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Strategies for Increasing the Sustainability of Small Restaurant Business

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Walden University

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Sahara Givens-Evans

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Strategies for Increasing the Sustainability of Small Restaurant Business

by

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MBA, Colorado Technical University, 2015

BS, DeVry University, 2007

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

July 2022

Abstract

Small business owners who operate in the restaurant industry face many challenges and sometimes succumb to failures. Identifying solutions to avoid failure is important and will strengthen this community of entrepreneurs and help in terms of creating sustainability strategies. Grounded in Richard Cantillon's entrepreneurship theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small business owners in the restaurant industry use to sustain business beyond 5 years. Participants included six small restaurant business managers who survived beyond 5 years and specialized in fast-casual food service within Chicago. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and participant reflections. Instinctive innovation emerged as a critical theme after implementing a thematic analysis process. A key recommendation is for small restaurant owners and industry professionals to implement business process revisions, comprehensive marketing plans, location choices, and technological solutions. Implications for social change include the potential to increase employment rates and provide local individuals and families with stable incomes, which will benefit communities through increased tax revenues.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to God, who is the head of my life and who provided me with all the patience, strength, and guidance that I needed to endure this process. To my mother Cynthia Givens, who encouraged me to go back for this degree – you saw in me what I did not, and I am glad that you did. To my late father Odell Givens – I know that you would be looking down on me with the biggest smile on your face right now in amazement. To my husband Howard – I appreciate the love and encouragement you always gave me during this process. To my daughter Dynham – I want my completion of this degree to encourage you to always know that you can do whatever you put your mind to. If mommy can do this...you can do so much more! To my sisters, Adelia, Cinnamon, Aston, and Shema – you all are the greatest sisters that anyone can have, and I appreciate you all being there for me during this process! To my sister Cee Cee, I miss you dearly. To Lawanda and Shauna...you ladies totally rock. I could not have asked for a better set of friends. Krystie, before you gained your wings you referred to me as Dr. Evans, I told you to wait until I officially finished my program, but I am glad that you did as I never knew that would be my only chance to hear you say those words. I love you all!

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Table of Contents

Section 1: Foundation of the Study.....	1
Background of the Problem	1
Problem Statement	2
Purpose Statement.....	2
Population and Sampling	3
Nature of the Study	4
Research Question	5
Interview Questions	5
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Operational Definitions.....	6
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations.....	7
Significance of the Study	8
A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature.....	9
Transition	37
Section 2: The Project.....	39
Purpose Statement.....	39
Role of the Researcher	39
Participants.....	42
Research Method and Design	43
Research Method	44
Research Design.....	44

Population and Sampling	46
Ethical Research.....	47
Data Collection Instruments	48
Data Collection Technique	49
Data Organization Technique	51
Data Analysis	52
Reliability and Validity.....	54
Reliability.....	54
Validity	55
Transition and Summary.....	57
Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change	58
Introduction.....	58
Presentation of the Findings.....	58
Theme 1: Instinctive Innovation	60
Theme 2: Business Process Review and Revisions	65
Theme 3: Implementing a Comprehensive Marketing Plan	70
Theme 4: Location Choice for Customer Gain and Retention	73
Theme 5: Implementing Technological Solutions for Delivery Operation Services	74
Applications to Professional Practice	80
Implications for Social Change.....	81
Recommendations for Action	81

Recommendations for Further Research.....	82
Reflections	84
Conclusion	86
References.....	88
Appendix A: NIH Certificate of Completion.....	114
Appendix B: Interview Questions and Interview Protocol.....	115
Appendix C: Letter of Introduction	117

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

According to the U.S. Small Business Association (SBA, 2018), within one year of opening, approximately 9% of businesses experience closure. For a small business to sustain operations, they must know how to identify what causes failures and adopt strategies to achieve and promote sustainability. Parsa et al. (2019) said independent nonfranchise restaurants fail in high numbers within the first operating year due to numerous reasons, including poor management, location, lack of capital, ambiance, and incompetent entrepreneurial leadership. Additional reasons for failure include poor managerial practices, ineffective organizational skills, human, physical, and organizational capital, and the inability to conquer local industry competition (Campbell & Park, 2017).

Background of the Problem

Restaurant leaders should acquire skillsets allowing them to conquer expected and unforeseen barriers in their business. According to the SBA (2018), 50% of small businesses fail during their first 5 years. In the United States, lack of strong leadership, management, and funding are some reasons that restaurants fail (Boo, 2017). There are multiple sources designed to assist small businesses with financial solutions and strategies to thrive. Small businesses should use these available resources to create successful strategies. Sometimes, this includes creating partnerships with other like businesses.

Sustainability is earned by overcoming barriers over time. Jenkins (2020) said developing sustainability requires the active assistance of government programs to obtain

company outcomes. Small restaurant leaders should continuously identify and implement strategies promoting unique experiences to customers patronizing specific restaurants. The National Restaurant Association (NRA, 2020) said restaurateurs who strategically use technology as a part of their daily operations gain a competitive edge with consumers. One underlying skill needed to achieve sustainability is implementing creativity and innovation. Schiopu and Zloteanu (2019) said it is the responsibility of restaurant management to create fresh ideas that align with customer desires for restaurants to prosper. Petrovska et al. (2020) said in today's business market, the top objective and goal of most companies is to attract customers and maintain their loyalty. Innovations in the restaurant industry involve physical ambiance, dishes, and marketing.

Problem Statement

In the United States, the restaurant industry is lucrative, yet difficult to sustain for many motivated entrepreneurs (Banerjee & Podder, 2021). According to the NRA (2020), \$799 billion in restaurant sales were generated in 2017 and currently \$899 billion sales are projected for 2020, yet the restaurant industry still has a high rate of failure (Parsa et al., 2019). The general business problem is high rate of failures among small restaurants in the first 5 years of operation. The specific business problem is that some small business owners in the restaurant industry lack strategies necessary to sustain business beyond 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some small business owners in the restaurant industry use to sustain business beyond 5

years. The target population consisted of six small restaurant business managers who have survived beyond 5 years and specialize in fast casual food service within busy areas in Chicago. Implications for social change include a positive impact on the local economy by increasing employment rates and providing local individuals and families with stable incomes, which will benefit communities through increasing tax revenues.

Population and Sampling

The population for this qualitative multiple case study was six small restaurant business managers from the inner city of Chicago who successfully implemented working strategies to obtain and maintain business sustainability for periods beyond 5 years. This study involved using the purposeful sampling method. A researcher's decision to choose similar participants is supported by purposeful sampling according to Moser and Korstjens, (2018) as it requires selecting informants with qualifications to add to the phenomenon being researched. All research participants for this study were small restaurant business owners, so I found this sampling method to be most appropriate. When there were no longer new findings during data analysis, then all data were saturated. Though there are no strict guidelines to sample size according to Yin (2018), researchers tend to use samples from common participants to analyze similarities between their experiences in case studies. Tran et al. (2017) suggested researchers reach the end of the interview process when they are no longer able to find additional concepts to explore. While two to three case studies are enough to ensure enough data saturation (Yin, 2018), for this study I chose to include six small independent restaurant owners who were not associated with any larger restaurant franchises to ensure their unique

individuality as independent successful restaurants. If I would did reach saturation with my intended sample, I intended to gather more information from other restaurant owners who fit my criteria.

Nature of the Study

Fuller (2017) suggested three common types of methods exist when conducting research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. According to Yin (2018), the qualitative method involves incorporating interviews, observations, and questionnaires to explore an issue. The method I found appropriate for this proposed study is the qualitative method. The goal of my research is to explore and identify successful strategies used by small restaurant owners and managers for achieving sustainable operations beyond 5 years. Quantitative research is statistical evidence in the form of systematic and numerical measurements involving testing variables' relationships or differences (Zyphur & Pierides, 2017). I rejected the quantitative method because the goal of my study was to explore strategies rather than relationships among variables. Using mixed methods requires researchers to integrate qualitative and quantitative methods (McKim, 2017). I rejected mixed methods because conducting this proposed study did not require using the quantitative method to address the specific business problem.

Three of the most common qualitative research designs are phenomenological, ethnography, and case studies (Yin, 2018). A phenomenological design is an approach for exploring meanings of participants experiencing a phenomenon and identifying their individual perceptions and experiences (Filhour, 2017). I rejected the phenomenology

design because it involves gathering unstructured and uncommon research from individual lived experiences. According to Cardoso et al. (2017) the ethnographic design is used when researching community and cultural aspects. I did not select an ethnographic design because this proposed study did not require the exploration of group cultures. Researchers often use the case study design to investigate information involving a limited number of cases and ask questions beginning with why and how (Yin, 2018). The case study design is typically used in small studies when the researcher is attempting to approach business issues and concerns that need to be resolved (Tate et al., 2017). The case study design is appropriate because I seek to identify and explore strategies and processes that may lead small restaurant business owners to sustainability.

Research Question

The central research question is: What strategies do small business owners in the restaurant industry use to sustain business beyond 5 years?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you as a small business owner in the restaurant industry used to sustain a successful business operation beyond the first 5 years of operation?
2. What are your methods used for identifying and implementing new strategies for your restaurant business?
3. What were the key challenges to implementing your strategies for sustainable business operations?
4. How, if at all, does technology play a role in your sustainability strategies?

5. Please provide any additional comments you believe would add to this research.

Conceptual Framework

Researchers use the conceptual framework to understand underlying issues involving the issues of focus. Though small business owners are not all entrepreneurs, many of them have similar characteristics in terms of development of local economies. Cantillon (1755) introduced the entrepreneurship theory and recognized entrepreneurs as key components of economic development, and I found it appropriate to use the entrepreneurship theory to support my own research. Business owners take risks and are responsible for the successes and failures of their businesses. According to Cantillon, entrepreneurs are risk-takers who are responsible for the success or failure of their endeavors. Entrepreneurs differ from capitalists as they seek beyond increasing profits, but instead seek gratification from their work contributions and efforts that are often unnoticed (Bula, 2012). The entrepreneurship theory was relevant to understanding findings from my study because it was used to provide a potential lens for viewing strategies small business owners use to build these successful businesses.

Operational Definitions

I composed the following list of key terms and operational definitions frequently used in this study. All terms are defined with support of credible peer-reviewed sources.

Business success: Achievements resulting from multiple factors such as startup planning, financial backing, networking, and support from family and the government (Tan et al., 2019).

Entrepreneur: Creative and resilient risk takers who are resourceful and participate in developing businesses (Pretti et al., 2020).

Small business: Independently owned and functioning firms with between 250 and 1500 employees identified as sole proprietors, partners, or corporate legal entities subjected to pay taxes in the US (SBA, 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are unauthenticated ideas and realities that researchers believe to be true (Yin, 2018). One assumption was that all participants in this study provided truthful and valid responses to probing questions. A second assumption was that I was able to appropriately explore the research question using the case study design. I assumed business owners sustained their businesses by implementing strategies.

Limitations

All research should have validity and be verifiable (Yin, 2018). I targeted and selected interview participants located in Chicago. Data collected in this area may influence similar findings that may not be beneficial or applicable to other areas beyond Chicago. Some participants may have avoided sharing some company information such as financial ledgers, as this is a confidentiality breach in many organizations. Being unable to verify the financial success of businesses could lead to doubt regarding the validity of data collected during interviews.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries the researcher uses to limit the scope of the research (O’Leary, 2018). I used business owners and managers of restaurants that were not large chains who have successfully been in operation beyond 5 years. I did not research new business developments with less than 5 years of operation. Due to the design of this study, data that I collected could lead to trends and findings that may not be generalizable to other geographic areas. I did not research all leadership elements influencing sustainability beyond 5 years. I did not consider collecting and analyzing data from employees or patrons from any of my targeted facilities.

Significance of the Study

Completing the proposed study of small restaurant businesses in Chicago may be valuable because it could encourage readers who seek techniques and processes that enable small businesses to achieve sustainability. This study may provide strategies that other small business owners in the restaurant industry could use to survive beyond 5 years. Findings of this study could enable business owners to reduce the risk of failure by implementing documented strategies that are successful in the small restaurant business industry.

Contribution to Business Practice

As a result of this proposed study, owners of business practices may better understand strategies to obtain both new customers and maintain customer loyalty by providing what customers want. This study could provide information regarding how to conduct and properly plan business endeavors, gain and secure access to resources, and

promote adequate management through business leadership and ownership. Business owners may have a better understanding of how they should proceed when choosing geographical locations to avoid oversaturation in the local market, as this could lead to highlighting local industry competition and lacking focus on consumer needs.

Implications for Social Change

Implications for positive social change include the potential to create greater benefits for local communities. These benefits would include increases in demand for employment to create financial security. As businesses incorporate knowledge of innovative strategies in the restaurant industry, other small businesses may benefit from results of this proposed study. As businesses become more successful, so typically do demands to increase their employee base. Success also enables small businesses owners to contribute to local economies through increasing the size of the tax base for benefiting families and communities (Deller & Conroy, 2017).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this review was to search for literature that was applicable to my central research question: What strategies do small business owners in the restaurant industry use to sustain business beyond 5 years? I completed a multiple case study allowing me to research common strategies that small restaurant business owners used to gain success and remain sustainable. In this section of the study, I provided a review of the entrepreneurship theory and the impact it had on businesses and analyzed mechanisms that supported this theory. I organized information gathered for this literature review to address innovation, technology, contrasting theories, leadership styles

(transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, servant, and charismatic), restaurant management, quality, and experience. I analyzed literature to identify contributions to sustainability. This included sustainable leadership methods, marketing, sustainable technology incorporation methods, theoretical perceptions, and day-to-day practices in the small restaurant business industry.

Sources used for this research included peer-reviewed articles, academic literature, and books that contained information that was useful to my research study. Research was found via Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, ABI/Inform, EBSCOHost, and Emerald Management Journals. I also used Hospitality and Tourism Complete databases and Business Source Premier databases. In addition, I used official government websites to access relevant information. To search various databases, I used the following keywords: *restaurant sustainability*, *small restaurant business*, *business sustainability*, *strategies used to obtain restaurant sustainability*, *technology in the restaurant business*, *restaurant SMEs*, *theories used in the restaurant business industry*, and *leadership characteristics used in the restaurant industry*.

In total, in this extensive literature review, I included 197 references related to my research. Of the combined sources used to support my entire research study, 85% were peer-reviewed and published between 2017 and 2021

Entrepreneurship Theory

In this subsection, I provide a synthesis of academic literature regarding the conception, development, and evolution of the entrepreneurship theory and how it

pertains to successful strategies that small restaurant business owners used to remain sustainable beyond 5 years of operation.

Cantillon and Say are credited with the introduction to this entrepreneurship phenomenon. Chandra (2018) said additional findings added contributions to the evolution of the entrepreneurship theory.

Throughout history, perceptions and scientific reasoning of researchers has contributed to the development of the entrepreneurship theory. Multiple efforts and theoretical views are necessary to thoroughly comprehend the entrepreneurship process (Cherukara & Manalel, 2011). After the start of the 20th century, neoclassical economists were found to be the new driving force in the entrepreneurship theory (Bula, 2012).

The evolution of entrepreneurship theory involves various disciplines, including economics, sociology, innovation, and psychology (Cherukara & Manalel, 2011). Cantillon (1755) said when economic conditions are more favorable, this theory could encourage entrepreneurial growth. Cantillon said this theory could promote entrepreneurs who were viewed as risk takers to influence economic development because of being driven by other economic incentives such as policies regarding taxation, financial resources, raw materials, and availability of infrastructures. According to Cantillon, marketing and investment advancements were also among motivating economic incentives.

Say (1803) said entrepreneur was a combination of different facets of the economy, and all were needed to play a role socially to build the economy. Say said society encourages customs, values, and religious morals, and in turn social culture helps

to further build upon the entrepreneurship theory. Say said entrepreneurs were organizers who worked with capitalists who financed their endeavors, and therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge the combination of entrepreneurial leadership, financial support, and physical support to produce a product. Say addressed other powerful positions to prepare products and earn profit.

Schumpeter (1983) said entrepreneurship is innovation. Entrepreneurs who use new ideas and inventions could create innovative successes by using existing products or processes (Croitoru, 2017). Schumpeter said no new technology was used, but preexisting technology was used differently in an innovative manner.

The psychological theory involves individual mental and emotional states in terms of what drives their entrepreneurial endeavors. McClelland (1967) said the need for achievement is what regulates the actions of entrepreneurs. McClelland produced a needs-based model on motivation, of which power, achievement, and affiliation were the top focus. According to Khurana and Joshi (2017), these motivating factors are proportional in terms of cultural and personal life scenarios.

The entrepreneurship theory is a multidimensional concept (Bula, 2012a). According to Knight (1921), risks could strategically be insured. According to Hayek's (1937), the entrepreneur focuses on information and knowledge.

In an article about mapping the evolution of entrepreneurship as a field of research Chandra (2018) said this study is frequently driven by disciplines such as psychology, strategies and sociology, economics, policy development, and international business. Klein (2016) said if the firms incorporated the entrepreneurship theory, they

could quickly emerge and become more innovative while responding to economic changes. Business ownership is a priority among many entrepreneurs everywhere. Companies such as Walmart, Amazon, and Google are examples of small firms that became larger organizations by implementing processes associated with this theory. For this study, I found the theory of innovation to be a supporting theory and the resource-based theory to be a contrasting theory.

Supporting Theory: Theory of Innovation

Schumpeter (1983) said creative innovations of entrepreneurs were the driving force behind economic development, regardless of the company's geographical location. Schumpeter said entrepreneurs disrupt economy flow by introducing multiple forms of innovation (products, services, and processes). Schumpeter said introducing a new product or process would allow business owners to increase production while reducing costs.

Seo and Lee (2017) said the theory of innovation could be used to research potential processes that can be used by small restaurant business owners to acquire healthy restaurant initiatives and sustain them. Akdere and Benli (2018) said there is a lack of financial innovations within Schumpeter's analysis. Schumpeter placed heavy emphasis on entrepreneurial innovations and lacked focus on other facets of entrepreneurship and business (Akdere & Benli, 2018). Akdere and Benli said it lacks connections between financial innovations and entrepreneurial innovations.

Contrasting Theory: Resource-Based Theory

Rival theories include the resource-based theory, also known as the resource advantage theory. According to Badrinarayanan et al. (2019), this theory is a rival to the entrepreneurship theory because many who support the entrepreneurship theory view business owners and entrepreneurs as responsible for creating sustainability out of business risk-taking successes or failures. Use of resources available to companies to create sustainability is what guides companies to success (Badrinarayanan et al., 2019).

Campbell and Park (2017) said business leaders could gain competitive advantages by using resources inside their own organization. When using the resource-based theory, managers build a framework that involves strategically implementing company resources to create competitive and sustainable advantages. Badrinarayanan et al. (2019) said using rare and valuable resources during times when it is difficult for other companies to copy their sustainable strategies gives some organizations the mobility and leverage to achieve objectives.

Shan et al. (2019) said Chinese firms adapted to big data analyses and used the resource-based theory to acquire advantages against competition. The resource-based theory is used to inspire dynamic capabilities and there is a connection between competitive advantage and essential resources (Shan et al., 2019). Badrinarayanan et al. (2019) said achieving and sustaining competitive advantage is necessary to be considered valuable. Nason and Wiklund (2015) said there is not enough focus on nonsubstitutable resources or rarities of resources that still promote organizational growth in terms of competitive advantage.

Innovation

Innovation is adaptation of an invention presented by entrepreneurs (Schumpeter, 1983). According to Ortiz-Villajos and Sotoca (2018), innovation positively enhances possibilities involving business sustainability, presence, and company size. According to Schumpeter (1983), entrepreneurs and business owners must demonstrate adaptability, creative innovation, and excellent comprehension of consumer habits. According to Say (1855), entrepreneurs should be creative, innovative, and competent in terms of managing and producing employment opportunities for others. In most cases, resourceful and innovative business owners tend to survive operational processes leading to sustainability (Wojan et al., 2018). When entrepreneurs identify a need to implement innovation, they use internal resources such as employee creative abilities for business sustainability (Lee, 2018).

Technology

Schumpeter (1983) said entrepreneurs change fresh and creative ideas into innovative projects. Musonera and Weber (2018) said small business owners use technological tools such as social media because growing customer bases are using it increasingly.

Business owners and management have become dependent on technology for company improvements as they realize the importance of using social media for branding and marketing their companies and products (Rahbi, 2017). Business owners use new technology to enhance their companies, remain competitive, and brand their companies as they are aware that failure to incorporate new technology decreases their chances for

brand acknowledgement and increase their chances to fail (Tafesse & Wien, 2017).

Social media influences consumer patterns as use increases (Balan & Rege, 2017).

Technology allows small business owners to remain competitive while keeping up with industry trends.

Small restaurant businesses create and implement strategies for customer retention (Hwang & Park, 2018). Ahmed (2017) said that favorable customer service generates customer loyalty. Customer loyalty is also generated as a result of word-of-mouth on websites such as Facebook and Instagram.

According to Kellershohn et al. (2018), small business owners seek technology to compete with more appealing technology-based businesses in their industry. In the restaurant industry, innovative technology aids simplify the business and improve the customer experience (Schiopu & Zloteanu, 2019). Modernizing a restaurant facility involves incorporating interactive technology for the guest. Interactive technology has been well received by many business owners as social media had a positive impact on brand, company awareness (Seo & Park, 2018). Quick food ordering processes is appealing to consumers in fast food restaurants (Kellershohn et al., 2018). Electronic tablets, phones and electronic kiosks are now commonly used in establishments while during the food ordering and waiting process (Kellershohn et al., 2018).

Communication between employees and their customers can influence a business' reputation (Hwang & Park, 2018). By implementing technological solutions such as a digital kiosk at restaurant businesses, it helps the business run without the assistance of employees (Schiopu & Zloteanu, 2019). Some technology used by staff members has

already begun increasing individual job performance and restaurant performance. Clark et al. (2018) discussed wearable technology from the aspect of food handling and training. Though this does not completely create the perfect business structure, it helps to improve business processes. In a recent study on Interactive Restaurant self-service technology (IRSST) Ahn and Seo (2018) suggested that IRSST could be used to increase speed and eliminate unnecessary processes in restaurant businesses. Managing inventory is one process important to the company's preparation and inventory can now be analyzed with devices such as scanners. Technology is now considered the most important point of issue in business and using new innovative technology will result in business growth (Ahn & Seo, 2018).

Cantillon (1755) identified the importance of entrepreneurs and their roles in economic development. Cantillon said that entrepreneurs take risks regardless of uncertainty to initiate and develop balance in the economic supply and demand system. Much of economic development is credited to entrepreneurial theory as researchers used it as a basis to conduct their own studies. In 1949, Marshall identified entrepreneurs as people who participate in economic development, creates innovation, and supply goods to the demand system (Nasar, 2013). Business successes and failures are derived from the results of entrepreneurial efforts (Cantillon, 1755).

Entrepreneurial activity has become a key factor in economic growth and recent studies display the variety of interests in different types of entrepreneurial activity (Song et al., 2020). McClelland and Winter (1971) wrote that it is natural for individuals to want achievable success and accomplishment. Individuals pursue entrepreneurship for

different reasons. Success in entrepreneurship is not only determined by financial gain but by other means of gratification. Bula (2012) wrote that while some entrepreneurs seek profitable ventures, works unmeasured by profits are most gratifying. In most cases, business owners need motivation for their successes (Shaver & Scott, 1991). Recognition is one of the motivations of an entrepreneur. Recognition is also a motivation for small business owners. Kirzner's (1973) conceptual contribution to entrepreneurship is the opportunity to be recognized for their work and efforts.

Small business owners start their own businesses primarily for independence and the ability to gain control of their own financial destinies. Independence and the desire for a self-directed lifestyle influence the emotions of the entrepreneur (Foley et al., 2018; Schumpeter, 1934). Small business owners and entrepreneurs are responsible for the leadership, planning, and orchestration of how a business operates and sustains (Amisano & Anthony, 2017). Additional factors contributing to the success of an entrepreneur includes committing to be an influence on their communities and social atmospheres (Hendersden et al., 2017). Creating a more productive economy are one of many benefits to social entrepreneurship as entrepreneurial contributions to social value is made with the institution of employment (Chandra, 2018). There is an influence across relational generations due to entrepreneurial culture (Hanson et al., 2019). Reynolds (1991) also states that business success and failures could be impacted by industry competitors, governmental legislatures, and politics.

Some researchers believe that the connection between the entrepreneurship theory and business development formed independently. Researchers identified substantial

similarities to the entrepreneurship theory and the theory of the firm. Scholars such as Klein (2016) suggested entrepreneurs create businesses; hence, entrepreneurship is included in the foundation and constant building of a business. Klein found the cost of handling and managing the organizational production to be beneficial under multiple conditions according to this theory. As a result of this belief, Klein (2016) argues that the economic theory of the firm needs the entrepreneurship theory to thrive.

Entrepreneurs bear a significant number of responsibilities many of which require them to make tough and risky decisions. Some of their decision makings include implementing or neglecting to use the advice given to them but most importantly instilling advice in their followers. Risk-taking was an important focus in the entrepreneurship theory specifically by active sociologist Jenks (1949) who contributed to the development of the entrepreneurship theory by focusing on social roles. Jenks suggested there are no two identical social roles and that childhood experiences are used to mold adult roles. The entrepreneur is responsible for risks taken to correlate resource capital in efforts to profit financially (Klein, 2016). Psychologists are also active in theoretical research on entrepreneurship. Researcher McClelland (1961) directed focus to entrepreneurs who preferred mild risk situations to achieve. Hagen (1962) contributed to this research by suggesting that the primary interest in entrepreneurs is to solve technical issues in a practical manner and has high drives of achievement. In more recent years, Gardner (1985) identified entrepreneurs as individuals who attach to others with like minds and characteristics they identify with and Chell (2000) focuses on the difference

between individuals who are and are not entrepreneurs by their determination to be innovative, achieve wealth, and accumulate capital.

Supporting and Challenging Theories

Many scholars and theorists suggested numerous, conflicting, and rival theories they believed will achieve entrepreneurial success and stability. Historically, researchers used multiple theories to support their perceptions. For this research I chose to use the entrepreneurship theory; however, I found supporting characteristics and similarities as well as rivalries within the leadership theory and the systems theory. I initially considered the leadership theory but decided that the entrepreneurship theory provided a foundation that was best for my study's goals.

Leadership Theory

Understanding how to use leadership theory to influence subordinates is important as this could encourage the outcome of some business ventures (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2020). Leadership can be positively or negatively influential to a business and therefore, can impact the organizational structure (Vito, 2020). Entrepreneurs must adapt to the identities that will lead their businesses to growth (Ekinici et al., 2020). In relation to business success, leadership is identified as a factor in conquering implementation barriers (Choy-Brown et al., 2020). Leadership theory involves different types of leadership styles that offer different results.

For example, Carleton et al. (2018) discussed transformational leadership as being positively influential to inspire employees to progress beyond expected standards and achieve success and beneficial results. Transformational leaders must possess the ability

to influence the follower to trust them (Choi et al., 2017). Transformational leaders focus on preparing their followers with high morals and ethics (Carleton et al. 2018).

Leadership Styles and Business Sustainability

Every leader has their own approach to leading a business. Leadership is a business necessity though styles vary, but the effectiveness of each leader's approach is what make others view the leader's skills as efficient. According to Bonsu and Twum-Danso (2018), lack of constant production, issues contributed by society, and organizational flaws contribute to leadership failures. Honesty is imperative to the success of a business so leaders should keep this in mind while focusing on their practices. According to Suriyankietkaew and Kantamara (2019), the heart of a business is based on ethics and morality. Often practiced by servant and charismatic leaders, being truthful to self, the customers, and employees has been proven to assist in the future well-being of the company. Therefore, if the company is succeeding or amid turmoil, being honest to those in charge or the day-to-day operations will bring light to failure prevention in the company. The end goals of every company are to create a sustainable revenue and remain in operations for the longevity and company leadership is responsible to make this happen.

Şeşen et al. (2019) suggested that Psychological Capital (PsyCap) increases the positivity level of employee attitudes, overall performance of the organization, and decreases negative employee behavior therefore noting that PsyCap is credible for competitive sustainability in business environments. In a study to analyze the connection between leadership and positive psychological capital in the hospitality industry, Sesen et

al. (2019) used transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles. In this study, I discussed multiple leadership styles and the connection between leadership and business sustainability.

Dependent on employee and business culture, incompetent leadership often contributes to business failures. Frequently leaders fail to implement the appropriate leadership style (Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018). Every leadership style bears different reactions from the followers in the organization and the leader should be prepared for the possibility of multiple different outcomes (Wong & Giessner, 2018). Leadership styles are an important focus to this research study because thriving companies often implement and focus on this strategy. According to Choi et al. (2017), business leaders who identify their leadership style and the influence it promotes amongst their staff members can gain advantage over competitors while utilizing their workers to excel their company. Effective leadership empowers and builds employee morale, helps to stabilize the business, and creates the culture for the organization to propel financially while gaining and sustaining credibility.

Business owners who add to employee development are contributing to business growth while working toward a common goal (Choi et al., 2017). Leadership that incorporates a combination of reflection and feedback as well as communication will produce successful organizations (Vito, 2020). Leadership is influential to entrepreneurship endeavors. Like Cantillon's (1755) beliefs that building businesses formed stronger economies, leaders generally believe that building better workers forms stronger companies. Leaders in every industry use different leadership styles and

restaurant leadership must carefully select which style is most fitting for the restaurant type and employees it has. While there are many opportunities for drawbacks, there are also many strengths and some situational leaders may identify potential benefits while choosing to implement this leadership style in the quick service restaurant industry (Wright 2017). According to the situational leadership theory, the leader increases the terms associated with task completion as the follower matures or decrease the terms until the follower begins maturing (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977). Some leadership styles covered in this study are transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, servant, and charismatic. The restaurant industry calls for a variety of leadership styles to achieve many different types of goals.

Carleton et al. (2018) suggested that transformational leaders are role models which influence employees to expand upon their unique talents and strengths. They encourage others to view things from other perspectives and tend to focus on employee development. Many individuals indulged and directed attention to the scientific research of transformational leadership (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Burns (1979) first initiated the transformational leadership theory. In continuance, Bass (1985) argued a different perspective with his theory that transformational and transactional characteristics were a part of leadership.

Transformational leaders are global thinkers and believe that to have an effective team collaboration is beneficial (Choi et al., 2017). Another characteristic of a transformational leader is their desire to advance everyone and everything in the organization versus one person or one factor within the company. Involving and gaining

the commitment of interested followers to explore and implement new developments and innovation are characteristics of transformational leaders (Carleton et al., 2018).

Transformational leaders identify the need for change and the need to inspire others to agree with it (Curtis, 2018). In addition, transformational leadership involves role models who genuinely want to see their followers achieve goals based off their implemented drive and creativity (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Carleton et al. (2018), suggested that trait mindfulness is in relation to self- efficacy and positively impacts the decisions and behavior of transformational leaders.

According to Bonsu and Twum-Danso (2018), transformational leadership (specifically cross-cultural transformational leadership) links the growth and sustainability of businesses in a global era. Being technology efficient in conjunction with other acquired skillsets, innovative ventures have promoted business growth, sustainability, and profits (Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018). In the PsyCap study, results showed that the transformational leadership style proved to have a positive effect on the positive psychological capital which could lead to competitive business sustainability (Şeşen et al., 2019).

Though transformational leadership has many benefits, some researchers believe that this style of leadership should be moderately implemented in some cases depending on the job functions of staff being overseen by these types of leaders. Frieder, Wang, and Oh (2018) suggested the nature of a salesperson can be negatively impacted by a transformational leader if they demonstrate their leadership techniques too strongly. Lack

of moderate implementation can deteriorate the strength of the relationships between the performance and traits of a salesperson's role.

There are not many gray areas when being given instructions by transactional leaders as they provide clear instructions to those they lead (Afsar et al., 2017).

Transactional leaders use creative strategies to motivate their employees and implement positive reinforcements to those who do not achieve their goals (Passakonjaras & Hartijasti, 2020). Sarfraz (2017) posited that transactional leaders focus on ensuring that there is an efficient workplace for their organization. Transactional leadership involves the maintaining of an amount of performance or a relationship that consists of a bargain agreed upon by more than one individual (Afsar et al., 2017). According to Khan and Shahed (2018), the association between leaders and followers are the focus of this style of leadership. Some leaders believe in a combination of multiple leadership styles for certain types of businesses. According to Nielsen et al. (2019), leaders who combine transformational and transactional leadership styles experience positive effects which could be beneficial to business.

Educational organizations use the transactional leadership theory largely as the relationship between educators and their class demonstrates this style of leadership (Khan & Shahed, 2018). An example of even exchange would be students to complete their requirements in exchange for passing grades (Khan & Shahed, 2018). Entrepreneurial leaders are opportunists who individually identify opportunities not influenced by the same reasoning that affect others (Ramoglou & Tsang, 2017). Small business owners, managers, and appointed supervisors are identified as the leadership components of a

business and their character can influence the responses received from the employees.

While transactional leaders reward their subordinates on achieving set goals, this style of leadership does not encourage motivation beyond those set goals (Khan & Shahed, 2018).

In entrepreneurship, some researchers believe that transactional leadership can have a negative impact on entrepreneurial success due to the lack of stimulation for increasing challenges that could lead to higher goal achievement (Afsar et al., 2017). However, if leaders should set and anticipate higher than routine goals, this could link transactional leaders to positive organizational performance which also could lead to business sustainability (Donkor & Zhou Dongmei, 2018). In the PsyCap study, findings were that the transactional leadership style proved to have no effect on the positive psychological capital which would not lead to nor steer from competitive business sustainability (Şeşen et al., 2019).

While approaching the twenty-first century, Greenleaf (1970) brought mass attention to the concept of servant leadership. According to Gandolfi et al. (2017), this concept has been deeply rooted since ancient history. Brown et al. (2020) suggested the center of servant leadership is service supporting trustworthy foundations, relationships, and credibility. Gandolfi et al. (2017) conducted research to identify a definition of servant leadership and clarify what is not servant leadership.

Many individuals do not understand servant leadership and many people confuse it with weakness or disengagement of leadership (Gandolfi et al., 2017). Servant leaders carry unique qualities of which mainly involve the well-being of others. According to Northouse (2016), servant leaders are selfless leaders vested in the well-being of their

team. They strongly believe in personal development not just on the job but outside of it as well. As with any other leadership, servant leadership takes discipline, is difficult, but comes from within the leader as an individual (Gandolfi et al., 2017). Servant leaders are empathetic, and they take everyone's input into consideration (Northhouse, 2016). They consistently involve the diverse suggestions of all employees or parties involved in specific projects.

Both servants and charismatic leaders are humble individuals who encourage and influence the atmospheres that trustworthy relationships can thrive as proven in the study by Suriyankietkaew and Kantamara (2019). Northhouse (2016) suggested that servant leaders believe in the replication of great leadership, so they mold, develop, and empower the skills of other individuals to become leaders. Servant characteristics are different from dictator leaders. Servant leadership does mirror the characteristic of many other leadership styles (Jang & Kandampully, 2018). According to Curtis (2018), there is a theoretical overlap between leadership styles. Like that of visionary leaders as they keep the long-term goals in mind when leading others. While dictators give commands, servants are more successful with persuasive techniques. According to Northhouse (2016), servant leaders are counterintuitive and provocative in their approach to influence and persuade their peers. In a recent study on servant leadership in the restaurant industry, researchers Jang and Kandampully (2018) argued that there is a connection between employee views and servant leadership which plays a role in organizational functions.

According to history, charisma was primarily associated with leaders of royalty and religion (Grabo et al., 2017). Some leadership styles intertwine with others. For example, one of the elements of Bass' (1985) transformational model is charisma. Views on charismatic leadership vary amongst researchers. This emotional style of leaders can inspire their followers and stimulate their talents (Hansen et al., 2020). Charismatic leaders are compassionate, mature, and humble individuals. They are creative, determined, and have the vision. They make decisions based on wisdom and knowledgeable experience gained over lengths of time. They can implement great communicative skills in one-on-one situations or larger groups (Sy et al., 2018).

According to Grabo et al. (2017), charisma has become an important element in the leader's ability to move a group to do what is required in urgent situations. Hansen et al. (2020) suggested that charismatic leaders inspire others by mentally stimulating them to believe in their ideological values. Appearance and body language aid their influence on others. They are made of more than the outer influential appearance as the presentation of their substance is most important to them (Northhouse, 2016). Humility is also part of a charismatic leader's character. They listen well and place value on information brought to their attention.

Laissez-faire leaders lead from a distance as they lack close interaction with their followers (Wong & Giessner, 2018). Glambek et al. (2018) defined laissez-faire leadership as a leader's lack of response to the organizational needs of their subordinates. According to a recent study about laissez-faire leadership effectiveness, the perceived views on this leadership style results in the perception of poor leadership effectiveness

(Wong & Giessner, 2018). Laissez-faire leaders can miss the opportunity to diffuse situations that can occur in the workplace due to their hands-off style of choice. For example, workplace bullying, which often translates to a fear of job security can result in negative circumstances if it can continue without the assistance and guidance of a positive hands-on leader (Glambek et al., 2018).

While most of the research regarding this leadership style bears a negative reputation, there are some researchers that believe laissez-faire leadership has positive benefits. Some researchers argue that the lack of leadership presence could be influential on the increase in subordinate leadership skills. Diebig and Bormann (2020) argued that the lack of leadership, minimal support and slow decision making in unexpected situations exemplifies this leadership style. In addition, the lack of visible leadership makes the followers more incapable of predicting future organizational issues with their leader (Diebig & Bormann, 2020). In the restaurant industry, it is important that the leadership in place have an idea of the type of outcome they want when implementing the laissez-faire style of leadership or any kind of leadership. As every style is different, they also bear different reactions from the followers in the organization and the leader should be prepared for the possibility of multiple different outcomes (Wong & Giessner, 2018).

Achieving efficient leadership requires successfully influencing employee's performance to their highest capabilities. Khan and Shahed (2018) stated that anyone can become a leader if they have been through and learned from life experiences that could be used as a model for the needs of their organization. Many small business owners and managers are responsible for demonstrating leadership characteristics, and organizational

shaping is their primary task. According to Guzmán et al. (2020), organizations should require those people in leadership roles to possess cognitive, interpersonal, business, and strategic skills. Salas-Vallina et al. (2020) suggested that inspirational leaders or those who meditate often have a positive influence on their followers which helps to lead the company to success. Leadership characteristics vary, and leaders often adapt to styles they could best identify with to bring a company success. Though not a requirement, many leaders are charismatic as their followers find this quality appealing. Task delegation is important to many employees to achieve productivity. In laissez-faire leadership some staff members are influenced when leaders present the company goals as tasks (Wong & Giessner, 2018).

In addition to risk-taking and creative innovation, entrepreneurs are used to being a part of a business environment that constantly changes (Ekinsi et al., 2020). According to Sinaga et al. (2018), it is imperative that leaders can survive and thrive as the organization experiences changes over time. Sosik (2019) suggested that leaders are honest, ethical and use empathy when dealing with their subordinates if necessary. When times of crisis occurs leaders should still be able to demonstrate efficiency. Shreve et al. (2020) wrote that the more effective leadership consists of being able to know and understand the connection between learning styles and leading. Salas-Vallina et al. (2020) suggested that inspirational leadership has a positive impact on happiness at work, therefore, aids a company in succeeding. How a leader approaches resolving corporate issues may vary depending on the outcome the leader anticipates. In the PsyCap study, results showed that the laissez-faire leadership style proved to have a significant and

negative effect on the positive psychological capital which would not lead to competitive business sustainability (Şeşen et al., 2019). Every business matter is unique, so this allows management to choose from multiple styles of leadership depending on which style fits appropriately (Guzmán et al., 2020).

Leaders are the foundational builders for organizations (Gumparthi & Srivastava, 2020). When properly establishing leadership, management staff members are strategically placed throughout the company. The job of a manager includes evaluation of other staff, and according to Yao et al. (2019), managers in the hospitality industry are responsible for efficiently providing effective error training to their employees. Dev (2020) wrote that more management positions are now requiring business education degrees and are offering basic courses for business management. Creating strategies and business goals is the responsibility of management (Gumparthi & Srivastava, 2020). Some managerial skills include employing techniques, concepts, demonstrating leadership, and knowing how to gain control. Making necessary changes to thrive and keep a businesses' sustainable is an important managerial duty (Gumparthi & Srivastava, 2020). Managers are responsible for all facets of the organization as their job is to maintain all processes throughout different departments of the company (Janiesch et al., 2020). Managers should also be influential, directive, and knowledgeable of other organizational functions such as staff implementation. It is a managerial responsibility to plan and direct processes to execute the objectives of the organization (Gumparthi & Srivastava, 2020). Hiring and firing are processes managers use when there is a need to fulfill company objectives. Hiring, also referred to as onboarding, is crucial to the

lifespan of each employee. As a part of balancing the needs of an organization, multiple processes are included in onboarding new hires (Oh et al., 2017). Treating job seekers with courtesy and being responsive during the interviewing process is an important skillset for management to perform (McKenna, 2018). Good management values time spent with their subordinates and believed they could efficiently turn ordinary staff into extraordinary talents (Sheth, 2018). Companies use incentives as strategies for motivation enhancing and it builds trust in the staff which leads to increased production (Lee et al., 2020).

Restaurant Management

Efficient managerial skills are necessary to run a successful restaurant business (Kim and Bachman, 2019). Restaurant management is important to the structure and sustainability of a restaurant business. Within the last two decades, scholarly research on sustainability has become more common (Raab et al., 2018). Many models have been used as a format to develop a business structure. Management team members often adopt various business models to achieve sustainability. Restaurant management is not just comprised of internal elements but external factors as well. Some internal factors include food preparation, service, and planning for special events (Nguyen et al., 2018). Some external factors include recovery strategies after tragedies or disasters that may have affected the area. Managers and other leadership partners are expected to institute the appropriate measures needed when presented with multiple types of business issues.

Some researchers argue that consumer base and suppliers influence managerial decisions (Raab et al., 2018). Others suggested that business models are influential to

strategic processes and selecting the appropriate business model impacts the outcome of business success. Competition encourages the implementation of business models as companies must be creative. Bharwani et al. (2019) embarked upon research that involved trending competition in Indian stand-alone restaurants. Bharwani et al. suggested that due to the growing trend of stand-alone restaurants in India, the implementation of business model innovation could be used as a tool to conquer competition from similar nearby businesses in its industry. In this study, Bharwani et al. posited that outsourcing food and beverage in conjunction with the business model innovation was a positive move for specialty restaurants within luxury Indian hotels. Through his entrepreneurship model, Cantillon (1755) suggested a major effort in entrepreneurship to be the growth and building of an economy.

Competition in the restaurant industry is inevitable so remaining competitive is also an important duty to management. A major part of restaurant management is cleanliness. Kim and Bachman (2019) conducted a study on restaurant restroom cleanliness and how it influenced customers decisions on wanting to return to their establishment. They found that three major influences are present in the decision for customers to return: restroom appearance, restroom hygiene, and server behavior. Developing partnerships and resource management is vital to the backbone of the business. Having a local support team of other businesses to call for disposable goods aid in the necessities for running a business (Raab et al., 2018). Collectively, these factors aid in maintaining business against their competitors. According to a study by Raab et al.

(2018), restaurant managers began incorporating sustainability processes that higher management supports based on what practices competition has implemented.

Restaurant management also includes the ability to identify failing practices. One common failing practice is poor financial management (Campbell & Park, 2017). Internal human resource issues, lack of a firm marketing plan and meaningless businesses models were also mentioned as failing contributors. To avoid early business closure, Saleem (2017) posited that successful small business practices are identified by the business owner's influential ability towards achieving financing and competitive marketing strategies necessary to achieve business sustainability. Entrepreneurs make many decisions during their ventures. While some are successful, others are not successful. An important characteristic of an entrepreneur is to know when and how to avoid failing practices.

Quality and Experience

Quality product and positive experiences enhance the perception of economic value and are extremely important to entrepreneurs. A quality product is necessary, but the quality experience is found to be beneficial to please the needs of their customers (Badwan et al., 2017). Chi et al. (2018) suggested that to create a stable pattern of quality operational management should ensure that employees have clear expectations and a managerial support system in place to reference when needed. Remaining competitive is an ongoing task to entrepreneurs According to Badwan et al. (2017), key attributes to a restaurant's competition are understanding the customer desires, needs, experience and growing profits which could also influence customer retention and satisfaction.

Many factors determine the restaurant's perfect atmosphere. Salim (2017) suggested that business owners should strategically chose a location that could positively impact and influence the survival of a restaurant. As in many other industries, quality is key to restaurant businesses (Uslu, 2020). Genoveva and Siam (2017) suggested that small restaurant business owners create innovative experiences that make their business stand out and divides them from their competitors. Some popular strategies used to develop a quality experience includes first knowing the target customer base and catering to their market with trends that best suit their needs. Restaurants emphasize on customer satisfaction as they want to be remembered for providing the customer with a good experience (Uslu, 2020). Atmosphere impacts the customer experience as many of its elements can influence the behaviors of both the customer and restaurant staff (Uslu, 2020). Ahmed (2017) suggested that employee performance can increase customer satisfaction when employees are more committed emotionally to the company where they work. In addition, businesses that have team members who are cohesive in sharing the same efforts aid in the success and sustainability of the organization (Chen et al., 2017). While identifying what customers anticipate is service quality may be challenging to determine, service quality is a part of customer satisfaction, hence customers anticipate satisfactory service (Usla, 2020).

Comfortability is an important element to a restaurant experience. According to Chen et al. (2018), there are two types of capacity constraints both being symmetrical and asymmetrical, and they can have positive and negative impacts on small restaurant businesses. While argued that symmetrical constraints are identified as capacity

constraints that affect all types of businesses in the exact industry, asymmetrical constraints incorporate different strategies which provide consumers with a preference even in the same condition of capacity constraints (Chen et al., 2018). Factors of these capacity constraints include seating limits, time restrictions for certain meals of the day and cook capacity (Chen et al., 2018). Some capacity constraints include temporary inconvenience due to construction or unforeseen disasters that restaurants must work around. This may have a negative impact as customers will not be as comfortable in the environment the facility is used to providing and will go dine elsewhere (Chen et al., 2018).

According to Bayani and Crisanto (2017), small restaurant owners and managers are required to be receptive to the customer needs as a tactical mean of creating customer loyalty. Management follow-up makes the customers feel like they care that the employees are performing well. In cases of error, finding solutions to issues is highly valued over determining the cause of errors made (Dev, 2020). Administering the check and processing it promptly closes out the warm, welcoming experience. Business failure is significant regardless of the phase of business development. (Martinez et al., 2019).

According to Nguyen et al. (2018), service quality is identified as a main factor impacting the opinions of satisfied customers. Eye contact, body mannerisms, and sincerity used to communicate with customers add to restaurant formality (Nguyen et al., 2018). Negotiating with the customer in ways that would place ease on the mistakes made is usually appreciated. Being slightly apologetic in uncomfortable situations like reaching over to clear used dishes from the table demonstrates a courtesy that goes

unnoticed as well as maintaining refillable items such as warm bread or beverages.

Kurian and Muzumdar (2017) suggested that customer loyalty is positively impacted by restaurant formality. As certain restaurant behaviors are identified by customers as restaurant formality restaurant profits often increase as a result (Kurian & Muzumdar, 2017).

The impact of customer experience influences future decisions. According to Kim and Bachman (2019) it is important for businesses to create a positive first impression. They also suggested that satisfied customers encourage patron repetition and referral business. Paying attention to customer concerns is important show that you care about their needs and experience (Schiopu & Zloteanu, 2019). Technical, conceptual, and human skills are necessary for managers to deliver a good customer experience (Cornell, 2019). Catering to the demographics of an area is influential to the products being sold. Nel et al. (2018) analyzed demographic trends to identify reasons for restaurant failure. Demographics and associated cuisine types are important to some cultures when deciding which restaurant to dine.

Transition

In Section 1, I presented an overview of information detailing the need to explore the problem I found fascinating. I presented the central research question along with a list of interview questions identified necessary to research sustainable small businesses who have been in operation beyond 5 years. I included the in this section my problem statement, I explained the purpose of this study, the nature of the study and I also presented the conceptual framework. In addition, I discussed some specific terms to

provide clarity and you will also find discussion on the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. I briefly highlighted the potential contributions to business practices and social change.

In Section 2, I discussed the details of the project regarding the processes I used to choose participants and discuss the role of the researcher. It was used to restate the purpose of the study, discuss the research method, the research design, and the process of researching in an ethical manner. This section also discusses data collection instruments and techniques, data analysis, and data organization processes. I also used section 2 to discuss the reliability and validity of my research presentation just before concluding this section. In Section 3, I present recommendations regarding findings as well as recommend future research on this topic.

Section 2: The Project

The objective of this study is to determine what strategies small business owners in the restaurant industry use to sustain business beyond 5 years. Using innovative strategies is crucial to business success. Creating a sustainable business model is an important strategy that businesses could use. In Section 2, I address the purpose statement, role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection, data analysis, reliability, and validity to promote additional clarity and integrity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some small business owners in the restaurant industry use to sustain business beyond 5 years. The target population consisted of six small restaurant business managers who have survived beyond 5 years and specialize in fast casual food service within busy areas in Chicago. Implications for social change include a positive impact on the local economy by increasing employment rates and providing local individuals and families with stable incomes, benefiting communities through increasing tax revenues.

Role of the Researcher

For this study, I assumed the role of the researcher. I assumed the responsibility to collect critical data, incorporate theoretical concepts, perform data analysis, and present findings using supporting references or other documented seminal sources. I anticipated potential biases; however, I believed that my findings would support my research objectives as I acted as a data collection instrument and presented my study. Data

collection consists of information, statistical evidence, and results of scientific testing. I concluded this research with interpretations of evidence. I used a collective and qualitative interview approach during the data collection process and data analysis process.

I have over 5 years of professional experience in the administrative field of which 5 years were dedicated to the restaurant industry where I served as food preparer, food packer, and cashier as well as administratively while handling office paperwork. Despite my previous associations with the restaurant industry and the fact that I have resided in the Chicago area for all my life, I had no affiliation with any potential participants for this study. My educational background involved the technology industry, project management, and business administration. Though I have prior knowledge and professional experience in the administrative business industry, I had no intention of allowing my prior experiences to influence data collection or outcomes of findings.

I have found that biases often occur through the result of perspectives, morals, and human experiences. Assuming the role of researcher required me to solicit objective research to mitigate biases. Though challenging, I successfully mitigated bias by addressing differences between humans. My plan was to become familiar with participants and be efficient while collecting research data. I planned to eliminate bias by using probing and relevant interview questions. I took responsibility for eliminating my own individual perceptions or perspectives. I did not anticipate relying on all information I gathered, nor did I include any personal views of participants. I studied the Chicago area in which my participants were located, ensured I had no previous connections or

relationships with participants, and focused on strict and solid evidence. I remained aware of potential biases and therefore reduced bias.

Grech (2018) said researchers should operate ethically during the data collection process. The three elements of *the Belmont Report* are respect and protection for all persons, beneficence, and justice. My role as the researcher was to operate ethically and communicate truthfully with all research participants. In addition to reviewing the Belmont Report, I completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) web-based training course (see Appendix A) as a requirement for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. The researcher is responsible for analyzing protocols with regards to respect, protecting participant identity, and justice while collecting data (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979).

To maintain an organizational structure for this research, I adhered to interview protocol guidelines associated with this study. Interview protocols aid in terms of setting boundaries delimiting what the researcher collects and analyzes (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Researchers use interview protocols to address the research question and goals of the research (Yeong, et al., 2018). During the interviewing process, it is the role of the researcher to determine needs and choose participants based on interview requirements (Wolcott & Lobczowski, 2020). To ensure that I conducted well-structured interviews, I implemented a interview protocol (see Appendix B).

I implemented strategies to conduct qualitative interviews by using clear and concise questions that were distributed in a logical order. I made sure that my interview questions were in alignment with the main research question, built inquiry-based

communication, and gathered feedback regarding interview protocols. Castillo-Montoya (2016) said this process may assist in terms of dependability of qualitative research interview protocols and data quality.

Participants

Farrugia (2019) said obtaining eligible participants requires agreements of written and verbal consent (see Appendix C) and providing protection to participants. In addition, researchers should first acquire approval from appropriate departments of administration and ensure that participants meet criteria based on their experience and goals of research. Two participants are appropriate to fulfill data collection needed to satisfy a study (Yin, 2018).

Ensuring confidentiality of participants and remaining transparent is the responsibility of the researcher. To participate in this study, participants needed to be small restaurant business owners in Chicago. These participants were either small business owners or managers who oversee restaurant businesses daily. Businesses were successful small restaurant businesses that had been in operation for at least 5 years and had less than 500 employees. To ensure proper data collection, researchers must select qualified participants who meet eligibility criteria (Yin, 2018).

When conducting research, flexibility is required when determining possible approaches during the data collection and analysis process (Paine et al., 2020). First, I acquired IRB approval. After receiving IRB approval number 07-15-21-0597656, I then identified potential participants from my online, door to door searches or word of mouth referrals, and then contacted participants via email, letter, or phone explaining to them

my intentions for this study (see Appendix D). For those participants who met the requirements of my study, I collected further data. For those participants who did not meet the requirements, I no longer considered.

Upon confirming involvement, I invited the participants to a session to discuss my research in further detail. Researchers should elicit skills to search for participants who will provide valuable and meaningful data (Newton, 2017). Establishing a trustworthy relationship with the participants is essential to acquiring useful data. Researchers should realize the importance of instituting trusting and workable relationships with the participants and that it is necessary to have frequent communication with participants. Johnson et al. (2019) suggested that relationships between researchers and participants should be transparent enough to provide data and report findings. After meeting with all the participants, I then took all the data and began the process of analyzing the responses from all questions I gathered.

Research Method and Design

The objective of this study is to explore strategies that small business owners in the restaurant industry use to sustain business beyond 5 years. Qualitative researchers identify and use methods that will aid in gathering valuable data that is reliable and valid (Baskarada, 2014; Kavoura & Bitsani, 2014). The qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method approaches are commonly used by researchers conducting studies (Fuller, 2017). I used my central research question as a guide for which research method would best work with my study hence, I chose the qualitative method.

Research Method

According to Yin (2018), the qualitative method incorporates interviews, observations, and questionnaires to explore an issue. Qualitative researchers interact based off identifying conceptual trends (Kavoura & Bitsani, 2014). Qualitative researchers use skills that maximize data information in a small sample size (Baskarada, 2014). The goal of my research is to explore and identify successful strategies used by small restaurant owners and managers for achieving sustainable operations beyond 5 years. The method I found appropriate for this proposed study is the qualitative method.

Quantitative researchers analyze larger samples assuming they will gather solid data (Baskarada, 2014). Quantitative research is statistical evidence in the form of systematic, numerical measurements for testing variables' relationships or differences (Zyphur & Pierides, 2017). I rejected the quantitative method because the goal of my study is to explore strategies rather than the relationships among variables. Using mixed methods requires researchers to integrate qualitative and quantitative methods (McKim, 2017). Mixed method researchers combine the research processes of both qualitative and quantitative research to produce a better comprehension of the phenomenon they are researching (Leavy, 2017). I rejected the mixed method because conducting this proposed study does not require using the quantitative method to address the specific business problem.

Research Design

Three of the most common qualitative research designs are phenomenological, ethnography, and case studies (Yin, 2018). A phenomenology design is an approach for

exploring the meanings of participants experiencing a phenomenon and identifying with their individual perceptions (Fusch et al., 2017). According to Madden (2017), the phenomenological researcher analyzes the personal experiences of their participants identifying the meanings behind the experiences in the most complex way. Rider (2017) suggested that phenomenological researcher interpret findings as if it were their very personal experience. I rejected the phenomenology design because it involves gathering unstructured and uncommon research from an individual's lived experience lacks evidence and literature. Ethnographic researchers could best analyze participants with observational processes and similarly, according to Lloyd and Webby (2019) shared that researchers who use observational protocols could efficiently analyze participants.

One commonly practiced discipline in the ethnography design is anthropology, (Miller, 2017). Madden (2017) suggested that researchers aim to comprehend the participants daily experiences as best as possible as ethnographic research focuses on altered cultural evolution and accumulates throughout time. I did not select an ethnographic design because this proposed study does not require the exploration of groups' cultures. Using the case study design requires the participation of participants in providing data for the analysis and synthesis of multiple data types (Yin, 2018). Case study designs are used when researching multiple instances in similar phenomena. Data collection begins from participant exploitation to a hands-on experience (Yin, 2018). The case study design is appropriate because I seek to identify and explore the strategies and processes that may lead small restaurant business owners to sustainability.

Pillay and Mafini (2017) posited that data saturation occurs when researchers no longer feel the need to collect more data from observance of additional interviews for case studies. Data saturation refers to the quality of the quantity of information that I collected for this study (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017). To ensure data saturation I asked the interview participants questions that provoked rich and informative responses. I anticipated that the responses from all participants would have given me enough relevant data to further assess conduct research on this topic. Afterwards, I began member checking to further validate the information I collected in the interviews. This process was used post interview to ensure the accuracy of information that was recorded and to confirm that no additional information was omitted or misinterpreted.

Population and Sampling

The population for this qualitative, multiple case study included six small restaurant business managers from the inner city of Chicago who successfully implemented working strategies to obtain and maintain business sustainability for periods beyond 5 years. This qualitative, multiple case study used the purposeful sampling method. A researcher's decision to choose similar participants is supported by purposeful sampling (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). All research participants for this study were small restaurant business owners so I found this sampling method to be most appropriate. When there were no longer new findings during the data analysis then all data had been saturated (Tran et al., 2017). Though there are no strict guidelines to sample size according to Yin (2018), researchers tend to use samples from common participants to analyze the similarity between their experiences in case studies. While researchers vary

in their opinions on what is enough sampling, Tran et al. (2017) suggested that researchers reach the end of the interview processes when they are no longer able to find additional concepts to explore. While two to three case studies are enough to ensure enough data saturation (Yin, 2018), for this study I chose to include six small independent restaurant owners that are not associated with any larger restaurant franchises to ensure their unique individuality as an independent successful restaurant. If I would not have reached saturation with my intended sample, I would have gathered more information from other restaurant owners that fit my criteria.

Ethical Research

As a researcher, observing ethical standards is pertinent to the interview process. Additionally, in qualitative research, privacy is a key component (Dooly et al., 2017). All the managers and business owners that took part in this study had been solicited via written consent. This method provided an explanation as to the intention of this research study. I have included a copy of the written consent form (Appendix C) and interview questions (Appendix B) used for the participating individuals. I also provided the participants with knowledge that the interview session will be audibly recorded for data collection review and to ensure accuracy. Participants were advised that there are no incentives or compensation for participating in the interview process. Participant consents were used to state their willingness and participants were also made aware that unwillingness to participate in the interview process at any time was allowed without any form of penalty. Participants were treated respectfully, and I remained prudent to ensure I

maintained my ethical obligation while preparing a concise and sound research study (Rallis & Lawrence, 2017).

Participant data often included personal identifying information, thus is safely stored in a place not accessible to others with no affiliation to the study. Yin (2018) discussed the importance of privacy and care of the data collected and analysis. For this research study, I used a safe that will store all the data for 5 years to conceal participant identity and protect their rights.

Data Collection Instruments

I performed as the primary researcher in this qualitative multiple case study. I not only collected but analyzed and secured all the data for this study before and after presenting its findings. Qualitative researchers are instrumental in delivering the description of a phenomenon and often use mixed method to research for a better understanding of it (Leavy, 2017). I conducted semistructured, in-person interviews with open-ended questions to enhance research (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). I used an audio recorder during the in-person interviews, a notepad, and laptop, in person, to record and store data that I collected. According to Fusch and Ness (2017), the researcher poses questions that reflect the overall objectives of the research. This information may include financial records, company policies, procedures, and innovative plans. To gather the richest data and to best create a welcoming interviewing environment, I conducted the interviews in familiar surroundings that aids the participants in feeling most comfortable and use relevant, open-ended questions. These questions are commonly used to probe and grasp a more in-depth response from participants (Brown & Danaher, 2019). I had

scheduled five questions to begin my interviewing sessions regarding the strategies, methods, and technology used to maintain sustainability based on participant experience but further probed when necessary based off the participant responses that I felt required more data. One way I chose to mitigate bias and increase accuracy is by using member checking (Yin, 2018). Member checking ensures the reliability and validity of the researcher's observations and notes and is a way for participants to validate and confirm study's notes (Abedini et al., 2018). To add validity and credibility to my study, I used member checking processes by reviewing the interview recordings for accuracy and by double checking the transcript with the participants to confirm my interpretations of the data I collected from them. I wanted to give the participants an opportunity to confirm that all I wrote and found was accurate per their conversations with me. I also observed any websites, menus, social media activity or any other information that disclosed the company's history or any other information which may have led to valuable contributions to this study.

Data Collection Technique

My research goal was to explore strategies that small business owners in the restaurant industry use to sustain business beyond 5 years. I was the primary data collection instrument. In case studies, researchers collect data via interviews to study human behaviors while considering ethics during the entire research process while analyzing different views of a phenomenon (Varpio et al., 2017). The plan in this study was to use online search engines and referrals from individuals with connections to small restaurant businesses in my local target area to identify 50 potential participants to deliver

a letter of introduction via hand delivery, fax, or email. Out of those 50, I proceeded with consent forms from six of them. I prepared a script for verbal introductions that presented opportunities. I followed up with the participants to ensure that they had received the consent forms. My goal was to interview and collect enough data from at least six small restaurant business managers.

One of the data collection techniques that I used for this study included researching and retrieving any archived records that may have been published within government databases or other reputable sources regarding the participating restaurants financial status, successes, or failures. When researchers use member checking during the interviewing process this creates a stronger chance for data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2017). Data collected from sources such as company websites, public archives, financial statements are pertinent to a company's sustainability; however, Lisowsky et al. (2017) suggested researchers could be given a misinterpretation of information due to managers who sometimes present financial inaccuracies within unaudited documents. My goal in this process was to identify and evaluate the company's profit and losses or innovations that allowed them to succeed. Another data collection technique I used was any magazine, books or audio clips, or video footage that applied to the sustainability of a company. Any credible and reliable findings that can be confirmed increases the validity and reliability of a study (Chmielewski et al., 2017).

While researchers who conduct face to face interviews use scripts that include the interview protocol Brown and Danaher (2019) suggested that researchers could ask open ended questions which may lead to more in-depth responses from the participants in

semi-structured research. After I confirmed with the participants that wanted to volunteer for my study, I provided the option to meet with them via face-to-face. Skype has also become a more popular method of data collection because it is cost-effective, allows easier access to further distanced participants, and offers a wide range of support for researchers with global objectives (Rahbi, 2017). I reserved the time and date information via e-mail or phone communications. During that time, I encouraged the participants to bring any documentation that they would not mind giving me that they believe could be useful to my study. I also used that time to assure them that all documentation used for this study will be stored appropriately in a fireproof safe with a key lock to remain confidential. Five years after the data collection process, I will use a shredding machine to destroy and adequately dispose of all documentation. I have already begun using all suggestions provided per Walden University's regulations regarding privacy and confidentiality.

Houghton et al. (2017) suggested that a disadvantage when meeting with participants face-to-face is compromising the data collection process as researchers could be influential to the participants and owners may sometimes overemphasize or amplify their information. Disadvantages occur when using technology such as online streaming as the technical administration of the system could influence researcher and participant relationships (Rahbi, 2017).

Data Organization Technique

To help remain consistent with the organization of my data collection, I continued to follow the research interview protocol. To maintain the privacy of the participants, I

used an alphanumeric system (i.e., Participant 1, Participant 2), to identify them during the early data collection process. Eke and Singh (2018) suggested researchers use an array of tools like pen and writing pad for note taking and to organize and analyze the data they collect. For this study, I used NVivo software (Version 12.0), excel, and journal logs as tools to track and analyze data.

Data storage is a key component in research as it protects the confidential rights of human participants which also enhances the studies validity (Grech, 2018). One method I used to store data is by saving it on a protected USB device. To maintain confidentiality with regards to participant experiences and information provided during the interviewing process, I will adhere to the regulations of Walden University and monitor and maintain the security of all research documents for 5 years after this study.

Data Analysis

Yin (2018) suggested there are four types of triangulation. This includes (a) theory triangulation in which multiple perspectives are used to interpret a single set of data, (b) data triangulation of which multiple sources are used in a single study, (c) method triangulation where multiple methods are used to interpret a single problem, and (d) investigator triangulation of which several researchers or evaluators are used to interpret a single set of data. Some of the methods I chose to use in my study were researching enough literature, use member checking and conducting face to face interviews. I used method triangulation in my research to ensure reliability and validity of all information collected during the data collection and interview process with my participants. If I were to find that additional verification was needed, I would have

implemented additional interviews with other management or leadership within that same organization as a means of validating the initial responses I am given during interviews. Fusch and Ness (2017) suggested that researchers use a logical system to conduct data analysis. Yin (2018) suggested that data analysis is completed in five steps including (a) compiling, (b) data cleansing (c) disassembling the data, (d) reassembling the data, (e) interpretations, and data conclusion.

The data analysis process took place in the following sequence. First, I organized and compiled all the gathered data in chronological sequence. I collected similar points that highlighted important topics with similar answers and findings. Second, during the labeling process I reviewed written notes taken during the interview process and listened to all conducted transcripts in effort to cleanse the data by removing any unnecessary information when interpreting the purpose of all information given during the time of the recorded interviews. I emailed the participants what I interpreted from their responses and asked them to confirm for accuracy. Third, I began the dissembling process and implemented the use of NVivo 12 software. Golicic et al. (2017) suggested that by using NVivo software, researchers could best analyze similarities and differences between company finance records and interview transcripts. After confirming that my interpretations were correct, I used NVivo 12 software to sort and identify redundant patterns and themes. The fourth step is to reassemble data by identifying clusters of similar data from the data sequences (Yin, 2018). The final step was interpretations and data conclusion. Finding patterns, comparing logic, and identifying trends is the intention

of this process to create a thorough and conclusive narrative of the data collected for this study.

I have previously addressed my plan to use a form of alphanumeric processes to identify each restaurant participant to ensure privacy early in my data collection process.

My goal was to explore strategies used by small restaurant businesses to accomplish increased sustainability beyond 5 years. By studying different cases, it allowed me the ability to reveal conceptual similarities. By correlating similar key strategies used by successful restaurant business owners, I increased the opportunities to identify useful processes throughout the process of analyzing patterns.

Reliability and Validity

Consistency and accuracy are valuable to the results of a research study.

Jedrzejczak and Anders (2017) suggested that reliability is an element of dependability in qualitative research. In addition, Chmielewski et al. (2017) stated that researchers preferred findings that could be confirmed as opposed to just credible and dependable. In qualitative research, researchers must develop reliable and valid results. Reliability and validity are both used to develop quality results in qualitative case studies

Reliability

Researchers exhibit their methods for populating the findings of a study it supports the study's reliability (Cypress, 2017). To ensure that researchers report accurate results, researchers most commonly use strategies such as transferability, confirmability, dependability, and credibility as they display positively reliable, external, and internal validity concepts (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Member checking and participant information verification is used to provide validity and add to the data collection. (Thomas, 2017). While confirming the quality of the research, dependability is an important component (Cypress, 2017). The number of case studies needed to assure data saturation may vary thus, the final opinions of the researcher may vary as researchers determine the data collection criteria (Saunders et al., 2018). The satisfying number of cases vary from researcher to researcher however it was suggested by Sundberg et al. (2017) that structure and size play a relevant role in the study's outcome.

Validity

Researchers check for check the accuracy of all the information collected during the collection process to ensure validity. Clark and Veale (2018) mentioned that the validity of a study may be supported by the efficient processes for data collection, research tools, and analysis process. Korstjens and Moser (2018) suggested that validity of qualitative research could be verified by ensuring its dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Researchers determine credibility based on how data collected from participant views is evaluated (Naumann et al., 2017). A research study's credibility is necessary for participants wanting to develop better business processes based on the findings of what they read (Candela, 2019). Researchers have a select number of participants knowledgeable in their proposed research that will assist them with conducting a thorough investigation on the topic until reaching saturation (Graneheim et al., 2017). As

suggested by Thomas (2017), researchers implement member checking strategies to ensure qualitative research data validity.

Confirmability

According to Abdalla et al. (2018), in research, confirmability displays objectives that happened when characterizing the research after interpreting the data. According to Cypress (2017) believed that confirmability relates to the auditability of the researcher's analyzation. Techniques such as triangulation or journaling are used to assist other researchers in checking presented data in agreement with the research (Renz et al., 2018). Abdalla et al. (2018) posited triangulation reduces errors, bias and that as a result adds benefits to the data collection process. According to Abdalla et al. (2018) triangulation is used to provide clarity and similarity in different scenarios amongst multiple sources that are trustworthy.

Transferability

Researchers use transferability to confirm the general outcomes of other researchers (Daniel, 2018). In qualitative research, transferability gives the readers proof upon assessment that the study's findings can apply to additional situations and contexts (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Determining if research is similar is important to qualitative researchers so they often use transferability. Roth et al. (2017) suggested that transferability is a means to identify applicable results in the qualitative data collected and used for their research studies. Researchers use this technique to try to identify a similar connection between current and previous research (Daniel, 2018).

Transition and Summary

Section 2 consisted of details regarding the entire project. I discussed the purpose, the role of the researcher, the research method and design, reliability, and validity. Additionally, I discussed the population and sampling, ethical research, and the data collection process and techniques. The rationale behind this qualitative multiple case study is to explore successful strategies that small business restaurant owners could use to achieve sustainability beyond 5 years. Hence, I am driven to identify the processes that could be useful to other like businesses in the restaurant industry. In section 3, I present the research findings, implications for social change, my recommendations for action, recommendations for further research and I reflect on and summarized my research experience.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

In Section 3, I include a brief introduction, present research findings, and discuss applications to professional practice and implications for social change. I provide recommendations for action and further research regarding successful strategies for restaurant sustainability. Last, I reflect upon and summarize my entire research experience. Data for this research were collected via in-person face-to-face interviews. After collecting data, I implemented Nvivo 12 data analysis software. I then compiled all data for review and interpretation with the expectation of revealing common themes that would address my research question. I address the importance of implementing strategies for increasing the sustainability of small restaurant businesses.

Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore strategies that some small business owners in the restaurant industry use to sustain business beyond 5 years. This study consisted of six small nonfranchise restaurant business participants from six restaurants located in Chicago, Illinois who had successfully implemented strategies to help them achieve sustainability beyond 5 years of operation. During semi-structured interviews with restaurants that met criteria of my study, I posed five open-ended interview questions (see Appendix B) and followup questions to participants to best knowledge regarding how they used successful strategies to remain in operation. Data analyzed from interviews supported that all restaurants were sustaining due to use of successful strategies. To ensure privacy and confidentiality of participants, I coded their

names to be 101, 202, 303, 404, 505, and 606. All six participants were either small restaurant owners or appointed managers of casual food service facilities, and their involvement was key to successfully implement strategies for their restaurant businesses. Instinctive innovation, business process review and revisions, implementing a comprehensive marketing plan, location choice for customer gain and customer retention, and implementing technological solutions for delivery and daily operation services were themes as I conducted the data analysis process.

The overarching research question in this qualitative multiple case study was: What strategies do small business owners in the restaurant industry use to sustain business beyond 5 years? I interviewed six small restaurant business managers who were in Chicago, Illinois and have less than 500 employees. Upon analyzing my interviews, five themes emerged from my findings. As I began conducting semi-structured interview sessions, I initially began with five prepared open-ended questions. During interviews, all six managers provided responses that prompted me to follow up with additional probing questions. All questions involved challenges, success, strategies, overall innovation, and technological solutions. Upon completion of my interview process, I conducted my data analysis with the assistance of NVivo 12 software. This was used to organize data collected during interviews to help me create themes. As I analyzed data for this study, I have discovered that styles of survival among these participants aligned with Cantillon's perspective on the entrepreneurship theory. All participants took many risks to start their businesses. In addition, while assuming responsibility for their restaurant successes and failures, they continue to contribute to local economic growth and development by

offering opportunities for employment as they continue to supply goods or services needed to satisfy local demands and remaining sustainable. Gaining capital from their ventures is desired; however, these business owners are also focused on receiving the emotional gratification from their business contributions as well. All participants in this research study were contributors to economic development in local economies. All participants were risk takers who have built small restaurant businesses that survived beyond 5 years of operation.

Theme 1: Instinctive Innovation

One of the emerging themes I found within data that participants reported was instinctive innovation. Innovation supports success and the possibility of business sustainability (Hussain, et al., 2020; Ortiz-Villajos & Sotoca, 2018). Innovations are typically implemented on two occasions: throughout the life of the business as managers review their business processes, and during moments of instinct when there is not time to put thought into implementation. An example of instinctive innovation is using a 12-ounce cup to complete an order upon realizing that the restaurant was out of 9-ounce cups, and simply explaining the small inconvenience to the customer. Another example is rectifying an overbooking situation during which a large private party needs to be accommodated. Accommodations could include immediately sectioning off public spacing and closing it off with portable walls to make it as secluded as possible to guests. 101, 202, 404, 505, and 606 use innovation as part of their success strategies. Not only is innovation practiced by these managers, but it is also practiced by most entrepreneurs in general. While these managers did not solely rely on innovation alone, they did agree that

this is a major part of what keeps them going in terms of many aspects of their businesses.

Cantillon (1755) said creative innovations of entrepreneurs are a driving force involving economic development. Hence, innovation is welcomed at any time during the life of a business. Additionally, though Cantillon suggested entrepreneurial growth took place during more favorable economic conditions, he also suggested that entrepreneurs should take risks during times of uncertainty. All participants asserted that innovation was an important part of their entrepreneurial process from the initial conception of business ideas to unforeseen challenges within their business, including recent pandemic-related challenges. All participants agreed that their experiences during times of uncertainty presented the need for risky and immediate innovation under instinctive circumstances and though economic times were not as favorable, they had to take these chances to save their businesses.

In some cases, business owners do not implement innovation routinely unless they feel the absolute need to do so. For example, 303 said they have implemented some innovation, but found that unless it was necessary for better operations, it was best to leave current business processes as is and focus on business resources as they believe that helps them to sustain their business. 303 mentioned still being able to be successful as they rely on relationships they have built with their customers. They know many by first name and what their usual orders are. Their brick-and-mortar design has a vintage feel and the ambiance and customer service approach is very old school. They said innovation often means to modernize, and that was not something they wanted to trade their style or

approach for. They also said if their food is good and customers are satisfied with that, they will continue to sell to these customers repeatedly, and those customers will continue to spread the word about their business. While 303 did not rely heavily on the entrepreneurship of innovation, they were the only participant who expressed views and experiences involving Cantillon's theory, and the other five participants did not express these views. I suggest further research on this matter to determine the validity of this finding.

I discovered that a lot of responsibility falls on owners of these businesses, including creating success or failing at their business ventures. Whatever happens, these owners are solely responsible for it. While all six participants welcomed innovation to initiate their business, only five of the participants (all except participant 303) agreed that innovation is a constant key ingredient to their success aligning with previous concepts. Innovation can help businesses grow and sustain even during the toughest of times. As participating managers mentioned a variety of innovative methods and practices to help make their businesses sustainable over time, they also mentioned having to implement innovation based off instinct amid unforeseen circumstances such as the Covid pandemic. They all agreed that innovation was necessary to adapt with changing and uncertain times, and this comports with recent research from scholars who suggest that though Covid was challenging to survive, the restaurant industry remains successful due to innovation (Li, et al., 2021). My findings support that many implementations of innovation are creative and unique in their own instance.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many businesses had to temporarily close and unfortunately, many closed permanently. For those restaurants that are still open, the business owners understand that everyone was not so lucky. During the interviews it was mentioned 5 times, that they have witnessed other local business closures. In a state of panic and uncertainty, many business owners found themselves searching for strategies and solutions to survive and while some businesses were successful, others were not. In some cases, many owners hit an all-time low and were left not knowing what to do or how to move forward while creativity for many others was at an all-time high.

While it is common for restaurant owners to take time and contemplate on new ideas and strategies that could take their business to the next level, sometimes they do not have as much time to think out their next moves. Throughout the interviews, I noticed that many of the responses I got from participants required making quicker decisions to implement innovation without much time to ponder on these decisions especially during the pandemic. There were six mentions about government mandates and their effects. In all interviews, participants stated that it was an emergency to make drastic changes right away as the changes in many cases went into effect immediately. Here are a few examples of how participants used innovation during the government mandated shutdown.

In the case of participant 101, they would typically think through things and take time to plan before implementing something new to the business but as the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was underway it forced a much more instinctive method of implementing innovation right away. They had to think fast and, in a hurry,

and do whatever it took to save their business from failing. New government mandates allowed their business to now serve outdoors but because they did not have an outdoor eating area, they had to quickly think of how to expand their business to meet the outdoor service criteria. They creatively remodeled what was an existing parking lot into an outdoor patio. Participant 101 stated, “My father-in-law and I rented a tent, then we went to about eleven Home Depot locations trying to get enough tables and chairs. Then we put down some carpets, flowers, and industrial heating so that even when it is zero degrees outside, you can sit out there comfortably.” Participant 101 liked the idea and the benefits that the new outdoor patio brings so much they have decided to keep it permanently. They noted that it has positively boosted their business even during these tough times, so this innovation was quite beneficial to them.

Participant 303 rarely felt the need to make any changes during normal times and they could go about 5 years before finding the need to do so. Yet, they were forced to abruptly change a few things during the pandemic by moving most of their sit-in customers to carry out customers. Participant 303 stated, “I am slow to change things. I investigate things to see if I see something that is worth changing. When we had to close, people already knew what was happening so most of our sit-in customers became carry-out customers.” Much of this change for them was already in alignment with how the larger portion of their food sales were being made previously so it was an easy transition.

As a lot of other restaurants closed, participant 505 were still open and they got busier due to the other local closures. People still wanted to purchase food for takeout, so they took their business to open restaurants. One advantage that this restaurant had is they

were open 24 hours a day, and 7 days a week. Participant 505 needed to hire new staff amid the pandemic to compensate for their creative and innovative strategies leading to customer gain and sustainability. Participant 505 stated, “Call in orders increased heavily so we were able to hire help to deal with the increase and we found ways to organize our ordering systems to keep better track of them.”

Some participants find it important to keep up with the industry trends. To remain innovative, they often seek restaurant conferences or any other opportunities that displays the new innovative technology to the industry and visit the facilities of other local competitors. Participant 606 stated, “They have a lot of stuff there, whether it's food, supplies, technology or whatever. It's good to keep up with what's going on and talking to other colleagues that are in the business.” This interview helped me to gain clarity on just how creative many of the surviving business owners had to become to survive thus far. Though we are still in the pandemic, these strategies are not only have been used previously but currently and they look forward to continuing to use them to aid them to success in their businesses. There were five mentions of which participants expressed the fear of not knowing what will happen next and how long will this tough time last. Yet, all these participants found some form of creativity to continue standing till this day.

Theme 2: Business Process Review and Revisions

The second theme I found was the business process review and revisions. Implementing new business processes often requires the review of old ones first. Richard Cantillon believed that entrepreneurial efforts would initiate successes and failures in business. The business process review and revisions are a key element to entrepreneurial

efforts as some processes are success and some are failures. This theme aligns with Cantillon's (1755) concept as all the participants in this study agreed that though some processes work well, the need does sometimes arise for a review and revision of those processes that do not or even those that could be improved to encourage a better workflow for the business. All these participants agreed that fresh ideas are welcome if it will enhance the business productivity.

Some processes may work well for a long time contributing to a comfortable and stable business environment, but when businesses are faced with issues that arise, owners must identify problems and create solutions to prevent it from reoccurring. Therefore, many restaurant management leaders constantly review their businesses processes to aid in the prevention of any potential mishaps within their business. Four of the interview participants mentioned the importance of implementing time to review current processes and revise business processes that no longer works for them. These participants believe that business processes are key to daily operations of a successful business. For example, participants, 101, 202, 404, 505 spoke on the importance of their daily processes and how it helps with the flow of business. They all affirmed that these processes are what links the final product or service to the client. These participants agree that making changes in their businesses are sometimes difficult because they are uncertain if it will be successful or not, which aligns with researchers who attested that improvement approaches are challenging to implement and adapt to, (Schmitt & Hörner, 2021). However, Wojan et al. (2018) supports that by overcoming these challenges the participants could survive by strategically modifying their business processes and achieve sustainability.

Strategizing the best practices and procedures is something that business owners and managers constantly evaluate. Sometimes things that worked years ago do not work any longer. Sometimes, the economic changes induce change in processes and many changes initiated during the Covid pandemic are proof of this. These business owners all mentioned using creative innovation to implement new business processes to stay in alignment with government mandates and Cantillon's theory (1755), supports that entrepreneurs should be creative, and innovative while managing the business. In many cases, daily tasks carried out by the participant's employees are repetitious and help to ensure the same quality, but once new ideas come about and suggestions are given by the customers or employees carrying out the daily tasks, participant 101, 202, and 505 agreed that they must revise those processes. Here are a few examples of the processes that some participants mention during their interviews.

In most of these cases there is an order of sequence and the staff members have their parts rehearsed perfectly. A lot of eye contact and observation is used in the facilities from the moment the customer walks in to be serviced. Each act is strategically placed to provide the best customer experience. After interviewing participant 101 I learned that one of their successful strategies is making sure that every role within their restaurant knows and waits for their queue as it lets them know when to carry out their part in the customer service experience. Participant 101 stated, "First, after the customer come sit down, then the bus boys get their setups and water, next when the server sees the setups, she knows to go take the order, after that the order is taken to kitchen staff to be prepared." Each position is assigned their role in these practices which are strategically

put to create the best customer experience. Another thing I found common is that everyone is taught to take the orders a certain way so that the cooking staff knows exactly what to do and do not have to questions anything. This is quite beneficial as it avoids food delays and lengthy customer wait times. Consistency amongst the entire team encourages stable workflow in the kitchen because it proves that if everyone understands the order the same this would contribute to the best and quickest service possible. In some cases, reviewing during and after preparation is key to successful process strategies. Eliminating the chances for mistakes keep customers happy, in some cases when mistakes are made managers find themselves simply apologizing. While mistakes rarely require a refund, they still must be acknowledged somehow to ensure customer satisfaction. Should a mistake slip through the cracks, they have processes to make up for any errors made on their behalf. Participant 505 stated “They write a little note with the customer’s name and number and remember the next time to add what was missed the last time.” I found it interesting that in some cases the restaurants have a list with names and numbers of customers with pending complaints. While emphasizing the double-checking method participant 505 stated, “when the cook gets the ticket from the service machine, he reads it and prepares it the way it is written. It’s our job to read it again and make sure that it was made correctly before we let the delivery guy take it to them.”

Another process is planning the menu for the week. While some restaurants have a daily menu that does not change, some of the restaurants do. Due to the limitations of the Covid pandemic, it forced one of the restaurants to limit their menu options to sustain. Most participants had already experienced a negative impact on their customer flow as

many people had stopped going out to eat. So, to limit the food waste and enhance the workflow, they created weekly menus that offered limited choices. While reflecting on previous experiences, participant 202 stated, “The more choices people have the longer it takes them to figure out what they want. With limited staff during this pandemic, it helps to have the line move more quickly. By cutting back on the choices some, that helps.” In many cases, the option to phone in your order for pick-up was temporarily not available either so this process had to change and be reevaluated to see what would work for the current economic situation. Participant 202 also stated “we had to use as much manpower as we could on the front line, so we eliminated that option for call in orders as well”.

One example of this is when one of the newly implemented processes that many business owners found to be mandatory because of the pandemic was enhanced hygiene. Many restaurants required their staffs to get vaccinated before returning to work and many implemented a more consistent and monitored method to help control the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Wearing masks, taking temperatures, and hand washing are just a few common daily processes that were added to create a safe work environment for the staff and customers that visit. In addition to these newly implemented processes, participant 202 also mentioned during the interview that “There is a thermometer on the wall managers use to check temperatures before the employee gets started.” All these health and safety measures are key to adding to the comfort of the employees that work there and the customers that visit.

Theme 3: Implementing a Comprehensive Marketing Plan

Another theme I discovered to be common amongst all participants was implementing a comprehensive marketing plan. The restaurant industry is heavily saturated and to gain patronage and maintain customers the restaurant business owners must find ways to stand out from their competitors. All the managers did feel the need for customers to identify their presence, as it helps to retain them for future business and leads to sustainability, comports with the views of previous researchers (Ortiz-Villajos & Sotoca, 2018). Cantillon suggested that his theory would be driven by a list of motivating economic incentives. Hence, this theme aligns with Cantillon's (1755) entrepreneurship theory as marketing was amongst that list of economic incentives that could promote risk-taking entrepreneurs to impact the development of the economy. All my participating managers agree that marketing and advertisements were key to their business success and sustainability aligning with the theme and recent scholar suggestions that there is a significance between marketing and business sustainability (Hussain et al., 2020). All managers collectively believed that marketing and advertising helped to build their brands and maintains their images. This finding aligns with recent research as scholars suggest, when identifying the factors behind customers choice of restaurants, the managerial influence is not recognized as a contributor but instead most of the focus is credited to atmosphere, style, and the brands image (Lee, et al., 2022).

A review of my interviews found 11 references of marketing and advertising. Like the views of Hussain et al. (2020) marketing is a major strategy that most participants found necessary to sustain. Participant 606 stated, "marketing is their main

focus as it has helped them to successfully remain sustainable.” Marketing is essential to business because it is used to help sell products and services and, in most cases, these businesses would not exist without it, therefore supporting the suggestions of Hussain et al. (2020) that there is a significance between marketing and how it supports business success and sustainability.

Many of the participants noted that when used properly, marketing helped to effectively gain new clientele and is a strategy used to efficiently retain prior customers supporting the customer retention views of (Hwang & Park, 2018). This also aligns with views of the participants that marketing sets the stage for a company’s reputation and it aids in building business relationships with other businesses and customers. Participant 606 mentioned that “it is used to display new sales, specials, products, and services.” All the participants agreed that the use of marketing helps to keep a business relevant, and it generally drives a business on which direction they should go with their products, plans and processes. Participant 303 and 404 suggests that “word-of-mouth advertising has contributed to a lot of their businesses sustainability.” Many of these participants have admitted to using common advertising methods such as word of mouth advertising which is highly favored supported by research conducted by Hwang and Park (2018), flyer handouts, church program ads, radio advertising, and social media blasts on major platforms. All these methods have helped to enable owners to experience success however, each of my six participants for this research study all reported that word-of-mouth advertising is the most beneficial and powerful.

Participant 202 stated, “in the beginning of our business, we saved money with unpaid advertising because we marketed through local churches, schools, and record shops posting signs and menus. These methods worked for us as we put our advertising in places that we know customers in our local area visit and because it worked so well, we continue to do that at this time.”

During my interviews I also learned that focused marketing strategies are also beneficial in some cases. It helps the business owners to get straight to the exact target population that they are looking to reach. Also, while it is not common amongst the six participants that I interviewed, one of the participants even used mailing lists that they paid a small fee for to send out email blasts online. One example mentioned to me by participant 606 is they have paid 50-100 dollars to reach twenty-five or fifty thousand people about their business. Participant 606 stated, “I do use social media, so I can pinpoint certain target markets for ads”. This aligns with the views of Musonera and Weber (2018) in which they posited that business owners should use social media technology to grow their customer base. This is also beneficial and aligns with the fact that popular social media sites are the home of word-of-mouth advertisement. Marketing is necessary in the restaurant business because there is a lot of competition out there in this industry. According to participant 606, “you must be at the top of mind” aligning with the views of Ortiz-Villajos and Sotoca, (2018) as business presence is important. You must break through the crowd.” So, marketing is in fact the biggest focus for many successful businesses.

Theme 4: Location Choice for Customer Gain and Retention

All participants in this study credited the location they chose as being one of their successful methods of advertisement. They all suggested that location is key to the sustainability of a restaurant so choosing a location wisely can make or break a business. This is supported by Parsa et al. (2019) who argued that choosing a poor location could lead to business failures in less than a year. There were six mentions that location alone brought so many customers because they were right in the area and it helped that the face of their business was being seen on a constant basis therefore supporting the suggestions made by (Parsa et al., 2019). All managers believed that the more that business owners place their businesses within the local economy, they are in fact, simultaneously contributing to the economic development. I find that Cantillon's (1755) theory supports this theme as he suggested that entrepreneurs are key components in economic development regardless of geographic location. However, while all these managers were strategic in selecting a brick-and-mortar space, they all agree that busy areas with lots of driving and foot traffic are ideal to gain the attention of customers and their strategic location choices aided in the development of their local economy.

One participant had the benefit of a large grocery store chain move in across the street just a few years ago. Participant 303 stated, "Before them we did not have many large food stores just mom and pops stores. So now we've gained lots of customers because they see us right across the street." This confirms previous research that choosing a location strategically could influence restaurant survival (Salim, 2017).

Nearby residences with large number of tenants always drives in the opportunity for the old-fashioned method of word-of-mouth advertising. Participant 303 is stationed in an area that used to service a large housing project. However, when they were demolished, those who once lived in the area still managed to spread the word to others in their newly relocated areas. Participant 404 stated, “Location advertising works great for us because there is a local nursing home right across the street from this location that services a lot of elderly customers, so making sure that they have a nutritional meal helps to spread the word to new customers.” The cost of advertising can get astronomically expensive, so business owners mentioned having to remain budget conscious. Hence, having a great location is a one-time payment or (monthly if they are renting) that will go a long way as far as location advertising is concerned.

Theme 5: Implementing Technological Solutions for Delivery Operation Services

Technology is needed for operating businesses in many ways and all the managers agree that their businesses would not have had as much success without it. The views of Ahn and Seo, (2018) supports that implementing new technology is key to business growth which is necessary for sustainability. Research supports that these businesses are more competitive with current and newer technology (Kellershohn et al., 2018). Cantillon (1755) posited that efforts in entrepreneurship are what builds and grows the economy. All participants mentioned needing to find ways to keep their flow of revenue, especially most recently during tough times initiated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Technology apps are now being used as innovative processes to enhance a restaurants chance at survival by providing ways for better business operations and ways for customers to continue to

patronize these businesses. The findings in this theme are consistent with Cantillon's theoretical concept, mostly geared towards the individual entrepreneur and recognizes them as risk-takers. Though using third party technology could be risky, all the participants for this study were willing to be risk-takers and use one or more types of delivery apps or other operations technology with hopes that it will help their business maintain a consistent customer base and overall thrive.

Throughout my interviews, I discovered the more recently common uses for technology involve websites, social media pages and delivery service apps such as Uber Eats, Door Dash, Chow Now, and Grub Hub which is supported by the views of Seo and Park (2018) that technology has had a positive impact on brand and company awareness. Technological apps that host delivery services appeared to play a major role in the business survival of my participants, especially in lieu of the Covid pandemic. I believe that this theme is the most important of all the themes I discovered during the data analysis process as the discussion for the need to use delivery services were repeated many times. Collectively, there were 30 mentions of using third-party services throughout all my interviews. Participants did mention the needs for POS (point of sale) systems, inventory ordering systems and hosting systems as these systems aided in the daily workflow of these businesses. However, the third-party delivery service apps have multiple uses. For example, delivery services have allowed these participants the opportunity to expose themselves to new customers. They are easily marketed on the apps to the company's that they chose to join. Some participants advertise through the delivery apps while they are using them for that service. They advertise all the menu

items that they offer and when done properly these influences customers to want to shop with them. There are many benefits, challenges, and some disadvantages to using services like these as sometimes the use of these services interferes with the final product that the customer receives.

Benefits

Technology such as electronic tablets, phones and electronic kiosks are now commonly used and aids in the constant flow of the business process (Kellershohn et al., 2018). This supports the views and experience of participant 505 who stated, “Technology plays a good role in our business because it is non-stop, and it helps to fill in the times when in person business is slow. Participant 606 stated, “Technology, it plays a huge role. We use it for everything. Everything here is based on electronic technology. For example, we take orders on iPads instead of writing things down and then having to take all those steps back and forth, it saves us a lot of extra work.” This supports the beliefs of (Schiopu & Zloteanu, 2019) that innovative technology aids simplify the business.

Some participants admitted to using minimal technology when mandatory. As participant 202 stated, “We are very old school, so we do not use a lot of technology, but we do have a website with a menu posted.” This allows their business to have a face on the internet. However, online ordering nor delivery services are something that they chose to embark upon. As for other participants, one benefit in using these delivery services is that the participants save money by paying a delivery driver and all they must worry about is getting the food prepared and handing it off to the driver when they arrive. Participant 404 mentioned that “while delivery service apps is something new it truly helped them especially during the time of the pandemic. They were able to still service people through delivery.”

Many participants felt like the use of these services eliminated the hassle of customers having to leave their jobs or residences. For a small fee, customers can still have the food they desire and do not have to work so hard on getting it nor does the company have to work so hard on delivering it and this allows them more opportunities to make more money faster if they only focus on food preparation. Participant 505 mentioned a benefit being that because of this technology they now use, they had to hire new employees because they needed someone to help with the multitude of orders they were receiving from these services. During the pandemic, there has been an increase in usage of these services because it also makes people feel safer getting their food delivered instead of going out to grab it or sit in an establishment. Hence, once a trend has now become a necessity.

Challenges

As some participants began to use more than one servicer for deliveries, they had to adjust to the challenges of keeping everything in order. For example, participant 101 stated, “We had to go buy labels and other things to keep organized which was another adventure for us. However, technology especially in the Covid times helped us expand our business. Between online ordering or the apps via the Door dash, Grub hub companies. Our business from those ends both took off like crazy!” In some cases, managers feared that too much implementation of technology could erase the feel of their atmosphere. For example, many of the participants have an old school diner ambiance and they were careful to keep that feel even though they needed the benefits that modern

technology offers. Participant 101 stated, “Technological upgrades did not take away from our style, but it did enhance their business’ chance for survival.”

As beneficial as technology is, it does present a challenge to some old-fashioned diners being that they are forced to use it for a great part of the behind the scenes in their business. Besides getting used to using new tablets to take orders and POS systems, it is a big deal being that everything seems to be computerized to keep things in order.

Participant 303 stated that “You use computers for inventory, knowing all of your stock, how much you have left and what you need to buy, what you are selling and what the dollar value is on everything. This is the reason we must use them now.” Reflecting on other challenges, participant 505 stated, “It was challenging to keep up with 4 delivery service apps. So, we had to be innovative with the set-up of this machines to keep things in order.”

Disadvantages

One of the participants believed that the use of social media allows many negative customers the opportunity to destroy a business and that whether what they post is true or false, it has a way of being quite influential to the reputation a business has. Participant 202 mentioned that “we do not use social media because sometimes it can hurt your business more than help you.” Sometimes if a customer complaint is out of the restaurants control then they must contact the third-party service which could take longer in getting the situation resolved and unfortunately it reflects on the business negatively. Participant 505 stated, “Sometimes if there is no other way to satisfy the customer regardless of what happened, we just offer a refund”. Presentation means a lot to the face

of a business. If the food does not arrive hot enough or presentable or items missing, this often triggers complaints to the restaurant. Participant 505 believed that sometimes you do get good drivers and sometimes you do not. Then the participant reflected on a situation where one lady came back and said “Well, I ate the customer’s macaroni, so I thought I would come back and get me some more”. I was like, “you did what”?! The participant said, “Myself, after listening to some of these drivers I would not want to order. Because of the things that they would say.” Unfortunately, some restaurants have learned that these outside delivery services are not always trustworthy.

Applications to Professional Practice

Small business owners of non-franchise restaurants, owners of casual food service restaurants, and any other entrepreneurs in the restaurant industry could find this study beneficial as they could use this to enhance their knowledge on successful strategies used for increasing the sustainability beyond 5 years of operation. All participants in this study are valuable as they have made positive contributions, and their economic impact has been substantial. One way to determine sustainability is by identifying other sources of competition in the industry (Salim, 2017). I have found that a key strategy to success is that restaurant owners should identify their place within the industry’s competition to understand improvements needed to be made to remain competitive. Sustainable strategies could include knowing how and when to defend your business from other industry specific competitors. Five emerging themes were found in this study: Instinctive innovation, business process review and revisions, implementing a comprehensive marketing plan, location choice for customer gain and customer retention, and

implementing technological solutions for delivery operation services. Upon review of these themes, some small restaurant business owners may find it beneficial to implement these strategies as they have been found to be successful and they have promoted sustainability.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for social change include a positive impact on the local economy by increasing employment rates and providing local individuals and families with stable incomes for benefiting communities through increasing tax revenues. After reviewing the results of this study, I have identified several successful strategies that small restaurant business owners can use to improve their chances at a successful business operation. The goal is to eliminate possibilities for failure across the restaurant industry and increase chances for long term sustainability for jobs, and the business overall. Once achieved, restaurant owners can increase their needs to hire more employees to reduce the unemployment statistics and make great contributions to the economy both locally and nationwide. I plan to share the findings of my study with the participants who allowed me to interview them, teaching institutions, seminars, trainings, webinars other business owners and employees in the restaurant industry. I also welcome sharing my results with other researchers as well. This study will aid to the improvement of many businesses all around the world once published.

Recommendations for Action

My recommendations are derived from the themes that I discovered during my data analysis process. The participants in this study shared not only strategies used for

their own business's success, but strategies that will aid other businesses in also reaching similar success and sustainability beyond 5 years. By implementing some or all the strategies presented by the participants for this research study, they could gain sustainability, productivity, and experience increased revenue in their businesses. My first recommendation is that small restaurant business owners develop and implement a tool or process to review their individual businesses success and revise upon review any sustainable strategies previously implemented as needed on a semi-annual basis. My second recommendation is that small business owners consistently monitor their internal challenges as well as external challenges to best prepare for the unknowns that may affect their business performance. My third recommendation is to develop operational strategies and processes that involves choosing and utilizing technologies that could be key factors in increasing sustainability.

My final recommendation is to share the findings of this research with other small businesses associations such as SCORE or any professional organizations that posts valuable information for small businesses in the restaurant industry. In addition, I would seek any opportunities such as industry conferences or seminars, or restaurant industry trainings to present my research and the findings in efforts to aid any small businesses in the restaurant industry.

Recommendations for Further Research

According to Yin (2018) suggestions I identified the limitations or potential weaknesses for this study. The initial limitation of this study was I targeted and selected interview participants located solely in the inner city of Chicago. In this qualitative

multiple case study, the substantial information received from the participants was key in providing insight as to some strategies that has been used to provide sustainability beyond 5 years. Technological implementation and innovation are forever changing and key to many of the strategies I have discovered in this research study and because of this and the limitations experience when conducting this research, I recommend further research on this topic. I discussed the limitations of this research study in section 1 and as predicted, business owners did not provide any documentation or other supporting information regarding the financial gains or losses their company has experienced throughout their business ventures that could also be used to support the findings of this research. The participants were all interviewed in person and on site at their own business facilities therefore were in a place of comfort and familiarity. At times during the interviews, I did find the need to probe for additional information as the initial responses provided by the participants were not detailed enough to give substance to the questions that were being asked. Therefore, as mentioned in section 1, I implemented my probing technique to ask additional alternative interview questions to gain a more clear and concise answer that could be beneficial to this research study as suggested by Brown and Danaher, 2019. Some additional questions were used to aid the participants who may have temporarily been unable to thoroughly answer the questions due to slight memory loss.

My recommendations for further research would include expanding the sample size. In this research study I interviewed six participants, but I believe that exploring more participants would increase the chances of gaining more valuable information

towards this research. I recommend researching family owned and operated small restaurants as well as non-family owned and operated small restaurant businesses because I believe the family dynamics could produce some interesting results. I recommend geographical expansion to incorporate the interviews from multiple areas at a similar and larger radius. While the findings of this research revealed both internal and external strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that these participating restaurant owners could face, focusing on unforeseen internal and external challenges that businesses could encounter could be beneficial to this research. Using restaurants that prepares different styled cuisines would also be a great idea as this may affect the customer traffic flow in certain areas and could possibly advance the community of knowledge geared towards this research question. Some researchers may wish to conduct a study like this one in another industry such as the hotel and lodging industry or in the food distributorship industry about grocery stores as an example. In this very competitive industry, I believe that my recommendations for further research could be an essential asset to entrepreneurs, small restaurant business owners, management, and other leaders as to survival techniques that could be used to promote sustainability. My recommendations for further research could also be beneficial to students and future researchers as well.

Reflections

When I began this program, I knew my plan was to get a doctorate degree, start a consulting firm and help other small businesses to be successful for the longevity. However, I was not exactly certain how I would do that step by step. To meet the

requirements of this doctoral program at Walden University, doctoral students must be consistent and meticulous in their efforts to ensure that they completed all the requirements. As I reflect upon my DBA journey, I recall a mixture of every possible emotion one could encounter including happiness and excitement, anxiety, uncertainty, discouragement, and now I am finally looking forward to fulfillment. I was very excited as I anticipated that successful small restaurant business owners would be ready and willing to interview with me. When I found that some just were not willing to do so due to lack of interest or lack of time it became frustrating and very discouraging, but it also made me recognize to be mindful of those who did choose to do an interview with me. I kept in mind how valuable their time was when I did successfully get a few who did agree to interview with me.

After IRB approval, I was happy about advancing this far but I became anxious because at this time the world was in the middle of a pandemic and I was not certain whether Covid-19 would have a negative impact on how soon I could finish acquiring enough data to complete my analysis. I also became uncertain whether the participants would be okay with knowing that the information they share could be potentially implemented by their competitors. After the data collection phase was over, I reflected on the experiences I shared with each of my participants as they all were generous in contributing a wealth of knowledge to this research.

I reflected on why I wanted to interview small non-franchise restaurant businesses because I believed that they would face more challenges and must work harder than larger franchises due to their lack of industry connections, financial and marketing

resources. I reflected on why I chose this topic and whether it was the best choice and whether it produced the results I initially anticipated. I reflected on how tough this program became academically when I just assumed that I would breeze through it comfortably. Overall, I have grown throughout this process as it taught me a lot about myself personally and groomed me professionally. I now look to my future differently because of what I've endured throughout this process. Despite any challenges that I may have encountered, I found this experience to be overall rewarding.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some small business owners in the restaurant industry use to sustain business beyond 5 years. The target population consisted of six small restaurant business managers who have survived beyond 5 years and specialize in fast casual food service within busy areas in the inner city of Chicago.

Upon review of the strategies implemented by these successful restaurant owners, it was revealed that businesses can sustain successfully by remaining in alignment with the entrepreneurship theory as focused on throughout my conceptual framework. Similarly, as to entrepreneurs and their endeavors, business owners are risk takers and are responsible for the success and failure of their businesses. Collectively, my findings suggest that strategies used by small restaurant business owners include Instinctive Innovation, business process review and revisions, implementing a comprehensive marketing plan, location choice for customer gain and customer retention, and implementing technological solutions for delivery operation services. By using these

findings as the business foundation and following these strategies, small restaurant business owners could begin to witness a great amount of success which in turn, could lead their business to sustainability that lasts beyond 5 years.

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Appendix A: NIH Certificate of Completion



Appendix B: Interview Questions and Interview Protocol

1. What strategies have you as a small business owner in the restaurant industry used to sustain a successful business operation beyond the first 5 years of operation?
2. What are your methods used for identifying and implementing new strategies for your restaurant business?
3. What were the key challenges to implementing your strategies for sustainable business operations?
4. How, if at all, does technology play a role in your sustainability strategies?
5. Please provide any additional comments you believe would like to add to this research.

Interview Protocol

1. First, I will offer a proper self-introduction to the participant.
2. I will cover all details of the consent form and questions the participant may pose.
3. Prior to recording, I will ask permission to record the interviewing session.
4. I will confirm the okay to record session by getting the participant to agree on recording.
5. I will proceed to introduce participant with coded name.
6. I will begin the interviews with question 1 through 5.
7. I will probe with additional questions if needed.
8. I will proceed to member check with the participant at this time.

9. I will close out interview session and thank participant.
10. End of interview protocol

Appendix C: Letter of Introduction

Date: ()

Dear business owner or manager,

My name is Sahara Givens-Evans, and I am currently a student enrolled in the Walden University doctoral program. I am conducting a study on strategies for increasing the sustainability of small restaurant businesses. I humbly ask for your assistance in this matter by agreeing to a face-to-face interview lasting about 45 minutes long. I will ask you a few business questions and record your answers via an audio recording device. To protect the privacy of your organization, your information and the name of your business will not be shared with anyone and will remain confidential. I plan to share my findings with you and other small business owners that would find it interesting. Please note that qualified participants in this study will meet the following requirements:

- The restaurant participant in this study must be a legal adult over the age of 18.
- The restaurant business must reside in the city of Chicago, Illinois.
- The participating restaurant must be successfully operational beyond 5 years.

I appreciate your assistance as your input can make a difference for small businesses in the U.S. restaurant industry. Should you have questions regarding this or be interested in participating, please contact me via phone at 773-220-8310 or via email at sahara.evans@waldenu.edu. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sahara Givens-Evans

Walden University Doctoral Candidate