceptual framework for this study. Companies that participated in this study operate in different industries. They applied the GST approach to evaluate and improve their OBP in 5-years. By receiving the MBNQA, they demonstrated that their strategies were effective and must include the major themes identified.

Major Themes

Theme 1: System approach. It is also known as a systems view or a holistic

approach. Managers using a holistic approach recognize the interconnection and

interrelation among entities, equipment, processes, and those other business environments

(Karanikas et al., 2020) and address the increasing complexity and change in their

business (Shaked & Schechter, 2020). The six participants were evidence of what those

authors stated. The six participants also supported Simonovic's (2020) findings, who

stated that the system approach helps managers to organize business information to

identify what is relevant for their decision-making process improvement. Table 4 shows

the selected answers from participants.

Table 4

Interviewee's System Approach Statements

Respondent (R#)	Answer
R1	"We certainly run our business as a system. Understand your business in a system and how it is integrated across the organization."
R2	"System-view is one of the strategies used to achieve OBP."
R3	"Using a system approach, we focus on the most important things."
R4	"A holistic view is critical to our success, and we talk about it in everything we do."
R5	"Anything that helps us to improve our performance is captured in a meaningful way."
R6	"Looking at inputs from several sources …keeping in mind our mission."

Karanikas et al. (2020) noted that the context to use systems thinking and systems approach to managing SBs is important to improve performance. These authors supported the responses of the managers interviewed, all of whom understand that they need to see the parts of a whole to improve performance. The following paragraphs include how the business mission supports strategies with an integrative approach.

Mission. Having a mission statement is critical for OBP. Pernica and Tyll (2018) noted that a mission statement is a strategic element to the company's stakeholders because it contains stakeholders' purpose, goals, and competitive advantage offered to their customers. That is similar to the answer provided by R1, who said that their business mission is "the guiding light and the north star for our company, it is the goal of any strategy, and we are obsessed with consistently operating per our mission." Bayrak (2020) wrote, the mission statement describes the most important initiatives to be achieved or attained by its decision-makers, serves as a guide for SBs' stakeholders. Supporting that, the business mission for R2 and R5 is the start point to "decide what is important." R3, R4, and R5 agreed that their mission is the start point to set strategies.

Grimes, Williams, and Zhao (2020) noted that a mission statement reflects multiple values inside and outside the organization, and Varendh-Mansson, Wry, and Szafarz (2020) that the mission statement includes several approaches to balance and integrate different goals. That is similar to the answers provided by R2, R5, and R6. R2 said that the business mission is their "key business driver," whereas R5 stated that "everything aligns with the mission," and the first question R6 asks to make important decisions is "what do our mission say?" Although participants in this study operate in

different industries, all of them ascertained the business mission is the focal point to set

strategies for OBP improvement.

Another source of information was the business performance reports. From those

reports, findings showed that the term *system approach* was present 544 times, and the

word *mission* under the mission statement context appeared 136 times. Of the 544 times,

the term *system approach* was used, 52.76% appeared in R5 and R6 reports. Of the 136

times, the word *mission* was included in the context of a mission statement, 49.27%

appeared in R2 and R6 reports. Table 5 shows a summary of these findings.

Table 5

System Approach and Mission Statement

Respondent (R#)	System count in performance reports	%	Mission count in performance reports	%
R1	63	11.58	24	17.65
R2	58	10.66	35	25.74
R3	67	12.32	21	15.44
R4	69	12.68	19	13.97
R5	159	29.23	5	3.68
R6	128	23.53	32	23.53
Total	544	100.00	136	100.00

Among the words used by participants on their business mission statements are

associates, community, cooperation, and customers. Also, delight, deliver, employees,

guarantee, guest, high, and human. They also included the words industry, innovation,

leadership, management, and passion. Their mission statements also included the words

people, performance, practices, processes, products, professionalism, profitability, and

results. Other words included are service, strategies, solutions, sustainability, technologies, transform, and value.

Findings on Theme 1 revealed that SB managers who apply the GST could improve OBP having a systematic approach and using their mission statement to integrate the company purpose and as the start point of any decision-making process. That is in line with the knowledge base for this research. Table 6 summarizes the supporting literature used in section two regarding a business mission statement. Responses and documents analyzed from the six participants confirmed the importance of using mission statements as an effective strategy to improve OBP.

Table 6

Knowledge Base: Mission Statement

Author	Statement
Ross and Wade, 2015	One of the requirements a business must comply to be considered as a system is to have a mission
Esi, 2016	A company's mission statement influences long-term goals and the strategic business plan. The mission statement is a tool to encourage SB manages to find strategies to improve OBP
Göbel et al., 2017	SB managers reflect the present status of the business on the mission statement and use it as a guiding and integrative element.
Gavric et al., 2018	SB's identity indicates the direction of actions, and business cohesion is defined and articulated based on the SB mission statement

In line with the GST, Kapp, Simoes, DeBiasi, and Kravet (2017) stated that SB managers using an integrative approach could ensure the identification of effective strategies to operate their business and to achieve outstanding OBP. SB managers who participated in this study used their business mission as the starting and ending point to define their business purpose and to set effective strategies to realize it. Business sub-systems, such as organization planning, appropriate technology, and effective internal and external system interaction management, compose the whole system (McDonald, 2017).

Theme 2: Planning Results from this research showed that planning is a holistic strategy to improve business OBP. Planning should be part of standard managerial approaches (George, Walker, & Monster, 2019). Findings also showed that to set effective strategies, theme planning should include: (a) engagement, (b) processes, (c) risk, and (d) technology.

R2 stated that during the planning processes, managers have an integrative view of their business. That statement is the evidence of what Church, Lu, Ranjan, Reimer, and Prokopy (2020), who wrote that systems thinking entails recognizing interconnections and long-term thinking. Grimes et al. (2019) wrote that SBs manager should include multiple stakeholders, disciplines, and objectives in their planning processes. In line with that, R1's company set processes to promote performance excellence; they use a planning process to "be completely integrated across the functions of the organization." And R3 "focuses on planning, execution, and communication applying an integrative view of the business."

To enhance OBP effectiveness, SB managers must have a plan to manage internal and external business factors, formulate business goals, and to identify strategies (George et al., 2019). The meaning of that is, SBs managers planning process focus is to successfully achieve their business goals (George et al., 2019). The evidence of that is on R4 and R5 answers. R4 noted that during the planning stage, they identify opportunities to improve OBP, which is similar to the answers provided by R5, "We look at what is working again, what is not working, is the market changing, what is our employee base looks like?" That respondent also looks at the results of the turnover rate and employee and customer satisfaction levels. R5 also stated, "We come up with the bigger plan, and we decide the big rock goals, and we decide what of the big rock goal we need to address in the coming year."

R3 noted that planning is a process "to increase our ability to execute our mission statement," supporting the results reported by Bag, Wood, Xu, Dhamija, and Kayikci (2020). Bag et al. reported that synchronizing planning and operational activities are critical to enhancing OBP. In line with that, R6 said that "we look at the goals we set forth …. and inputs from other stakeholders." Having a planning process is one of the strategies used by this study participants to improve the OBP. The elements SB managers interviewed said are important when planning the OBP improvement include engagement, processes, risks, and the use of technology.

Engagement. Multiple studies showed the importance of managing stakeholders on the OBP enhancement process. Grimes et al. (2019) noted that SBs should create value for those groups of stakeholders who impact their OBP the most. This element

includes the engagement of customers, employees, and communities. The strategy each respondent uses to engage their stakeholders is different.

Employees engagement. Employees are essential elements for this research study participants' OBP planning process. R1 said, their workforce is "our most important asset. We tried to engage the heart of our workforce by making the process Journey fun for the organization." Arubayi, Eromafuru, and Egbule (2020) wrote that SB managers should focus on improving their human resources development practices to enhance their individual employees' performance. That is similar to what R1 said. The company's success depends on the commitment and diligence of its workforce.

R4, R5, and R6 responses also evidenced that. For R4, employee's engagement starts with setting their goals and continues with rewarding their improvement and recognizing their contribution to "the growth and profit of the firm." Whereas for R5, "We constantly keep our employees motivated by giving financial incentives and recognition." They also highlight employees on what impact they did. R5 also considered their "workforce performance impacts the entire company." R6 indicated they engage their employees with a profit-sharing program and with the team-oriented work culture.

Some authors support the idea that strategies to engage employees include employee development programs. Mulolli, Boskovska, and Islami's (2020) results showed that businesses' competitive advantage is a result of the decision SB managers make to invest in human resources development. Those results are similar to what the participants' companies do. R1 stated that "keeping an engaged and motivated workforce is essential for the success of our business." And R2 noted, "we focus on intrinsic

motivation as well as recognition and rewards," which is similar to what R1's company does. They celebrate team accomplishment regularly during large Company events and meetings.

Employee development could impact their engagement and motivation. In addition to training on technical matters, communicating the company's mission and values is important for business success. Training programs also contribute to improving employees' motivation (Mulolli et al., 2020), impacting OBP positively (Cheah, Amran, & Yahya, 2019), which is similar to the R3 response, who said that developing employees in line with the business values and culture, improve engagement levels. R1's company "improves employees' productivity providing training during their commutes and with formal programs." R5 stated, "the motivation happens with employees' complete understanding of our principals, our mission, and our path …We provide them the tools to do their jobs and an open-door policy to voice any concerns."

That means that among others, alignment and effective communication are also important factors to gain employees' engagement. The analysis of their business performance reports in terms of employee engagement showed that the identification of strategies to generate engagement in the workforce requires five elements. Those elements are: (a) Alignment, (b) drivers, (c) skills improvement, (d) recognition and rewards, and (e) assessment. Table 7 to Table 11 summarizes each of those elements.

Table 7

Employees Engagement: Alignment

Respondent's report (R#)	Reported
R1	Aligns performance and development, drivers to measure engagement, and their organizational behavior with their business mission.
R2	Align their company's mission, vision, and values to exceed customer expectations.
R3	Alignment to the company's culture values and their industry starts with the hiring process, performance reviews, and communication practices.
R4	Alignment comes from the company's culture, which gains employees engagement by promoting high- performance work, communicating performance expectations, and using the best communication practices.
R5	Aligns workforce capability and capacity with the company's culture and the current and future business goals for a long-term sustainability
R6	The employment process is aligned to their organizational culture hiring capable people

Table 8

Employees Engagement: Drivers

Respondent's report (R#)	Reported
R1	Engagement drivers are organizational behavior consistent with their mission, communication practices, employee's skills improvement, development, and support
R2	Factors for workforce engagement and satisfaction determined through industry and nonindustry benchmarking
R3	Key engagement factors, motivation and hygiene factors,
R4	Surveys help identify engagement drivers. The importance of each factor may vary.
R5	Determine engagement drivers through various communication methods.
R6	Identify drivers for engagement through annual surveys, safety statistics, leading/lagging safety indicators, retention rates, and referral programs.

Table 9

Employees Engagement: Skills Improvement

Respondent's report (R#)	Reported
R1	Through coaching, support from colleagues and CEOs, formal and on the job training.
R2	Using a best-in-class selection program, during onboarding, with training, coaching practices, support from team members.
R3	Through formal education, training, coaching, mentoring, and work-related experiences.
R4	Promoting the sharing of skills, knowledge, and diverse ideas through the company's structure, employee training, standing teams, coaching, and mentoring.
R5	Continuous training through events and communication methods. Specific job-related training, supervisors and employees review the performance development plan to identify skills improvement needs.
R6	A predictable and clear process for advancement opportunities. Training using the Six Disciplines model, tools, and use of the software

Table 10

Employees Engagement: Recognition, Rewards, Incentives (RRI)

Respondent's report (R#)	Reported
R1	Feedback from clients is celebrated publicly and in personal ways.
R2	Recognize outstanding performance through awards, compensation, promotion, and the monthly newsletter, and the manager bonus program.
R3	Based on the annual performance evaluation, team attitude, job independently, adaptability, innovation, safety, reliability, and attendance of employees are recognized and rewarded. Incentives include the profit-sharing process.
R4	Using the employee's performance evaluation. Reinforce a strong client and business focus through annual recognition and monetary rewards.
R5	Using annual salary surveys ensures that the base compensation ranges are aligned with the geographic market for each position. Also, employee feedback or business needs to help to develop the rewards package
R6	Uses the salary progression system is designed to reward performance that meets expectations, results in verbal recognition, and promotional opportunities.

Table 11

Employees Engagement: Assessment

Respondent's report (R#)	Reported
R1	Engagement Index rating is determined based on alignment with the company's mission.
R2	Position scorecards and coaching charts, Game Film Consultants.
R3	The workforce needs evaluated in surveys and using segmented data.
R4	Evaluate and improve approaches to determining workforce satisfaction annually.
R5	Survey program
R6	Through feedback from surveys, project management systems, and evaluation forms following training.

Although the respondents' companies are operating in different industries, all of them used the GST approach to evaluate and improve their OBP. They received the MBNQA, which demonstrated that their strategies were effective. As shown in Tables 7 through 11, the research participants' company reported different needs, uses different tools, and different strategies to gain employees' engagement, which are in line with the participants' interview responses.

Interviewees' responses and business performance reports analyzed are consistent with the knowledge base for this research, the following authors cited in the knowledge base. They supported employee engagement as a strategy for outstanding OBP. Gupta

and Sharma (2016) and Kumar and Pansari (2016) agreed that employees are critical

factors to improve OBP. Motivation, teamwork, support to employees, and commitment

could help SB managers improve OBP (Lodgaard et al., 2016). Improving employee

engagement could help SB managers to increase a company's performance (Maurya &

Agarwal, 2018). Respondents indicated that SB managers should gain not only their

employees' engagement but also their customers.

   Customer engagement. Several authors indicated that customer engagement

drives OBP. Hazée, Van Vaerenbergh, Delcourt, and Kabadayi (2020) wrote that

organizations should be aware of the essential roles of customers' trust. SB managers

should make accurate, informed decisions based on customer insights (Hazée et al.,

2020). In the same way, for Al-Damen (2017), SBs depend on their customers, which

need to be known to exceed their expectations. The evaluation of interviewees' answers

showed similar results, the importance of including customer engagement when SBs are

planning for business performance improvement. R1 said that "customer satisfaction is

essential for sustainment of our business," and R5 that knowing their customers is vital to

gain their loyalty. "Our customers impact our business …If we lose a customer, it is a big

one for us. The retention of customers for us is very critical."

   Faltejskova, Dvorakova, and Hotovcova (2016) said that customer satisfaction is

a reaction to a perceived stimulus. Evidence of that is on what R1, R2, and R6 said. R1

commented, "customer retention is a big indicator of customer loyalty, customer

engagement happens when delivering good customer services, and on an ongoing basis, a

motivated workforce ensures high customer satisfaction." Also, R2 and R6 added that

they "rely on their employees' direct relationship with customers, to have them engaged and gain their loyalty." Similarly, R6 commented, "We use our internal systems to train our operators to know the customer expectations," whereas R5 said, "the value-added services are important… is a huge win for our customers."

To ensure companies develop their purpose, Faltejskova et al. (2016) noted that SB managers could react to customers' requirements analyzing their engagement level. That is what R3 and R5's company does. R3 said they take care of its customers, examining customer satisfaction and loyalty. And R5 " uses a variety of approaches to be listening to, interact with, and observe customers ...involve opportunities for two-way feedback." That is also similar to what R4 said they do. They ask their customers to rate them in several competencies, which help them take corrective action to keep customers engaged and gain their loyalty. In line with that, R3 added, "when adverse trends appear …implement solutions. If there is an issue, our teams quickly respond and make it right with the end goal of winning the guest over." R2 said their teams manage customer satisfaction and loyalty at each business location in line with the business mission statement.

From business performance reports, each respondent's company used different ways to engage customers. Among the strategies they used to engage customers are to maintain the relationship with the critical customer by working in the customer's office, having weekly short meetings, ensuring customers' excellent experiences, and using performance improvement processes to improve their customer satisfaction culture. Also included is meeting and exceeding customers' demands, including their customers' social

causes. Another strategy is to identify opportunities for new products and services, improve communication mechanisms, provide clients access to the information that impacts their planning activities. Workforce management and training is also a strategy used to meet client expectations as well as focus their business core competencies to their customer satisfaction.

Findings revealed that interviewee answers and companies' performance analysis reports are consistent with the knowledge base for this study. The following authors, from this research knowledge base, supported customer engagement as an element that SB managers should consider during their planning processes. Customer satisfaction, quality of services provided, and customer loyalty related directly in two ways, said Ngo and Nguyen (2016). Appelbaum et al. (2017) added that managing customer satisfaction and loyalty could contribute to improving OBP. Customer satisfaction depends on service quality, customer perceptions of quality and value, customer service, access to information, and understanding of customers and their perception of quality (Appelbaum et al., 2017; Hult et al., 2017; Rajendran & Suresh, 2017; Shaefer, 2017). Respondents indicated that SB managers should gain not only their employees' and customers' engagement but also their related communities.

Community engagement. Stakeholders include communities that the business activities could influence. Cheah et al. (2019) showed that business planning for external support is critical for enterprises' performance. During the planning process, R5 indicated they include community support as a component to improve OBP. R5 added they encourage employees to support professional, local, and nonprofit communities. They

also participate in their community "through charities, donations, being part of a Board, having inclusion programs, and sponsoring and hosting recruiting sessions at schools." R5 stated that "SB needs to focus on diversity and inclusion of disabilities."

The business performance reports analysis revealed that to enhance OBP using the GST, companies must support related communities. Companies participating in this project reported they are good neighbors through the implementation of projects to support their key communities. Those key communities include industry, local communities, and causes and organizations with a personal connection. Companies also reported that they motivate their suppliers and employees to support their communities. Findings revealed that the key stakeholders contributing to shareholders achieve their business mission are employees, customers, and communities.

From the evaluation, both interview responses and the performance companies' report are consistent with what was documented by the authors included in the knowledge base of this study. McGrath and Whitty (2017) indicated that stakeholders are (a) investing stakeholders (control the business activity), (b) primary stakeholders (contribute business activities continuity - employees), (c) secondary stakeholders (support business activities - providers), and (d) customers (receive and use the services or products offered). Aryanasl et al. (2017) stated that SB managers considering stakeholders, among other elements, to ensure successful businesses.

Haggege et al. (2017) indicated SBs with high-performance include in their plan (a) customer engagement, which consists of the customer cost, loyalty and commitment, and user-driven innovation. Some of the other authors supporting community

engagement are Baumgartner & Rauter (2016) and Lloret (2016). They agreed that helping to address community and adverse environmental situations could help SBs to have an effective plan to enhance OBP aligned to the business models, gaining competitive advantage.

Contributing to improving the community's performance, SB managers could enhance OBP (D'Agostini et al., 2017; Esmaeel et al., 2018; Leonideu et al., 2017; Martinez-Martinez et al., 2019). To help in addressing the specific needs of a community, SBs could offer the products, support, and services they need (Jackson & Jackson, 2016). Communities, as defined by R5, are industry, local communities, and causes and organizations with a personal connection. I want to recall the last two words to close this discussion, SBs managers should engage any person who is in connection with their business in any degree, level, or environment of their business to identify strategies to improve OBP. Also, those strategies must be oriented to realize their business mission statement efficiently.

After all, I could say that SB managers must consider all stakeholders who have a direct or indirect relationship with their business. A mission statement is a guiding statement for managers to set plans. I identified that no business, micro, small, medium, or large could achieve an outstanding OBP if the community, one of the stakeholders, is not engaged. To efficiently implement the strategy planning, in addition to stakeholders' engagement, participants indicated the need to identify meaningful processes.

Processes. With processes, with a focus on the OBP improvement and to realize SB's mission statement, companies support daily operations. Simeunović, Tomašević,

Slović, & Stojanović (2020) noted that for the continuity of the system or SB

performance, the processes management is critical. That is what R3's company does.

They identify processes to "support the strategies. We execute processes to monitor the

marketplace for changes and disruptions. Continuous improvement is making the process

used to improve performance." And R5 identified meaningful processes for "anything we

do. Using processes, we capture anything that helps us improve our performance." In line

with that, R1said

> We use processes to provide a systematic and integrated business work system.
>
> We completely endorse the process and requirements to help provide the structure
>
> and discipline necessary to promote performance excellence. Also, the process
>
> core values align with the company's values and guiding principle. Processes are
>
> an essential piece of our recent success.

Having processes as a strategy to improve OBP have some requirements, as

indicated by Glova and Mrázková (2018). Those authors stated that well-organized

processes add value to the OBP strategy. R4 confirmed that statement, they "have a

robust planning process that includes the key focus areas. Our deployment process helps

us for well plan execution." Another evidence found that confirms those authors is the

answers provided by R5 and R6. R5'company operationalized its mission statement "and

deployed to stakeholders through the development and execution of the planning

process." The R6's process for planning includes "looking at inputs from several sources

and looking at where we believe our business is going and keeping in mind our

Mission… and try to see how we can position ourselves to take advantage of future

opportunities." Respondents indicated that other processes could effectively help to improve OBP.

Moeldner, Garza-Reyes, and Kumar (2020) noted that process innovation improves OBP. Supporting that, R5 said, "You never know what may happen. We have processes in place because of that. We are constantly cross-training and updating processes." R1's responses showed they have an integrative process in place, which includes a process: approach, deployment, learning, and integration. R1 said, "It is an effective cross-functional way of looking at a process from a systematic standpoint. The metrics management process is very comprehensive and systematic. It is performed at all management levels." R5 also adopted an integrative process as follow:

> We adopted a six-step process for planning OBP achievement, provides a
> framework for accountability, and ensure transparency. We review external
> factors, like the market, and internal factors, like key work systems and workforce
> capacity. The COVID-19 pandemic emergence was a rapid event. We were able
> to quickly pick up all our staff and work from home because of our infrastructure
> and the processes in place.

The evaluation of each company's performance report resulted in the identification of processes and the number of processes each company uses. Figure 6 shows the number of processes reported by each company used as a strategy to operate their business efficiently. R1, R4, R6, and R5 have a similar number of processes, while R2 and R3 need almost double of those processes. Among the processes used by the

participant's companies, the most common are related to customers, employees,

improvement, management, performance, planning, sales, work, and risk.
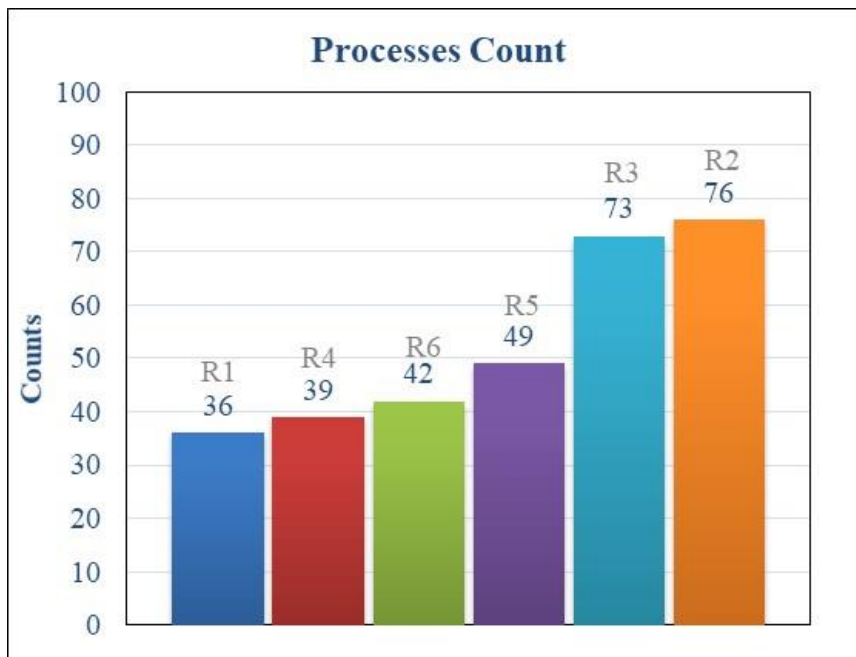
Figure 6. Processes. The number of processes documented in each company's performance report. The company's performance report for R1, R 4, R5, R6 contains between 36 and 49 procedures to support their company's operations. R2 and R3 company's report showed they require 75 average processes to support their activities.

The interview responses and the analysis of the companies' reports are consistent

with the knowledge base. Thompson and Blazey (2017) noted that SB managers should

orient their business' strategy to increase efficiency in their business processes. The static

and mechanistic business environment is a system of relationships, processes, and

patterns that accelerate change in the business environment (Vargo et al., 2017).

Ceptureanu et al. (2017) supported what Appelbaum et al. concluded; successful change

processes in operating systems depend on the employees' knowledge and their

motivation, which improves with formal and on-the-job training. Aryanasl et al. (2017) stated that for successful businesses, SB managers must consider processes improvement.

Haggege et al. (2017) noted that static drives include internal processes which consist of time and cost-efficiency and reducing tie to market. Management of business process efficiency is critical for the process of identifying strategies for business continuity (Esmaeel et al., 2018). Some SB managers do not see an association between business performance with improving business processes more than to control product quality or to control costs (Kim et al., 2017).

From responses, documents, new literature, and the knowledge base, I could say that the industry, market, or business size are not relevant to identify efficient strategies to improve the SBs' OBP. The main thing I could conclude is that SBs managers who desire OBP enhancement should include meaningful processes as a strategy. They must consider their businesses as systems with active elements interacting among them. Also, the selection of the processes must consider the business requirements and the SB's mission statement. In addition to people's engagement and process identification, interviewees used risk management as an element to improve their planning strategy.

Risks. Multiple studies included risk management as an important factor for business success. SBs uncertainty increases businesses' exit rates (Ghosal & Ye, 2019). Hence, auditing practices could help SB managers understand the causes of low business performing and potential business failure (Munoz-Izquierdo, Segovia-Vargas, Camacho-Miñano, & Pascual-Ezama, 2019). Denney (2020) said that identification, assessment, and response to uncertainties is the objective of risk management strategies. Findings

revealed that respondents provided evidence to support the results documented by those authors.

To identify risks R1, R2, and R3 "monitor," "stay on top of, "have a pulse on" the industry/market. The strategy R5's company uses to identify risks is having continuous communication with their suppliers, vendors, and clients. R1 said, "We addressed risk through having a risk register and risk mitigation plan." To assess risk and uncertainties, R3 "execute processes to monitor the marketplace changes and disruptions," and R4 considers business risk and uncertainty "during our strategic planning process," and include actions their plan, whereas R6 noted that risk management includes "understand through cooperation… and looking at the future." The active interaction of the components influencing SBs produces complex systems that could increase business uncertainty and risks (Belov & Novikov, 2017). Ibiwoye, Mojekwu, and Dansy (2020) found that SBs managers should apply risk management practices to ensure business continuity. That is one of the strategies used by R1's company. R1 said, "We constantly review what is coming and what the impact is going to be, to be better prepared, and to make sure that business continuity is there."

Consistent with that, R2, R3, and R5 use strategies to address risks. R2 uses "a SWOT analysis," and R3 uses a "measurement and analysis system" to identify "the most important things to ensure performance meets or exceeds." Risk management for R5 is part of their planning sessions, "with the aid of processes, with the aid of agility, and with the aid of inclusive planning, we can assess risks and be able to achieve our overall organization performance." Risk management helped interviewees to address the

COVID19 pandemic effects on SBs overall performance. R1 said they "quickly turned our focus to managing our business virtually" They focus their efforts on getting people over the initial choke about that emergence. "We applied our core competency to successfully sustain our revenues and profits since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic." R2 said they "stayed on top of the industry and nonindustry news and trend, which helped us to manage the COVID-19 situation." Whereas R3 indicated, "organizational agility contributed to our ability to respond to the pandemic and prevent it from negatively impacting our business, also, to provide for contingency planning and emergency preparedness."

To address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, R4 focused on how their workforce "was going to work from home." Also, they monitored areas "to identify signs of " a potential pandemic impact and tracked "the touchpoints with their strategic and key account clients." Consistently, R5 and R6 responses to COVID-19 management indicated they used their experience, current processes, and available resources. R5 said, "this event COVID-19 was rapid; we were able to quickly pick up all our staff and work from home because of our infrastructure and the processes in place." They learned from previous experiences where the entire city was shut down for weeks. Similarly, R6 said, "the COVID pandemic has made us try to utilize best our resources, human and equipment, to produce our varied product offerings and lower costs." R1 added something remarkable, "chooses to turn down business rather than poor-risk performance or employee behavior inconsistent with our fundamental values."

After the analysis of the 5-years of business performance analysis reports reported by each company, findings revealed they consider risk as a critical element for business continuity and high-performance levels. Figure 7 shows the count of threats and mitigations strategies identified in the business analysis performance report per company. Among others, the risks identified are those risks related to employees, community, customers, processes, products, contracts, cybersecurity, and market. The strategies identified to mitigate those risks include, but not limited to, provide training, monitor business environments, and market analysis. Also, listening to customers, communities, and vendors and perform a SWOT analysis.

Figure 7. Risks and mitigation strategies count. R1, R3, R4, and R5 identified a similar number of risks and mitigations strategies. This information could not be accurate since the companies could not report all the risks associated with their business.

Both the responses from these research participants and the companies' reports

content are consistent with the knowledge base for this study. The literature reviewed in

Section 2 included several authors supporting that SB managers should include risk

analysis in their strategies to improve OBP. Esmaeel et al. (2018), Kato and Charoenrat

(2018), Kim et al. (2017), Naude and Chiweshe (2017), and Zeininger et al. (2017)

agreed on that internal and internal business factors' vulnerability, and risks are critical

when setting strategies for SBs performance and business continuity.

With all of that evidence, anticipating potential risks is one strategy that helps the

SB manager to investigate the opportunities and resources required for consistent

outstanding business performance and continuity. I want to recall what R5 said, "our

focus is on sustainability, not merely survival," which means if SB managers do not

prevent, identify, analyze, and mitigate sources of potential risks, put on risk the business

continuity. In addition to people engagement, process identification, and risk

management, technology is another component used by this study participants to improve

their planning strategy.

Technology. Researchers found the use of technology help in the efforts to

improve OBP. Yeniyurt, Wu, Kim, and Cavusgil (2019) noted that information

technology-related resources are essential elements of a strategy to enhance firm

performance. Supporting that, Aydiner, Totoglu, Bayraktar, and Zaim (2019) indicated

that innovative information technology and information systems are vital for firms'

growth and survival. The integration and alignment of the latest information management

technology to their internal processes improves SBs performance (Yeniyurt et al., 2019).

Findings from the interviewee's responses analysis evidenced what those authors wrote.

Respondents R1, R4, and R5 had similar answers contrasting with the R3's response. R1 said, "we have multiple systems, each requiring some level of integration into the other systems." R4 noted, "we perform an external scan… technology is a huge part of this scan." And R5 commented, "We are constantly looking at technologies to ensure outstanding OBP." While R3 said, "our systems and processes with may or may not be technology-based to provide high levels of performance."

Effective and efficient use of information systems drives business and decision-making processes high performance, which leads to an enhanced OBP (Aydiner et al., 2019). R1 said something similar. "Our system was used to tell more about the metrics and the ability to good real-time data." Information systems contribute to improve and to facilitate communication among stakeholders (Aydiner et al., 2019). An intensive and continuous cross-communication allows coordination among all divisions to understand internal and external business environments (Pei, Tian, and McAvoy, 2019). Consistent with the results reported by Aydiner et al. and Pei et al., R1 commented, "We use systems for our communication and metric standpoint to keep people aligned to our key metrics and real-time good data management," and R2 said, "all technology used to maximize the efficiency … one single human resources system handles all personnel needs. The team was able to consolidate several applications to one newer, more efficient application."

Information systems help SB managers and employees to identify any concern, problem, uncertainty, or potential risk (Aydiner et al., 2019). In support of that, R1 said,

"we got a QMS for project performance evaluation for customer loyalty." And R2 said, "our workforce performance management system establishes training, measure, and evaluate people processes, work processes, and workflow to delight our guests." Pei et al. (2019) wrote that integration involves sharing relevant information, coordinate, and be part of the decision-making process among different people and divisions within an SB. R5's answer is similar to that. R5 said, "we use systems to manage customer relationship management, were our folks can go in and enter the relevant information. Other platforms allow people to constantly look for ways to improve, which is our ultimate goal to ensure OBP."

From business performance reports, companies identify opportunities to improve with high user-friendly interfaces. The design of their processes ensures the accuracy, integrity, timeliness, and security of organizational data. Data is real-time or captured automatically. They make sure information and data integrity and reliability implementing quick-start systems, data verification, and security features. They address hardware and software reliability using three levels of information systems architecture. Another strategy is to monitor the essential systems and applications for performance; a team develops proprietary software applications to meet stakeholders' needs. Some companies remarked that leaders must be good listeners and communicators to aligning and integrating systems (and people). To keep current on technological changes, SBs should attend technology conferences, meeting groups with vendors and external users, and maintaining subscriptions to information systems publications.

The systems most commonly used by the six companies are related to stakeholders monitoring, capture complaints, and QMS. Most of them have two or three main integrative systems provided by a single provider. Some companies use information systems resources of one of its parent companies for data management and daily decisions. Figure 8 shows the number of systems each company reported.
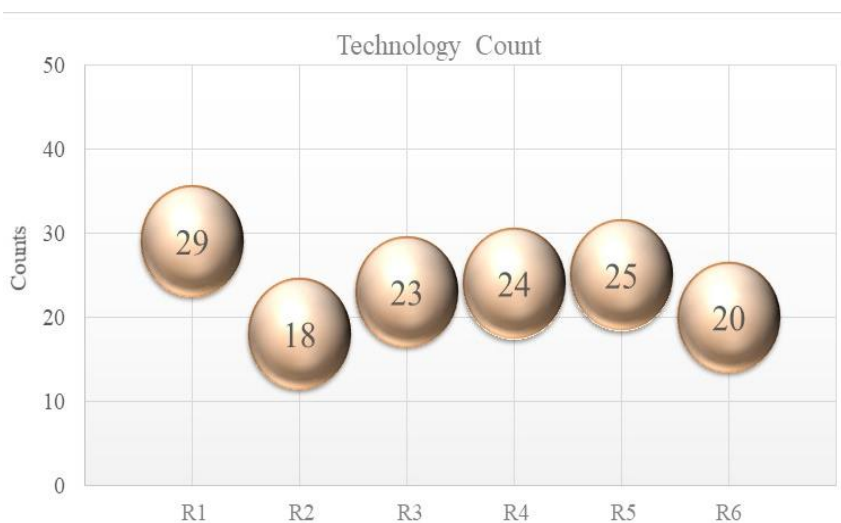
Figure 8. Technology count. R3, R4, and R5 reported a similar number of technologies/systems. All of them operating in different industries. This information could not be accurate since the companies could not report all the systems associated with their business.

Findings revealed consistency between interview responses, business analysis reports, and the knowledge base for this project. From the authors cited in section two, Lodgaard et al. (2016) wrote that for SB managers, information systems and improvement methods are essential to enhance OBP, which also improves when SB managers put in place strategies to identify and implement a business plan (Murphy & Leonard, 2016). Garza-Reyes (2018) noted that SB managers could identify efficient strategies to improve OBP by the application of QMS. A proactive strategy for sustained

businesses is associated with sustainability control systems (SCS), which influences corporations' permanent outstanding OBP (Wijethilake, 2017). QMS help SB manages in the analysis of data collected on suppliers, customers, market performance, and business operations performance (Garza-Reyes, 2018). Information systems and planning are critical components for SBs overall performance (Gimmer et al., 2018).

Some authors cited in the knowledge base confirmed planning as a strategy to improve OBP. Turner and Endress (2017) wrote that business mission and plan must be aligned when SB managers pursue address challenges and changes during their business life successfully. Planning emerged from the interviewee response analysis as a major theme. SB managers could improve overall performance, improving the performance of business growth through the planning process (D'Agostini et al., 2017; Esmaeel et al., 2018; Leonideu et al., 2017; Martinez-Martinez et al., 2019).

Among the authors cited in the knowledge base of this study supporting the GST application to improve the SBs' OBP included are Ross and Wade (2015). Those authors noted that SBs are systems, they have parts, and the existing interaction among them is clear. Other authors said similar statements. McDonald (2017) noted that under the GST perspective, business elements include organization strategies, appropriate technology, and effective internal and external system interaction management. Also, the active interaction of the components influencing SBs produces complex systems that could increase business uncertainty and risks (Belov & Novikov, 2017).

Onalaja et al.'s (2018) noted that using the systems thinking approach enables top-level stakeholders to identify and manage uncertainties and to minimize its associated

risks. Bandyopadhyay and Leonard (2016) noted that SB managers understand their industry and the strategies to ensure employees understand the benefit of the GST application. Weaver et al. (2018) stated that managers using GST could understand the importance to unlock and release more resources into the community, establish long-term relationships, and understand the nature and dynamics of responsible business practices.

Findings also revealed that participants' answers were consistent with those authors. Respondents identified effective strategies to improve OBP using GST lenses. Respondents identified four elements that impacted the SB planning processes and demonstrated their active interaction with a higher-level strategy, the mission statement. An integrative approach helps SB managers identify all the possible subsystems or business elements influencing the identification of adequate strategies to manage and develop their business for outstanding OBP (Kapp et al., 2017). Findings showed that effective strategies to improve OBP used by each respondent's company included not only managers with a system approach and having planning strategies, but also improvement elements.

Theme 3: Improvement. Some authors indicated that continuous improvement is an important factor in improving OBP. Continuous improvement contributes to SB managers enhance the performance of key factors (Cheah et al., 2019). That is similar to the answers provided by some of the interview participants. For R3, "the central piece to performance excellence is continuous improvement, which is a never-ending approach to making the important things better. Outstanding performance is an ongoing dedication to continuous improvement. Relentlessly pursue continuous performance."

Consistently, R1 answered that "people are using data in drive success, in drive trigger improvements," R2 mentioned, "put together a plan to address the bottom measures and drive improvement," and R4 noted, "we use the scores and comments to make improvements." Also, R5 indicated that "our people are constantly looking for ways to improve." In line with that, R6 stated they ensure continuous improvement and high quality in their products to exceed their customer expectations with the support of their agent and intermediary. Findings revealed that this research participants' strategies to improve continuously include the following business elements (a) communication, (b) innovation, (c) measurement, (d) suppliers, and (c) teams.

Communication. Researchers wrote that communication is important to enhance OBP. Communication and information sharing among SBs stakeholders influence the SBs' survival rate (Ibiwoye et al., 2020) and enable employee's access to tacit knowledge (Laban & Deya, 2019). In the same way, R1 said, "communication is a key factor when applying an integrative view of the business. To good communication recipe in having fun, we celebrate as well as any accomplishment."

Similarly, other participants share information with their stakeholders. R2 commented that "once developed, we communicate strategies in weekly directors meeting. Strategy leader reports on (a) current status, (b) accomplishments, (c) what is currently being addressed, and (c) what will be addressed next. We communicate measures monthly." R4 also communicate their culture "from day one" and communicate their "key business drivers result weekly to all team member." And, for R5's company, "daily meeting contributes towards a weekly conversation, the weekly conversation

contributes toward the monthly meeting, the monthly then go out the stream, and they discuss quarterly."

More efficient communication, coordination, and interaction among SBs and stakeholders could improve OBP (Pei et al., 2019). That is similar to what three respondents answered. R4's company "are touch points during the year and an annual performance review (with points) to assess the employee's achievement of their goals." R6's company "communicate with all of our associates on the initiatives and make sure we have their input, and that they understand what we are doing so, they can help achieve those." And R5's company has team meetings with the senior leadership team, "everybody gets together and say ok we need to align all the systems. We do strategic planning once a year, but we meet quarterly each group also meet daily and weekly meetings."

Some researchers explained the importance of communication methods and the company's IT capabilities. Singh, Wiese, and Sillerud (2019) noted that to ensure the success of improvement initiatives, SB managers need to standardize communication methods and feedback strategies. Ul-Hameed, Shabbir, Imran, Raza, and Salman (2019) said that important elements to improve the quality of services is the firm's IT capability and information communication technology (ICT). Those authors found an echo in the answer provided by R1 and R5. R5's company provide their employees with platforms to help them "communicate across the organization and are continually in communication with our suppliers, vendors, and clients through tradeshows, monthly sync calls, vendor and customer surveys, regional virtual meetings, Salesforce dashboards, and more." R1's

company "uses integrative technology on the intranet as a platform to conserve good communication across the organization." From companies' performance reports, Figure 9 summarizes the number of tools each respondent's company uses to communicate with its stakeholders.
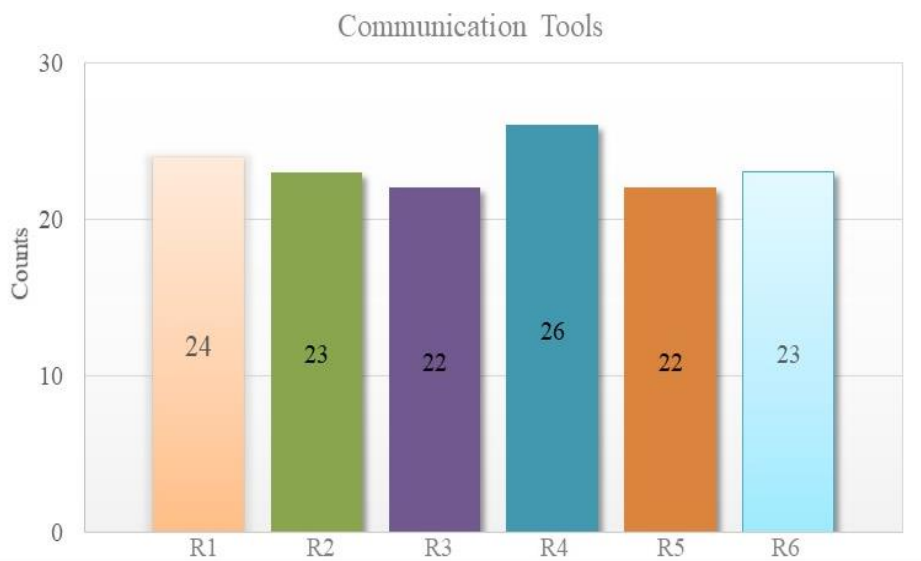
Figure 9. Communication tools. All participants' company reported an average of 24 tools used to communicate with their stakeholders efficiently.

Among others, the tools reported by companies to effectively and efficiently communicate with stakeholders include intracompany and external emails, flyers, communication platforms, webpage, holding recurrent meetings through the year, face to face interviews, rewards sessions, public recognition, and surveys. The purpose to communicate is not limited to announce new policies. It includes sharing new procedures, announcing new hires and new contracts signed, company's stock price, market situation, emergency awareness, level of customer and employee engagement, and the employees, vendors/supplier's recognition.

Findings from reports and participant's responses are consistent with the knowledge base for this study. Lack of strategies for effective communication could drive sabotage (Taher & Krotov, 2016). Employee's commitment to change improvement depends on formal and informal communication intensity, which improves OBP (Appelbaum et al., 2017). Good communication practices improve leadership and OBP (DOC, 2019). Also, to have efficient communication practices, findings revealed the importance that innovation had for the improvement strategy used by the respondents' businesses.

Innovation. Innovation and co-innovation impact SBs performance (Loukis, Janssen, & Mintchev, 2019; Yeniyurt et al., 2019). That is consistent with what some respondents said they do. R3 said they "innovate our processes to continue to provide high levels of OBP." R5 commented that their "employees could submit innovative ideas to gain efficiency …Small innovations have the biggest impact on OBP." And R6 indicated they "set up important areas based on initiatives for improvement." R1 also commented that "the key yardstick of our customers is to deliver good value and delivers strong outcomes on their initiatives."

Innovation is the most important factor in producing quality products and can improve competitiveness, which results in SB performance improvement (Ismanu & Kusmintarti, 2019). That is similar to the strategies some respondents said they use. "From an innovation standpoint," R1 "got an internal team to identify valuable problems to solve and to develop potential solutions. To support employees' skill development, we

created an audible online book service." In R5's company, "every single initiative is aligned to our vital few objectives included in the mission statement."

The willingness of a firm to innovate depends on the support and promotions strategies managers apply for new ideas (Pedraza-Rodríguez, Bolcha, & Santos-Roldán, 2020). Innovating on IT products should increase the satisfaction of all key stakeholders (Morozov, Mezentseva & Proskurin, 2021). That is in line with what some respondents confirmed. R1 has meetings to share ideas for business performance improvement. Employees in R5's company have access to a platform for "even a granular level of innovation; they are rewarded through special programs and initiatives." R5 added, "we are constantly looking for industry partners who are innovating in our industry; we merge with them as an exclusive distributor."

From business performance reports, the source of ideas for innovation included benchmarks, bestseller books, business risks, customers, and employees. Also, from innovative ideas list, lessons learned, market monitoring, measurement results, and their mission statement. Included are observations, specialized teams, standardized industry processes, suppliers/vendors, and trends. To collect new ideas, some used quarterly team meetings, specific platforms, reports, and or surveys, while others use particular/formal sessions for ideas generation. The process to approve an innovative idea starts with stakeholders' innovation motivation. Someone generates a creative idea reviewed by specialized teams and or management teams, which discuss the innovation opportunity at management level meetings or, in some cases, with the team members having direct

contact with clients. Once the idea is approved, the organization is informed using different communication strategies.

The criteria used by participant companies to evaluate an idea are diverse. Findings revealed that some companies review the source, others the gaps in organization performance, and others the need to address strategic challenges. Others review the impact on operations, the risk profile, the impact on stakeholders, the need for new customers, or to expand relationships with existing external stakeholders. Also, the criteria included is the need for new products, services, equipment, or product quality. All the companies agreed that once the idea is approved, they recognize those who identified the opportunity to innovate through internal email, posts, flyers, rewards meetings, and or public meetings. Findings are consistent with this research knowledge base. Table 12 shows authors, from the knowledge base, who indicated the importance of innovation has to improve OBP. Also, to have efficient communication practices and have effective processes to identify innovative ideas, findings revealed the importance that measurement had for the improvement strategy used by the respondents' businesses.

Measurement. Applying a holistic perspective to know the performance of operational dimensions could contribute to managers implement sustainable strategies and understand the trade-offs better (Mangla et al., 2020). Measuring SB's performance is significant as it provides information on how well business managers achieve business objectives (Shad, Lai, Fatt, Klemes, & Bokhari, 2019). What some interview participants said they do evidence of those authors' findings. R6 said that SBs should measure what is

controllable. R3 stated they measure important things to identify actions to take on results

deviated from what they want.

Table 12

Knowledge Base: Innovation

Author	Statement
Ahmed (2017)	Competitive SBs managers identify innovative strategies regularly.
Tani et al. (2018)	SB managers pursuing outstanding OBP should include a smart approach to innovation for products and or services development.
Cooper et al. (2016)	High managerial direction and entrepreneurial performance influence innovation, and its efficacy influence the OBP
Hallak et al. (2018)	SBs performance applying training programs drives innovation and influences creative self-efficacy, which improve OBP

Mersland, Nyarko, and Szafarz (2019) wrote that the purpose of the mission

statement is legitimacy and accountability. Performance measurement ensures an

efficient and effective OBP planning process (George et al., 2019). The evidence is on

some responses provided by this study participants. R1 said, "we know what is important,

measure and review periodically …for key decisions or adjustments for our business."

And R5 noted, "we create key indicators to measure our performance. Control strategies

ensure our communication channel is in sync."

Because of SB managers constantly look for effective and efficient business

results, measurement is relevant, but for some SB managers, the identification of factors

to measure OBP is complex (Taouab & Issor, 2019). Key performance factors include drivers, enablers, or critical success factors and problems, barriers, or challenges of operational excellence (Mangla et al., 2020). That is consistent with the answers provided by R1, who highlighted the importance of evaluating "your results over time so that you can determine trends, but also they compare yourself" And R4 said, "each measure has goals defined based on "the improvement of current performance and industry benchmarks."

McDonald, Bookwalter, Dickey, and MxEwen (2019) wrote that improvement includes monthly quality metrics, project-specific KPIs, and trends through business operations life. The answers provided by some respondents are evidence of what those authors said. R2 responded, "all of our key business drivers are measured frequently (daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly)." Whereas R1 indicated that their performance management system "makes the metrics actionable, which are indicators of potential performance issues." They manage metrics "and convey our results in a real-time, clear manner" Also, every six months, they evaluate metrics performance, which results in the elimination or addition of metrics. They keep in mind which one adds value or needed insight or help to understand the OBP better.

Metrics provide meaningful information when it is possible to identify what they measure and the reason to use those metrics (McDonald et al., 2019). Respondents were in line with that. In the case of R2, their general managers identify the top 3 measures and the bottom three measures and set a plan to drive improvement based on what is required to address the bottom three measures. R4 measures three key focus indicators, workforce,

customers, and finances and monitor every quarter. R6 said they measure "the internal diversion that we cause, the rework costs, and the maintenance costs." They also track their customer satisfaction level through their partners.

The business mission statement is a critical element to monitor OBP status and evaluate corrective strategies (Mersland et al., 2019). The most important factor in measuring is the level of the business mission realization over different periods through the business life (Taouab & Issor, 2019). R4's company "actions are taken for areas that are not on goal. If the results indicate that the strategic plan is not moving the company in the desired direction, we make mid-course corrections to our plan." Consistent with that, R5 said they collect information from customers through surveys. Only to identify improvement opportunities and to get industry, market, and competitors' insight, and uses an independent third party to measure their customer engagement level. Contrary, R1 said they use anonymous and nonanonymous surveys to identify best practices to align with goals and behaviors and to identify processes to improve customer engagement. In addition to those factors, risk monitoring was important for respondents.

Recent studies showed the importance to monitor risks. Shad et al. (2019) reported that risk monitoring decreases operational risks and helps business managers to focus on its resources to undertake business activities and generate value, which is similar to what some respondents said in regards of the emergent COVID-19 pandemic. R4 stated that "during the pandemic, we began monitoring numerous areas to watch for signs that the pandemic may impact us." R2 said, "the daily review of the constantly changing price of commodities helped us to manage that situation." And R1also evaluated the risk

register and risk mitigation plans regularly, "we applied our core competency to successfully sustain our revenues and profits since the outbreak of the pandemic." Monitoring risks ensures that the business can both manage the business risk and meet the stakeholder expectations, reduce the asymmetry of business information, improve earnings ratios, and cost reduction of capital (Shad et al., 2019).

Research participants' companies are serving in different industries using different business models. Figure 10 shows the number of factors measured for each company. On that figure, R1 and R5 have the higher number of factors to measure and analyze. Findings from the analysis of business performance reports revealed that all of the participant's companies highlighted the importance of measuring factors that add value and creates opportunities to improve the SB's overall performance.
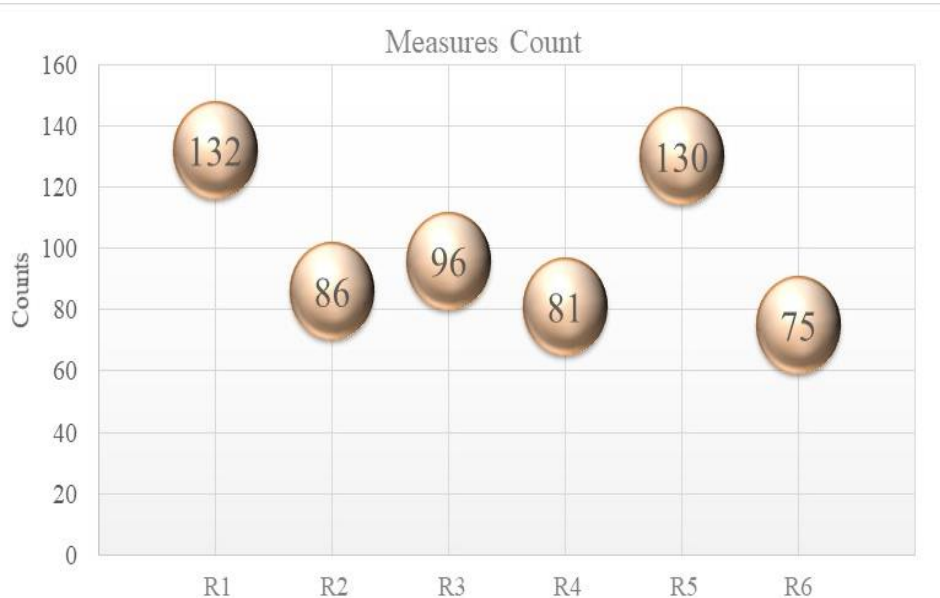
Figure 10 Measures count. An average of 80 different factors is what R2, R3, R4, and R6 measure. R1 and R5 have a similar amount of measures to review.

Findings are consistent with the knowledge base for this study. Esmaeel et al. (2018) stated that SB managers could measure business performance through three elements growth, profitability, and market performance (Esmaeel et al., 2018). SB managers should orient their business' strategy to measure work process effectiveness, customer satisfaction, workforce, leadership and governance, and finance and market (Thompson & Blazey, 2017). Client satisfaction is a measure of the customer's perceived quality and value (Rajendran & Suresh, 2017). Also, having efficient communication practices, identifying processes, innovating with a purpose, and implementing efficient measurement practices, findings revealed that for respondents, suppliers are important for the improvement strategy.

Suppliers. The relationship between buyers and suppliers is crucial for any organization pursuing OBP enhancement (Ku, Hsu & Wu, 2020). That is similar to the R5 responses. This study participant said that to strengthen vendor/supplier relationships, they meet with them often through phone calls, meetings, or in a golf tournament. "We host just our vendors, not clients." Klein, Schneider, and Spieth (2020) said that vendors/suppliers provide feedback on goals and activities contributing to the OBP enhancement. The evidence is on R5's answers, who said that "at the end of the year, we identify our top vendors. Our vendors are part of our supply chain, and they are a key piece in this chain here." Consistently, McDonald et al. (2019) noted that vendor/supplier quality and nonconformance influence further quality improvement initiatives. That is similar to the practices R3' companies used. That company emphasizes the importance of

suppliers to realize their mission. They also created a strategy to build an excellent supplier relationship, ensuring to pay them on time.

From companies' performance reports, some companies select suppliers and vendors to partner with, while some of them reported having no suppliers or partners to perform their services. From those who need suppliers/vendors to accomplish their mission, some maintain a database of critical providers, while other respondents find the vendors based on industry news. Those companies that created a database update their key suppliers/vendors list based on feedback either from clients, employees, or their importance to work systems, product offerings, delivery needs, or sales volume.

Findings also revealed that those suppliers who do not meet the standards and or product/substitutions specifications are, in some cases, replaced. To reduce the need to change supplier, which impacts clients' satisfaction and loyalty, costs, and processes efficiency, some companies hold regular and annual meetings with them. Also, they go for site visits, use scorecards, websites, and e-mails to communicate suppliers/vendors the company's mission and values, expectations, product, and delivery standards. Findings also revealed that an economical, simplified, lean, and efficient process could result from having a reduced list of critical suppliers and vendors. Keeping good relationships with critical suppliers/vendors is relevant for participant companies to open market participation improvement opportunities and innovation.

Those findings are consistent with the knowledge base. Significant risks for the OBP include an increase in charges of transportation with a small volume of supplies and loss of suppliers with a high range of specialized products (Myšková & Doupalováa,

2015). Business managers should analyze data collected on suppliers pursuing to improve business performance strategies (Garza-Reyes, 2018). In addition, to have efficient communication practices, identify processes, innovate with a purpose, implement efficient measurement practices, and consider their suppliers, findings revealed the importance of teams for the improvement strategy.

 Teams. Specialized teams are a minor and unexpected theme found to support the major theme improvement. Several studies showed that functional teams are essential to support daily operations and to improve performance. Banks et al. (2019) noted that businesses organize individuals in teams, which are the building blocks for SBs. The factors that members of a team contribute to the team include their personalities, prior knowledge, expertise, and abilities (Banks et al., 2019). That makes the team deliver at the business system levels, impacting all team members' performance and the mission realization success (Banks et al., 2019)**.** Sharp (2020) noted that organizing employees in teams increase productivity, accountability, and creativity.

 Evidence found includes what R1 said the company does. They have teams to formulate the company strategy, processes and to identify the risk mitigation plan. They also have teams to discuss plans and communications, for nurturing an innovative environment, to manage metrics across the company, and to evaluate the management of those metrics. And, other teams monitor, measure, and review performances periodically, and other review customer survey responses. Although R1 demonstrated SBs should have multiple teams, R2's company "does not have many layers to work through with few teams. They accomplish action items more quickly and efficiently." That is similar to

what Kushner and Strasser (2020) indicated, teams exist to help SBs managers improve functional outcomes.

In that regard, R2 indicated they have teams to execute strategies and a team responsible for maximizing efficiency by using technology. That is similar to what other respondents said. In R3's company, one team sets the strategies to ensure OBP, and in R4's company, a team is responsible for addressing gaps in meeting the established goals. Also, that company has a team to reviews new projects with identified high risk and have a team to support the preparation of the technology needs report. R5 responses revealed they have six functional teams: leadership, materials, manufacturing, support service, business development, and services. And R6 answers revealed they have a team to develop the overall strategy and initiatives and a team to understand their customer specifications and needs.

From business performance reports, the following Figure 11 shows the count for teams each company's respondent reported. From that figure, R1's company has a more significant number of teams than the other companies. The most common teams used by companies reported on the performance report are the executive team, leadership team, continuous improvement team, information technology team, and innovation team. The knowledge base of this study did not include specialized teams. The strategy to have dedicated teams to improve the efficiency of the strategy improvement was unexpected.
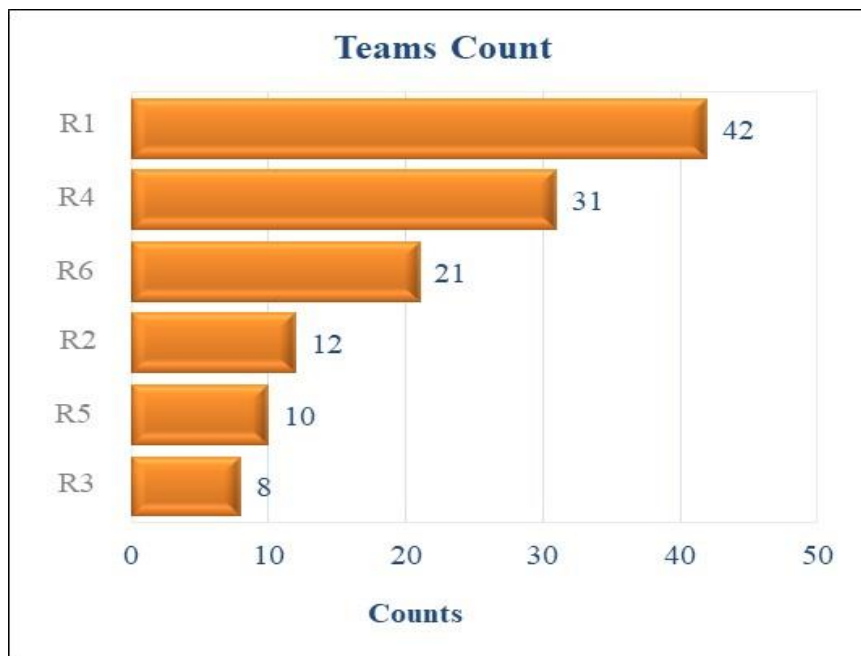
Figure 11. Teams helping companies to run their business.R2, R3, R5 have an average of 10 teams in their operations.

The strategy of continuous improvement is in line with the GST. Continuous improvement involves the analysis of the interaction of several factors to improve OBP. Rusu (2016) noted that interaction between business elements influences the OBP. SBs must focus on enhancing business performance using strategies to improve an integrated system, said Blazey (2017). SB managers should orient their business' strategy to measure work process effectiveness, customer satisfaction, workforce, leadership and governance, and finance and market (Thompson & Blazey, 2017).

Implementing a systems thinking approach in SBs operations, SB managers could facilitate the identification of operational processes improvement, and operational efficiency, and energy use improvement (Jaaron & Backhouse, 2018). Business

transformation requirements include dealing with all the relevant business processes and the existing connection among critical functions used to understand how companies distribute information and data among employees and other stakeholders (Abollado & Shehab, 2018). Wehner (2018) wrote that early and proper control and monitoring of market needs and business capacities would contribute to outstanding OBP. The active interaction of elements forming a business influences the OBP (Brokowski & Mazhar, 2018; Wehner, 2018).

Findings Summary

In sum, findings from this study revealed that SBs in any industry having a system approach could reach an outstanding OBP. They could improve OBP by implementing strategies with a systematic view, which requires SBs have a clear mission statement. As indicated by this study's participants, the mission statement is the integrative part of the business, which is one of the elements indicated by the studies included in the knowledge base of this study. To realize their mission statement, they were able to identify plans to manage the critical elements to improve business performance strategically. Also, the six companies were able to evaluate those elements, using strategies to enhance their interactions and feedback continuously. Figure 12 shows how the systems thinking approach integrates the three key strategies (system approach, planning, and improvement) found in this study to improve OBP.
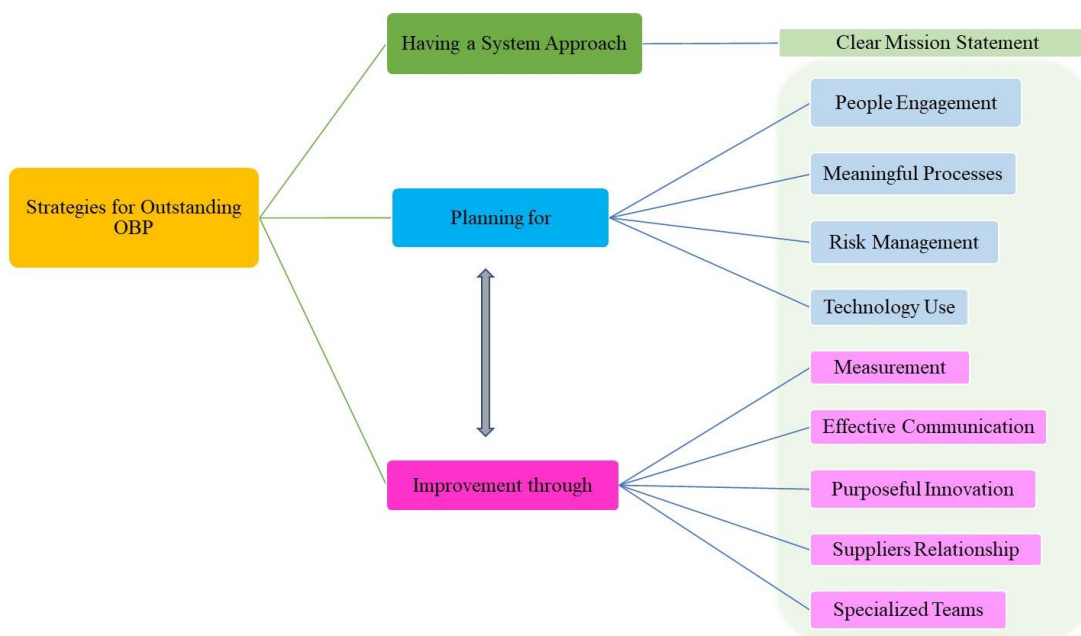
Figure 12. Strategies used by the study participants to reach an OBP.

System approach, planning, and improvements are interconnected and actively interact. The business mission is the goal of any strategy implemented to improve any of the Planning or Improvement strategic elements. The systemigram in Figure 13 shows in a visual format the interaction among the SBs' components or subsystems identified from this research data analysis. Those elements that emerged from the answers provided by the SB managers who participated in this research represent the strategies to enhance the OBP.
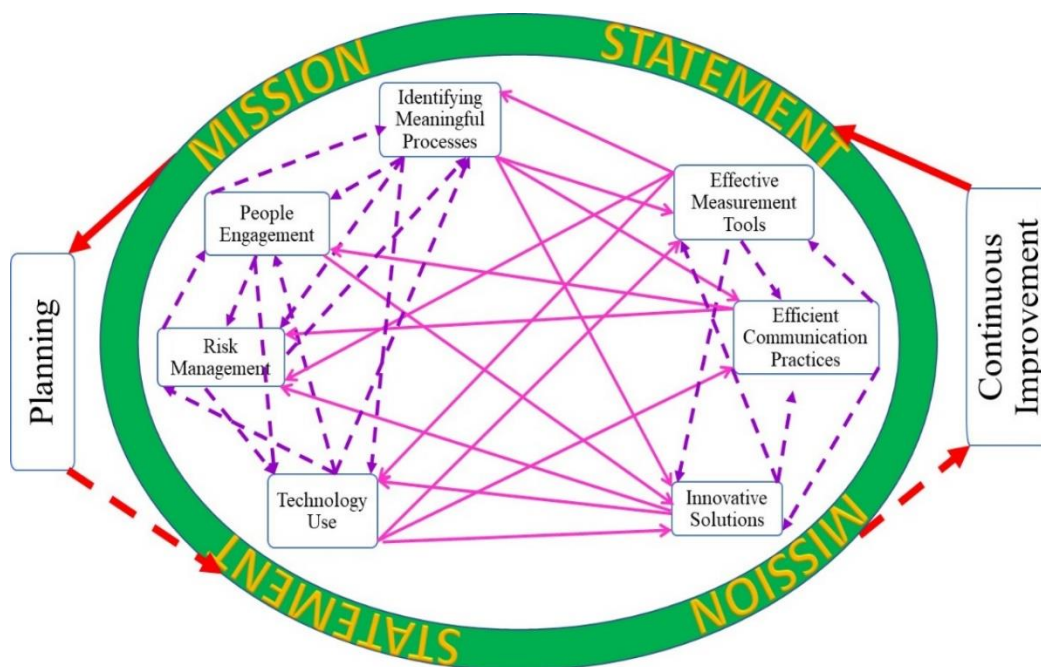
Figure 13. Research study Systemigram. Interaction and feedback of business elements important to set effective strategies to reach outstanding OBP

To finish with this analysis and report of findings section, I would like to remark recommendation from some respondents:

R1: "Got to be sophisticated enough to know how to set your established goals, project your performance, and being driven by a good benchmarking."

R5: "Have a defined strategy and have a robust diversity and inclusion plan for success but also be agile to address unforeseen circumstances like COVID-19."

R6: "Understand through cooperation… and looking at the future."

Application to Professional Practice

The objective of this research study was to understand the strategies that managers of successful and government-recognized SBs used to improve and sustain their outstanding OBP through time. Finding from this study revealed a sort of

generalized formula to enhance and maintain SBs high performance no matter their number of employees or the industry. With the findings of this research, SB managers could understand that the requirements and strategies to manage a business is not the same for all SBs and could be different from similar businesses. Each business is unique, and managers/owners need to understand their business requirements. Any micro, small, or medium business could apply these findings to improve their OBP. The major strategies found in this study will contribute to enhancing OBP, which I would say are the basic principles a business must follow to establish long-term high performing businesses.

Results of the research participants' responses analysis, review of additional documents, and the new literature presented are consistent with the knowledge base of this research. By having a system approach, SB managers and owners will have. Consequently, they will gain their stakeholders' engagement, will be able to use resources appropriately, and, more importantly, they will ensure. Following, I introduced how each theme that emerged from this study can be applied.

System Approach

Having a system approach, SB managers/owners will be able to write a clear, concise, and effective mission statement. By understanding how the different internal and external factors impact their business, SB managers will have a solid knowledge of their business. Hence, no matter the adverse situation they experience, they will have the ability to act proactively and react to the last-minute impacting situation properly in line with their business mission. The business mission statement is the integrative part of a

business. Through the mission statement, SBs keep their focus on what is important to reach a sustained outstanding OBP. As some respondents evidenced, the business mission is the point to start and the company's guiding line to set effective strategies and to make decisions. They also confirmed that by publishing and efficiently communicating the mission statement, SB managers help stakeholders have a clear direction to act in any position within the company.

All the strategies respondents to the interview identified were in support of their business mission. Consequently, they are keeping their successful businesses for a long time. Also, to have a system approach, findings revealed that planning is an important strategy to ensure OBP enhancement.

Planning

Planning is the second strategy used by this study's interviewees. Respondents indicated they "look at overall and the long term in planning sessions" their planning sessions focus on the OBP improvement and on key areas of the business, "which are driven by our mission." Also, during the planning session, some of them look at the external business environment components to set effective plans to address strategic challenges. Other respondents' company, use their planning sessions to decide what is important, aligned with their business mission, to set effective strategies. From these findings, SB managers will understand that having good planning practices as a strategy, they will align all their decisions with their mission statement.

Findings from this research revealed four supporting strategies successful SB managers considered in improving their OBP through the planning strategy. Key

stakeholders' engagement, to identify and write meaningful processes, risks management, and the use of integrative technology. This research's respondents indicated that their stakeholders are key customers, employees, and key communities. Respondents defined Key communities as professional communities, social communities, and communities related to the education field. Some participants indicated that they identify processes for everything they need to do repeatedly, ensuring that, under last-minute adverse circumstances, any person within the company could perform required tasks with the same quality and results. Also, some participants answered that they use processes to evaluate risk and uncertainties associated with the business. All of them agreed that they use different systems and or integrative systems to improve OBP.

With this research findings, SB manager could acquire additional skills to focus on their mission statement to identify efficient strategies to engage stakeholders; identify meaningful processes; identify and manage business threats, and to identify and implement efficient and integrative technologies. Finally, findings reported in this study would provide SB managers with a broader view of the strategies used to enhance OBP through planning to keep their business running long-time. The third major strategy identified in this study, to realize the business mission and ensure long-term outstanding OBP, was improvement.

Improvement

SB managers interviewed highlighted the importance of continuous improvement. Improving measuring performance of the key elements and strategies application, utilizing effective communication practice, innovating, including suppliers/vendors, and

forming specialized teams. Respondents presented evidence of how this strategy contributed to improving their OBP. Participants said that using strategies to improve, they were able to measure their business performance against their competitors but, more important, against themselves. Improvement strategies helped businesses to measure their strategies effectivity, to create new concepts, products, and services to gain competitiveness, and to communicate effectively with internal and external stakeholders. Also, to improve continuously, successful SB managers included their suppliers/vendors strategically and formed specialized/dedicated teams. SB managers corrected the business curse to the market new requirements, using strategies for continuous improvement.

SB managers who read these findings will comprehend the importance of identifying strategies to improve performance applying the GST, in line with their business mission. Also, they will gain new knowledge on which elements and their interactive action could be important for their business and the effective strategies most used by successful SB managers to improve their OBP. But the most important is that SBs will understand in an easy way how successful SBs managers realized their business mission, having an integrative approach, using strategies for effective planning, and identifying what is important to improve the OBP continuously.

Implications for Social Change

Knowing how to set strategies for outstanding OBP, there could be a reduction in the risk for SBs to exit from their markets. That means that SBs will have stable operations. With SBs learning how they could identify the strategies for long-term business performance enhancement, they will transfer that knowledge to the new

generation of managers. Hopefully, future entrepreneurs will know how they would apply the systems approach, systems thinking, since the establishment of their business idea. That will positively impact the SB sector, promoting future SBs longer existence. Hence, the implications for positive social change include the potential to help SBs exist longer, providing stable employment, developing the local economies, and enhancing the lifestyle level of families and communities.

Recommendations for Action

SBs manager still needs to address several challenges with now continuously evolving markets. Managers need to find effective strategies for outstanding OBP that fit their business model requirements in light of their business mission. Learning the critical parameter to consider setting effective strategies to prolong their business operations will not only improve their business results but will help their key communities. Practical recommendations are from the three themes or strategies that emerged from this study.

Apply Systems Approach

Any person related to a business should know businesses are active and interactive systems. It is a system that is composed of active elements/subsystems interacting among them and feeding back in two directions. Meaning that business stakeholders must learn, understand, process, and live their business mission. Mission statements indicate why a company exists. Hence employees understanding the reason for their business existence understand how they could contribute to improving the OBP easily.

Managers should communicate the mission statement across the company. That way, employees could understand which business elements, including themselves, are interacting and creating diverse effects increasing business failure risk. Communication tools could include the boarding package, mission statement publication in the areas where employees and related stakeholders could easily access the statement, also through meetings, through the company website on the main page, through informative campaigns, internal newsletters, emails, and or during training sessions.

With that in mind, internal stakeholders could help external stakeholders understand how they will positively impact the overall business results in a win-win relationship by replicating what they learn and live inside the company through meetings, conferences, and or workshops celebrated internally and within key communities. The system approach facilitates the identification of effective strategies to enhance OBP in line with the business mission statement.

Planning to Realize the Mission Statement

A mission statement is a guiding line for any business. It integrates what the business does, how the business will deliver its offerings, and who are their potential customers. All who participate in the planning process must consider the mission statement to set strategies to improve OBP. SB managers must consider stakeholders' engagement, meaningful processes, risk analysis and management, and the use of integrative technology when setting business plans.

Once the plan is ready and set to realize the business mission through those four-element, managers and leaders must ensure employees at different levels and across the

company know and understand the plan correctly. All in the company must understand how they will contribute to deploying the plan effectively and efficiently. The communication tools could include meetings dedicated to explaining the plan, posters, one-to-one communication with employees, employee annual goals meeting. Efficient communication of the business plan will foster an atmosphere of trust, transparency, security, and the opportunity to gain employee engagement, which increases opportunities for better employee performance translated into fewer business risks and customers' engagement.

Continuous Improvement

To ensure outstanding business performance, SBs need to measure the results of implemented strategies and stakeholder's performance. That will allow identifying potential deviations from the business plan and will stimulate innovating for business success. Specialized teams, vendors/suppliers, and good communication practices will contribute to the effectiveness of continuous improvement strategies. Evaluating the key business success factors and taking action to make on-time and effective corrective actions will ensure outstanding OBP.

Managers and leaders should use all the tools and media available for internal and external stakeholders at all business levels, environments, and across the company to let them know how they and the business are performing compared with the expected results and against their markets. Being aware of how the company is doing will promote innovative and or corrective ideas from different sources that will help with the OBP

improvement. Communication tools include dashboards, internal, and when required, external emails, posters, performance review meetings, among others.

In sum, SB managers and any person strongly related to a business environment from any position that could help them realize the business mission will benefit from this research results. SB managers should ensure that key stakeholders know and understand the business mission, understand how that business operates, what impacts its operations, how the business elements interact, and how the business operations and its factors influence not only them but key related communities. SB managers should also ensure efficient their internal and external stakeholders understand the need for continuous improvement and how they could participate in realizing the business mission. To ensure efficient communication of the strategies and their implementation to ensure all the business elements and its effects improve continuously, SB managers should implement to their internal and their key community actors, websites, posters, workshops, conferences, and courses.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of conducting this research study was to identify effective strategies SBs can use for outstanding OBP. Strategies identified from participants' responses are a sample of the effective strategies successful SBs managers use to improve and sustain outstanding OBP. Participants have run their business for more than 20 years; those companies operate in different industries. Hence the strategies found with this study would be applied for SBs from different industries. Future researchers should consider expanding the population to businesses with less than 50 employees existing between 3

and 5-years of operations. The objective would be to identify whether the GST could help those businesses to mature with a low risk of exit.

One of the limitations of this study was the availability of SB managers participated in the process the company followed to receive the MBNQA. This limitation was not relevant to this study. The unexpected COVID19 pandemic, population, and the selection criteria limited participants' availability. Future researchers could invite participants working for SBs in a sector with a large number of successful SBs. Another limitation was the interview format. Due to the limited time participants had to an interview session, some of them conditioned their participation to answer the interview questions via email. My recommendation for future researchers is to propose all kinds of data collection tools available. That will let the potential participants decide what will fit better to their schedules, availability, and business situation. Also, researchers will not lose time in unnecessary changes for the consent form.

Reflections

The doctoral study transformed the perception I had about life and the business world. When I started this journey, I was not able to identify a business opportunity at all. I was an external consultant for the oil industry for a long time. I was impacted by the industry's most recent crisis, which began in 2014. I operated a micro business in the consulting field, evaluating integrated oil field development plans, including risk and uncertainty. Although I had a lot of limitations and barriers to complete this study, God was my guide. God provided me with health, money, food, a safe home, people who supported me, and the most important thing for this goal, permanent internet access.

Once I started my proposal, I was fascinated with the huge amount of knowledge we can get. Reading was the window I had to see the business world from different perspectives, to learn how to identify business opportunities, the different and infinite theories used to evaluate business strategies and to know what is important. Today after reading more papers than what I imagined I would read in my entire life, I could say that a person or business must apply the GST to succeed. The problem is that few people/managers know how to connect the dots with the GST because few papers disseminate that approach.

With the finding in this research, everything is clear. With a purpose or business mission, any business could understand what it needs to operate. It is the first step. Then managers must ask what they will do to make that happen; planning is the answer. Identify critical elements and setting strategies to address their interactions and feedback in line with the purpose/mission. Lastly, but not the least, is to know how things are going since their implementation, which means to measure, review results, communicate, innovate, and have teams to focus in specific areas. That is continuous improvement. Those are three key strategies that people need to apply when they pursue outstanding business performance.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore effective strategies SBs managers could use to ensure outstanding OBP. The knowledge base showed that in addition to the GST, several authors used other theories that supported that approach when studding a business element. Other than the GST, other theories do not evaluate the entire business system.

They dedicate the study to a portion of the system. Whether the employees, operation, customers, political environment, or other business elements. They implicitly integrate the GST approach to evaluate that particular element or subsystem. The knowledge base showed that SBs should have a mission statement, identify the elements influencing the business performance, and understand the active interaction among them.

Analyzing and improving only one element/subsystem/environment of a business could create an adverse effect because of the existent active interaction of the internal and external business elements. Being aware of that, the SB manager could identify efficient strategies for outstanding OBP. Finding from the answers provided by the six managers participated in this study, revealed their management approach and view of their business are consistent with the GST.

The integrative element of a system/business is the mission. As respondents indicated, starting with the mission statement, SB managers set business plans to coordinate the business key elements and execute continuous improvement strategies to evaluate the active interaction among those key elements. Any decision or strategy must align with the mission statement. Considering the GST integrative approach and that interviewed SBs mangers proved that its application reduces the risk to exit the market, there is not a limitation to expand the GST to micro, medium, and SBs operating in any industry. Something remarkable is what some participants said,

- "Got to be sophisticated enough to know how to set your established goals, project your performance, and … being driven by a good benchmarking." (R1, 2020)

- " Have a defined strategy and a robust diversity and inclusion plan for success but also be agile to address unforeseen circumstances like COVID-19." (R5, 2020)

- "Understand through cooperation …and looking at future" (R6, 2020)

- "Chooses to turn down business rather than poor-risk performance or employee behavior inconsistent with our fundamental values." (R1, 2020)

References

Abdalla, M., Oliveira, M., Azevedo, C., & Gonzalez, R. (2018). Quality in qualitative

organizational research: Types of triangulation as a methodological alternative.

Administration: Teaching and Research, 19, 66–98.

doi:10.13058/raep.2018.v19n1.578

Abollado, J. R., & Shehab, E. (2018). A systems approach for the definition of lean

workflows in global aerospace manufacturing companies. *Procedia CORP, 70*,

446-450. doi:10.1016/j.procir.2018.03.053

Adams, J., & Kauffman, R. G., Khoja, F. M., & Coy, S. (2016). Looking at purchasing

development through the lens of small business. *Journal of Managerial Issues*,

28, 145-170. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/44113702

Ahmed, O. (2017). Integrated performance measurement system. *Trakia Journal of*

Sciences 15(1), 145-151, Trakia University. doi:10.15547/tjs.2017.s.01.026

Akaeze, C.O. (2016). *Exploring strategies for small business sustainability in competitive*

environments (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital

Dissertation and Theses database. (UMI No. 3746398)

Akhtar, Ch. S., Awan, S. H., Naveed, S., & Ismail, K. (2018). A comparative study of the

application of systems thinking in achieving organizational effectiveness in

Malaysian and Pakistani banks. *International Business Review, 27*(4), 767-776.

doi:10.1016/j.ibusrev.2018.01.001

Al-Damen, R. A. (2017). The impact of total quality management on organizational

performance: Case of Jordan Oil Petroleum Company. *International Journal of*

Business and Social Science, 8(1), 192-202. doi:10.30845/ijbss

Allana, S., & Clark, A. (2018). Applying meta-theory to qualitative and mixed-methods research: A discussion of critical realism and heart failure disease management interventions research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *17*(1), 1-9. doi:10.1177/1609406918790042

Allen, K. A., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., & Waters, L. (2018). Understanding the priorities of Australian secondary schools through an analysis of their mission and vision statements. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *54*, 249–274. doi:10.1177/0013161X18758655

Al-Surmi, A., Cao, G., & Duan, Y. (2020). The impact of aligning business, IT, and marketing strategies on firm performance. *Industrial Marketing Management, 84*, 39-49. doi:10.1016/j.indmarman.2019.04.002

Amornpinyo, N. (2018). The characteristics of entrepreneurs with successful and sustainable small businesses in Northeastern Thailand. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities, 26*(1), 113-128. Retrieved from http://www.pertanika.upm.edu.my/

Appelbaum, S. H., Cameron, A., Ensink F., Hazarika, J., Attir, R., Ezzedina, R., & Shekhar, V. (2017). Factors that impact the success of an organizational change: a case study analysis. *Industrial and Commercial Training, 49*, 213-230. doi:10.1108/ICT-02-2017-0006

Arubayi, D. O., Eromafuru, E. D., & Egbule, A. C. S. (2020). Human resource development and employee performance: The role of individual absorptive

capacity in the Nigerian oil sector. *Journal of Management Information and Decision Sciences, 23*(2), 1-15. Retrieved from https://www.abacademies.org/journals/journal-of-management-information-and-decision-sciences-home.html

Aryanasl, A., Ghodousy, J., Arhmandi, R., & Mansouri, N. (2017). Components of sustainability considerations in management of petrochemical industries. *Environ Monitoring & Assessment, 189*(6), 1-10. doi:10.1007/s10661-017-5962-y

Aslam, E., Haron, R., & Tahir, M. N. (2019). How director remuneration impacts firm performance: An empirical analysis of executive director remuneration in Pakistan. *Borsa Istanbul Review, 19*, 186-196. doi:10.1016/j.bir.2019.01.003

Astroth, K. S., & Chung, S. Y. (2018). Focusing on the fundamentals: Reading qualitative research with a critical eye. *Nephrology Nursing Journal, 45*(4), 381-385, 348. Retrieved from https://www.annanurse.org/resources/products/nephrology-nursing-journal

Atmowardoyo, H. (2018). Research methods in TEFL studies: Descriptive research, case study, error analysis, and R&D. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *9*(1), 197-204. doi:10.17507/jltr.0901.25

Aydiner, A. S., Totoglu, E., Bayraktar, E., & Zaim, S. (2019). Information system capabilities and firm performance: Opening the black box through decision-making performance and business-process performance. *International Journal of Information Management, 47,* 168-182. doi:10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2018.12.015

Aydinerm A. S., Tatoglu, E., Bayraktar, E., Zaim, S., & Delen, D. (2019). Business

analytics and firm performance: The mediating role of business process

performance. *Journal of Business Research, 96*, 228-237.

doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.11.028

Ayub Ghouri, M. W., Hussain, M. A., Kanwal, T., Afzal, B., & Rasheed, M. (2018).

Influence of E-commerce on business growth in Pakistan: An approach to analyze

privacy, threats, and consumer trust in business. *International Journal of

Computer Science Issues (IJCSI), 15*(2), 27-35. doi:10.5281/zenodo.1227756

Bag, S., Wood, L. C., Xu L., Dhamija, P., & Kayikci, Y. (2020). Big data analytics as an

operational excellence approach to enhance sustainable supply chain

performance. *Resources, Conservation & Recycling*, *153,* 1-10.

doi:10.1016/j.resconrec.2019.104559

Baifang, L., Li, L., & Xinyu, L. (2017). Research on general system theory and

enterprise's assets structure. Proceedings of 2017, the International Conference on

Management, Education, and Social Science (ICMESS 2017). *Advances in Social

Science, Education and Humanities Research, 72*, 406-409. doi:10.2991/icmess-

17.2017.96

Baines, L. S., Dulku, H., Jindal, R. M., & Papalois, V. (2018). Risk taking and decision

making in kidney paired donation: A qualitative study by semistructured

interviews. *Transplantation Proceedings, 50*(5), 1227–1235.

doi:10.1016/j.transproceed.2018.02.079

Baldrige Foundation. (2019). *Baldrige program impacts.* Retrieved from

https://www.nist.gov/baldrige/how-baldrige-works/about-baldrige/baldrige-

impacts

Bandyopadhyay, P. K., & Leonard, D. (2016). The value of using the Baldrige

performance excellence framework in manufacturing organizations. *The Journal*

for Quality and Participation, 39(3), 10-14. Retrieved from

https://asq.org/quality-resources/pub/journal-for-quality-and-participation

Banks, S., Landon, L. B., Dorrian, J., Waggoner, L. B., Centofanti, S. A, Roma, P., &

Dongen, V. (2019). Effects of fatigue on teams and their role in 24/7 operations.

Sleep Medicine Reviews, 48, 1-9. doi:10.1016/j.smrv.2019.101216

Baumgartner, R. J., & Rauter, R. (2016). Strategic perspectives of corporate sustainability

management to develop a sustainable organization. *Journal of Cleaner*

Production, *140*, 81-92. doi:10.1016/j.jclepro.2016.04.146

Bayrak, T. (2020). A content analysis of top-ranked universities' mission statements from

five global regions. *International Journal of Educational Development, 72*. 1-12.

doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2019.102130

Belov, M. V., & Novikov, D. A. (2017). *General-system approach to the development of*

complex activity technology. Procedia Computer Science, *112,* 2076-2085.

doi:10.1016/j.procs.2017.08.220

Berkey, B., & Orts, E. W. (2019). Business ethics for a material world: An ecological

approach to object stewardship. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 29(*1), 143–146.

doi:10.1017/beq.2018.39

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. M. (2016). Member checking, a

tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health*

Research, 26(13), 1802-1811. doi:10.1177/1049732316654870

Bleiker, J., Morgan-Timmer, S., Knapp, K., & Hopkins, S. (2019). Navigating the maze: Qualitative research methodologies and their philosophical foundations. *Radriography 25*(1), 4-8. doi:10.1016/j.radi.2019.06.008

Bouwary, P. (2015). *Factors required for small business sustainability in Nigeria.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3738094)

Brokowski, C., & Mazhar, A. (2018). CRISPR ethics: Moral considerations for applications of powerful tool. *Journal of Molecular Biology, 431*(1). 88-101. doi:10.1016/j.jmb.2018.05.044

Buus, N., & Perron, A. (2020). The quality of quality criteria: Replicating the development of the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ). *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, *102*, 1-8. doi:10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2019.103452

Campbell, J. M., & Park, J. (2017). Extending the resource-based view: Effects of strategic orientation toward community on small business performance. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 34*, 302-308. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2016.01.013

Ceptureanu, E. G., Ceptureanu, S. I., Popescu D. I., & Vlad, L. B. (2017). Two stage analysis of successful change implementation of knowledge management strategies in energy companies from Rumania. *Energie, 10*(12), 1-17. doi:10.3390/en10121965

Cheah, J., Amran, A., & Yahya, S. (2019). External oriented resources and social

enterprises' performance: The dominant mediating role of formal business

planning. *Journal of Cleaner Production, 236*. doi:10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.117693

Chen, D., & Qi, S. (2016). The importance of legal form of organization on small

corporation external financing. *Western Economic Association International,

54*(3), 1607-1620. doi:10.1111/ecin,12330

Chittithaworn, C., Islam, Md. A., Keawchana, T., Hasliza, D., & Muhd Yusuf, D. (2011).

Factors affecting business success of small & medium enterprises (SMEs) in

Thailand. *Asian Journal of Social Science, 7*(5), 180-190.

doi:10.5539/ass.v7n5p180

Chu, H., & Ke, Q. (2017). Research methods: What's in the name? *Library and

information science research, 39*(4), 284-294. doi:10.1016/j.lisr.2017.11.001

Church, S. P., Lu, J., Ranjan, P., Reimer, A. P., & Prokopy, L. S. (2020). The role of

systems thinking in cover crop adoption: Implications for conservation

communication. *Land Use Policy, 94*, 1-6. doi:10.1016/j.landusepol.2020.104508

Ciftci, I., Tatoglu, E., Wood, G., Domirbag, M., & Zaim, S. (2019). Corporate

governance and firm performance in emerging markets: Evidence from Turkey.

International Business Review, 28(1), 90-103. doi:10.1016/j.ibusrev.2018.08.004

Cooper, D., Peake, W., & Watson, W. (2016). Seizing opportunities: The moderating role

of managerial characteristics on the relationship between opportunity-seeking and

innovation efficacy in small businesses. *Journal of Small Business Management

54*(4), 1038-1058. doi:10.1111/jsbm.12228

Cosic, R., Shanks, G., & Maynard, S. (2015). A business analytics capability framework. *Australasian Journal of Information Systems, 19*, 5-19. doi:10.3127/ajis.v19i0.1150

Cragoe, N. G. (2019). Oversight: Community vulnerabilities in the blind spot of research ethics. *Research Ethics*, *15*(2), 1-15. doi:10.1177/1747016117739936

Cypress, B. S. (2017). Rigor or reliability and validity in qualitative research: Perspectives, strategies, reconceptualization, and recommendations. *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing*, *36*(4), 253–263. doi:10.1097/DCC.0000000000000253

D'Agostini, M., Gonçalves Tondolo, V. A., Camargo, M. E., dos Santos Dullius, A. I., Portella Tondolo, R. d., & Russo, S. L. (2017). Relationships between sustainable operations practices and performance: A meta-analysis. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management, 66*(8), 1020-1042. doi:10.1108/IJPPM-11-2015-0168

Dawidowicz, P. (2012). The person on the street's understanding of systems thinking. *System Research and Behavioral Science, 29*(1), 2-13. doi:10.1002/sres.1094

Degen, R. J. (2017). Wisdom, uncertainty, and ambiguity in management decisions based on experiences and the trustworthiness of research methods to substantiate them. *Revista Ibero Americana de Estrategia (RIAE), 16*(4), 6-22. doi:10.5585/riae.v16i4.2596

Denney, V. P. (2020). Exploring the upside of risk in project management: A phenomenological inquiry. *Journal of Modern Project Management, 8*(1), 278-298. doi:10.19255/JMPM02312

Di Berardino, D. D. (2016). Corporate governance and firm performance in new

    technology ventures. *Procedia Economics and Finance, 39*, 412-421.

    doi:10.1016/S2212-5671(16)30342-2

Esi, M. C. (2016). A theoretical analysis of the mission statement based on the

    axiological approach. *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy*, *4*(4),

    553-570. Retrieved from http://www.managementdynamics.ro/index.php/journal

Esi, M. C. (2017). The strategic implementation of a business organization's mission and

    managerial decisions. *Ecoforum Journal, 6*(1), 1-6. Retrieved

    from http://www.ecoforumjournal.ro/index.php/eco/index

Esmaeel, R. I., Zakuan, N., Jamal, N. M., & Taherdoost, H. (2018). Understanding of

    business performance from the perspective of manufacturing strategies: Fit

    manufacturing and overall equipment effectiveness. *Procedia Manufacturing, 22*,

    998-1006. doi:10.1016/j.promfg.2018.03.142

Faltejskova, O., Dvorakova, L., & Hotovcova, B. (2016). Net promoter score integration

    into the enterprise performance measurement and management system: A way to

    performance methods development. *E+M Ekonomie a Management/ E+M*

    Economics & Management, 19(1), 93-107. doi:10.15240/tul/001/2016-1-007

FitzPatrick, B. (2019). Validity in qualitative health education research. *Currents in*

    Pharmacy Teaching and Learning, *11*(2), 211–217.

    doi:10.1016/j.cptl.2018.11.014

Fjeldstad, O. D., & Snow, C. C. (2018). Business models and organization design. *Long*

    Range Planning, 51(1), 32-39. doi:10.1016/j.lrp.2017.07.008

Fletcher, D., De Massis, A., & Nordqvist, M. (2016). Qualitative research practices and

    family business scholarship: A review and future research agenda. *Journal of*

    Family Business Strategy, 7(1), 8-25. doi:10.1016/j.jfbs.2015.08.001

Foley, T., Boyle, S., Jennings, A., & Smithson, W. H. (2017). We're certainly not in our

    comfort zone: A qualitative study of GPs' dementia-care educational needs. *BMC*

    Family Practice, 18(66), 1-10. doi:10.1186/s12875-017-0639-8

Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative

    research. *The Qualitative Report, 20*(9), 1408-1416. Retrieved from

    https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr

Gallagher, J. R. (2019). A framework for internet case study methodologies in writing

    studies. *Computers and Composition, 54*, 1-14.

    doi:10.1016/j.compcom.2019.102509

Garza-Reyes, J. A. (2018). A systematic approach to diagnose the current status of

    quality management systems and business processes. *Business Process*

    Management Journal, 24(1), 216-233. doi:10.1108/BPMJ-12-2016-0248

Gavric, G., Kirin, S., Fedajev, A., & Talović, V. (2019). The phenomenon of mission in

    Serbian companies. *Serbian Journal of Management, 14*(1), 145-156.

    doi:10.5937/sjm14-16850

Gentles S. J., Charles, C., Ploeg, J., & McKibbon, K. A. (2015). Sampling in qualitative

    research: Insights from an overview of the methods literature. *The qualitative*

    Report, 20(11), 1772-1789. Retrieved from https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr

George B., Walker R. M., & Monster, J. (2019). Does strategic planning improve

organizational performance? A Meta-Analysis. *Public Administration Review, 79*(6), 810-819. doi:10.1111/puar.13104

Ghosal, V., & Ye, Y. (2019). The impact of uncertainty on the number of businesses. *Journal of Economics and Business, 105*(3), 1-18. doi:10.1016/j.jeconbus.2019.04.001

Glova, J., & Mrázková, S. (2018). Impact of intangibles on firm value: Empirical evidence from European public companies. *Journal of Economics, 66*(7), 665-680. Retrieved from http://www.ekonom.sav.sk/sk/casopis

Göbel, C., Teitscheid, P., Friedrich, S., Langen, N., Speck, M., Engelmann, T., & Rohn, H. (2017). Implementing sustainable business models in the hospitality sector with the help of a mission statement. *International Journal on Food System Dynamics, 8*(2), 165–169. doi:10.18461/ijfsd.v8i2.827

González Macias, C. J., & Cuevas Contreras, T. J. (2019). The life story: A social qualitative research method and its application in tourism management studies. *Revista Iberoamericana de Turismo, 9*(Especial), 59–77. doi:10.2436/20.8070.01.143

Grimes, M. G., Williams, T. A., & Zhao, E. Y. (2020). Beyond Hybridity: Accounting for the values complexity of all organizations in the study of mission and mission drift. *Academy of Management Review*, *45*(1), 234–238. doi:10.5465/amr.2019.0209

Grimes, P. E. (2017). Evolution and world-systems: Complexity, energy, and forum. *Journal of World-Systems Research, 23*(2), 678-732. doi:10.5195/JWSR.2017.728

Grimmer, L., Grimmer M., & Mortimer, G. (2018). The more things change, the more they stay the same: A replicated study of small retail firm resources. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 44*, 54-63. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2018.05.012

Guetterman, T. C., & Fetters, M. D. (2018). Two methodological approaches to the integration of mixed methods and case study designs: A systematic review. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *62*(7)*,* 900-918. doi:10.1177/0002764218772641

Guo, J. X. (2019). Measuring information system project success through a software-assisted qualitative content analysis. *Information Technology and Libraries, 38*(1), 53-70. doi:10.6017/ital.v38i1.10603

Gupta, N., & Sharma, V. (2016). Exploring employee engagement: A way to better business performance. *Global Business Review, 17*(3), 45–63. doi:10.1177/0972150916631082

Gurley, D. K., Peters, G. B., Collins, L., & Fifolt, M. (2015). Mission, vision, values, and goals: An exploration of key organizational statements and daily practice in schools. *Journal of Educational Change, 16(2)*, 217-242. doi:10.1007/s10833-014-9229-x

Haggege, M., Gauthier, C., & Ruling, C. (2017). Business model performance: five key drivers. *Journal of Business Strategy, 38*(2), 6-15. doi:10.1108/JBS-09-2016-0093

Hallak, R., Assaker, G., O'Connor, P., & Lee, C. (2018). Firm performance in the upscale restaurant sector: The effects of resilience, creative self-efficacy, innovation, and industry experience. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 40,* 229-240. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2017.10.014

Hamilton, A. B., & Finley, E. P. (2019). Qualitative methods in implementation research:

An introduction. *Psychiatry Research*, *280*, 1-8.

doi:10.1016/j.psychres.2019.112516

Hazée, S., Van Vaerenbergh, Y., Delcourt, C., & Kabadayi, S. (2020). Service delivery

system design for risk management in sharing-based product service systems: a

customer-oriented approach. *International Journal of Operations & Production*

Management, 40(4), 459-479. doi:10.1108/IJOPM-08-2019-0581

Heath, J., Williamson, H., Williams, L., & Harcourt, D. (2018). It's just more personal:

Using multiple methods of qualitative data collection to facilitate participation in

research focusing on sensitive subjects. *Applied Nursing Research, 43*, 30-35.

doi*:*10.1016/j.apnr.2018.06.015

Heyeres, M., Tsey Komla, Yang, Y., Yan, L., & Jiang, H. (2019). The characteristics and

reporting quality of research impact case studies: A systematic review. *Evaluation*

and Program Planning, 73, 10-23. doi:10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2018.11.002

Hong, S., Oxley, L., McCann, P., & Le, T. (2016). Why firm size matters: Investigating

the drivers of innovation and economic performance in New Zealand using the

business operations survey. *Applied Economics, 48*(55), 5379-5395.

doi:10.1080/00036846.2016.1178843

Hult, G. T., Morgeson, F. V., Morgan, N. A., Mithas, S., & Fornell, C. (2017). Do

managers know what their customers think and why? *Journal of the Academy of*

Marketing Science, 45(1), 37-54. doi:10.1007/s11747-016-0487-4

Hyder, S., & Lussier, R. N. (2016). Why businesses succeed or fail: A study on small

business in Pakistan. *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies, 8*(1), 82-100. doi:10.1108/JEEE-03-2015-0020

Ibiwoye, A., Mojekwu, J., & Dansu, F. (2020). Enterprise risk management practices and survival of small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria. *Studies in Business & Economics,15*(1), 68-82. doi:10.2478/sbe-2020-0007

Ismanu, S., & Kusmintarti, A. (2019). Innovation and firm performance of small and medium enterprises. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research, 8*(2), 312-323. Retrieved from http://buscompress.com/journal-home.html

Jaaron, A. A. M., & Backhouse, C. J. (2018, June). Achieving sustainability through service operations design: The role of systems thinking. *Paper presented at the 25th annual Europa Operations Management Association International Conference, Budapest, Hungary.* 1-10. Paper retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326040743_Achieving_sustainability_th rough_service_operations_design_the_role_of_systems_thinking

Jackson, E. A., & Jackson, H. F. (2016). The role of corporate social responsibility in improving firm's business in the directions of sustainable development, accountability and transparency. *Economic Insights – Trends & Challenges, 68*(1)*,* 39-50. doi:10.1504/AJESD.2017.089942

Johnson, J. L., Adkins, D., & Chauvin S. (2019) Quality indicator of rigor in qualitative research. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, *83*(10), 1-22. doi:10.5688/ajpe7120

Kapp, J. M., Simoes, E. J., DeBiasi, A., & Kravet, S. J. (2017). A conceptual framework

for a systems thinking approach to U.S. population health. *System Research and Behavioral Science, 34*(6), 686-698. doi:10.1002/sres.2420

Karagiozis, N. (2018). The Complexities of the Researcher's Role in Qualitative Research: The Power of Reflexivity. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Educational Studies, 13*(1), 19–31. doi:10.18848/2327-011X/CGP/v13i01/19-31

Karanikas, N., Popovich, A., Steele, S., Horswill, N., Laddrak, V., & Roberts, T. (2020). Symbiotic types of systems thinking with systematic management in occupational health & safety. *Safety Science, 128,* 1-9. doi:10.1016/j.ssci.2020.104752

Kato, M., & Charoenrat, T. (2018). Business continuity management of small and medium-sized enterprises: Evidence from Thailand. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, 27,* 577-587. doi:10.1016/j.ijdrr.2017.10.002

Kim, S. H., Jang, S. Y., & Yang, K. H. (2017). Analysis of the determinants of software-as-a-service adoption in small business: Risk, benefits, and organizational environmental factors. *Journal of Small Business Management, 55*(2), 303-325. doi:10.1111/jsbm.12304

Kirkpatrick, S. A. (2017). Understanding the Role of Vision, Mission, and Values in the HPT Model. *Performance Improvement, 56*(3), 6–14. doi:10.1002/pfi.21689

Klein, S., Schneider, S., Spieth, P. (2020). How to stay on the road? A business model perspective on mission drift in social purpose organizations. *Journal of Business Research*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.01.053

Kordova, S. K., Frank, M., & Miller, A. N. (2018). Systems thinking education: Seeing the forest through the trees. *Systems*, *6*(3), 1-14. doi:10.3390/systems6030029

Ku, E. C. S., Hsu, S. F., & Wu, W. C. (2020). Connecting supplier–supplier relationships to achieve supply chain performance of restaurant companies. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights, 3*(3), 311-328. doi:10.1108/JHTI-10-2019-0113

Kumar, V., & Pansari, A. (2016). Competitive advantage through engagement. *Journal of Marketing and Research, 53*(4), 497-514. doi:10.1509/jmr.15.0044

Kushner, D. S., & Strasser D. C. (2020). Stroke inpatient rehabilitation team conferences: Leadership and structure improve patient outcomes. *Journal of Stroke and Cerebrovascular Diseases, 29*(4), 1-9. doi:10.1016/j.jstrokecrebrovasdis.2019.104622

Laban, O. M., & Deya, J. (2019). Strategic innovations and the performance of information communication technology firms in Nairobi Kenya. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development, 8*(2), 1-24. doi:10.6007/IJARPED/v8-i2/5599

Leonideu, L. C., Christodoulides, P., Kyrgidou, L. P., & Palihawadana, D. (2017). Internal drivers and performance consequences of small firm green business strategy: The moderating role of external forces. *Journal of Business Ethics, 140*(3), 585-606. doi:10.1007/s10551-015-2670-9

Levitt, H. M., Bamberg, M., Creswell, J. W., Frost, D. M., Josselson, R., & Suarez-Orozco, C. (2018). Journal article reporting standards for qualitative primary, qualitative meta-analytic, and mixed methods research in psychology: The APA publications and communications board task force report. *The American Psychologist, 73*(1), 26-46. doi:10.1037/amp0000151

Lezak, S. B., & Tibodeau, P.H. (2016). Systems thinking and environmental concern. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 46*, 143-153. doi:10.1016/j.jenvp.2016.04.005

Lloret, A. (2016). Modeling corporate sustainability strategy. *Journal of Business Research, 69*(2), 418-425. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.06.047

Lodgaard, E., Ingvaldsen, J. A., Aschehoug, S. H., & Gamme, I. (2016). Barriers to continuous improvement: Perceptions of top managers, middle managers, and workers. *48th CIRP conference on manufacturing systems. Procedia CIRP, 41*, 1119-1124. doi:10.1016/j.procir.2016.01.012

Loukis, E., Janssen, M., & Mintchev, I. (2019). Determinants of software-as-a-services benefits and impact on firm performance. *Decision Support Systems, 117,* 38-47. doi:10.1016/j.dss.2018.12.005

Luckmann, P., & Feldmann, C. (2017). Success factors for business process improvement projects in small and medium-sized enterprises empirical evidence. *Procedia Computer Science, 121*, 439-445. doi:10.1016/j.procs.2017.11.059

Malterud, K., Hamberg, K., & Reventlow, S. (2017). Qualitative methods in PhD theses from general practice in Scandinavia. *Scandinavian Journal of Primary Health Care, 35*(4), 309-312. doi:10.1080/02813432.2017.1397257

Mangla, S. K., Kusi-Sarpong, S., Luthra, S., Bai, C., Jakhar, S. K., & Khan, S. A. (2020). Operational excellence for improving sustainable supply chain performance. *Resources, Conservation, & Recycling*, *162*, 1-3. doi:10.1016/j.resconrec.2020.105025

Mark, A. D., & Wells, S. (2019) Evaluation of an afterschool mentorship program for self-efficacy. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice, 9*(1), 224-233. doi:10.5590/JERAP.2019.09.1.16

Marks, A., Wilkes, L., Blythe S., & Griffiths, R. (2017) A novice researcher's reflection on recruiting participants for qualitative research. *Nurse Researcher*, *25*(2), 34-38. doi:10.7748/nr.2017.e1510

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2016) *Designing qualitative research* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Martinez-Martinez, A., Cegarra-Navarro, J. G., Perez-Garcia, A., & Wensley, A. (2019). Knowledge agents as drivers of environmental sustainability and business performance in the hospitality sector. *Tourism Management, 70*, 381-389. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2018.08.030

Matta, C. (2019). Qualitative research methods and evidential reasoning. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences, 49*(5), 385-412. doi:10.1177/0048393119862858

Maurya, K. K., & Agarwal, M. (2018). Organizational talent management and perceived employer branding. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis, 26*(2), 312-330. doi:10.1108/IJOA-04-2017-1147

Mazzei, M. J., Flynn, C. B., & Haynie, J. (2016). Moving beyond initial success: Promoting innovation in small business through high-performance work practices. *Business Horizon, 59*(1), 51-60. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2015.08.004

McDonald, J. B. (2017). *Customer relationship management strategies at historically black colleges and universities* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from

https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations

McDonald, M. G., Bookwalter, V. D., Dickey, M., & McEwen A. (2019). Pansophy data
as used to develop metrics and evaluate trends across SRF projects and facilities
to further quality improvement initiatives. *Proceedings* of *2019 International
Conference on RF Superconductivity (SRF'19)*, Dresden, Germany. 718-720. doi
10.18429/JACow-SRF2019-TUP103

McGrath, S. K., & Whitty, S. J. (2017). Stakeholder defined. *International Journal of
Managing Projects in Business, 10*(4), 721-748. doi:10.1108/IJMPB-12-2016-
0097

Mersland, R., Nyarko, S. A., & Szafarz, A. (2019). Do social enterprises walk the talk?
Assessing microfinance performances with mission statements. *Journal of
Business Venturing Insights, 11*, 1-11. doi:10.1016/j.jbvi.2019.e00117

Mohammed, H. K., & Knapkova, A. (2016). The impact of total risk management on
company's performance. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Science, 220*, 271-277.
doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.05.499

Moeldner, A. K., Garza-Reyes, J. A., & Kumar, V. (2020). Exploring lean manufacturing
practices' influence on process innovation performance. *Journal of Business
Research, 106*, 233-249. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.09.002

Morozov V., Mezentseva O., & Proskurin M. (2021). Application of game theory for
decisions making on the development of IT products. *In 2020 International
Scientific Conference "Intellectual Systems of Decision Making and Problem of
Computational Intelligence",* Springer, Cham, *377-394* doi:10.1007/978-3-030-

54215-3_24

Mulolli, E., Boskovska, D., & Islami, X. (2020). The competitive role of human resource management strategies on SMEs in a transitional economy. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Current Research, 8*(4), 521-529. doi:10.14741/ijmcr/v.8.4.4

Munoz-Izquierdo, N., Segovia-Vargas, M. J., Camacho-Minano, M., & Pascual-Ezama, D. (2019). Explaining the causes of business failure using audit report disclosures. *Journal of Business Research, 98*, 403-414. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.024

Murphy, W. H., & Leonard, D. (2016). Quality management (QM) leads to healthier small businesses. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development, 23(4)*, 1104-1119. doi:10.1108/JSBED-12-2015-0169

Mykhalovskiy, E., Eakin, J., Beagan, B., Beausoleil, N., Gibson, B. E., Macdonald, M. E., & Rock, M. J. (2018). Beyond bare bones: Critical, theoretically engaged qualitative research in public health. *Canadian Journal of Public*, *109*(5-6), 613–621. doi:10.17269/s41997-018-0154-2

Myšková, R., & Doupalová, V. (2016). Approach to risk management decision-making in the small business. *Procedia Economics and Finance, 34*, 329-336. doi:10.1016/S2212-5671(15)01637-8

Naude, M. J., & Chiweshe, N. (2017). A proposed operational risk management framework for small and medium enterprises. *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences, 20*(1), 1-10. doi:10.4102/sajems.v20i1.1621

Ngo, V. N., & Nguyen, H. (2016). The relationship between service quality, customer

satisfaction, and customer loyalty: An Investigation in Vietnamese retail banking

sector. *Journal of Competitiveness, 8*(2), 103-116. doi:10.7441/joc.2016.02.08

Onalaja, A. Cheung, W. M., & Samwinga, V. (2018). Identifying infrastructure project

uncertainties during project initiation using systems thinking. *Proceedings of the

Creative Construction Conference, CCC 2018*, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 537-543.

doi:10.3311/CCC2018-071

Palinkas, L. A., Hortwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K.

(2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed

method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and

Mental Health Services Research, 42*(5)*, 533-544. doi:10.1007/s10488-013-0528-

y

Park, E., Caine, V., McConnell, D., & Minaker, J. (2016). Ethical tensions as educative

spaces in narrative inquiry. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 17(2), 1-20.

doi:10.17169/fqs-17.2.2571

Pedraza-Rodríguez, J. A., Bolcha, P., & Santos-Roldán, L. (2020). From strategies to

innovation: An empirical study from Spain. *Technology Analysis & Strategic

Management*, 1-14. doi:10.1080/09537325.2020.1795112

Pei, X. L., Tian G. Y., & McAvoy, D. (2019). Relationships between different types of

servitization and operational performance: Considering the effect of cross-

function integration. *Revista de Cercetare SI Interventie Sociala, 64,* 181-198.

doi:10.33788/rcis.64.15

Perez-Luño, A., Saparito, P., & Gapalakrishnan, S. (2016). Small and medium-sized

enterprise's entrepreneurial versus market orientation and the creation of tacit knowledge. *Journal of Small Business Management, 54*(1), 262-278. doi:10.1111/jsbm.12144

Pernica, K., & Tyll, L. (2018). Building of entrepreneurial ethos through mission statements: The difference in approach between public and private universities in the Czech Republic. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Knowledge, 6*(1), 52–60. doi:10.2478/ijek-2018-0004

Phillippi, J., & Lauderdale, J. (2017). A Guide to field notes for qualitative research: Context and conversation. *Qualitative Health Research, 28*(3), 381-388. doi:10.1177/1049732317697102

Plotnikova, M., Romero, I., & Martinez-Roman, J. A. (2016). Process innovation in small businesses: The self-employed as entrepreneurs. *Small Business Economics 47*(4), 939-954. doi:10.1007/s11187-016-9743-8

Porvaznik, J., & Ljudvigova, I. (2016). General theory of systems, cybernetics, and evaluation of human competence by solving present crisis problems of civilisation. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, 230*, 112-120. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.09.014

Prakash, A., Jha S. K., Prasad, K. D., & Singh, A. K. (2017). Productivity, quality, and business performance: An empirical study. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management, 66*(1), 78-91. doi:10.1108/IJPPM-03-2015-0041

Raithatha, M., & Komera, S. (2016). Executive compensation and firm performance: Evidence from Indian firms. *IIMB Management Review, 28*(3), 160-169.

doi:10.1016/j.iimb.2016.07.002

Rajendran, R. P., & Suresh, J. (2017). Customer satisfaction index as a performance

evaluation metric: A study on Indian e-banking industry. *International Journal of*

Business, 22(3), 251-274. Retrieved from: http://www.craig.csufresno.edu/ijb/

Ramirez, S. A. (2018). Diversity and ethics: Toward an objective business compliance

function. *Loyola University Chicago Law Journal, 49*(3), 581-609. Retrieved

from https://lawecommons.luc.edu/luclj/

Rashid, A. (2018). Board independence and firm performance: Evidence from

Bangladesh. *Future Business Journal, 4*(1), 34-49. doi:10.1016/j.fbj.2017.11.003

Reichow, B., Barton, E. E., & Maggin, D. M. (2018). Development and applications of

the single-case design risk of bias tool for evaluating single-case design research

study reports. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 79*, 53-64.

doi:10.1016/j.ridd.2018.05.008

Ridder, H. G. (2017). The theory contribution of case study research design. *Business*

Research, 10(2)*,* 281-305. doi:10.1007/s40685-017-0045-z

Rodela, R., Perez-Soba, M., Bregt, A., & Verweij, P. (2018). Spatial decision support

systems: Exploring differences in pilot-testing with students vs.

professionals. *Computers Environment and Urban Systems*, *72*, 204–211.

doi:10.1016/j.compenvurbsys.2018.06.011

Rosenthal, M. (2016). Qualitative research methods: Why, when, and how to conduct an

interview and focus groups in pharmacy research. *Currents in Pharmacy*

Teaching and Learning 8(4), 509-516. doi:10.1016/j.cptl.2016.03.021

Ross, D. A., & Wade, J. P. (2015). A definition of systems thinking: A systems approach. *Procedia Computer Science, 44*, 669-678. doi:10.1016/j.procs.2015.03.050

Rusu, C. (2016). From quality management to managing quality. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, 221*, 287-293. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.05.117

Santoso, S. (2017). Influence of entrepreneurship education, gender, and parent background to relationship between self-efficacy and entrepreneurship intention. *International Journal of Information, Business, and Management, 9*(3), 264-275. Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/

Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2016). *Research methods for business students* (7th ed.). Essex, England: Pearson.

Senge, P. M., Smith, B., Kruschwitz, N., Laur, J., & Schley, S. (2010). *The necessary revolution: How individuals and organizations are working together to create a sustainable world*. New York, NY: Crown Business.

Shad, MK., Lai, F. W., Fatt, C. L., Klemes, J. J., & Bokhari, A., (2019). Integrating sustainability reporting into enterprise risk management and its relationship with business performance: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Cleaner Production, 208*, 415-425. doi:10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.10.120

Shaefer, C. (2017). How the Baldrige Framework supports customer-focused excellence. *PA Time, American Society for Public Administration*. Retrieved from https://patimes.org/

Shaked, H., & Schechter, C. (2020). Systems thinking leadership: New explorations for school improvement. *Management in Education, 34*(3), 107–114.

doi:10.1177/0892020620907327

Sharp, T. (2020). The State of American Choral Directors Association. *Choral Journal*, 60(7), 2–94. Retrieved from https://acda.org/category/choral-journal/

Shin, H., Lee, J. N., Kim, D., & Rhim, H. (2015). Strategic agility of Korean small and medium enterprises and its influence on operational and firm performance. *International Journal of Production Economics, 168*, 181-196. doi:10.1016/j.ijpe.2015.06.015

Simeunović, B., Tomašević, I., Slović, D., & Stojanović, D. (2020). Novel approach to measuring business process performance. *Ekonomicky Casopis (Journal of Economics)*, *68*(4), 360-379. Retrieved from http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/

Simonovic, S. P. (2020). Systems Approach to management of water resources: Toward performance based water resources engineering. *Water, 12* (4), 1-16. doi:10.3390/w12041208

Singh, J., Wiese, A., & Sillerud, B. (2019). Using phenomenological hermeneutics to understand the experiences of managers working with quality improvement strategies in an assisted living facility. *Healthcare, 7(*3), 1-13. doi:10.3390/healthcare7030087

Sovacool, B. K., Axsen, J., & Sorrel, S. (2018). Promoting novelty, rigor, and style in energy social science: Towards codes of practice for appropriate methods and research design. *Energy Research & Social Science, 45*, 12-42. doi:10.1016/j.erss.2018.07.007

Spear, S. (2017). Impression management activity in vision, mission, and values

statements: A comparison of commercial and charitable organizations. *International Studies of Management & Organization, 47*(2), 159–175. doi:10.1080/00208825.2017.1256165

Sroka, W., & Szanto, R. (2018). Corporate social responsibility and business ethics in controversial sectors: Analysis of research results. *Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management, and Innovation, 14*(3), 111-126. doi:10.7341/20181435

Stephenson, R., Rothlisberger, C., & Westover, J. (2018). Extracurricular engagement and person-organization fit through internalizing organizational mission statements and values. *Organizational Cultures: An International Journal*, 17(4), 21-37. doi:10.18848/2327-8013/CGP/v17i04/21-37

Sturmberg, J. P., Martin, C. M., & Katerndahl, D. A. (2014). Systems and complexity thinking in the general practice literature: An integrative, historical narrative review. *Annals of Family Medicine, 12*(1)*,* 66-74. doi:10.1370/afm.1593

Sun, F., Long, A., Chiang, C., Huang, H., Hou, Y., & Yao, Y. (2018). Rationale underpinning postgraduate student nurses' choice of research methods used for their master's theses. *Nurse education in practice, 33*, 127-132. doi:10.1016/j.nepr.2018.10.002

Syed Fuzi, S. F., Abdul Halim, S. A., Julizaerma, M. K. (2016). Board independence and firm performance. *Procedia Economics and Finance, 37,* 460-465. doi:10.1016/S2212-5671(16)30152-6

Taher, N. B., & Krotov, V. (2016). Business process reengineering: Addressing sources of resistance and sabotage tactics. *Journal of Competitiveness Studies 24*(3), 145-

163. Retrieved from https://www.questia.com/library/p439692/journal-of-competitiveness-studies/

Tani, M., Papaluca, O., & Sasso, P. (2018). The systems thinking perspective in open-innovation research: A systematic review. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity, 4*(3), 1-28. doi:10.3390/joitmc4030038

Taouab, O., & Issor, Z., (2019). Firm Performance: Definition and measurement models. *European Scientific Journal, 15*(1), 93-106. doi:10.19044/esj.2019.v15n1p93

Thompson, K. R., & Blazey, M. L. (2017). What we can learn from the Baldrige criteria: An integrated management model to guide organizations. *Organizational Dynamics, 46*(1), 21-29. doi:10.1016/j.orgdyn.2016.10.010

Tsey, K., Lawson, K., Kinchin, I., Bainbridge, R., McCalman, J., Watkin, F., & . . . Rossetto, A. (2016). Evaluating research impact: The development of a research for impact tool. *Frontiers in Public Health*, *4*(160), 1-11. doi:10.3389/fpubh.2016.00160

Turner, S., & Endres, A. (2017). Strategies for enhancing small business owners' success rates. *International Journal of Applied Management and Technology, 16*(1), 34-49. doi:10.5590/IJAMT.2017.16.1.03

U.S. Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology (2020). *Baldrige performance excellence program: Core values and concepts*. Retrieved from https://www.nist.gov/baldrige/core-values-and-concepts

U.S. Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology (2017a). *Baldrige excellence builder: Key questions for improving your organization's*

performance (NIST T1548). Retrieved from http://www.nist.gov/baldrige

U.S. Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology. (2017b). *2017-2018 Baldrige Excellence Framework: A systems approach to improving your organization's performance (Business/Nonprofit)*. Gaithersburg, MD. Author.

U.S. Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology. (2017c). *How Baldrige works*. Retrieved from https://www.nist.gov/baldrige/how -baldrige-works

U.S. Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology. (2019). *2019-2020 Baldrige excellence program: Proven leadership and management practices for high performance (Business/Nonprofit)*. Gaithersburg, MD. Author

U.S. Small Business Administration. (2018a). *Small business facts: Why do businesses close?* Retrieved from https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/Small_Biz_Facts_Why_Do_Businesses_Close_May_2018_0.pdf

U.S. Small Business Administration. (2018b). *Texas Small Business Economic Profile, 2018*. Retrieved from https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/advocacy/Texas.pdf

Ugochukwu, O., & Fasola, O. O. (2018). A proposed control system for checkmating and aeronautics agency riddled with fraud. *Transactions on Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence, 6*(5), 17-27. doi:10.14738/tmlai.65.4416

Ul-Hameed, W., Shabbir, M. S., Imran, M., Raza, A., & Salman, R. (2019). Remedies of low performance among Pakistani e-logistic companies: The role of firm's IT

capability and information communication technology (ICT). *Uncertain Supply Chain Management, 7*(2), 369–380. doi:10.5267/j.uscm.2018.6.002

Valentine, S. R., Hanson, S. K., & Fleischman, G. M. (2018). The presence of ethics codes and employees' internal locus of control, social aversion/malevolence, and ethical judgment of incivility: A study of smaller organizations. *Journal of Business Ethics, 160(3)*, 657-674. doi:10.1007/s10551-018-3880-8

Van Lier, B. (2013). Organizing information connections for mobile healthcare. *European Journal of ePractice, 21*, 75-87. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/

Varendh-Mansson, C., Wry, T., & Szafarz, A. (2020). Anchors Aweigh? Then time to head upstream: Why we need to theorize "Mission" before "Drift." *Academy of Management Review,* 45(1), 230–233. doi:10.5465/amr.2019.0081

Vargo, S. L., Koskela-Houtari, K., Baron, S., Edvardsson, B., Reynoso, J., & Colurcio, M. (2017). A system perspective on markets: Toward a research agenda. *Journal of Business Research, 79*, 260-268. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.03.011

Villarreal Larrinaga, O. (2017). Is it desirable, necessary and possible to perform research using cases studies? *Cuadernos de Gestion, Universidad del Pais Vasco, Instituto de Economia1Aplicada a la Empresa (IEAE), 17*(1), 147-172. doi:10.5295/cdg.140516ov

Vityaev, E.E., & Demin A. V. (2018). Cognitive architecture based on the functional system theory. *Post proceeding of the 9th Annual International Conference on Biologically Inspired Cognitive Architecture, 145*, 623-628.

doi:10.1016/j.procs.2018.11.072

Von Bertalanffy, L. (1950). An Outline of General System Theory. *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, 1*(2), 134-165. doi:10.1093/bjps/I.2.134

Von Bertalanffy, L. (1969). *General system theory: Foundations, development, applications.* New York, NY: George Braziller.

Von Bertalanffy, L. (1972/2017). The history and status of general system theory. *Academy of Management Journal, 15*(4), 407-426 (Original work published 1972). doi:10.5465/255139

Weaver, M. W., Crossan, K., Tan, H. B., & Paxton, S. E. (2018). A system approach to understanding the perspectives in the changing landscape of responsible business in Scotland. *European Journal of Operation Research, 268*(3), 1149-1167. doi:10.1016/j.ejor.2017.11.050

Wehner, J. (2018). Energy Efficiency in Logistics: An interactive approach to capacity utilization. *Sustainability, 10*(6), 1-19. doi:10.3390/su10061727

Widdersheim, M. M. (2018). Historical case study: A research strategy for diachronic analysis. *Library & Information Science Research, 40*(2), 144-152. doi:10.1016/j.lisr.2018.06.003

Wijethilake, C. (2017). Proactive sustainability strategy and corporate sustainability performance: The mediating effect of sustainability control systems. *Journal of Environmental Management, 196*, 569-582. doi:10.1016/j.jenvman.2017.03.057

Willar, D., Trigunarsyah, B., & Coffy V. (2016). Organizational culture and quality management system implementation in Indonesian Construction Company.

Engineering, Construction, and Architectural Management, 23(2), 114-133.

doi:10.1108/ECAM-02-2015-0026

Williams, A. (2017). *Sustainability strategies for small business restaurant owners.*
(Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from
http://www.scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/

Woods, J. A., Gottschall, R., Matthews, C. H., & Carsrud, A. L. (2017). The influence of
industry association involvement on technology decision-making in small
businesses. *Journal of Enterprising Culture, 25*(3), 317-337.
doi:10.1142/S0218495817500121

Yeniyurt, S., Wu, F., Kim. D., & Cavusgil, S. T. (2019). Information technology
resources, innovativeness, and supply chain capabilities as drivers of business
performance: A retrospective and future research directions. *Industrial Marketing
Management, 79*, 46-52. doi:10.1016/j.indmarmand.2019.03.008

Yeong, M. L., Ismail, R., Ismail, N. H., & Hamzah, M. I. (2018). Interview protocol
refinement: Fine-tuning qualitative research interview questions for multi-racial
populations in Malaysia. *The Qualitative Report, 23*(11), 2700-2713. Retrieved
from: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/

Yin, J., & Quazi, A. (2018). Business ethics in the Greater China region: Past, present,
and future research. *Journal of Bus Ethics 150*(3), 815-835. doi:10.1007/s10551-
016-3220-9

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and Applications* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA:
SAGE.

Zahle, J. (2019). Data, epistemic, values, and multiple methods in case study research. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A, 78,* 32-39. doi:10.1016/j.shpsa.2018.11.005

Zeininger, L., Irimie, S., & Mihai, M. (2017). SME's implementing a quality management system: Risks and opportunities. *Economics and Applied Informatics - Dunarea de Jos University of Galati, 23*(3), 14-19. Retrieved from https://econpapers.repec.org/article/ddjfseeai/

Zych, M. M., Berta, W. B., & Gagliardi, A. R. (2019). Initiation is recognized as a fundamental early phase of integrated knowledge translation (IKT): Qualitative interviews with researchers and research users in IKT partnership. *BMC Health Services Research, 19*(1), 2-10. doi:10.1186/s12913-019-4573-4Tab

Appendix A: Editorial Authorization

Following the authorization to reprint figures from the DOC publications.

Congratulations on your dissertation as a doctoral candidate for business administration, and thank you for referencing the Baldrige Excellence Framework.

It is not a problem to reprint the image, as we encourage sharing of the Criteria figure. One point is that you are referencing the 2017–2018 framework, which was updated in 2019–2020. Thankfully, that image did not change.

You may use that image in your dissertation. All of the images from the framework on this web page— https://www.nist.gov/baldrige/publications/baldrige-excellence-framework/baldrige-excellence-framework-graphics#overview—are in the public domain and may be used freely; the Criteria image is included here. Each image is listed with the credit that should accompany its use, and that credit is embedded within the image.

Please let me know if you need any further clarification.

Happy Thanksgiving,
Dawn

Dawn M. Bailey
Education Team/Communications Team
Baldrige Performance Excellence Program
National Institute of Standards and Technology
301-975-3074
www.nist.gov/baldrige

Follow us on Twitter @baldrigeprogram

Read *BLOGRIGE*, the Baldrige blog, on its new site at https://www.nist.gov/blogs/blogrige

Baldrige: (Im)Prove Your Performance™

Following the authorization to reprint figures from Elsevier publications

Appendix B: Interview Protocol
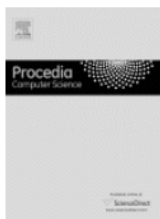
After selecting the candidates to participate in my study from the existing list of MBNQA recipients the DOC (2017c) has on their webpage,

1. I will send an invitation letter via e-mail to each of them and the consent form indicated in the previous section in this appendix.

2. After they return the email indicating they consent what stated in the consent form, I will have a prelaminar communication by email or phone call to answer new questions they could have. I will also send the proposed calendar for the interview session. Further contact will be necessary to agree on the interview schedule.

3. Before the interview, I will send the interview questions.

4. During the interview, I will ask follow-up questions to be sure I understand the answer, and the interviewee understood my question. Also, I will take notes.

5. After each interview, I will send study participants the interview transcripts to avoid bias and to ensure my interpretation and information is accurate and correspond to what they wanted to transmit with their answers.

6. Once the process is complete, I will send them my interpretation and analysis of their responses.

7. Finally, I will send a small recognition plate to those interviewed expressing my gratitude for their participation in my research.