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Strategies for Small Business Restaurant Sustainability Beyond the First 5 Years

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Strategies for Small Business Restaurant Sustainability Beyond the First 5 Years

by

Allison Marie Sellers

MS, Concordia University Chicago, 2016

BS, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, 2013

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

September 2021

Abstract

Ineffective leadership strategies can negatively affect the sustainability of small business restaurants. Leaders of small business restaurants who do not implement effective leadership strategies may face challenges sustaining their business in the first 5 years of operation. Grounded in entrepreneurship theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies that successful small business restaurant managers employ to help sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation. The participants of this study included three individuals who successfully managed small business restaurants in the Midwestern United States. Data collection procedures included semistructured interviews and a collection of company documentation such as business mission statements, organizational charts, and job descriptions. Data were analyzed using coding, theme development, member checking, and methodological triangulation. Four themes emerged: maintaining good customer relationships, quality of product, employee satisfaction, and importance of community involvement. A key recommendation is for small business restaurant owners to build honest relationships both within the company and with suppliers. Small business owners may engage directly with customers and employees while working alongside their staff and being hands-on with the business operations. Implications for positive social change include information that can support small businesses to remain successful. In return, a successful small restaurant business may lead to more job opportunities, encourage employee advancement, and increase local business-to-business transactions.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to my husband, who never doubts my abilities to put my mind into completing a task, no matter how crazy it may seem. Without his support, and that of my family, I could never have achieved this enormous task.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the dedication and continued efforts put forth by all of my teachers and staff at Walden University. I would like to extend a special thank you to Dr. Annie Brown, Dr. Edgar Jordan, and Dr. Kenneth Strang for your attention to detail, direction, and mentorship along this journey.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

A small business is an organization employing fewer than 500 employees (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2019). The problem some start-up ventures face is that more than half of all small businesses will not survive beyond the first few years in operation (Quansah & Kartz, 2021). I explored the strategies small business restaurant managers use to effectively sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of operation. I collected data through semistructured, telephone interviews. The findings of this research may aid small business restaurant managers in their early stages of business or those struggling to become more sustainable. The importance of small businesses continuing to remain successful can significantly influence the amount of job opportunities in Midwestern United States.

Background of the Problem

Despite the extensive research conducted on small business sustainability, nearly half of newly established small businesses fail before they reach 5 years in operation (Quansah & Kartz, 2021). Because U.S. small businesses have been a major part of the economic foundation (Dahmen & Rodriquez, 2014), made up 99% of all public enterprises, and provided 55% of all hired employees between 2012 and 2015 (Shukla & Shukla, 2014), the success of new establishments is essential to the continued success of the economy.

Factors such as innovation, marketing, finance, and strategic management have been shown to be key elements of business strategies that support sustainable businesses. But there are also short- and long-term factors that contribute to the failure rate for small

businesses (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2016). These failures may be because of a lack of leadership skills, inexperience within an industry, lack of financial education, or poor marketing strategies. Research on available funding options, theoretical frameworks that align with a business strategy, and effective marketing skills can be useful tools for leaders to use when looking to help make a business more sustainable. Additional research to determine successful business strategies and leadership skills may contribute to small business restaurant success by helping business leaders make effect decisions to sustain their business beyond 5 years.

Problem Statement

In the third quarter of 2017, 241,000 small businesses started (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2019). With at least 50% of these businesses failing in the first 5 years, the United States economy is negatively affected (Quansah & Kartz, 2021). The general business problem is that small business restaurant managers fail to implement effective strategies to sustain their businesses, resulting in loss of profits. The specific business problem is that some small business restaurant managers lack the necessary leadership strategies to sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies successful small business restaurant managers employ to help sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation. The target population consisted of three restaurant managers in Midwestern United States who were interviewed with questions focusing on current strategies that have demonstrated business profitability and continued

sustainable operations beyond 5 years. This study may have a positive social impact on other small business restaurant managers in the beginning years of their operation or those struggling with business sustainability. By applying the findings of this research, small business restaurant managers may improve their business strategies and management styles. As a positive result, these small business restaurant managers may provide more job opportunities for communities benefiting local economies through increased tax revenues.

Nature of the Study

Among the three available research methods, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, a qualitative method was the most appropriate for this study because of the use of interview questions, analysis, personal experiences, and application of literature review to the existing findings. A qualitative study helps analyze data meaningfully and interprets a philosophy that researchers want to investigate further (Saunders et al., 2015). Understanding the experiences of the participants provides insight for addressing the research problem (Reinecke et al., 2016), providing a potential solution for small business restaurant managers struggling with sustainability. Qualitative studies also account for certain unpredictable measures such as recessions and the effects on the economy (Bengtsson, 2016).

Conversely, the quantitative method consists of data collection and statistical analysis of variables' relationships or groups' differences while following a standardized template for studying data and searching for answers (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Reinecke et al., 2016). The use of numerical data obtained from analyzing preselected

variables from a sample group in a designated population did not align with the intent of this study and therefore was not selected as an appropriate research method. A mixed methodology can be described as using a combination of elements from both a qualitative and quantitative approach such as data collection from a sample group, preselected variables, and interviews in one single study (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). This combination of methodologies was not used for this study because variables were not selected or further used.

For this study, I used a case study to explore strategies used by managers who have experienced sustainability of their small business restaurant beyond the first 5 years in operation through in-person interviews as well as company documentation. Qualitative case studies use multiple sources of evidence, encompass theorization, use pattern matching for data analysis, and focus on replication logic as opposed to aggregating data (Yin, 2018). By using a case study design, one can investigate a contemporary phenomenon and help to understand the dynamics of a specific topic (Saunders et al., 2015). With this design, researchers can explore why participants with different strategic skills and experiences took specific actions towards a desired goal and why other options may not have been appropriate for their restaurant at that given time. Ethnography, narrative, phenomenological, and ground theory designs are not appropriate for this research study. Ethnography is the study of culture or social groups over a long period of time (Saunders et al., 2015), but the focus was on business strategies of small business restaurant managers, regardless of culture. A narrative design, which uses participants' personal stories (Saunders et al., 2015), is also not an appropriate design for this study

because to the use of personal stories, which is not the intent of this study. Phenomenologists focus on individuals who have experienced a phenomenon and was not selected because of the emphasis on personal perceptions and perspectives. I chose a case study design because it is the most appropriate for the study because of the use of interviews with managers regarding their personal experiences and additional documentation of the organization. A multiple case study was selected for this study to ensure data saturation was achieved and as many as possible successful strategies were discovered and presented.

Research Question

What leadership strategies do managers in small business restaurants use to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of beginning operation?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies have contributed to the success and sustainability of your business beyond 5 years?

2. What key challenges did you encounter when implementing your sustainability strategies?

3. How did you address these key challenges?

4. Based on your experiences, what elements of these strategies are most responsible for profitability and success of your businesses?

5. What indicators do you use to gauge to assess the effectiveness of your business strategies for long-term sustainability?

6. What else would you like to share about your experiences as a manager in this business that has helped to continue to run a sustainable business?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was entrepreneurship theory, which was developed by Cantillon in the early 1700s (Cantillon, 1755). Entrepreneurship theory initially focused on supply but later evolved into a means for exploring sustainability efforts, allowing for the possibility to create new business opportunities (Carlsson et al., 2013). This can apply to building leadership strategies for small business restaurant managers. The significant elements of entrepreneurship theory are managerial skills, planning, and developing and deploying successful business strategies. All of these elements can help to address the specific business problem in this study. Exploring successful managerial skills through entrepreneurship theory could enable business managers to reflect on existing skills and adjust management styles as necessary. Further, effective planning and overseeing business strategies can prevent business problems when unforeseen events occur and allow for improvement of key business processes. Entrepreneurship theory also helps individuals to drive new competition within a market and promotes healthy economic competitiveness (Abu-Saifan, 2012). Integrating entrepreneurship theory into a business's leadership strategy may help understand the most effective way to market in a specific industry or location. Therefore, entrepreneurship theory aligned with this study's purpose to explore leadership strategies to help sustain small business restaurants beyond the first 5 years in operation.

Operational Definitions

The following definitions are terms that will appear within the study. The goal of these definitions is to ensure that the reader of this study has a better understanding of the terminology.

Bootstrapping: Bootstrapping is a means of obtaining funds to start a new business venture from family, friends, credit cards, personal savings, or retained earnings (Markova & Petkovska-Mircevska, 2009; Malmstrom & Wincent, 2018).

Business strategies: Business strategies are actions that help support the attainment of a companies' vision while considering three factors; cost leadership, differentiation, and focus (Savitri, 2018).

Business success: Business success is a measurement of a positive outcome from decisions made and the consequences from these decisions (DaSilva, & Trkman, 2014); business success relies a great deal on the organizations learning competencies (Kozielski, 2016)

Small business: In addition to the size standard of 500 or fewer employees, a small business can be defined as a small business if they meet the following criteria: organized for profit, the business resides in the United States, operates primarily in the United States, is independently owned, and is not dominant in its specific field (Beesley, 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Understanding assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are all key elements to recognize when conducting a reliable study. Assumptions are apparent in qualitative

studies and assume the selection process for a study will produce valid results (Yin, 2018). Limitations at times can be a weakness toward the study because of dishonesty or a small target group. Delimitations are restraints used to narrow a study to obtain more specific results (Irby et al., 2015).

Assumptions

Assumptions can be taken for granted in a study and, at times, cause confusion if not properly addressed (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). At times, assumptions are made by researchers when looking at qualitative studies (Yin, 2018). The first assumption made for this study is that a qualitative multiple case study was an appropriate approach. The second assumption was that all participants would provide truthful and honest answers to the questions asked. Finally, I assumed that the Midwestern United States would provide useful data for this research.

Limitations

Limitations are considered boundaries of a study and may relate to the participants, research method, or setting of the study (Irby et al., 2015). Limitations may also be potential weaknesses (Yin, 2018). One limitation of this study is the transferability to a larger population, another geographical location, or other industries. A second limitation is the reliability, honesty, and knowledge of a small sample group.

Delimitations

Delimitations can be considered a boundary of a study and are implemented within a study to narrow the focus (Irby et al., 2015). Only businesses with fewer than 500 employees were selected for this study based on the definition of a small business by

the U.S. Small Business Administration (2016). A second delimitation of the study is the

geographical location selected for the study, the Midwestern United States. A third

delimitation is that all participants had to be operating a business that has been successful

for at least 5 years.

Significance of the Study

Exploring strategies that managers used to survive beyond the first 5 years of

operation may provide insights for aspiring and existing small business restaurant owners

who may be struggling with sustainability. The success of small business restaurants is

essential since small businesses currently make up 99.7% of employing firms in the

United States (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2019). As the number of small

businesses remains so high, knowing the most effective ways to run a small business is

essential to avoid failure. Implementing the findings of this study may help reduce the

unemployment rate in Midwestern United States and increase revenue within the

community. Thriving small businesses can bring strength to the continuously growing

small business sector.

The implications for positive social change include job opportunities for those in

the community, benefiting local economies. In return, added job opportunities,

encouraging employment advancement, and an increase in business-to-business

transactions may add an overall unity between the business and the community. When

small businesses in a community are successful, management may be better equipped to

provide funding for communities' programs, scholarship opportunities, or financial help

to local charities.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies successful small business restaurant managers employ to help sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation. Literature reviews are one of the most common techniques used to manage, summarize, and interpret prior research on a specific subject (Dumay et al., 2016). The purpose of the literature review was to understand current information significant to the research question while further expanding on relevant information. The provided an overview of the general topic of leadership strategies used to sustain small business restaurants beyond the first 5 years of operation.

The databases and search engines used in the literature search for this study included EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and government databases. The following keywords were the most common keywords searched to locate relevant literature: *small business sustainability, small business, leadership, management, small business owners, financial stability, stability, entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship, financial capital,* and *small business strategy.* The literature review contains 96 sources; 80 (83%) have publication dates on or after 2015, and 16 (17%) have publication dates prior to 2015. Of the 96 sources, seven (7%) are books, 88 (92%) are peer-reviewed articles, and one (1%) was a website.

There are six subject sections within this review: entrepreneurship theory, alternative theories for entrepreneurship theory, complementary theories for entrepreneurship theory, perceived small business success strategies, entrepreneurship

and innovation, entrepreneurship and marketing, entrepreneurship finance, and entrepreneurship and strategic management.

Entrepreneurship Theory

Individuals working toward opening a new establishment are often referred to as entrepreneurs, though entrepreneurship is defined in a variety of ways. Researchers have defined it as a means for job and wealth creation (Welter et al., 2016); a means for measuring an organization's status and ability to take business opportunities (Stuetzer et al., 2018); and the discovery, enactment, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities that may create future goods and services (Reuber et al., 2018). Entrepreneurship may differ significantly across developing and developed countries but is important to each economy (Chowdhury et al., 2019).

A few examples of entrepreneurs who faced the risks of failure but have since succeeded are Bill Gates (Microsoft) and Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook). These individuals recognized the potential for a successful business venture and capitalized on a non-existing market. The ability to combine both entrepreneurship and technology via the internet was a major change in the way businesses operated (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). Entrepreneurs were able to connect with experts on nearly any given topic at the touch of a button (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). This became especially important as the emphasis of entrepreneurship and innovation continued to grow. Entrepreneurship has continuously impacted economic development in the United States (Andersson & Evers, 2015) because of the entrepreneurs before and after individuals like Gates and Zuckerberg.

The use of entrepreneurship theory helps to drive innovation and develop new job opportunities. Using the components of entrepreneurship theory, small businesses are more likely to gain a competitive advantage, which may help to impact the overall performance of the new venture (Anwar et al., 2018). The use of entrepreneurship theory in small businesses not only allows for managers to dive into new markets but also helps them assess the use of raw materials to best meet their business strategies to become and remain successful (Dorin & Alexandru, 2018). Fully understanding their position in a market and the most efficient way to use material may help small businesses continue to succeed.

Additionally, entrepreneurship theory, though having some risky aspects, implements innovation and helps to move resources from low productivity areas to higher productivity and ideally a profitable market (Smirnov, 2017). With a focus on supply and demand (Cantillon, 1755), early research acknowledged a need for further education to ensure time and resources were not wasted. Entrepreneurship theory emphasizes price adjustments for items and or services and to help consumers avoid paying premium rates (Cantillon, 1755).

Along with entrepreneurship theory, there are many traits of entrepreneurs that are helpful to business success. Being a strong, independent, knowledgeable leader may help an entrepreneur not only succeed in their business but also develop reliable leadership strategies to build a strong team of support. Entrepreneurs set a high level of expectations for themselves, tend to be conscientious, extroverted individuals, and have a clear idea of where they would like their ideas to go while obtaining maximum success (Kerr et al.,

2018). Entrepreneurs also have high risk-taking tendencies, strong internal control resources, and are extremely motivated (Xiao & Chen, 2019). By being aware of the business boundaries and having the mindset of an entrepreneur, managers are better equipped to make financial, marketing, staffing, and other business-critical decisions without hindering the future of the business (Radziwon & Bogers, 2018). Entrepreneurship provides a way to problem solve, become solution-focused, and present a fresh perspective to past business processes.

Another important trait of being an entrepreneur is knowing where one stands in comparison to the competition to set a benchmark for business expectations and success. One way for leaders to better understand their position in a market sector is by researching the competition, the competitions' products, their pricing and promotions (Sihite & Simanjuntak, 2015). Collecting, analyzing, and managing competitor information is called competitive intelligence (Shujahat et al., 2017), which focuses on gathering and analyzing the intelligence necessary for strategic planning (Maritz & du Toit, 2018). Competitive intelligence and marketing intelligence are necessary when looking at effective strategic planning (Dewi & Darma, 2019). A well-educated leader with the tools to transfer knowledge to their followers may be more likely to see their business thrive. For example, finding the right time to launch a new idea or attempt entry into an existing market is crucial for the success of the business (Zhang & Song, 2020). Being the first or one of the first competitors in a specific market allows entrepreneurs to mold the market to meet their specific product or service needs.

Further, it is important that entrepreneurs not focus on profitability alone (Le & Raven, 2015). Being persistent, knowledgeable in decision-making, and skillful in the practice are critical components of reaching a level of success according to the individual (Fishbein et al., 2016). Managers who focus on consumers' wants and find the best way to invest in such products or services to meet these needs tend to be on the successful end of the spectrum in the eyes of consumers (Christensen, 2016).

The ability to locate and effectively use resources is also a skill that leaders must have in order to avoid wasting funds and potentially putting the business at risk of failing. Management must focus on producing a product or service for a desired market at the lowest cost possible to help increase profits while meeting the demands of an existing or new and thriving market. The ability for a leader to encourage their followers to focus on innovative ideas can help in the growth of a business, both at the beginning stages with locating resources and in the final stages when delivering a product or service (Dunne et al., 2016). A clear vision for the future of the business and the leader's ability to encourage their followers helps build commitment in the followers (Rana & Malik, 2016). Having followers with the same passion for business success can help in the overall sustainability of the business.

Small business owners can use entrepreneurship theory to help build strong leadership strategies to better support their business beyond 5 years while avoiding the waste of time and resources. Although entrepreneurship theory was selected for this study, other theories have provided insight to better understand the best leadership strategies successful small business restaurant managers employ to help sustain their

business beyond the first 5 years of operation. These other theories will be summarized throughout this review of the literature.

Alternative Theories for Entrepreneurship Theory

Alternative theories for entrepreneurship theory were transformational leadership theory and resource-based theory.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Individuals who consider themselves transformational leaders tend to have specific characteristics. Transformational leaders are those who have high expectations for themselves and their endeavors, typically resulting in a higher standard of performance (Bass, 1999). Transformational leadership focuses on team building, personal attention to team members, organizational support, and an optimistic mindset (Aga et al., 2016). Transformational leaders also uplift the morale and motivate their followers (Bass, 1999). Similar to entrepreneurship theory, managers with a motivated and driven mindset are hard-pressed to find followers similar to themselves, which may hinder their business' success.

The life cycle of a transformational leader typically changes alongside the company as it transitions from a new start-up company to a mature organization (Tepper et al., 2018). Transformational leaders can develop new processes or change existing cultures by first observing and then developing a plan of action to implement in their business strategies (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Transformational leadership has a direct effect on the followers such as a business's team members (Turnnidge & Côté, 2016). The three

levels of follower development with transformational leadership are intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental.

Intrapersonal Development. The first level of transformational leadership theory is intrapersonal development. The intrapersonal level affects the way that individuals perceive their tasks, themselves, and their emotions (Turnnidge & Côté, 2016). This level also affects the attitude toward a given task, removes the mindset of task and reward, and replaces the thought with a sense of meaning for completing a certain task (Turnnidge & Côté, 2016). Emotion regulation and social support are skills commonly found with those who practice intrapersonal development (Hofmann et al., 2016). Management's ability to recognize and emphasize followers' improvement of intrapersonal development may help strengthen perceived successful business strategies, as job satisfaction and organizational performance are correlated (Bakotić, 2016).

Understanding intrapersonal development and the role it plays within a leader's personality may influence the overall development of the business and employees. Intrapersonal development helps followers to enhance their sense of self and their abilities (Turnnidge & Côté, 2016). The stronger sense of self that followers have, the more likely they are to commit to the business and help push towards a positive outcome for the business (Turnnidge & Côté, 2016). Lastly, leaders' personality traits and prior experience can play a significant role in the way different situations with followers get handled (Day et al., 2014). This phenomenon may reside with managers and their ability to work with employees on both their good and bad days in order to work towards a singular goal for the business. Ultimately, research on intrapersonal development

concluded that promoting positivity and reducing negative emotions might be an underlying mechanism to effectively use transactional leadership (Day et al., 2014; Turnnidge & Côté, 2016).

Interpersonal Development. The second level of transformational leadership is interpersonal development, which is the perceived relationship between a follower and their leader and or group (Turnnidge & Côté, 2016). The leader–follower relationship depends on a positive learning environment created by the leader (Day et al., 2014). Trust in a leader influences the ability of a follower to be vulnerable with the expectation that they will be treated as a valued member of the team (Turnnidge & Côté, 2016). Certain skills interpersonal leaders use to impact followers positively include empathy, bond building, being socially aware, and a change catalyst (Day, 2001).

Interpersonal development has a subgroup within its level called the group process. The group process of interpersonal development focuses on follower relationships and the ability to work cohesively (Rickettss & Rudd, 2002). Using transactional leadership strategies may promote team cohesion, team learning, and a sense of community (Turnnidge & Côté, 2016). In small businesses, the need for teamwork is an essential aspect of the success of the businesses. Group process might help followers to become more creative members, which has the potential to help grow the business (Turnnidge & Côté, 2016).

Environmental Level. The final level of transformational leadership is environmental. The degree of fairness, justice, innovation, goal clarity, and safety are common elements associated with transformational leadership at the environment level

(Turnnidge & Côté, 2016). Transformational leaders can positively influence followers by focusing on these key elements. Positive outcomes from the use of transformational leadership at the environmental level are increased work engagement, quality of life, and organizational commitment (Turnnidge & Côté, 2016).

Resource-Based Theory

Resource-based theory is among one of the most popular theories when discussing processes that have been successful for small business sustainability. Even businesses with fewer resources are able to compete with companies with greater resources when using resource-based theory because it gives them competitive advantage and helps with managing resources (Rita, 2019). Entrepreneurship is an intricate part of resource-based theory (Alvarez & Busenitz, 2001). Entrepreneurs' opinions on resource allocation are subject to their own opinions, but using resource-based theory can guide these decisions toward a more sustainable future. Thus, entrepreneurship and resource-based theory can work together when properly aligned with business strategies. What sets an entrepreneur apart from everyone else is the ability to have insight into the value of a resource that others may overlook (Alvarez & Busenitz, 2001). Having knowledge management and the ability to renew and update existing information regarding undervalued resources, effectively exploiting and sharing these ideas and uses for new resources, and developing sustainable practices are all key elements of being an entrepreneur (Uddin et al., 2015).

It is also important to understand the connection resource-based thinking can have on the overall business. For instance, using resource-based theory with alliances can help

to build a strong strategy for all parties of the alliance and better use of common resources. When two firms are in similar strategic positions, either vulnerable or strong, they are more likely to form an alliance (Das & Teng, 2000). A strategic alliance helps interface between partners, design the structural interface between partners, and conceptualize, formalize, and centralize the alliance within the organization (Albers et al., 2016).

Complementary Theories for Entrepreneurship Theory

Complementary theories are used to accompany a theory to better understand the focus of the study. A complementary relationship is a relationship between reliance and sustainability (Espiner et al., 2017). For this study, both diffusion of innovation theory and management theory were complementary theories to entrepreneurship theory. Diffusion of innovation theory refers to the reaction businesses have to innovation introduced into the market and how they handle these changes. Management theory emphasizes four concepts to align goal-making decisions with business sustainability: objectives evaluation, business processes of implementing the plan, group decision-making techniques, and future goals (Drucker, 2013).

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Diffusion theory is among the common theories used when discussing small business sustainability. Rogers (2003) developed diffusion of innovation theory to understand the common questions that arise in terms of technology innovation in society. Technology is gradually taking over more of the business world, and entrepreneurs are there waiting to implement these useful innovative technological ideas. Having a good

grasp of these changes is essential for small businesses to succeed. According to

Berkwick's (2003) research on diffusion of innovation, the three areas of perception of

innovation, which influence the ability for innovation to be adopted into a business, are

characteristics of innovation, characteristics of the adopter, and contextual factors.

Christensen (2016) stated that disruption of evolution is inevitable and tends to begin

when a smaller firm with fewer resources enters the market. Adapting to the continued

changes in technology along with the business's resources can help to implement new

successful strategies into an already developed market.

Management Theory

Management theory was a second theory used to complement entrepreneurship

theory. Leaders use management theory to reconsider organizational routines, aid in

decision making, and define a concept of performance (Gond et al., 2016). Management

theory, as described in recent studies, could help morph modern management to sustain

their business success (Drucker, 2013). A good manager emphasizes *real business* and

focuses on business foundations to grow the business (Drucker, 2013). Objectives

evaluation, business processes of implementing the plan, group decision-making

techniques, and future goals (Drucker, 2013) are the four concepts derived from

management theory. These four concepts are important to any entrepreneur at all levels of

their business cycle. Knowing where change is coming from, where it is going, and the

steps needed to maintain business sustainability through setting goals is essential for

entrepreneurs to remain successful.

Perceived Small Business Success Strategies

Starting a business is challenging and often leaves the entrepreneur in a position to fail. What one individual considers a success may not be considered successful to another entrepreneur or business owner. Success is a subjective concept; therefore, each business owner may develop their own definition of success (Le & Raven, 2015). Customer satisfaction, product and or service quality, and sufficient cash flow were among the perceived success factors found in a study conducted by Meyer and Mostert (2016). A small business owner's personal characteristics, capabilities, and skills are components that affect business sustainability (Frid, 2015). A combination of both personal development and business growth can be benchmarks for success.

For the purpose of this study, businesses that have been in operation for at least 5 years were considered successful. The following elements of effective leadership were key components of business success; proper planning, setting goals, and effective communication (Lawrence, 2015). The definition for leadership continues to evolve as a result to changes in demographics, technology, and work practices and significantly impacts organizational culture, employee effectiveness, performance, and satisfaction in the organization (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016). Organizational leadership is vital for the success of small businesses (Postma & Zwart, 2015).

Leadership in small businesses relies greatly on the manager's abilities to lead their employees and effectively communicate the business's goals. The topic of *leadership* amongst business enthusiasts has been discussed in recent years (Wen & Chen, 2016). Leadership varies depending on the individual's surroundings and, in some

instances, the timing of the business starting up (Frid, 2015: Tiftik et al., 2015). Being in

the right mindset with the proper education can help to build confidence and self-

efficiency in leaders' abilities to effectively lead their team members to aid in the success

of the business (Llayaraja, 2015).

Knowing when to adjust a leadership style can help to better communicate with

employees, consumers, and business partners. Building trust and intellectually

stimulating individuals are important components of leadership (Malik et al., 2017).

Using a variety of leadership styles helps to motivate followers (Coates & Howe, 2015).

Two common leadership styles used in small businesses are transformational leadership

and transactional leadership. Transformational leadership has high validity and

encompasses leader-follower elements such as commitment, trust, satisfaction, and

improved job performance (Hoch et al., 2016). Transformational leadership style builds

workplace conditions that promote workplace safety (Boamah et al., 2017). Transactional

leadership is built on contingent reinforcement, short-term goals, and an exchange

relationship between leader and follower (Hoch et al., 2016). Unlike transformational

leadership, transactional leadership clearly defines the actions and roles leaders expect

followers to take in order to achieve specific goals (Kark et al., 2018). The use of any

leadership style, including transformational leadership and transactional leadership, relies

heavily on the leader's ability to communicate with their employees effectively.

Communication between leaders and their employees are essential for goals,

expectations, and perceived business success to meet the requirements of the leader.

Examining a situation, recognizing the business opportunity, and addressing the potential

risk or reward of the opportunity are the first steps leaders take when considering

strategic management (Robinson & Stubberud, 2015). The ability to effectively

communicate these steps with a business's employees could be the difference between

business success and failure. With employees being the 'face' of an organization, having

employees who understand the desired future of a business can make reaching these goals

much easier.

Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Entrepreneurship and innovation have many similar elements. Entrepreneurs

undertake risky ventures in order to introduce new goods and services (Levine &

Rubinstein, 2016) and are responsible for 50% of innovation since World War II

(Markova & Petkovska-Mircevska, 2009). A collaborative effort in terms of innovation

can provide the most reward for entrepreneurs (Ketchen et al., 2007). Collaborative

innovation is an effort among individuals who share ideas, knowledge, and expertise to

come up with a new innovative idea to better suit those involved (Ketchen et al. 2007). In

most cases, the combination of brains can bring forth more ideas than just one

entrepreneur may be capable of thinking up themselves.

Collaboration is a key concept for management to understand to effectively use

the ideas of those involved in the business. Collaborative innovation can be used within a

business between employees (Piperopoulos, 2016). Innovative efforts may be more

obtainable when multiple people are working towards the same end goal with the desire

to see the business succeed in mind (Piperopoulos, 2016). A study conducted by

Auerswald (2008) discovered a connection between innovation and opportunity and the

potential for growth that this connection brings to the business. By collaborating with other entrepreneurs, small businesses potentially open themselves up to more opportunities that alone, they would be unable to pursue.

Entrepreneurship and Marketing

Marketing is one of the only ways to get word out about a business and ideally bring in new and repeat customers. The reach, speed, and frequency of communication are key to effective marketing for entrepreneurs (Fink et al., 2020). Marketing strategy can be used as a way to create an optimal organizational structure that enables development and the ability to adapt to change, how to choose the best set of marketing strategies to drive desired outcomes when considering the competition, and enterprise-wide initiatives to implement strategies aimed towards customer engagement (Morgan et al., 2018). An effective marketing strategy offers a clear idea, may encompass emerging trends, is cost-conscious, and holds minimal risk (Fink, 2020). The ability to relate to the customer is key to grabbing their attention.

In small towns, marketing can spread via word of mouth rather quickly. In a study conducted by Díaz (2017), customer satisfaction increased customer loyalty, which was also linked to customer retention. The downside of word of mouth communication is that one bad experience can spread like wildfire, deterring new customers from entering a new establishment for the first time. Contrary to sharing bad marketing via word of mouth, Maisam and Mahsa (2016) found that word of mouth marketing, when positively spread, greatly influence an organization or product.

For some leaders, marketing is not their strong suit and something that has to be developed, and for others finding the time to dedicate just to marketing is a struggle. Management may not always have the proper skills to market their business effectively, therefore, forcing themselves to get creative in their marketing approach (Ibeh et al. 2019). An understanding of brand awareness, innovation, sustainability, and competitive advantage are elements of marketing that business owners may focus on to properly market their business within their means (Shams et al., 2015). Involving the customers by asking for their opinions and suggestions about the business, products, and services may be a step towards positive marketing while using minimal financial resources.

Leaders can research and develop many different marketing strategies to implement into their business strategy. Smith (2016) explained the importance of the 4 Ps of marketing and the need to both understand each of these Ps and the way they fall into the businesses marketing strategy. Place, price, product, and promotion make up the 4 Ps and are considered the foundation of any marketing strategy (Smith, 2016). Implementing each of the 4 Ps into a marketing strategy and being able to get feedback from customers are possibly the most valuable information a business can get (Smith, 2016). Knowing what marketing strategies are working and what needs adjusting can turn a failing business around.

Entrepreneurship Finance

One of the most important parts of entrepreneurship is obtaining the necessary funds to not only begin a business but also sustain the business in the first months or years of the business life cycle that it takes to get the business turning a profit and

maintaining a steady income. Access to funds, both internal and external, is a major

obstacle entrepreneurs first face when looking to start their business (Howell, 2017;

Molina et al., 2016). Howell's (2017) research on small and medium sized enterprises

found that entrepreneurs typically relied on formal financing and not informal financing.

It is important to align financial options with the business strategy. If the goal is to open

and maintain one location, ideally, after the business is regularly bringing in a profit,

there is no need for continued investors. If the end goal is to open multiple locations in

the area, leaders will need continued investments from either the business or an outside

party. Three options entrepreneurs can use to finance their business venture are

bootstrapping, business loans, or professional investors (angel investors/ venture

capital/corporate investors).

Bootstrapping

One of the available financing options is bootstrapping. Bootstrapping is a method

to meet the financial needs of an organization without relying on external finance from

equity or debt (Nchabeleng et al., 2018). For some entrepreneurs, bootstrapping is not

chosen because of limited access to external funds, but is instead a way for the

entrepreneur to gain total control over their business venture (Ye, 2017). Bootstrapping

consists of borrowing money from family or friends, credit cards, personal savings, or

retained earnings (Ensing & Woods, 2016; Malmstrom & Wincent, 2018).

A common downside to bootstrapping is the potential growth of a business.

Bootstrapping can cause an entrepreneur to remain at a stall in their success because of

lack of finances. When an entrepreneur has a business strategy that requires finances to

help grow the business, bootstrapping does not always align with those strategies (Markova & Petkovska-Mircevska, 2009), causing the business growth to either slow down or remain at a standstill until additional funds are available. In general, bootstrapping offers limited support for high-growth expectancy (Markova & Petkovska-Mircevska, 2009), and a business that faces larger growth than their initial funding can support must look for additional funding elsewhere. People in a close circle, like friends and family, are most likely to help in situations where there is a need for finances on short notice (Ye, 2017). For those considering bootstrapping for their finances, understanding the expected growth of the business, having a good understanding of finances, and having a plan B are all essential elements to successfully operating a new venture.

Business Loans

For some, personal finances to start up and maintain a business are not always an option. When this is the case, entrepreneurs must look for additional means of funding. Bank loans are available for most but tend to come at a higher cost than other forms of finances. Banks do not loan money for free, which causes the borrower to pay back a substantial amount more than what they originally borrowed come the time their loan is completely paid off. Bank loans tend to limit their risk by providing funds to those that are able to offer another form of collateral (Markova & Petkovska-Mircevska, 2009). It is common for entrepreneurs to have to guarantee their net worth with personal collateral to obtain a business loan (Robb & Robinson, 2014). Without equity or collateral to present to the bank in return for a business loan, the chances of a fair interest rate and large

enough amount loaned may prevent the entrepreneur from obtaining finances this way (Robb & Robinson, 2014).

Venture Capital

Another financial option is a venture capital. Individuals funding start-up portfolios are called venture capitalists and typically fund high-growth potential projects (Drover et al., 2017). Venture capital does not only pertain to start-up funds and can be acquired later in the business life cycle as needed. Stevenson et al. (2018) described venture capital as a critical ingredient for continued innovation and a necessary part of the continued widespread of entrepreneurial growth. The goal of venture capitals is to invest, monitor, and then exist (Markova & Petkovska-Mircevska, 2009). The ideal candidates for venture capitalists are those in new and emerging markets and are privately owned (Markova & Petkovska-Mircevska, 2009).

Not everyone has the mindset necessary to be a supportive venture capitalist. Venture capitalists' desire to invest in upcoming business has a great deal to do with the likelihood of success and innovation these new businesses bring to the table (Bernstein et al., 2016). A study conducted by Bernstein et al. (2016) concluded that ventures backed by more experienced venture capitalists outperformed those backed by less experienced venture capitalists. It is important for entrepreneurs to find a venture capital that aligns with their business strategies and will support their decision making as opposed to questioning their decisions and ultimately slowing down the success of their business.

Entrepreneurship and Strategic Management

Ensuring entrepreneurship and strategic management are in alignment is necessary for most small businesses to succeed. Strategic management is the need for optimal distinctiveness, a balance between being both alike and different from the competition (Zhao et al., 2016). Strategic management can be used as an explanation for organizational expectations and outcomes (Zhao et al., 2016). The root of business success or failures can come directly from business strategies, making business strategic management an important aspect of starting and running a successful business. Concentrating on sense of direction with a structured framework helps to create an obtainable strategic management plan (Frow et al., 2015). Knowing where the core competencies of a firm should be used and the ideal way to create value and profit for the business are part of strategic management that businesses should not overlook (Blake & Moschieri, 2016). Planning, implementation, and continued training are all important elements of strategic management that small businesses should put an emphasis on in order to apply their strategic management tools effectively.

Planning

When starting a new business, the planning phase of finances, resource allocation, and goal objectives are the key concepts to identify and manage in order to move on to the implementation phase. Knowing the current status of the business, where management wants the business to be in the future, and the intensity of the efforts needed to reach these goals will play a significant role in the overall performance and sustainability of a business (Engert & Baumgartner, 2016). Brinckmann and Kim (2015)

identified three stages to follow in order to set obtainable goals while in the planning process: define short- and long-term objectives, identify a process to obtain these objectives, and delegate specific tasks to certain individuals in order to use all resources available to ensure success and business sustainability.

In order to identify short- and long-term goals, entrepreneurs must know their position within the industry. Conducting a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis is one way for entrepreneurs to obtain additional information about their industry and where their business might perform amongst the competition (Bohari et al., 2017). Strengths are those characteristics that give the business an advantage (Das, 2017). Weaknesses are characteristics that put the business at a disadvantage to others in the industry (Das, 2017) Opportunities are external changes to benefit the business financially and or in performance, and threats are external elements that may cause problems for the business (Das, 2017). A well-developed business strategy in the early stages of the business life cycle reduces uncertainty and help support continued business decisions (Sari, 2017).

Implementation

The second step of strategic management is the implementation process. Strategies without a process for implementation may be more problematic than originally expected and end up being a pile of worthless documents (Engert & Baumgartner, 2016). Implementing a strategic plan can be challenging, but through the hardships, the business owners may be able to see where they may be struggling and what opportunities they have to reallocate resources to strengthen that department. Strategic management also

encompasses the need for a plan when the business is evaluating risk for the business and the future of the business.

Risk management may not be as important of a topic as finance, resource allocation, or employee retention, but it has a high impact on the overall performance of an organization. Ferreira's et al. (2017) findings explained that the greater risk entrepreneurs are constantly facing compared to managers of larger corporations. The reasoning behind Ferreira's et al. (2017) statement was that entrepreneurs' need for success relies on the growth of their start-up venture and not just on generating income as a main business objective. Strategic leaders are watchful of factors that may challenge the businesses status quo and abilities to overcome obstacles (Tawadros, 2015). When faced with said challenges, leaders must be quick to adjust their strategies to accommodate for necessary changes.

Continued Training

Continued training goes beyond the physical training of employees but encompasses performance measurements and continued evaluation of the business strategies to ensure the strategy is remaining effective and used to its fullest capabilities. Wheelen et al. (2017) explained strategic management as a way to achieve specific business objectives and set forth a way to manage these objectives through strategic alignment. By having set expectations of where the business strategy is headed, continued training towards set goals can be much more obtainable as opposed to just going about your daily routine and handling issues as they arise. Setting expectations for employees who align with the business strategy is also an essential element of continued training.

Understanding when to focus on new training techniques in the business life cycle is essential for small businesses to implement change effectively. Continued training techniques use out-of-domain training in the early stages and then transition to in-domain application (Khayrallah et al., 2018). By following this style of continued training, employees are able to familiarize themselves with the basics of a process and then apply their knowledge to real-life situations. A challenge of out-of-domain training is that some unforeseen circumstances are not always able to be replicated (Khayrallah et al., 2018). These unforeseen circumstances forces employees to adapt to their surroundings and figure out a solution as quickly and seamlessly as possible. Employees who are highly committed to the organization and on board with the businesses strategic plans are extremely important for the organization to achieve their strategic goals (Hanaysha, 2016).

Transition

Section 1 of the study includes information on the background of the business problem, the problem statement, purpose statement, conceptual framework, and the nature of the study, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, significance of the study, and finally, the review of the academic literature. The literature is the bulk of section 1 and consists of an in-depth exploration of the following themes: entrepreneurship theory, alternative theories for entrepreneurship theory, complementary theories for entrepreneurship theory, entrepreneurship and innovation, entrepreneurship and marketing, entrepreneurship and finance, entrepreneurship and strategic management. Section 2 will consist of the role of the researcher, participants, research method and

design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection, organization, and

analysis, reliability and validity. In section 3, I applied the knowledge gained and

research compiled from the first two sections while conducting my interviews and

explained in detail the possible implications for change.

Section 2: The Project

The goal of this study was to explore leadership strategies that small business restaurant managers use to help sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of operation. In Section 2, I will discuss the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, the participants of the study, research method and design, and population and sampling. This section also contains information on data collection, organization, and analysis techniques as well as reliability and validity of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies successful small business restaurant managers employ to help sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation. The target population consisted of three restaurant managers in Midwestern United States who were interviewed with questions focusing on current strategies that have demonstrated business profitability and continued sustainable operations beyond 5 years. This study may have a positive social impact on other small business restaurant managers in the beginning years of their operation or those struggling with business sustainability. By applying the findings of this research, small business restaurant managers may improve their business strategies and management styles. As a positive result, these small business restaurant managers may provide more job opportunities for communities benefiting local economies through increased tax revenues.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher in this study was to collect and analyze data on small business sustainability and identify common themes. The researcher is the primary data collection instrument for the study (Yin, 2018), meaning I was responsible for interviewing the participants and accurately documenting the comments, insights, and experiences of these participants (Dikko, 2016). In addition to collecting participants' insights, it is crucial for the researcher to integrate the information into the study with a sense of impartiality and awareness of the participants' values (Siegle et al., 2014).

By honestly collecting data, I minimized bias and remained a neutral listener throughout each interview. It is important for the researcher to listen their interviewees, get involved in the discussion, and show interest in the participants' opinions (Kumar & Cavallaro, 2017). I was also ethical during the interviews by adhering to the expectations laid out in the *Belmont Report*: (a) the principles of respect of persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (National Institute of Health, 2014). My goal was to comply with these three elements to the best of my ability by asking questions that would avoid influencing the participants' opinions.

A semistructured, telephone interview approach was selected for this study. By following an interview protocol, I followed the same general script for each interview conducted, which ensured that the critical aspects of the study were met. An interview protocol helped to obtain participants' observations and additional comments, ensuring that all questions were asked and as much information was gathered (Yin, 2018). This information may not only be used in future research but will also be shared with the

participants and any other inquiring small businesses to hopefully aid in improving their business strategies for continued success.

As a long-time resident in the Midwestern United States, the success of the small businesses in the area is not only important for the economy but the well-being of the community and my family. I have witnessed many small businesses fail throughout the years in the Midwestern United States. I looked for participants for this study who I may not have had a personal relationship with but had seen while visiting their restaurant. I hope that the additional research on what other small businesses have done to continue to grow and succeed will help business owners struggling and avoid closing their business. For these reasons, I conducted this study for a better understanding of successful strategies that organizations can apply to their processes and procedures. These small businesses may use this research without using valuable funds that are more suitable to use elsewhere in their business.

Participants

Semistructured interviews were conducted via telephone with small business owners in the restaurant industry who have successfully operated their business for at least 5 years. The selected geographic location for this study was the Midwestern United States. The participants for this study were comprised of three restaurant managers who had demonstrated successful small business restaurant operations for at least the first 5 years of business.

After receiving institutional review board approval (# 10-09-20-0729618), I began my selection process with phone calls to each of the managers of local businesses who fit

into this study's criteria. I started by asking if they would be willing to participate in the study by providing a general background of my research topic, asking that they use the words "I consent" while understanding that they may pull out of the study at any given time. After obtaining my three participants, I set up an hour-long block that worked best with their schedule.

Figuring out how best to communicate with participants is essential for a smooth flowing interview as well as collecting honest answers from the participants. Building a good rapport with the participants helps to eliminate tension and gain the participants' trust (Brett et al., 2014). To achieve the purpose of this study and obtain valid information, I worked to build a trustworthy relationship with each participant and continue to follow up as a customer while checking in with management for additional changes that their businesses may have faced since conducting the interviews.

Research Method and Design

I selected a qualitative research method and a multiple case study design for this study. These selections were made based on my knowledge of research methods and what best suited the research topic and questions. These decisions helped to research leadership strategies successful small business restaurant managers employ to help sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Research Method

For the purpose of this study, I selected a qualitative research method as opposed to a quantitative or mixed methodology approach, which helped to explore participants' busieness strategies while making make objective evaluations and finding common

themes between the three participants' approaches to business sustainability. A qualitative research method uses interview questions, analysis, and personal experiences to dig deep into the research of a given topic and focuses on quality research as opposed to quantity research (Bengtsson, 2016; Yilmaz, 2013). In qualitative research, people's words, written texts, and visual forms about a social phenomenon as experienced by said people in their natural settings are the focus (Grossoehme, 2014).

Another research method option was a quantitative method. The quantitative research method focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis of variables' relationships or groups' differences (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Reinecke et al., 2016). Quantitative research generalizes findings and has the potential to lack complete information regarding a business strategy because of the data collection tools quantitative research may use (Landrum & Garza, 2015; Thamhain, 2014). I could not obtain the necessary in-depth perspectives and experiences from the participants using the quantitative method; thus, a quantitative research method was not selected.

The third option for a research method was a mixed methods. A mixed research method is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Researchers who use mixed methods use elements of each research method to form one method for a study (Frels & Onquegbuzie, 2013). Although a mixed methods approach could help to obtain a wider variety of information, using a mixed methods approach may require more resources and time than what a doctoral-level student may be equipped to present (Cronholm & Hjalmarsson, 2011); Yin, 2018). The amount of time necessary for a mixed methods and the use of quantitative research method elements made the selection of a

mixed methods approach unsuitable for this study. Further, I did not select the mixed methods since I did not use a quantitative method.

A qualitative method was selected because of the research question and available data. The objective of this study was to research leadership strategies small business restaurants have used to become and remain successful during their first 5 years of operation. The most available option to collect data was through telephone interviews in a semistructured format. A benefit to using a qualitative method allowed me to not only collect initial information from the interviews with the participants but follow up immediately with additional questions as well as reach out at a later time when new questions may arise.

Research Design

A multiple case study was selected for this study considering the available options and how well a multiple case study aligned with qualitative research. A case study design is used to answer *what, how,* and *why* questions (Yin, 2018). Researchers use multiple case studies to explore the experiences of a designated group over the span of a designated amount of time (Haines, 2017). Case studies consist of in-depth descriptions and analysis of a specific phenomenon to provide a thorough understanding of a topic and potential future research (Yin, 2018). Using a multiple case study approach, I explored leadership strategies successful small business restaurant managers employ to help sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation.

The three other design methods suitable to be used with a qualitative research method are ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative designs. An ethnography

approach studies the cultural aspects of a business (Yin, 2018). I was not studying the cultural aspects, such as beliefs or individual behaviors; therefore, the ethnographic design was not appropriate for this study. Phenomenology designs focus on the core of experiences and or a lived experience (VanManen, 2017). A phenomenology design is used when searching for an in-depth understanding of a complicated issue through lived experiences (Chan & Walker, 2015); this design was not selected because the goal was not to search for one complex issue amongst a group of individuals. A narrative design links experiences associated with a given topic of research by obtaining a chronological order of events from a participant (Yin, 2018). A narrative design was not chosen for this study because finding a solution through lived stories regarding business sustainability was not the intent of this study.

Data saturation is a key element to most research projects and is essential to increase the precision of the study. Researchers use data saturation to increase the validity and reliability of a study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Robinson (2014) explained data saturation as a point in the research process where enough information is collected and analyzed and can be replicated in another study. Failure to reach data saturation can have a negative effect on the validity and the overall quality of the research. Data saturation, in my research, was reached when no additional information, relative to the initial research question, was shared by the participants who effectively sustained their business beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Population and Sampling

The population for this case study was small businesses who employ fewer than 500 employees, who have been in operation for at least 5 years, and are located in the Midwestern United States. In addition to the listed requirements, all participants are in the restaurant industry. I began by contacting local small business restaurant managers who meet these requirements in the hopes that at least three will be willing to participate. I intended to conduct each interview at the managers desired time and location to fit their schedule.

The importance of an ideal interview setting is essential in a qualitative study for participants to feel their most comfortable. Interviewees are found to respond to the questions being asked and answer in all honesty to the best of their abilities when they are most comfortable (Doll, 2017). I asked the participants to choose let me know of a time that best fit their schedule for the interview. I used open-ended questions in a semistructured format at the participants' selected location during the most ideal time and date for the participant to ensure their comfortability. Semistructured interviews are essential for researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences through open-ended questions (Yin, 2018). I took scrupulous notes, documented consultation, and audio-recorded the interviews to obtain and retain all of the information collected from each interview.

I used purposive sampling to explore the strategies that have aided in the success of local small business restaurants within such a competitive environment. Purposeful sampling is the act of selecting information-rich subjects who will most likely provide the

maximum amount of information to ensure data saturation (Benoot et al., 2016; Iqbal et al., 2017). I triangulated my interview results with company documentation and other research studies on small business sustainability to reach data saturation (Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012). Triangulation is the process in which a researcher uses two or more research methods to confirm a study's results and ensure the study reaches data saturation (Calheiros & Patricio, 2014).

Ethical Research

Ethical consideration is one of the most important elements of a research project, forcing the researcher to take the necessary actions to ensure all steps are taken to avoid a breach of ethics or conflict with a participant. Ethical consideration is especially important when research is conducted on human beings (Pope, 2017). The Belmont Report (National Commission on the Protection of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979) has three guiding principles that help researches avoid research misconduct. The first guideline is to ensure all participants are treated with respect and given all necessary information prior to making an informed decision regarding their participation (National Commission on the Protection of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The second guideline is regarding the researcher's ability to carefully evaluate the risk to all participants and avoid unnecessary harm or mistreatment (National Commission on the Protection of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The final guidelines ensure that any research risk does not focus on one group of people but instead spread amongst an entire population (National Commission on the Protection of Biomedical and

Behavioral Research, 1979). I understood and accepted these guidelines and implemented them in my interviews and research.

After institutional review board approval, I contacted my desired participants via phone to introduce myself, explain the reasoning for my call and set up a meeting to further go over the intent of my study and their involvement. At this initial meeting, I provided the participants with my research topic, a consent form for his or her signature, and explained that there will be no incentive to participate in the study. The content of the consent form included (a) my name and contact information, (b) the university I am attending, (c) the purpose of the study, (d) and possible risks, and (e) the right for the participant to withdraw from the study at any time. A signed copy of the consent form was provided to the participant for their records. The consent form can also be used as a reference if questions were to arise. The participants for this study remain confidential, and any questions that are a concern for discomfort were omitted. The participants are referred to as *participant A, participant B,* and *participant C* in my study.

Data Collection Instruments

For this study, I was the primary data collection instrument. The role of the researcher, in a qualitative study, is to understand and interpret common themes that arise from data collection (Kozleski, 2017). In my study, I used various sources to collect data, including participant interviews and a review of company documentation. While conducting telephone interviews, I listened to and engaged the participants to establish trust and a professional relationship. These telephone interviews with the targeted population used open-ended semistructured questions. After conducting each of the

interviews, I scheduled a follow up interview with each of the participants to ensure that all essential elements were covered, and any additional findings were included. Follow up interviews help enhance the reliability and validity of the interview.

A follow up interview with participants is a key element of member checking. This process allows participants to discuss the themes derived from the interview and provide feedback regarding anything from the interview that may have been misconstrued or missed completely (Andraski et al. 2014). I scheduled a follow up interview with each participant to discuss the themes and go over any additional feedback they wanted to include. The follow up interviews were conducted on an agreed-upon date and time that worked best for the participants. Member checking is important because of its ability to build trust with the participant through transcribing or summarizing an interview as well as enhance the transferability of the data collected (Caretta, 2015). After collecting all of my data, I analyzed the common themes and triangulated all of the data from the interviews, company documentation, and academic research.

Data Collection Technique

The data collection used for this study was semistructured interviews because the purpose of this study was to explore leadership strategies successful small business restaurant managers employ to help sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation. Other data collection techniques researchers may use are unstructured or structured interviews to collect data (Parker, 2014). Data collection for this study was collected from participants who meet the set requirements for the study: (a) small business owners in the restaurant industry, (b) businesses who have remained sustainable

for at least 5 years, and (c) are located in the Midwestern United States. After accepting

my invitation to participate in the study, I scheduled a date and time with the participants

at their desired location to ensure they were the most comfortable.

I used a semistructured technique to conduct my interviews with the three

participants. The benefits of a semistructured interview style and an interview protocol

(Appendix B) are the free flow conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee

(McIntosh & Morse, 2015). During the interviews, I took notes, used a recording device

when necessary, obtained and reviewed company documentation, compiled all collected

data, and followed up with each participant via a scheduled meeting to ensure all facts are

accurate and as detailed as possible.

Data Organization Technique

How a researcher organizes their data is essential for a smooth process of data

analysis, review, and reporting of the collected information (Watkins, 2017). All data

collected through interviews and additional company documentation was saved on a

thumb drive with separate folders for each participant. Bromana and Woob (2017) noted

the importance of finding the best software tool for a researcher to use to ensure clarity in

data analysis, visualization of common themes, data entry, and a way to reduce errors. All

data collected for this study remains saved on the thumb drive and was locked up nightly

while compiling the data. Upon completion of my study, I will store the collected data for

up to 5 years to ensure the privacy of each participant.

Data Analysis

After collecting the necessary amount of data through interviews, company documentation, and literature research, the next steps for the researcher to take were to analyze the collected data. Yin (2018) stated that the use of multiple steps in qualitative research helps to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon studied. For this reason, I used methodological triangulation as my data analysis tool. Methodological triangulation is a combination of two or more types of data sources that connect the participants (Joslin & Muller, 2016). The use of multiple data sources also helps to build the validity and reliability of a research study.

For my study, I used academic literature, semistructured interviews, and business documentation from each participant for my data analysis. I then derived common themes that surfaced through my triangulation between these forms of data and input this information into the NVivo 12 © software program. NVivo 12 © software helps to organize data from a structured framework of codes or through an interpretation of the data provided (Boddy & Boddy, 2016). From the emerging themes, I was able to determine the innovative strategies small business leaders used to help sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation. To triangulate my data, I used the qualitative analysis method. The qualitative analysis method is used to organize data in a way that is easily coded, organized, and triangulated (Blanc, 2017; Freitas et al., 2017). I categorized and coded the emerging themes on a Microsoft Excel © spreadsheet. This technique allowed for an easy review of the material as well as color-coding to locate common themes, concerns, and comments.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are used in a research study to strengthen the study's findings and are essential for a qualitative study. Reliability refers to the consistency of a study where validity is the accuracy of the study (Wladis & Samuels, 2016). Some researchers have stated that the additional terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are as important when focusing on trustworthiness as reliability and validity are (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure a study is both reliable and valid, researchers are expected to follow a precise set of procedures while collecting and analyzing their data (Elo et al., 2014). My goal to adhere to the expectations associated with reliability and validity was to ensure that my research was dependable, transferable, and had reached data saturation.

Reliability

The reliability of a research topic is demonstrated when the contents of the data collection process and analysis become consistent and repeatable. Reliability, in a qualitative study, refers to how the researcher addresses the dependability of the overall project (Bailey & Bailey, 2017). Member checking and methodological triangulation were used to increase the reliability of the study. Using member checking via follow-up phone calls or visits can help to build trust between the researcher and participants (Andraski et al., 2014; Caretta, 2015). Researchers use methodological triangulation to connect emerging themes through two or more types of data sources (Joslin & Muller, 2016). After I conducted my interviews, I provided the participants with the notes I took

during the interviews and asked for their feedback to ensure all information was correct
and nothing of substance was left out.

Validity

The validity of a research project refers to the legitimacy of a qualitative study
and implies that all facets of the research process are trustworthy and accurately
portrayed (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The use of methodological triangulation will be
essential to ensure validity within this study. Effective triangulation leads to data
saturation. A researcher will reach data saturation when no new information being
collected and analyzed will result in further need for research (Robinson, 2014). In
addition to the importance of validity in research, dependability, credibility,
transferability, and confirmability are equally important to building the trustworthiness of
a research study and reaching data saturation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To address dependability in this study, I described in detail the research design
chosen, the research process, and the details used to collect and analyze data. I used
member checking via follow-up scheduled interviews for clarity on information collected
during the initial interview. Credibility in a research study is acceptable when the same
concepts and themes are reoccurring amongst different participants, and the study's
results are believable, reasonable, and truthful (Cope, 2014; Turner et al., 2017).
Transferability relates to the ability of the findings of research to be applied to other real-
life settings in the future (Nowell et al., 2017). Lastly, confirmability is the ability for
another researcher to replicate the study, resulting in the same conclusions (Elo et al.,

2014). Addressing credibility, transferability and confirmability helps to reduce any bias results in the study.

Transition and Summary

In section 2 of the study, I restated the study's purpose, my role as the researcher, the criteria used to select potential participants, and a justification as to why the researcher method and design was selected. Next, I provided a detailed section on the population and sampling used followed by ethical research. Additionally, my data collection instrument and technique are discussed, followed by the data organization technique and data analysis. Finally, I discuss the reliability and validity of the study. In section 3 of the study, I present the findings of the study, an application to professional practices, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and potential for further research on sustainability for small business restaurants.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies successful small business restaurant managers employ to help sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation. Data came from interviews and company documentation from three individuals managing small business restaurants in the Midwestern United States as well as a review of academic literature on small business sustainability. I used methodological triangulation to derive common themes between each of the resources used. Cantillon's (1755) entrepreneurship theory aligned with the strategies these small business leaders use to help sustain their businesses. The recurring themes that all participants use to sustain their organization are (a) maintaining good customer relationships, (b) quality of product, (c) employee satisfaction, (d) importance of community involvement. When comparing the emerging themes to the literature reviewed and conceptual framework, the study's theme demonstrates alignment and consistency.

Presentation of Findings

My research question was "What leadership strategies do managers in small business restaurants use to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of beginning operation?" I used a qualitative research method and a multiple case study design to provide the information needed to answer the research question. I interviewed three small business managers in the restaurant industry who employ fewer than 500 employees and are located in the Midwestern United States. Each participant answered six open-ended

questions about strategies, challenges, and implementation of successful strategies. After

conducting my interviews, I used NVivo 12, a data analysis application, to organize the

data collected and create nodes (themes). After a full analysis of the collected data, four

themes became clear identifiers for leadership strategies these managers used to sustain

their businesses: (a) maintaining good customer relationships, (b) quality of product, (c)

employee satisfaction, and (d) importance of community involvement.

Theme 1: Maintaining Good Customer Relationships

The most noticeable of the emerging themes is the importance of customer service

and the relationships built with suppliers. Throughout the interviews, maintaining good

customer relationships in respect to running a successful small business in the restaurant

industry was discussed 16 times. Small business restaurant managers must recognize and

adapt their business strategies to focus on retaining customers through healthy

relationships (Kurian & Muzumdar, 2017). Maintaining good relationships with suppliers

is also important for managers to focus on. While discussing customer relationships, all

three participants commented on maintaining relationships with their customers coming

into their business as well as their suppliers that they use daily.

Customer Service

Each of the participants noted the importance of customer service and mentioned

this multiple times throughout their interviews. For instance, Participant A stated,

The biggest thing is probably customer service and the quality of the food. For

customer service, if you piss people off, they simply won't come back. I mean,

there are people in here four times a week. The police that come in here all the

time, they get the same food. It is amazing the routine people are in.

Participant B stated,

Another thing from my personal experience is the relationship with the customers.

It is key. Especially when serving food, these people are buying your product.

Unlike being in retail, they are going to get that product here or at another place.

We don't have that benefit, they are only getting our product in our location so we

have to sell it. So that relationship with the customer is key.

Participant C stated,

Not only will my employees be sure to treat everyone with kindness and respect,

but they genuinely enjoy the clientele that come into the bar. Creating a positive

work environment has always been a priority to me, because if your staff is

happy, then they will do whatever they can to make the customers happy, and if

the customers are happy, then they will likely return.

Throughout each interview, it became clear that without the efforts put into

building and maintaining customer service skills, the success of the restaurant would not

be where it is today. All three participants stressed the importance of always putting in

the effort with the customers to show that you truly are appreciative of their business.

Each participant shared stories of exchanges with customers who left lasting impressions

on their lives. Previous research has also found that leadership strategies that focus on the

close relationship with the customers and the ability to adapt to market trends

significantly increase a business's chances for success (Shen et al., 2016). Participant B

confirmed this importance by stating, "I tell the front counter girls that they are the first face that the customer sees. I tell them to treat them like they are their best friend."

Participant C also mentioned during their interview the need to recognize their deficiencies when looking at a means to reach new clientele. Because of the rapid increase of social media over the last 10 years, Participant C began to see the positive impact social media marketing had on reaching new customers and communicating with existing customers. Thus, Participant C delegated the task of managing social media communications to one of the younger employees. The efforts made by each participant to connect with their customers helped to build a lasting relationship and inadvertently created word-of-mouth advertising. With each of the establishments being located in small towns, this type of advertising has continued to grow and help to maintain the success for these small businesses.

Supplier Relationships

As mentioned, building and maintaining good relationships with customers is not the only important relationship needed for small businesses to succeed; the relationships each participant has with their suppliers were also essential. Business relationships can impact the long-term success of a small business (Zaefarian et al., 2017), and relationships, both with customers and suppliers, help recognize valuable opportunities (Shu et al., 2018). Participant A described an instance where there was a chance to save a little bit of money by changing suppliers for a certain raw material, but after discussing with the owner, they made the decision to continue to purchase from their long-time supplier simply because of the relationship that had developed over the many years of

working with each other. Similarly, Participant B mentioned numerous times that some of their supplier relationships go back more than 30 years. Participant B explained that when their product has seemingly changed in the past, they were able to reach out to their suppliers to see if they had made any adjustments to the raw material. Because of the relationships that they have built and the respect earned, their suppliers would be honest and let them know that certain changes were made. Participant B explained that in some cases, they were able to move forward with their business relationship but at other times had to find a new supplier because their final product had changed more than they were willing to accept.

Participant C discussed how important it is to maintain relationships with suppliers for their machinery as well as their suppliers for raw material

As a small business owner, I believe it is important to understand how to do minor repairs or wear and tear on your own to save money anywhere possible. I am fortunate enough to have a large network of carpenters and union workers who have always been able to help as well. During the recession, it certainly came in handy.

When further discussed, Participant C explained that during hard times and the ultimate decisions between being able to remain open or having to close their doors, every dollar counted and maintaining relationships with those that could add value to the business without supplying a physical item was equally as important as the food and beverage suppliers.

Theme 2: Quality of Product

The second emerging theme was the quality of the product. Product quality was mentioned 11 times throughout the interviews, but more importantly, almost every question asked turned into a discussion regarding the quality of the product being provided. .Participant A compared their restaurant to a much larger chain restaurant in the area: "we believe we are just as good as them. Yes, we are higher priced, but I still think our food is as good, if not better." In regard to the participants' products, the term *consistency* came up multiple times with each individual. Each participant emphasized the importance of keeping the products they are providing at a superb quality. Participant B said,

> People are coming in for our product. Like I said, it's the consistency, and
>
> training the new guy. Some guys come in and catch it right away but the guy
>
> making the pizza should be making the same pizza my father-in-law was making
>
> in 1960.

Participants indicated that the quality of their food, which customers could easily purchase elsewhere, significantly contributes to their customer retention. The findings of this study indicate that managers should adopt strategies that will ensure continuous quality improvement. All three participants mentioned having conversations with long-term customers regarding the quality of the food they continuously purchased. When the relationship is built on respect and loyalty, each participant mentioned taking their criticism seriously and following up with their complaint to get the problem cleared up.

When focusing on expertise, small businesses typically lack the experience or resources that larger businesses may have (Small Business Association, 2016). Each of the individuals interviewed for this study are experts in their particular field of the restaurant industry. Participant B said they know their product can be purchased from a hundred other restaurants in the area but knows their homemade products and the consistency of their product are key to being successful.

Participant C, who uses their marketing tactics to help sell their products, focuses their efforts on retaining customers who favor specific sports teams that the restaurant proudly displays throughout the restaurant. Their products are selected to make the customer feel as though they are in a specific city watching their favorite sports teams. Unlike other local restaurants, Participant C said they are the only establishment offering these products and amenities. The atmosphere is what attracts the customer to the restaurant and their products have them returning as loyal customers.

Each participant discussed the possibility of an expansion to their business. Participants A and B have gone through an expansion in recent years and made clear that the products being sold before the expansion and after the expansion had to stay the same, or their customers would become upset. Participant A said, "Ideally, you want to walk into this one and walk into the other one and it be the same place." Participant B said,

Like I said, people are coming in for the product. We're not changing the menu or anything in the kitchen. The seats are going to look different but the product is going to be the same. And once they see that, once or twice, and eating the same

pizza they have literally been eating for 40 years, you know, that's what is going

to make this transition go smooth.

Being able to differentiate the business, in both quality and product design, to meet

customer needs is a large part of what is needed for small businesses to succeed (Linton

& Kask, 2017). Showing a customer that the quality product provided will be offered at

another location is a great start for the success of an expansion.

Theme 3: Employee Satisfaction

The third emerging theme is employee satisfaction. Employee satisfaction was

discussed nine times between the three interviews. Having employees who are truly

happy while working can greatly impact the experience customers have when visiting an

establishment. Building networks, responsible accountability, and trust are three points

vital for enhancing business efficiency (Han & McKelvey, 2016). he importance of

transparency and how transparency begins to build trust (Han & McKelvey, 2016).

Participant A said,

I know that in the past employees have had issues with the old owner, but he's not

even here. So, it's basically us now, we treat them right, and they stick around.

We have had girls that have been there for 4 years. They start here young and they

just stay here. You know, we have the young ones, so they have other things on

their mind but still, they show up and they are happy when they are here.

Participant B said,

Were roughly 20 employees, we don't have a large turnover because we try not

to. On that end, that ties into our relationship with people. I said, being nice goes a

long way. We try to get guys in here for a while. It gets to a point sometimes

where you can't let people walk all over you. You sometimes have to draw the

line. But I think if you're consistent with that, you know, they know how much

they can take.

Participant C explained how important creating a positive work environment is and when

you have happy employees, you have happy customers who continue to return. Small

businesses tend to have a higher turnover rate, mainly because of the higher

responsibilities and demand of the employees (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). Honesty,

transparency, and positive relationships can help to reduce turnover and ultimately save

the business money and efforts.

Both Participant A and Participant B emphasized the importance of giving clear

directions of what is expected so that the employees know what is expected of them

going forward. With small businesses, the room for error is very small. One poor

experience by a customer can have a lasting impact on the business's reputation. For all

three participants, their employees are the first face the customer sees. The importance of

a positive first experience for a customer is imperative to building relationships with

loyal customers and providing a work environment that employees are proud of.

Theme 4: Importance of Community Involvement

The last emerging theme derived is the importance of community involvement.

Although the importance of community involvement did not get the attention that the first

three themes did during each of the interviews, community involvement was discussed by

each of the participants for a total of seven times and was clearly a meaningful point for each individual to make.

Participant A noted that they support local teams throughout the year. Being a resident of the same town that this restaurant is in, I know firsthand how often this restaurant has donated to youth teams, community events, parades, and other miscellaneous community activities. When visiting the restaurant, customers can see framed pictures of the youth teams that the restaurant has sponsored in the past, and on summer days, it is not uncommon to see an entire baseball team outside enjoying some ice cream. Acts like these are what keep the family feel of this specific restaurant continuously growing.

Participant C discussed their involvement in a chamber of commerce and neighborhood association that helps promote other small businesses. Although there is a fee to be a part of these organizations, Participant C stated that paying the small fee is beneficial to not only help support other small businesses but to obtain new customers who likely live in the community. Along with these associations are also events that the business participates in throughout the year.

Participant B's involvement with the community focuses on providing job opportunities for those just getting into the workforce. We discussed that not everyone who works with them is young or just starting to work but may be at a different phase in their life that they need some extra cash or work experience. Participant B stated that 90% of their employees live in the community. Participant B explained that when there is an opening for a position, they would much rather hire someone's younger sibling or

friend who is looking for a job. Participant B explained that when the trust is built

between themselves and their employees, they are willing to take their word for it that

whomever they are asking the managers to hire, that they are a good person and will

come there to work and help the business continue to succeed.

Application to Professional Practice

Small business restaurants can use this study to explore the strategies small

business restaurants have used to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of

operation. The findings of this study consist of four emerging themes: (a) maintaining

good customer relationships, (b) quality of product, (c) employee satisfaction, (d)

importance of community involvement. By focusing on these four emerging themes,

small businesses may benefit from implementing some of these successful strategies into

their business strategies to further their potential success. Each of the participants

involved in this study is in business for longer than 5 years and has positively contributed

to the local economy.

Managers of small business restaurants can use the information from this study to

help in their sustainability efforts. Managers of small business restaurants may wish to

remember the importance of exceptional customer services and the value of a quality

product. Each of the participants of this study noted the importance of positive

interactions with their customers. Managers of small business restaurants can focus on

having meaningful conversations with customers and showing their appreciation for

visiting their restaurant. Building relationships with loyal customers can help to generate

a steady profit from a group of people that frequently visit the restaurant. In addition to

building and maintaining good customer relationships, the positive marketing these

individuals may provide via word of mouth is priceless and long lasting. When discussing

the quality of products served, each participant was clear that there was no price

reduction or discount they would consider to purchase a raw material that would

negatively impact their product. Knowing the best way to spend available resources to

produce the quality products is important to continuously monitor and adjust as needed.

Having a good relationship with the suppliers of raw material is one way that managers

can monitor the changes of the raw material before the product is already delivered and

the business is forced to utilize what has been given to them.

The importance of employee satisfaction and community involvement did not get

the same attention that customer relationships and quality products did but are two

themes derived from the research that could be the cause of failure if not properly

managed. Although all small businesses may not have the resources to constantly replace

or retrain employees, choosing to treat those that have a hand in the success of the

business with respect can go a very long way. Managers could consider building a

respectful relationship with their employees so that there is a healthy foundation of

communication for both the employer and employee to address problems or concerns as

they arise. As some of the participants mentioned, providing an atmosphere where

managers are seen on the front line of operations establishes a sense of unity for all

employees. Lastly, embedding the business in the community they are operating in can

improve business but also build a layer of trust between the community members and the

business. Showing community members that the employees and managers of the business

truly care about the growth of the community and its people can bring positivity to the business and potential new customers.

Implications for Social Change

In the United States, small businesses employ over 59% of the workforce (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2019). The increase of sustainable businesses in the community could help continue the rise of employment opportunities which in return may generate additional funds for community programs, scholarship opportunities, or financial help for local charities. The impact of being part of a successful business has the potential to influence not only the business itself but also the surrounding community. The relationships built and skills learned while being part of a small business are life-long lessons young employees can carry with them from profession to profession. Specific to the findings of this study, showing young employees the strategies used to run a small business may help focus on new and innovative ideas.

The constant change of sustainable efforts made by small businesses continue to improve the lives of all those involved with the growth of the small business. Hale et al's (2017) research on sustainability efforts explains the importance of focusing on the values that help grow a small business while focusing on efforts that can help in both the near and distant future of the business. For example, a limited use of plasticware to avoid one time use of utensils which may end up in a landfill. Those looking to improve their small business can apply the findings from this study and possibly contribute to social change by presenting successful strategies small business owners use, which could potentially lead to improved profitability and continued growth.

Recommendations for Action

Based on the four themes derived from semistructured interviews, review of

company documentation, and analysis of current literature, I recommend small business

owners put their efforts into building honest relationships with the customers, suppliers

and their employees. The growth of relationships with employees has proven to have a

positive impact on good customer relationships. When employees interact with

customers, it is important to remember that a poor experience can leave a lasting impact

on the customer. Building strong relationships with suppliers is equally as important for

small businesses because they may not be able to replace their materials on short notice if

something were to happen to the current supplier. If the small business is not comfortable

with adjustments a supplier makes to raw materials, the business may be forced to make a

change to another supplier which could result in unforeseen cost.

The focus on growing relationships should not only be for employees but for

everyone involved in the organization. Managers, at all levels, could always use a

refresher on the company's mission statement and goals. Building a trusting and open

relationship with employees allows for open ended discussions that may bring to light

opportunities for growth or even innovation. Both the research analyzed and the

interviews held provided indications that when the whole team has the same goals in

mind, the likelihood of success grows.

To better serve the community, presenting the findings of this study at a town

meeting follow by a question-and-answer segment has the potential to reach a larger

audience. By presenting the findings and offering up additional information when asked

would help to keep the attention of the audience. Brainstorming a plan of action based on the derived themes of this study could be the starting point of change for a small business that is in need of change in order to continue being in business. Additionally, getting the study published in journals focused on small business sustainability is an avenue to explore presenting the findings of this study to those in need of guidance on sustaining their business beyond the first 5 years in operations.

Recommendations for Further Research

I chose a qualitative multiple case study to explore the leadership strategies small businesses have used to remain successful in the restaurant industry beyond the first 5 years of operation. The strategies that the three participants have described in their organizations aligned with the literature review and conceptual framework used for this study, but throughout this journey, additional questions surfaced. The questions that surfaced throughout the completion of this study consisted of the applicability of these findings to a larger population, like a restaurant who employs more than 500 employs or one that is not only located in the Midwestern United States but possibly surrounding states. Another opportunity for additional research is to compare the finds of this study against managers of a similar capacity but in a different industry.

As relationships were a main concept shared by each of the participants, a quantitative study on how these relationships affect profits for an organization could add great value to the industry as well. More in-depth research on the relationship between management and employee, concerning turnover rate, would provide an immeasurable amount of value to a small business. Furthermore, analyzing the cost effects of changing

raw material and how the raw material changes possibly affect customer retention would provide managers with the tools to consider leaving an existing relationship with a supplier for a new supplier.

Reflections

The Doctor of Business Administration program at Walden University was nothing short of my most formidable challenge academically. What I had hoped to be a short but rewarding journey quickly turned into a longer yet successful journey. Through the changes of teachers, faculty members, and peers, I have learned valuable lessons I can apply to my professional and personal life and expectations through this life. Although I do not work in the restaurant industry, I live in a small town that thrives on small businesses and their ability to succeed. While raising young children in the same community I grew up in, my hope is that the restaurants we enjoy as a family will potentially be my children's first experience in the workforce. It would be an honor for any of my children to be a part of such a passionate and dedicated establishment that cares about their own and cares about the community and its growth.

During my class portion of the Doctor of Business Administration program, I assumed my study would come naturally to me. I assumed the hardest thing to complete my study would be dedicating time. Unfortunately, life happens, and other priorities got in the way. This is not to say that I did not learn lessons from my setbacks, lessons for which I will forever be grateful. My family is and always will be my main priority while I am on this Earth, and if I can transfer some of the lessons learned through my struggles, my friends and family will be better people for it. I commend all those working towards

a goal that, at times, feels impossible but never giving up. I praise the managers and owners of small businesses who never gave up on their dreams and continue to work through the trying times we have faced in the past year. I am honored to be a part of their journey, and I hope that my dedication and hard work will benefit their organization, even in the slightest way.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the leadership strategies managers in small business restaurants use to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of beginning operation. The target population consisted of three restaurant managers in the Midwestern United States who demonstrated business profitability and continued sustained operations beyond 5 years. I used entrepreneurship theory as the conceptual framework to complete the study and member checking and methodological triangulation to ensure I reached data saturation.

As the sources were analyzed, four emerging themes were derived that helped to answer the question presented. These four themes consisted of (a) maintaining good customer relationships, (b) quality of product, (c) employee satisfaction, and (d) importance of community involvement. The summary of the analysis links each of the emerging themes to the existing literature and conceptual framework but fills in the gaps regarding geographical location and touches specifically on the restaurant industry. Based upon these findings, I confirm that small business restaurant managers who use successful strategies to build good customer relationships, focus on product quality,

emphasize employee satisfaction, and get involved with the community will enhance

their chances for business sustainability beyond the first 5 years of operation.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

The research question for this study is "What leadership strategies do managers in small business restaurants use to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of beginning operation?" This qualitative multiple case study will consist of six open-ended questions to gather insight, experiences, and ideas from the participants regarding their ability to remain successful beyond 5 years of operation in the Midwestern United States.

Interview Protocol	
Protocol Steps	Protocol Actions
Select participants	I will reach out to potential participants via phone or in-person visits with small businesses in the restaurant industry that meet the criteria set forth for this study. During this initial conversation I will explain the concept of the study, the expected involvement from the participants and ask for their consent to participate. I will explain that at any time they will be allowed to remove themselves from the study and that their involvement and business' information will remain confidential
Set time and location for the interview	I will allow the interviewees to select the time and location for the interviews to ensure their comfortability

Introduction	I will recap the purpose of the research study, ask again for consent and provide a written consent form for each participant. I will explain that the interview will be recorded and used to transcribe the interview, which they will receive a copy of and then the recording will be erased.
	I will then ask for basic information from each participant to establish a background of each individual.
	    1. Role in the Organization
	    2. Years the Organization has been operating
	    3. Name of Organization

Ask open-ended questions while looking for non-verbal cues that will allow for additional follow-up questions.	1. What strategies have contributed to the success and sustainability of your business beyond 5 years? 2. What key challenges did you encounter when implementing your sustainability strategies? 3. How did you address these key challenges? 4. Based upon your experiences, what elements of these strategies are most responsible for profitability and success of your businesses? 5. What indicators do you use to gauge to assess the effectiveness of your business strategies for long-term sustainability? 6. What else would you like to share about your experiences as a manager in this business that has helped to continue to run a sustainable business?
Interview wrap up	I will thank each of the participants for their time, candor, and participation. I will make sure that each participant has my contact information for follow-up questions or concerns. I will also let each participant know that they will receive a copy of my completed study when it has been finalized.
Input data into NVivo 12	I will input all of my data in NVivo 12 to derive common themes from each of the interviews.
Member Checking	I will continue to visit each of the participating organizations, as I always have, and

	regularly check in on business processes to see if any new developments are made and should in included in our initial interview.