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Retail Distribution Within the New York City Organic Cacao Market

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Abstract

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MS Finance, Webster University, 2011

BS International Business, Bethune-Cookman University, 2008

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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Abstract

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies small physical commodities firm owners need to establish a distribution channel within the commodities market to enhance profits. The general business problem was that importing physical commodities from emerging markets was not profitable. The specific business problem was some small physical wholesale commodities firm managers lacked strategies to establish distribution channels for imported commodities. The information presented in this study is important to suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers of organic cacao products to identify strategies to enhance their distribution channels. Disruptive innovation and the theory of constraints grounded the conceptual framework to relate ideas presented in this study. The central research question guiding the study concerned strategies small physical wholesale commodities firm owners used to establish distribution channels within the commodities market. Participants included 6 small business owners who gave recorded responses during in-depth, face-to-face interviews. The 6 interview recordings were transcribed, then coded and interpreted. Data analysis revealed 6 themes, which included price point strategy, B2B relationships, differentiation, strategic locations, sufficient operating capital, and customer relationships. Enhancing profits in the distribution channels of small organic cacao companies requires a holistic approach in the New York City area. The social implications of this study may draw attention to organic cacao, which is a healthy alternative to confectionery chocolate. Strategies introduced to enhance profits may increase economic growth in the local communities in the New York Tri-State area.

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Dedication

To my twin daughters, Sophia and Arielle.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Background of the Problem

The cacao business industry is a billion dollar industry with an estimated value in the global market of $75 billion annually (Kazemi & Esmaeili, 2010). Organic cacao manufacturers process cacao, better known as *cocoa tree*, into various natural raw forms, including cacao nibs, cocoa powder, cocoa butter, and cocoa liquor (Delbourgo, 2011). The wholesale industry for cacao products is competitive, and several firms compete against one another (Barrientos, 2014). For firms, the aim is to optimize industrial production to ensure quality throughout the supply chain and process cacao products at a competitive cost (Alshekhil, Foo, Ching, & Chung, 2011). The success of the firm is dependent upon the unique environmental characteristics of the industry in which one competes (Pleshko & Heines, 2012). The economy has affected retailers in the chocolate industry, and the industry can no longer rely on natural growth (Trapalos, 2012). Companies have to find innovative ways to grow their market share. Local companies that lack extensive chocolate expertise must either copy or attempt to out-innovate foreign companies marketing chocolate for more than a century (Allen, 2011). The organic cacao market is a niche market with limited competitors (Krystallis, Vasallo, & Chryssohoidis, 2012).

As people become more health-conscious, organic foods are becoming more popular (Smed & Anderson, 2012). People consider organic cacao a *super food* with many health benefits such as antioxidants and potential cardio-protective, antibacterial, antiviral, anti-allergenic, and anti-carcinogenic properties (Ackar et al., 2013). These product benefits make natural organic cacao attractive to an increasingly growing health-conscience public (United States Department of Agriculture, 2014). Nastase, Stoian, and Ion (2011) posited global consumer demand for organic production has created lucrative markets for small organic cacao businesses and expanded the right to choose healthy food. Managers of small organic cacao businesses are attracted to this niche market because there is a fair chance to access an economically attractive market while also improving household food security (Nastase et al., 2011). Concerns about the safety and nutrition of food produced by the conventional, industrial, agricultural system have led to uncertainty (Follett, 2009). The natural organic cacao industry is sustainable, nutritious, and environmentally friendly (Crozier et al., 2011).

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) differ from multinational corporations because SMEs typically do not have a formal process for developing new products and services (Colombo, Laursen, Magnussom, & Rossi-Lamastra, 2012). The SMEs must innovate differently to obtain market share in the physical commodities industry (Edwards, 2012). Vrgovic, Vidicki, Glassman, and Walton (2012) posited that SMEs should find other partners and methods to initiate innovation. Innovation strategies for SMEs have to incorporate the lack of brand recognition, financial and operational resources, technological and logistical support, and efficiencies in the supply chain (Ellinger et al., 2011). Market (2012) illustrated the importance of identifying factors such as the increased global competition, the decreased product lifecycles, and the rapidly changing consumer demand as factors influencing innovation.

Problem Statement

Supply chain management affects the way organizations operate, and uncertainty with supply chains challenges how managers compete (Simangunsong, Hendry, & Stevenson, 2012). Approximately 85% of companies had a supply chain disruption during the previous 12 months, which affected products going through the distribution channel (Wildgoose, Brennan, & Thompson, 2012). The general business problem was that importing physical commodities from emerging markets is not profitable. The specific business problem was that some small physical wholesale commodities firm managers lack strategies to establish distribution channels for imported commodities.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small physical commodities firm owners needed to establish a distribution channel within the commodities market to enhance profits. The focus of the study was on wholesale firms distributing organic cacao products to retail and manufacturing companies of cacao products in the New York City area. In particular, the objective was to interview individuals who were responsible for buying, branding, and distributing organic cacao products to end consumers.

I explored a population of six small establishments with a sample of six owners who retailed cacao products. The criterion for established firm owners was three owners with 5 years or more experience, and the criterion for new entrants was three owners with less than 5 years of experience. The primary data collection method was in-depth face-to-face interviews. The objective was to triangulate data through supporting documentation, records, and policies that support formal strategies to establish a distribution channel within the New York City commodities market to enhance profits. I selected small companies because of their limited financial, marketing, and operational resources. Small businesses can create social change in New York City by increasing job growth, generating tax revenues, and increasing the positive perception of the community.

Nature of the Study

Harrison (2013) stated quantitative methods tend to focus on a few variables assessed as precisely and accurately as possible, and a mixed method approach combines the advantages of each method and contributes to mitigate the weaknesses of the methods involved. Vaitkevicius and Kazokiene (2013) stated quantitative research identified occurrence of the phenomenon and distribution of its typological features in the population. Quantitative research develops explanatory universal laws in social behaviors by statistically measuring static reality, and qualitative research explores a socially constructed dynamic reality through a framework, which is flexible, descriptive, holistic, and context sensitive (Yilmaz, 2013). Fetters, Curry, and Creswell (2013) posited mixed methods research studies draw upon the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches and provide an innovative approach for addressing contemporary issues. I selected a qualitative approach over quantitative because a qualitative approach realizes more depth than quantitative methods (Lund, 2012). Investigators typically use five commonly recognized designs for qualitative inquiry: narrative, grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, and case study (Erickson, 2012).

I did not select a narrative study because the purpose of the study was not examining the life experience of a single individual (Safari & Thilenius, 2013). The plan was not to select a phenomenology approach because the objective was not to explore the lived experiences of small business managers who successfully developed and implemented strategies for supply chain management. Grounded theory is applicable for researchers who are developing or generating theory and was not suitable for the current study. The goal was not to use an ethnography study because the purpose of the study was not examining or exploring the behavior of a culture or sharing group (Thomas, 2012).

The direction was to use a collective case study because the focus was on one issue, and in this type of study the researcher selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue (Yin, 2014). I selected a qualitative approach because this approach would provided a descriptive, detailed, understanding into establishing distribution channels for cacao. Prowse and Camfield (2013) stated qualitative researchers expand on why and how questions, capture processes, and pay significant attention to why certain individuals benefit from an intervention, and others do not. A multiple case study approach provides an in-depth investigation of single or multiple participants, and it assists with setting the groundwork for future research (Stewart, 2012). For this study, I investigated six establishments to explore distribution channels within the organic cacao market.

Tight (2010) stated the multiple case study approach is a form of social research and research strategy qualifying as holistic. A multiple case study approach is beneficial in this study because multiple case studies provided an opportunity for innovation and is a way to source ideas about behavior in the organic cacao industry (Tight, 2010). Stewart (2012) claimed the challenge in multiple case studies is to identify cause-effect conclusions, and there may be biases in data collection and interpretation.

Research Question

The following central research question guided the study: What strategies do small physical wholesale commodities firm owners use to establish distribution channels within the commodities market?

Interview Questions

1. What role do you have in this organization?
2. What type of customers does your business service?
3. What type of organic cacao products do you provide?
4. What are the challenges of working with large distributors?
5. What has been your experience working with small suppliers that distribute organic cacao products?
6. How do you determine to purchase organic cacao from new manufacturers?
7. What negative experiences, if any, have you encountered with small organic cacao distributors?
8. What factors have led to negative experiences with small organic cacao distributors?
9. What obstacles have you found entering the New York City market?
10. What other information can you provide that might provide a better understanding of the challenges faced in this industry?

Conceptual Framework

The intent for this study was to use disruptive innovation theory and theory of constraints to ground the research conducted. Petrick and Martinelli (2012) stated disruptive innovation demands companies possess a deep understanding of the nonobvious problems requiring further inquiry in the future. The organic cacao market is a niche market with opportunities for smaller, less established companies to penetrate this industry (Crozier et al., 2012). These SMEs should possess a deep understanding of the problems not apparent in the supply chain, distribution channels, and establishing relationships with B2B clients (Xia, Xiao, & Zhang, 2013). Disruptive innovation is a means of broadening and developing new markets and providing new functionality, which may disrupt existing market linkages (Yu & Chieh Chang, 2010). SMEs in the organic cacao market have to create a competitive advantage against confectionery-chocolate companies with brand recognition such as Cadbury, Hershey, and Nestle (Allen, 2011). Govindarajan, Kopalle, and Danneels (2011) posited disruptive innovation initially underperforms on the attributes that are important to mainstream customers and introduces a new attribute that is important to an emerging market segment; such innovations do not attract the mainstream segment. The organic cacao industry is an emerging market, as consumers become more health conscious and want healthier food choices in their diets (VonEssen & Englander, 2013). Disruptive innovation may not represent large, high-margin opportunities for established companies and the decision-making structure can rule out innovative ideas (Christensen, 1997). New entrants have the capability to force the pace of innovation because established companies typically are risk adverse and view these ideas as risky (Karakay & Yannopoulos, 2011).

The theory of constraints is a management tool, and the attention of management should focus on the few constraints that prevent the organization achieving its goals (Spector, 2011). The goal of the theory of constraints is to maximize performance of a system (Naor, Bernardes, & Comam, 2013). Mears, de la Banda, Wallace, and Demoen (2014) stated the theory of constraints' primary assumption is at least one constraint in each system limits the ability of achieving higher levels of performance relative to its goals. Small businesses in the organic cacao market have to identify the constraints affecting profits and establishing distribution channels (Olgethorpe & Heron, 2013). A constraint-oriented perception on management is another strategy toward gaining higher profits (Robbins, 2011).

Operational Definitions

Business-to-business (B2B) relationships: B2B relationships are business activities conducted between a wholesaler and a retailer (Parry, Rowly, Jones, & Kupiec-Teahan, 2012).

Cacao industry: The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) classified the cacao industry as sector 311351 chocolate and confectionery manufacturing cacao beans, or sector 311352 confectionery manufacturing cacao beans (North American Industry Classification, 2014).

Cacao wholesalers: These wholesalers sell cacao products in large quantities, with the goal to resell, or retail, in other businesses (Bosona, Nordmark, Gebresenbet, & Ljungberg, 2013).

Disruptive innovation: Disruptive innovation is defined as technologies changing the order of existing industries, and creating new markets (Jang, 2013).

Distribution channel: A distribution channel is a route to market for a supplier; when applied correctly refers to any specific route to market, which can include direct channels such as sales force, catalog, direct mail and the Internet (Xia et al., 2013).

Innovation management: This type of management is the discipline of managing processes related to innovation as an economic, social, and technological phenomenon (Shafique, 2013).

New York City: New York City has five boroughs, which include Brooklyn, Manhattan, Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island (Kantor, 2010).

Organic cacao: Organic cacao is a labeling term that indicates the food or other agricultural product produced through approved methods that integrate cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity (Unites States Department of Agriculture, 2014).

Private label: A private label is a retailer’s name used on a product as a brand; however, manufactured by another company (Lamey, Deleersnyder, Steenkamp, & Dekimpe, 2012).

Small organic cacao business: A small organic cacao business is a business possessing 500 or fewer employees (Small Business Administration, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

I made three assumptions throughout the study. First, I assumed the selected participants possessed the knowledge to provide information on the topic. The second assumption was participants retailed a variety of organic cacao brands products and had purchased organic cacao products from small and large organizations. The plan was to verify that participants purchased organic cacao products from small and large organizations. The third assumption was that all participants would answer honestly.

Limitations

A limitation of this study included participants who were not purchasing organic cacao products on a national or international level. The participants were primarily small retailers in the local New York City area with fewer than 10 locations. The objective was to focus on small B2B transactions in the organic cacao market. The findings of this study are not transferable to companies in various industries and represent the target population only. The findings of this study might be applicable to other small cacao businesses in the New York City area because the objective was to observe a paradigm for small cacao businesses in the New York City area. In addition, the short time limit for this study was a limitation.

Delimitations

A delimitation was that only the local area of New York City was considered. The data only represented New York City. Expanding the sample beyond the local area of New York City was beyond the purpose and scope of the study.

Significance of the Study

This study may fill gaps in understanding how SMEs compete against larger organizations in the physical commodities market. Specifically, I explored perceptions of small to medium size organizations establishing distribution channels and competing against large corporations in the organic cacao market. Limited research was available for small firms establishing distribution channels in the organic cacao market.

Implications for Social Change

Crozier et al. (2011) posited organic cacao products have many health benefits and food connoisseurs consider cacao a super food. Healthy food and organic products have been growing in popularity, especially because there have been multiple initiatives combating obesity in the United States (Teck-Chai, Mei-Wan, Hoi-Piew, & Choon-Ling, 2013). Ackar et al. (2013) stated Americans are becoming more health conscious and care about how farmers grow and process their food. The popularity of fair trade certified products has increased, and this simultaneously assists farmers in developing nations to maintain sustainable farms and fair labor practices (VonEssen & Englander, 2013). The research in this study may draw attention to organic cacao, health benefits, as well as prove to be a healthy alternative to confectionery chocolate.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore why small physical wholesale commodities firms may lack formal strategies to establish a distribution channel within the New York City commodities market to enhance profits. In addition, physical commodities firms then have to create a distribution channel, in the home country, in a competitive market in which margins are low, and the efficiency of supply chains typically dictates if a firm realized a competitive advantage.

The following literature review consists of contemporary peer-reviewed research for studies concerning theory. The literature review includes peer-reviewed studies that address limitations, weaknesses, and potential for future research in each category. Other sources include statistical reports and scholarly books. The Walden library databases were the primary resource to obtain the sources and search routines included articles that were full-text, scholarly, and peer reviewed. Keywords in the search criteria included B2B, *cacao industry, cacao wholesaler, disruptive innovation, distribution channels, innovation management, organic cacao, private label, small organic cacao business, and retail management, theory of constraints,* and *disruptive innovation theory*. The emphasis was on peer-reviewed studies published no more than 5 years prior to the current study.

Disruptive Innovation

The goal was to use theory of constraints and disruptive innovation theory as a basis for research exploration. Disruptive innovation is a powerful means of broadening and developing new markets and providing new functionality, which may disrupt existing market linkages (Yu & Chang Chieh, 2010). The organic cacao market is a niche market that has opportunities for small, less than established companies to penetrate this industry. Bright and Coll (2012) defined disruptive innovation as an innovation that is a catalyst to create new market and value network. In addition, the disruptive innovation concept is a paradigm shift that affects the way managers approach a process. Kohlbacher and Hang (2011) found disruptive innovation either introduces an affordable product or service that increases access and ability by becoming easier for customers who historically lacked the resources, or help consumers be more efficient in their current behavior pattern. In addition, the shift of demographics presents disruptive innovation opportunities for managers.

Srivastava and Gnyawali (2011) investigated through their research the relationship with managers using knowledge-based resources in a dynamic environment and disruptive innovation. Synergies with partners that have abundant resources enable managers' access to knowledge, which managers combine with internal knowledge to pursue disruptive innovation opportunities (Classen, Van Gils, Bammens, & Caree, 2012). Managers are able to enhance innovation performance by possessing the ability to convert knowledge resources and produce new knowledge, which allows managers to use knowledge as a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Kaya & Patton, 2011). Learning organizations are an intricate component in disruptive innovation opportunities (Sandstrom, Berglund, & Magnusson, 2014). Companies face risks associated with pursuing disruptive innovation opportunities such as insufficient internal resources and capabilities of maintaining these opportunities (Kaya & Patton, 2011).

To implement disruptive innovation, a firm must identify and address implications for managerial processes, for personnel recruitment, for setting leaders' expectations, and for developing appropriate performance metrics for those responsible for market creation (O'Connor & Rice, 2013). Market creation of disruptive innovation opportunities requires extensive time and resources, which may not be feasible for small companies (Kuswantoro, Rosli, Abdul, & Ghorbani, 2012). Large companies encounter difficulties with disruptive innovation opportunities because of their size, although small businesses have characteristics that are more agile and are able to change their processes quickest (O’Connor & Rice, 2013). Koen, Bertels, and Elsum (2011) found established firms succeed in supporting innovation and experience failure in business model innovation in which a substantial risk exists to create new value networks to reach nonconsumers. Established companies encounter challenges with developing a new business model and changing their culture to implement disruptive innovation opportunities (Lindgreen, 2012).

The probability of creating new growth business is 10 times higher if managers pursue a disruptive theory, and disruptive innovation is attractive to customers but unattractive to established companies (Robles, 2015). Small organic cacao businesses are capable of acquiring customers unattractive to established cacao companies because established cacao companies sell conventional confectionery chocolate that does not appeal to health-conscious consumers (Crozier et al., 2012). Euchner (2012) found that innovation results from combining existing skills, which small organic cacao businesses are adopting by providing healthy chocolate products.

Theory of Constraints

Naor et al. (2013) posited the theory of constraint (TOC) is an example of an operations management approach successfully used in practice; however, it is not accepted as a scientific body of knowledge. TOC derived from managers attempting to solve ill-structured real life problems (Wang et al., 2014). The TOC focuses on defining the system’s goal, determining global performance measures, identifying system constraints, exploiting the system’s constraint, subordinating the system to the constraint, elevating constraints, and not allowing inertia to become the system’s constraint (Spector, 2011).

TOC is a philosophy of focused continuous improvement based on systems thinking and system principles, and a logical sequence of steps to take advantage of the constraint principle (Pretorius, 2014). This theory requires a company’s management to seek the next constraint continuously once a constraint has broken, even though the next constraint may not be as restricted as the first constraint. The focus of this theory is to maximize the system's performance (Gupta & Andersen, 2012). TOC antecedents derived from enterprise resource planning, which is a software package that comes from dynamic analysis of proprietary algorithms, a system of rules, steps, and metrics transacted to accomplish specific goals (Olgethorpe & Heron, 2013).

Three global measures identified for the TOC for evaluating organizational performance toward the goal of the company are throughput, inventory, and operating expense (Gupta & Andersen, 2012). These three measures are company-level operational measures of performance and may be used by the company’s management to achieve continuous improvement (Kaya & Patton, 2011). Performance measures are tools used within a performance managing system by managers to help companies reach their goals (Kuswantoro et al., 2012). Dalci and Kosan (2012) posited the TOC was first introduced by Goldratt and Cox and found the premise is that a minuscule number of constraints prevent any organization from achieving its goals. Any organization can improve its performance and move toward its goals by improving the weakest operating activity

(Minai & Lucky, 2011). When an organization removes the constraint, and the organization moves to a higher level of production or service, a new constraint appears, and the cycle of managing the system with respect to the new constraint resumes (Robbins, 2011).

Distributions Channels

Distribution channels are an intricate component of small physical commodity-based firms (Eun Ju, Rhee, & Sang-Un, 2013). Firms use innovative distribution strategies to increase revenue streams and move customers away from the high-cost channels (Peterkova & Gruberova, 2012). Kuswantoro et al. (2012) found innovation in the distribution channel functions might improve performance for SMEs. Difficulty arises for small firms to establish an efficient distribution channel in the organic cacao market (Quade, Birkenkrahe, & Habermann, 2012). Innovation becomes a fundamental driver to increase the competitiveness of firms and strengthens firm performance (Shafique, 2013).

Conflict may damage B2B relationships and affect the growth of small firms (Ganesan, Brown, Mariadoss, & Ho, 2010). Relationship marketing is affecting productive relationships between B2B operations (Lehtinen, 2011). Understanding damaged relationships is critical in building and sustaining strong distribution channels (Samaha, Palmatier, & Dant, 2011). Using contracts to manage channel relationships are both positive and negative (Parry et al., 2012). B2B exchanges typically perform poorly because organizations do not effectively cooperate or adapt, which prevents firms from learning about, combining, using, and adapting their resources in a way that creates value (Vega-Vazques, Revilla-Camacho, & Cossio-Silva, 2013).

Strategic choices regarding distribution channel shape a firm's general direction (Goering, 2010). Brettel, Engelen, Muller, and Schilike (2011) concluded that distribution channel choices made by small companies are the catalyst for the varying discrepancies displayed in new entrepreneurial ventures. The distribution channel system and transaction cost, product, strategy, and competition related variables typically perform better (Golici & Sebastiao, 2011). Small companies used performance metrics to ascertain how decisions regarding distribution channels affected small firms' performance (Choi, Li, & Xu, 2013). Cooper, Tadikamalla, and Shang (2012) stated every organization and management system require measures and standards to drive performance and achieve continuous improvement.

B2B transactions typically are more complex and require long sales cycles than business-to-customer relationships (Schwepler & Good, 2011). Muylle, Dawar, and Rangarajan (2012) posited businesses might serve smaller volumes of customers with specialized knowledge and complex needs, leading managers to focus on personal selling before brand building. Choi et al. (2013) illustrated that B2B networks are complex and have multiple tiers of indirect channel participants with products bought and sold by a variety of industrial, retail, institutional, commercial, wholesale, or retail organizations. Participants engage in B2B transactions prior to the end user receiving the product (Shin, 2012). B2B networks are critical to value networks to small businesses in the organic cacao industry (Vega-Vazques et al., 2013).

A holistic approach to business relationship management can create value for a firm over time (Wang, 2013). Chinomona (2013) stated, from a small and medium enterprise perspective, dimensions of relationship (cooperation, relationship commitment, relationship satisfaction, and trust) influence power in relationships, and that legitimate power has the most significant effect on distribution relationships. B2B channel power effects on relationship outcomes and relationship quality are substantial (Parry et al., 2012). Chinomona found that legitimate power has the most significant effect on cooperation than relationship satisfaction, trust, and relationship commitment respectively.

Decentralized distribution systems have no centralization in the implementation, which differs from centralized systems with one controller (Eun Ju et al., 2013). The dispersion of functions and powers in a distribution channel can create a strategic advantage for firms in the organic cacao industry (Iyambo & Otubanjo, 2013). Goering (2010) examined a decentralized distribution channel approach and concluded that a decentralized profit-maximizing producer chose a higher durability than cost minimizing when constrained. In a decentralized distribution channel, the manufacturers encounter commitment issues with both current buyers and downstream retailers (Samaha et al., 2011).

Ethical behavior and moral judgment by a company’s personnel factor into the performance and reputation of the company (Schwepker, 2013). B2B relationships rely on trust and reputation (Chatterjee, 2013). Schwepker and Good (2011) found sellers with higher moral judgment are associated with behaviors reflective of desired long-term customer relationships. Profitability, growth, innovation, firm survival/continuity, community service, personal satisfaction, satisfied stakeholders, good balance between work and private life, public recognition, and utility are primary components to building success in the organic cacao market (Gorgievski, Ascalon, & Stepan, 2011). Ganesan et al. (2010) contended buyer perception of supplier conformance to normative standards leads to relationship strains accounting for the decision to switch suppliers.

Business model innovation leadership (BMIL) might assist small companies in their strategic management (Classen et al., 2012). Business models have to be tailor-made for the specific organization to address the complex challenges that the company faces in the market (Chatterjee, 2013). Lindgren (2012) theorized BMIL strategies result in a central strategic position in the market; however, small and medium-size enterprises are at a disadvantage to carry out the complexities of these strategies. Small businesses react to a specific customer, and typically lack the resources to react to the entire market (Srivastava & Gnyawali, 2011). Small business managers manage and strategically implement business model innovation (Booyens, 2011).

Customers can have an intricate role in the performance of a distribution channel system (Dalci & Kosan, 2012). Businesses have insight and knowledge of the products purchased, and can provide solutions to make the distribution system efficient (Kachersky & Kim, 2011). Noordhoff, Kyriakopoulous, Moorman, Pauwels, and Dellaert (2011) stated reducing costs and increasing the effectiveness of innovation efforts could cause B2B firms to engage in joint innovation activities with customers. The results of a joint innovation strategy with customers depend on the customer's innovation, knowledge and the relational safeguards that suppliers implement to manage the relationship (Kaya & Patton, 2011).

Small businesses benefit from developing networks and gain innovative strategies through these networks (Koen et al., 2011). Colombo, Laursen, Magnusson, and Rossi-Lamastra (2012) found small firms' use of networks to innovation performance is a complex issue. Small firms design their external networking activities and organizational decisions in the domain affect small business innovation performance. Gronum, Verreynne, and Kastelle (2012) found that heterogeneous ties improve innovation in small businesses.

Pricing

Determining prices not too high for customers are challenging for small businesses considering their supply chain and operation expenses (Smed & Andersen, 2012). Pricing points can determine if a relationship is established or not (Williamson, 2012). Small businesses have to price their goods or services with balance, so their product is not overpriced or underpriced (van Rompay, de Vries, Bontekoe, & Tanja-Dijkstra, 2012). Berck, Leibtag, Solis, and Villas-Boas (2009) determined the effect of high prices on food products depends on the pass-through of these raw commodity prices to the prices of foods purchased and consumed by consumers. Stulz (2013) found corporations rely on on pass-through, operational hedging, and foreign currency debt to manage financial risk. Small businesses with the resources can hedge as a form of price protection against decreasing or increasing prices, depending on what party is involved in the transaction (Ribeiro & Oliveira, 2011).

Forecasting prices is a valuable tool for firms in the organic cacao market. Price forecasting can assist with inventory management (Luan & Sudhir, 2011). West (2012) found residual and contract liquidity testing provides efficient estimates of contract prices beyond the futures strip. Accurate price forecasting for agricultural commodities have significant decision-making implications for suppliers (Berk, Leibtag, Solis, & Villas-Boas, 2009). Forecasting future prices may decrease operating and inventory cost for small firms in the organic cacao market (Ribeiro & Oliveira, 2011). Borousan, Sharifian, Hajiabolhassani, and Hazrati (2011) found the use of a knowledge management-based system increased forecast accuracy.

Wholesale pricing typically is lower and more flexible than retail pricing (Ellickson, Misra, & Nair, 2012). Williamson (2012) posited commodity prices pass through to wholesale prices at a higher rate (4-41%) than wholesale prices pass through to retail prices (2-18%), and commodity prices may take 4 to 27 months to pass through to retail prices at rates ranging from 1.5% to 7%. A lag between wholesale prices and retail prices, and small businesses have to account for this factor periodically through the year (West, 2012).

Distributing organic cacao products through supermarket platforms is effective if distributors establish relationships with buyers in that network (Bosona et al., 2013). Packaging and pricing typically are primary components in establishing relationships with supermarket purchasing managers (Chinomona, 2013). Ellickson et al. (2012) found conventional supermarket chains faced intense competition from the rise of new store formats and innovative entrants. These new entrants caused traditional retailers to switch price strategies (Koen et al., 2011). New organic-centric and natural food establishments have been increasingly entering the grocery market; however, pricing for these establishments are typically reported higher than conventional supermarkets (Cuellar & Brunomonti, 2014). These new establishments focus on the quality of the organic and natural products, rather than low prices (Marasteanu et al., 2014).

In B2B, the price correlates with the quantity and generally the higher the quantity, the lower the price point compared to the retail price (Noordhoff, Kyriakopoulous, Moorman, Pauwels, & Dellaert, 2011). Gu and Yang (2010) found producers of consumer packaged goods often offer several package sizes of the same product and charge a lower unit price for a larger size. This theory, referred to as the quantity discount effect, has a significant effect on consumer buying behavior (Safari & Thilenius, 2013). Regarding supply analysis, manufacturers do not consider quantity-discount effects when setting prices and manufacturers can design effective nonlinear pricing strategies and obtain more profits (Simangunsong, Hendry, & Stevenson, 2012).

Pricing strategies affect the profit and growth of firms in the organic cacao industry (Xia et al., 2013). Kachersky and Kim (2011) examined the circumstances under which consumers' beliefs about the persuasive intent of alternative pricing formats influence their preferences for offers using those formats. The perception of a firm's motives affects pricing (Ellinger et al., 2011). Tan and Sousa (2011) determined pricing decisions are important to the success of the firm because pricing decisions have a direct effect on revenue. Margins are typically low in the organic cacao market, and small firms have to be especially aware of how prices affect their profit margin (Marasteanu et al., 2014). Firms often use promotion and dynamic adjustment of price to manage customers, as well as proper production/inventory plans to satisfy the customers to maximize profit in the firm (Zhang, 2012).

Supply Chain Management

Supply chain management is an important component to the success of companies of various sizes (Nieto & Santamaria, 2010). An efficient supply chain can create a competitive advantage for small firms in the organic cacao industry (Arzu, Akyuz, & Erman-Erkan, 2010). Xu (2011) defined a supply chain as a set of activities that span enterprise functions from the ordering and receipt of raw materials, manufacturing of products, to the distribution and delivery to customers. Supply chain management is a set of flow synchronized activities for integrating suppliers, manufacturers, transporters, and customers efficiently so that the right product or service is delivered in the right quantities, at the right destination, at the agreed upon time (Colombo, Laursen, Magnussom, & Rossi-Lamastra, 2012).

Strategic management is necessary for the coordination of supply chains as organizations, manufacturers, and logistics evolve (Goering, 2010). Akyuz and Erkan (2010) posited technological developments in information systems and technologies have the potential to facilitate the coordination among different functions, allowing the virtual integration of the entire supply chain. Supply chain efficiency is a primary component of the organic cacao market (Nastase et al., 2011). Establishing a distribution channel in the organic cacao industry is highly competitive (Masrasteanu, Jaenicke, & Dimitri, 2014). Janvier-James (2012) stated the distribution competitiveness in a physical exchange with the rest of the world is important for economic growth and development. The author made a distinction between a performance measurement and an efficiency measurement (Minai & Lucky, 2011). Distributors use efficiency and performance measurement simultaneously to optimize results (Rong & Grunow, 2010).

Technological advances and globalization are factors that have added to the complexity of the supply chain strategy and integration (Srivastava & Gnyawali, 2011). Implementing activities internally and externally is a challenge for small companies to manage (Lowik, van Rossum, Kraaijenbrink, & Groen, 2012). Childerhouse and Towill (2011) explored the link between supply chain integration and competitive performance, and supply chain integration significantly correlates with increased firm performance. Supply chain integration derives from a *systems* perspective that the optimization of the whole system realizes better performance than optimizing individual subsystems (Olgethorpe & Heron, 2013).

Small companies are experiencing growth by using metrics to measure performance and identify priorities (Choi et al., 2013). Developing a metric system can increase the productivity of a business (McEvoy et al., 2014). Experts and practitioners of the Supply Chain Council developed the Supply Chain Operations Reference (SCOR) model as a framework (Wang, Chan, & Pauleen, 2010). The SCOR model is widely accepted in business process standards and is a reference tool for assigning business processes and associated factors of performance measures rather than a comprehensive framework for a supply chain management system (Mishra & Ansari, 2013).

Supply chain configuration management facilitates changes throughout the life cycle of products and equipment and may decrease costs within supply chains

(Olgethorpe & Heron, 2013). Seco and Vieira (2014) explored a fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) supply chain, and aimed at quantitatively assessing the effects of different supply configurations on the resulting total supply chain costs and bullwhip effect. Simangunsong, Hendry, and Stevenson (2012) contended supply chain design parameters affected both the total logistics cost and the bullwhip effect. Managing the flow of material efficiently from supply sources to the end customer involves proper design (Vinodh, Prakash, & Selvan, 2011).

Several factors disrupt the supply chain, including extreme weather conditions, political instability, oil dependency, information fragmentation, cybercrime, and the increasing cost of insurance (Li & Chan, 2012). Most incumbent firms attempt to deter entry of new competition in their markets long before new competition even considers market entry, and are more profitable by up to 45% in doing so (Karakaya & Yannoupoulos, 2011). Mitigation strategies prevent disruptions in the supply chain and decrease the risk for small companies (Wildgoose, Brennan, & Thompson, 2012). Companies should examine the complexity of their supply chain prior to adopting commonly recommended supply chain risk mitigation strategies (Jin & Fang, 2011). Simplifying a supply chain can decrease the number of disruptions for firms that do not possess the economic means for sophisticated systems. The risk of implementing complex supply chain systems may outweigh the benefits (Xu, 2011).

Supply chain agility, implemented through design, can assist a small company in times of supply and demand volatility (Akyuz & Erkan, 2010). Vinodh, Prakash, and Selvan (2011) explored the use of fuzzy association rules mining (FARM) approach, which enables the decision makers to make flexible decisions for evaluating agility in supply chains in the presence of attributes such as flexibility, profitability, quality, innovativeness, proactivity, speed of response, cost, and robustness. Complex manufacturing systems require the validation of innovative solutions using advanced managerial tools and techniques (Peterkova & Gruberova, 2012). Managers must evaluate the agility component of supply chain management to ascertain the adaptability of the organization (Wildgoose, Breenan, & Thompson, 2012).

Small businesses often use large firms in their industry to benchmark their performance and efficiency (Alexopoulos, Papakostas, Mourtzix, & Chryssolouris, 2011). Business managers use benchmarks to rank the performance compared to competitors (Chan, Lu, & Zhang, 2013). Ellinger et al. (2011) assessed the relationship between supply chain management and firm financial performance using Delphi-Style option data from AMR Research's Supply Chain Top 25 rankings. Supply chain management is a holistic process that requires the management of multiple interdependent entities (Childerhouse & Towill, 2011). Companies determined supply chain competent by industry experts typically have superior, efficient supply chains over the competitors (Ellinger et al., 2011).

The morals and values of managers in an organization affect the stakeholders of that organization (Gorgievski, Ascalon, & Stephan, 2011). Kern, Moser, Sundaresan, and Hartman (2011) applied stakeholder theory and multiple methods of data collection to develop and confirm a hierarchy-specific purchasing competence management framework for Chief Purchasing Officers (CPO). The CPOs do not oversee the daily operations; however, CPOs are responsible to provide the necessary guidance to organize and structure the interactions with suppliers and internal customers (Gronum, Verreynne, & Kastelle, 2012). A significant relationship between CPOs' purchasing management competence and different purchasing performance measures confirms the appropriateness of stakeholder theory for such a competence framework (Lindgreen, Vanhamme, van Raaij, & Johnston, 2013).

The CPO uses purchasing as a source of short-term and long-term value creation accessible to the company (Kern, Moser, Sundaresan, & Hartman, 2011). Lindgreen, Vanhamme, van Raaij, and Johnston (2013) identified four mixes of practices: (a) transactional; (b) interpersonal dyadic; (c) interpersonal network; (d) and integrative relational configurations to measure organizations' use of transaction purchasing, electronic purchasing, interactive purchasing, and network purchasing. Evaluating how a specific choice of supply relationship relates to an organization's performance is only plausible if the organization can measure the type and strength of its purchasing relationships and then judge those relationships against specific performance indicators (Akyuz & Erkan, 2010). With the performance outcome data on hand, organizations can specify their strategies, and managers can make informed decisions about the organization's relations with groups of suppliers (Golicic & Sebastiao, 2011).

Cacao

Consumer perception of cacao quality and prices are derived from the differentiation of cacao beans, origins, processing, and flavor profile (Crozier et al., 2012). Delbourgo (2011) explored the origin of cacao and milk chocolate, and offered a synopsis of Slane’s travels to Jamaica, in which he classified cacao as a species and helped to develop chocolate. Smed and Andersen (2012) commented the stronger capability of eating healthy, the easier it is to react to both types of information because eating healthy lowers the cost of reacting to the information.

More consumers are identifying organic cacao products as a healthy alternative snack and consider these products super foods because of the nutritional benefits (Nastase et al., 2011). Tokede, Gaziano, and Djousse (2011) stated cocoa products, which are rich sources of flavonoids, reduce blood pressure and the risk of cardiovascular disease. Organic cacao products have many health benefits such as antioxidants, magnesium, calcium, and dietary supplement (Delbourgo, 2011). Health conscious consumers are emerging in the United States (VonEssen & Englander, 2013). Teck-Chai et al. (2013) posited that functional foods have increased in developed economies as people look for a safer way to improve general health and living. Regulatory bodies governing functional food may affect distributors of health food products (Bei, 2012).

Companies distributing food products have to be aware of contamination and foodborne illnesses (Bosona et al., 2013). Proper handling and storage ensure the quality of food products to avoid food safety risks (Teck-Chai et al., 2013). Rong and Grunow (2010) investigated the design and implementation of traceability systems as a tool for managing safety risks in the food industry. Efficient management of food safety risks requires the consideration of the amounts of potentially recalled products, affected regions/customers, and logistics efforts connected to solve the safety problem (Gallego, Fortunato, Rossi, Korol, & Moretton, 2013). Critical for any company involved in food distribution is to be aware and adhere to safety regulations regarding handling and manufacturing food products (Follett, 2009).

Marketing

Marketing is a primary factor to success in the organic cacao industry (Nastase et al., 2011). Iyambo and Otubanjo (2013) posited that marketing and strategy are for the attainment of competitive advantage(s) against the other players in the firm's chosen industry. Marketing operates at the level of management, and a holistic approach to marketing programs is necessary (O'Connor & Rice, 2013). Before a product launch, marketers must infer how demand may respond to various levels of marketing-mix variables to set an appropriate marketing plan (Luan & Sudhir, 2010).

Marketing strategies should satisfy a company's market objectives and priorities (Pleshko & Heiens, 2012). Creating a marketing strategy can assist a company to use resources to accomplish the optimal sales objectives (Peterkova & Gruberova, 2012). Wind, Sharp, and Nelson-Field (2013) stated advertising practice requires results, which are reusable and predictable. This rationale allows firms to predict and forecast based on the firm's particular marketing campaign. Luo (2011) stated product line design is a critical decision that determines many firms' successes, and requires close coordination between marketing and the engineering domains. Product designers should consider both marketing and engineering considerations concurrently in a product line design (Shahhosseini & Ardhahaey, 2011). Marketers also have to be aware of strategic reactions from the competing manufacturers and the retailer in response to the entry of the new product lines (Shin, 2012).

Successful companies establish brand equity and have high consumer retention (Szymanoski & Gijsbrechts, 2012). Marketing approaches might help differentiate between companies based on background factors such as the financial and competitive situation, the industry and the competence of marketing people involved (Lehtinen, 2011). Stahl, Heitmann, Lehmann, and Neslin (2012) investigated the relationships between brand equity and customer acquisition, retention, and profit margin, the primary components of customer lifetime value (CLV). Using marketing metrics in the organic cacao firms are beneficial to small companies in the industry seeking a competitive advantage (Nastase et al., 2011). Marketing efforts exert indirect effects on CLV through brand equity, and the *soft* and *hard* sides of marketing coordination (Al-Dmour, Al'Zu'bi, & Kakeesh, 2013). Yu-Jia (2011) found brand equity, marketing mix strategy, and service qualities are significant factors and have a direct effect on customer loyalty.

Companies have to make different decisions about bringing products or services to the market (Chen, Lu, & Zhang, 2013). Aremu and Bamiduro (2012) stated marketing mix practice is adopted in sectors of the economy, and practice has been a critical determinant of an organization's short run and long run success and differential advantage in any market environment. The marketing approach serves as a platform for development and survival of the entrepreneurial business in both the short and long run (Golicic & Sebastiao, 2011). Aremu and Bamiduro (2012) stated sectors of the economy adopt a marketing mix practice, which is a critical determinant of an organization's short run and long run success, and differential advantage in any market environment.

In contrast, Shin (2012) found customer orientation and inter-functional coordination had a direct effect only on customer satisfaction, although three dimensions of market orientation failed to link to other performance variables like market effectiveness, adaptability, and profitability. Product and communication capabilities were a necessary condition, although channel and pricing capability showed interesting relationships (Kachersky & Kim, 2011). Forecasting demand is challenging for small companies (Luan & Sudhir, 2010). Companies need to develop analytic metrics to understand consumer demand for goods or services in their industry (Smed & Andersen, 2012). Companies can lose business opportunities from miscalculations of consumer demand and product supply (Vega-Vazques et al., 2013). Customer-centric strategy firms need to focus on forward-looking indicators and ensure a synergistic relationship between decision rights, performance measurement, and reward systems (Bonacchi & Perego, 2011). A successful customer-centric organization should realign its organizational architecture (Yu-Jia, 2011). Fornell, Rust, and Dekiempe (2010) found predicting aggregate consumer spending is important to marketing strategies, and previous attempts to predict consumer-spending growth using standard macroeconomic predictor variables has little success. Consumer satisfaction affects choice and purchase behaviors at the individual customer level and the B2B level and customer satisfaction can explain future growth in discretionary spending (Bagdare & Jain, 2013).

Buyers typically are more educated about the products and services purchased because they have more information (Clement, Kristensen, & Gronhaug, 2013). Marketing material is important in establishing demand for products and services (Parry et al., 2012). Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier (2010) posited that customers are gaining power because markets are becoming transparent, competition is increasing, and consumers can easily retrieve information about potential suppliers and their products from the Internet. Consumers empowered to select marketable products exhibit stronger demand for the underlying products than those not empowered to do so because customers assume psychological ownership of the selected product (Schwepker & Good, 2011).

Increased demand and revenue create challenges for small firms (Tsuruta, 2012). Han and Ogawa (2012) incorporated demand-boosting strategies into a mixed duopoly model to consider the endogenous determination of market demand. A series of marketing analyses indicated that demand-boosting and creation strategy are an important instrument for firms in an oligopoly market (Aremu & Bamiduro, 2012). Equilibrium characteristics differ from those found under an exogenous demand setting (Fuchs, Prandelli, & Schreier, 2010).

Marketers have to be aware of the cultural effects of products or services their companies provide (Zhu & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2013). Shahhosseini and Ardahaey (2011) determined taking account the importance of its elements in absorbing cultural buyers and keeping them satisfied should be the central concern for marketing managers in the cultural market. Marketing strategies can determine appropriate strategies in cultural fields to offer the best services in the most beneficial way for both parts of the business (Al-Dmour, Al’Zu’bi, & Kakeesh, 2013). Marketing mix can define the marketing elements for successfully positioning market offer (Aremu & Bamiduro, 2012).

Private label marketing campaigns are increasing in the organic cacao market, and manufacturing firms and their brand managers face serious challenges (Marton-Partal, 2012). Lamey et al. (2012) explored whether, and to what extent, marketing conduct varies over the business cycle, and how this contributes to the growing popularity of private labels. Private label accounts behave counter-cyclically in economic up and down swings and that part of the boost in private label share during contractions is permanent (Szymanowski & Gijsbrechts, 2011). Chimhundu (2011) found patterns in the growth of private label in relations to national brands and stated the applicability of the punctuated equilibrium theory to the growth and market share development of private label. Geyskens, Gielens, and Gijsbrechts (2010) explored how the introduction of the economy and premium private labels may affect the choice of mainstream-quality and premium quality national brands and the choice of the retailer's existing private label offering. The effect of premium labels introductions in the market on premium quality national brands are still unclear (Wang, 2013). Gielens (2012) found that new products help prevent the decline of national brand shares, and national brands tend to hurt national brands more often than private labels.

The amount and type of information a consumer has regarding a product or service affects buying behavior (Kachersky & Kim, 2011). Szymanowski and Gijsbrechts (2012) investigated whether consumers generalize knowledge from product experience across private labels of different retail chains, and whether such cross brand learning depends on the private labels brands' link with the chain name. Consumers' perceptions of brands can affect their buying behavior regarding national brands and private labels (Dalci & Kosan, 2012).

Sales Management

Sales team management is an intricate component of successful marketing campaigns (Gummerus, 2013). Schwepker (2013) found that high sales team consensus enhances sales team potency. Chi, Chung, and Tsai (2011) posited that leader positive moods directly enhanced team performance, and also indirectly led to improved team performance through the explicit mediating process and the implicit mediating process.

Organizations use sales forecasting to identify demand (Ribeiro & Oliveira, 2011). Borousan, Sharifian, Hajiabolhassani, and Hazrati (2011) posited sales forecasting has to use data, information, or knowledge in a personalized or codified way. Only firms participating in the creation and use of knowledge can achieve the rewards of business reform in the current knowledge-based economy, and the use of a knowledge management based system increases sales forecasting accuracy (Seghers, Manigart, & Vanacker, 2012).

Social capital is an essential resource for small firms that lack financial resources (Gronum, Verreynne, & Kastelle, 2012). Seghers, Manigart, and Vanacker (2012) examined how entrepreneurs' human and social capital influence their knowledge of finance alternatives. Finance is one necessary resource required for new ventures to form and subsequently operate (Classen et al., 2012). The process of acquiring sufficient and adequate finance is fraught with difficulties, especially for small and new ventures (Goochoco-Bautista, Sotocinal, & Wang, 2014).

Innovation Management

Small, medium, and large firms gain competitive advantage through innovation (Gronum, Verreynne, & Kastelle, 2012). Booyens (2011) found the innovation rate of small, medium, and micro-size enterprises is relatively high, with small enterprises reporting the highest innovation rate. Innovative firms can adapt to the customer and market trends (Jang, 2013). Classen et al. (2012) illustrated that by fostering innovativeness, businesses engage in cooperative agreements to access external resources.

Various challenges exist that small organic cacao businesses have to overcome to become sustainable in the organic cacao industry (Nastase et al., 2011). Colombo, Laursen, Magnussom, and Rossi-Lamastra (2012) explored organizational and managerial challenges that small and medium size enterprises (SME) encounter in networked innovation. The SMEs encounter severe obstacles in their path toward innovation (Noordhoff, Kyriakopoulous, Moorman, Pauwels, & Dellaert, 2011). Using networks to improve innovation performance is a multi-faced and complex issue that SMEs have to navigate (O’Connor & Rice, 2013).

Establishing external networks are advantageous for small firms (Vrgovic, Vidicki, Glassman, & Walton, 2012). Lowik, van Rossum, Kraaijenbrink, and Groen (2012) commented firms use specific relational capabilities to acquire new knowledge, and small firms rely more on their networks. Small firms should invest in the exploration of strong ties instead of increasing the weak network tie (Walker, 2012). Nieto and Santamaria (2010) stated innovative capability is important driver of sustainable competitive advantage for small businesses in increasingly changing markets, in which the continuous development of new products and processes is the fundamental to survival, growth, and profitability. Technological collaboration is a useful mechanism for firms of any size to improve innovativeness and is an important factor for the smallest firms (Lee, Kelley, Lee, & Lee, 2012).

A firm implements innovative strategies and network processes to coordinate, influence, and direct other firms (Vojak, Price, & Griffin, 2012). Companies have shifted from innovation initiatives centered on internal resources to those centered on external networks (Nambisan & Sawhney, 2011). Colombo, Laursen, Magnusson, and Rossi-Lamastra (2012) considered the organizational and managerial challenges that small and medium-size enterprises encounter in networked innovation, and highlighted their novel contributions. Small to medium enterprises' use of networks to innovate performance is a multi-faceted and complex issue (Chen & Nicholas, 2012). Gronum, Verreynne, and Kastelle (2012) concluded that heterogeneous ties improve innovation in small to medium enterprises.

Small companies that lack operating and financial capital can use investors' capital or loans from banking institutions (Lowik, van Rossum, Kraaijenbrink, & Groen, 2012). Obtaining credit and bank loans are challenging. As an alternative, small companies seek wealthy individuals to fund their operations (Seghers, Manigart, & Vanacker, 2012). Macht (2011) commented that business angels are private, wealthy individuals who invest large amounts of their own money directly into small, young, non-public businesses, with which business angels have no family connection, and is a highly used source of finance for small entrepreneurial ventures. Business angels do not possess relevant capital, may provide involvement valuable to, and appreciated by, the investee management; however, not every business appreciates the involvement of inexpert investors (Silva & Carreira, 2012).

Companies have to choose their investors wisely, and ascertain that the investor's goals align with the company's goals (Tsuruta, 2012). Collewaert (2012) examined the relationships among angel investor-entrepreneur relationship conflicts, and goal conflicts on one perspective, and their intentions to exit on another perspective. The relationship between management and investors must be a fiduciary and transparent relationship, and have the same goal-oriented strategic vision (Chan, Lu, & Zhang, 2013). Entrepreneurial intentions to exit are higher for entrepreneurs who face more task and goal conflicts (Chen & Nicholas, 2012). Angel investors' intentions to exit a business increase when faced with more goal conflicts with management (Goochoco-Bautista, Sotocinal, & Wang, 2014).

Technological advances have changed the landscape of how organizations conduct business across industries (Lee, Kelley, Lee, & Lee, 2012). Nadeau (2011) stated technological innovation is an important resource of the entrepreneurial firm that can attract venture capital investment, provide competitive advantage, and produce superior performance. Innovation can improve a firm's ability to attract larger venture capital investment, which accelerates commercialization, builds a market advantage, and distances competitors (Lindgren, 2012). Chen and Nicholas (2012) described how entrepreneurs could leverage external expertise via intermediaries to achieve their near-term and longer-term objectives, and found corporate venture groups are increasingly important in filling the funding gap in early-stage research. Small companies are decreasingly able to raise the total amount required to reach the exit from traditional venture capitalists (Naor et al., 2013). Successful entrepreneurs are those who recognize the importance of early positioning of the company in a global context, focusing on the advancement of the lead product opportunity, and bringing the right external resources (O'Connor & Rice, 2013).

Attracting external equity is challenging for small firms, especially if the products or services are new (Silva & Carreora, 2012). Zaleski (2011) analyzed the determinants of obtaining external equity on the financial growth cycle model, and stated startups seeking external equity need to clear information hurdles to convey their profitability to outside investors. Experience is a determinant in acquiring investing capital, and a competitive advantage is more important for inexperienced entrepreneurs (Chan, Lu, & Zhang, 2013).

Growth Management

Surviving with a lack of resources accessible to larger firms in the same industry, creates unique challenges for small businesses (Chan, Lu, & Zhang, 2013). Small businesses lack resources compared with larger firms in the same industry (Olgethorpe & Heron, 2013). Lee et al. (2012) examined the effect of internationalization of small and medium enterprise survival, and the direct and moderating effects of technology resources and research and development alliances. Small to medium size enterprises that operate in technology-intensive environments can expand the market for their technologies through sales internationalization (Srivasta & Gnyawali, 2011). Expanding a small to medium enterprise market beyond its national borders, with increasing levels of commitment, can increase the probability of survival (Xia et al., 2013).

Entrepreneurial growth is the general goal of small companies; however, small companies must define and implement strategies to sustain growth (Chen & Nicholas, 2012). Hart (2012) stated that because the majority of firms start small and remain small, a disproportionate interest focuses on entrepreneurial and business growth. For five decades, policy makers, practitioners, and academics have demonstrated continued interest in entrepreneurial and business growth (Chen, Williams, & Agarwal, 2012). Entrepreneurial and business growth represents an understanding and appreciation of both positivist and non-positivist approaches, as well as the employment of multiple methods (Hess, 2010).

The dynamics and structure of family businesses can differ from non-family owned organizations (Parry et al., 2012). Classen et al. (2012) investigated differences in the diversity of cooperation partners used for innovation-related activities between family and non-family small to medium enterprises, as well as within the group of family small to medium enterprises. Family small to medium enterprises use a less diversified set of partners to acquire innovation-related resources than non-family small to medium enterprises (Srivastava & Gnyawali, 2011).

Multiple observations of the same perspectives are advantageous in a case study (Dalci & Kosan, 2012). Lowik, van Rossum, Kraaijenbrink, and Groen (2012) used multiple case study to show that firms use specific relational capabilities, which the firms defined as bridging capabilities to acquire new knowledge. Small firms create a competitive advantage by acquiring new information. Small firms benefit from strong ties through the application of bridging capabilities to avoid the over-embed trap (Kaya & Patton, 2011).

Firms should consider international projects in a globalized economy (Wang, Chan, & Pauleen, 2010). Quade et al. (2012) posited small and medium-size enterprises are increasingly dealing with international projects and distributed teams, and described an effective approach for a *PM Toolbox* that allows finding the right project tool for a specific project need. Small businesses have to commit to projects with care considering risks, especially undertaking international projects. The economics perspective suggests that entrepreneurial opportunities arise from changes in the business environment (Patzelt & Shepard, 2011). Entrepreneurs are more likely to discover sustainable development opportunities the more their knowledge of natural and communal environments become, (Kaya & Patton, 2011).

Business models promote growth in an organization (Koen et al., 2011). Chatterjee (2013) developed a model that enables firms to choose from one of four types of generic business models as their primary focus and then go through a systematic process to consider multiple design configurations for their business model and use decision protocols to choose the design that has a high probability of success. Chatterjee

(2013) used Porter's generic strategy, and categorized business models as driven by efficiency or perceived value. Many business managers change their model in pursuing growth, or when business managers perceive threats from changes in the industry (Lindgren, 2012). Understanding the logic of the core objectives assists to alert managers when approaching the envelope for their size limit (McKelvie & Wiklund, 2013).

The global economy integrated, causing changes in strategic paradigms (Perterkova & Gruberova, 2012). Chandra, Styles, and Wilkinson (2012) explored the patterns of rapid internationalization by using the emerging international entrepreneurship paradigm. The rapid internationalization of small and medium enterprises remains a topic of strong interest in international business and marketing scholars (Gronum, Verreynne, & Kastelle, 2012). The underlying processes driving internationalization are the same for various firms, whether classified as born global or not using traditional definitions (Kuswantoro et al., 2012). The underlying processes include leveraging existing knowledge, resources, and learning and feedback processes resulting from firm action, and the role and effect of networks of relationships (Vrgovic, Vidicki, Glassman, & Walton, 2012).

Location can factor into the success realized by that company (Iyambo & Otubanjo, 2013). The need for increased global interest in entrepreneurship and small business development as a means of economic sustainability and growth through emphasis on location (Minai & Lucky, 2011). The importance of location factors in the entrepreneurial and business development bridges the gap by investigating the moderating effect of location on the relationship between individual determinants, external factors, and firm characteristics (Karakay & Yannopoulos, 2011). Location typically does not have a role in the moderating of the relationship between the individual determinant and firm performance (Kuswantoro et al., 2012).

Generating sustainable growth in the organic cacao industry relates to low versus high growth contexts (Crozier et al., 2012). Prats, Sosna, and Velamuri (2012) posited that the managerial challenges of generating growth in low-growth contexts are different from those of managing growth in high-growth contexts. Managers take a dynamic perspective and understand that their entity's growth trajectory in future situations might demand different management skills and behaviors (Hess, 2010). Chen, Williams, and Agarwal (2012) examined how entrepreneurial entry by diversifying and firms in new industries leads to different levels of performance. Diversifying firms can use their experience and integrative knowledge to react to the need for novel configurations when the markets go through technology regime changes (Lee et al., 2012). Diversifying firms appear to develop the ability to modify their resource base through the process of entering a new market and managing the complexity of multiple markets (Karakay & Yannopoulos, 2011).

Small firms can experience growth in different ways (Lowik, van Rossum, Kraaijenbrink, & Groen, 2012). McKelvie and Wiklund (2013) illustrated how growth research may advance by changing the focus to growth mode. Small firms need to understand aspects of growth before exploring firm growth (Prats, Sosna, & Velamuri, 2012). McKelvie and Wiklund (2013) identified three research streams (growth as an outcome, the outcome of growth, and the growth process) and three basic modes of growth (organic, acquisitive, and hybrid).

The lack of financial resources in small companies hinders growth (Seghers, Manigart, & Vanacker, 2012). Tsuruta (2012) investigated how small businesses finance their growth opportunities in Japan as an example of a financially developed economy. Firms with growth opportunities must finance short-term credit if the firms do not have sufficient cash holdings (Hess, 2010). Small businesses with higher credit demand increase trade credit to finance the working capital, and small businesses with collateral assets also use trade credit more to finance their working capital (Prats, Sosna, & Velamuri, 2012).

Retail Management

Factors that affect retail sales include price, location, size, store image, and service levels (Wang, 2013). Consumers typically choose to purchase based on retail pricing. Mishra and Asari (2013) posited consumers may have a low price image despite a retailer’s high price, conversely, consumers may believe retailer’s to have a high price image even though their prices are relatively low compared to competitors. In addition, location is a primary factor for a retailer’s success (Minai & Lucky, 2011). Roslin and Rosnan (2012) stated the difference between selecting the right location determines failure and success, and found a good retail location provides a retailer with strategic advantages that are difficult for competitors to imitate. Store locations are long-term strategic investments for retailers (Peterkova & Gruberova, 2012). Chang and Wang

(2014) posited that store image is a retailing strategy to attract consumers to stores, and considers price image is an essential element of store image.

Bagdare and Jain (2013) found customer experience is a major source of differentiation and competitive advantage, and suggested each experience is unique, resulting in a subjective and personal evaluation by a customer. The level of service a retail establishment provides directly influences consumer purchasing behavior (Roslin & Rosnan, 2012). Kazakeviciute and Banyte (2012) described retail crowding as a psychological state of mind when an individual's demand for space exceeds its supply, and found retail crowding is significant in shaping consumer behavior, emotions, and the value buying process. The physical spacing and organization of a store's products affects the customer's experience (Stahl, Heitmann, Lehmann, & Neslin, 2012).

Cuellar and Brunamonti (2014) posited that consumers in different retail channels are willing to pay different prices for certain items, and sellers can exploit those differences and charge different prices for the same items in each channel. Consumer packaged organic cacao products sold through numerous retail channels including grocery stores, health food stores, juice bars, and pharmaceutical stores (VonEssen & Englander, 2013). Hu and Li (2012) found more companies integrate e-commerce channel with traditional retail store, which results in both retail service and profit increasing. Retailers benefit from developing online platforms that enable their consumers to purchase products and services directly through the Internet (Safari & Thilenius, 2013). Providing online retail channels provide consumers convenience., which enhances the consumer experience (Xiz, Xizo, & Zhang, 2013). New technologies have created new strategies to access markets, and practice of multichannel retailing expanded exponentially (Nieto & Santamaria, 2010). Adding additional retail channels may negatively affect the revenues of existing retail channels (Samaha et al., 2011). Avery, Steenburgh, Deighton, and Caravella (2012), found that adding a retail store to direct channels yields different results from adding an Internet channel to a retail store. Bhatnager and Syam (2014) found the profitability of hybrid retailing involving a mix of traditional physical stores and Internet channels is dependent on the online retention rate for slow-moving products that exclusively sell online.

Some retailers charge slotting fees for organic food products that require manufacturers to make payments to acquire shelf space for their products, and slotting fees usually target new products (Marasteanu et al., 2014). Some product manufacturers are unwilling to pay slotting fees, which result in retailers not carrying their product lines (Chinomona, 2013). Arya and Pfeiffer (2012) illustrated fees paid by manufacturers to introduce new products often exceed the amount spent on product development and market analysis, which helps balance revenues in the output market with procurement costs in the input market. Miklos-Thal, Rey, and Verge (2011) commented the grocery sector has shifted bargaining power from suppliers toward retail chains, and fees related to shelf space trigger concerns that manufacturers could use them to eliminate competition or to exclude smaller competition. Organic cacao manufacturers face challenges with acquiring shelf space for their new products in retail stores (Crozier et al., 2012).

Wang (2013) found that attitudes toward visual packaging directly influence consumer-perceived food product quality and brand preferences. Van Rompay et al. (2012) found that packaging designs shape consumers' perceptions of product attributes, and product packaging increases perceived brand value and related measures such as price expectations. It is important for new organic cacao products to have attractive packaging that appeals to the retailer's customers, which inclines retailers to provide shelf space for these products (Marasteanu et al., 2014). Clement, Kristensen, and Gronhaug (2013) found package design features stimulating a bottom-up process facilitate the early visual process, and products with few design features can attract consumers' first attention.

Krystallis, Vassallo, and Chryssohoidis (2012) posited the value theory as a framework whereby the set of values employed in an undifferentiated manner across various consumer decision-making contexts, which involves different types of products. Maximizing consumer value is important to sustaining a competitive advantage (Parry et al., 2012). Gummerus (2013) found the division of value into creation and outcome determination offers managers a more systematic view on value, and acknowledgement of the number of actors that encourages them to approach the value of multiple perspectives. Perceived value is subjective from the consumer's perspective, which is challenging for retailers to define system-specific value (Wang, 2013).

Conversely, Vega-Vazquez, Revilla-Camacho, and Cossio-Silva (2013) proposed service dominant logic, which means that firms do not deliver value, but rather work out value proposals. The service dominant concept implies that customers create value by consuming the products, and customer active participation in the value creation process is essential (Gorgievski, Ascalon, & Stephan, 2011). The service dominant concept requires both consumer and retailer to co-create value in a continuous process (Kuswantoro et al., 2012). Vega-Vazquez, Revilla-Camacho, and Cossio-Silva (2013) positied cocreation requires the building of experience and the resolving of problems with a combined effort between the parts that make up the relationship, and the retailer’s value creation abilities are at the point of interaction between the customer and the company.

Transition

In Section 1 of this study, I described the problem, background, and purpose for conducting research. The purpose was to define the business and specific problem in this section and the goal of the investigation. Section 1 also includes the research question, nature of the study, and conceptual framework of this study. In Section 2, the objective is to describe the instruments, data collection, and data analysis. This section includes the organization and the methods used to analyze data. Section 2 includes subsections on the role of the researcher, participants, reliability and validity, and ethics in the study. In Section 3, the goal is to organize themes, interpret, and draw conclusions from the data collected.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 of this study includes subsections of the project methods. I discuss my role as the researcher, participants, method, design, population, sampling, and ethical considerations. Data collection, organization techniques, analysis, and the reliability and validity are subsections presented in this section.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies some small physical commodities firm owners need to establish a distribution channel within the commodities market to enhance profits. The focus of the study was on wholesale firms distributing organic cacao products to retail and manufacturing companies of cacao products in the New York Tristate area. In particular, the objective was to explore individuals responsible for buying, branding, and distributing organic cacao products to end consumers.

I explored a population of six small establishments with a sample of six owners that retailed cacao products. The criterion for established firm owners was three owners with 5 years or more experience, and the criterion for new entrants was three owners with less than 5 years of experience. The primary data collection method was in-depth face-to-face interviews. The objective was to triangulate data through supporting documentation, records, and policies that support formal strategies to establish a distribution channel within the New York City commodities market to enhance profits.

I selected small companies due to their limited financial, marketing, and operational resources. Small businesses can create social change in New York City by increasing job growth, generating tax revenues, and increasing the positive perception of the community. Local communities can benefit from the economic growth generated by small businesses.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative study, I am the data collection instrument (Camfield & Palmer-Jones, 2013). My role as the researcher was to gather and analyze data regarding how small physical wholesale commodities firms can establish a distribution channel with the New York City commodities market as noted by Eun Ju et al. (2013). The intent was to establish relationships with participants in the study by ethically collecting and objectively presenting data received from participants in face-to-face in-depth interviews. The Belmont Report led to the conception of institutional review boards (IRBs), and these boards have the authority and the responsibility to ascertain that research investigators follow the regulations for protection of human research participants (Hui-Ju, Ya-Ling, & Su-Fen, 2011). I followed regulations set forth by Walden University IRB in relation to the protection of human research participants.

I developed questions that permit face-to-face in-depth interviews to explore why some small physical commodities firm owners lack formal strategies to establish a distribution channel within the commodities market to enhance profits. In addition, I collected documentation and physical artifacts (websites and signage) to triangulate. Case studies have a significant role in the management-related research, and the case enables a rich and detailed study of a particular phenomenon, issue, or problem (Stewart, 2012). The objective was to use a multiple case study replicating the logic across a number of separate instances, which led to investigations of a particular phenomenon at a number of different locations.

Qualitative research typically requires different relationships between researchers and participants than do survey based strategies (Irwin, 2013). Interactions between researchers and participants produce data, which relate to the project design, researchers' disciplinary assumptions, theoretical inclinations, and methodological decisions (Erickson, 2012). The objective is to gather data from interactions with participants who relate to the project design, theoretical inclinations, and methodological decisions.

My experiences include trading physical and derivative cacao for investors. In addition, I have experience merchandising organic cacao for small organic cacao businesses in the wholesale and retail level. My peers and colleagues consider me knowledgeable in trading and merchandising cacao products. No potential conflict of interest exists because companies who trade or merchandise organic cacao products do not contract me. Daily interactions with organic cacao buyers and sellers provided insight into the perspectives of the parties.

A researcher determines obligations that develop if there emerge any critical incidents that challenge the original intent and direction of the research (Barbour, 2010). The intent is not to influence the results from the data gathered; however, biases exist in the research (Francis et al., 2010). The goal is to mitigate the biases as much as possible. Biases are inherent, and it is easy for a researcher to attach to a particular perspective, which undermines impartiality (Gee, Loewenthal, & Cayne, 2013). Decision-making involves the integration of deliberative, experiential, and affective processes that correspond to individual differences in abilities and skills, and individuals' decisions are subject to systematic biases (Strough, Karns, & Schlosnagle, 2011). Dibley (2011) posited McCormack's lens approach to narrative data analysis encourages the researcher to consider the whole story from more than one angle and enable interpretation of any type of individual story and comparison of themes arising across narratives from participants. This approach is effective and enables the researcher to preserve the truthfulness of the original narrative (Harrison, 2013). Personal lenses exist in which one views the world, and the more one recognizes their lens, the better one can listen to the perspectives of others (Irwin, 2013).

Participants

I gained approval from Walden University IRB prior to conducting any research. The intent was to use purposive sampling to identify and recruit six owners within the organic cacao small business sector. To initiate contact, I phoned the owner of a small organic cacao firm in New York City and discussed the proposed study. Once a business owner expressed interest to participate in the study, the goal was to obtain the names of owners that met the criteria to participate in the study. The criteria to participate in the study included owners responsible for (a) buying; (b) branding; and (c) distributing organic cacao products to end consumers with limited financial, marketing, social, and operational resources. I discussed the intent of the research, the consenting process, the confidentiality of shared information, rights of participants, interview approach, secondary data collection, and time requirements to participate. I made initial contact with each participant, and they each granted me access to their businesses. Participants received the consent forms explaining the research objectives, participation requirements, and the ability to answer none, some, or all the questions in the interview process, without consequence. The plan was to e-mail the consent forms to participants for their viewing. Participants read and reviewed the consent form and could ask questions at any point before, during, or after the research. The plan was to briefly review the consent form with participants at the beginning of their scheduled interview.

I collaborated with participants to establish a suitable interview place and time, being cognizant of participant time constraints. At the onset of the interview, I asked specific criteria-related questions to ensure the suitability of participants for the study, and proceeded with the semistructured, face-to-face interviews by asking a series of open-ended questions (see Appendix B). During the interviews, I ascertained that participants understood their role in the research. I used a voice recorder to record interviews and to store electronic data on a password-protected hard drive accessible only by me. The intent was to store copied materials in a locked cabinet accessible only by me and destroy information after 5 years by permanently deleting files associated with the study and physically destroying hard copy personal information.

Research Method and Design

In the following subsections, I discuss the chosen research method and design. The subsections include a description of the research method and design. The goal is to provide justification for using the chosen method and design derived logically from my specific business problem statement.

Research Method

I used a qualitative approach for this study to explore the issues regarding a small firm establishing a distribution channel within the New York City cacao commodities market. Parylo (2012) stated qualitative research is framed broadly within the socially constructed and advocacy/participatory, which allows researchers to discover multiple truths. In qualitative studies, a researcher may reach more than one conclusion based on the data collected from study participants (Irwin, 2013). The essential purpose of qualitative research was to record in detail the conduct of everyday events and to identify the meanings that those events have for those to participate in them and for those to witness them (Erickson, 2012). The objective was to learn from each participant's experience, not direct questions from a personal standpoint. Qualitative research is exploratory (Lund, 2012), and the intent was to explore the distribution channels for small firms in the New York City organic cacao market when the variables and theory base are unknown.

Quantitative researchers aim to interpret the causes of changes in social facts, primarily through objective measurement and quantitative analysis (Arghode, 2012). The goal in quantitative methods is to quantify the participant responses and interpret them to make decisions, and accepts and rejects the null hypotheses by interpreting data from a large number of participant responses (Ruggeri, Gizelis, & Dorussen, 2011). The intent of my research was to interpret the essence of participants' experiences, rather than quantify their responses. I did not select a quantitative approach because of the difficulty with measuring management changes for small organic cacao businesses in a quantitative way, and the pooled data needed for up-to-date statistical models were not available. In addition, quantitative approach does not explore themes. Harrison (2013) stated a mixed methods approach is potentially superior to a single method design. The intent was not to use a mixed method design because the intent is not to combine quantitative and qualitative research methods in the same research inquiry (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013).

Research Design

I chose a multiple case study design for the proposed study because the multiple case study design is appropriate for the exploratory phase of an investigation, as identified by Yin (2009). The objective was to triangulate data through supporting documentation, records, and policies that supported formal strategies to establish a distribution channel within the New York City commodities market to enhance profits. The plan was to collect this data before the face-to-face interviews at each participant's place of business, and analyze them for reoccurring themes. The goal of a case study design is to analyze a case and propose the best possible solution (Gallego et al., 2013). I determined the perspectives of six owners in the New York City organic cacao market who had the experience and could provide a comprehensive description.

Gambetti, Graffigna, and Biraghi (2012) posited the grounded theory approach is suitable for research that is complex, problematic, and relativist nature. The purpose of grounded theory designs is to develop new theory (Thomas, 2012), and the objective is to link existing theory to a business problem thus is unsuitable. An ethnographic approach addresses group behavior and practices (Thierbach & Lorenz, 2014). The purpose of ethnography design is to explore the behavior or culture of a sharing group (Zhu & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2013), and this design is beyond the scope of the proposed study and is unsuitable for the proposed investigation. Harding (2012) commented the use of the narrative approach for academic investigation beyond the confines of fiction and literature has gained credibility, and a wide range of disciplines have critically and fruitfully engaged with the narrative approach. The intent of a narrative study design is examining the life experience of a single individual (Austin, Nolan, & O'Donnell, 2009), and the design is beyond the scope of the proposed study and is unsuitable for the proposed investigation.

Davidsen (2013) stated phenomenological philosophy developed from a discipline focusing on thorough descriptions toward an emphasis on interpretation inherent in experience. The intent of a phenomenological study design is to present a subject as the phenomenon of consciousness, and refers to the totality of lived experiences that belong to a single person (Madjar, 2014). The phenomenological design is beyond the scope of the proposed study and is unsuitable for the proposed investigation because the objective was not to interpret lived experiences of participants in the face-to-face interviews. The case study design was the best option regarding the stated business problem. Case-based approaches equip researchers to encounter complexity, manage uncertainty, and generate innovative strategies (Sprain & Timpson, 2012).

Population and Sampling

The population was small and medium sized organic retailers in New York City. The primary sample of three owners with five or more years experience, and a sample of three owners with less than five years experience, drawn from a population of six local retailers in New York City, is appropriate for a multiple case study design indicated in the data gathered by surveyors in the Census (2011). I used a multiple case study approach in the quest for understanding the participants' experiences.

Multiple case designs are preferred over single case designs because multiple case designs enable the researcher to develop more in-depth themes than a single case design (Yin, 2009). Oroy, Stromskag, and Gjengedal (2011) found this approach offers a method of interpretation that reveals human issues and practices taken for granted. The direction is to use a non-probability purposive sampling. Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, and Nigam (2013) posited purposive sampling for case study design, as less expensive than random sampling, and more conducive for the proposed study. The criteria for selecting the local retailers consisted of six owners from six small businesses that purchase organic cacao products from a small wholesale distributor establishing distribution channels in the local area. The plan was to interview retailers because of their direct interaction with end consumers. These local retailers have establishment types such as gourmet food markets, health food stores, bakeries, juice bars, pharmacies, and chocolate makers.

The criteria for the participants also included conducting business with large and small organic cacao firms in the past two previous years. The objective was to observe the essence of the experiences of the six owners establishing a relationship with a small wholesale organic cacao distributor. The goal was to interpret interviews with participants in an attempt to ascertain the perspectives of owners of small firms establishing distribution channels in the organic cacao market in New York City. The objective was to use methodological triangulation through supporting documentation, records, and policies that support formal strategies to establish a distribution channel within the New York City commodities market to enhance profits.

Ethical Research

I received approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the consent form and invitation letter. Each participant signed the consent form in accordance with the requirements of the IRB. The consent form is available in Appendix A. The plan was to assign a number to identify each participant as a measure to maintain privacy. Participants in this study were volunteers, and information gathered from these participants remained confidential. Participants who qualified received a consent form through email informing them of the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the process. Participants who chose to withdraw from the study received the opportunity to do so anytime without penalty.

The goal was to identify themes, and interpret the data responsibly and with academic integrity. The objective was to exercise viable measures to avoid using an inappropriate research method, incorrect use of information, and inaccurate reporting in compliance with Walden University guidelines. In addition, the plan was to assign a number to participants to protect the identity of study participants. Each participant was given a numerical single digit number, and was referred to by that single digit number. I am the only person that has access to the data, secured in a safe place for 5 years to protect the rights of participants. I will delete the data after 5 years from the date of the publishing of my doctoral study, to protect the confidentiality of participants by permanently deleting files from the hard drive of the computer.

Data Collection Instruments

My objective in this section is to present information regarding data collection instruments and data organizing techniques. In a qualitative study, I am the data collection instrument (Camfield & Palmer-Jones, 2013). The objective was to use face-to-face in-depth interviews in this study and record the interviews with a voice recorder. The purpose of using face-to-face in-depth interviews was to ask participants 10 open-ended interview questions, included in Appendix B. Interview protocols used to conduct the interviews include a private space acceptable to participants, a watch to monitor interview time, voice recorder, notepad, and writing utensil. The intent was to ask the same questions in the same order to participants. I scheduled interviews with participants by contacting them the day prior to their appointments to confirm the interview appointment, and to reiterate participants’ rights, study intent, and interview process. The day of the appointments, participants engaged in the interview process, and I collected and stored secured confidential information on my personal computer, and will destroy data after 5 years by deleting the files. The goal was to use recorded field observation and written notes to record data during the interview. Birjandi and Bagherkazemi (2011) characterized face-to-face interviews by the presence of a participant, and an interlocutor who primarily acts as the examiner/interpreter. I had the opportunity to build rapport with each participant using the face-to-face interview process. The lack of face-to-face contact might decrease establishing rapport and a natural encounter with participants, especially with in-depth data (Irvine, 2011). The defining characteristic of qualitative research is the pursuit of data that is rich, detailed, or in-depth (Irvine, 2011).

Disadvantages in face-to-face interviews include the expense, and the risk participants may not recall events thoroughly (Snowball & Willis, 2011). The goal was to minimize the disadvantages by focusing in the local area of New York City, and giving each participant time to think and respond to each question asked. Allowing participants time to reflect on each question increased the validity of the data using the face-to-face in-depth interviews as the primary data collection instrument. A handheld tape recorder recorded the duration of the participants' in-depth interviews. I transferred the recorded data on the handheld recording device to a personal computer, which is password protected and is only accessible to me.

The objective was to use methodological data triangulation through supporting documentation, records, and policies that support formal strategies to establish a distribution channel within the New York City commodities market to enhance profits. The plan was to gather this supporting data regarding the participant's establishment on a tablet following the face-to-face interviews. The objective was to transfer and organize the information recorded on the tablet with the corresponding recorded audio in-depth interview file to my personal computer.

Francis et al. (2010) posited data saturation is the point in data collection when no new additional data are found that develop aspects of a conceptual category. Francis et al. (2010) contended data saturation guides research in which the appropriate sample size is a function of the study. Data saturation addresses whether a interview study has achieved an adequate sample for content validity, and data saturation enables researchers to replicate the study (Grimshaw, 2010). The more widely distributed a particular experience, there are fewer participants required to provide an understanding of the phenomenon, and samples as small as four individuals can produce accurate information with a high confidence level (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Data Collection Techniques

The techniques used to collect data in this study included primary in-depth interviews with owners with more than five years of experience in retail organic cacao; as well as in-depth interviews with owners with less than five years retailing organic cacao, and triangulating related records through supporting documentation, records, and policies. Each selected owner received the opportunity to participate in the interview. I set appointments with participants at their convenience, and confirmed the previous day on the mutually agreed time and place. I provided a private space acceptable for participants, a watch to monitor the interview time, voice recorder, notepad, and writing utensil. I used semi-structured interviews guided by 10 open-ended questions, and I used an electronic recorder to audio record each session to ensure understanding of the shared information. In addition, I member-checked by contacting participants via telephone, discussing contributions, and verifying the accuracy and meaning of collected information. I kept the transcripts as originally written, and then made extensive notes about how the participants modified their responses. The intent was to use an interview protocol ensuring an identical scripted interview process and questions to enhance the validity of the data. I designed the interview questions to assist in answering the central research question. The goal was to encourage participants to expand the discussion, sharing their professional experience. A list of the interview questions is included in Appendix B. I also took interview notes through the duration of the interviews. The goal was to record interviews and take notes to help assure data completeness and accuracy. I also member-checked to make sure that the information was collected and correctly interpreted for each study participant. The objective was to make any necessary changes to ascertain the accuracy and meaning of the data. In addition, the objective was to identify the type of establishment, number of employees, organic cacao products offered for sale, and location.

I obtained documentation related to distribution channel strategy, innovative strategy, and any other subjects supporting the proposed research by asking participants during the interview process. Yin (2009) found any additional documentation, such as policies or management procedures, assist the data gathering process. I gathered supporting documents and policies from owners of formal distribution strategies prior to the scheduled interviews. Upon the conclusion of the study, I developed a synopsis of findings that I sent to each study participant as a courtesy.

Data Organization Technique

The data collection methods I used to collect data included a voice recorder, and I gathered artifacts and documentation retrieved from websites or organizational documentation such as policies or articles. I recorded the interviews using Apple® voice recorder software, then transferred the collected data to a personal computer. To differentiate participants, single digit numerical numbers were used to distinguish and conceal personal identifiers. The goal was to secure data with a password protected database and store the related documentation in a secure cabinet accessible only by me. I organized data in numerical order, and will store it for a minimum of 5 years, and then I will destroy the data.

The objective was to use the normalization process theory to facilitate understanding of components of formal strategies regarding distribution channel creation, and using a coding framework that consists of familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping, and interpretation (Gallacher et al., 2013). McEvoy et al. (2014) found the normalization process theory offers transparent and transferable explanations for the phenomena of interest revealed by empirical investigation. May et al. (2009) posited the normalization process theory provided a set of sociological tools to understand and explain the business processes through which new or modified practices of thinking, enacting, and organizing work are implemented in cacao businesses.

Data Analysis Technique

Gee, Loewnthal, and Cayne (2013) posited researchers use the case study approach to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of participants. I separated any previous perceptions, opinions, and ideas about the phenomenon to mitigate researcher bias that might affect the study. Thereafter, the objective was to develop a list of significant statements from each participant and group them into themes. The goal was to provide a textual description of what each participant in the study experienced.

Based on responses from the participants in the interviews and secondary information gathered, I developed themes from the assembled data by analyzing recurring words, and drawing the words and any related connected terms together to form clusters of information. In addition, I compared and contrasted experienced and inexperienced participants with formal strategies to determine any reoccurring themes among the two distinct groups.

I provided a structural description of how each participant expressed his or her experiences. The structural description included observed interview notes of the establishment. The purpose was to write a composite description using both textural and structural descriptions. Guion, Diehl, and McDonald (2011) stated data triangulation is a procedure to check and determine the validity by analyzing research questions from multiple perspectives. I used methodical data triangulation in this study. Member checking was the process used to verify that data from each study participant is complete and accurate. Guion et al. (2011) found using interviews, documentation, and additional source information data triangulated the study, which is a description of methodological triangulation. The interview questions are as follows:

1. What role do you have in this organization?
2. What type of customers does your business service?
3. What type of organic cacao products do you carry?
4. What are your disadvantages of working with large distributors?
5. What has been your experience working with small suppliers that distribute organic cacao products?

6. How do you determine to purchase organic cacao from new manufacturers?
7. What negative experiences, if any, have you encountered with small organic cacao distributors?
8. What factors have led to negative experiences with small organic cacao distributors?
9. What obstacles have you found entering the New York City market?
10. What other information can you provide that might provide a better understanding of the challenges faced in this industry?

Retail owners of organic cacao in the New York City market received the questions. I asked the questions from the perspective of how these owners would choose to conduct business with a small organic cacao company. These interview questions related to the research question by attempting to find the advantages and limitations of small organic cacao companies establishing distribution channels in the New York City market. The interview questions may present biases that may exist for owners choosing to conduct business with small wholesale companies. For example, interview questions 5, 6, and 9 could potentially present biases an owner may have regarding small organic wholesale companies. Identification of biases in owners is consistent with the research question because the goal was to explore the factors that would affect small organic cacao wholesalers establishing distribution channels in the New York City Market.

The data are related to the conceptual framework of this study to determine if disruptive innovation theory is an appropriate strategy for small organic cacao wholesalers in the New York City market. In particular, questions 6, 7, 8, and 9 can reveal what innovative steps a small organic cacao wholesaler can take to gain entry into the New York City market. The goal was to identify and explore strategies and methods for small organic cacao companies entering the market. I grouped each strategy identified into themes to organize the data for analysis. These particular themes relate to the conceptual framework of the study.

I used the NVivo® software to code and organize data from the participants' responses. The objective was to identify and establish patterns from the gathered data and link correspondence from different categories. The plan was to use the NVivo® software to create code levels and organize themes and patterns identified from the data. The concept-mapping feature of NVivo® software aids in visualizing the relationships of the interpreted themes, and the NVivo® software is a valuable tool to organize the data in a manner that is conducive and effective in this study (Go, Ma Pei, & Su Xio, 2013).

Crowston, Allen, and Heckman (2012) found software systems that process text in human languages benefit researchers because the systems partially automate qualitative data analysis, which has a direct affect on content analysis by semi-automatically extracting theoretical evidence from text. The objective was to analyze transcripts from the interviews to understand how participants solved distribution challenges and to understand the effect on the performance of various problem-solving approaches adopted by different organizations. The plan was to use NVivo software to assist in data analysis, which enables me to explore large data sets in depth.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Hirdes et al. (2013) found factors that undermine the quality of data in real-world situations include poor training, systematic biases in reporting financial incentives, and avoidance of negative consequences of unfavorable findings. The objective was to withdraw my personal perspectives in the data gathering, analysis, and interpretation processes. In addition, I identified knowledgeable, experienced participants in the interview based on their years in the industry. Participants received no financial incentives for contributions. The goal was to transmit the true essence of the participant's professional experience, although maintaining reflexivity throughout the study.

The credibility of this study largely depends on how I collected and analyzed data. Guo, Ma Pei, and Su Xioa (2013) illustrated dynamic reliability assessment is data collected automatically, although the component is in the real environment. The plan was to take detailed field notes during the interview and to transcribe each in-depth interview to indicate pauses and overlaps in the audio data. Camfield and Palmer-Jones (2013) posited qualitative data relates to the time and skills required to create research materials of sufficient quality.

Validity

Street and Ward (2007) found reviewers question validity by: (a) questioning whether the case provided an accurate representation of the significant events; (b) the order that the events occurred; (c) whether important facts were missing; and (d) the importance of events relative to time. When a study has high validity, the probability of rival explanations decreases (Simmerman & Swanson, 2001). The goal was purposeful selection of participants to ensure the probabilities of themes are equally distributed. The intent was to use an interview protocol ensuring an identical scripted interview process and questions to enhance the validity of the data. Data saturation can be achieved with small samples as long as the participants possess a certain degree of expertise in the domain of inquiry (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Data saturation is reached when no new data, no new coding, no new themes emerge, and the study can be replicated to reach the same results (Francis et al., 2010). The intent was to enhance transferability by thoroughly describing the research concept and the assumptions that were central to the research.

The objective was to provide in-depth descriptions of the phenomena and participants in relation to their professional experiences. Torrance (2012) found that methodological triangulation requires two or more data sources to give a fuller informative picture of what is going on, which is more valid than using a single data source. I used methodological triangulation. The objective was to use two interview groups that would answer the same interview questions, and supporting documentation to triangulate this study. Moreover, I employed the member checking process to validate data in this study. Torrance (2012) stated respondent validation occurs when the researcher verifies participant contributions by checking for accuracy of initial data, including inquiring if participants have more to add, and asking participants if their account is accurate, and complete.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I provided the methods to collect and analyze the data for the study. In Section 2, the objectives were to elaborate and discuss in detail data collection instruments, techniques, organization, analysis, reliability, and validity. In Section 3, I categorize and interpreted data in an attempt to ascertain the true essence of each participant’s professional experience. Section 3 includes subsections applicable to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further studies.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 3 of this study includes results, conclusions, and reflections of the study. I discuss the responses from participants in the face-to-face in-depth interviews, provide themes from the collected responses, and provide conclusions from the data collected. Presentation of the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social changes, recommendations for action, recommendations for further study, reflections, and summary with study conclusions are subsections in this section.

Overview of Study

Innovative distribution strategies of organic cacao in the New York City area are important to small businesses creating distribution channels in the area. Peterkova and Gruberova (2012) posited that small organic cacao businesses use innovative distribution strategies to increase revenue streams and deter customers from high cost channels. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small physical commodities firm owners need to establish a distribution channel within the commodities market to enhance profits. The research question was as follows: What strategies do small physical wholesale commodities firm owners use to establish distribution channels within the commodities market? The participants in this study addressed strategies for enhancing profits in the New York City market. The participants' responses from the interview were interpreted to create themes through the NVivo® software, and then the themes were analyzed with references to the literature on effective business practices, disruptive innovation theory, and theory of constraints presented in the conceptual framework of this study. I found that price point strategies, B2B relationships, differentiation, strategic locations, sufficient operating capital, and customer relationships were key components of effective strategies to enhance profits in the organic cacao industry.

Presentation of the Findings

In this study, I used six participants for in-depth face-to-face interviews. Three of the participants were owners that had been in business for 5 or more years, and three of the participants were owners that had been in business for less than 5 years. All of the participants were located in New York City. The participants were interviewed at their locations. Participants were identified with numbers 1 through 6 to follow the confidentiality guidelines outlined in the signed consent forms. The participants agreed to participate in this study and spoke freely, answering all 10 interview questions. The interviews were recorded using Apple® voice recorder software, then transferred the collected data to a personal computer. I transcribed the audio interviews into Microsoft Word document format and entered them into the NVivo® software. In addition, I gathered artifacts, documentation, and field notes from each participant to support strategies for enhancing profits in the organic cacao distribution channels. Once I interpreted the data, each participant was called via telephone to complete the member check process and for data triangulation. I coded the data in NVivo® software, and themes and conclusions were developed.

Themes

I identified six themes from the participants, which were price point strategy, B2B relationships, differentiation, strategic locations, lack of operating capital, and customer relationships. I developed these themes from interpreting the participants' responses from the in-depth interviews. I related these themes to the literature review and conceptual framework.

Price Point Strategy

The first theme was price point strategy. All of the participants except one indicated that price point strategies were a major factor in sustaining a competitive advantage. Participant 1 posited,

> When we meet with a new manufacturer, we try to get the best selling items from them and try to make a deal if they can give us any free goods because sometimes they offer us deals like if you buy three we give you three. So we look for the good price because in the very beginning, free items honestly.

Acquiring organic products that have brand recognition and great price was the biggest concern for Participant 1. In addition, acquiring free products from new organic cacao manufacturers was important. Small businesses do not want to take the risk of acquiring new products and not be able to see them, so retailers attempt to get free products for the first order, which are called “free fills.” Participant 1 stated,

> the difference between small and large distributors is the small ones, you know is for the pricing because when you work with the large companies they usually give you a price break down because small companies they have a tight budget, so they don’t lower their prices so much. So the main point I think is if you have expired items large companies usually give you full credit, but small ones no.

All of the owners indicated that being able to negotiate price points with suppliers was pivotal to beginning a new relationship with suppliers. Wholesale price points typically are lower and more flexible than retail price points (Ellickson et al., 2012). Price points can determine if a relationship exists between organic cacao product manufacturers and retailers (Williamson, 2012). Van Rompay et al. (2012) posited that small businesses have to price their goods or services with balance, so their product is not overpriced or underpriced. Participant 6 stated, “the profit margin is low on each product, so if you don’t purchase them at good price from the supplier you will lose money. Because if its expensive, it will just sit on the shelf and nobody will buy.” Small businesses do not want to purchase organic cacao products that stay in inventory for a long period of time. Specifically, retailers do not want to use their shelf space for products that do not sell. The majority of participants indicated that high prices and brand recognition were the major contributing factors of difficulty of selling organic cacao products.

However, Participant 4 stated, “All of our products have to be of the highest quality, this way price don’t matter to customer.” New organic-centric and natural food establishments have been increasingly entering the grocery market; however, these establishments have typically reported pricing higher than conventional supermarkets (Cuellar & Brunomonti, 2014). These new establishments focus on the quality of the organic and natural products rather than low prices (Marasteanu et al., 2014). I observed Participant 4’s location was in an affluent neighborhood, and the clientele served was comprised of working professionals and tourists.

Price point strategies for small organic distributors have a direct relationship to disruptive innovation theory. Disruptive innovation is a powerful means of broadening and developing new markets and providing new functionality, which may disrupt existing market linkages (Yu & Chieh Chang, 2010). Small and medium-size companies in the organic cacao market have to create a competitive advantage against confectionery-chocolate companies with brand recognition such as Cadbury, Hershey, and Nestle (Allen, 2011). Companies must find innovative ways to price their organic products that sustain a competitive advantage.

Theory of constraints directly relates to price point strategies for small organic cacao companies. Small organic cacao businesses have to identify the constraints that affect profits and establishing distribution channels (Olgethorpe & Heron, 2013). The majority of participants indicated that they receive better price points from suppliers of organic cacao products when they purchase higher volumes, which requires more operating capital. For small organic cacao businesses, increasing operating capital is a constraint.

B2B Relationships

The second theme was B2B relationships. Growers, manufacturers, wholesalers/brokers, and retailers are all parts of the supply chain in the organic cacao market. Choi et al. (2013) illustrated that B2B networks are complex and have multiple tiers of indirect channel participants with products bought and sold by a variety of industrial, retail, institutional, commercial, wholesale, or retail organizations. Building and maintaining relationships throughout the supply chain benefits small organic cacao companies. All of the participants indicated that managing relationships with supplier and manufacturers were a key component to their success. Synergies with businesses in the supply chain that have abundant resources enable managers' access to knowledge, which managers combine with internal knowledge to pursue disruptive innovation opportunities (Classen et al., 2012).

Establishing and maintaining a B2B relationship requires time and patience. B2B transactions typically are more complex and require longer sales cycles than business-to-customer relationships (Schwepler & Good, 2011). Participant 2 stated, “to start a new relationship, we listen to what the salesperson has to say. We look at the product. We see what they sold, what type of clientele they have, and that’s how we make our decisions.” B2B networks are critical to value networks for small businesses in the organic cacao industry, and may enhance profits in the distribution channels (Vea-Vazques et al., 2013).

Participants were divided equally on their preference of working with large supplier/distributors versus small suppliers/distributors except for Participant 4 and 5. Participant 4 stated,

> With small companies I have had glitches here and there, and things are bound to happen. But I can tell you stories about the big distributors. But I don’t have stories of rage in me about the small ones. I only have rage about the big ones.

Conflict may damage B2B relationships and affect the growth of small firms (Ganesan et al., 2010). Conversely, Participant 5 stated,

> We don’t really have disadvantages working with large distributors. Quite frankly, we prefer large distributors over small ones because of our pricing needs. I would also say reliability is a major factor. We have to be able to trust that our suppliers will supply products on time and pretty much maintain consistent quality.

Participant 3 stated,

> We have a distributor that is big named company. Easy to work with this company. They have good products, give us good price, customers like it, you know brand recognition. Most of the brand I carry is from there because customers like and if your customer want something I order right away with this big named company.

All of the participants indicated that suppliers should maintain the same quality products with competitive prices and be reliable in terms of delivery of the products. Chinomona (2013) posited, from a small and medium enterprise perspective, dimensions of relationship (cooperation, relationship commitment, relationship satisfaction, and trust) influence power in relationships, and legitimate power has the most significant effect on distribution relationships. Trust is the foundation of managing relationships within the supply chain for small organic cacao companies.

Differentiation

The third theme was differentiation. Differentiation strategies are used by small organic cacao companies to set themselves apart from their competition. Bright and Coll (2012) defined disruptive innovations as an innovation that is a catalyst to create new market and value network. Differentiating products are a way for small organic cacao businesses to create a new market and value network. Participant 4 stated, “See we have a small store and we never expanded because there isn’t that much good stuff to put into a store. A store 2-3 times this size. I mean there just isn’t, you have to separate the wheat from the chaff. You could fill shelves of course but not with really good interesting premium stuff you know. That's why I would use the word curate because that denotes what I am trying to do here." It was observed that Participant 4's business carried the lines of organic products the other participants businesses did not acquire. Participant 4 indicated that their strategy was to identify small organic cacao manufacturers that produce quality products and price their products at a premium in their location. Participant 4 stated, "I have to see the ingredients, and I have to have it sampled. It has to be certified, and have to fit with everything else in the store. Price is not a big deal here."

Marketing approaches may help differentiate between companies based on background factors such as the financial and competitive situation, the industry and the competence of marketing people involved (Lehtinen, 2011). Participant 5 indicated that they differentiate their products by packaging, marketing, and e-commerce. Kohlbacher and Hang (2011) posited disruptive innovation either introduces an affordable product or service that increases access and ability by becoming easier for customers who historically lacked the resources, or helps consumers be more efficient in their current behavior pattern. By placing their products for sale online on platforms such as Ebay® and Amazon®, Participant 5 is reaching non-traditional customers that normally could only purchase their products in their storefront. New technologies have created new strategies to access markets, and practice of multichannel retailing expanded exponentially (Nieto & Santamaria, 2010). Participant 5 had private label brands that the other participants did not. Participant 5 stated, "We carry a specialty line of four products the we developed on our own. We have Organic Peanut Butter Bon Bons in milk and dark. They come in 4 pieces and 9 pieces, and a 4 piece Organic Wink of the Rabbit

Caramels." Private label marketing campaigns are increasing in the organic cacao market, and large manufacturing firms and their brand managers face serious challenges competing with these products (Marton-Partal, 2012). Consumers' perceptions of brands can influence their buying behavior regarding national brands and private labels.

In addition, it was observed that Participant 5 offered a loyal customer reward program. The loyalty reward program was based on the premise of signing customers up for the program, requesting their email address, tracking their orders, and offering customers discounts on a sliding scale when consumers purchased a certain amount of products. Collecting customers' emails and social media usernames also enabled Participant 5 to market their products when they have sales campaigns and events at the store.

Small organic cacao companies that provide online retail channels provide consumers convenience, which enhances the consumer experience (Xiz, Xizo, & Zhang, 2013). All of the participants except Participant 4 and Participant 6 offer their products for sale on the internet. I observed each website from the four participants that had one. All of the websites were professional in appearance; however, each website presented the organic cacao products differently. For example, Participant 1's website provided an abundance of information on each organic cacao product. The origin of the bean, the flavor profile, customer reviews, and recipes were all included in the product descriptions, which differentiated it from the other websites. Conversely, Participant 3's website was limited with just the name and price of the product. However, Participant 3 offered a fresh juice menu made with organic cacao products, which none of the other participants sold their organic cacao in juice form. Euchner (2012) found that innovation results combining existing skills, which small organic cacao businesses are adopting by providing healthy chocolate products. Participant 4 was strongly against food products sold online, and stated, “The most challenging thing is the dilution, I can honestly say like places like Wholefoods. I mean now you can these products in any number of places. People are buying the things on the computer now, which is ridiculous! I don’t agree with that one bit!”

Strategic Locations

The fourth theme was strategic locations. All of the participants indicated the location of their business was a direct factor of them enhancing profits in their distribution channels. The importance of location factors in the entrepreneurial and business development bridges the gap by investigating the moderating effect of location on the relationship between individual determinants, external factors, and firm characteristics. I observed that all of the participants were on streets with a high volume of pedestrians. The exception was Participant 2, which was located on a street with a low volume of pedestrians. Location of a small organic cacao business can factor into the success realized by that company. Roslin and Rosnan (2012) stated the difference between selecting the right location determines failure and success, and found a good retail location provides a retailer with strategic advantages that is difficult for competitors to imitate.

Participant 3 stated, “We are in a great place here to serve all of our customers. We are right next to four major colleges, offices are everywhere over here. We have people walk in and buy all of the time.” For small organic cacao businesses, advertising may be a constraint because of the cost; however, the location of the business can make it visible to customers that normally would not see the business. Small organic cacao business locations are long-term strategic investments for retailers (Pterkova & Gruberova, 2012). Participant 5 stated, “We are a luxury chocolate boutique. We service the affluent crowd on Park Ave.” Participant 5’s business location was a strategic investment to sell luxury products. Conversely, Participant 6 was in a low-income neighborhood with discounted organic cacao products. I observed customers in Participant 5’s business being very knowledgeable about organic products in general; however, I observed the opposite in Participant 6’s location. Participant 6 stated, “My biggest obstacle entering the New York City market is trying to convince consumers how beneficial an item of food is for the body.’

Sufficient Operating Capital

The fifth theme was sufficient operating capital. Dalci and Kosan (2012) posited a constraint was anything that prevents an organization achieving its goal, and there is always at least one constraint in the system at any given time. Small businesses in the organic cacao industry are challenged with maintaining the necessary operating capital to support their operating needs, and to grow their businesses. Financial constraints are the inability of a firm to raise the necessary amounts of capital to finance its innovation activity.

Participant 1 stated, “I expanded my business to Queens, you know Sunnyside. But unfortunately we were unable to compete with the economic crisis in 2008, so I had to close two stores. One small like almost 2,000 square feet. Small gourmet shop like 1,000 square feet for Turkish grocery and we couldn't survive because rent was high, and everything was going up you know. If you want to open this kind of business in New York, especially in the city, I think you should have back up money. Very serious back up money! I mean if you invest $2,000,000 you should have $1,000,000 extra for backup because too much competition." The lack of operating capital caused Participant 1 to close two stores. Chan, Lu, and Zhang (2013) posited firms are more financially constrained, which have higher growth rates and face uncertainty, exhibit a higher marginal value of cash holdings. Social capital was an essential resource for small firms that lack financial resources (Grnum, Verreynne, & Kastelle, 2012). Participant 1 had several employees and more locations compared to the other participants.

Participant 6 stated, "Let me tell you, it is not easy! Rent is so high! I don't have a man paying my bills and feeding my family. Just a startup with four walls. So it is very, very, very costly. You probably need three times more than you invested because nobody know you exist and what you sell you understand. You have to have money for rent and lights, water, phone, and garbage. Every business must have a sticker on their door which was more money. For sanitation to come, I pay $600 a month. They nickel and dime you at every corner!" Participant 6 expressed that there a lot of fees to legitimately run a business in New York City, and these fees are added on to the normal business expenses, which they also perceive was high. All of the participants expressed that having available operating capital and access to a line of credit are key components of surviving in the New York City market. The process of acquiring sufficient and adequate financing was fraught with difficulties, especially for small and new ventures (Goochoco-Bautista, Sotocinal, & Wang, 2014). Participant 6 indicated that they received a small business loan in 2011; however, they were experiencing difficulty in repaying the loan.

Build Customer Relationships

The sixth theme was building customer relationships. All of the participants indicated that customer service gave them an advantage against their competitors. I observed all of the owners actively engaging their customers, and providing them with product information. The service dominant concept implies that customers create value by consuming the products, and customer active participation in the value creation process was essential (Gorgievski, Ascalon, & Stephane, 2011). By engaging and being interactive with customers, small business owners can improve their service and create value from the information that they learn from their customers. Participant 2 stated, "Small organic cacao suppliers actually care about the stores that they sell to and people. They want to know how it is selling, how it is doing, what do the customers ask for, and what do they want. You just don't get that with large companies. No personal touch. It is challenging because we have to give a lot of personal attention to all of our customers. Make sure they are satisfied when they walk out the door. Make sure they don't get expired products. Make sure the products are always fresh, tasty, and put in the right places. I guess if we are talking about food because we have to be very careful because people digest food, and you don't want to get them sick." Gallego, Fortunato, Rossi, Korol, and Moretton (2013), posited efficient management of food safety risks requires the consideration of the amounts of potentially recalled products, affected regions/customers, and logistics efforts connected solve the safety problem.

I used field notes to compare and contrast three participants with five or more years in business, and three participants with less than 5 years' experience. The three participants with five or more years of experience have similarities, which are Participants 1, 4, and 5. For example, each one of these participants has multiple strategic locations in New York City, multiple employees, and professional marketing material. Marketing material came in the form of brochures, business cards, menus, and flyers handed out to pedestrians outside. Participant 1 has a commercial that airs on the local channels. All three of these participants had renovated locations, and their locations were organized in appearance. Their websites were professionally designed interactive websites.

Participants 1, 4, and 5 all had value added services that they offered their customers. For example, each of these participants has a loyal customer reward program. They sign customers up by requesting email addresses and social media handles. Then they offer discounts when customers make a certain level of purchase, which was different for each establishment. Participants 1, 4, and 5 all used the emails and social media handles to simultaneously introduce new products and offer sales to these customers. In addition, customers can leave feedback about products or services. Vega-Vazquez, Revilla-Camacho, and Cossio-Silva (2013) posited co-creation requires the building of experience and the resolving of problems with a combined effort between the parts that make up the relationship, and the retailers value creation abilities are at the point of interaction between the customer and the company.

Participants 1, 4, and 5 all stated that they did not have any challenges entering new organic cacao products. In response to question 9, Participant 1 stated, “I can’t say that I have. The store has been here 44 years. We owned it for 38, so none really to speak of. It was my fathers before me. I have been here since I was 11 years old, and I owned it for 21 years.” Participants 1, 4, and 5 were confident in introducing new products because of their existing customer base.

Participant 2, 3, and 6 owned their businesses for less than 5 years. All three of these participants owned only one location. In addition, each participant did not have employees. Instead, they were responsible for managing every aspect of the their business. I observed these participants performing multiple task at once while interacting with their customers. Chan, Lu, and Zhang (2013) posited surviving with a lack of resources, accessible to larger firms in the same industry, creates unique challenges for small businesses. Participant 3 was the only participant out of these three participants that has a website for the business; however, the website was limited and was not interactive with customers. Participants 2, 3, and 6 all had brochures, fliers, and business cards to market their organic cacao products.

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings of this study are applicable to suppliers and retailers of organic cacao products in the New York City area. Small wholesalers and retailers of organic cacao may benefit from the strategies identified and implemented from similar organizations in New York City. The six themes identified were price point strategies, B2B relationships, differentiation, strategic location, shortage of operating capital, and building customer relationships supported strategies to enhance profits in the distribution channel in the organic cacao industry. Entrepreneurs that are thinking about starting a small organic cacao business in the New York City can use the conclusions in this study to assist them with their decision. Moreover, established small organic companies in the New York City area can use this study to gain insight on their competitors' strategies.

Implications for Social Change

Communities and individuals may benefit from this study from the information provided about organic cacao products. Organic cacao has health benefits, and is an alternative to confectionery chocolate products. Delbourgo (2011) posited that organic cacao products have health benefits such as antioxidants, magnesium, calcium, and dietary supplements. There are health initiatives sponsored by local companies in New York City. These companies promote healthier lifestyles for individuals in the community. The common goals for these companies to fight diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. Tokede, Gaziano, and Djousse (2011) posited organic cacao products reduce risk of diseases such as cardiovascular disease. Organic cacao is a healthy snack alternative to traditional confectionery chocolate products. Nastase et al. (2011) stated more consumers know organic cacao products as a health alternative snack, and consider these products to have nutritional value. Small organic cacao businesses are capable of gaining market share because established chocolate companies are not marketing to health-conscious consumers (Crozier et al., 2012). Introducing new organic cacao products to the New York Tri-State area offers consumers healthier eating choices. Cuellar and Brunomonti (2014) posited that new organic and natural food establishments have been increasingly entering the grocery market.

In addition, the strategies introduced to enhance profits may increase economic growth in the local communities in the New York Tri-State area. Bright and Coll (2012) stated disruptive innovation is the catalyst for new markets and the creating value networks. Small businesses create employment, provides benefits for employees, and provide innovation to local communities. Koen et al. (2011) stated small businesses benefit from developing networks and gain innovative strategies through these networks. Nieto and Santanmaria (2010) posited innovative capability is an important component of achieving a competitive advantage for small businesses because of an increasingly changing market. The continuous development of new products and processes is necessary for sustainability, profitability, and growth. Gummerus (2013) posited managers have a more systematic view on value. Sustainability involves the local community, and small businesses have a responsibility to their local communities. Owners of small organic cacao companies may create value for their local communities in a multitude of ways.

Recommendations for Action

I recommend that small organic company owners strategically negotiate lower prices with suppliers/manufacturers of organic cacao products to gain higher margins after resale of these products. Smed and Andersen (2012) stated determining prices that are not too high for customers, is challenging for small businesses that are considering their supply chain and operation expenses. Price point strategies require small business owners to negotiate advantageous price points with suppliers and distributors. Gaining lower pricing points than competitors in the retail organic cacao industry will enhance profits. Xia et al. (2013) posited pricing strategies affect the profit and growth of firms in the organic cacao industry. There is a direct relationship between small businesses and pricing strategies in the New York Tri-State area. Marasteanu et al. (2014) stated margin is typically low in the organic cacao market, and small firms have to be aware of how prices affect their profit margins. Noordhoff et al. (2011) stated in B2B relationships, the higher the quantity purchased, the lower the price point compared to the retail prices.

The second recommendation is to build strong relationships with businesses throughout the supply chain. Building strong relationships with suppliers and distributors throughout the supply chain is important for the success of small organic cacao retailers. Lowik et al. (2012) stated implementing activities internally and externally are challenges for companies to manage. Small organic cacao companies may overcome this challenge by using their relationships within their supply chains. Childerhouse and Towill (2011) found a significant relationship between supply chain integration and increased business performance. Small business owners can maintain a sustainable advantage through social capital. Gronum, Verreynne, and Kastelle, 2012) posited social capital is an important asset for small firms that lack financial resources.

The third recommendation is to differentiate the products and services provided. Bagdare and Jain (2013) found customer experience is an important factor of differentiation and competitive advantage, and suggested each experience is unique, resulting in a subjective and personal evaluation by a customer. Small organic cacao companies can implement added value activities to separate themselves from competitors such as customer reward programs, educate customers of the health value of organic cacao, and provide recipes for customers to use organic cacao products. Packaging of organic cacao products can effectively differentiate products from competitors. Tanja-Dijkstra (2012) stated packaging designs shape consumers’ perceptions of product attributes, and product packaging increases perceived brand value and related measures such as price expectations. In addition, manufacturers, suppliers, and wholesalers have to be aware of the type of packaging they offer to organic cacao retailers. Marasteanu et al. (2014) stated it is important for new organic cacao products to have attractive packaging to appeal to the retailers’ customers, which may prompt retailers to provide shelf space for these products.

The fourth recommendation is to strategically locate the business near a high volume of pedestrians shopping in the same area. Roslin and Rosnan (2012) found the difference between selecting the right location determines failure and success, and found a good retail location provides a retailer with strategic advantages that are difficult for competitors to imitate. Strategic locations include easy accessibility to the public, clean outward appearance, and a high volume of pedestrians in the area. Iyambo and Otubanjo (2013) stated that location and physical image can factor into the success realized by a company.

The fifth recommendation is to acquire a level of working capital to sustain the business in periods of unforeseen hardships. The lack of capital effects small organic cacao companies' growth capabilities, and makes it challenging to manage daily operating activities. Lowik et al. (2012) posited small companies that lack operating and financial capital can use investors' capital, or loans from banking institutions. Small business owners need access to capital to manage daily expenses and unforeseen expenses. It is challenging for small business owners to obtain credit and bank loans. Macht (2011) posited, business angels are private, wealthy individuals who invest large amounts of their own capital into small non-public businesses.

The sixth recommendation is to build relationships with customers, and acquire feedback from these customers to create value. Szymanoski and Jijsbrechts (2012) stated successful companies establish brand equity and have high consumer retention. Retaining customers is directly related to customers' perceived value of the business. Revilla-Camacho and Cossio-Silva (2013) stated the retailer's value creation abilities are at the point of interaction between the customer and the company. Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier (2010) stated that customers are gaining power because markets are becoming transparent, competition is increasing, and consumers can easily retrieve information about products they purchase. Small businesses can build rapport with their customers and create a personal experience for each customer.

Recommendations for Further Research

The first recommendation for future study is the language and cultural barrier of owners and their customers. It was observed in the field that small business owners in the NewYork Tri-State area are multicultural with English being their second or third language. I observed customers having difficulty communicating with owners and employees about organic cacao products in some locations, while other locations did not have these challenges. The language and cultural barriers of the owners/employees and customers may be factors in enhancing profits in the organic cacao industry.

The second recommendation is to explore if directly sourcing from organic cacao growers enhances profits in the New York Tri-State area. Working with suppliers directly, developing a brand, and marketing the product may be more beneficial to small retailers of organic cacao than purchasing their organic cacao from large distributors. Some small organic cacao retailers purchase their products from large and small distributors; however, they rarely purchase directly from the growers of organic cacao. In an increased globalized economy, direct access to the growers of organic cacao is lower than it has been in the past.

The third recommendation is to study the effect of e-commerce in the organic cacao industry. Traditional storefronts are now offering their products online to reach more customers. Some organic cacao businesses do not offer their products online, and may be at a competitive disadvantage by not offering products online.

Reflections

Before I conducted this study, I thought that small organic cacao retailers were not prevalent in the New York Tri-State area. However, I learned that there are several organic cacao retailers in this specific area that compete on a daily basis with large competitors. The small organic cacao owners cater to their niche market segment, and are successful accessing their markets. There was a high volume of small business owners that fit the criteria for this study.

I scheduled appointments with each participant. Organizing and scheduling interview appointments with participants was challenging. They all had busy schedules, and all of their schedules were subject to change without notice. I had to reschedule appointments with participants multiple times and had to interview them when they were available. Small business owners have a multitude of tasks to complete on any given day, and sparing 15-20 minutes is challenging for them. Some of these small business owners did not have employees, so I postponed interviews as customers entered their establishment. I was able to coordinate with each participant for the best time to interview at his or her establishment, and I completed the interviews within the time I specified to participants. All of the participants were accommodating and enthusiastic about participating in this study.

The participants answered interview questions freely and honestly. The responses of the participants gave me new insight into the organic cacao industry in the New York Tri-State area. Specifically, one of my preconceived notions was small organic cacao companies had negative experiences with small distributors. All six of the participants indicated that they had no negative experiences with small distributors. All participants stated that questions 7 and 8 were not applicable. Some of these retailers preferred working with small distributors versus large distributors because they believed they could acquire unique products that their competitors did not acquire.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Enhancing profits in the distribution channels of small organic cacao companies requires a holistic approach in the New York Tri-State area. Companies should focus on multiple components to enhance profits in their distribution channels. The key components I identified in this study were price point strategy, B2B relationships, differentiation, strategic location, lack of operating capital, and building customer relationships. Strategically addressing all of these components enhances small organic cacao companies' profits in the New York Tri-State area. Each of these six components has a direct relationship with small organic cacao businesses. The small business owners that participated in this study have all indicated that each of the six factors identified affected their businesses. The small businesses that addressed these components in their business models achieved sustainability, and a competitive advantage.

In addition, adding value to products and services by using customer feedback enhanced profits. For example, loyal customer reward programs, and providing a history of the origin of the organic cacao products helped enhance profits. Reward programs offered incentives for customers to purchase organic cacao products at a discount. Reward programs simultaneously enabled small cacao business access to their customers that they did not possess previously. Marketing on social media is advantageous to small organic cacao companies because of the low cost associated with these social platforms. Small businesses can use social media platforms to create value for their customers by introducing sales, inviting loyal customers to special events, and receiving feedback from customers. Receiving feedback can directly help businesses improve their operating activities. Vrgovic et al. (2012) posited leveraging existing knowledge, resources, and feedback processes resulting from company decisions, have a role in building customer relationships. Building personal relationships with customers is a way that small organic cacao businesses can maintain a competitive advantage against larger competitors. Large companies are impersonal, and small companies can create a personalization experience for their customers.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study. The researcher is inviting owners that retail organic cacao products in the NYC Tri-State area to participate in this study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

A researcher named Omari Williams, who is a doctoral student at Walden University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to explore strategies small physical commodities firm owners need to establish a distribution channel within the commodities market to enhance profits.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participants will be asked to participate in an audio recorded face-to-face interview lasting approximately 15-20 minutes.
- Omari Williams will ask you to provide supporting documentation, records, and policies that support formal strategies to establish a distribution channel to enhance profits.
- Omari Williams will member check by contacting participants via telephone, discussing contributions, and verifying the accuracy and meaning of the collected information.

Here are some sample questions:

a. What role do you have in this organization?

b. What types of customers does your business service?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
The study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
There are no known risks for participating in this study. If you are uncomfortable responding to some of the questions, please inform me and we can either stop the interview or skip a question.

Although there are no direct benefits to you, your participation will provide researchers with insights related to understanding how small to medium size companies compete against larger organizations in the organic cacao market.

Payment:
Participants will not be paid to participate in the study.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by issuing a number and initials to maintain the privacy of the individual will identify all interviews. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via: Omari.williams@WaldenU.edu If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 3121210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **01-06-15-0306822** and it expires on **January 5,2016.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant ________________________________

Date of consent ________________________________

Participant's Signature ________________________________

Researcher's Signature ________________________________

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What role do you have in this organization?
2. What type of customers does your business service?
3. What type of organic cacao products do you provide?
4. What are the challenges of working with large distributors?
5. What has been your experience working with small suppliers that distribute organic cacao products?
6. How do you determine to purchase organic cacao from new manufacturers?
7. What negative experiences, if any, have you encountered with small organic cacao distributors?
8. What factors have led to negative experiences with small organic cacao distributors?
9. What obstacles have you found entering the New York City market?
10. What other information can you provide that might provide a better understanding of the challenges faced in this industry?