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Strategies to Reduce Entrepreneurial Burnout

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

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by

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MSPM, The Citadel Graduate College, 2018

BS, Strayer University, 2009

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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December 2022

Abstract

Burnout is a threat to small business sustainability. Many small business entrepreneurs start their business endeavors lacking strategies to reduce burnout that could lead to business failure. Grounded in self-leadership theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies small business entrepreneurs use to reduce burnout in their initial three years in business. The participants were four South Carolina licensed barbers in business for a minimum of three years who had successfully implemented strategies to reduce burnout. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and public documents from participants' business websites and social media. Thematic data analysis resulted in four emergent themes: strategic planning, positive thinking, professional development, and involving others. A key recommendation is for entrepreneurs to prioritize self-care to reduce burnout. The implications for positive social change include the potential to create sustainable entrepreneurial opportunities that stimulate local economies by increasing tax revenues to benefit citizens.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to all entrepreneurs fighting to achieve their dreams.

Acknowledgments

I appreciate my amazing husband, Jonathan Singleton, our five awesome children, and my loving mother-in-law, Phyllis Singleton, for their continued support and patience as I pursued my scholarly ambitions. I am grateful for my father, Alvin Pinckney, Jr., and my late mother, Lillian Pinckney. She still inspires me from the other side. Her faith in me made this journey possible. I am also pleased with Walden University, my doctoral chair, Dr. Matthew Knight, second committee member, Dr. Kenneth Gossett, and university research reviewer, Dr. Michael Gottleib, for their dedication to my success.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Many entrepreneurs do not experience longevity with their first business endeavor. Novice entrepreneurs begin their business ventures without the necessary competencies to help reduce the risk of business failure (Cosenz & Noto, 2018b; Eager et al., 2019). Some business owners feel empowered to start their businesses without proper preparation to avoid unemployment, generate income, or pursue their passion. Various small business owners lead themselves into stressful situations that lead to burnout. Everyone can self-lead, but many are ineffective at self-leadership (Neck et al., 2020). Some entrepreneurs endure stressors because they lack resources and do not understand their unique organizational and personal threats that can hinder the growth and development of their business(es), unintentionally increasing their exhaustion. Business ownership provides financial liberty for some and is the source of depression and burnout for others.

Background of the Problem

The sustainability and success of entrepreneurial endeavors are critical for economic growth. Small businesses are responsible for 99.9% of firms in the United States; however, approximately 40% of startups fail in the first 4 years of business, and 50% of small businesses fail within 5 years (Byun et al., 2020; Cosenz & Noto, 2018b; U.S. Small Business Administration, 2020). Despite the small business failure rate, entrepreneurial activities are increasing (Eager et al., 2019). Entrepreneurship is portrayed through the media as a glorious experience and not the equally common narrative of survival and subsistence (Hunter, 2012).

Many small business owners experience burnout because of the challenges they face when implementing entrepreneurial endeavors (Omrane et al., 2018; Shi & Weber, 2021). Exploring strategies to help entrepreneurs reduce burnout may help decrease the small business failure rate by influencing entrepreneurs to consider the true cost of entrepreneurship and make specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-based decisions as they navigate their dynamic markets.

Problem and Purpose

The specific business problem was that some entrepreneurs lacked strategies to reduce burnout during the initial 3 years of business. The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies entrepreneurs use to reduce burnout. The target population consisted of four South Carolina licensed barber entrepreneurs in operation for a minimum of 3 years who had implemented successful strategies to reduce burnout.

Population and Sampling

Researchers collect and analyze data to answer research questions, and the data collected must be taken from people or organizations that meet the research criteria. The group of people or organizations used to answer research questions is called a population (Majid, 2018). Ethical researchers sample the population by collecting and analyzing data for fewer people when the population size is unmanageable (Majid, 2018; Stratton, 2021). A sample can identify adequate characteristics to answer research questions (Majid, 2018; Stratton, 2021). However, there are times when a researcher may conduct a

census of the entire population to answer the research questions when the population size is manageable (Majid, 2018).

Barbers licensed by the South Carolina Board of Barber Examiners were the population for this study. Eligible barbers contributed success strategies for reducing burnout in their professions and had maintained their licenses for a minimum of 3 years. The South Carolina Board of Examiners finds it appropriate for a licensed barber of 3 years to be eligible to become an instructor of new barbers (South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, n.d.). I used nonprobability and snowball sampling techniques because a list of all licensed barbers in South Carolina was not used to form a sampling frame. Therefore, four barbers in the Tri-County area of Charleston, South Carolina, were selected as research participants to achieve data saturation. The population was appropriate for this study because barber entrepreneurs are responsible for generating income despite obstacles increasing the likelihood of additional stressors and burnout. I collected secondary data from public documents on the participants' business and social networking websites.

Nature of the Study

The methodological choices for research are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Mohajan, 2018; Strijker et al., 2020). The qualitative method is interactive and complex in nature, requiring constructive socialization during data collection and analysis to interpret subjective and socially constructed meanings (Mohajan, 2018). Researchers use the qualitative method to identify and explore themes from the data (van Gelderen, 2016). Using probability sampling to test a hypothesis, researchers follow the quantitative

method to examine variables' characteristics and relationships (Majid, 2018; Mohajan, 2018). Researchers use the mixed method when combining qualitative and quantitative methods to address complex research questions through analytical procedures of qualitative words and images and quantitative statistics and graphs (Strijker et al., 2020). The current study did not require quantitative or mixed-method research methodologies because the research question did not require testing a hypothesis. Therefore, the qualitative methodology was most appropriate because it allowed me to identify successful strategies from key themes among nonstandardized data collection into classification categories to answer the research question.

Ethnography, narrative inquiry, phenomenological, and case study are principal qualitative research designs to answer research questions (Mohajan, 2018; Yin, 2018). Ethnography is a qualitative research design developed to study cultures and ethnic groups (Mohajan, 2018). Researchers may conduct an ethnography to explore social issues (Mohajan, 2018). However, a full account of the study of a culture or ethnic group was not appropriate for the current study because my intent was not to explore social issues. A narrative inquiry is a complete personal account of an event with a specific meaning and purpose (Mohajan, 2018). A narrative inquiry research design requires participants to tell a complete personal story, not partial testimony (Mohajan, 2018). A narrative research design was inappropriate for the current study because a complete personal account of an event would not have helped identify strategies to reduce burnout. Researchers use the phenomenological research design to investigate the personal meanings of the participants' specific lived experiences with the phenomena (Mohajan,

2018). Researchers can use phenomenological findings to understand behavioral responses during a particular phenomenon (Shad et al., 2020). To answer my research question, I did not need to understand the personal meanings of the research participants' lived experiences or actions. Researchers use the case study design to investigate participants' real-world experiences with the research topic by asking *what*, *how*, and *why* questions (Yin, 2018). Researchers may obtain answers to their case study questions by exploring a single company or person or multiple cases (Yin, 2018). The qualitative multiple-case study design was most appropriate to draw cross-case conclusions for capturing themes and similarities to identify strategies entrepreneurs use to reduce burnout in the initial 3 years. I interviewed four small business owner entrepreneurs to achieve data saturation and answer the research question.

Research Question

What strategies do entrepreneurs use to reduce burnout during the initial 3 years in business?

Interview Questions

1. What key strategies have helped you to reduce burnout during your initial 3 years in business?

2. How did you determine the key strategies that helped reduce burnout?

3. How did implementing your key strategies help to reduce stress in your personal life?

4. What lessons have you learned that you feel are important for new first-time business owners to know and implement before launching their businesses to minimize their exposure to burnout?

5. What additional information can you share to help me understand how you reduced burnout during your initial 3 years in business?

Conceptual Framework

The self-leadership theory (SLT) was the contextual foundation for this study. Researchers use the conceptual framework as a guide for developing their study (Turner & Endres, 2017). Entrepreneurs are leaders unto themselves. Entrepreneurs' character, competence, and human capital directly influence the business firm (Jensen et al., 2015; Joslyn, 2018; Ostergaard & Marinova, 2018). Successful entrepreneurs require a combination of opportunity, capabilities, and resources (Sousa, 2018). Self-leadership is the ability to manage oneself in a motivating fashion to do work that must be done (Manz, 1986). Self-leadership is a prerequisite to successful business management practices because it leads to entrepreneurial success (Jensen et al., 2015; Neck & Houghton, 2006; Neck et al., 2020). Entrepreneurs should set behavioral and cognitive strategies that perpetuate self-leadership to guide the trajectory of their business endeavors (Neck & Houghton, 2006).

The SLT was developed in the 1980s by Manz to expand the self-management theory and aligned with the importance of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory. The SLT operates within the theoretical self-regulation framework that suggests confident individuals conquer problems that hinder goal attainment (Neck & Houghton, 2006). SLT

comprises behavior-focused, natural reward, and constructive thought pattern strategies (Neck & Houghton, 2006). Behavior-focused strategies increase self-awareness to execute tasks (Neck & Houghton, 2006). Natural reward strategies transform mundane business activities into enjoyable tasks and focus on the reward of task completion (Neck & Houghton, 2006). Constructive thought pattern strategies facilitate the conversion of dysfunctional beliefs and assumptions into positive, productive thoughts (Neck & Houghton, 2006). Employing the three overarching self-leadership strategies, business owners can position themselves to deploy organizational strategies and processes efficiently and effectively. In essence, the SLT is the process of controlling and leading oneself strategically (Jensen et al., 2015). Entrepreneurs with self-leadership skills dare to resolve, which is necessary to identify successful strategies to reduce burnout during the first 3 years of business.

Operational Definitions

The following keyword definitions help readers understand the term and its use in this research study.

Burnout: A psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Omrane et al., 2018).

Business model: A graphical, mathematical, or symbolic framework that conceptually represents and constructs new business organizations' strategic and organizational pillars to create value and produce revenue (Cosenz & Noto, 2018a).

Entrepreneur: A self-employed individual, an established business owner, or an individual with entrepreneurial tendencies (Ostergaard, 2019).

Entrepreneurship: The appropriate mindset and skills that facilitate business and personal growth (Ostergaard, 2019).

Lean startup: A scientific hypothesis-driven approach to entrepreneurship that allows entrepreneurs to test their vision with minimum viable products (de Faria et al., 2021).

Self-efficacy: The self-estimation or personal judgment of self or one's ability to achieve a goal (Cristofaro & Giardino, 2020).

Startup: A human institution that facilitates the creation of new products and services to customers that do not know they need or want the products or services (Larios, 2021).

Well-being: The state of satisfaction with one's quality of life (Connolly et al., 2020).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Research assumptions are issues, ideas, or opinions within research that are accepted as truth without proof that can alter the conclusion of a study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). My first assumption was that entrepreneurs operating for more than 3 years had discovered strategies to reduce burnout. I also assumed that the sample size would sufficiently answer the research problem. My final assumption was that the participants would have sufficient time and knowledge to provide detailed answers to the interview questions.

Limitations

According to Theofanidis and Fountouki (2019), limitations refer to potential weaknesses or restrictions of the study outside of the researcher's control. My first limitation was that the study results were limited by the honesty, transparency, and thoroughness of participants' experiences of discovering specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-based strategies to help others. The feedback provided by the participants in the sample size may not have been sufficient to answer the research problem, which posed the second limitation of this study to provide strategies to reduce burnout. The third limitation of the study was that participants may not have been allowed sufficient time to provide detailed answers.

Delimitations

Delimitations of a research study are related to variables such as the scope of the research, participants, and geographical location (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The first delimitation of this study was that participants had to be barber entrepreneurs in the state of South Carolina servicing the Tri-County area. The participants also had to have an active barber license for 3 or more years and have implemented successful strategies to reduce burnout.

Significance of the Study

This study's findings may contribute useful insights into strategies to reduce entrepreneurial burnout in different industries while compelling entrepreneurs to assess themselves as self-leaders. Business owners with self-leadership skills influence business success by utilizing the right behavioral and cognitive strategies to improve business

practices and reduce work-related stress (Jensen et al., 2015). The implications for positive social change include the potential to lower unemployment and increase tax revenues to fund infrastructure, education, and social support programs to benefit local citizens.

Contribution to Effective Business Practice

The findings in this study could be important to first-time entrepreneurs because small business owners create the largest share of jobs in the United States. Some entrepreneurs experience business fatigue during the business execution phase because of inadequate resource assessment, insufficient business and project management competencies, and lack of self-awareness (Jensen et al., 2015). Reducing burnout during the initial 3 years in business could assist entrepreneurs in increasing business performance through strategies leading to improved performance and sustainability.

Implications for Social Change

Entrepreneurs are important and contribute to positive social change because of the number of new businesses they create. Knowledge learned from this study on the strategies that reduce burnout may increase business survival rates because the lack of effective strategies could be a root cause of burnout. Pinpointing the successful strategies used to improve the survival of entrepreneurs beyond 3 years of operation could affect social change by creating sustainable entrepreneurial opportunities and stimulating the local economies by increasing tax revenues to benefit citizens.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

In this qualitative multiple-case study, I explored strategies entrepreneurs use to reduce burnout during the initial 3 years in business. This literature review of scholarly research is grounded in SLT. A literature review is a synthesized, comprehensive, overview of relevant literature related to a specific theme, theory, or methodology that advances the subject knowledge of the research topic, identifies knowledge gaps, and may develop new theoretical frameworks (Paul & Criado, 2020). A literature review compiles past and recent research to further the understanding of a research topic and provide direction for future research (Paul & Criado, 2020).

I synthesized methodological and theoretical contributions that further the understanding of entrepreneurship, business practices, and leadership related to reducing entrepreneurial burnout. My literature review is organized by the key topics of this study, starting with the SLT as the conceptual framework and discussing other supporting theories. The remainder of the literature review focuses on other topics relevant to this study, such as burnout, entrepreneurship, small business management, and business planning. These focus areas provide strategies and business competencies that may help reduce entrepreneurial burnout. The lack of effective behavioral and cognitive strategies can hinder entrepreneurs from becoming good self-leaders.

This literature review synthesizes the extant literature to critically analyze the SLT, complementary theories, and relevant topics contributing to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial education, types, orientation, and strategies. I explore foundational aspects of (a) entrepreneurship, (b) entrepreneurial education and types, (c)

entrepreneurial orientation and strategies, and (d) entrepreneurial and project management competencies to understand strategies entrepreneurs may need to reduce burnout. The literature review also includes an analysis of behavioral and cognitive strategies; business strategies, such as lean startup; and the use of business models.

This professional and academic literature review includes seminal, peer-reviewed research, reports, and books. I searched Google Scholar and the holdings of the Walden University Library to acquire literature from various multidisciplinary management, entrepreneurship, education, economics, health, and business online journals and databases, such as ProQuest, SAGE, EBSCOhost, as well as government websites and physical books published by SAGE, The Project Management Institute, Ballentine Books, John Wiley and Sons, and the Harvard Business Review Press. My search keywords were *burnout, business competencies, business failure, business startup, entrepreneur burnout, entrepreneurship, leadership, project management, self-efficacy, self-leadership, small business owners,* and *well-being*. This study includes 174 cited references, of which 156 (89%) are peer-reviewed articles, 138 (79.3%) were published between 2018 and 2022, 10 were books, and five were government websites.

SLT

The conceptual framework for this study was the SLT by Charles Manz. Manz (1986) defined self-leadership as the ability to manage oneself strategically to achieve goals. Self-leadership was also described as the process of self-influence (Goldsby et al., 2021; Harari et al., 2021; Maykrantz & Houghton, 2020; Muller & Niessen, 2017; Neck et al., 2020). Another definition of self-leadership is the act of leading oneself to achieve

personal desires (Goldsby et al., 2021; Harari et al., 2021; Manz, 1986; Neck et al., 2020). Since the 1980s, researchers have used the SLT to address the achievement of challenges and opportunities at a higher level of effectiveness (Cristofaro & Giardino, 2020; Stewart et al., 2019). Individuals can accomplish personal success with self-leadership skills.

The skill set of self-leadership encourages individual-dependent reasoning and behaviors. Self-leadership is a skill that can help individuals control their environment from within through the five building blocks of self-leadership (Lovelace et al., 2007; Neck et al., 2020; Stewart et al., 2019). The five building blocks of self-leadership are (a) the social cognitive theory; (b) the self-determination theory; (c) the self-regulation theory, which sets individual standards; (d) the self-management theory; and (e) positive psychology (Manz, 1986; Neck et al., 2020). Each building block has an important role in the development of self-leadership.

Manz (1986) initially proposed the SLT to understand organizational behavior (OB) because certain aspects of OB were neglected in research. The study of OB is important because it contributes to business outcomes (Manz, 1986). OB is the study of how people perform while working in organizational environments (Salehi et al., 2021). Organizations are efficient when their people are organized. Manz (1986) understood to be organized implied the need for control. OB researchers study human behavior in organizational environments and the relationship between human behavior and the organization (Salehi et al., 2021). The purpose of organization is to impose control (Manz, 1986). Leaders can use control as a mechanism to influence outcomes.

An organization comprises control systems that influence, coordinate, monitor, reward, and punish behavior through standardization and evaluation to achieve business objectives. OB involves how employee motivation and action translate into organizational capabilities (Gagne, 2018). Manz found that self-leadership provides significant managerial benefits (Manz & Neck, 1991; Muller & Niessen, 2017). Before the SLT, the understanding of organizational control processes began and ended with the rhetoric of applying manageable control mechanisms in the form of work standards, appraisals, and rewards from leaders.

Leaders use control processes to imbue employees with organizational values, visions, culture, and belief systems to influence or control employees into reaching organizational goals. Manz (1986) understood that each employee had an internal control system stronger than an imposed control system. Since the 1990s, leaders began acknowledging that an employee driven by self-leadership is more reliable than an employee that follows traditional leadership because self-leadership includes the ability to develop others as leaders and facilitate a healthy relationship between leaders and employees (Prussia et al., 1998; Ugoani, 2021). Organizational control processes are valuable to leaders and managers when workers adopt business processes as their own.

Workers who do things for an internal reward are driven by a deeper purpose than those who do things because of external influence. Effective self-leadership improves performance and is an internal source of influence (Goldsby et al., 2021; Harari et al., 2021; Muller & Niessen, 2017; Ugoani, 2021). To some extent, all people are self-leaders; however, many are not good at it (Neck et al., 2020). Self-leadership is important

for organizational success and the basis of self-managed work. Self-leaders influence, direct, and motivate themselves in a self-controlled fashion that empowers them to achieve their desires by applying cognitive, behavioral, and natural reward strategies, constructive thought patterns, and self-reward (Neck et al., 2020; Prussia et al., 1998). Using self-leadership helps workers to create the ultimate system of self-control through the individual application of all five of the conceptual building blocks of self-leadership (Manz, 1986; Neck et al., 2020; Prussia et al., 1998). Entrepreneurs experience self-leadership through self-influence to initiate and sustain their business endeavors (Neck et al., 2020). Effective long-term self-leadership comes from within.

Leadership is important. Executives, managers, entrepreneurs, and others in positions of authority or mentorship should also utilize self-leadership skills to lead others (Goldsby et al., 2021). The understanding of leadership was initially limited to exchanging influence from one individual to another. Northouse (2019) defined leadership as the power to influence others. The concept of self-leadership appeared to be an oxymoron to some scholars (Stewart et al., 2019). This power to influence has been engrained into the human psyche because of parental leadership and child followership (Maykrantz & Houghton, 2020). Therefore, some scholars did not validate Manz's concept of self-leadership upon introduction because the concept of self-leadership challenged the traditional behaviors and psychological assumptions of leadership being a dynamic that contains two or more people (Jensen et al., 2015; Stewart et al., 2019). Leaders should be able to lead themselves before leading others.

The importance of self-leadership is now recognized among scholars. Researchers who once criticized the SLT find self-leadership in organizations, management, project management, and leadership important (Jensen et al., 2015). Self-leadership was founded on several theories (Neck & Houghton, 2006; Neck et al., 2020). Effective self-leadership contributes to employee and entrepreneur performance, job satisfaction, career success, lower absenteeism, lower work anxiety, and self-efficacy (Cristofaro & Giardino, 2020; Goldsby et al., 2021; Lovelace et al., 2007). The understanding of leadership has evolved.

Self-leadership characteristics are not reserved for the elite. Self-leadership is a learned behavior (Alnakhli et al., 2020). According to several researchers, self-leadership is how people control their behaviors and thoughts by leading themselves to achieve personal effectiveness in their professional and private lives (Cristofaro & Giardino, 2020; Goldsby et al., 2021; Neck & Houghton, 2006; Neck et al., 2020). Self-leadership captures the highest degree of internal control in organizations, provides an understanding of self, and offers a practical perspective on self-management (Neck et al., 2020; Stewart et al., 2019). Self-leadership is for individuals that desire to be effective.

Self-leaders create goals for personal reasons. Internal and external sources of influence affect performance differently. Goals or standards created by an external source require external influence, and goals or standards created internally by an individual require self-influence (Manz, 1986). Manz (1986) suggested that an individual's internal control system is the ultimate control system because it deals with the underlying reason for expressed behavior. Employees come to jobs with values, visions, and beliefs that are not erased for a paycheck. An individual's internal control system has self-evaluation

processes, rewards, punishments, and behavioral scripts to control their decisions (Manz, 1986). Manz's understanding of internal control systems parallels Bandura's (1977) explanation that people desire to exercise control over the things that happen in their lives.

The Critical Elements of Self-Leadership

The process of establishing and managing standards is important. A standard is the foundation for goal attainment through the practice of developing, committing, and pursuing objectives (Gagne, 2018; Manz, 1986). Self-leaders achieve goals through intentional behaviors. Understanding what, how, and why things need to be done are the critical elements of self-leadership to meet desired outcomes (Neck et al., 2020). Self-leadership is a skill comprised of the unique responsibility of an individual to (a) set standards to achieve goals that they know must be done, (b) strategically implement actions or adjust behavior to demonstrate how actions need to be done through the promotion of intrinsic motivation, and (c) purposefully analyze why actions should be done to facilitate the necessary levels of self-control to stay the course (Manz, 1986; Neck et al., 2020). The three critical elements separate self-leadership from other styles of leadership.

Self-leadership is when a leader self-adjusts to achieve goals, while other forms of leadership focus on leading others toward goal attainment. True self-leaders have personal meaningfulness and ownership of governing standards (Manz, 1986). The building blocks of self-leadership present an array of cognitive and behavioral strategies that address what, how, and why individual capabilities become self-leading.

Intentional, informed, and self-influenced individuals can be effective self-leaders by applying the self-leadership building blocks and understanding the critical elements. The SLT building blocks include (a) the social cognitive theory, which addresses the dual-control system, triadic reciprocal model, and self-efficacy; (b) the self-determination theory, which addresses the need for competence and determination; (c) the self-regulation theory, which presents individual standards; (d) the self-management theory, which indicates how individuals complete tasks as required through behavioral and cognitive strategies; and (e) positive psychology that address positive emotions, character traits, and intentional activities (Manz, 1986; Neck et al., 2020). Self-leadership allows individuals to lead from within, reducing external dependence on others.

Strategic Categories of Self-Leadership

Self-leadership is the process of strategically motivating and influencing oneself. The strategic categories of the SLT are behavior-focused, natural reward, and constructive-thought strategies (Goldsby et al., 2021; Harari et al., 2021; Maykrantz & Houghton, 2020; Neck & Houghton, 2006; Neck et al., 2020). The SLT emphasizes the importance of cognition, intrinsic rewards, behavior, and other internal factors (Stewart et al., 2019). Leading oneself with behavioral and cognitive strategies is a component of self-leadership (Castellano et al., 2021; Neck & Houghton, 2006; Neck et al., 2020). Motivation is the reason for doing something, while influence is the power to cause changed behavior.

Specific behavioral and cognitive strategies help individuals align themselves to effectively self-lead and control their environments. Self-leadership begins when

individuals recognize a gap between their perceived situation and an internal standard and desire to close the gap through goal attainment (Stewart et al., 2019). Behavioral-focused, natural reward, and constructive thought patterns are self-leadership strategic categories that facilitate self-influence (Neck & Houghton, 2006). Heightened self-awareness manifests through behavioral activities leading to the appropriate self-observation, self-reward, self-goal setting, and self-cueing. Behaviorally, self-leadership will wean out unproductive and ineffective behaviors through self-correction (Harari et al., 2021; Maykrantz & Houghton, 2020; Muller & Niessen, 2017; Neck & Houghton, 2006). Leaders who practice self-leadership strategies create an advantage in controlling their work environments (Lovelace et al., 2007).

Behavioral-Focused Strategies. Individual behavior can impact planned outcomes. Some individuals must lead themselves to face challenges, make sacrifices, and perform needed actions to accomplish tasks (Neck et al., 2020). Behavioral-focused strategies are activities individuals perform that enhance their self-assessment, self-reward, and self-discipline, which would lead to behavior modifications to perform tasks when lacking intrinsic motivation (Goldsby et al., 2021; Lovelace et al., 2007; Maykrantz & Houghton, 2020; Muller & Niessen, 2017; Neck & Houghton, 2006; Prussia et al., 1998). Behavioral strategies can be as simple as setting reminders to complete a task on time (Neck et al., 2020). Behavior is managed through self-observation, self-goal setting, self-rewards, self-punishment, and self-cueing (Muller & Niessen, 2017; Neck et al., 2020). Self-leaders can use behavioral strategies to achieve planned outcomes.

Natural Reward Strategies. People should perform activities they believe are worthwhile and make them feel good. Individuals actively seeking naturally rewarding activities create positive attention toward task completion, enabling competence, self-determination, purpose, autonomy, and positive energy (Maykrantz & Houghton, 2020; Neck & Houghton, 2006; Neck et al., 2020; Prussia et al., 1998). Effective self-leaders strategically plan to incorporate naturally rewarding tasks throughout the process to help them reach their goals (Neck et al., 2020). Rewards are the most exciting aspect of task completion; however, the feeling of accomplishment does not have to wait until the end.

Constructive Thought Patterns. A constructive thought pattern can propel individuals to achieve things that destructive thought patterns do not allow. Creating constructive thought patterns alters thoughts using positive mental imagery, self-talk, self-analysis, and beliefs (Manz & Neck, 1991; Maykrantz & Houghton, 2020; Prussia et al., 1998). Constructive thought patterns include eliminating dysfunctional beliefs and assumptions (Manz & Neck, 1991). Dysfunctional thinking hinders effectiveness (Manz & Neck, 1991). Trust is essential to maintaining constructive thought patterns to eliminate inhibiting beliefs that could lead to burnout. The ability to trust is birthed from an individual's cognitive processing and could positively influence performance (Ugoani, 2021; van der Werff et al., 2019). Trust can create a psychological, motivational state to achieve intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction (van der Werff et al., 2019). Healthy self-talk and positive mental imagery help individuals bring their desires into reality. Individuals cannot have effective self-talk if they are not self-aware and trust themselves through self-leadership.

Supporting Theories of the Conceptual Framework

Self-leadership is strategic behavior management. Manz (1986) developed the SLT primarily from Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory. The SLT provides a comprehensive self-influence perspective through the self-management of behavior (Goldsby et al., 2021; Manz, 1986; Muller & Niessen, 2017). As self-leaders strive to manage their behaviors better, they become action oriented. In a nonpublished setting, Beaulieu coined the self-action leadership (SAL) theory in 2013 by adding a moral component to the SLT (Jensen et al., 2015). SAL is action-oriented self-leadership that emphasizes moral behavior, existential growth, and the development of self and others (Jensen et al., 2015). The social cognitive and self-determination theories are the first two building blocks of self-leadership. Self-leaders experience personal development through behavioral management.

Social Cognitive Theory

The social cognitive theory is one of the five building blocks of self-leadership. As a foundational pillar of self-leadership, the social cognitive theory addresses one's capabilities to organize, control, and execute necessary actions to reach the desired outcome (Bandura, 1977; Harari et al., 2021; Prussia et al., 1998). The social cognitive theory was relevant to the development of the self-leadership theory because it addresses how people influence their behavioral reactions and regulate their behavior in their environment using internal standards and cognitive processes (Alnakhli et al., 2020; Neck et al., 2020). Researchers use the social cognitive theory to explore how individuals self-monitor through self-regulation, self-awareness, self-efficacy, and the triadic reciprocal

model of behavior to achieve the appropriate behavioral reactions (Bandura, 1995; Neck et al., 2020). However, the social cognitive theory indicates that the triadic reciprocal behavior model and self-efficacy help individuals advance from self-monitoring to self-influencing to achieve their goals (Bandura, 1995; Neck et al., 2020).

The triadic reciprocal model presents how individuals relate to and react to their internal and external experiences. The triadic reciprocal model of behavior indicates that behavior is produced by a combination of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors (Alisic & Wiese, 2020; Neck et al., 2020). Bandura (1995) explained that the triadic reciprocal model addresses how people respond to different situations and how situations affect behavior and well-being. The triadic reciprocal model addresses the causation of personal, behavioral, and environmental experiences on individual choices, influencing outcomes.

People are influenced by how they see themselves. Self-efficacy addresses the perception of capabilities, skills, and confidence toward goal attainment and enhances personal effectiveness (Harari et al., 2021; Neck et al., 2020). Self-leaders use self-efficacy to assess personal ability, demonstrate individual effectiveness, and exercise good judgment to impact performance (Goldsby et al., 2021; Neck et al., 2020). As a skill, self-efficacy is developed through personal and vicarious experiences that exercise one's cognitive, social, linguistic, and physical abilities (Harari et al., 2021; Prussia et al., 1998). Individuals who effectively use the skill of self-efficacy will determine which challenges to undertake, the level of effort towards an endeavor, and how long to endure challenging times, often using self-instructional thoughts, or learning through modeling

(Prussia et al., 1998). Self-efficacy indicates how individuals view themselves in response to challenges and how individuals make decisions regarding actions to undertake and which ones to avoid (Bandura, 1995; Neck et al., 2020). A positive perception of self can contribute to positive results.

The Self-Determination Theory

Self-leaders become motivated to work for different reasons. The self-determination theory presents psychological processes to assist individuals in achieving goals using intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, personal development, and wellness (Gagne, 2018; Neck et al., 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2019, 2020). The self-determination theory indicates that people are motivated to work when they complete a task that makes them feel good or to achieve an external result or reward (Gagne, 2018). Individuals can use the self-determination theory framework to show inherent motivational propensities to learn, grow, and connect with others (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The self-determination theory indicates that people who overcome challenges will become more self-determined (Neck et al., 2020). Self-leaders are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to complete desirable and undesirable tasks to achieve goals.

Some people lack the motivation to complete tasks when facing challenges. Individuals experience intrinsic motivation when they perform fun activities that provide personal enjoyment and experience extrinsic motivation to satisfy external demands or avoid negative consequences (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are three fundamental psychological needs to help motivate individuals to be self-determined. Some people need to feel they have the power to make decisions, the

skills and understanding to do the work, and the relatedness to collaborate and build

relationships with others to exercise determination (Gagne, 2018). With activation and

intention, motivation is produced using social, biological, and cognitive energy. Self-

leaders must be determined to lead themselves out of difficult situations.

SAL

Leaders have different moral compasses. The SAL theory adds a moral

component to self-leadership (Jensen et al., 2015). Adolf Hitler and Nelson Mandela

were both self-leaders and influential leaders but not morally aligned (Jensen et al., 2015;

Neck et al., 2020). The SAL theory suggests that leaders lead themselves by focusing on

personal development and well-being for themselves and others (Jensen et al., 2015). The

SAL theory comprises four stages to encourage leaders' personal and professional

development from the inside out using a character-centric approach (Jensen et al., 2015).

The cyclical steps of the SAL are (a) planning and preparation; (b) developing integrity-

based character; (c) completing actions; and (d) observation, analysis, and change (Jensen

et al., 2015). Self-action leaders care about the well-being of themselves and others.

Burnout

The experience of burnout may indicate mismanagement of resources. According

to the World Health Organization, burnout is the unsuccessful management of chronic

workplace stress (Adina et al., 2021). Burnout is stress and a consequence of

occupational stress (Voitenko, 2020). Freudenberger (1975) defined burnout as a

technical term with three elements. According to Freudenberger, burnout is a

psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased sense

of accomplishment (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2020; Omrane et al., 2018). Burnout is a state of total exhaustion, feeling of failure, and debilitation because of excessive use of personal resources and energy in a professional environment (Freudenberger, 1975; Omrane et al., 2018). Chronic stress can lead to burnout, and stressed employees hurt company culture and profits (El Oddi & Knoop, 2022). About half of U.S. workers have left a job to get away from their managers to reduce stress (El Oddi & Knoop, 2022). U.S. companies spend roughly $15 billion annually on managerial and leadership training and development (El Oddi & Knoop, 2022). Burnout results from a devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that leads to a state of chronic fatigue, depression, and frustration because the expected fulfillment or rewards were not met (Omrane et al., 2018). People may experience burnout when their current state does not match their expectations because of a lack of time, money, resources, and experience.

Entrepreneurs need to reach a state of well-being by effectively managing stress. Burnout is the manifestation of managing stress ineffectively. Stress is a manifestation of the imbalance between demands and availability (Rauch et al., 2018). Burnout was initially known as a syndrome of support professionals' inability to adapt to the emotional stress of their working environment (Omrane et al., 2018). Freudenberger originally understood burnout as depleted resources and energy (Omrane et al., 2018). Burnout decreases performance (Calvo & García, 2018). Burnout indicates exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness (Dewi et al., 2022). Burnout threatens business, personal life, and health (Omrane et al., 2018; Sufi & Sandhya, 2019). People in business leadership roles are exposed to economic, organizational, and sociopsychological

stressors (Voitenko, 2020). Health and well-being in the workplace are important factors in promoting organizational success (Steffens et al., 2018). The personal well-being of entrepreneurs should be their priority because well-being is a state of satisfaction with one's quality of life (Connolly et al., 2020). When an entrepreneur experiences burnout, personal well-being or quality of life is attacked first (Shir & Ryff, 2021). Well-being is influenced by psychological functioning, which is one's ability to meet personal aspirations (Connolly et al., 2020). Engaging in entrepreneurship can also lead to higher levels of job and life satisfaction, which are critical to entrepreneurs achieving a state of well-being.

Entrepreneurial endeavors, including business ownership, can be stressful, leading to burnout even though individuals may experience burnout differently. According to Maykrantz and Houghton (2020), stress is mind-body arousal that can lead to positive and negative results. However, stress is inevitable (Maykrantz & Houghton, 2020). Stress becomes unhealthy when it manifests as fatigue in the body, causing some people to crash. Stress can cause physiological effects such as insomnia, depression, suicide, eating disorders, and sustenance abuse, to name a few (Maykrantz & Houghton, 2020). Entrepreneurs' mental health and well-being have become important in entrepreneurship management (Busch et al., 2021). People who serve others experience higher burnout because of the constant need to respond, work, or give.

Stress without relief triggers the psychological breakdown that causes burnout. According to Sufi and Sandhya (2019), the four types of stress entrepreneurs experience are (a) loneliness because of the lack of trust in others, (b) immersion in work because of

the needs of businesses, (c) stakeholder management issues because of the need to depend on others that are not as invested into the success of the endeavor, and (d) the need for achievement may be too much for an entrepreneur to handle, which adds to stress. Unfortunately, burnout is a serious experience among entrepreneurs.

Burnout can threaten business operations. Nascent entrepreneurs are more likely to experience burnout because of their inability to meet demands, leading to emotional, cognitive behavior and psychological patterns that jeopardize their organizations (Dewi et al., 2022; Omrane et al., 2018). Work overload is a cause of stress, which can lead to burnout. Work overload happens when individuals endure work volume or conditions that overwhelm their available resources, capabilities, and time (Dewi et al., 2022; Stroe et al., 2018). Business owners cannot effectively manage business demands with scarce resources (Rauch et al., 2018). Burnout, as a syndrome, can lead business owners to chronic stress or exhaustion (El Oddi & Knoop, 2022). Stress without sufficient relief can spark psychological breakdowns (Maykrantz & Houghton, 2020). Entrepreneurs could fail in managing their businesses because of stress. Burnout manifests because of what the owners lack. First-time small business owners should understand that a business is only as strong as the business owner or team. Business owners may experience burnout because of insufficient resources, bad habits, ignorance, and a lack of self-awareness.

Self-leaders are responsible for creating the right work conditions to thrive. Some entrepreneurs cannot effectively prioritize and manage their well-being or health because of their workload (Busch et al., 2021). However, some individuals can persevere through the heavy workload demands and produce healthy psychological responses such as self-

efficacy and purpose while enduring stress (Busch et al., 2021). These individuals can thrive because they can recover or restore their state of well-being quickly without depletion (Busch et al., 2021). Unfortunately, not everyone that endures stress or high work demands experiences recovery.

Entrepreneurs should be able to lead themselves out of challenging and stressful situations. Self-leadership adds value to the quality of life (Jensen et al., 2015). Self-efficacy is the self-estimation or personal judgment to achieve goals (Cristofaro & Giardino, 2020). Business sustainability is a huge business objective for entrepreneurs, which can be attainable through the conscious direction of self (Jensen et al., 2015). According to Alisic and Wiese (2020), self-management and self-efficacy are important for managing career insecurities and vulnerable resources. Self-leaders are ultimately responsible for reducing their burnout.

Burnout does not have to be endured throughout the lifespan of the business endeavor. To reduce uncertainty is to reduce stress; therefore, entrepreneurs can reduce stress by reducing uncertainty (Rauch et al., 2018). Burnout is a syndrome of depletion (Sofair, 2017). Entrepreneurs should equip themselves with strategies to help them achieve their business goals and to evaluate personal and organizational resources, planning, and resource support.

Reduce Burnout Through Self-leadership

Self-leadership can help entrepreneurs organize their responsibilities and risks to reduce burnout. Entrepreneurs endure increasing levels of work-related stress that may lead to burnout (Godwin et al., 2016). Globalization, technological advances, limited

resources, and inflation are stressors on business leaders and managers, causing exhaustion and burnout (Lovelace et al., 2007). In the early 2000s, work stress cost organizations billions of dollars annually in lost productivity, health care expenses, and lawsuits induced by stress (Calvo & García, 2018; Lovelace et al., 2007). Self-leadership may play a vital role in helping entrepreneurs manage demands and mitigate stress through the building blocks of self-leadership (Godwin et al., 2016; Lovelace et al., 2007; Neck et al., 2020). Stress management can be challenging (Maykrantz & Houghton, 2020). Self-leadership can help organizational leaders and entrepreneurs thrive in stressful dynamic work environments because self-leadership shapes individual experiences through thought patterns, self-efficacy, and reducing disciplinary failures (Godwin et al., 2016; Maykrantz & Houghton, 2020; Ugoani, 2021). The traditional leader–follower relationship can be exchanged for the interactive and mutual influence of shared leadership when the individuals involved in the relationship are self-directed (Lovelace et al., 2007; Maykrantz & Houghton, 2020; Ugoani, 2021). Entrepreneurs face challenges when organizing and strategizing in complex, dynamic, and disruptive business environments (Torres et al., 2017).

A balanced view of self may help entrepreneurs make the best judgment calls without relying on instincts that may or may not be developed. Self-aware individuals understand their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, needs, resources, and stress thresholds (Harvard Business Review Press, 2019). Self-awareness is needed for self-leading entrepreneurs to be successful. A deeper understanding of self-leadership, entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial types may help entrepreneurs strategically manage

themselves in alignment with their business operations to reduce stress and business burnout (Arshad et al., 2020; Calvo & García, 2018; Omrane et al., 2018; Tehseen et al., 2019). The use of self-leadership facilitates self-control, behavioral self-management, intrinsic motivation, autonomy, mental practice, self-awareness, self-respect, self-worth, self-assessment, self-regulation, and self-organization, which first-time entrepreneurs may need to achieve business objectives with less stress (Goldsby et al., 2021; Jensen et al., 2015; Neck et al., 2020; Shir & Ryff, 2021; Ugoani, 2021). The application of tools and resources may help entrepreneurs organize their business endeavors. Burnout can stifle first-time business owners from building and sustaining their business endeavors (Godwin et al., 2016). Entrepreneurs should lead themselves through challenging times to reach sustainability and reduce burnout through self-leadership (Goldsby et al., 2021). Some entrepreneurs experience burnout because they do not understand themselves as an entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurship

The understanding of entrepreneurship has evolved. Cantillon (2010), the father of economics and entrepreneurship theories, reintroduced an entrepreneur as a functional economic concept in the 1700s as a medium of exchange and circulation, bringing balance to supply and demand (Larios, 2021; Thornton, 2020). Cantillon is credited for changing the meaning of an entrepreneur from a political term to a market orientation (Thornton, 2020). Before the 1700s, entrepreneurs were referred to as colonizers and explorers for their violent, war-like, and strategic maneuvers to gain a competitive advantage in earlier centuries (Thornton, 2020). The term strategy is derived from the

Greek word *strategos*, which means art of the general or art of war (Dyer et al., 2018).

Entrepreneurs engage in strategic risk-taking activities to exchange goods and services

for profit (Sufi & Sandhya, 2019). Risk-takers face uncertainty (Diandra & Azmy, 2020;

Welter et al., 2021). Entrepreneurship is an uncertain undertaking (Nikolaev et al., 2020;

Welter et al., 2021). Cantillon understood entrepreneurs as anyone who buys goods or

resources at a fixed market price to be sold again in the future at the risk of unknown and

uncertain profit or loss (Thornton, 2020). Entrepreneurs are risk-takers.

People can explore entrepreneurship through different paths. A single definition

of entrepreneurship is impossible (Dijkhuizen et al., 2018; Doran et al., 2018; Vukičević

& Celić, 2020). *Entreprendre* means an act of administration or refers to someone

completing activities (Kier & McMullen, 2018; Thornton, 2020). Entrepreneurship is a

multidisciplinary, complex, dynamic phenomenon in business with broad variances in

understanding (Alsaaty & Sawyer, 2019; Diandra & Azmy, 2020; Ostergaard, 2019). As

an art and discipline, entrepreneurship influences business outcomes by activating the

appropriate mindset and leveraging skills that facilitate business and personal growth

(Diandra & Azmy, 2020; Ostergaard, 2019; Torres et al., 2017). Entrepreneurs have

made contributions academically across sociology, psychology, economics, and

management because it is the result of the behavioral responses of interacting or reacting

to environmental opportunities, even to the point of blurring the dividing line between

entrepreneurs and nonentrepreneurs (Bi et al., 2021; Handayati et al., 2020; Jones et al.,

2018; Ostergaard et al., 2018). Entrepreneurs contribute to economic growth and

innovation (Alsaaty & Sawyer, 2019; Handayati et al., 2020; Mahfud et al., 2020;

Ostergaard et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2018;). The Small Business Administration (SBA), government grants, loans, business startup programs, and social media have contributed to the popularity of entrepreneurship career paths.

Entrepreneurship does not mean the same thing to everyone. Approaching entrepreneurship from one perspective may lead to a misinformed perspective. Gartner (1988) did not perpetuate the idea that a fixed state of existence or personality traits would define a true entrepreneur (Ramoglou et al., 2020). For example, not all scholars agree that individual traits determine who can and cannot become entrepreneurs because entrepreneurs are not a monolith (Gartner, 1988). Gartner defined entrepreneurship as an organizational process that creates a new organization or business venture to pursue an opportunity. Some scholars limited the definition of an entrepreneur to individuals who started or owned a business or a manager within an organization (Dijkhuizen et al., 2018). Technological advances, like social media, have made it easier for ordinary people to explore entrepreneurial career paths.

Entrepreneurs create new opportunities. Economists confirm that entrepreneurs are the creatives responsible for the innovation that drives socio-economic growth in many countries through small- and medium-sized enterprises by reducing unemployment, product innovation, contributing to political and technological changes, and exploiting opportunities (Arshad et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2018; Eniola et al., 2019; Haider et al., 2017). The concept of entrepreneurship was not always recognized as the economic game-changer impacting employment and productivity by creating innovative products and services for profit that help solve societal challenges (Chege & Wang, 2020; Dean &

East, 2019; Sousa, 2018; Sufi & Sandhya, 2019). The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor consortium was established to explore the relationship between entrepreneurship and economic growth and development (Doran et al., 2018). Economies become sustainable because of entrepreneurial endeavors.

There is a psychological component to entrepreneurship. An entrepreneur can transform a business idea into a career and convert an opportunity into an organization that builds the economic infrastructure for wealth (Diandra & Azmy, 2020). Economic growth predicates entrepreneurial development (Yurchynska & Serdiuk, 2017). Entrepreneurial development can be influenced by an entrepreneur's psychological factors (Diandra & Azmy, 2020; Yurchynska & Serdiuk, 2017). Psychological factors include personal self-fulfillment, autonomy, ideological values, human capital, and wellbeing (Ostergaard, 2019; Ostergaard & Marinova, 2018; Yurchynska & Serdiuk, 2017). New products and services stimulate economic gain.

Entrepreneurs are creative and critical thinkers. An entrepreneurial mindset is shaped through cognitive processes and competence (Handayati et al., 2020). Identifying who entrepreneurs are in terms of traits and risk-taking thresholds is the wrong approach to understanding an entrepreneur (Bi et al., 2021; Gartner, 1988; Ramoglou et al., 2020). Cognitive and behavioral approaches to understanding entrepreneurial competencies and patterns provide more insight into how an individual can toggle between the actions and thought patterns that differentiate between someone operating as an entrepreneur versus those that display more nonentrepreneurial behaviors and cognitions (Bi et al., 2021).

Entrepreneurs are self-led through entrepreneurial intentions (Mahfud et al., 2020).

Entrepreneurs can look through obstacles and create opportunities.

Entrepreneurship is a journey that most entrepreneurial education resources do not

acknowledge or insufficiently capture. Entrepreneurship can be understood as a process

of becoming (Pokidko et al., 2020). Becoming an entrepreneur is not limited to age or

circumstances (Pokidko et al., 2020). An entrepreneur's perception, role, and duties

constantly evolve (Thornton, 2020). Entrepreneurs can transform ideas into opportunities

and people into visionaries creating new business ventures with uncertainty (Kier &

McMullen, 2018; McCaffrey, 2017; Pokidko et al., 2020; Welter et al., 2021). Individuals

who explore entrepreneurship undergo a transformation process to develop the

competencies and behaviors to sustain the desired business endeavor (Pokidko et al.,

2020).

Entrepreneurial Education

Knowledge and best practices can be transferred through entrepreneurial

education. Entrepreneurship education generally promotes entrepreneurial activity and

creativity by teaching practical competencies and theoretical learning and is the fastest

method to assist novice entrepreneurs (Gunzel-Jensen & Robinson, 2017; Hagg &

Kurczewska, 2020; Nabi et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2021). Entrepreneurial behaviors can

be learned and developed through education because education can empower people in

academia, organizations, and communities (Handayati et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2018;

Nabi et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2021). Learning can reduce uncertainty (Rauch et al.,

2018). Entrepreneur education and resources are blossoming, but most entrepreneurial

education is taught from a classical economic perspective, which may not be directly

transferable to help entrepreneurs navigate the creation of a startup or to discover their

entrepreneurial type (Gunzel-Jensen & Robinson, 2017; Pokidko et al., 2020). Learning

is fundamental for entrepreneurs with startups (Larios, 2021). Knowledgeable

entrepreneurs can better prepare for their business endeavors.

There are three types of entrepreneurship education. There is education *about*

entrepreneurship, *for* entrepreneurship, and *through* entrepreneurship (Gunzel-Jensen &

Robinson, 2017). Education about and for entrepreneurship exposes traditional teachings

of theory and skills, while education through entrepreneurship expounds on

psychological aspects of mindset, capabilities, and learner-centric knowledge (Gunzel-

Jensen & Robinson, 2017). Entrepreneurs need to be self-aware and know which form of

entrepreneurial education is needed for each phase of their entrepreneurial journey.

Entrepreneurial Types

Entrepreneurs should have a business-appropriate posture and understand their

entrepreneurial type before engaging in business. Identifying who could become or is an

entrepreneur was overly complex (Gartner, 1988). Entrepreneurship is not limited to risk-

takers that create startups (Doran et al., 2018). An entrepreneur can be a self-employed

individual, an established business owner, or a self-starter with an innovative approach to

business activities within existing organizations (Doran et al., 2018; Ostergaard, 2019).

Entrepreneurs that know their entrepreneurial type can develop the appropriate strategies

to reduce burnout to cultivate a state of well-being for their best interest. There are three

entrepreneurial types: (a) self-employed, (b) business owners, and (c) core entrepreneurs

(Ostergaard, 2019). According to Arshad et al. (2020), entrepreneurs posture themselves through (a) innovativeness, (b) pro-activeness, (c) risk-taking abilities, (d) competitive aggressiveness, and (e) autonomy, which determines how well they perform activities, practices, and decision-making processes. A business-appropriate posture is pivotal and strategic for entrepreneurs to reduce burnout.

Entrepreneurship is not only for creating and maintaining a new business venture. Entrepreneurship can be measured differently (Doran et al., 2018; Ostergaard, 2019; Yurchynska & Serdiuk, 2017). Entrepreneurship can be a path to fulfill core values that add to an individual's well-being (Shir & Ryff, 2021). Entrepreneurial development is predicated upon the well-being of entrepreneurs (Dijkhuizen et al., 2018). However, the path to well-being on the road to entrepreneurship is not clearly defined (Nikolaev et al., 2020). Entrepreneurs are not the same and can explore different and unconventional paths to explore their entrepreneurial endeavors. The effectiveness of entrepreneurship is determined by the characteristics of the entrepreneur (Yurchynska & Serdiuk, 2017). The role of the entrepreneur seems simple but is complicated.

An entrepreneur's job can be to organize business operations. Entrepreneurship, as a system, influences organizational structure through the conception of ideas (Ostergaard, 2019; Sousa, 2018). Historically, previous attempts to differentiate between entrepreneurs, small business owners, and managers were challenging (Gartner, 1988). Different entrepreneurial types were not always understood, and the relationship between entrepreneurial types was not always identified because the term entrepreneurs needed a balanced explanation (Ostergaard, 2019). As entrepreneurs increased, so did the

knowledge gap of what it meant to be an entrepreneur. Generically, an entrepreneur is someone who explores entrepreneurial activities (Yurchynska & Serdiuk, 2017). Unique business operations and management structures justify the distinction between the three entrepreneurial types.

Self-Employed Entrepreneurs. A freelancer is a broad term and accommodates many different paths of entrepreneurship. The self-employed entrepreneurs are freelancers who usually serve their local communities (Ostergaard, 2019). Self-employed individuals usually reference people who (a) had no work history or were previously unemployed, (b) had a self-employed family, (c) had a parent that worked part-time to take care of children, and (d) lived in areas with limited job opportunities (Blanchflower & Oswald, 1998). Business owners differ from self-employed entrepreneurs because business owners hire people within their community and maintain a set product or service with little change, usually keeping the business in their families (Ostergaard, 2019). Freelancers usually work on their terms and define their paths to business sustainability, unlike small business owner entrepreneurs.

Not all entrepreneurs desire to employ others. According to Connolly et al. (2020), self-employed business owners without employees are more satisfied with their jobs than business owners with employees. Business owners, the second entrepreneurial type, may be motivated by a market opportunity through an innovative idea or by the need to create income (Eniola, 2021). Self-employed entrepreneurs may feel compelled to transition into small business owners with employees depending on business growth and needs.

Small Business Owners. Different measures separate small businesses from other business structures. According to the SBA, a small business establishment has 500 or fewer employees, intends to make a profit, is independently owned, and pays taxes (Anastasia, 2015). Minor nuances can change the business status, such as the industry or income of the business (Anastasia, 2015). Many theorists desire to expand the definition of small businesses by restructuring the employee headcount into effective subcategories (Anastasia, 2015). The SBA has declared microenterprises as small businesses with less than 10 employees and lacks substantial finances to grow and sustain the business (Anastasia, 2015). Small business enterprises have a wide range of organizational structures. Business owners have unique barriers to entry, hard and soft skills, resources, and support systems.

First-time entrepreneurs should intentionally direct their actions to accomplish their goals. Not all entrepreneurs have the same resources and funding opportunities because not all will qualify (Anastasia, 2015). Before competing in their respective markets, women and other minority business owners in the United States must be aware of the systemic bottlenecking that threatens their business growth (Anastasia, 2015). Competitive business environments can be volatile and unforgiving (Kopmann et al., 2017). Before starting a business, risk-takers should adequately assess personal threats, opportunities, strengths, and weaknesses.

Business owners should understand who they are, their attitudes, and their aspirations to reduce burnout while executing their business endeavors. Business growth is contingent upon the character, competence, and capacity of the owner's human capital

and resources to effectively sustain a business (de Faria et al., 2021; Jensen et al., 2015; Joslyn, 2018; Ostergaard & Marinova, 2018). Entrepreneurs who lack leadership, communication, and critical thinking skills find it difficult to communicate and behave effectively (Varela, 2020). The ability to lead oneself through stressful situations is a huge undertaking (Maykrantz & Houghton, 2020).

Anyone can create a business. New businesses form when people have an idea or opportunity conceptualized purposely or haphazardly (Hunter, 2012). A startup is a human institution that facilitates the creation of new products and services for customers (Larios, 2021). The term *startup* can describe businesses in the initial stages lacking entrepreneurial experience and resources (Cosenz & Noto, 2018a; Salehi et al., 2021). A startup can be identified by the business size, time and experience in operation, level of work effort, informality, stage of product development or production, financing availability, or a combination of these factors (Cockayne, 2019). The failure rate is 90% for startup businesses, with 40% failing in the first 4 years (Cosenz & Noto, 2018b; Fox, 2021). The service and retail industries have the most startups, and half of the new startups in the United States are home based (Hunter, 2012). The definition of a startup organization is not clearly defined (Cockayne, 2019). Some researchers differentiate between small business startup activities and establishing a business startup. According to Fox (2021) and Graham (2012), not all new businesses are startups because a startup is a business created to grow into a scalable large enterprise. Most personal service businesses, such as barbershops and home based businesses, are not formed to grow fast to scale like a software company, therefore, establishing a difference between a startup

company and small business startup activities to establish a new venture (Graham, 2012;

Ostergaard, 2019; Rotiélio e Silva Junior, 2019). People start businesses to achieve

different objectives.

Small business owners and self-employed entrepreneurs may revert or evolve

from a role of a core entrepreneur based on their personal and business assessments.

Small business owners and self-employed freelancers are gloried for personal happiness,

empowerment, financial success, and economic sustainability, which does not support the

realities of roughly half of the business owners that embark on a business ownership

journey (Byun et al., 2020; Cosenz & Noto, 2018b; Hunter, 2012). Instead, many are met

with disappointment, loss, and heavier burdens (Eager et al., 2019). Small business

owners and entrepreneurs must be prepared to take on burdens and risks in their efforts to

achieve success strategically; otherwise, they will burnout and not endure the growing

pains of business (Omrane et al., 2018). Entrepreneurs are willing to take risks to create

their desired business venture (Turner & Endres, 2017). Being a risk-taker should not

compel business owners to take unnecessary risks.

Core Entrepreneurs. Some people with entrepreneurial strengths do not desire to

start their business endeavors. Core entrepreneurs are creative people who can lead and

innovate with entrepreneurial competencies (Ostergaard, 2019). People with

entrepreneurial skills are often not recognized as entrepreneurs like those who identify as

self-employed or small business owners. Core entrepreneurs, also known as

intrapreneurs, have the skills to produce entrepreneurial results that lead to value creation

and revenue in business organizations (Ostergaard, 2019). Intrapreneurs are dependent,

creative, innovative individuals who contribute to the economy's growth by working in established organizations without personal risk (Honig & Samuelsson, 2021). Traditional entrepreneurship requires a commitment that intrapreneurs or core entrepreneurs are not required to make (Honig & Samuelsson, 2021; Shir & Ryff, 2021). In times of hardship or burnout, intrapreneurs can rely on their organization or parent firm's financial, social, cultural, and human resources, which is an advantage and privilege that first-time small business owners do not have (Honig & Samuelsson, 2021). Intrapreneurs can strategically plan with more certainty and less risk than entrepreneurs. Intrapreneurs develop, manage, and execute their products or services with organizational support, unlike self-employed and business owners' entrepreneurial types (Honig & Samuelsson, 2021). Intrapreneurs may enjoy the path of least resistance.

Entrepreneurs pursue work differently from nonentrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are different from nonentrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs have the power and authority to make organizational decisions during uncertainty (Bi et al., 2021; McCaffrey, 2017; Sufi & Sandhya, 2019). Employed nonentrepreneurs do not have to be innovative. Nonentrepreneurs work in secure environments with executives to facilitate decision-making in the company's best interest. These nonentrepreneurs work within business systems using best practices, processes, and proven tools to produce the desired results to meet forecasted business objectives. Nonentrepreneurs do not have the authority to act independently for their interest (Sufi & Sandhya, 2019). Entrepreneurs who own small businesses with employees, self-employed, or intrapreneurs have greater responsibility and decision-making, which is the main separator between entrepreneurs and

nonentrepreneurs (Bi et al., 2021). Core entrepreneurs use entrepreneurial competencies to create new opportunities securely within established organizations.

Entrepreneurial Orientation and Strategy

The self-employed entrepreneurial type manages their business endeavors alone, relying solely on their entrepreneurial competencies to succeed. Performance management should be important to all entrepreneurs, regardless of firm or entrepreneurial type (Lazarova & Stefanova, 2018). The entrepreneur's knowledge and the business firm's organizational posture determine the business endeavor's fate. There is a relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and business performance (Arshad et al., 2020). Business acumen and a proper understanding of the firm's business environment and organizational needs are pivotal to developing the correct strategies to keep the endeavor in good standing.

Self-leadership and business acumen are used to achieve business objectives. Entrepreneurship comprises activities and processes to achieve business objectives and influence business outcomes (Diandra & Azmy, 2020; Ostergaard, 2019; Torres et al., 2017). Core entrepreneurs working in small to large companies can participate in entrepreneurial activities and use entrepreneurial competencies to establish organizational processes and endeavors to help their organizations explore and develop new opportunities.

Strategies help entrepreneurs increase performance. According to Haider et al. (2017), entrepreneur orientation (EO) is a fundamental trait among business owners with higher performance attributed to their innovativeness, risk-taking, and pro-active

attributes. Martens et al. (2018) found that EO increases project success. However, the lack of entrepreneurial competencies could hinder the growth of small businesses (Tehseen et al., 2019). The relationship between EO and business performance increases business engagement (Viana et al., 2018). Effective organizational strategies help entrepreneurs position their businesses for success.

No business owner should assume that their business is performing from sales alone. Keats and Bracker (1988) studied the relationship between the individual performance of small business owners and how their actions influence business outcomes. Keats and Bracker identified six constructs to understand small business performance: (a) entrepreneurial intensity, (b) task motivation, (c) perceived strength of environmental influences, (d) behavioral-strategic sophistication, (e) cognitive-strategic sophistication, and (f) task environment factors (Gaskill et al., 1993). Entrepreneurs should assess all factors contributing to business performance.

Self-employed and small business owners should establish business practices to help evaluate performance. The use of performance management helps align strategic planning objectives and process improvement initiatives (Gheorghe, 2020). Business conditions are consumed with volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environments and conditions (Agarwal, 2020). Entrepreneurs should have the business competencies to invest in innovative and proactive tools and resources for the organization's benefit.

Business owners need to quickly see and understand their companies' status for quick decision-making and avoid business failure. According to Lazarova and Stefanova (2018), measuring key performance indicators helps monitor organizational changes by

exposing challenges, issues, and accomplishments. Regardless of the entrepreneurial type, strategic management of their business endeavors is significant in determining success or failure. According to Omrane et al. (2018), burnout appears to be a major cause of business failure. Growth is an internal process that increases the sustainability of a business (Tehseen et al., 2019). Even though entrepreneurs take on financial risks in hopes of achieving their financial and business aspirations, many do so without the necessary competencies to avoid premature business failure (Cosenz & Noto, 2018b; Turner & Endres, 2017). Entrepreneurs must have the capabilities and the competencies to grow a business.

Entrepreneurs can exercise power to influence their lives, the lives of others, and the economies in which they live. Power is the capacity to control and change the course of action (Northouse, 2019). Effective self-leadership activates power from within the individual. Self-leadership can be a skill set that separates burnout and successful entrepreneurs. Despite the economic contributions of small businesses through entrepreneurship, business and project failures have been unavoidable (Martens et al., 2018; Omrane et al., 2018). Business planning may be an effective strategy to increase business success and reduce entrepreneurial burnout. Entrepreneurship is management.

The Need for Self-Leadership in Entrepreneurship

Self-leadership enables people to achieve their desired outcomes. Entrepreneurs should be self-led. One of the greatest challenges people may face in leading themselves through stressful situations is achieving a state of well-being (Maykrantz & Houghton, 2020; Neck et al., 2020; Nikolaev et al., 2020; Shir & Ryff, 2021). Entrepreneurship is

among the most stressful career paths globally (Chadwick & Raver, 2019; Fox, 2021; Sufi & Sandhya, 2019). Entrepreneurship is only made possible by the entrepreneur's will and self-organization (Godwin et al., 2016; Shir & Ryff, 2021; Sufi & Sandhya, 2019). Some people become entrepreneurs to pursue their purpose, and others for survival (Hunter, 2012). Self-leadership is a realistic vehicle to help entrepreneurs reach their desired destination by self-organizing skills, behaviors, and activities to create the desired value in their personal and professional lives (Shir & Ryff, 2021). Applying self-leadership creates a motivational and influential framework to help people perform the appropriate actions to achieve their goals (Gagne, 2018; Neck et al., 2020). Entrepreneurs should strive to be effective self-leaders, understanding who they are, their entrepreneurial type, and their aspirations to reduce burnout while executing their business endeavors.

The building blocks of self-leadership are helpful personal development prerequisites to entrepreneurship. Self-efficacy, self-determination, self-control, self-management, and positive thoughts are linked to entrepreneurial success (Neck et al., 2020). Self-leadership is a skill that can be developed with practice (Neck et al., 2020). The SLT requires individuals to self-manage with the proper behavioral, cognitive, and constructive thoughts to be empowered to lead.

Project Management Competencies

Entrepreneurs create their business endeavors through projects. Business leaders, managers, and workers use projects at all levels to drive organizational change from one state to another (Project Management Institute, 2017a). Completing projects delivers

business value (Project Management Institute, 2017a). A project is a short-term endeavor to create a unique product, service, or result, making project management a primary focus of entrepreneurship (Akhmetshin et al., 2019; Project Management Institute, 2017a). Entrepreneurs structure their organizations through projects that help them meet their operational goals (Akkermans et al., 2020). Entrepreneurs may benefit from understanding and applying project management disciplines to manage their organizations (Akkermans et al., 2020). The talent triangle of project management addresses the power skills, ways of working, and business acumen that people may need to manage change through applying leadership, technical project management, and strategic and business management skills (Project Management Institute, 2017a). Successful projects can increase organizational value and increase the confidence of the entrepreneur.

The use of project management competencies may help entrepreneurs manage uncertainty. Organizations across industries use project management methodologies to strategically manage change and sustain their business endeavors (Akhmetshin et al., 2019). The use of project management among experienced business leaders should compel inexperienced entrepreneurs to seek to apply project management competencies for themselves. Business leaders that utilize project management techniques, methodologies, and knowledge may strategically posture their organizations to respond to changes and create new avenues to grow and increase profits appropriately through effective planning and integration of processes (Akhmetshin et al., 2019; Asemokha et al., 2019). Project management can be a vital skill set for all entrepreneurial types, but

especially for self-employed entrepreneurs because they often work alone and without support, unlike business owners or core entrepreneurs. Good project managers are self-leaders who practice technical and business management skills to work efficiently and reduce burnout.

The ability to create is an important entrepreneurial competency. Idea generation and imagination derive from an individual's cognitive ability that can help with problem-solving when mixed with the appropriate knowledge base, innovation, communication, and administration (Kier & McMullen, 2018). Entrepreneurship includes the exploration of venturesome activities that rewards managers and entrepreneurs with profit and sustainability (Kier & McMullen, 2018; Larios, 2021). Innovation is an entrepreneurial competency project managers use to create business operations, practices, and processes (Akhmetshin et al., 2019). At the core, project management and entrepreneurship are creative concepts. Entrepreneurs should employ the discipline and framework of project management competencies to optimize success. An entrepreneur with project management competencies will likely plan strategically to reduce burnout.

Strategic Planning

Planning and reducing uncertainty can contribute to the success of entrepreneurial activities. Some entrepreneurs may not be mature or experienced enough in their respective markets to plan and make informed decisions (Honig & Hopp, 2019; Larios, 2021). Strategic planning can reduce the level of uncertainty of a new business endeavor when strategies are developed using project management attributes such as lessons learned and organizational history (Cosenz & Noto, 2018b; Honig & Samuelsson, 2021;

Hopp & Greene, 2018). Entrepreneurs should be encouraged to use plans, tools, techniques, frameworks, and models to implement strategies properly and promote organizational effectiveness (Dyer et al., 2018; Welter et al., 2021). A business endeavor is only as strong and mature as the enterprise's leader. Unfortunately, many entrepreneurs are faced with unrelenting tasks to manage changes due to uncertainty, turbulence, and ambiguity in their industries.

Business Models. Planning for a new business idea can be stressful and exhausting, especially if one's livelihood depends upon the business idea's success. A business model may be an effective tool to help entrepreneurs strategically plan and create a vision for their business endeavors. Business models have evolved and can be effective in helping entrepreneurs develop knowledge in their field when experience is lacking (de Faria et al., 2021). As a framework, entrepreneurs can build a business model to establish strategic and organizational pillars with their business organizations to create value, achieve goals, and produce revenue (Asemokha et al., 2019; Cosenz & Noto, 2018a, 2018b; Dyer et al., 2018; Nosratabadi et al., 2019). Business leaders recognize business models as a strategic tool to bring ideas to market, furthering how business models shape business practices (Wieland et al., 2017). As a part of business planning, entrepreneurs can use business models as a template, statement, or model to shape organizational expectations by managing value flow and critical success factors (Cosenz & Noto, 2018b; Nosratabadi et al., 2019; Wieland et al., 2017). Often, new entrepreneurs are people with passion and lack the skills and knowledge they need to be efficient and effective.

First-time business owners may benefit from using project management tools, techniques, and competencies to help them create a business baseline. Business owners can use business models to make positive intraorganizational decisions to generate money, map organizational complexities, and facilitate entrepreneurial learning of business environments, products, processes, services, and customers to reduce uncertainty and burnout (de Faria et al., 2021; Nosratabadi et al., 2019). Organizational leaders construct business models differently across literature, but all interpretations describe similar elements (Cosenz & Noto, 2018a). Elements of a business model include customer segments, value proposition, customer relationships, revenue streams, strategic and key resources, cost structure, and business activities to measure profitability, growth, and social impact (Asemokha et al., 2019; Cosenz & Noto, 2018a, 2018b; Wieland et al., 2017). Business models promote business effectiveness and reduce burnout.

Lean Startup. Depending on the type of business, small business owners may consider a lean startup business model to test their business idea to limit risk and reduce burnout. Lean startup is an agile and experimentation approach to business development that welcomes changing requirements to increase customer satisfaction (Bocken & Snihur, 2020; Project Management Institute, 2017b). Organizational leaders use lean startup as a strategic approach to make informed decisions regarding their new endeavors at a low cost (Bocken & Snihur, 2020; Welter et al., 2021). Lean startup is a scientific hypothesis-driven approach to entrepreneurship that allows entrepreneurs to test their vision with less risk (Bocken & Snihur, 2020; de Faria et al., 2021). A combination of

business planning and lean startup may benefit when the future is unknown. Lean startup

methodology can be used before, without, or in conjunction with a business plan.

Not all business plans or lean startup approaches cover the same activities or processes.

New business owners can use lean startup methodologies to help plan their business by

challenging their beliefs or hypothesis, exploring the business market, engaging

customers to verify needs, and facilitating a market test with sales to prove the viability

of products or services, which generates inputs to create an effective business model.

Using lean startup helps entrepreneurs create roadmaps to validate their assumptions

through experimentation with limited risks when the product, customers, or business

environment allows it (Welter et al., 2021). Using a lean startup helps entrepreneurs

socialize their products or services to the customers for feedback (Welter et al., 2021).

Lean startup is commonly used in safe environments like business incubators and

accelerator programs to guide novice entrepreneurs and create a space to reduce business

burnout.

The Burden of Doing Business

Self-leadership and project management can help entrepreneurs reduce burnout

and risk. Burnout may not be avoidable but can be reduced (Omrane et al., 2018). No one

that chooses the path of entrepreneurship should expect their business endeavors to go as

planned, without difficulty, or without exposure to stress (Omrane et al., 2018).

Occupational stressors threaten organizational success because of negative impacts on

individuals' quality, productivity, and ability to perform under stress (Voitenko, 2020).

Entrepreneurs are at greater risk for psychological and nerve pressure during the first 5

years of operation (Omrane et al., 2018). Rauch et al. (2018) linked entrepreneurial stress to uncertainty and the perceived inability to meet demands. Uncertainty rises when there is no strategy, and the fear of the unknown is a stressor in an unmanageable environment (Rauch et al., 2018). However, as a super adaptive syndrome, stress can apply enough pressure that an individual begins to self-develop during hardship (Voitenko, 2020). Self-leadership and project management competencies reduce burnout and promote strategic planning.

There are serious risks associated with becoming an entrepreneur and sustaining that role in one of the entrepreneurial types. Entrepreneurs expose themselves to more disadvantages than wage workers or employees because of higher working demands and the lack of work-life balance (Connolly et al., 2020). Some entrepreneurs are unaware that their psychological empowerment influences their resistance to burnout and work-related stress (Blais et al., 2020). Chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors lead to burnout but applying self-leadership strategies can make business manageable (Calvo & García, 2018). Mental fatigue reduces cognitive activity, and without cognitive strength, decision-making abilities and mood management become unstable, leading to increase risks (Blais et al., 2020; Cristofaro, 2019). Unfortunately, the lack of support, help or employees, finances, and other resources contributes to the burnout of entrepreneurs. Risk-taking and psychological empowerment contributes positively and negatively to the success of entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs need a higher risk-taking tolerance to optimize success. Entrepreneurs should strategically utilize the appropriate tools and models to lessen the burden of business management (Gheorghe, 2020). Psychological

empowerment and strong cognitive levels regarding competence can positively or negatively contribute to the experience of burnout or work fatigue.

The Importance of Self-Management

Entrepreneurs should understand entrepreneurial competencies, challenges, and market nuances as part of their strategy to execute their business endeavors successfully and reduce burnout. Some entrepreneurs experience burnout because of incompetence and lack of strategic planning (Cosenz & Noto, 2018b). Entrepreneurs can use self-leadership to leverage the skills that facilitate business and personal growth (Cosenz & Noto, 2018b; Jensen et al., 2015; Ostergaard, 2019). Self-leadership can help individuals develop professionally and entrepreneurially by driving the need to complete the necessary tasks to achieve the desired business objectives (Bandura, 1995; Neck et al., 2020). Good self-leadership practices may help entrepreneurs overcome issues that may fuel business burnout, such as inadequate assessment of resources, insufficient business and project management competencies, and lack of self-awareness. Self-leadership can add value by creating a better quality of life for individuals that master the skill. Most entrepreneurs are striving for a better quality of life without succumbing to the pressures of burnout. Successful leaders lead through change.

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Transition

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In Section 1, I provided the background of the problem and the purpose statement to explain the research. Additionally, I presented the population and sampling, nature of the study, research question, interview questions, conceptual framework, operational

definitions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, the significance of the study, and literature review in Section 1 to demonstrate an organized and aligned research study.

In Section 2, I explain the role of the researcher. I will restate the purpose of my research before detailing my planned expectations regarding the participants, research method, research design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data analysis, reliability, and validity. In Section 3, I will include the presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, reflections regarding my experience with this study, and a conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 includes the project plan I followed to conduct this qualitative multiple-case study. I provide the purpose statement before discussing the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization techniques, data analysis, and reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies entrepreneurs use to reduce burnout during the initial 3 years in business. The target population consisted of four South Carolina-licensed barber entrepreneurs in operation for a minimum of 3 years who had implemented successful strategies to reduce burnout.

Role of the Researcher

Researchers contribute significantly to the research process. Researchers investigate problems by using methodologies, applying research designs and conceptual frameworks or theoretical lenses, engaging participants, and collecting and analyzing data to answer research questions (Johnson et al., 2020; Rumman & Alheet, 2019). Researchers are charged to engage in research ethically with good judgment to protect all stakeholders who can be positively or negatively affected by the research (Romm, 2020). Researchers serve as the primary data collection instrument and must obtain approval before conducting research (Johnson et al., 2020; Taherdoost, 2021). Researchers use data collection methodologies, tools, software, and techniques to help collect and analyze data (Nassaji, 2020). I understood the responsibilities and competencies of a researcher as

the researcher of this study. I was invested in this study because I am a self-employed business owner who failed in my first few business endeavors because of burnout. Identifying strategies to reduce burnout may promote sustainability among novice business owners.

Before beginning the data collection process, I was responsible for informing research participants regarding my research and obtaining their informed consent. I determined each participant had the capacity to consent according to the three principles of *The Belmont Report* (see Birt et al., 2016; National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979; Romm, 2020). The principles of *The Belmont Report* promote the ethical results of researchers by demonstrating respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Romm, 2020). In addition to *The Belmont Report*, I adhered to the guidelines and obtained approval to conduct the study from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

I conducted semistructured interviews with participants to collect data to answer my research question. As delineated in Section 1 of this study, the interview questions were predetermined. Using the same questions across participants helped me achieve data saturation during the interviews. Researchers use semistructured interviews to ask nonstandardized, open-ended questions and promote a trusting relationship with participants (Johnson et al., 2020; Pope, 2020; Yin, 2018).

Building a good relationship with the interviewees is important because a good relationship can facilitate better communication (Pope, 2020). Unwarranted gestures, tone changes, and other nonverbal cues by a participant or myself could provoke bias or the

misinterpretation of information. Yin (2018) explained that poorly articulated questions could create bias. I scheduled 30-minute Google Meet meetings at the participant's convenience to conduct interviews. I captured all personal identifying participant information through public sources, such as businesses or social networking websites. According to Carr et al. (2019), collecting public data does not require consent.

As the researcher, I minimized the possibility of inaccurate results. I also mitigated bias and avoided viewing data through only my personal lens by following an interview protocol (see Appendix), implementing participant validation of my interpretation of the data collected through member checking, and reaching data saturation. Researchers conducting qualitative research enable a closer relationship with participants than those using quantitative research methodologies (Pope, 2020). Researchers use an interview protocol to prepare and conduct successful, productive, ethical, and repeatable interviews for each participant (Taherdoost, 2022). Researchers are not exempt from bias and assumptions; therefore, biases need mitigation (Stahl & King, 2020). Researchers mitigate bias and personal interpretations in research though ensuring the information gathered during data collection is reflective of the participants, which is achieved through the process of validity confirmability in qualitative research (Johnson et al., 2020). I requested the participants confirm that the data I collected reflected their experience and used an interview protocol to mitigate bias and conduct a repeatable interview processed that promotes validity.

Participants

I interviewed four licensed barbers in the Tri-County area of South Carolina. To be eligible for inclusion in this study, barbers needed 3 years of experience as a South Carolina-licensed entrepreneur. Barbers also needed to be able to contribute successful strategies for reducing burnout in their service profession. Licensed barbers include natural hair stylists and professionals who understand hair's shaping and care in its natural state.

I used nonprobability sampling to gain access to participants because a list of all licensed barbers in South Carolina was not used to form a sampling frame to select research participants to achieve data saturation in this study. The participant requirements were appropriate for this study because barbers are entrepreneurs who may use cognitive and behavioral strategies to reduce burnout and achieve business sustainability. Barbers were among the first entrepreneurial career paths that created wealth in African American communities (Shabazz, 2016). Identifying themes among barbers may help aspiring entrepreneurs develop strategies to reduce burnout in customer and personal service-dominated industries.

Any researcher that plans to conduct research with human participants must receive approval from an IRB (American Psychological Association, 2020). After obtaining approval from the Walden University IRB, I solicited and recruited qualified, licensed barbers from an online search of barbers in the Tri-County area of South Carolina to find potential participants. I reviewed potential participants' business and social networking websites to determine their eligibility in the form of qualifying

information, such as years in business, appointment calendars, customer reviews, location, strategic website features, and other publicly available information. I also confirmed that potential participants were licensed barbers using the South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing, & Registration Online Look-Up Tool to verify barber licensing status and first issuance date. After determining they met the participant criteria, I emailed qualified participants the informed consent form to gauge their interest in participating in this study. Then, I engaged with each potential participant according to the procedures outlined in the consent form.

Sending the informed consent form to qualifying barbers was a strategy for initiating a working relationship with research participants. Fostering a trusting relationship between the researcher and participants can enhance the quality of the study (Pope, 2020; Stahl & King, 2020). A small number of participants is normal for qualitative research studies (Azungah, 2018; Nassaji, 2020). After agreeing to participate in this voluntary study, I continued the working relationship by allowing participants to schedule a call before the interview to discuss their expectations and answer any questions they had to ensure their comfort as outlined in the informed consent form. Establishing a working relationship with four participants was feasible.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods are the three methodology choices for research (Mohajan, 2018; Strijker et al., 2020). The qualitative methodology was most appropriate to answer my research question. The qualitative methodology is useful for

analyzing business problems and providing possible solutions using life experiences

when the answers are not quantifiable (Ebneyamini & Moghadam, 2018; Mohajan,

2018). The qualitative method is interactive and complex in nature, requiring constructive

socialization during data collection and analysis to interpret subjective and socially

constructed meanings (Mohajan, 2018). Researchers use the qualitative method to

explore and analyze complex problems and data to find themes, patterns, and similarities

in shared experiences. Contrastingly, researchers use the quantitative methodology to

analyze numbers and statistical measures (Majid, 2018; van Gelderen, 2016). I did not

use numbers or statistical measures when collecting data because I was not attempting to

test a hypothesis and wanted to understand the experiences of participants. Researchers

use mixed methods, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, to address research

questions best answered using words, images, statistics, and graphs (Majid, 2018). Mixed

methods were not appropriate for the current study because I did not need to combine

qualitative words and images and quantitative statistics and graphs to answer my research

question.

Research Design

Case study, ethnography, narrative inquiry, and phenomenological research

designs are used in qualitative research to answer the research question (Mohajan, 2018;

Yin, 2018). Case study research offers a flexible framework that captures the

complexities of real-life experience in a way that other qualitative designs do not offer

(Ebneyamini & Moghadam, 2018). A case study design can be used to explore business

problems to help provide solutions or theories by a researcher asking *what, how,* and *why*

questions to single or multiple sources (Ebneyamini & Moghadam, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Using a multiple-case study research design allowed me to interview multiple barbers to

identify their lessons learned and capture strategies that may reduce entrepreneur burnout.

The ethnography research design is a framework that allows researchers to learn from

cultures and ethnic groups (Mohajan, 2018). Ethnography was inappropriate for this

study because studying cultures and ethnic groups would not have answered the research

question. A narrative inquiry is a personal account of an event, and such lengthy

testimonies are unnecessary for exploring a business problem (Mohajan, 2018).

Testimonies or a personal account of the event from research participants would not have

benefited my study. Researchers use the phenomenological research design to investigate

specific experiences and understand personal experiences and behavioral responses (Shad

et al., 2020). My research question did not require an understanding of individual

experiences. Researchers use case study research designs to study a research problem

within a community or group to report the findings to seek a resolution (American

Psychological Association, 2020). Researchers can also use case studies to collect data

from multiple sources (Yin, 2018).

Population and Sampling

I used purposive nonprobability and snowball sampling techniques to identify

four licensed barbers in South Carolina that had used successful strategies to reduce

burnout. Nonprobability sampling is used when researchers intentionally select research

participants using a data source (Johnson et al., 2020). I used nonprobability sampling

because I selected four participants through a Google search of licensed barbers that met

the participant criteria. Barbers licensed by the South Carolina Board of Barber

Examiners must have maintained their license for a minimum of 3 years and currently

worked as an entrepreneur to meet my participation criteria for this multiple-case study.

There are no rules that govern the sample size of nonprobability sampling techniques;

however, researchers should use good judgment to justify the sampling technique, the

purpose of the study, and the ability of the sample to answer the research question

(Denieffe, 2020; Johnson et al., 2020). I also used snowball sampling by asking

participants for recommendations for additional participants that met the study criteria.

Snowball sampling is when participants identify other possible participants for research,

creating a snowball effect (Eager et al., 2019). Snowballing helped me to complete timely

interviews.

I interviewed a sample size of four participants until data saturation was reached.

Data saturation is reached when new data are collected that offer few or no new insights

(Hayashi et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2020). Qualitative research does not require many

participants to reach data saturation because data saturation depends upon the collected

data's quality (Azungah, 2018; Hayashi et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2020; Nassaji, 2020).

Purposive sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique that researchers use to

allow their judgment in selecting participants that can best answer the research question

(Denieffe, 2020; Johnson et al., 2020). Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental

sampling, is used when working with a small sample size. According to Denieffe (2020),

a strategy for using purposive sampling is to target participants with different and

important perspectives. Therefore, I selected four barbers in the Tri-County area of

Charleston, South Carolina, as research participants that met the participant criteria to achieve data saturation. The population and sample size were appropriate for this study.

Ethical Research

I conducted ethical research as the researcher for this study. Researchers engage in ethical and moral principles in scholarly writing and publishing to (a) ensure the accuracy of scientific findings, (b) protect the rights of participants, and (c) conform to intellectual property rights (American Psychological Association, 2020; Johnson et al., 2020; Taherdoost, 2022). The researcher is responsible for upholding ethical standards and practices that guide their behaviors regarding the rights of research participants or anyone that can be affected by their research (Romm, 2020; Taherdoost, 2022).

Research participants must provide informed consent for the data collection and research to be ethical. Researchers use informed consent forms as an ethical protection procedure to establish a formal agreement with each participant to make an informed decision regarding their participation in the research study (Dankar et al., 2020). Informed consent requires that participants are properly notified regarding their choice to participate freely in a research study while understanding the nature, purpose, use, and role in the research (Lobe et al., 2020).

The informed consent form provided an overview of the research topic and the voluntary role of participants to set expectations regarding participation procedures. Before participating in this study, all participants received a copy and attested to the informed consent form (see Appendix). Participants provided their consent via email. Informed participants reserve the right to withdraw their consent (Lobe et al., 2020). I

advised participants in the consent form they could stop participating at any time during the process by contacting me via email. No compensation or gifts were exchanged to incentivize participation. I ensured that individual participants' experiences were depicted as intended through the process of member checking. Member checking is a process that allows participants to review and approve a summary of the researcher's interpretation of the primary data collected during the interview (Candela, 2019).

Completing the study ethically after receiving informed consent and data was important. Researchers are not permitted to share data from qualitative research because researchers are required to preserve participant confidentiality (American Psychological Association, 2020). I concealed and protected the identity of each research participant by using a unique naming convention and avoiding using participants' names, business names, or any personally identifying information. The labeling convention was alphanumeric. I stored all collected data electronically in Google Drive, a cloud-based secure drive with password protection. I will store the data there for 5 years after the study's completion to protect the confidentiality of participants. After 5 years, I will permanently delete my electronic records.

I remained ethical and facilitated trust by ensuring participants understood their roles and rights regarding this study and my reverence for ethical standards. I obtained approval from the Walden University IRB to show my commitment to upholding the ethical standards for human research participants. According to the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979),

The Belmont Report guides researchers with ethical principles. The Walden University IRB approval number for this study is 09-21-22-1026281.

Data Collection Instruments

Researchers use primary and secondary data collection methods to collect data (Rumman & Alheet, 2019; Taherdoost, 2021). Researchers use data collection instruments to help them answer the research question and ensure the quality of the research (Johnson et al., 2020; Taherdoost, 2021). The researcher is the primary data collection instrument in qualitative research (Johnson et al., 2020; Taherdoost, 2021). Rumman and Alheet (2019) argued that researchers should identify their data collection instruments and demonstrate their ability to collect sufficient data. Taherdoost (2021) explained that primary data is unpublished first-hand information. Researchers engage primary data sources that can offer first-hand information to answer the research question (Rumman & Alheet, 2019; Taherdoost, 2021). Interviews are a primary data collection method in qualitative research. The information provided in interviews is first-hand accounts of experience regarding a phenomenon. Data collected from published sources are secondary data (Taherdoost, 2021). Search engines, company websites, and social networking sites are sources researchers can use to collect secondary data (Carr et al., 2019).

I was the primary data collection instrument for my research. I used semistructured interviews to collect primary data from research participants. Researchers use semistructured interviews to collect data by asking open-ended questions to participants (Yin, 2018). I collected data from participants during the semistructured

interviews using an interview protocol (see Appendix) and audio recording through Otter. I used Otter, an audio recording software, for audio recording and transcription during interviews. Otter is a speech-to-text transcription application that changes speech-to-text through artificial intelligence and machine learning. The Otter.ai Chrome extension allows users to transcribe and caption dialogue using Google Meet and save audio transcripts. Transcribing is time-consuming. I manually verified the transcription by listening to the audio recordings word for word to edit and confirm the transcript for accuracy. The transcripts were exported from Otter into a Microsoft Word document. Yin (2018) advised researchers not to record participants without their permission. Participants consented to recorded interviews as specified in the informed consent form.

I collected secondary data from public documents on business and social networking websites. After I conducted the interviews and verified the transcription of the data recording, I used participant validation, also known as member checking, to confirm the accuracy of the data collection. The member checking process improves the reliability and validity of the data collection (Birt et al., 2016; Candela, 2019; Johnson et al., 2020). The member checking process enhances the trustworthiness of data collected in qualitative research (Candela, 2019). Researchers use member checking to ensure participant voices are captured as intended by allowing participants to review and approve a summary of the researcher's interpretation of the data (Birt et al., 2016; Candela, 2019; Johnson et al., 2020). I sent a summary of my interpretation of the data collected from each participant during their semistructured interviews to validate my

summary of their experiences to enable member checking to validate my research findings.

Data Collection Technique

Researchers gain insight into their research topic through data collection. Data collection is a pivotal and sometimes challenging component of a research study (Birt et al., 2016; Taherdoost, 2021). Researchers collect qualitative through unstructured approaches to capture the feelings, perceptions, and emotions to answer a research question (Taherdoost, 2021). There are different techniques for gathering qualitative data through interviews, observations, and document reviews (Taherdoost, 2021). I conducted one-on-one semistructured interviews with four participants by scheduling 30-minute Google Meets and an interview protocol (see Appendix) for guidance. I asked five *how* and *what* interview questions and follow up questions to collect data to identify strategies to help entrepreneurs reduce burnout.

Interview protocols help researchers prepare to conduct successful, productive, ethical, and repeatable interviews for each participant (Taherdoost, 2022). An interview protocol is appropriate for researchers to use when conducting semistructured interviews (Taherdoost, 2021). This protocol is a step-by-step strategic process to help researchers execute repeatable and successful interviews. My interview protocol included an introduction of the researcher, interview questions, and the interview closing reminders. I audio-recorded and transcribed each interview to ensure I captured the data as the participant intended. Otter was my primary resource for audio recording the interviewers, and I did not need to use my cell phone voice recorder as a backup.

Researchers have advantages when conducting semistructured interviews, such as (a) the ability to ask open-ended questions to capture experiences, (b) the opportunity to notice nonverbal cues, and (c) a means to establish trust with the interviewee (Azungah, 2018; Ilyushin & Azbel, 2017; Taherdoost, 2021). There are some disadvantages to conducting semistructured interviews as a data collection technique. Interview-based data collection techniques can increase ethical issues and errors in research because interview responses are not easy to analyze (Azungah, 2018). Collecting data during interviews can create a complex and perplexing situation between the researcher and interviewees in ways that can (a) alter the meaning or information communicated, (b) increase the risk for bias through poorly articulated questions, and (c) create opportunities for reflexivity, which are a disadvantage to the data collecting process (Birt et al., 2016; Taherdoost, 2021; Yin, 2018).

Barbers or natural hair stylists may have informal company documents; therefore, I reviewed and collected data from public documents available on business or social networking websites instead of requesting access to company documents. I triangulated data from the semistructured interviews with secondary data from public documents such as appointment calendars, customer reviews, location, strategic website features, and other public information. The ability to review electronic interactions between the participants and their prospects and clients on their business or social networking website can be an advantage in capturing strategies. Social media can provide direct access for researchers to examine how individuals conduct their lives and businesses (Carr et al., 2019). At times, social media can give insight into individual behavior patterns (Carr et

al., 2019). A disadvantage of viewing websites and social networking accounts is that participants can hide and delete information they do not want the public to view.

Triangulation is the cross-checking of data using multiple data sources and helps to minimize researcher bias (Azungah, 2018; Birt et al., 2016; Candela, 2019). I used semistructured interviews and public documents as my primary and secondary data sources. To enhance validity, I used member checking to confirm my interpretations of the data collected per participant. I emailed each participant within two business days after their interview to confirm my summary and to schedule a post-interview call, if desired by the participant. I do not conduct a pilot study.

Data Organization Technique

Data organization is important to protect the participants and the integrity of the research (Johnson et al., 2020). I organized and tracked primary and secondary data using Microsoft Word. All data were labeled to protect the identity of the participants using the alphanumeric labels BL1, BL2, BL3, and BL4. All interview transcripts and summaries have an alphanumeric file name for each business leader. Files were exported from Otter to Microsoft Word and Excel for member checking, organization, and analysis. The data I collected from available public documents on participants' business or social networking websites will be named with the corresponding alphanumeric label.

Otter is a speech-to-text transcription application that helps users change speech-to-text through artificial intelligence and machine learning. I used Otter with Google Meet during interviews to record and transcribe the interviews in real-time and manually verified the transcriptions for accuracy. I organized the data in Microsoft Word in

preparation for analyzing the findings in Excel. I stored all collected data on Google Drive, a cloud-based secure drive with password protection. After 5 years, I will permanently delete my electronic records.

Data Analysis

Researchers need to understand how the data collection process, instruments, sources, techniques, and analysis work together to answer the research question successfully and ethically. Researchers use multiple data collection sources to confirm their research findings. Triangulation cross-checks data using multiple data to validate the conclusions (Azungah, 2018; Birt et al., 2016; Candela, 2019). Triangulation involves collecting and analyzing qualitative data (Natow, 2019). There are four types of triangulation: data, theoretical, researcher, and methodological (Abdalla et al., 2018). Researchers may triangulate data among multiple (a) data sources, (b) data collection methodologies, (c) data analysis techniques, and (d) other support researchers to construct validity (Candela, 2019; Johnson et al., 2020; Natow, 2019). I conducted methodological triangulation using data collected using semistructured interviews and reviews of public documents and social media.

Researchers should collect and analyze qualitative data carefully, logically, and systematically (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). Qualitative data analysis can be difficult for researchers to identify patterns and interpret text using qualitative data collection sources such as interview transcripts, images, and public documents (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Taherdoost, 2022). Thematic analysis is a methodology researchers can use to identify, analyze, and

interpret open-ended responses into themes in qualitative research designs (Castleberry &

Nolen, 2018; Roberts et al., 2019). Identifying themes helps researchers answer the

research question (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Castleberry and Nolen (2018) outlined

that compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding are the five

steps that form a simple thematic model for qualitative data analysis.

I analyzed data using thematic analysis after organizing all primary and secondary

data in Microsoft Word. Researchers can analyze qualitative data manually or through

computer software applications (Johnson et al., 2020). Compiling is the first step in the

data analysis process. I inserted each interview transcript questions and answer and

secondary data findings into Excel to compile all data in its entirety before disassembling

the data. Disassembling is separating and coding data, the second step of the data analysis

(Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Williams and Moser (2019) found that coding is a technique researchers can use

to structure and organize data strategically. Coding is organizing and creating an

inventory of qualitative data using words or short phrases to sort data into themes,

concepts, and ideas (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Williams

& Moser, 2019). Disassembling helped me to identify the similarities and differences and

define each code in the research findings. Reassembling, the third step in the thematic

data analysis process is how researchers group and categorize themes. I color coded key

themes that aligned with my conceptual framework of self-leadership and other research

studies. I created a table to display the research themes using Excel.

The fourth step in data analysis requires researchers to interpret the data. Interpreting is critical and happens in the first three steps (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Researchers should ensure that interpretations of research findings are complete, fair, accurate, valuable, and credible before concluding the study (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Concluding is the fifth and final step of the data analysis process. Researchers make conclusions to answer the research question. Qualitative research conclusions do not normally provide generalizations. I used thematic analysis to analyze my data to generate my findings.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliable and quality research is dependable and trustworthy (Hayashi et al., 2019; Nassaji, 2020; Stahl & King, 2020). Researchers can increase reliability by minimizing errors and bias within the research study (Yin, 2018). Data quality issues can negatively affect data collection making research findings untrustworthy. The reliability of research increases when ethical researchers use member checking, triangulation, interview questions, interview protocols, and other resources to help ensure the dependability of the data collected (Nassaji, 2020). Researchers use triangulation for cross-checking the data from multiple sources (Hayashi et al., 2019; Natow, 2019; Yin, 2018). Researchers use member checking to enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection by allowing participants to confirm their inputs were captured accurately (Candela, 2019). Researchers cannot achieve research dependability without validity.

I provided dependable research by utilizing member checking and triangulation to ensure my data collection procedures were ethical and the processes repeatable. Using primary and secondary data sources, multiple data collection techniques, member checking, and thematic analysis strengthen the dependability of my research.

Validity

Researchers use credibility, transferability, confirmability, and data saturation to determine the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings (Nassaji, 2020; Stahl & King, 2020). The validity of qualitative studies refers to the trustworthiness and quality of research using multiple data sources (Candela, 2019; Hayashi et al., 2019; Stahl & King, 2020). Validity is a measure of the correctness and accuracy of the data results through member checking, triangulation, data saturation, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Nassaji, 2020; Stahl & King, 2020).

Credible research is believable. Researchers triangulate data to increase the dependability and credibility of the research findings (Candela, 2019; Johnson et al., 2020; Stahl & King, 2020; Yin, 2018). I ensured my research was credible using methodological triangulation and member checking. Researchers use methodological triangulation when using more than one method for collecting or analyzing data. Confirmability relates to research trustworthiness and credibility (Stahl & King, 2020). Researchers can confirm the trustworthiness of their research through member checking. Member checking is a method in which data collection is confirmed through participant validation (Candela, 2019; Nassaji, 2020). Researchers can use participant validation to

increase the validity of the research (Candela, 2019; Johnson et al., 2020; Nassaji, 2020; Stahl & King, 2020).

Qualitative research can become transferable when the data collected is rich (Stahl & King, 2020). I documented my data collection and analysis process to enhance transferability for future research. Researchers need to have quality and quantity of data before proclaiming data saturation (Johnson et al., 2020). Data saturation is the standard to determine rigor in qualitative research (Hayashi et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2020; Nassaji, 2020; Stahl & King, 2020). I reached data saturation by collecting rich data through semistructured interviews until no new information was presented. My research has credibility, transferability, and confirmability. I followed ethical research guidelines, used methodological triangulation, and conducted member checking to confirm the trustworthiness of my research.

Transition and Summary

In this multiple-case study, I explored strategies to help entrepreneurs reduce burnout in the initial 3 years. In Section 2, I planned the success of my research study. Section 2 included the purpose of my study, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data organization techniques, data analysis, reliability, and validity.

Section 3 will include the presentation and explanation of my research findings, themes identified through data analysis, alignment of the findings to the literature and the conceptual framework, a discussion of the applicability of the findings to professional

practices, implications for social change recommendations for actions and future

research, my reflections regarding the research, and my conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies to help entrepreneurs reduce burnout in the initial 3 years in business. I collected data from four licensed entrepreneurial barbers in the Charleston, Tri-county area of South Carolina with a minimum of 3 years of barbering experience and currently serving as a barber, barber instructor, barbershop owner, or natural hair stylist. The findings showed strategies entrepreneurs used to create sustainable businesses and work-life balance to reduce burnout. I identified four themes: strategic planning, positive thinking, professional development, and involving others. Strategic planning included the importance of creating a lifestyle of planning business activities to sustain the day-to-day business and completing administrative activities to achieve business objectives. Positive thinking demonstrated the need for positive self-talk, self-confidence, and a genuine love for the business. Professional development highlighted the entrepreneurial responsibility to grow professionally and develop. Involving others indicated the need for entrepreneurs to ask for help from family, friends, and mentors; hire help when necessary; and connect with others by building and maintaining healthy relationships.

Presentation of the Findings

The primary research question was: What strategies do entrepreneurs use to reduce burnout during the initial 3 years in business? As the primary data source, I conducted four individual semistructured interviews with licensed barbers asking five interview questions (and follow-up questions as necessary). To protect the identities of

the research participants, I listed each business leader as BL1, BL2, BL3, and BL4. Public documents from their business and social media websites were used to collect secondary data. The SLT was the conceptual framework for this study. I thematically analyzed the data in Microsoft Excel, resulting in the following four themes: strategic planning, positive thinking, professional development, and asking for help. From these themes, I identified strategies for reducing burnout. Table 1 includes the themes, number of participants identifying each theme, and occurrences of the themes.

Table 1

Frequency of Themes

Themes	Number of participants identifying the theme	Number of occurrences
Strategic planning	4	110
Positive thinking	4	91
Professional development	4	66
Involving others	4	61

The conceptual framework of the SLT aligned with participant responses. The SLT comprises behavior-focused, natural reward, and constructive thought pattern strategies that derive from the five building blocks of self-leadership (Neck & Houghton, 2006; Neck et al., 2020). The social cognitive theory, self-determination theory, self-regulation theory, self-management, and positive psychology create the conceptual foundation or building blocks of self-leadership (Neck et al., 2020). Self-leaders use behavioral-focused strategies to execute tasks (Neck et al., 2020). Effective behavioral-focused, natural reward, and constructive-thought pattern strategies help entrepreneurs strategically plan, prioritize self-care and professional development, and ask for help to reduce burnout. Entrepreneurs use behavior-focused strategies to make the necessary

alternations to their processes and procedures to achieve the desired results (Neck et al., 2020). Entrepreneurs that use natural reward strategies find enjoyment in tedious business activities by focusing on the reward of completing objectives. Constructive-thought patterns facilitate positive energy by removing negative energy and unproductive thoughts (Neck & Houghton, 2006; Neck et al., 2020).

Theme 1: Strategic Planning

Entrepreneurs should equip themselves with strategies to help achieve their business goals. Unfavorable outcomes are often the result of a weak strategy and ambiguity (Al-Dhaafri & Alosani, 2021; Manzano-Garcia et al., 2021). Entrepreneurs are responsible for strategically growing and maintaining their business endeavors with limited resources; therefore, optimizing business management proficiencies through strategic planning is critical for entrepreneurial success (Williams et al., 2018). BL4 said, "The key strategies that helped me reduce burnout are planning, organization, avoiding procrastination, and implementation." According to Honig and Samuelsson (2021), the process of business planning and business outcomes are distinct business planning constructs. Strategically, entrepreneurs should plan for their business using time and money management techniques to keep business activities organized.

All participants confirmed that strategic planning is essential to reducing entrepreneurial burnout. Burnout can be a result of work-related stress (Voitenko, 2020). Entrepreneurs who are not diligent to strategically plan their budgets, time off, lunch breaks, office hours for administrative tasks, office hours to provide client services, and time for professional development may increase their exposure to burnout. BL1 stated,

"Schedule time off. Have a break throughout your day, so you're not working back-to-back, trying to accumulate money. You have to know your limit."

Strategic planning may help entrepreneurs make decisions and align business goals. According to Al-Dhaafri and Alosani (2021), strategic planning helps business leaders map an organization's strategic direction. BL4 said,

> Do your homework. Do your research. Make sure that everything is lined up because if you don't have everything lined up and planned out could cause a lot of stress on you. After you are stressed out, things become overwhelming, and then burnout comes. So, it's almost like a snowball effect. Yeah, once one thing happens. The next thing happens, and it all goes back to planning, organization, not procrastinating, and implementation.

BL4's narrative illustrates how entrepreneurs could experience burnout without researching and planning accordingly. According to Jukova et al. (2019), entrepreneurs make mistakes during planning due to low competence and are encouraged to hire consultants or experts to assist in planning. Entrepreneurs should research, get a mentor, or hire experts to plan strategically and reduce burnout.

According to Shir and Ryff (2021), entrepreneurship is a self-organizing act. Improper implementation wastes time and energy. Entrepreneurs should make time to execute their plans for their business endeavors by establishing the proper organizational and administration buffers. It may be helpful for entrepreneurs to strategically develop their schedule to allocate time to service customers, plan and execute administrative activities, and ensure they have personal time to reduce burnout and feel autonomous.

The subthemes of strategic planning are time management, money management, and organization. Entrepreneurs can strategically plan when considering their time, money, and business organization needs. BL3 stated, "The timing of what we do is kind of hard to gauge." Creating boundaries is important for entrepreneurs to protect their schedules and reduce stress. Implementing strategies increases organizational effectiveness (Dyer et al., 2018). BL2 noted that it is important to budget your time and money, stating, "I would say building a budget but also budgeting your time as well. Make sure you set aside some time for yourself and your family." BL1 shared that planning ahead of time helps promote a balanced lifestyle:

> I usually plan out my schedule way ahead of time. So next month, I know what my schedule looks like. I actually make sure that my schedule throughout the week can align with my family as well, so if I need to move things around, I move things around at least a week ahead of time so that way I can avoid being overwhelmed with my schedule and physical work because my appointments are scheduled. I only go by appointment. You try to walk in and get something done; then it's more than likely for me to put you on another day.

All participants had websites for customers to book appointments online with transparent pricing.

BL3 explained the need to plan properly and budget income, sharing, "Be aware. You need to be aware of those hot moments, all those times when the money is coming in, and plan and budget accordingly." According to Tambunan (2021), entrepreneurs would not be successful without planning. Strategic planning helps to reduce burnout in

the initial 3 years in business. Table 2 shows the strategic planning subthemes, number of participants identifying the subthemes, and number of occurrences of the subtheme in the data collection.

Table 2

Strategic Planning Subthemes

Subthemes	Number of participants identifying the subtheme	Number of occurrences
Time management	4	33
Money management	4	16
Organization	3	11

Connecting Strategic Planning to the Literature

Strategic planning prepares entrepreneurs to engage in business. Business planning encompasses a variety of activities (Welter et al., 2021). Regardless of the entrepreneurial type, entrepreneurs influence business operations. Business operations should be strategically planned to optimize success and reduce burnout. BL4 stated the importance and positive outcomes of conducting business research and planning to reduce burnout. Conducting research and planning helps to reduce uncertainty. Entrepreneurs can use business planning tools and techniques to help manage uncertainty (Zhang et al., 2018). BL1 stated the importance of strategically planning to protect personal time. Business planning is a process entrepreneurs can use to create effective business management practices, processes, and procedures and forecast the future. BL2 and BL3 confirmed the need for entrepreneurs to budget their time and money to prepare for the future. Entrepreneurs should be encouraged to plan to reduce burnout strategically by managing their time, money, and organizational needs.

Connecting Strategic Planning to the SLT

Business competencies, such as strategic planning, time and money management, and organizational skills, are important to help entrepreneurs reduce burnout. The SLT is a realistic vehicle to help entrepreneurs reach their desired destination. Self-leaders work to intentionally shape their behaviors to achieve their goals (Neck et al., 2020). Self-leadership is the ability to self-manage (Manz, 1986). All four business leaders confirmed the effectiveness of one or more aspects of self-leadership through behavioral strategies, such as blocking time off for rest and relaxation, family, and general self-care, to reduce burnout. BL1 strategically schedules time off, including taking breaks throughout the workday. BL4 set aside time to plan to strategically grow the barber business separate from working in the business in the form of barbering and grooming customers. BL4 also talked about avoiding procrastination to implement plans strategically.

Entrepreneurs should strive to implement effective cognitive and behavioral strategies to execute their business endeavors to reduce burnout. Self-leaders can thrive during challenges and capitalize on opportunities effectively (Cristofaro & Giardino, 2020; Stewart et al., 2019). According to Cosenz and Noto (2018b), some entrepreneurs experience burnout because of the lack of necessary competencies, such as strategic planning and an emotional approach to pricing. Strategic planning allows entrepreneurs to anticipate and respond to needs to promote organizational excellence (Al-Dhaafri & Alosani, 2021; Dyer et al., 2018). Self-leading entrepreneurs may reduce burnout through strategic planning.

Theme 2: Positive Thinking

Thoughts shape perspective. According to Sattar (2018), thoughts are powerful energy that can positively or negatively affect how people conduct business. The findings from all participants confirmed that positive thinking was a strategy to reduce burnout. BL3 believes refreshing one's energy can positively affect one's mental state, saying, "Find different things to refresh your energy and mental state. That should reduce your burnout." BL3 also said, "Charge what you're worth and stick to it because if you sell yourself short, you're going to burn yourself out because you're going to feel like you're working for nothing." Barbers who charge more for their work may think more positively regarding their craft than those who charge less for their work. Entrepreneurs who think positively about themselves and their businesses may reduce burnout.

Negative thoughts or frustration can lead to stress and burnout. Pessimistic thinking can stifle enthusiasm, effective marketing of products or services, and entrepreneur income potential, causing unnecessary stress and burnout. BL1 said, "Burnout can be mental and physical in my line of work. Taking a vacation is good for me personally. It helps me to reset. I can step away." BL1 also said, "I know that when I take a mental break, that helps me feel more balanced instead of feeling super stressed. We've all been stretched." BL4 also confirmed that time for self-care is very important. The subthemes of positive thinking are prioritizing self-care and love or passion for the job. Positive thoughts can be fueled by love or passion. Entrepreneurs who prioritize self-care may be rested and refreshed to think positively and effectively through complex business problems.

The ability for entrepreneurs to think positive thoughts is predicated upon prioritizing self-care and having a genuine love for the business to reduce burnout. Thinking positive thoughts is an essential characteristic for entrepreneurs to balance their emotions. Emotions can negatively affect positive thoughts and the delivery of services. BL2 said, "Don't let fear zap your enthusiasm." BL4 emphasized the need for entrepreneurs to prioritize self-care and emotions to give customers quality service. BL4 said,

> Your clients are going to realize when you don't have proper rest. You are going to be edgy and antsy. You are not going to want to communicate because you are tired, and it is going to show. Once that happens, you could start to lose clients because, believe it or not. Your clients will pick up on that.

Entrepreneurs will face challenges and stressful situations. Prioritizing self-care encompasses behaviors that reduce stress and promote work-life balance, such as physically and mentally resting and taking time off to spend with family. BL2 said, "Just make sure you set aside some time for yourself and your family." Procrastination is counterproductive to prioritizing self-care. BL4 explained how procrastination could reduce positive thinking and lead to burnout, stating, "Procrastination has a key role. Once you start procrastinating and putting things off, things start to pile up on you. And then things start getting overwhelming for you that could cause you to get burned out very easily."

All participant responses demonstrated the importance of prioritizing self-care by setting the appropriate boundaries between themselves and business and expressing a

passion for their profession. BL1 said, "Definitely make sure that it's something you love doing. I love what I do. It does help that I love what I do." BL2 echoed BL1 by stating, "Make sure that it's something I really enjoyed doing. Almost without even getting paid for it. It just makes it a plus being paid for it."

Some entrepreneurs provide a product or service and share their personal lives with their customers. Customers expect good service when the servicer is having a good or bad day; therefore, having a passion for the job can help reduce the experience of depletion and burnout. BL3 said regarding having a passion for people to reduce burnout,

Definitely having a heart for people…my mentor died a few years back but said when it comes to a cut and your client, 70% is your cut, that's what they pay for, but the other 30% is you, and if they like you, they continue to keep coming back.

BL4 shared the importance of customers building trust, saying,

Being a barber, we see so many people, and many of the people we see choose us as a barber to relate to and open up and talk to because they feel they can trust us. I think they feel that the barber is a person to talk to outside of my home because they know that a barber relates to a lot of people, and it's almost like we are counselors.

Table 3 shows the thinking positive thoughts subthemes, number of participants identifying subthemes, and number of occurrences of the subthemes in the data collection.

Table 3

Positive Thinking Subthemes

Subthemes	Number of participants identifying the subtheme	Number of occurrences
Prioritizing self-care	4	30
Love or passion for the job	4	8

Connecting Positive Thinking to the Literature

The use of constructive thought patterns is a strategy to facilitate positive energy. Positive thinking can counteract destructive thoughts and dysfunctional beliefs (Manz & Neck, 1991; Neck et al., 2020). Entrepreneurs must manage their cognitive behaviors, including negative emotions, to reduce burnout (Manzano-Garcia et al., 2021). Loss of energy, low motivation, low organizational commitment, poor work quality, and feelings of failure are consequences of burnout and reduce positive thoughts (Manzano-Garcia et al., 2021). BL3 intentionally found new products, services, and experiences to encourage positive thoughts and increase motivation. BL1 learned that prioritizing self-care helped to facilitate positive thinking and passion for maintaining the business. According to Alnakhli et al. (2020), a person's thoughts can be maintained through healthy self-talk, positive mental imagery, and removing negative beliefs. Burnout can be experienced through emotional exhaustion and beliefs of failure (Freudenberger, 1975; Omrane et al., 2018). According to the World Health Organization (2019), burnout is an occupational phenomenon that negatively affects personal and professional lives because of exhaustion, negative feelings and thinking related to work, and reduced professional efficacy. Self-efficacy influences positive self-talk (Zhang et al., 2018). Entrepreneurs

who think positively about themselves are likely to perform behavioral activities that prioritize self-care to facilitate positive thinking and reduce mental stress and burnout.

Connecting Positive Thinking to the SLT

Entrepreneurs are responsible for leading themselves to achieve their goals. Actions are manifested thoughts. Self-leaders motivate themselves through behavioral and cognitive strategies because it is the self-leading act to achieve personal desires (Goldsby et al., 2021; Harari et al., 2021; Manz, 1986; Neck et al., 2020). Entrepreneurs led by positive thoughts may be more enthusiastic about promoting their business endeavors. Optimism and positive thinking can motivate individuals to face challenges and overcome obstacles (Zhang et al., 2018). Self-efficacy, a building block of self-leadership, can help entrepreneurs facilitate positive thoughts and fuel self-confidence by regulating behavior (Garaika & Margahana, 2019). Entrepreneurs with self-efficacy think positively about accomplishing their business objectives and are led by positive emotions and entrepreneurial intentions (Chen et al., 2021; Garaika & Margahana, 2019; Zhang et al., 2018). Positive thinking can lead to good customer service. Stress can lead to negative thinking resulting in bad customer service. According to Arifin et al. (2020), some customers value service more than the cost and pay willingly for satisfying service. BL4 said, "Customers may notice when you are edgy." Positive thinking can positively influence performance. Self-leaders can improve performance and reduce burnout from an internal source of influence because they believe in their capabilities to perform the activities that need to be done and create the necessary buffers to reduce burnout (Goldsby et al., 2021; Harari et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2018). Entrepreneurs with

effective self-leadership skills think positive thoughts to achieve their business objectives. BL2 stated that it is important not to let fear zap enthusiasm.

Theme 3: Professional Development

All participants reduced burnout by growing professionally. As business leaders, the participants applied lessons learned, offered new services, invested in new products, and continued their education which are the subthemes of professional development. According to BL4's business website, this barber business leader has 20 certificates of achievements, affiliation, and completion; 25 additional courses for continued education; and offers medical hair restoration services. BL4 is a barber instructor and mentors other barbers. BL1 is a master barber, natural hair expert, coach, and cosmetology instructor. According to BL1's website, these barber business leaders offer courses to help aspiring hair care specialists obtain clarity, confidence, and certification.

Investing in new products and learning new services may help entrepreneurs to grow professionally. BL2 said, "I started buying tools and getting intrigued." BL3 said, "I think burnout comes from just being redundant in your services. Try new services and procedures. I think buying new products and tools kept me refreshed and energized, so I don't burn out." BL3 grew from barbering to judging and participating in barber and hair shows. BL3 encourages entrepreneurs by stating:

Find different lanes in your industry or your business to go down. Find different paths to walk down within your industry to keep yourself interested, so you don't become stagnant and do the same things all the time. Find different things to

refresh your energy and your mental state. That should reduce your burnout. That's what I do.

BL3 encourages other barbers and entrepreneurs to challenge themselves, but BL1 cautions entrepreneurs to know their work threshold. BL1 stated, "You have to know your limit." BL1 said, "Strategies came from learning. Just learning the hard way." BL2 said:

I have experienced the good and the bad. I would never say I would never want the good without the bad because those were learning experiences for myself. I knew that it was something I learned when I was able to see growth, reduce stress, and was able to have more foresight for my business.

BL4 shared that mentoring helps to share lessons learned without others trying to learn the business. BL4 said,

I wish that I had a mentor when I was coming up in the business because there were a lot of mistakes that I could have avoided. But with these things that I've learned through my 30 years of barbering, I had to share with other barber colleagues because I would never want them to go through some of the things that I went through that I know that they could avoid. So, mentorship is very, very important.

Table 4 shows the professional development subthemes, the number of participants identifying subthemes, and the number of occurrences of the subthemes in the data collection.

Table 4

Professional Development Subthemes

Subthemes	Number of participants identifying the subtheme	Number of occurrences
Lessons learned	4	34
Investing in new products, services, and tools	4	22
Continued education/role expansion	4	10

Connecting Professional Development to the Literature

Regardless of the entrepreneurial type, entrepreneurs are responsible for their professional growth and development. All participants have applied lessons learned, invested in products, services, or tools, and continued their education or expanded their roles. BL1 and BL4 invested in education according to the business websites that have allowed them to reach more clientele. BL2 and BL3 grew professionally and offered additional services. BL2 learned how to repair clippers, and BL3 judged hair and barber shows. Entrepreneurship requires entrepreneurs to evolve their behaviors, competencies, and perception to attain business objectives (Pokidko et al., 2020; Thornton, 2020). Entrepreneurs may benefit from taking the initiative to lead themselves to acquire skills and competencies that promote entrepreneurial, economic, cognitive, emotional, and motivational health (Tur-Porcar et al., 2018). Learning from the mistakes of others may help entrepreneurs reduce burnout. Burnout can be experienced because of a decreased sense of accomplishment (Omrane et al., 2018). Pursuing growth opportunities can fuel a sense of purpose.

Connecting Professional Development to the SLT

Most individuals with an entrepreneurial approach to business take responsibility for their professional growth and development by leading themselves to reach their goals. Self-leaders are willing to use behavioral and cognitive strategies to grow professionally, add value to their lives, and achieve their goals (Jensen et al., 2015; Neck et al., 2020). Self-leaders can identify the gaps between their current state and where they desire to be to take the appropriate actions to close the gaps (Stewart et al., 2019). Competence and human capital directly influence business outcomes (Jensen et al., 2015; Joslyn, 2018; Ostergaard & Marinova, 2018). Self-leadership can help leverage skills to facilitate growth (Cosenz & Noto, 2018b). As self-leaders, BL1 and BL4 became master barbers and obtained additional certifications and training to grow their business endeavors. Growing a business or aiming to achieve a result may require entrepreneurs to acquire knowledge and learn a new skill. BL1 continues to develop professionally by offering natural hair care coaching services. Self-leading entrepreneurs will professionally develop to grow with their business endeavors.

Theme 4: Involving Others

Some entrepreneurs do not have the support of family, friends, mentors, or strategic partnerships to plan, organize, or sustain their business endeavors before reaching burnout. Burnout is the depletion and mismanagement of resources and energy (Omrane et al., 2018). All participants communicated the importance of involving others. Sadly, some entrepreneurs do not ask for help thinking they should be able to build and manage their businesses themselves. BL1 said, "You really can't do it alone. Honestly,

you can't. You do need others to help." BL2 said, "Please connect yourself with others on your level and those above you." BL2 also stressed the importance of family. Therefore, entrepreneurs should ask for help from family, friends, stakeholders within their local communities, volunteers, or employ others to contribute to business needs. BL1 shared that the help of family helps to reduce burnout:

> Asking for help from friends and family definitely helped me in the beginning not to be physically burnt out. I even involved my children in working throughout the week. In the beginning, I had my son help with scheduling my appointments. My daughter would come in and help fold towels and do things, so I didn't have to worry about doing them.

> A team is valuable to entrepreneurs because the involvement of others can help

lessen the burden of business. According to Todorova (2019), 95% of entrepreneurs involve the help of others to help initiate their business endeavors in some capacity. Small business entrepreneurs were responsible for adding 1.1 million net jobs in 2019 in the United States (U.S. SBA 2020). BL4 encourages small business owners not to do everything themselves and to hire help:

> Try not to do everything yourself. Allocate some things to other people who are experts in the field. Don't try to be the Greyhound bus driver. I mean that a Greyhound bus driver drives the bus, collects the tickets, unloads the luggage, loads the luggage, and does everything with that Greyhound bus when it would be much easier if he had someone to collect the tickets and load the luggage. Then he could concentrate more on driving the bus. So, I say do not try to do everything

yourself. Don't try to be your marketer. Don't try to do your taxes. Leave that up to the experts so you can concentrate on your business.

The subthemes of involving others are family and friends, mentorship, community, industry support, and hired help. Many entrepreneurs cannot reduce burnout without the help of others. Table 5 shows the involving others subthemes, the number of participants identifying subthemes, and the number of occurrences of the subthemes in the data collection.

Table 5

Involving Others Subthemes

Subthemes	Number of participants identifying the subtheme	Number of occurrences
Family and friends	4	27
Mentorship	3	15
Community or industry support	2	13
Hired help	1	6

Connecting Involving Others to the Literature

Not all entrepreneurs need to involve others in their day-to-day operations in the same capacity. The need for help may depend on the entrepreneurial type of the entrepreneur. Freelancers or self-employed entrepreneurs may be satisfied working alone (Connolly et al., 2020). However, small business entrepreneurs create jobs. Small business owners are a major contributor to the economic growth in the United States, employing over 60 million people in 2017 (U.S. SBA, 2020). Core entrepreneurs work for small business owners. Core entrepreneurs or intrapreneurs do not desire the risk of business ownership and prefer to work for an organization (Honig & Samuelsson, 2021). Entrepreneurs should involve others based on their organizational needs.

Some small business owners try to maintain their business endeavors without involving others. There are times when the support of a team may be critical to help small business owners make business decisions (Todorova, 2019). BL1 confirmed the importance of asking for help from family and friends to complete tasks to reduce stress. BL2 expressed how the support of a spouse brought out potential. BL2, BL3, and BL4 echoed the necessity of mentorship and applying lessons learned from entrepreneurial veterans. Sometimes without the support of other people, small business owners could become burdened. Burnout is an occupational hazard, and it may not be easy to recover from burnout (Lin et al., 2020). A team can help with vision execution, innovation, strategies, and motivation (Todorova, 2019). Entrepreneurs should seek to involve others and establish strong relationships as required (Schummer et al., 2019). Small business owners may experience burnout when others are not involved.

Connecting Involving Others to the SLT

Self-leaders should be able to identify when they need to ask for help. Self-leaders manage their demands to reduce stress (Godwin et al., 2016). All business leaders confirmed the need to involve others in their business endeavors to reduce burnout. BL1 said, "You need others to help." BL4 said to hire help if necessary. Effective self-leaders understand the codependent relationship between themselves and others (Neck et al., 2020). The lack of resources can increase entrepreneurial burnout. Burnout is the result of unmanaged work stress (Moss, 2020). Unfortunately, some entrepreneurs are not self-aware, overlook their mental and physical thresholds, and expose themselves to work-related stress (Blais et al., 2020). Self-leaders organize their responsibilities and risks to

reduce burnout. Involving others to assist with business activities may be required to lessen the burden of business.

Application to Professional Practice

The results of this qualitative multiple-case study may help entrepreneurs identify strategies to reduce burnout in the initial 3 years in business. Ultimately, entrepreneurs are solely responsible for their success, failure, and burnout experience; however, this study could help entrepreneurs who provide a product or service develop and become effective self-leaders professionally. This study may challenge entrepreneurs to seek entrepreneurial education, learn project management competencies, find or become a mentor, become more involved in their communities, and strategically plan to lessen the burden of doing business. All participants contributed valuable information that could help novice entrepreneurs prepare and effectively execute strategic business practices. Strategic planning, positive thinking, professional development, and involving others are important strategies for entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs may find relief using these strategies when battling burnout. Simple strategies like prioritizing self-care, taking mental breaks, thinking positively, scheduling time off to rest, and asking for help from family and friends may seem trivial but effectively reduce burnout. The World Health Organization (2019) stated that burnout is chronic workplace stress. Some entrepreneurs experience burnout in an attempt to overcome business challenges.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for social change include a positive impact on entrepreneurs and their local communities through the increase of sustainable businesses and other

entrepreneurial activities. Business sustainability could lower unemployment and increase local tax revenues to benefit citizens. The strategies identified in this study could help entrepreneurs reduce burnout and become self-leading to effectively execute business activities with the appropriate behavioral and cognitive strategies to achieve their goals. Entrepreneurs that use effective strategies may increase their effectiveness at managing resources and self-management. The mismanagement of resources can cause burnout (Adina et al., 2021). The sharing of my study may help entrepreneurs understand the potential impact on their businesses and local communities if strategies to reduce burnout are not a priority.

Recommendations for Action

The participants in this study shared valuable lessons from their combined 62 years of experience to help entrepreneurs reduce burnout. Obstacles in entrepreneurship will come. Aspiring, novice, and existing entrepreneurs should pay attention to the results of this study. I plan to share and teach the results of this study to entrepreneurs, business leaders, and students at conferences, seminars, and schools of business, through books and online resources, with business programs in my local community, and with the participants of this study to initiate the social change.

Implementing the strategies presented in this study can help entrepreneurs identify the gaps from where they are to where they need to achieve their desired business goals. Entrepreneurs should prepare themselves to face and endure challenges because of the complexities of doing business (Torres et al., 2017). My first recommendation is for entrepreneurs to pursue a business endeavor or career path they love. People start

businesses for different reasons, but passion may compel entrepreneurs to work through challenges, including burnout, because the business may mean more to them than money. My second recommendation is for entrepreneurs to develop a strategic iterative plan for their business endeavors and professional growth and development. Self-employed entrepreneurs should understand that their business endeavor is as strong as they are, and any weaknesses they may have, the business may also have. Small business owners should plan for the business, themselves, and their employees. Core entrepreneurs should understand their role in an existing organization and plan to grow accordingly. My final recommendation is for entrepreneurs to become effective self-leaders. Self-leadership skills may help entrepreneurs organize their responsibilities, reach sustainability, and reduce burnout by leading themselves to implement the appropriate behavioral and cognitive strategies to succeed.

Recommendations for Further Research

I anticipated three research limitations in Section 1 of this study. Research limitations refer to the study's restrictions outside the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). All data collected were limited to the (a) honesty, transparency, and thoroughness of participants; (b) the possibility of insufficient answers to the research question; and (c) the risk of participants not having enough time to provide detailed responses. Data saturation was reached through participant answers to semistructured interviews, follow-up questions, and information from public websites.

All data were collected from four licensed barbers in South Carolina; therefore, the results were restricted to their business experience and known strategies. Barbers are

in the personal service industry. Therefore, my first recommendation for further research would be to explore strategies to reduce burnout from entrepreneurs in different industries. Entrepreneurs may have different challenges that lead to burnout across diverse industries. Secondly, I would recommend using a larger sample size with more interview questions. The data collected from six participants in a different industry may generate significantly different strategies to reduce burnout than those collected from four participants from the personal service industry.

Additionally, more interview questions may help facilitate more detailed responses. Lastly, I would recommend further research to include entrepreneurs' business revenue. There may be a relationship between business revenue and burnout. Entrepreneurs may convey their burnout experience differently based on their industry, the number of interview questions, and revenue. My recommendations for further research may expand the awareness of strategies to reduce the burnout of entrepreneurs across multiple industries.

<p align="center">Reflections</p>

My doctoral journey has been a fulfilling experience that cost me more than money. Many sacrifices were made for me to achieve this milestone. I am leaving this program with a terminal degree, but I will remain a lifetime learner. I am thankful for the doctor of business administration program at Walden University because it was exactly what I needed to follow my dreams. I started this journey as a step towards achieving my professional goals: to influence project management and entrepreneur research and to teach project management.

I did not know what to expect at the start of the doctor of business administration program. In hindsight, the courses were perfectly aligned to set me up for success, and the residencies were timely. I had the pleasure of attending my first residency in person, and that experience has carried me through the program. At the December 2019 residency in Maryland, I learned the expectations of the doctoral study, but I did not know how I was going to complete the research. So, I went through the motions. It was not until I found the conceptual framework of self-leadership that my doctoral to help entrepreneurs reduce burnout because real. Self-leaders shape their behaviors to achieve their goals. Entrepreneurs who experience burnout may need to shape their behaviors to mitigate stress. The opportunity to interview research participants was a rewarding experience. I was comforted by the reality that my research may help entrepreneurs reduce burnout and can influence positive social change one entrepreneur at a time.

Conclusion

In this qualitative multiple-case study, I aimed to explore strategies entrepreneurs use to reduce burnout in their initial 3 years in business. Approximately 50% of small businesses fail within 5 years (Byun et al., 2020; Cosenz & Noto, 2018b), and burnout is a contributing factor. Some barber entrepreneurs face challenges and experience burnout in their initial years. Barbers may be expected to serve more than a haircut, grooming, and customer service. Some barbers support healthcare initiatives and influence community decisions while managing their businesses in some African American communities (Carlton et al., 2020). I chose the SLT as the conceptual framework because entrepreneurs lead themselves to achieve their personal, professional, and organizational

goals. The mismanagement of resources leads to burnout (Adina et al., 2021). Barber

entrepreneurs must lead themselves to be successful and reduce burnout.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
What you will do	**What you will say—script**
Introduce the interview and set the stage advising that the audio recording is about to begin and advising that I will not use their name or their business name.	Script: Hi! I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me today. As I stated on the phone/email when we scheduled this meeting, I'm Eva Singleton, a doctoral student at Walden University, working on a qualitative multiple case study to answer my research problem. The specific business problem is that some entrepreneurs lack strategies to reduce burnout during the initial 3 years in business. I aim to determine strategies to help entrepreneurs reduce burnout. We can begin if you are ready.
• Watch for nonverbal queues • Paraphrase as needed • Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth	1. What key strategies have helped you to reduce burnout during your initial 3 years in business? 2. How did you determine those key strategies that have helped reduce burnout? 3. How did implementing your key strategies help reduce stress in your personal life?

4. What lessons have you learned that you feel are important for new first-time business owners to know and implement before launching their businesses to minimize their exposure to burnout?

5. What additional information can you share to help me understand how you reduced burnout during your initial 3 years in business?

Wrap up interview Thank participant	Script: Those are all the questions I have for you. Do you have any further comments you wish to make on the topic of burnout for business owners? Thank you so much for your time today. Your input has been very helpful to my project.
Schedule follow-up member-checking interview	I would like to confirm that I have captured your responses as you intended. I want to send you a summary of your interview for your review. May I call you on XX/XX/XXXX to review the data I have collected with you? What time works for you?