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# Using Knowledge Management Practices in Small Business Organizations

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Abstract

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Small businesses struggle to attain, retain, and transfer knowledge using knowledge management (KM). Small business enterprise (SBE) leaders who do not leverage core competencies of KM are at high risk of failure. Grounded in Nonaka's dynamic theory of knowledge creation, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the KM strategies small retail business leaders in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area use for sustainability. The participants comprised 4 small business enterprise leaders in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area who effectively used KM strategies to sustain business beyond 5 years. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and internal and external company documents. Yin's 5-step process was used to analyze the data, and 4 themes emerged: communication, training and development, knowledge transfer, and innovation. A key recommendation is for SBE leaders to pay close attention to the transfer of information and business innovation to remain relevant. The implications for positive social change include the potential for SBE leaders to create jobs and economic wealth within their communities.

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# Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to my wonderful family. To my mother, thank you for your unwavering support throughout the entire journey. The sacrifices that you made over the years to ensure I had all the tools I needed to be successful, is amazing. To my astounding grandparents, thank you for the countless words of aspirations and monthly mementos to remind me that success is right around the corner. To my aunt and uncle, even before I embarked upon this journey, you saw a goal that was destined for me. I thank you for the love and encouragement. And lastly, to my close friends and colleagues I want to say thank you for your understanding, support, friendship, love, and encouragement throughout my journey.

# Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Olivia Herriford, for her support, guidance, constructive feedback, and encouragement. Over the last few years, I have learned a lot about myself from integral conversations both personally and professionally. For that, I am extremely thankful. I would also like to extend a warm thank you to Dr. Jamiel Vadell and staff for the support and insight throughout my journey.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

## Background of the Problem

Small businesses are the lifeblood of the U.S. economy creating two-thirds of net new jobs and driving approximately 44% of U.S. economic revenue activity (Small Business Administration, 2019). There has been an increase in small business openings, with more than 50% failing within 5 years of startup (SBA, Office of Advocacy, 2016). With a higher failure rate than larger companies, small businesses are often neglected in terms of research (Samujh, 2011). The problem is that many small business managers have difficulty attaining, retaining, and transferring knowledge within their organization. Knowledge management plays a vital role in managing an effective organization. Studies show workers spend about 10% of their time creating new knowledge, however, the other 90% is looking for, or recreating, information that already exists (Jemielniak, 2012). Regardless of company size, knowledge management is crucial to the productivity and profitability of the business.

## Problem Statement

Due to the complexity of business environments and competition intensity, organizational leaders realize that the value of intangible assets (knowledge), is a critical determinant for organization's competitiveness (Abualloush, Bataineh, & Aladwan, 2017; Chien, Yuan, & Hsiung, 2015; Hussinki, Ritala, Vanhala, & Kianto, 2017). The Small Business Administration (2018) reports 30.2 million small businesses within the USA, with 50% fail rate year over year. The general business problem is that some small business enterprise (SBE) leaders do not leverage the core competencies for business

growth to achieve business sustainability. The specific business problem is that some leaders of small retail businesses lack knowledge management strategies for business sustainability.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the knowledge management strategies small retail business leaders use for business sustainability. The targeted population of the study was four small retail business leaders located in Dallas, Texas who sustained their businesses for more than 5 years by using knowledge management strategies. The contribution to social change is increased longevity of the benefits small businesses provide to local economies and the communities.

## Nature of the Study

There are three methodologies to consider when conducting research; qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. Qualitative research is a methodology with which the researcher attempts to gain an understanding of a social concept by exploring the reasons, opinions, and motivations, which can explain the actions of people towards phenomena (Bender, 2013). Qualitative researchers explore information about the human side of an issue and the behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals (Vass, Rigby, & Payne, 2017). Researchers also use the qualitative method to assist in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion, whose roles in the research issue may not be readily apparent (Vass et al., 2017). In contrast, the goal of quantitative research is to examine the relationships or differences among variables through testing hypothesis (Cox, 2012). Combining both

quantitative and qualitative research creates a mixed method research design. The term "mixed method" refers to an emergent methodology of research that advances the systematic integration, or "mixing," of quantitative and qualitative data within a single investigation or sustained program of inquiry (Wisdom, 2103). I used the qualitative research method to conduct the proposed study because the intention was to explore how managers identify, capture, evaluate, retrieve, and share the enterprise's information assets to create a sustainable business in an ever-changing market. Unlike the quantitative and mixed method approaches, which focus on quantifying and generalizing the understanding of phenomena, researchers use the qualitative method to gain an understanding of participants underlying reasons and motivations (Wise, 2011).

There are several design strategies of inquiry in qualitative research including: (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, (c) narrative research, and (e) case study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Phenomenological research design involves understanding the essence of a phenomenon by exploring the views of people who have experienced that phenomenon (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Phenomenology design was not appropriate for the proposed study because the focus is on the perception and experiences of people as opposed to tangible actions. In ethnography research, a heavy focus is placed on up-close personal experience with possible researcher participation; not just observation (Rothstein, 2010). Ethnography design is not appropriate because the researcher explores concepts from a cultural and ethnic perspective (Merriam, 2014). I focused on the research problem from a strategic, rather than an ethnographic, perspective. A case study is a qualitative design in which the researcher identifies a unique concept within a

physical setting and critically explores it through the collection of data within restricted boundaries (Bender, 2013). A multiple case study design was most suitable for my research topic because it focuses on the practices of several small businesses. Using a case study design enables a researcher to provide a contextually rich analysis of data bounded by time and place relating to a phenomenon utilizing what, how and why questions (Yin, 2018). A multiple case study was the most appropriate design for the study because it supports the exploration of how small retail business leaders use knowledge management strategies for achieving business sustainability.

## Research Question

The research question that guided this study was: What knowledge management strategies do some small business enterprise (SBE) leaders apply for business sustainability?

## Interview Questions

1. How do you gather knowledge within in your organization to support your business sustainability**?**
2. How do you make this knowledge accessible within your organization?
3. What knowledge management tools do you use in your business operations?
4. What are some specific challenges your organization has overcome by using its strategies to capture and apply knowledge?
5. How has your organization's knowledge management strategies contributed to your business sustainability?

6. What role does management play in the implementation of knowledge management in your organization?
7. What additional information would you like to share regarding knowledge management strategies for achieving the sustainability of your business

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is Nonaka's dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation. Nonaka constructed this theory in 1994 while exploring numerous knowledge sharing techniques (Nonaka, 1994). Nonaka (1994) posited organizational knowledge creation occurs through continuous dialogue among individuals with tacit and explicit knowledge via four patterns of interaction: socialization, combination, internalization, and externalization. Explicit knowledge is codified knowledge transmittable in formal, systematic language whereas tacit knowledge is the personalized knowledge that is difficult to formalize and communicate and deeply rooted in action, commitment, and involvement in context (Polanyi, 1962). The dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation is relevant to this study because it highlights the importance of organizational learning. The dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation fully utilizes knowledge, gains competence, expand capacity, and changes organizational behavior (Garvin, 2000). Dynamic organizational knowledge creation integrates context, knowledge assets, and knowledge creation processes throughout the business (Von Krogh, Nonaka, & Rechsteiner, 2011). Using Nonaka's four modes of knowledge creation, knowledge management (KM) initiatives can help an organization embed knowledge into organizational processes to continuously

improve practices and behaviors for the achievement of performance goals (King, 2009). Organizational learning is one of the important ways in which a business can improve its utilization of knowledge for sustainability (King, 2009). While individuals develop knowledge, organizations play a critical role in articulating and utilizing that knowledge (Nonaka, 1994). Nonaka's dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation is relevant within small businesses utilizing knowledge management strategies and its importance to sustainability.

## Operational Definitions

*Explicit knowledge:* Knowledge that can be readily articulated, codified, accessed and verbalized (Helie & Sun, 2010).

*Knowledge asset:* The term knowledge assets means the accumulated intellectual resources of an organization (Balbridge, 2003).

*Knowledge audit:* The process or practice of examining organizational systems, procedures, and personnel to determine where knowledge deficiencies exist (Burnett, Williams, & Grinnall, 2013).

*Knowledge-based viewpoint (KBV):* An emerging management theory on knowledge as the primary source of competitive advantage (Grant, 1996).

*Knowledge management (KM).* A process of creating, sharing, using and managing the knowledge and information of an organization (Girard & Girard, 2015).

*Organizational knowledge:* The different knowledge and skills that the employees of a large company or organization have, and how it is used and shared to make the organization more effective (Cambridge, 2016).

*Organizational learning:* Capabilities within an organization that enable improved performance based on experience, repetition, experimentation, or analysis of past events (Sun & Anderson, 2011).

*Resource-based viewpoint (RBV):* A model in which organizational performance derives from resources and capabilities that create value (Grant, 1996).

*Tacit knowledge:* Knowledge that is difficult to write down or share verbally; it can only be learned by doing or observing (Cambridge, 2016).

## Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

### Assumptions

Assumptions, in research, are facts assumed true without verification (Roy & Pacuit, 2013). These assumptions disclose multiple reality perspectives (Yin, 2014). Qualitative research begins with certain assumptions made or theories adhered to by researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Shah & Corley, 2006). The only assumption identified prior to the research is that participants would be truthful when sharing their experience using knowledge management strategies. I assumed all participants, realizing that their responses are confidential; would provide honest responses to the interview questions.

### Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses that could affect the study (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010). Even if a study has a robust design, it may have evidence of limitations, such as a strong regional focus, being too population-specific, or only conducive to incremental findings. The primary limitation identified prior to the research of this study

was that managers may be unaware of knowledge management practices within the organizations, and/or may have an unwillingness to provide research data on current knowledge management practices.

Sample size was also an identified limitation of the study. Qualitative sample sizes should be large enough to obtain feedback for most or all perceptions without gaining saturation (Morse, 1994). It was important that I use a smaller sample size to truly identify the how and why of issues, processes, and situations.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations refer to the limitations purposefully placed on the scope of a study (Ody-Brasier & Vermeulen, 2014). While the emphasis was on knowledge practices in small businesses, data collection of the study focused mainly on retail organizations in Dallas. The study's sample size consisted of 4 leaders of small businesses in Dallas, TX who have been in business for 5 or more years. Findings are not applicable to larger organizations in different geographical regions, due to the organizational structure and availability of resources for knowledge management and training.

## Significance of the Study

According to the U.S. Small Business Administration (2016), small businesses represent 99.7 percent of all employer firms. Since 1995, small businesses have generated 64 percent of new jobs and paid 44 percent of the total United States private payroll (SBA, 2016). Small business owners have been instrumental in economic growth in emerging and developed economies (Boateng, Muhammed, & Abdulrahman, 2013; Cronin-Gilmore, 2012). Understanding the importance of knowledge management in

small organizations adds a perspective to knowledge management research because it focuses on the small business need for organizational success. Knowledge management (KM) is a critical area of research for small business managers and is essential to small business success (Martinez-Conesa, Soto-Acosta, & Carayannis, 2017). Implementing the findings of the proposed study ~~may~~ provide small business managers with a better understanding of the environment, practice, and potential benefits form knowledge management.

**Contribution to Business Practice**

Knowledge management impacts the entire organization by helping employees, managers, and executives share information and best practices that positively impact collective performance (Malhotra, 2005). Knowledge management is a value-adding practice that seeks to enhance profits, innovation, and decision making by providing more and better information to every member of the organization (Malhotra, 2005). Due to increased competitive pressure, modern organizations tend to rely on knowledge and its exploitation to sustain a long-term advantage (Fakhar Manesh, Pellegrini, Marzi, & Dabic, 2020). For sustainability, businesses must think beyond the boundaries of day-to-day operations to remain successful in an ever-changing market. I explored how managers facilitate the process of knowledge management and its potential role in promoting the success of the business.

Evaluating success mechanisms that apply knowledge management within the organization provide small business leaders with insights and recommendations on how to evaluate, manage, and identify knowledge-based assets within the organization. Doing

so, managers can create a more robust business structure and make rigorous business decisions after understanding the internal effects of knowledge management and its significance within a business. In addition, small business leaders may gain insights on how to inculcate knowledge management practices as a means of sustaining their organization beyond 5 years.

**Implications for Social Change**

The contribution to social change are the insights small businesses gain about knowledge management and its potential for supporting organizational longevity and economic integrity. Closures of small businesses increase unemployment and cause a loss of government tax revenue (Small Business Administration, 2014). An exploration of the successful processes and practices of knowledge management enable business leaders to perpetuate business and create employment opportunities in an ever-changing economy. Successful small businesses in local economies boost employment and employee discretionary income, while increasing tax incomes for local governments.

## A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The literature review has three main purposes: (a) to inform the audience of developments in the field, (b) to establish researcher credibility, and (c) to set the current study within the context of previous research (O'Leary, 2014). In the professional and academic literature review, I explore research and theories on the effects of knowledge management on small business sustainability. The conceptual framework of the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation highlights the importance of directorial learning and the impacts organizational behavior (Senge, 1991). I compared, contrasted,

and summarized sources related to the business problem and provided analysis of current thought on knowledge management and small business stability.

ProQuest, EBSCO, Google Scholar and Walden library were resources used to gather data from scholarly journals, academic articles, doctoral studies, and professional trade journals. There were various keywords used for conducting research. Some of the main terms used were *small business, small businesses in the United States, business sustainability, organizational growth, financial performance, business competitive environment, knowledge management, innovation, and qualitative analysis in the small business enterprise industry*.

The literature review contains 94 sources of which 82% were published between 2016 and 2020. There are 93 peer-reviewed articles cited in the literature review which account for 89 % of the cited sources. Knowledge management, barriers to knowledge, knowledge transfer, organizational knowledge, knowledge management systems, absorptive capacity, human and social capital, resource-based theory and competitive advantage are topics used to organize the literature review.

**Knowledge Management**

Knowledge management is increasingly recognized as a key aspect of international business and management (Shao & Ariss, 2020). Knowledge management (KM) is the creation, acquisition, and sharing of knowledge among individuals (Gonzalez & Martins, 2017). KM is any system that helps people in an organization share, access, and update business knowledge and information. The success of an organization's procedures and initiatives depends on knowledge management (Castrogiovanni, Ribeiro-

Soriano, Mas-Tur, & Roig-Tierno, 2016). Knowledge is an intangible asset that is difficult to measure (De Bem, Coelho, & Dandolini, 2016). KM is important to managers within any organization because of the need for information transfer. Developing a knowledge system enables organizations to improve work practices, make better decisions, and avoid the censure that comes from failing to learn from previous experience (Mahoney, 200). Leaders must understand the core requirements of knowledge management to implement successful knowledge management strategies within the business. (Al-Hakim & Hassan, 2016).

Al-Hakim and Hassan (2016) defined the framework of KM as (a) the critical success factors of KM, (b) KM strategies, and (c) knowledge management processes. The critical success factors of knowledge management include (a) human resources, (b) information technology, (c) leadership, (d) organizational learning, (e) organizational strategy, (f) organizational structure, and (g) organizational culture (Al-Hakim & Hassan, 2016). A knowledge management strategy is a strategic investment that represents the company's choices and options to enhance the processes (e.g. knowledge sharing) and to help define which knowledge is relevant and which is not. These are internal processes within the organization. There are five basic knowledge management strategies that organizational leaders may use for conducting business: (a) knowledge strategy as business strategy, (b) intellectual asset management strategy, (c) personal knowledge asset responsibility strategy, (d) knowledge creation strategy, and (e) knowledge transfer strategy (Wiig, 1997).

Knowledge management as a business strategy is the generating, transferring, and regeneration of systematic, explicit, and deliberate knowledge (Wiig, 1997). Knowledge creation and transfer happen in day-to-day encounters between people within any business organization. The intellectual asset management strategy, on the other hand, focuses on intellectual assets (Wiig, 1997). These are items such as company names, domains, or anything that generates goodwill. Personal knowledge asset responsibility strategy is the process of employees using the appropriate knowledge assets for their work responsibilities (Wiig, 1997). Knowledge creation strategy is the process of learning from current knowledge to gain new knowledge (Wiig, 1997). Knowledge transfer strategy is the process of gaining and sharing knowledge (Wiig, 1997). Knowledge transfer strategy provides a guideline to define how a company develops its talent, giving clear guidance on issues such as role clarity, standards, consistency, transparency, and priority (Trautman, 2012). Knowledge transfer processes include (a) utilization, (b) sharing, (c) storage, (d) organization, (e) creation, and (f) codification of knowledge (Al-Hakim & Hassan, 2016; Costa & Monteiro, 2016). Knowledge acquisition and knowledge sharing are the two most important processes (Costa & Monteiro, 2016).

Research on knowledge management and knowledge transfer is relatively new. Between 1975 and 1997, knowledge management was growing rapidly within the U.S. and international organizations (Wiig, 1997). Chaparral Steel began adopting a knowledge-focused management style to help restructure and shape its overall

organizational structure in the late 1900s. The company shifted its corporate strategy to focus directly on explicit management of knowledge, unlike other organizations.

In 1990, The Initiative for Managing Knowledge Assets (IMKA) promoted the idea that organizations reevaluate the knowledge drivers that contribute to the organization's success (Omotayo, 2015). During this period, knowledge management promoted strategy by the large management consultancies, which used their own internal KM programs as exemplars (Skyrme, 2011). A growing number of large companies created formal KM posts, such as Chief Knowledge Officers and new knowledge initiatives, and brought several existing programs originally designated under other labels, such as *business transformation* or *learning organization* under the KM umbrella (Skyrme, 2011). It was not until the late 1990s that consulting firms and businesses began investing in knowledge management and KM practices.

Prior to 2000, knowledge management was an underutilized practice in most businesses. In the early 2000s, small businesses began to explore leveraging knowledge within the organization (Dalkir & Liebowitz, 2011). The dawn of the knowledge age began the shift of organizational focus to knowledge and knowledge management (Dalkir & Liebowitz, 2011). Knowledge individuals bring to others within their organizations could lead to organization-wide knowledge, thus improving knowledge management (Wang, Wang, & Liang, 2014). KM is ongoing within organizations because, without needed knowledge, organizational projects can fail (Hornstein, 2015).

**Barriers to Knowledge Management**

Knowledge flow drives acquisition, transformation, application, and collection of knowledge through individual and organizational learning (Almeida & Soares, 2014; Eriksson & Leiringer, 2015; Pemsel & Wiewiora, 2013; Solli-Saether et al., 2015). The sharing of pertinent knowledge can be a challenge within businesses. Knowledge sharing becomes an issue for many businesses due to the lack of uniformity throughout the organization, which causes informational limbo (Almeida & Soares, 2014). Ferreira, Peralta, and Saldanha (2014) also believed that knowledge sharing is a challenge in many organizations because some employees view knowledge as a controlling mechanism that is insignificant to others. Breakdowns in knowledge conservation create barriers in knowledge transfer. Identifying barriers that may hinder the knowledge management process is vital for organizational leaders (Lotti Oliva, 2014).

To implement successful knowledge management within an organization, organizational leaders must first determine the barriers that may prevent successful implementation (Valmohammadi & Ghassemi, 2016). Leaders depend on reliable and efficient knowledge management practice strategies for achieving the goals and objectives of their companies (Ray, 2014). Many managers are not aware of the knowledge management abilities they can bring to their organization (Kelly, Edkins, Smyth, & Konstantinou, 2013). Mauss and Halls (1954) hypothesized people transfer knowledge only for something in return; known as the gift-exchange theory. Attitudes managers have toward learning can restrict knowledge management practices (Villar, Alegre, & Pla-Barber, 2014). Ray (2014) identified several common barriers that can

prevent the implementation of knowledge transfer within businesses: (a) time, (b) organizational culture, (c) teamwork, (d) trust, (e) leadership, (f) lack of employee participation, and (g) lack resources.

Time is one of the most reoccurring barriers of knowledge management identified in small/large organizations. O'Dell and Grayson (1998) highlighted the lack of time as a common sharing barrier, concluding that even though managers are aware of the benefits of knowledge sharing, they often struggle to implement it due to time constraints. These time restrictions are also a reason people potentially hoard knowledge rather than share with others. People naturally focus on tasks that are more beneficial to them when allotted smaller periods of time (Michailova & Husted, 2003); creating an overall barricade. The barrier restricts the ability to apply lessons learned for knowledge sharing (Pemsel & Wiewiora, 2013). It is important for managers to allow enough space for employees to generate and share knowledge.

Trust is another barrier to knowledge sharing and management. Most people are unlikely to share their knowledge without a feeling of trust that others will not misuse it (Riege, 2005). In some organizations, knowledge is a controlled mechanism where employees only reveal certain information for their benefit (Wiewiora, Murphy, Trigunarsyah, & Brown, 2014). Many employees do not want to share their knowledge because of distrust and suspicion (Ha et al., 2016; Waheed et al., 2013). People want to gain knowledge, but without organization-wide trust, knowledge sharing will not increase among employees (Waheed & Kaur, 2014). Swift and Hwang (2013) identified two types of trust; affective and cognitive. Affective trust is emotional trust involving an

individual's personality (Swift & Hwang, 2013). Cognitive trust is logical trust involving an individual's experience and background (Swift & Hwang, 2013). Although very different, once combined, both cognitive and affective trust creates an extreme barrier within the organization. Business leaders should incorporate knowledge sharing into their business strategies; creating a knowledge sharing culture (Waheed & Kaur, 2014). When people trust each other enough to share knowledge within the organization, job satisfaction increases (Ha, Lo, & Wang, 2016).

Knowledge hoarding is the accumulation of information, which directly contrast with knowledge hiding; the intentional concealment of knowledge requested by another individual (Connelly, Zweig, Webster, & Trougakos, 2011). Knowledge hiding occurs within organizations when employees hide knowledge from others when needed (Peng, 2013). In small businesses, employees may believe the knowledge they create or obtain is their psychological property; therefore, they are unwilling to knowledge share (Peng, 2013). Other employees are willing to share knowledge because they have higher ownership towards their organization (Peng, 2013). Ownership creates a higher sense of self-value for the company. Nonetheless creates organizational barriers such as (a) individual barriers, (b) organizational barriers, (c) technological barriers, (d) contextual barriers, and (e) interproject barriers (Akhavan, Reza Zahedi, & Hosein Hosein, 2014).

The culture of an organization is a determining factor in knowledge development within employees (Wiewiora, Trigunarsyah, Murphy, & Coffey, 2013). Establishing a culture where employees are willing to share their knowledge will rely on the leadership within the organization (Tong, Tak, & Wong, 2015). An organization's climate affects

employees' knowledge-sharing decisions. Companies with stronger knowledge-sharing cultures were less likely to engage in evasive hiding, proving organizational leaders should sustain a knowledge sharing culture amongst staff and management (Connelly et al., 2011; Tong, Tak, & Wong, 2015). When employees are encouraged to share knowledge, organizations have a more prominent culture (Shiaw-Tonget al., 2016).

**Knowledge Transfer**

Learning organizations promote areas where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire; where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured; where collective aspiration is set free; and where people are continually learning how to learn together (Senge, 1990). An effective approach for gathering and transferring knowledge is the use of knowledge management systems (Dulipovici & Robey, 2013; S. Wang et al., 2014). Knowledge management systems are information systems that drive knowledge sharing between employees to aid in the overall success of an organization (S. Wang et al., 2014). Knowledge management systems are significant to organizations because the application of these systems results in the successful sharing of knowledge throughout organizations (Wang et al., 2014). KM systems provide a gateway for knowledge sharing through media, thus allowing access to knowledge across an entire organization (Dulipovici & Robey, 2013). Also, people can create their own knowledge (Hamid, Waycott, Kurnia, & Chang, 2014) and establish meaning around shared knowledge (Holzweiss, Joyner, Fuller, Henderson, & Young, 2014).

Enterprise training systems are an alternative approach for knowledge sharing in businesses. Through proper training, managers can implement knowledge transfer throughout the company (Ji, He, Xu, Liu, & Zhao, 2015). By offering enterprise training, a business can strengthen its brand and create positive brand knowledge, which influences overall organizational stability. Wang, Lee, Wu, Chang, and Wei, (2012) believed a company's brand equity has a positive and significant influence on marketing performance. When all employees receive similar education, there is more consistent product knowledge and service. Ross (2018) stated consistency can bolster the company's market share by promoting the overall knowledge base within the organization. If information is gathered, shared, and exploited correctly, knowledge is successfully developed. An internal knowledge base is an integral part of any company. It is unique and provides an edge over competitors (Ross, 2018). Andriotis (2018) stated enterprise knowledge sharing and training can assist in driving revenue, reduce organizational risk, and improve business processes. Bashouri and Duncan (2014) believed organizations should have processes that require the interaction and participation of employees to obtain knowledge and share the information they learn throughout the entire company for the benefit of all employees. Without knowledge sharing, activities would not exist where the distribution of knowledge would occur (Charband & Navimipour, 2016). As knowledge sharing occurs within a business, there is a positive impact on performance and innovation capabilities (Charband & Navimipour, 2016).

Performance management systems are another approach to knowledge transfer within small business organizations. Ostroff (1992) concluded performance management

constructs a knowledge innovation bridge connecting performance appraisers and appraised employees. Using performance management systems can help encourage teams to work together to share knowledge (Aguinis, Joo, & Gottfredson, 2013). When employees have incentives and rewards and are accountable for projects, they are more willing to share their knowledge (Hau, Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2013; S. Wang et al., 2014).

Management control systems are another approach to knowledge sharing within small business organizations. A management control system (MCS) is a system which gathers and uses the information to evaluate the performance of different organizational resources such as human, physical, and financial resources (Anthony, 2007). These control systems influence the behavior of organizations, which promotes the implementation of organizational strategies (Anthony, 2007). Leaders may use the information learned to construct a more succinct business model and knowledge management/transfer system. Maciariello and Kirby (1994) proposed the theory that management control is concerned with coordination, resource allocation, motivation, and performance measurement. Anthony and Govindarajan (2007) defined management control as the process by which managers influence other members of the organization to implement the organization's strategies. Management controls play a significant role in knowledge transfer (Bardy, Massaro, & Zanin, 2014).

**Organizational Knowledge Creation Theory**

Continuous learning is essential for survival and success in today's world (Gilley, 2000). Learning is the process of obtaining knowledge from one's experience or through study (Ahmady, Nikooravesh, & Mehrpour, 2016). Although organizations learn and

adapt to change, they are often slow in making changes. Successful organizations consider change and development as the most crucial factor in determining their success (Gilley, 2000). Organizations need to have a learning culture that motivates employees to continuously learn and gain knowledge (Cahill, Pierce, Werner, Darley, & Bobersky, 2015). Organizational leaders can establish settings where employees can collaborate and discuss their opinions and ideas to bring about new knowledge as a team (Wang et al., 2014).

Nonaka's (1994) dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation holds that organizational knowledge emerges from continuous dialogue, which encompasses both tacit and explicit knowledge via four patterns; interactions, socialization, combination, internalization, and externalization. Knowledge is a complex and multi-faceted concept and provides many entities and activities in an organization, including the organization's culture, policies, documents, and employees (Nonaka, 1991). Increasingly, knowledge is proving to be a valuable commodity embedded in products (especially high-technology products) and in the tacit knowledge of highly mobile employees (Chin, Lo, & Wang, 2016). Although knowledge is an intellectual asset, it has some paradoxical characteristics that are radically different from those of other valuable commodities. These knowledge characteristics include the following: an abundance of knowledge, use of knowledge, transferal of knowledge, and maintenance of knowledge within the organization (Dalkir, 2011). Any organization that dynamically deals with a changing environment should not only process information efficiently but also create information and knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Organizational knowledge is the different knowledge and skills employees have and the measurement of how knowledge is shared to improve organizational performance (Cambridge, 2016). The effect of external collaboration in organizational learning, suggesting the importance of acquiring, distributing and interpreting knowledge by employees to ensure a successful development of innovations (Martínez-Costa, Jiménez-Jiménez, & Dine Rabeh, 2018). Employee skills support overall knowledge creation and perception within the organization. There are two main exceptions: first, structural theories of organizational behavior and second the overall strategic management. These theories recognize a systemic level of knowledge within organization routines. A strategic management perspective places emphasis on the embedded core competencies that determine an organization's capability (Edmondson & Moingeon, 1996). Desired behaviors are more likely to occur once structural theory occurs (Edmondson & Moingeon, 1996). Whereas strategic management centers on the core competencies that define the unique value the organization provides to customers, shareholders, and other key stakeholders (Hamel, 1991; Hamel & Prahalad, 1993). Both perspectives represent an epistemology of possession (Cook & Brown, 1999) where the organization possesses knowledge in the form of routines and core competencies respectively.

The prime focus in the process of organizational creation is the individual members of an organization. Individuals are continuously committed to recreating the work in accordance with internal perspectives. The current debate encircling the concepts of tacit and explicit knowledge centers on whether these are separate and distinct entities. Lotich (2012) defined tacit knowledge as collective know-how, techniques, processes,

and expertise, which is part of an individual's or organization's knowledge base. Explicit knowledge is information that facilitates action, easily identified, articulated, shared, and employed (Helie & Sun, 2010).

Cook and Brown (1999) believed tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge are not interchangeable. Rather, each form of knowledge facilitates the acquisition of the other in that one can apply one's tacit knowledge to generate explicit knowledge and vice versa. Knowledge is important to organizational success in a competitive knowledge-centric economy. Learned knowledge, combined with existing knowledge, creates an overall successful outcome. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) theorized the linking of tacit and explicit forms of knowledge. Knowledge is an expansion of information through social interaction between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge using four modes of knowledge conversion (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Interchanging forms of existing tacit and explicit knowledge form organizational knowledge (Nonaka, 1994). Socialization, externalization, internalization, and combination, also known as the SECI process, are four components of knowledge transfer, that when combined, forms knowledge conversion. (Nonaka, 1994). Using existing knowledge assets, an organization creates new knowledge through the SECI process, where new knowledge, once created, becomes, in turn, the basis for a new spiral of knowledge creation (Nonaka, Toyama, & Konno, 2000).

Socialization is the exchange of tacit knowledge to tacit knowledge amongst individuals (Meloni & Villa, 2007). Socialization includes knowledge that individuals acquire from others through dialogue and observation. Meetings and brainstorming

sessions are a form of knowledge transfer/creation within an organization. Externalization focuses on the interchange of tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge (Yi, 2006). Unlike socialization, externalization requires more tangible attributes such as elicitation and documentation. Explicit knowledge from inside or outside the organization combines, edits, or processes information that forms new knowledge; which is then disseminated among the members of the organization (Gourlay, 2002).

The third element of Nonaka's theory is internalization, which is instilling knowledge by doing (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Individuals internalize knowledge into their own mental models from documents, but cognitively develop another set of skills by physically doing. This conversion is an interchange of explicit knowledge to tacit knowledge. On the other hand, the combination is the process of merging different explicit objects into a more complex explicit knowledge system. Combining different forms of explicit knowledge, such as that in documents and databases, increases overall knowledge creation and transfer within the organization (Springer, 2014).

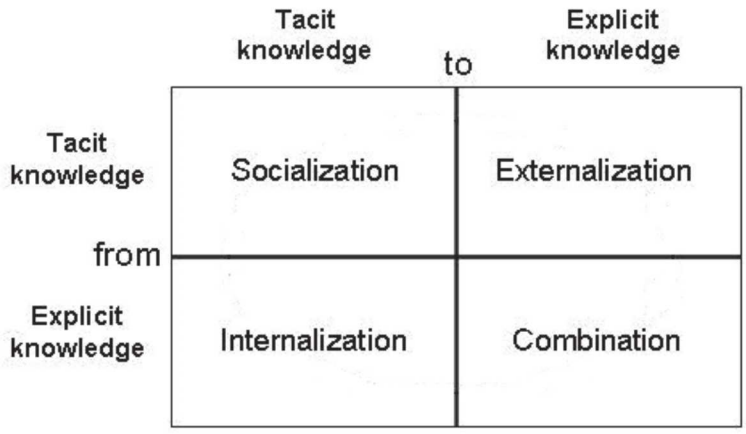


*Figure 1.* Four modes of knowledge conversion between tacit and explicit knowledge. From *The knowledge-creating company: How Japanese companies create the dynamics*

*of innovation* (p. 62), by I. Nonaka and H. Takeuchi, 1995, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

**Knowledge Management Systems**

Introducing knowledge management systems into small to mid-size enterprises (SME) is a challenge because of the limited resources available to these companies (Herrmann, Herrmann, & Jahnke, 2007). IKM organizational theories and practices derive from large company experiences (Evangelista, Esposito, Lauro, & Raffa, 2010). Although major corporations lead the way in introducing and implementing KM, it is increasingly important for small businesses to manage their collective intellectual assets (Frey, 2001). SME KM research exists in three distinct contexts (a) the knowledgeable SME manager or entrepreneur, (b) the knowledge systems and routines embedded within the context of the firm and its immediate networks, and (c) the institutional and policy framework intended to support knowledge production within SMEs (Thorpe, Holt, Macphereson, & Pittaway, 2005). Desouza and Awazu (2006) identified a lack of explicit knowledge repositories within organizations. Instead, each manager/owner acts as the knowledge repository (Desouza & Awazu, 2006). Since SMEs are resource constrained and cannot spend efforts to create knowledge, they look outside the organization for knowledge (Desouza & Awazu, 2006). It is important to implement knowledge management systems to not only disperse and create knowledge but store it as well.

Information and communication technology (ICT) is playing a vital role in the development of knowledge management (Adamides & Karacapilidis, 2006; Belbaly, Passiante, & Benbya, 2004; Bolisani & Scarso, 1999; Chua, 2004;). In this knowledge-based economy, many organizations use knowledge management and ICTs to gain and

sustain power (Anantatmula & Kanungo, 2008; Greiner, Böhmann, & Krcmar, 2007; Kankanhalli et al., 2005). ICTs range from several technologies. Desktop computers, laptops, handheld devices, intranets, enterprise software, data storage devices, and network security devices are all considered information and communications technology (ICT) (Ashrafi & Murtaza, 2008; Manueli, Latu, & Koh, 2008; Sophonthummapharn, 2009). ICT has become a critical enabler and foundational component of KM (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Lee & Hong, 2002; Sun & Scott, 2005).

ICT plays a significant role in organizational learning by capturing, storing, and transferring knowledge throughout the business lifecycle. Managers and individual contributors use ICT tools to create and retrieve information for organizational decision making (Beckinsale & Ram, 2006; Brunn, Jensen, & Skovgaard, 2002; Chang & Lin, 2015; Schware, 2003). Although the creation of knowledge is primarily a human process; ICT provides tools to facilitate the knowledge creation process (Omotayo, Funmilola, & Olubunmi, 2015; Sun & Scott, 2005). The use of internet-based technologies enables sharing throughout the organization. ICT automates existing processes and organizational changes, and share data throughout the organization (Dedrick, Gurbaxani, & Kraemer, 2003).

Data used in ICT creates, transfers, and reuses stored knowledge. There are key aspects of sharing and transferring knowledge; make the knowledge visible, show the role of knowledge, and promote a knowledge sharing infrastructure (Merlo, 2016). Managers can cipher pertinent materials needed to ensure information is manageable and stored. This is attainable through the use of Internet-based technologies (computers,

internet, websites, mobile phones, other wireless communications devices and computer networks), such as Office 365 (Exchange Server SharePoint, etc.), which allow the reuse of knowledge within and outside organization (Manueli et al., 2008; Wickramasinghe, 2003).

**Absorptive Capacity**

Absorptive capacity, while extensively researched, has no consensus definition in the literature. Introduced in the 1900s, studies provide evidence of adaptive knowledge, but no valid and reliable instruments exist to measure absorptive capacity (Lichtenthaler & Lichtenthaler, 2009; Qian & Acs, 2011). Absorptive capacity is a firm's ability to identify, assimilate, transform, and apply valuable external knowledge. Congruently, absorptive capacity is a limit to the rate or quantity of scientific or technological information that a firm can absorb. Zahra and George (2002) extended the theory by specifying two absorptive capacity models that focus both on developing and identifying knowledge known as potential and realized absorptive capacity.

Zahra and George (2015) asserted potential absorptive capacity is both knowledge acquisition and knowledge assimilation. Knowledge acquisition refers to a firm's capability to identify and acquire externally generated knowledge critical to its operations (Zahra & George, 2015). Knowledge assimilation is the firm's routines and processes that allow its members to analyze, process, interpret, and understand the information obtained from external sources (Zahra & George, 2002). These sources can be competitors or similar organizations. Collected data throughout the company provides a source for knowledge for sharing.

Realized absorptive capacity is another subdomain identified by Zahra and George (2002) from previous work investigating knowledge management. Realized absorptive capacity is transformation capability defined as a firm's capability to develop and refine the routines that facilitate combining existing knowledge and the newly acquired and assimilated knowledge (Zahra & George, 2015). Exploitation is the capacity of a firm to apply the newly acquired knowledge in products or services from which it can get financial benefits (Zahra & George, 2015). St-Pierre and Audet (2011) examined what managers of growing small businesses needed to reach the next phase of growth and found that they ignored or did not consider the value of intangible assets. The intangible assets from an accounting perspective are difficult to measure but nonetheless are essential resources.

The absorptive capacity form of knowledge transfer has direct effects on financial performance and innovation (Zou, Ertug, & George, 2018). The team also concluded the relationship between firm size and absorptive capacity is positive for small firms but negative for larger firms. The size of the organization plays a huge role in the movement and transfer of knowledge. In hindsight, social integration mechanisms, knowledge infrastructure, management support, and relational capability all have a positive and significant impact on the absorptive capacity-innovation relationship (Zou et al., 2018).

Absorptive capacity has a positive and significant relationship with innovation capability which in turn has a significant relationship with the company's quality performance (Kurniawan, Hartati, Qodriah & Badawi, 2020). The benefits associated with absorptive capacity are mostly indirect. Managers have difficulty determining the

optimal investment in intangible resources. Accumulative absorptive capacity in a firm is achievable in several ways but is usually a resource allocation decision. Firms can also enhance their absorptive capacity by sending employees to specialized training programs. The act of directly exposing employees to new knowledge from training is inadequate to increase the absorptive capacity of the organization. Absorptive capacity is a function of investment in employee development (individual absorptive capacity) and will grow over time (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). This transfer of knowledge is not linear because learned skills may or may not benefit the firm.

The absorptive capacity gap is a concern for small businesses. Resource constraints are one of the main problem areas small businesses face when involving absorptive capacity. This is because it may limit the organization's ability to hire qualified employees or consultants who have high absorptive capacities. When the absorptive capacity of the firm is not increasing, lost business opportunities occur because of the diminished capacity to identify and capitalize on emerging trends in the marketplace (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Ippolito & Zoccoli, 2010). Jiménez-Barrionuevo, García-Morales, Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez, and Mihi-Ramirez (2011) referred to this phenomenon as a competitive gap. This gap restricts firms from broadening their horizons and creates a more acute view of specific technological areas where firms with high absorptive capacities are actively exploiting market opportunities. Firms with low absorptive capacities are reactive and may experience performance issues such as loss of market share or reduced profitability. Absorptive capacity contains (a) a problem-solving

component, (b) a learning component, and (c) an information-processing component (Camison & Fores, 2010).

**Resource-based View**

During the 1990s, the resource-based view (also known as the resource-advantage theory or RBV) of the firm became the dominant paradigm in strategic planning (Priem & Butler, 2001). RBV can be a reaction to the positioning school of thought, created by Michael Porter (1981), and its somewhat prescriptive approach which focused managerial attention on external considerations, notably industry structure (Lewis & Kipley, 2012). Porter's (1981) theory of competitive advantage is managers can develop value-creating competitive strategies by analyzing competitors, evaluating substitute products, identifying suppliers/buyers, and measuring competitive rivalry. The positioning school or TPS supplies businesses with a theory a firm should think about positioning itself in its industry in a way that enables it to achieve competitive advantage (Martin, 2015). In contrast, the emergent RBV argued the source of sustainable advantage derives from doing things in a superior manner; by developing superior capabilities and resources (Priem & Butler, 2001).

Since the initial introduction, the RBV takes an 'inside-out' view or firm-specific perspective on why organizations succeed or fail in the market place. RBV focuses on a unique set of resources and capabilities when manipulated and used by management, achieve long term competitive advantage (Grant, 1996). Resources can be in the form of employees, policies, processes, documents, and culture. The RBV theory has four main characteristics that provide a basis for defining a resource: (a) valuable, (b) scarce or

unique, (c) difficult to copy, and (d) non-substitutable (Brown, 2012; Grant, 1996; Ippolito & Zoccoli, 2010). If resources are valuable, it enables management to implement strategies that improve efficiency and effectiveness. According to RBV theory, a leader of a firm can add value in the customer value chain, develop new products or expand in the new marketplace (Madhani, 2012). In the RBV, strategists select the strategy or competitive position that best exploits the internal resources and capabilities relative to external opportunities (Day, 1994). Given tactical resources signify a complex system of internalized assets and capabilities, businesses can adopt various possible competitive positions. Although scholars debate the precise categories of competitive positions, there is general agreement that the RBV is much more flexible than Porter's prescriptive approach to strategy formulation (Hooley, Greenley, Fahy, & Cadogan, 2001).

**Competitive Advantage**

While most business leaders appreciate the strategic value of knowledge and the need to manage their knowledge assets, many of them seem unable to derive real benefits from their efforts (Murray, 2012). Some of the key causes of the deficiency include: (a) the lack of focus on KM initiatives, (b) a staggering over-reliance on technology to provide both the solution and the benefit, (c) structures that are inappropriate for capitalizing on an organization's knowledge assets, and lastly, (d) a lack of proper ownership (Murray, 2012). Pemsel, Muller, and Soderlund (2016) hypothesized the driving force behind competitiveness within organizations is knowledge. It is important for managers to not only transfer knowledge but use it as a competitive advantage. Not having knowledge management skills for leveraging knowledge can cause a decrease in

the competitive advantage of organizational sustainability (Peng, 2013). Most knowledge management strategies positively influence organizational performance and increase the competitive advantage of an organization on a long-term basis (Delen, Zaim, Kuzey, & Zaim, 2013; Nesbitt & Barton, 2014; Villar et al., 2014). Managers should adopt strategic processes to protect competitive knowledge within the organization (Ahmad, Bosua, & Scheepers, 2014).

Knowledge management is an innovative source of competitive advantage within organizations (Miklosik & Zak, 2015). Implementing knowledge management practices is not a requirement within organizations for creating a sustainable competitive advantage (Alegre, Sengupta, & Lapiedra, 2013). Internal knowledge transfer within firms will result in a competitive advantage; however, gaining external knowledge will also contribute to an organization's success (Colakoglu, Yamao, & Lepak, 2014). Performance only improves when people do things differently (Murray, 2012).

Performance is another knowledge management indicator to create innovation and competitive advantage for organizations. In business, innovation describes the decisions, activities, and practices that move an idea to realization for the purpose of generating business value (Provines, 2018). The essence of innovation lies in the utilization of knowledge (Sun, Liu, & Ding, 2019). Knowledge management not only brings about innovative performance, but it increases the competitive advantage of an organization (Lee, Foo, Leong, & Ooi, 2016).

For organizations to continue to have a competitive advantage, organizational leaders need to create valuable knowledge (McIver, Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, &

Ramachandran, 2013). The creation and development of knowledge can be transferred and shared among their components, with an impact on organizations' innovation and performance (Marchiori & Franco, 2020). The establishment of knowledge management processes and resources can result in the transfer of new knowledge throughout an organization creating a consistent knowledge flow to increase overall innovation (Villar et al., 2014). Although barriers do exist, knowledge management creates an overall competitive advantage for small business organizations. Figure 2 outlines how both explicit and tactic knowledge creates an overall competitive advantage.

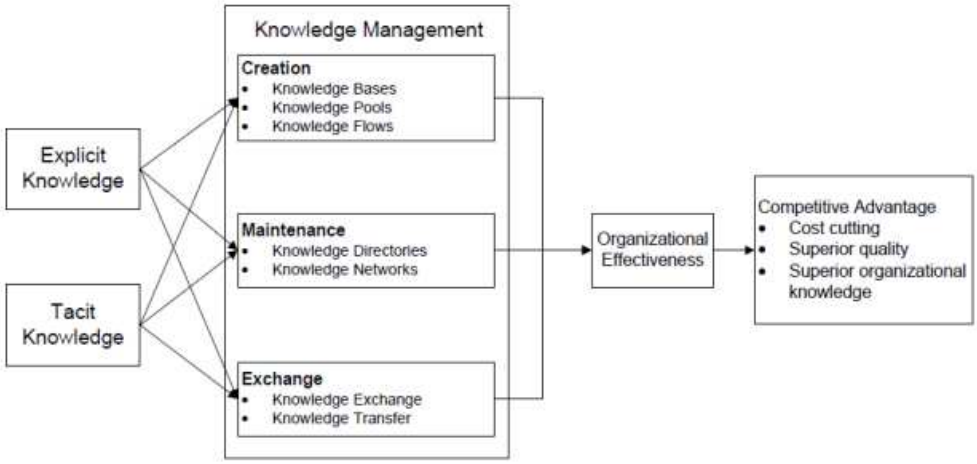


*Figure 2.* Research model outlining the overall flow of knowledge to create a competitive advantage. From "*Knowledge for Governance, Governance of Knowledge: Inclusive Knowledge Management in Collaborative Governance Processes,"* by Van Burren, 2009. International Public Management Journal. 12(2): 208-235.

**Human and Social Capital**

Human capital is a crucial factor in maintaining profitability in small businesses. Research has proven this form of internal knowledge represents the understanding and skills acquired by leaders through formal and informal learning (Jaskiewicz, Combs, & Rau, 2015). Human capital also includes the acquisition of knowledge and learned behaviors from trans-generational ties (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015). When dissected, capital is a type of asset that allows a business to make more money or otherwise further its goal (Grimsley, 2018). Combined, human capital is the sum of employee knowledge and skills the company can use to further its goals (Grimsley, 2018); it also includes an entrepreneur's educational achievement and business experience (Cassar, 2014; Millan et al., 2014).

Education plays a key role in human capital and leadership (Van Praag & van Stel, 2013). Leaders with years of related work experience, problem-solving skills, and self-efficacy have a higher business success compared to individuals starting businesses as their last alternative (Stuetzer, Obschonka, & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2012; Zanakis, Renko, & Bullough, 2012). The overall edification of the business provides a wealth of knowledge to not only the organization but its employees. The lower the educational achievement level of the small business owner, the lower the business success (Small Business Administration, 2013). The lack of proper business education and acumen is a major issue for small businesses achievement (Nunez-Cacho Utrilla & Grande Torraleja, 2013).

Knowledge, human capital and social capital are all fundamental in organizational stability. Social capital (SC) is the existing tangible and prospective resources accessible through leaders' network of relationships to generate support (McKeever, Anderson, & Jack, 2014). SC stimulates innovation activities, which leads to higher monopolistic profits, and promotes higher social capital in a self-reinforcing mechanism (Thompson, 2018). However, social capital can be a "double edged sword" (Kanwal, Tang, Ur Rehman, Kanwal & Fawad Sharif, 2020). Unlike human capital, social capital assists in the facilitation, cooperation, and information- sharing between economic agents; being a fundamental part of innovative activities (Thompson, 2018).

Social capital is applicable to business organizations as it serves as a framework to understand relationships between individuals and among larger networks of teams, departments, functions, organizations, and associations (Cohen & Prusak, 2004). Theoretically, social capital is broken down into two groups; macroeconomic and microeconomic. From a macroeconomic perspective, Easterly and Levine (1997) believed social capital increases the effectiveness of economic policies. Coleman's (1990) social capital theory asserted the relationships and contexts that comprise social networks contribute to human capital in the form of action towards goals. Whereas human capital allows individuals to obtain other resources such as financial capital, social capital is a valuable enabling resource in purposeful activity towards the realization of goals (Dunham & Wilson, 2007). Although very different, large and small businesses use knowledge capital to reflect the organization's performance, innovation, success metrics, and retention.

**Organizational Performance and Knowledge**

Organizational performance, intellectual capital, and knowledge management are valuable to an organization's competitive advantage (Li, Song, Wang, & Li, 2019). Successful organizations are characterized by their ability to improve elements of organizational performance, as this often results from knowledge processed that reflect the nature of leadership and the values of diversity and continuous development (Francisca-Elena, 2020). Leaders of successful companies focus on the knowledge of their employees, rather than on physical assets such as plants and machinery (Intezari, Taskin, & Pauleen, 2017). This insinuates a drastic change from production to human development. Li, Song, Wang, and Li (2019) identified a significant positive relationship between KMS, customer capital, and innovation capital. Innovation capital refers to explicit organizational knowledge inherent in an organization's intellectual property, business designs, business process techniques, patents, copyrights and trade secrets (among other factors) which enables organizations to build a competitive advantage either through economies of scale and scope or differentiation (Hsu & Mykytyn Jr., 2006). Intezari, Taskin, and Pauleen, (2017) found organizations that consider knowledge management, intellectual capital, and organizational performance, have effective product development, organizational growth, and profit growth, further proving that organizational performance and intellectual capital in conjunction with knowledge management has become the engine of corporate development.

Knowledge is a vital asset which organizations use to enrich innovation, enhance their vision, mission and strategies, and ensure superior organizational performance with

a high profitability over competitors (Shehabat, 2020). Effective knowledge management strategies enable an organization to break down silos and increase usage of valuable data. To maximize the impact on organizational performance, Shahzad, Bajwa, Siddiqi, Ahmid, & Raza Sultani (2016) suggested leaders should link KMS to organizational strategy. To remain successful, leaders must implement knowledge strategies and resources that are clearly organized and defined. Knowledge management, strategy, and culture alignment result in organizational value improvements and financial performance (Wu & Chen, 2014). If there is no close relationship between organizational culture, strategy, and KM, there may be no benefit for the business.

Intellectual capital is knowledge-based equity (Edvinsson & Malone, 1997). To become successful, leaders must clarify how organizational assets (KM, intellectual capital, and performance) help support the strategic goals of the company, as well as quantify the contribution of value to the organization (Intezari et al., 2017). Whereas intellectual capital helps identify the driver of financial performance (Marr, 2005), knowledge management aligns with business sustainability (Edvinsson & Malone, 1997).

Human capital is another major factor in a successful organization. The concept of human capital refers to knowledge, abilities, and skills used to stimulate economic growth (Coleman, 1988). Human capital blends four essentials including genetic heritage, education, approach and experiences about life and business (Hudson, 1993). All of which make up specific cultures within an organization. Human capital is one of the primary elements of intellectual capital and it is helpful in gaining sustainable competitive advantage (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Investment in human capital through

professional training is useful to positively raise competition and global productivity (Cannon, 2000).

Effective knowledge management and knowledge sharing encourage product development, growth, profit, and teamwork. For KMS to be effective, the overall organizational strategy and knowledge-sharing strategy must align (Shahzad et al., 2016). Culture and leadership should be consistent with the KMS and overall knowledge-sharing processes. When these all align, KMS has a positive impact on overall organizational performance. Improved productivity, more collaboration, and increased trust are all outcomes of improved knowledge management and intellectual capital and could help an organization remain competitive in a globalized market (Kim & Shim, 2018; Lin, 2015).

Knowledge management orientation (KMO) is the likelihood of an organization to enhance and share existing knowledge (Vanani, Qorbani, & Sohrabi, 2016). A KMO model is another way that a leader can obtain, measure, and instill knowledge within the organization. Although connected to knowledge transfer, knowledge management orientation consists of four variables; innovation, learning, knowledge sharing, and information technology (Nawab, Nazir, Zahid, & Fawad, 2015). Lin (2015) researched the concept of knowledge management orientation (KMO) and its impact on organizational effectiveness. Lin (2015) also discovered how knowledge sharing streamlines internal processes of knowledge absorption.

**Social Knowledge Management**

The pervasiveness of social media and user-generated content has triggered an exponential increase in global data (Meneghello, Thompson, Lee, Wong & Abu-Salih,

2020). Social media technologies have been embraced by individuals and organizations on such a massive scale in the last decade that knowledge sharing, and application has molded into a totally new paradigm (Chugh & Joshi, 2020). Social knowledge management (SKM) is the application of social media, in the knowledge management context, to identify, share, document, transfer, develop, use or evaluate knowledge (Lazlo & Lazlo, 2002). SKM is also the management of social knowledge, where the aim is more towards social development and not just promoting competitive advantages for companies (Chua & Banerjee, 2013). In relation to small business organizations, SKM is the knowledge management framework that allows organizations to create, modify, and learn from the information provided via social platforms. The shift from traditional knowledge management to that of social knowledge has caused an alteration in both communication style and knowledge sharing practices (Eisenhauer, Bowker, Grace, & Powell, 2015).

Organizational progress in the practice of knowledge management creates vibrant exchanges of ideas within collaborative business environments that spark innovation. Large companies maintain the effective transfer of knowledge across the company to remain competitive in their markets that increasingly rely on the rapid dissemination of intangible assets (Nisar, Prabhakar, & Strakova, 2019). Integrating knowledge across a firm is a critical source of competitive advantage. Firms are increasingly implementing internal social media sites to promote knowledge sharing among their employees (Leonardi, 2014). Effective utilization of the firm's intangible assets helps function as a catalyst for creating a competitive advantage over other organizations operating in the

market (Leal-Rodríguez, Roldán, Leal, & Ortega-Gutiérrez, 2013). Corporate social media can provide information and knowledge benefits by enhancing the capacity of individuals to share and communicate critical personal and business information remotely (Chow & Chan, 2008). Organizations can use these social channels to learn more about the organizational need, which creates business stability.

The effectiveness of knowledge management has two levels: individual and organizational. At the individual level, knowledge management provides employees with the opportunity to acquire new skills and experience through joint work, shared knowledge, mutual learning, and increased personal effectiveness (Mizintseva & Gerbina, 2018). At the organizational level, knowledge management improves the organization's performance, efficiency, productivity, quality, and innovation through constant knowledge sharing/learning (Mizintseva & Gerbina, 2018). Each level of effectiveness contributes to knowledge management and sharing throughout the organization.

To solve organizational knowledge management problems, it is necessary to combine human technologies and information technologies (Mizintseva & Gerbina, 2018). Combining people and technologies helps preserve the corporate experience, promotes sharing of knowledge within the organization, and provides access to necessary information (Mizintseva & Gerbina, 2018). In the last decade, the use of social media has exploded, enabling customers to engage directly with companies as well as their employees, partners, leaders, and owners (Eisenhauer et al., 2015). Consumers openly share opinions on products, services, brands, companies, and customer service through

social outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Yelp, et cetera. (Eisenhauer et al, 2015). Sharing of information, at this magnitude, has become a highly influential avenue for consumers to provide insight and create interactions with organizations. These social interactions have become a channel to collect information that helps sustain organizational success. Although there is a plethora of research dealing with different models of the KM life cycle in the context of business organization to enhance organizational performance, there is no explicit proposal for the KM life cycle in the context of social knowledge management where the objective is to manage social knowledge for social development (Kasemsap, 2018). Researchers have been able to create a social knowledge life cycle, building on the information learned from past knowledge management studies. This model consists of four phases; identification, organization and storage, sharing/interactive dissemination, and evaluation. Although vaguely different, each step congruently contributes to social knowledge management.

Social knowledge management aims to determine if appropriate knowledge assets exist in cyberspace or identify areas of improvement throughout the organization (Chan & Yee, 2018). Identifying the overall need for such knowledge is a critical step in maintaining data. Data must be stored to be accessible to individuals. The platform that supports a social KM initiative needs to organize data in a systematic manner so that all the available materials are organized subject-wise, creating a sense of filing and providing a repository for managers and employees to review and update (Chan & Yee, 2018). Sharing and evaluation are the third phase in the overall social knowledge management life cycle that provides an avenue for disseminating information throughout

the organization (McElroy, 2000). This phase is heavy on human interaction because of the constant delivery and analysis of information.

Social media can facilitate the easing of knowledge problems through providing the necessary information, locating knowledgeable people, providing a virtual context, harnessing the collective wisdom, and building trust (Aisenberg Ferenhof, Durst, & Mauricio Selig, 2016). In virtual communities, knowledge intervention by an expert can ensure knowledge creation and knowledge dissemination on a continuous basis. Managing knowledge is a paramount for organizational survival and effectiveness in turbulent, fast-changing, and environments (Nisar et al., 2019). Knowledge has become a crucial resource organization's need to develop expertise, solve problems, increase organizational learning, and initiate new situations for both the individual and the organization now and in the future (Bell, 1973; Grant, 1996). Organizational learning is seen as a dynamic process based on knowledge and is translated through various levels of activity (Antunes & Pinheiro, 2020).

Unlike traditional ICT, social media manage the content of the conversation or interaction as an information artifact in the online environment. Critical to this notion of networking and knowledge sharing is the ability of people to collaboratively create content and knowledge (Yates & Paquette, 2011). These technologies provide users with the ability to respond quickly to changes in the information and the environment and provide flexibility, adaptability, usability, and customizability within small business organizations.

## Transition

Section 1 introduced the study and provided insight into how small business owners succeed and sustain their businesses. The introduction of the study included the Problem Statement, Purpose Statement, Nature of the Study, Research Question, Significance of the Study, and Literature Review. The literature review provided an understanding of the key constructs for the conceptual framework. Key subjects discussed were (a) knowledge creation, (b) knowledge sharing, (c) resource management, (d) strategic decisions (e) human and social capital, and (f) absorptive capacity.

Section 2 begins with a re-introduction of the study purpose along with clarification of the role of the researcher, and participants. In this section, I will provide insight into the research design and method, data collection, populations and sampling, research participants, and ethical research. Section 3 will then transition to the presentation of the findings with applications for professional practice, recommendations for action and further research, along with a conclusion.

# Section 2: The Project

Section 2 provides a description of the research project and outlines the role of the researcher and the participants, provides more information on the research method and design, and identifies the population and sampling. In addition, Section 2 describes the data collection instrument and techniques, discusses ethics and research, data organization techniques, data analysis, and methods to ensure the study's reliability and validity.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the knowledge management strategies small retail business leaders use for business sustainability. The targeted population of the study was small retail business leaders located in Dallas, Texas who has sustained their businesses for more than 5 years by using knowledge management strategies. The contribution to social change is increased longevity of the benefits small businesses provide to local economies and the communities.

## Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher, in qualitative research, is to access and collect the thoughts and feelings of study participants (Sutton & Austin, 2015). It is imperative that the researcher has substantial knowledge in interpreting and understanding the themes within the research. The researcher needs to follow an interview protocol to ensure the questions asked are specifically aimed to areas of the study (Patton, 2015). Since the researcher is an instrument during the data collection process it is critical there are no biases (Cronin, 2014; McCusker, & Gunaydin, 2015; Fink, 2000). Understanding

research bias allows researchers the ability to critically and independently review the scientific literature and avoid treatments that are suboptimal or potentially harmful (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). My role and experience as a manager of digital marketing, as well as a potential entrepreneur, provided insight and exposure to various small businesses and overall operations. Individuals often use experience and previous knowledge to aid in the construction of the themes and analysis of data. As the researcher, it was important that I avoided any biases to ensure reliability and validity of data.

In this qualitative research, I was the primary data collection instrument and abided by strict ethical guidelines to protect the participants during the research study. According to the *Belmont Report on Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research* (1979), researchers should develop procedures to alleviate any ethical issues and secure the participants' privacy while conducting the study (McGuire & Beskow, 2011). To ensure I created an atmosphere where each participant was treated with (a) respect, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice, I used the Belmont Report as a guideline when conducting my research. The researcher can have a major influence on participants, so it is important the I created an environment where conscious or unconscious stimuli did not influence the participants and/or alter experimental results.

## Participants

One of the most important tasks a qualitative researcher can undertake is the selection of participants (Sargeant, 2012). For this study, the target population was small

business owners in the retail industry who have operated their businesses unremittingly for at least 5 years using successful knowledge management strategies. I identified participants using an online search of small businesses in Dallas, Texas that have sustained operations at least 5 years. Before conducting interviews, I contacted the different leaders and business professionals in each organization to discuss the intent of the study and receive consent.

The main eligibility requirement for participants was leaders that successfully use knowledge management practices in their small business organizations. Each participant was informed of the purpose of the study and confirmed his or her use of knowledge management strategies within the business. Documented information provided by successful business owners revealed the competitive strategies that affect the performance of their small businesses.

Creating a foundation of genuine trust is important to help participants feel comfortable about sharing their answers during data collection (Kornbluh, 2015). The ability to establish rapport is often considered to be one of the most important skills for effective interviewing (Bell, Fahmy, & Gordon, 2014). Being open-minded, flexible, reassuring, supportive, friendly, genuine, warm, sincere, empowering, respectful, sensitive, and empathetic are all qualities to exude to build and encourage rapport (Leach, 2015). I established rapport through attentiveness, identifying mutual interests, courteousness, and information-sharing behavior. Once rapport is successfully built, trust and mutual respect will increase and communication will be more effective (Youell & Youell, 2011).

## Research Method and Design

I selected a qualitative research method with a multiple case study design. Qualitative research using case studies offers verifiable data from direct observations of the entities involved (Yin, 2018). Case study research has important strengths, such as illuminating the causal bond between different factors, identifying core concepts and variables, and exploring their meaning (Neuman, 2011).

### Research Method

The most significant element of a doctoral research process is selecting the appropriate research method to support the research question and accomplish the goals of the study (Hayes, Douglas, & Bonner, 2013). There are three types of research methods used in studies: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. The purpose of this study was to explore the knowledge management strategies small retail business leaders use for business sustainability. Qualitative research was appropriate for this study because it provides insights and understanding of people's experiences, as well as the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials (case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts) (Denny & Weckesser, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Quantitative research involves the systematic empirical investigation of observable phenomena via statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques (Given, 2008). The objective was to develop and employ mathematical models, theories, and hypotheses pertaining to phenomena (Given, 2008). Unlike qualitative research, which seeks to understand the verbal, observational, and behavioral data, quantitative research

focuses more on numbers to support a hypothesis (Breen, Kemena, Vlasov, Notredame, & Kondrashov, 2013). Since the objective was to understand the knowledge strategies leaders use within business to sustain for more than 5 years, gathering statistical data would not be valid for this study.

Mixed method research is research that focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or a series of studies (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). Mixed method researchers uses data to get a more extensive understanding of a business problem. The sample for the study is small, therefore it does not rely on quantifying data from many resources. The mixed method can also be time-consuming and require a team rather than an alone researcher to conduct the study rigorously and within the specified time frame (Tariq & Woodman, 2013). Using a mixed method research approach did not meet the requests of this study because I placed higher focus on the quality of data, as opposed to the generalizability of results.

**Research Design**

Research designs link the components of investigation in the exploration of research questions to draw conclusions in a study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The case study method was the selected research design. A case study is an intensive, systematic investigation of a single individual, group, community or unit in which the researcher examines in-depth data relating to several variables (Woods & Calanzaro, 1980). Case studies also examine complex phenomena in natural settings to increase the understanding of the participants (Yin, 2008). For my study, I considered three major

qualitative research designs, phenomenology, ethnography, and case study, to determine the design that is most suitable.

Phenomenology is a qualitative research design used to describe how human beings experience a certain phenomenon (Heale & Twycross, 2017). Phenomenology design allows the researcher to delve into the perceptions, perspectives, understandings, and feelings of those people who experience or live the phenomenon or situation of interest (Giorgi, 2012). The purpose of this study was not to gain an understanding of how individuals view themselves and the world around them. Since I was seeking to understand more of the organizational knowledge and strategies, and not individual or group lived experiences, a phenomenological design was not be suitable for the study.

In comparison, ethnography is the study of people and/or cultures. Ethnography is concerned with developing a rich description and interpretative understanding of how different peoples, communities or cultures experience, interpret and structure their lives (Burgess, 1984). Administering an ethnographic study means the researcher focuses on a cultural system and immerses into the daily activities of the participants. Ethnography was also rejected for this study because there was no interest in the organizational culture but rather the knowledge strategies managers are using within the business.

The research design selected for this study is a multiple case study. The difference between a single case study and a multiple case study is that the researcher studies multiple cases to understand the differences and the similarities between the cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995). Multiple case studies increase the possibility of direct replication, which makes the conclusions resulting from independent cases more

powerful than conclusions from a single case (Yin, 2017). This type of case study allows for a more in-depth understanding of the cases as a unit, through a comparison of similarities and differences of the individual cases (Stake, 1995). A multiple case study also has a higher chance of obtaining data saturation in a study. Data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible (Guest et al., 2006; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Walker, 2012).

Interviews are one way that researchers may reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The questions should be structured to facilitate asking multiple participants the same questions, otherwise one would not be able to achieve data saturation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Failure to reach data saturation has an impact on the quality of the research conducted and hampers content validity (Bowen, 2009; Kerr, Nixon, & Wild, 2010). Data saturation may be attained by as little as six interviews depending on the sample size of the population (Guest et al., 2006). It may be best to think of data in terms of rich and thick rather than the size of the sample (Burmeister, & Aitken, 2012; Dibley, 2011). Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot, (2013) suggested that three to six participants are adequate for a case study based on the principle of data saturation. I interviewed four small business managers that use knowledge management. Data collected from the interviews was thoroughly reviewed to ensure data saturation and no additional information or relevant themes emerge.

## Population and Sampling

A population is a group of individuals with at least one common characteristic which distinguishes that group from other individuals (Best & Kahn, 2006). My intent was to explore the knowledge management strategies that small businesses use for survival beyond 5 years in Dallas, Texas. Although there are hundreds of small businesses in Dallas, gathering information on each business was not feasible for this study. The large population would be too great and diverse for a study of this limited scope. Quantitative methods place primary emphasis on generalizability while qualitative methods place primary emphasis on saturation (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Palinkas et al., 2015). Since generalization in a statistical sense is not a goal of qualitative research, probabilistic sampling is not justifiable in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). I used a purposive sampling technique to identify my specific population.

Purposeful sampling is the technique to obtain a non-representative subset of a larger population to serve a specific purpose (Pirlott, Kisbu-Sakarya, DeFrancesco, Elliot, & MacKinnon, 2012). One of the core arguments supporting a purposeful sampling approach is that it is not meant to be comprehensive in terms of screening, mainly because the interest of the authors is not in seeking a single correct answer, but rather in examining the complexity of different conceptualizations (Benoot, Hannes, & Bilsen, 2016). Purposeful sampling involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Clark, 2011). I used purposeful sampling for this study to ensure the selection of participants have similar success with experience in KM practices and implementation

within business. The focus point is small business managers, therefore, it is imperative that I only engaged small business managers who use knowledge management strategies within their organization.

A researcher achieves data saturation when interviewing additional participants does not yield additional insights towards answering the research question (Taylor, Bogdan, & Walker, 2016). Although a specific number is not identified for sampling, I engaged four small business leaders; a subset of the research population. Ideally, achieving theoretical saturation involves selecting individuals or cases that can ensure all aspects of that phenomenon are included thoroughly explored (Palinkas et al., 2015) Selection of a representative group for data collection is important for valid and reliable results in a research study (Ford, 2016). Using four business owners increased the possibility of saturation; reaching the point where further data collection became counter-productive and new data did not add to the research question.

## Ethical Research

Ethical research concerning human subjects must sustain the highest form of moral integrity (Haahr, Norlyk, & Hall, 2013). Researchers have a duty to protect the life, health, dignity, integrity, right to self-determination, privacy and confidentiality of personal information of participants (World Medical Association, 2014). It was important to remain ethical to ensure reliability of the study. One of the most important ethical considerations in qualitative research is the use of human subjects. In qualitative research, ethical principles protect research participants and guide the foundation of, *do no harm* (Maxwell, 2013). Before conducting the study, I followed the informed consent

process approved by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the study meets ethical principles. The Walden IRB approval number for my final doctoral manuscript is 08-11-20-0371885.

To assure that I adhered to ethical standards, I asked participants to acknowledge the consent form for participation in the study; ensuring the privacy and security of data. An informed consent form protects participants partaking within a study both morally and lawfully (Lambert & Glacken, 2011). The purpose of the consent form is to document the intention of obtaining the highest level of integrity and confidentiality of the participants' identities (Marrone, 2015). The consent form also provided clarity on the accessibility of information and materials, offer insight on the rights to publish data, and ensure anonymity. As part of the consent, I informed the participant that there were no incentives for participating in the study.

Confidentiality in research implies that data identifying the participants is not reported (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2017). If participants feel their responses are safeguarded, they are more likely to disclose more data. Researchers must provide confidentiality by designating a location and a period for data storage (Ludvigsson et al., 2015). Safeguarding information helps respect the privacy of participants and helps researchers enable confidentiality. Within this study, information gathered during the interview process was be coded so that it is not identifiable. Data was also securely stored to guarantee information was not leaked. To ensure anonymity, I assigned pseudonyms to each participant within the study (i.e. Par1, Par2). Information was then be transcribed and stored for future access. All electronic or recorded data was encrypted, locked, and

stored with all interview records and tangible documents. After 5 years of completion date of this study, the information will be properly disposed of, destroyed, and/or deleted to ensure the security of data.

Participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any time during the process by informing me in person or in writing. Withdrawing from the study may have been before or after offering initial consent, during the interview process, or after the interviews were held. All consenting participants partook in the study and contributed to the results.

## Data Collection Instruments

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument of data collection; relying on his or her skills to receive information in natural contexts and uncover its meaning by descriptive, exploratory, or explanatory procedures (Suter, 2012). Although structure is not required, most qualitative research interviews are either semistructured, lightly structured, or in-depth (Mason, 1994). I conducted semistructured interviews with participants. Semistructured interviews allow researchers the ability to seek clarification when participant answers are not clear (Doody & Noonan, 2013). This type of interview also allowed me to retrieve information that is not always visible in a controlled interview or survey. Although controlled interviews are very helpful within qualitative research, researchers in semistructured or unstructured qualitative interviews-have the potential to influence the collection of empirical materials (Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012).

Interviews were the primary data collection method in the study. I used the interview protocol located in Appendix to guide this study. In qualitative research,

interviews are the most common form of data collection (Pezalla, et al., 2012). According to Oakley (1998), qualitative interviews are a type of framework in which the practices and standards are recorded, achieved, challenged, and reinforced. A well-designed interview should capture data in key areas while still allowing flexibility for participants to bring their own personality and perspective to the discussion (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Interviews give the most direct and straightforward approach to gathering detailed and rich data regarding a phenomenon (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Unlike surveys within quantitative research, interviews allow and participants to provide supportive data and encourage additional information on experiences outside of the set interview questions.

Triangulation in qualitative research tests validity through the convergence of information from different sources (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999) identified four types of triangulation: (a) method triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) data source triangulation. The benefits of triangulation include increasing confidence in research data, creating innovative ways of understanding a phenomenon, revealing unique findings, challenging or integrating theories, and providing a clearer understanding of the problem (Thurmond, 2001). To achieve data validity, I used the methodological triangulation method. Methodological triangulation involves using more than one option to gather data, such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents. In conjunction with the participant's interview data, I collected and accessed

company documents regarding knowledge management within the organization for use in triangulation.

## Data Collection Technique

I conducted interviews via Skype based on participant availability. Holding face-to-face interviews had advantages such as capturing verbal and nonverbal queues, including body language, voice inflection, et cetera. Using Skype allowed participants the ability to contribute in a manner more convenient for their schedules. Skype also provided me with visual documentation to review the authenticity of the data. Skype also has a recording feature to assist in reviewing data before transcription. Unfortunately, when collecting and analyzing interview data, researchers tend to pay little attention to describing nonverbal data (Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Nonverbal communication is integral to deception detection in an interview (Ekman & Friesen, 1974; Ekman, O'Sullivan, Friesen, & Scherer, 1999; Fiedler & Walka, 1993; Warren, Schertler, & Bull, 2009). Being able to physically see participants is very important while gathering information.

I also used a voice recorder to gather data from both Skype and in-person interviews. The underlying assumption is interviewing results are accurate information about respondents, despite the many factors that can affect how the interview is conducted and the quality of data obtained (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Audio and video recording are valuable tools that help researchers keep records of interviews, which in turn helps them during data analysis (Al-Yateem, 2012). Using a voice recorder ensured data accuracy during transcription. The recording can be viewed or listened to repeatedly

in case of doubt and/or during data analysis (Al-Yateem, 2012). After completion of the interview, member checking confirmed my interpretation of the collected and analyzed data.

## Data Organization Technique

Data organization is one of the most important activities within a study, as it involves the tracking, storage, and retrieval of data. The participant data collected defines the direction of the research results and establishes the quality of the study (Bach & Oun, 2014). Johnson, Dunlap and Benoit (2010) state that one of the most fundamental and significant decisions in conducting qualitative research is the choice of data organization software to store and transcribe data. The software should be able to integrate information across many functions and purposes. Researchers recommend the use of software such as NVivo to organize data. NVivo is used for the analysis of unstructured text, audio, video, and image data from interviews, focus groups, surveys, social media, and journal articles (Gibson, Webb, & Lehn, 2014). I used NVivo to assist in the organization and analysis of information provided by participants and ensure data is correctly captured and stored.

I also used reflective journals to capture information throughout the data collection. Keeping self-reflective journals is a strategy that provides reflexivity, allowing the researcher to examine personal assumptions and goals, as well as clarify individual belief systems and subjectivities (Russell & Kelly, 2002). Reflective writing gives an awareness of the thought processes the researcher has during the research study (Henter & Indreica, 2014). Like all interview materials, it is important to keep this information secure. Therefore, to ensure anonymity and security, the reflective journal, documents,

and study materials were locked and stored in a personal safe; for 5 years after completion of the study. The interview data was also be coded to ensure participant information is not attainable or recognizable.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis is a vital element of qualitative research. Research starts with the collection of quality information and is then organized and analyzed to draw conclusions on the themes of the data. Data analysis has two phases; primary and secondary. Primary data analysis involves identifying themes and patterns within each category found in the interview transcripts (Schlomer & Copp, 2014). Secondary data analysis involves identifying, corroborating, and contradicting emerging themes and patterns in the documents, and testing several combinations of tools and parameters (Bianchi et al., 2016). For the proposed study, I used methodological triangulation to analyze and confirm the validity of the data.

Researchers employ data triangulation to validate a phenomenon using multiple data sources such as interviews and archival records (Ponelis & Holmner, 2015). I used the participant interview responses, along with historical and company records to triangulate data. I compared and contrasted data from the semistructured interviews, documents, and archival sources, to ensure that the data fully represented the experiences of the participants. The audio recordings, interviews, and notes were also very important and were entered in a data analysis system, Nvivo 11, to analyze and assist in decoding relevant themes. Themes arose from comparing and contrasting convergent data from reviewing records, literature, and the conceptual framework. After data was available and

decoded, I arranged the findings in themes and sub-themes to assist in supporting the descriptions of the findings. Ward, Furber, Tierney, and Swallow (2013) recommended that researchers explore NVivo as a flexible software application for deciphering the contextual content. Analyzing interview data utilizing NVivo allows the researcher the ability to identify intersecting data points (Paulus, Woods, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016). All field notes compiled during the interview were used as complementary sources of information to close the gap in time between the interview, transcribing, and coding.

## Reliability and Validity

Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, whereas the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2001). Unlike quantitative researchers who seek causal determination, prediction, and generalization of findings, qualitative researchers seek illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997). In qualitative research, reliability and validity are concepts used to gauge the quality of research. Reliability ensures consistency of the measure, while validity gauges the overall accuracy. The following section identifies and explains what measures were taken to accomplish reliability and validity in the study.

### Reliability

In qualitative research with diverse paradigms, reliability is challenging and epistemologically counter-intuitive (Leung, 2015). The essence of qualitative research is to make sense of and recognize patterns among words to build up a meaningful picture

without compromising its richness and dimensionality (Leung, 2015). The evaluation criterion includes four alternative assessments for trustworthiness:
(a) dependability, (b) credibility, (c) transferability, and (d) confirmability (Lincoln, Guba, & Pilotta, 1985). Dependability refers to the consistency of data and its similarity to other researchers' findings regardless of the study (Hays, Wood, Dahl, & Kirk-Jenkins, 2016). Dependability is also an indicator of whether the research results are trustworthy (Cuthbert & Moules, 2014; St. John et al., 2016; Wong & Cooper, 2016).

Implementing an interview protocol is one way to increase reliability in qualitative research (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). For each interview, I followed an interview protocol to ensure uniformity and increase the dependability of the study. A researcher's interview protocol is an instrument of inquiry—asking questions for specific information related to the aims of a study (Patton, 2015). The essence of reliability for qualitative research lies with consistency (Carcary, 2009). Administering each semistructured interview with the same decorum left little room for deviation or researcher bias.

Interview transcription is another mechanism that supports the data analysis process and increases the dependability of the research (Dasgupta, 2015; O'Keefe, Buytaert, Mijic, Brozovic, & Sinha, 2016). Researchers use interview transcription and member checking to enhance fidelity (O'Keefe et al., 2016; Simpson & Quigley, 2016; Wong & Cooper, 2016). Member checking, also known as participant or respondent validation, is a technique for exploring the credibility of results (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). The timing of transcription is also imperative because

conversations are still salient and active (Mondada, 2007). In this study, all audio documentation was recorded and transcribed immediately to guarantee data is concise and accurate. A summary of compiled data was then sent to participants for comprehension and verification.

**Validity**

Validity in qualitative research refers to the appropriateness of the research tools, processes, and data (Leung, 2015). Unlike reliability which describes consistency within the analytical procedures, validity is the integrity and application of methods and the precision in which the findings accurately reflect the data (Long & Johnson, 2000). Although some qualitative researchers have argued that the term validity is not applicable to qualitative research, others have realized the need for a qualifying check or measure for their research (Golafshani, 2003). As a result, many researchers have adopted confirmability to measure validity within a study.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results can be confirmed or corroborated by others (Williams, 2006). Studies suggest that confirmability of qualitative inquiry are an audit trail, reflexive journal, and triangulation use to record data (Bowen, 2009; Koch, 2006; Lincoln, et al., 1985). To achieve confirmability, I conducted a data audit in which I examined the collected data to ensure there were no researcher biases and distortion identified. I used the interview data to crosscheck with observation notes and documents to ensure consistency of information. The audit trail involves an examination of the inquiry process and product to validate the data, whereby a researcher

accounts for all the research decisions and activities to show how the data is collected, recorded and analyzed (Bowen, 2009; Li, 2004).

**Credibility**

Credibility refers to the extent to which a research account is believable and appropriate, with particular reference to the level of agreement between participants and the researcher (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). Credibility also ensures the research is consistent and measures the intent of the study (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There are several methods to measure the accuracy or credibility of the findings in qualitative research. Some of the most popular are data triangulation and member checking. Triangulation is the most popular and effective method to increase the credibility of a study (Abdalla, Oliveira, Azevedo, & Gonzalez, 2018; Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). As mentioned previously, I applied methodological triangulation to increase the overall accuracy of data and minimize interpretation. Methodological triangulation involves the use of data from two types of sources such as interviews and documents (Patton, 1999). The interview documents and transcripts were reviewed and triaged to ensure truthfulness and minimization of ambiguity.

**Transferability**

Transferability is the transferal of qualitative research results to other contexts with other respondents; it is the interpretive equivalent of generalizability (Bitsch, 2005; Tobin & Begley, 2004). According to Bitsch (2005), the researcher facilitates transferability through thick description and purposeful sampling. The proposed study included a comprehensive description of the participants, population, research setting,

data collection, and data analysis. I also included an interview protocol to ensure that information is conveyed correctly and accurately for future replication. A qualitative researcher enhances transferability by doing a thorough job of describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research (Trochim, 2006). Including detailed research methods as well as data organization techniques improves the transferability of the study.

**Data Saturation**

Data saturation is reached when no further research is feasible or attained within a study (Guest et al., 2006; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Walker, 2012). Saturation is a tool used for ensuring that adequate and quality data are collected to support the study (Walker, 2012). Failure to reach data saturation has an impact on the quality of the research conducted and hampers content validity (Bowen, 2009; Kerr, et al., 2010). There are many small business retail stores in Dallas/Fort Worth, however, this study identified those that apply knowledge management. The participants helped provide rich data that was needed to explore the research question. The number of interviews needed for a qualitative study to reach data saturation is difficult to quantify (Bernard, 2012). The interview questions themselves, structured consistently, can achieve data saturation (Guest et al., 2006). To confirm data saturation, I used the same interview questions during each interview to certify consistency and minimize deviation. I also conducted multiple semistructured interviews until no additional themes emerged from the data. Consistency in the questions for all respondents assists in ensuring data saturation within

a study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Also using these multiple sources of data to triangulate data enhanced the reliability of results.

## Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I described the overall purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, and expanded on the selection of a qualitative case study approach to explore the knowledge management strategies small retail business managers use to remain successful over 5 years. Participants were identified using purposeful sampling which helps select participants based on like characteristics and objectives of the study. Section 2 also provided information on the data collection tools and process, along with a description of how I ensured the research was ethical, credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. In Section 3, I present the findings of the study, discuss recommendations for further research, as well as the application to professional practice and implications for social change.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

## Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the knowledge management strategies small retail business leaders in the Dallas / Ft. Worth metroplex, use for business sustainability. I used a multiple case study design with two sources of data for methodological triangulation. Semistructured interviews and internal/external documents were used to collate data from 4 leaders of small retail businesses in the Dallas / Ft. Worth area. All findings were driven from information gathered from the semistructured interviews in which participants provided insight about their experiences using successful knowledge strategies in their business practices. Methodological triangulation was used to compare interviews and internal/external (public) documents to enhance the credibility and reliability of the study. The main themes that were prevalent throughout each interview, were (a) communication, (b) training and development, (c) knowledge transfer, and (d) innovation.

## Presentation of Findings

The research question that guided this study was; What knowledge management strategies do some small business enterprise (SBE) leaders apply for business sustainability? To understand the real-world view and get a holistic assessment of the organization, I used a multiple case study design. Semistructured interviews and archival documents such as financial documents, managerial reports, training documents, and meeting minutes, were used for triangulation. The interview questions were open-ended, allowing the participants to expound on how they used knowledge management strategies

to improve business sustainability. Each participant was assigned a code (P1, P2, P3, and P4) to maintain confidentiality and allow anonymous coding throughout the study. Based on the data gathered 4 themes arose; (a) communication, (b) training and development, (c) knowledge transfer, and (d) innovation.

**Theme 1: Communication**

Communication was one of the more prominent practices and strategies that participants revealed during each interview. Each participant mentioned communication in some form when answering interview question one and three. Crawford and Strohkirch (2006) believed that lack of communication negatively effects knowledge management acquisition, creation, and application skills by 15%. Leaders play a vital role in organizational learning and success. Participants felt it is important for leadership to clearly communicate expectations and business functions to ensure longevity within the organization.

Most participants stated that communication is essential for knowledge transfer within an organization. Knowledge transfer (KT) is a term used to encompass a very broad range of activities to support mutually beneficial collaborations between universities, businesses, and the public sector (Cambridge, 2020). This knowledge transfer happens through effective communication. Constant and consistent communication between small business owners and employees are critical for improving retention and transfer. Internal communication must always occupy a prominent place in any organization, as it allows interactions with the environment to be processed, ensuring the circulation of information and understanding, as well as the necessary cohesion for

the smooth functioning of the organization (Baretto, 2020). P1 stated that "sharing knowledge and communication is important. It important to build networks but most important I encourage my employees to share information and build comradery." All 4 participants (P1, P2, P3, P4) believed that communication in connection with knowledge transfer has helped their organization remain successful over the last few years.

Theme 1, communication, aligned with the conceptual framework as it illustrates the importance of organizational knowledge creation within an organization. Study participants believed leaders should not only communicate to employees but encourage peer-to-peer communcaiton as well. The main purpose of internal communication is to make all company employees influential, well-trained, and empowered to facilitate communication in the workplace (Barreto, 2020). Internal communication is important for an organization to thrive because it determines the validity of an organization and where alliances and understanding occur (Barreto, 2020).

**Theme 2: Training and Development**

Training and development were another theme identified by participants when discussing knowledge management within the organization. Although often referred to together, these practices are relatively different in nature. Training is a learning process in which employees acquire knowledge, skills, experience and attitudes to perform their job better for the achievements of their organizational goals (Boadu, Dwomo-Fokuo, Boakye & Kwaning, 2014). Whereas development is a continuous process that enables people to progress from a present state of understanding and capability to a future state in which

higher-level skills, knowledge and competencies are required (Boadu, Dwomo-Fokuo, Boakye & Kwaning, 2014).

Each participant mentioned that one of the most critical factors in the organization's development lifecycle was the emphasis on training and development. The leaders (P1, P2, P3, P4) believed that training and development generates a platform for employee engagement, which in turn creates an avenue where knowledge can be easily transferred and shared. P1 mentioned "for a business to truly grow, it must put just as much effort into education as it does marketing." P2 also stated "a knowledgeable and prepared team provides an advantage in an unpredictable market." Barney et al. (1991) believed that organizations require learning and creativity to increase resources and skills to sustain the company's competitive advantages, furthering the theory that training and/or development increases the longevity of an organization in a dominating market. Suman, Kiran, Singh, and Neelam (2020) further believed that the process of training and development embraces knowledge management, and enhances organizational strategy, cultivating a learning organization. A learning organization creates and transfers knowledge, consistent with Nonaka's dynamic theory of knowledge creation.

A company's work environment, training and development, and management are important determinants of organizational performance and culture (Elona Cera, 2020). In a fluctuating economy, it is important that leaders support training and development to sustain their businesses. Training and development creates a knowledge-sharing environment where employees learn from management and other colleagues (O'Neill, 2020).

**Theme 3: Knowledge Transfer**

Knowledge transfer was another asset identified by participants used to retain employees and information within the organization. All the participants mentioned knowledge transfer when expounding on how information is dispersed or maintained within their organizations. These knowledge transfer mechanisms are broken down into two forms; personalization and codification. Personalization refers to the one-to-one transfer of knowledge between two entities in person (Ngoc Thang & Anh Tuan, 2020). Personalization also involves hand on, one-on-one training. P2 mentioned "when employees are hired, they are assigned a buddy to show them the ins and outs of the business." P3 also mentioned that "when new people are hired, they must shadow a senior employee to provide insight on the day to day activities." Readytech (2020) stated that hands-on training accelerates learning, provides a safe learning environment, creates self-directed learners, motivates individuals, increases engagement and delivers strong ROI. This falls directly in line with data obtained from each participant on the importance of successful knowledge transfer within the business.

Codification is another knowledge transfer mechanism that is used within businesses to successfully instill knowledge. Codification relies on technology, systems, and procedures to describe and codify the knowledge and experiences of people (employees), thereby transforming organizational knowledge from tacit into explicit form (Ngoc Thang & Anh Tuan, 2020). Tacit knowledge is transferred into documents (explicit) used to substitute as training materials for the new and existing employees. P4 stated "certain team members are responsible for creating training documents for new

employees, as well as ones with tenure. Doing so builds comradery and teamwork inside the small team." P1 mentioned that "all employees, on a schedule, are responsible for creating and administering trainings and information to the team to ensure everyone is on the same page." The constant input and team knowledge sharing is used to perpetuate the organization.

Knowledge transfer has a positive correlation with the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation because both focus on tacit and explicit knowledge for organizational learning. The conceptual framework that guided this study considers knowledge creation as a dynamic process, in which the continuous dialog between tacit and explicit knowledge generates new knowledge and amplifies it across different ontological levels (individual, organizational, inter-organizational) (Farnese, Barbieri, Chirumbolo, & Patriotta, 2019). Theme 3, knowledge transfer, ties directly to the dynamic theory of knowledge creation as both are grounded by the importance of how the creation and dissemination of information is crucial to organizational success.

**Theme 4: Innovation**

Each participant identified product innovation, process innovation, and business model innovation as key drivers in growth and sustainability. "Being able to chameleonize the company and keep customers and employees engaged is extremely important." P2 stated. P1 and P4, on the other hand expressed more interest on internal process innovation and advancement to create knowledge value for the customers, themselves (owners), and other shareholders. According to Plessis (2007), the value proposition of knowledge management in the innovation process is that KM (a) provides

platforms, tools, and processes to ensure integration of an organization's' knowledge base, (b) assists in steady growth of the knowledge base through gathering capturing of explicit and implicit knowledge, and (c) provides a knowledge driven culture within which innovation can be incubated. Although each participant expounded on knowledge and internal or external innovative measures, the finding aligns with the conclusions from Nonaka (1997), who considers knowledge as a main requisite for innovation and competitiveness.

Process innovation involves significant changes in techniques, equipment, and software in the organization; resulting in small businesses becoming more efficient, flexible, and responsive (Schiliro, 2015). Von Hippel (1986) pointed out the importance of ignoring existing patterns and updating processes to create disruptive innovations. The change in direction falls solely on the leader to disseminate information and create structure where information is shared. P3 stated "I have always looked for new ways to revamp our business, however I also make it my business to communicate that change to my team to make sure we have the same goal." Kuuluvainen (2012) believed for an organization to survive for more than 5 years, leaders need to have a strong ability to manipulate internal processes to maintain relevance in dynamically changing market environments. Process innovation falls directly in line with the findings, because it is essential that small business leaders create avenues to promote knowledge and innovation for their organizations to survive in an everchanging economy.

Business model innovation was acknowledged by participants as a means for revamping and structuring their businesses for success. Each participant provided insight

on how business innovation helped them remain relevant in the retail industry. There are numbers of ways a business model can be defined, however for the purpose of this study, I used the Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) definition that a business model is the rationale of how an organization creates, delivers, and captures value. This form of innovation is about continually aligning the components of the company to adapt to environmental changes and capture opportunities (Schaller & Vatananan-Thesenvitz, 2019). Yang, Wei, Shi, and Zhao, (2020) stated that a business model innovation consists of three core components: value proposition, activity system, and resource portfolios, all of which are essential in a company's progression. P1 mentioned "In the original business model, merchandise was only sold in stores and promoted via word of mouth and ads. With the change in technology, digital and social marketing became more prevalent. So now I sell items via social media (Instagram)." This type of business model innovation has affected not only small businesses but larger organizations as well. Makhmoor and Rajesh (2017) found that innovating an organizations business model increases profits 4 times as much as a classic business model. P1 also indicated "sales more than doubled once our social media presence was recognized." Small business leaders must incessantly visit their value proposition and create flexible business models to keep their companies relevant and stable.

Innovation capability, marketing capability, and learning capability all contribute significantly to small business performance (Sok et al., 2013). Knowledge management and creation influences the success of the innovation processes (Ode & Ayavoo, 2020). In today's competitive and turbulent market, knowledge sharing plays an indispensable

role in creating new knowledge and processes for sustainable innovation in organizations (Abbas et al., 2020). Knowledge management and sharing is linked to the codification and sharing of tacit knowledge (Ode & Ayavoo, 2020). Participants concluded that their organizations' knowledge management capabilities were linked directly to their organizations' internal and external innovation. P4 stated that "a successful organization must be flexible and adapt to the changes". P1 and P3 emphasized the true importance of product innovation and how managers and leaders are responsible for sharing knowledge and value to team members. Managers, therefore, need to recognize there is a positive correlation between knowledge management and innovation.

## Applications to Professional Practice

The findings from this study provide small business owners with an increased understanding of the importance of knowledge management strategies within their organizations and the impact on overall business longevity, knowledge transfer, and innovation. Small business owners can apply the findings of the study, to increase small business development and economic growth.

The results of this study provide integral strategies for small business owners to improve internal knowledge management. Furthermore, the findings enhance professional practices by expanding on the implementation of knowledge tactics business owners can use to remain sustainable. Small business owners need to apply the right strategies to operate effectively and maintain profitability (Yang, Sun, & Zhao, 2019). Clark (2020) found the skills, expertise, data, communication, and technology that KM

encompasses is vital to stay current for both employees and customers. Study participants agreed that knowledge within the organizations is essential to progression.

The findings from this study also provide small business owners with approaches they can use to improve longevity and sustainability. Study results revealed that leaders need to pay close attention to the transfer of information and business innovation to remain relevant. SBE leaders must not only learn from the knowledge that is gathered within their organization but invest in the overall capture and transfer of that information. It is essential that leaders implement processes and procedures to retain knowledge. Small business owners may also use the findings to discover viable strategies to improve knowledge management and sustainability within their businesses. The themes identified may help identify new KM strategies to boost leaders' support, improve profitability, and build market expertise within the organization.

## Implications for Social Change

Abbas et al. (2020) found in today's competitive and turbulent market, knowledge management plays an indispensable role in the process of sustainable innovation in organizations. The first implication for social change from the findings of this study focuses on the use of KM by leaders and other employees to expand the skills of the organization and community. Knowledge creation typically involves tapping the tacit and highly subjective, insights, informal skills, and practices of individual employees in ways upon which an organization can act (Ward, Smith, Keen, West, & House, 2018). The expansion of skills that employees learn is important to the economic growth of the community. The learned knowledge becomes an intangible asset to not only the

company, but surrounding businesses as well. The learned skills can be used to assist growth within other small business organizations. The findings identified may be used by other small business leaders to enrich organizational performance and sustain the economy of their local communities.

Social change occurs over time and often has profound and long-term consequences for society (Dunfey, 2019). Knowledge enhances innovation, which helps business organizations achieve valuable benefits, effectiveness, sustainability, growth, and economic prosperity (Geissdoerfer, Vladimirova, & Evans, 2018). Small business owners implementing knowledge management strategies to improve sustainability, will improve socioeconomic growth and community engagement. Creating new jobs in smaller economic areas can help improve organizational wealth and decrease unemployment. Sustainable business creates job opportunities for individuals and provides economic support for communities. Small business owners may use the findings from this research to identify new strategies to implement that support organizational and community development.

## Recommendation for Action

Knowledge has a vital role in the challenging business environment and contributes to sustaining business performance (Abu Baker & Yosof, 2016). Small business owners should consider if the results of this study align with the overall intent to improve sustainability in the market. The findings of this study may enlighten leaders to what knowledge management strategies are necessary to create a sustainable knowledge-sharing organization. Based on the findings, I recommend three areas of strategic focus

for SBE leaders and managers to ensure the survival and growth of their businesses: (a) communication/knowledge transfer, (b) product and business innovation, and (c) organizational learning.

Small business leaders must place focus on internal communication and knowledge transfer within their organization to remain successful. Knowledge transfer is more than just the official training and sharing of materials, it also is about discovering ways to transfer employee experience into a system where is can it be shared or stored. The results of this study illustrate that employee knowledge and information is critical in identifying and seizing growth opportunities within the organization for long-term sustainability. The study outcomes also provide insight on why employee knowledge and knowledge sharing practices are just as important as company documentation. Effective implementation of individual or employee knowledge transfer, provides better solutions for business or organization performance (Hassan, Noor, & Hussin, 2017). Small business leaders should create avenues for employees and leadership to share data; increasing overall organizational knowledge.

The second recommendation for small business leaders and managers is to invest in and learn from product and business innovation. With an economy that is intrigued by new technology, it is important for businesses to invest in innovative measures to sustain their business. With new ways to obtain knowledge, such as social media and big data, it is important for leaders and employees to use these tools to understand consumers and the market. Owoseni and Twinomurinzi (2018) found that technology enhances the absorptive, adaptive, and innovative capacities leaders use to develop opportunity-

sensing capabilities, opportunity-shaping capabilities, and opportunity-seizing capabilities. The study findings provide evidence that improving activities such as process innovation and business model innovation impact the growth and survival of SBEs positively.

The third recommendation for small business leaders and managers is to invest in organizational learning (individual and business). Organization learning (OL) takes place in two ways; (a) self-learning through the experience of its members and (b) dissemination of new knowledge acquired by other members of the organization (Ramanujam et al., 2019). Organizational learning is a crucial concept for improving performance and competitive value (Friedman et al., 2005). Study findings revealed that organizational learning (individual or group) is critical to the survival of SBEs in Dallas/Ft. Worth. Each participant mentioned organizational learning as a key driver to their overall company success. The experience of the participants illustrated that leaders who place a high focus on organizational learning have higher rates of growth in business.

The findings and recommendations from this study may benefit future doctoral students, research participants, and other small business owners within the Dallas/Ft. Worth area. The learnings could assist in the management, potential growth, and survival rates of small businesses. With unprecedented external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is becoming harder and harder for smaller organizations to survive and progress. To provide insight, I will disseminate the findings via related conferences and/or training relating to knowledge management in small business. In addition, to

ensure information is accessible, I will publish this study via Proquest and invite other researchers to review.

## Recommendations for Further Research

In this qualitative multiple case study, I identified evidence that small business owners are using knowledge strategies to increase longevity and growth of their organizations. However, I also recognized three limitations of the study; (a) sample size, (b) participants' awareness or knowledge management within their organization, and (c) participants' unwillingness to provide data on their current knowledge management practices.

Sample size and eligibility criteria are limitations that I recommend future researchers consider when conducting similar multiple case studies. I selected 4 retail business owners within the Dallas/Ft. Worth area who use knowledge management strategies within their organizations. Increasing the sample size may identify new themes and approaches to knowledge management strategies that small business owners are using to create sustainable businesses. In turn, expanding the eligibility criteria, outside of the retail industry, may allow future researchers to gain new insights on knowledge management strategies leaders in other sectors are using for sustainability of their organization.

Most organizations are extremely competitive and are hesitant to share internal information and documents. However, once trust and confidentiality are established, the leaders are more open to providing data and sharing company documents. I suggest researchers conducting similar studies to contact the participants frequently via telephone

or email to establish trust and understanding. This would allow the researcher to build trust and ensure the leader is aware of how knowledge management is applied within his or her organization. Establishing trust further ensures participants are willing to share their data and knowledge management practices.

## Reflections

Conducting this study has helped me understand the importance of knowledge management not only in small business organizations, but Fortune 500 companies as well. When I embarked upon the study, I wanted to understand the nuances of knowledge within my current business organization. In my 9 years working for multiple organizations, I have watched companies invest in contractors versus employees; to eventually lose the knowledge established. I then recognized that knowledge loss was more prevalent in small organizations that do not have the necessary funds to allot to knowledge management. I have witnessed, firsthand, smaller businesses open and close within the initial stages of development. For this reason, I decided to explore what strategies leaders of small organizations are using to sustain their businesses. The data from the semistructured interviews and company documents, along with literature review helped me to better understand the research problem and comprehend next steps for future entrepreneurs.

In reflection, the DBA Doctoral Study process was intense and challenging. The process of conducting research not only helped me understand the processes of business, but also gave me the blueprint to conduct future studies. With the effects of the pandemic (COVID-19), participant candidate responses began to diminish. However, it only forced

me to work harder and get creative with overall engagement. But in totality, the process taught me patience, time management, and exceptional writing skills that I will use both personally and professionally.

## Conclusion

While research on knowledge management in business organizations has had scholarly attention, it has mostly been considered in the institutional contexts (Audretsch, Belitski, Caiazza, & Lehmann, 2020). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore what knowledge management strategies small business owners used to remain sustainable beyond 5 years. The growing awareness and importance of knowledge for organizational survival places KM, as a concept, at the forefront of the organizations' practices (Byukusenge & Munene, 2017). Some small business owners lack strategic options needed to support the sustainability of their organizations. These leaders should establish and maintain a knowledge-based organization to perpetuate their businesses. Successful entrepreneurs rely on knowledge to facilitate economic development (Welter et al., 2019).

Four themes emerged from the study which provided insight on the strategies that are prevalent in small businesses: (a) communication, (b) training and development, (c) knowledge transfer, and (d) innovation. The findings from this research study relate to Nonaka's dynamic theory of knowledge creation, which states that knowledge is created through a continuous dialogue between tacit and explicit knowledge via four patterns of interactions, (a) socialization, (b) combination, (c)internalization and (d) externalization (Becerra-Fernandez & Sabherwal, 2001). The themes provided by

participants, link to Nonaka's theory of knowledge creation, and expound on how leaders obtain, create, and transfer knowledge at all levels within the workplace. Small business leaders can apply the study findings to develop and implement supplementary strategies to improve productivity and profitability within the organization.

Organizational performance is a competitive differentiator in business (Payal, Ahmed, & Debnath, 2019). SBE leaders must ensure that they implement knowledge strategies within their organizations to progress in a fluid environment. With pandemics such as COVID -19, and other extreme external impacts, it is important for leaders to place higher focus on communication and business innovation. Small business leaders must ensure that knowledge is consistently and concisely shared throughout their organizations, by both employees and leadership, if they want to grow and sustain their organizations beyond 5 years.

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol

| Using Knowledge Management Practices in Small Business Organizations | | |
|---|---|---|
| Date, time, and location of the interview | | |
| Interviewee/Participant identification number | | |
| Step 1 | Introduction | Introduce myself and thank the participant for taking part in the study. |
| Step 2 | Purpose | Identify the knowledge management strategies that the small business enterprise (SBE) leaders apply for business sustainability |
| Step 3 | Description of why the interviewee is participating | Explain the participant is selected based on their qualifications and experience with knowledge management.<br>The information they provide will be beneficial in answering the research question and partially fulfilling my Doctor of Business Administration degree requirements. |
| Step 4 | Description of the benefit of participation | Explain that participant's findings will provide small business leaders with lessons learned to improve small business longevity |
| Step 5 | Ethics | Ethical standards will be maintained before, during, and after the interview. |
| Step 6 | Confidentiality | Inform participants that all information will be recorded and stored without identifying material to ensure confidentiality.<br>All electronic copies will be password protected on my personal device. Hard copies will remain in a locked filing cabinet in my home office and electronic for 5 years after the approval of the study. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | I will destroy all data 5 years after approval of the study. |
| Step 7 | Participant questions | Do you have any questions or concerns regarding this study or the interview process we have just discussed? |
| Step 8 | Interview transition | Identify the transition into the interview questions using a semi-structured approach. |
| Step 9 | Conduct the interview while taking note of body language and verbal cues. Ask probing and additional questions as necessary throughout the open discussion. | 1. How do you gather knowledge within in your organization to support your business sustainability?<br>2. How do you make this knowledge accessible within your organization?<br>a. *Are there any specific programs etc that you would like to elaborate on?*<br>3. What knowledge management tools do you use in your business operations?<br>4. What are some specific challenges your organization has overcome by using its strategies to capture and apply knowledge?<br>a. *If you can think of any additional information, please feel free to elaborate.*<br>5. How has your organization's knowledge management strategies contributed to your business sustainability?<br>6. What role does management play in the implementation of knowledge management in your organization?<br>7. What additional information would you like to share regarding knowledge management strategies for achieving the sustainability of your business? |

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|---|---|---|
| Step 10 | Closing | Thank the participant for their time and ask if follow-up discussions, or questions are acceptable. If so, ask the desired method of communication. |