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Effective Strategies to Sustain Small African American Beauty Salon Business Beyond 5 Years

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Sherwana Jefferson

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Effective Strategies to Sustain Small African American Beauty Salon

Business Beyond 5 Years

by

Sherwana Jefferson

MS, National University, 2020

BS, University of Phoenix, 2017

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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April 2024

Abstract

Small business owners without effective business strategies risk business failure. More than one-half of African American-owned small businesses close within the first five years of operation because they lack effective strategies to sustain their businesses.

Grounded in general systems theory, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study was to identify and explore strategies that African American small beauty salon owners use to sustain their businesses beyond five years. The participants were five business owners of small African American beauty salons who sustained their businesses for five years. Data were collected using semistructured interviews, a review of business documents, and a review of the business website and Facebook social media site content. Through thematic analysis, three themes were identified: (a) continuous learning and adaptation, (b) principles and business ethics, and (c) collaboration and networking. A key recommendation is for African American small beauty salon owners to recognize customers' specific needs by providing personalized and individualized services. The positive social change implications include the potential for African American small business salon owners to reduce closures among African American small beauty salons, retain skilled employees, and support the local community workforce.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my daughter, Keiana. Thank you for selflessly sacrificing countless hours of quality time throughout this journey to allow me to finish my endeavor. I am honoring my deceased father, Thomas Henry, who inspired me to pursue this goal and instilled within me his greatest gift: the spirit of excellence, will, determination, and dedication. This degree is for you, Dad. I also dedicate this dissertation to my fantastic mother, Shirley, my amazing better half, James, and my brother, Terrick, for their understanding, support, and encouragement throughout this process! I dedicate this study to my family, friends (especially Patricia and Frannie), shipmates, and academic colleagues who have supported, encouraged, and kept me uplifted in prayer throughout this journey. Last, my study is dedicated to every working mom, dedicated servicemember, and devoted family member and friend like me who dreams big. Never stop dreaming, and always pay it forward.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Background of the Problem

Small businesses are defined as independent companies with fewer than 1,500 employees (Small Business Association, 2018a). Annually, about 630,000 new small businesses are established (Small Business Association, 2018b). However, over half closed within the first 5 years, resulting in approximately 320,000 closures from 2011 to 2017 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Small businesses, including African American small beauty salons, face unique challenges; yet research on these factors is lacking (Mayr et al., 2021). African American small beauty salon owners experience a higher failure rate that is attributed to a limited understanding of effective business strategies (Lextrait, 2022). Analyzing successful strategies of African American small beauty salon owners operating for 5 years provides valuable insights for industry sustainability.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem is that some African American small beauty salon owners lack effective strategies to sustain businesses beyond 5 years. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to identify and explore effective business strategies that African American small beauty salon business owners use to sustain their businesses successfully beyond 5 years. For this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study, the population consisted of African American small beauty salon business

owners in the southwestern United States who have implemented effective business strategies to extend their business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Participants must provide knowledgeable aspects and perspectives from experiences about the phenomenon in qualitative research. Five small African American beauty salon owners in the southwestern United States employed effective business strategies to extend their business sustainability beyond 5 years. Purposive sampling intentionally selects participants based on specific criteria, ensuring in-depth insights from individuals relevant to the study's focus (Sawarni et al., 2021). The purposive sampling method is used when gathering comprehensive information from participants who meet specific criteria. This study used purposeful sampling to engage and recruit research participants.

Eligibility criteria for this study included African American small beauty salon business owners in the southwestern United States who have implemented effective business strategies to extend their business sustainability beyond 5 years. These individuals meet specified participant criteria and possess the capability to provide insights that address my research inquiries. Potential participants were contacted by email. Spacey et al. (2020) highlighted the effectiveness of utilizing social media as a strategic means of engaging with potential participants to address their concerns. Once IRB approval was received, prospective participants who were African American small beauty salon owners were recruited. Participants were recruited via LinkedIn, social media networks, and relevant beauty salon associations.

The data sources planned for this study were semi-structured interviews, public records, and government documents, including business website information, Facebook social media site material, public financial statements, annual reviews, and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) records. Roberts et al. (2021) noted that researchers may have to employ formal or informal communication approaches during in-person interviews to mitigate issues such as participant access, such as obtaining organizational documents, or selecting suitable interview locations. To gain access to participants, snowball sampling techniques using LinkedIn and social media networks were employed to locate African American small beauty salon owners and establish direct communication.

General systems theory (GST) is an interdisciplinary framework that examines systems as interconnected and independent entities, whether in the natural or human-made realm (Kobia & Gachunga, 2019). Introduced by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1972, GST explains complex systems' interactions (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Within GST, there is an emphasis on dynamic processes over static structures, with a preference for understanding relationships and interconnections rather than isolated components (Van Assche et al., 2019). GST transcends disciplinary boundaries and offers a comprehensive lens for studying multifaceted phenomena within various systems. GST underscores the significance of processes, relationships, and interconnections as pivotal elements in comprehending intricate systems, highlighted by their inherent interrelatedness.

Research Question

What effective strategies do African American small beauty salon owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Sebele-Mpofu (2020) defined assumptions as unsupported assertions that researchers treat as facts in their studies. Researchers use assumptions to form theoretical statements in their research. Recognizing and managing these assumptions is crucial when making determinations, generalizations, and implications in research (Levitt, 2021). The study's key assumptions included the choice of a qualitative method for data collection, the accuracy of participant responses regarding effective business strategies for small business sustainability, and the reliability of successful African American small beauty salon owners' descriptions of long-term success strategies.

Limitations

O'Neil (2019) defines limitations as uncontrollable influences that can impact study results and result in inadequacies. According to Gao and McDonald (2022), limitations constrain research findings. The first limitation of the study was the sample size, which only partially represented African American small beauty salon businesses in the study's specific region. Another potential limitation was the accuracy of participant recollection regarding the effective business strategies for sustaining operations beyond 5 years.

Transition

African American small beauty salon owners are integral to the U.S. economy; yet, a research gap exists regarding understanding their sustainable business strategies. Examining the impact of internal and external factors, particularly managerial knowledge and business proficiency, can enhance African American small beauty salon owner's understanding and support their long-term success beyond five years. Section 1 discusses the background, problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, assumptions, and limitations. Section 2 reviews the literature on strategies for sustaining African American beauty salons beyond 5 years. Section 3 covers the research methodology, including design, analysis, data collection techniques, and strategies for study completion. It also details study findings and their practical applications.

Section 2: The Literature Review

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

This literature review was conducted to answer the following research question: What strategies do African American small beauty salon owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years? The following four areas are the literature review's larger topics: (a) conceptual framework, (b) analysis of supporting theory, (d) analysis of potential themes and phenomena, and (e) relationship between this study and previous research.

Utilizing the Walden University library, I examined journal articles, dissertations, literature on small businesses, and other reference materials. The primary databases consulted for information consisted of topics related to African American-owned small businesses and small businesses. Additional databases accessed included SAGE Publications, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, Emerald Management Journals, EBSCOhost, Management and Organization Studies, government databases, and LexisNexis Academic. This capstone includes 146 referenced sources. Ninety-two percent of the sources were published within 5 years of the expected chief academic officer (CAO)'s approval date in 2024, and 93% were peer-reviewed.

Conceptual Framework

General Systems Theory

Von Bertalanffy (1972) introduced general systems theory in the 1930s to investigate the links between events and components. Bellman et al. (2021) noted that researchers use general systems theory to assess the interconnections and diverse

elements within a system rather than focusing on isolated patterns. Further, Daniel et al. (2022) have proposed that the framework of general systems theory can aid researchers in evaluating and identifying elements collaborating to produce a particular outcome. Von Bertalanffy argued that researchers and business leaders could apply general systems theory to analyze the relationships between phenomena and organizational practices. Midgley and Lindhult (2021) asserted that researchers explore systems to comprehend the systemic interconnections that business owners need to recognize, diagnose, and manage. A grasp of the fundamental principles of general systems theory enables researchers to understand how systems operate within successful African American small beauty salons.

Von Bertalanffy (1972) proposed that a fundamental aspect of general systems theory involves distinguishing between open and closed systems, arguing that there is a continuous exchange of energy, materials, people, and information in open systems. Business leaders can utilize open systems to gather valuable insights from their operational environment. Conversely, Xia et al. (2020) observed that closed systems lack conversions of components, connections, or synergy among their parts. Sun et al. (2020) confirmed that business leaders who thoroughly understand closed systems and the external factors influencing business success can enhance their operations. For African American small beauty salon owners aiming to extend their sustainability beyond the typical 5-year mark, adopting the effective business strategy of comprehending open and closed systems could prove instrumental.

Von Bertalanffy (1972) suggested that applying general systems theory in business operations could enhance business leaders' comprehension of business systems. Ngondo and Klyueva (2020) theorized that business leaders could utilize this theory to gain insight into the complexities of systems and better grasp external environmental influences. Rapp et al. (2020) noted that ecological inputs and outputs play a crucial role in an organization's core functions, necessitating the establishment of protocols by business leaders to adapt to environmental demands. Daniel et al. (2022) concluded that business leaders who employ general systems theory methods can develop skills and proficiencies that improve performance through more efficient processes. For African American small beauty salon business owners, implementing the effective business strategy of integrating the diverse components of general systems theory into their operations can extend business sustainability beyond the conventional 5-year timeframe.

According to Ouvrard et al. (2020), business proprietors must comprehensively understand how essential business elements and operations collectively enhance the durability of their enterprises. Nyagadza (2022) argued that small business leaders must navigate various systems to maintain sustainability, including marketing, technology, customer satisfaction, and financial relations. Roundy and Burke-Smalley (2022) corroborated this perspective by affirming that the integration of general systems theory allows business owners to gain insights into how interconnections within these systems contribute to the sustained success of their ventures. For African American small beauty salon business owners seeking to extend their operational longevity beyond the standard 5-year period, adopting the effective business strategy of incorporating general systems

theory approaches holds the potential for success. Von Bertalanffy (1972) emphasized the diagnostic potential of combining general systems theory and systems thinking for managers in addressing business issues within firm operations. Karahan et al. (2022) underscored the applicability of systems thinking approaches for business leaders in evaluating their operations. Justice et al. (2020) advocated incorporating general systems theory concepts in business strategies, thus enabling leaders to gain diverse perspectives on their operations and solve complex problems with interconnected components. This approach shows potential for African American small beauty salon owners, proposing that incorporating concepts from general systems theory into their business practices may prolong sustainability beyond the customary 5-year timeframe. Similarly, Van Assche et al. (2019) proposed that employing general systems theory principles can enhance business leaders' understanding of strategy. Becker et al. (2022) affirmed the importance of systematic implementation for business sustainability. For African American salon owners, adopting these principles offers a way to harness open system advantages while addressing closed system limitations, extending their operations beyond the standard 5-year timeframe. The following section explores the concept of systems thinking.

Systems Thinking

Researchers utilize systems thinking to explore the connections and dynamics among system components. Settembre-Blundo et al. (2021) proposed that managers can effectively regulate actions affecting different parts of a system, assessing whether these actions lead to new outcomes in other parts, all through the application of systems thinking. This approach allows managers to evaluate how various organizational

components are interconnected and influence each other. For African American small beauty salon business owners, adopting systems thinking in their decision-making processes could prove highly productive.

Laruelle (2021) underscored the importance of pragmatic decision-making for leaders in successful organizations. Von Bertalanffy (1972) postulated that the principles of general systems theory rely on several factors, including interactions with other successful African American small beauty salon business owners, pragmatic decision-making for sustained productivity, maintaining consistency in business operations, fostering connections with other successful African American small beauty salon business owners, shaping customized business structures, and maintaining comprehensive awareness of business performance. Laruelle concluded that merging the characteristics of general systems theory and systems thinking could assist African American small beauty salon owners in identifying specific management aspects crucial for extending their business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Small business owners are integral to a more extensive sustainability system. Diverse organizational leaders utilize systems thinking to manage processes in various environments, stemming from the need to explore aspects related to learning organizations (Bellman et al., 2021). Systems thinking, arising from the necessity of comprehensive exploration, is vital. General systems theory and systems thinking provide a framework for assessing experiences and perceptions relevant to sustainability in African American small beauty salon businesses. Integrating systems thinking into

operations can extend sustainability beyond the typical 5-year horizon. Next, we delve into criticisms of the General Systems Theory.

General Systems Theory Criticisms

The criticisms of general systems theory (GST), as Boulding (1956) highlighted, revolve around its abstract nature and perceived lack of practicality. Boulding argued that the theory's high level of generality posed challenges to its usefulness in scientific inquiry. This criticism stems from the idea that GST operates at a level of abstraction that makes it challenging to apply directly to specific systems or situations. GST relies heavily on analogies and broad concepts instead of offering a concrete and detailed framework for understanding individual systems. GST can be seen as more of a conceptual theory than a practical one, limiting its applicability in specific scientific and practical contexts. Boulding's critique emphasizes that the notion of a "system" in GST is so broad and all-encompassing that it becomes challenging to apply the theory effectively to specific fields or domains without losing its generality. This criticism suggests that GST may lack the precision and specificity to address different systems' unique characteristics and complexities.

However, not all scholars share Boulding's criticism of GST. Kast and Rosenzweig (1972) argued that GST could be beneficial for understanding organizational behavior and developing effective management strategies. Byass (2011) proposed its usefulness in comprehending complex health systems and crafting effective health policies. These perspectives highlight the diverse applications of GST, suggesting valuable insights in various domains, including sustainability strategies. Despite

Boulding's criticisms regarding its abstract nature, GST has proven its utility in multiple fields. The ongoing debate around its limitations and strengths underscores its complex and influential nature, shaping various research and practice areas. The following section critically evaluates theories supporting general systems theory.

Analysis of Supporting Theories

Exploring alternative theories confirmed the general systems theory's suitability for this study. The research literature has introduced numerous sustainability theories. The following subsections provide descriptions of the unused theories and the rationale for not selecting them.

Entrepreneurship Theory. Schumpeter's entrepreneurship theory, introduced in the 1930's, remains a valuable framework for understanding key elements of small business success. It emphasizes efficiency, effectiveness, and various essential traits contributing to small business sustainability (Schumpeter, 2007). The theory underscores the intricate connections between inputs, processes, and outputs in entrepreneurship, supported by Lucian and Sergiu's (2019) research. Rauch (2020) and Shaw and Sørensen (2019) emphasized the significance of entrepreneurial innovation. This enduring theory provides a comprehensive framework for entrepreneurs to navigate challenges and opportunities. Lucian and Sergiu's research illustrated practicality, while Rauch, Shaw, and Sørensen highlighted the importance of cultivating innovative qualities for entrepreneurial endeavors. This knowledge continues to guide and inspire small business owners toward sustainable success; however, this theory has primarily been utilized in the start-up phase. General systems theory provides a practical framework to explore

effective strategies African American small beauty salon owners use to sustain their business beyond five years.

Triple Loop Theory. Triple-loop learning theory, an advancement of previous learning models, refines the approach to continuous learning and decision-making (Fahrenbach & Kragulj, 2020). Initially introduced by Hawkins (1991), this theory focuses on effective task execution, prioritization, and sound decision-making. Romme and van Witteloostuijn (1999) highlighted the importance of new small business owners acquiring the skills to tackle complex problems. Entrepreneurs in small businesses, as problem solvers and decision-makers, benefit significantly from triple-loop learning principles, enabling them to make informed decisions at the right time (Piñeiro-Chousa et al., 2020). Cognitive processing is crucial in helping business owners understand and implement these strategies. Small business success relies on leaders' learning, leadership, and decision-making, impacting profitability, survivability, and sustainability. Entrepreneurs who plan, monitor, and learn tend to succeed. Triple-loop learning guides owners in tasks and strategies; however, this study favors GST's holistic perspective on interconnectedness in African American small beauty salons. The following section analyzes potential themes and phenomena of effective strategies for sustaining African American-owned small beauty salons beyond 5 years.

Analysis of Potential Themes and Phenomena

Over the past decade, a noticeable trend has emerged among researchers and African American small business owners, who have increasingly embraced sustainability strategies. This section conducts a comprehensive review of professional and academic

literature, explicitly identifying potential themes and phenomena related to the effective strategies employed by small business owners and African American small business owners to ensure the longevity of their enterprises, extending beyond the standard 5-year period. This literature review encompasses six key categories: the beauty salon industry, African American small businesses, strategic planning, innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainability. In subsequent sections, the literature will demonstrate how researchers and African American small business owners have managed to sustain their operations for over five years by implementing effective strategies. As the African American small business sector continues to grow, it is evident that an increasing number of African American entrepreneurs are actively seeking viable long-term sustainability strategies.

Beauty Salon Industry

The beauty salon sector in the US is diverse and encompasses both the sale of beauty products and the provision of specialized beauty services (Confetto et al., 2023). This industry involves the application of various substances to the body's external surface, serving purposes like enhancing appearance, cleansing, and maintaining good condition. In developing countries, SMEs constitute approximately 90% of businesses and contribute 40% of GDP, generating two-thirds of the world's jobs (Dubouloz et al., 2021). Small businesses play a substantial role in influencing GDP, employment rates, business valuation, and revenue.

The beauty salon sector's significance within the broader economy underscores the substantial role played by small businesses, particularly in the beauty salon industry. SMEs contribute significantly to economic growth, employment opportunities, and

financial stability. This highlights the importance of examining effective sustainability strategies employed by African American small beauty salon owners, as their success benefits their businesses and contributes to the industry's health and vitality. In this context, understanding effective sustainability strategies employed by African American small beauty salon owners becomes crucial for the industry's continued growth and prosperity. Considering the critical role played by beauty salons, the subsequent sections will explore small and medium-sized enterprises and African American businesses in the United States.

Small African American Businesses

Small businesses and SME owners are pivotal in driving economic growth, exerting substantial influence on employment rates, valuation, and revenue. This impact extends beyond national borders, contributing significantly to job creation and shaping both national and global economies, as highlighted by studies such as Belmi et al. (2020), Csillag et al. (2020), and Chege and Wang (2019). These entrepreneurs are instrumental in regulating a nation's wealth progression, optimizing resource usage, and fostering economic development. Particularly noteworthy is the example of India, where small businesses and SMEs play a vital role in employing a significant portion of the population and making substantial contributions to manufacturing production and exports (Csillag et al., 2019). This highlights their fundamental role in the economic fabric, especially in developing countries, where their impact is recognized nationally and globally.

Gherghina et al. (2020) stated that small businesses and SME owners are pivotal in driving economic growth. Solberg et al. (2022) emphasized that these enterprises have a pragmatic impact on various aspects of the economy, including gross domestic product (GDP), employment, valuation, and revenue. Belmi et al. (2020) highlighted the significance of small businesses and SMEs as vital contributors to job creation. Small businesses and SMEs form the backbone of economies by fostering job opportunities, spurring innovation, and driving economic development. Their contributions to GDP are substantial, as they collectively account for a significant portion of a country's economic output. Their role in providing employment is essential, as they often serve as a primary source of jobs, especially for local communities and marginalized populations. It is crucial to recognize that the success of African American-owned small businesses and SMEs has a broader-reaching effect, as it positively influences both national and global economies.

African American small businesses and SME owners play a significant role in shaping the global economy. Csillag et al. (2019) emphasized that economic factors such as employment rates, efficient resource utilization, and overall economic development are critical determinants of a nation's economic progress. Solberg et al. (2022) noted that successful small businesses and SME owners comprehensively understand global economies, highlighting their role as informed contributors. Gherghina et al. (2020) highlighted that small businesses and SMEs constitute a substantial portion of companies in the global economy. These studies collectively emphasize the integral part that African American small businesses and SME owners play in shaping the global economic

framework, contributing to economic development, and enhancing the overall economic composition of various countries, especially in developing regions.

Csillag et al. (2019) emphasized the vital role of small businesses and SMEs in India's economy, providing employment and contributing to manufacturing and exports. However, Farquhar et al. (2020) advised that limited knowledge of global economies may lead to business failures for small business owners. This underscores the importance of a business strategy incorporating international economic awareness, especially for African American small beauty salon owners, to extend sustainability beyond the conventional 5-year threshold. Understanding global economic dynamics is crucial for the long-term success of small businesses and SMEs, irrespective of location. As Csillag et al. (2019) noted, small businesses and SMEs in India serve dual roles, providing employment and contributing significantly to manufacturing and exports. African American small beauty salons and SMEs can benefit from adopting a strategy that includes awareness of global economic dynamics, highlighting the broader relevance of understanding global economies for all small businesses.

The number of African American small businesses and SME owners contributing to economic growth steadily rises. These entrepreneurs have various motivations for launching new ventures. More than 50% of new small business owners in the United States launch new ventures to attain greater flexibility. While some entrepreneurs initiate businesses to introduce new products, others seek additional or improved income streams (Kanda et al., 2024). Some African American entrepreneurs choose entrepreneurship due to labor market discrimination, such as lack of employment. Unemployment significantly

inspires African Americans to establish new businesses (Martins et al., 2023). Many African American entrepreneurs choose entrepreneurship due to labor market discrimination, such as lack of employment. Mathias et al. (2020) argued that identifying opportunities that larger organizations overlook drives African American entrepreneurs to create small businesses. In some cases, job development is closely linked to establishing African American small businesses (Zuofa et al., 2022). They propose that a connection exists between communal well-being and the success of African American small business owners. For African American small beauty salon business owners, implementing an effective business strategy that includes identifying and capitalizing on revenue-generating employment opportunities could be instrumental in extending their business sustainability beyond the standard 5-year horizon.

African American small business owners are increasingly vital contributors to economic growth. Their motivations vary, from pursuing flexibility and introducing new products to addressing unemployment and seizing opportunities that larger organizations may overlook. The success of these businesses is interconnected with job development and communal well-being, underlining the importance of recognizing and leveraging employment opportunities. By adopting an effective business strategy that aligns with these motivations and opportunities, African American small beauty salon business owners can extend their ventures' sustainability beyond the typical 5-year timeframe.

African American small business and SME owners are crucial in responding to increased unemployment by hiring additional employees. Moreover, their employment practices often focus on benefiting under-resourced communities, including hiring

residents, elderly individuals, and disadvantaged workers. However, these business owners need to recognize and capitalize on market opportunities, as taking advantage of such opportunities could lead to business success. By implementing an effective business strategy centered on identifying and leveraging these opportunities, African American small beauty salon business owners have the potential to drive economic growth, create jobs, reduce unemployment rates, and extend their business sustainability beyond the typical 5-year period.

These perspectives reveal a shared recognition of the critical need to explore and understand the reasons behind business owner failures. The study's focus on African American small beauty salon business owners in the southwestern United States aligns with the broader context of high failure rates experienced by African American small businesses and SME owners, particularly in the southwest region. The alarming statistic that two out of three small businesses in the United States ultimately close underscores the urgency of addressing business failure. By implementing an effective business strategy that identifies and mitigates the causes of failure, African American small beauty salon business owners can significantly enhance their business sustainability, potentially extending their operations well beyond the standard 5-year period.

Challenges and Obstacles. The critical challenge faced by African American small business owners is that they face a higher likelihood of credit denial, even when their creditworthiness is comparable to other entrepreneurs (Barkley & Schweitzer, 2023). This issue signifies potential systemic biases within the lending industry, where African American business owners may encounter obstacles in securing essential

financial resources. Access to credit is pivotal for business growth and sustainability, making this disparity a significant concern. However, these small beauty salon businesses owned by African Americans can overcome these challenges and achieve long-term sustainability by implementing effective strategies to address biases and navigate obstacles; these businesses can thrive beyond the standard 5-year threshold. This commitment to long-term success demands resiliency and commitment to success.

Mangum (2020) identified several key factors that can contribute to the long-term success of African American business owners. These factors include demographic shifts, opportunities for business acquisitions, increased migration patterns, and a growing labor force. By strategically leveraging these factors, small beauty salon businesses led by African Americans can significantly extend their longevity. These perspectives reveal a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by African American small business owners. These challenges range from credit denials to limited access to resources and expertise. The challenges African American small business owners face regarding credit access and potential biases requires attention and reform at both the policy and societal levels. While individual business owners can take proactive measures to enhance their prospects, addressing systemic inequalities is essential to ensure equal opportunities for all entrepreneurs, regardless of race.

Business Failure. Various factors contribute to the success or failure of small businesses, particularly within the initial five years of operation. Honig and Samuelsson (2021) emphasized the inherent uncertainties of starting a profitable business, which can often lead to failure within the first five years. A significant factor in business success is

the importance of supervisory knowledge, human capital, and financial management. These elements are critical in determining a business's potential for success or failure. Thrassou et al. (2020) supported this concept by identifying inconsistent performance, a lack of focused strategies, failure to maintain professional expertise, limited managerial knowledge, and ineffective performance measurement processes as significant causes of business failure. These findings highlight the significance of supervisory knowledge and strategic planning in ensuring business sustainability.

Kramoliš and Dobeš (2020) and Meekaewkunchorn et al. (2021) focused on factors like owner passivity, weak stakeholder relations, and an inability to foster teamwork as contributors to business failure. These factors highlight the importance of intangible assets, particularly human capital, in gaining a competitive advantage. This emphasis on human capital becomes even more critical in regions with elevated failure rates, such as African American beauty salons in the southwestern United States (Jackson & Sanyal, 2019). Dung and Giang (2022) emphasized the significance of effective business strategies and decision-making proficiency. Shepherd et al. (2023) highlighted the risks associated with suboptimal performance and business failure due to distrust and reliance on speculative sources in the small business sector. Successful small businesses must navigate a complex landscape that includes supervisory knowledge, human capital, financial management, strategic planning, teamwork, and effective decision-making. These factors are particularly relevant within specific contexts, such as African American beauty salons, where addressing unique challenges is vital for ensuring business sustainability beyond the critical initial five years.

Small businesses and SMEs, particularly those owned by African Americans, are vital to economic growth, employment, and overall economic development. Identifying opportunities, leveraging market advantages, and addressing factors contributing to business failure are essential strategies for sustaining these businesses and contributing to long-term financial success. To improve business sustainability, African American small beauty salon owners must identify and evaluate the factors contributing to business failure, as two-thirds of small business withdrawals in the United States result from business closures (SBA, 2018c). Distrust and poor business performance can lead to failure (Faramondi et al., 2023). Addressing these issues is crucial for extending business sustainability beyond five years. To further explore the discussion of factors affecting business sustainability, the following section focuses on the critical aspect of strategic planning and its effects on successfully sustaining small businesses, including African American beauty salons.

Strategic Planning

A comprehensive strategic framework encompassing innovation, financial management, adaptability, and sustainability is crucial in pursuing sustainable business practices. Scholars like Birbisa and Lakew (2020), Gonzales-Martinez et al. (2021), and Morris and Tucker (2021) emphasized the interconnectedness of these elements. This section explores real-world examples of businesses adopting multifaceted approaches to sustainability, considering customer satisfaction, employee empowerment, and community engagement. This section provides various viewpoints on government

intervention and diversity and inclusion practices. These insights highlight the dynamic nature of business practices in the context of evolving market dynamics.

Birbisa and Lakew (2020) supported a comprehensive strategic framework incorporating innovation, financial management, organizational change, and sustainability for adaptable and resource-efficient long-term growth. Gonzales-Martinez et al. (2021) emphasized strategic planning's role in aligning businesses with customer needs, enhancing satisfaction, product quality, and profitability. Morris and Tucker (2021) underscored strong leadership, employee empowerment, and community engagement as vital for sustainable business models that contribute to employee well-being and community support beyond profit generation. A consensus exists on the importance of a multifaceted approach to business sustainability, and the need for a comprehensive strategic framework that encompasses elements like innovation, financial management, organizational change, and sustainability is highlighted as a fundamental strategy. Aligning business strategies with customer-centric goals and fostering Leadership, employee empowerment, and community engagement are critical considerations for achieving long-term success and sustainability. These perspectives highlight the interconnectedness of various business operations and the need to address them to ensure business viability and growth. Businesses seeking sustainability must adopt a multifaceted approach that considers internal and external factors, emphasizing adaptability, customer satisfaction, and community engagement as integral components of their strategies.

de Bruin et al. (2023) highly recommended community-centric approaches and targeted financial support. They also emphasized the value of mentorship and networking programs, although some participants call for systemic changes to address broader economic challenges. Technology adoption is recognized for its efficiency but raises concerns about digital disparities. The authors' observations on government intervention highlight the diversity of opinions. Supporters advocate for targeted policies to promote diversity and inclusion, while critics argue for a neutral regulatory stance.

The debate around diversity and inclusion practices persists, with some expressing concerns about neglecting broader economic challenges. Cultural competence in marketing is a topic of contention, with varying perspectives on whether to adopt targeted strategies or consider potential limitations in reaching broader markets (Fluhrer & Brahm, 2023). Promoting equal opportunities through government interventions, such as diversity and inclusion practices, establishes a fair and unbiased workplace environment. These initiatives aim to reduce discrimination, fostering diversity and inclusion that, in turn, enhance productivity and innovation. Addressing systemic inequalities, like racism and sexism, is essential, and government interventions play a vital role in mitigating such issues through policies that champion diversity and inclusion. A diverse and inclusive workforce benefits the economy, enhancing growth and competitiveness. Scholarly recommendations offer valuable insights for sustainable growth amid changing market dynamics and consumer preferences.

Community Engagement and Localized Customization

Clemons et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of community engagement and customized approaches in African American business endeavors. The author asserted that these strategies are pivotal in establishing trust, fostering customer loyalty, and generating positive word-of-mouth marketing within the local community. By tailoring their products and services to align with their community's preferences and cultural nuances, businesses can enhance their cultural relevance and forge more profound and meaningful connections with their customers.

Arora and Chakraborty (2021) offered a counterpoint by cautioning against overly hyper-localized strategies that could potentially limit a business's growth prospects. They advocate for a balanced approach that combines community-centric tactics with broader market considerations. The authors argue that the balance allows enterprises to maintain their connection with the local community while exploring opportunities for expansion beyond their immediate surroundings. Small businesses, especially in culturally diverse communities, face a dilemma: balancing localized engagement for community trust and loyalty with the need for broader market expansion. Striking this balance is crucial for long-term sustainability and adaptability, catering to the local community and a wider customer base.

Technology Adoption

Ullah et al. (2023) highlighted technology's transformative potential for small businesses, stressing its necessity for sustained growth in an evolving business landscape. Technology's transformative power enables small companies to compete with giant

corporations by streamlining operations, boosting productivity, and enhancing customer engagement. Philipson (2020) emphasized the risks of resistance to technology. Falling behind in the rapidly changing, technology-driven business landscape can have dire consequences. The author asserted that to remain competitive and relevant, businesses must stay updated with technological advancements. These perspectives highlighted technology's crucial role in small businesses' growth and competitiveness. This underscored the need for businesses to embrace technology as a strategic imperative to stay relevant, efficient, and competitive in an increasingly digital business environment.

Felin et al. (2019) raised valid concerns regarding the digital divide, cost barriers, and privacy/security issues associated with technology adoption. The digital divide signifies unequal access to technology and the internet, potentially disadvantaging specific communities, including African American entrepreneurs. Cost barriers pose a significant challenge as investing in technology infrastructure and training can strain small businesses' resources. The rapidly evolving digital landscape amplifies concerns related to privacy and security, which can be particularly daunting for smaller enterprises with limited cybersecurity resources. These perspectives underscore the critical need for a balanced approach to technology adoption and highlight that technology has a role in shaping small businesses' future for sustainable growth.

Mentorship and Networking Programs

The role of mentorship and networking programs in supporting minority-owned businesses, specifically African American small businesses, is a topic of significant importance. These programs have been recognized for their potential to provide valuable

guidance and increase the survival rates of companies within this demographic, as highlighted by the Small Business Administration (SBA, 2019). Mentorship offers budding entrepreneurs access to experienced individuals who can share their knowledge, offer insights, and provide guidance on navigating the complex world of business ownership. The statistics indicating the positive impact of mentorship on business success must be considered, emphasizing the value of such programs in fostering business growth and sustainability.

However, it is essential to acknowledge and address potential challenges associated with these mentorship and networking initiatives, as outlined by Kuratko et al. (2021). These challenges encompass issues such as unequal access to mentorship opportunities, discrimination faced by minority entrepreneurs, and the risk of tokenism, where individuals from underrepresented backgrounds are included merely to fulfill diversity quotas without genuine support or inclusion. These concerns raise essential questions about the effectiveness and fairness of such programs and underscore the need for a more comprehensive and equitable approach.

To ensure that mentorship and networking programs genuinely benefit African American entrepreneurs and other minority-owned businesses, proactive efforts must be made to address these issues. It is crucial to create an environment where access to mentorship and networking opportunities is equitable, discrimination is actively challenged, and tokenism is actively discouraged. Additionally, these programs should be designed to be inclusive and sustainable, providing practical support tailored to the diverse needs of the African American small business community. This synthesis

underscores the importance of recognizing the potential of mentorship and networking programs and actively working to overcome their associated challenges to create more equitable and supportive environments for African American entrepreneurs.

Government Intervention

Casey et al. (2022) highlighted the remarkable impact of targeted policies and diversity initiatives on the prosperity of minority-owned businesses. These policies underscore the significance of measures like mentorship programs, access to procurement opportunities, and financial incentives in leveling the playing field. These initiatives have effectively categorized systemic barriers and provided the necessary support for these businesses to thrive. Guest et al. (2020) agreed with these sentiments, cautioning against a neutral regulatory stance that could inadvertently perpetuate disparities. They emphasize the importance of deliberate policies that ensure equal opportunities for individuals, regardless of their demographic backgrounds. These studies offer evidence of the tangible benefits derived from targeted policies promoting the success and sustainability of minority-owned businesses. This synthesis underscores such policies' consistent and enduring effectiveness in fostering a more inclusive business environment that enables diverse entrepreneurs to flourish.

Marketing

Mansur and Djaelani (2022) emphasized several critical factors that contribute to the success of small businesses, particularly those owned by African Americans. They stressed the importance of operational efficiency, the delivery of quality products, and the implementation of effective pricing strategies. Collectively, these components form the

foundation for a small business to thrive in a competitive marketplace, regardless of its owner's background. Complementing these elements, strategic planning emerges as a key driver, enabling firms to satisfy their customers, enhance product quality, and bolster profitability (Kobia & Gachunga, 2019). This highlights the intricate and multifaceted nature of the approach required for ensuring the long-term success of African American small businesses. It underscores the necessity of integrating various elements, including cultural competence, operational efficiency, quality product offerings, astute pricing strategies, and meticulous strategic planning. These aspects form a comprehensive plan for businesses to thrive in various market contexts, collectively conveying the dynamic landscape in which African American small businesses operate. To attain long-term success and sustainability, companies must navigate complex terrain, including community engagement, technology adoption, mentorship programs, government intervention, and effective marketing. Success in this environment necessitates a balanced and adaptive approach that carefully considers both localized community dynamics and broader market forces while focusing on the core principles of operational efficiency, product quality, pricing strategy, and strategic planning. The following section will explore the role of innovation in sustaining African-American-owned small beauty salons beyond five years.

Innovation

Entrepreneurship and innovation are closely intertwined facets of business success, with varying perspectives on their relationship. Some studies, such as those by Ciasullo et al. (2019), argued that entrepreneurship does not necessarily equate to

innovation. However, Aminova and Marchi (2021) asserted that innovation is fundamental for generating enduring business value, particularly in nascent enterprises. The efficacy of innovation within small business contexts often hinges on intangible factors like the quality of local and regional innovation systems, emphasizing the importance of innovative system designs that effectively address consumer needs and preferences (Parrilli & Radicic, 2021).

Training enhances creativity, fosters innovative ideas, and refines design paradigms (Aminova & Marchi, 2021). It equips business owners with essential skills to optimize operational efficiency, with innovation playing a pivotal role in cultivating sustainable business practices by exploring and assimilating pioneering ideas (Mas-Tur et al., 2020). The strategic integration of innovation enhances a business's ability to respond adeptly to dynamic shifts and actively pursue emerging opportunities, emphasizing its crucial role in ensuring the perpetuity of small-scale enterprises. A strong correlation exists between sustainability and innovation, as highlighted by Veronica et al. (2020). SMEs can enhance their sustainability, adaptability, innovation, and growth through open stakeholder relationships, co-creation, knowledge sharing, and the reuse of environmental knowledge. Sustainable Business Model Innovation (SBMI) is also emphasized by Bocken and Geradts (2020), underlining its relevance in fostering competitive advantage and corporate sustainability. Ethical considerations further magnify the significance of sustainable business models, positively influencing employee well-being and engagement (Salvioni & Almici, 2020). Ethical leadership sets a positive example, reinforcing a moral

culture that enhances trust in leadership and contributes to a more innovative, engaged, and committed workforce.

Adaptability and responsiveness are crucial to maximizing sustainability, as illustrated by business model innovations, particularly in technology (Dharmayanti et al., 2023). Effective training and growth, focusing on creative on-the-job training, positively impacts productivity and business growth (Varghese & Finkelstein, 2021). Small business owners actively participating in various entrepreneurial aspects, including staff training and development, are recommended for overall success (Markowska & Wiklund, 2020). In summary, innovation is paramount for the sustained success of African American small businesses, encompassing continuous creativity, change, and motivation to drive growth, enhance productivity, and stay competitive in the dynamic business landscape (Javaid et al., 2024). The subsequent section will investigate the sustainability of entrepreneurship among African-American-owned small beauty salons beyond five years.

Entrepreneurial Sustainability

Fehrer and Wieland (2021) presented a valuable perspective on the entrepreneurial process as a dynamic exchange and bartering of resources leading to value creation. This view highlights the transactional aspect of entrepreneurship, emphasizing how entrepreneurs leverage their resources, such as skills, capital, and networks, to create something of value in the market. It recognizes that entrepreneurship is not a solitary endeavor but involves interactions and exchanges with various stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, and partners. Schnellbacher and

Heidenreich (2020) built upon this by emphasizing that individual actions do not solely drive entrepreneurship but are also shaped by social and institutional factors. This broader perspective underscores entrepreneurship's complex and multifaceted nature, where external influences significantly shape entrepreneurial outcomes.

As Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra (2019) discussed, sustainable entrepreneurship introduced a distinct dimension to the entrepreneurial landscape. It emphasizes the importance of aligning environmental, social, and economic values in entrepreneurial endeavors. This approach transcends mere profit-seeking and highlights the responsibility of entrepreneurs to contribute to the well-being of society and the planet. Entrepreneurs who embrace sustainability are driven by fundamental beliefs guiding their actions toward creating businesses that positively impact the environment, community, and civilization. This perspective recognizes the potential of entrepreneurial innovation and wealth creation to bring about positive social and economic change. These insights provide a holistic view of entrepreneurship. Verstraete focuses on resource-driven entrepreneurship, while Schnellbacher and Heidenreich highlight social and institutional influences. Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra emphasized sustainable entrepreneurship's positive societal and economic impact. Together, these perspectives enrich our understanding of entrepreneurship.

Goal-oriented entrepreneurs prioritize their businesses' long-term growth and sustainability while considering their impact on society and the environment. Sustainable entrepreneurship involves identifying and exploring opportunities that contribute to lasting environmental and social benefits (Biggeri et al., 2022). This approach can lead to

market solutions and act as a catalyst for change, realizing opportunities for sustainable development (Biggeri et al., 2022). To reap the benefits of entrepreneurial sustainability, small beauty salons must offer market-oriented solutions, aligning their success with addressing market problems and fostering sustainability. These perspectives provide optimism by highlighting strategic pathways to overcome these obstacles and sustain these businesses beyond the five-year horizon. It underscores the importance of addressing biases and leveraging demographic and economic factors for the long-term success of African-American-owned small beauty salon businesses.

Entrepreneurial sustainability inevitably involves dealing with various uncertainties. Lüdeke-Freund et al. (2019) highlighted a significant uncertainty in sustainable entrepreneurship: successfully establishing a business through innovations despite challenges faced by small beauty salons. The success of these salons extended beyond financial returns to encompass nonfinancial impacts, such as positive societal influence and improved innovative capabilities, considering organizational, personal, and social-cultural values (Mayr et al., 2021). Small beauty salon owners can foster innovation for sustainable entrepreneurship by generating social, ecological, and economic value for stakeholders in their business development strategies.

Relationship of this Study to Previous Research

In this pragmatic qualitative inquiry study, the primary objective is to explore the effective strategies employed by African American small beauty salon owners to extend the sustainability of their businesses beyond five years. Peer-reviewed literature reveals a gap in understanding the strategies vital for the sustainability of African American-owned

enterprises, often leading to the failure of small beauty salon businesses within this community within the initial five years. While various studies explore aspects of small business ownership and effective business strategies for long-term success, there needs to be more research focused on the unique challenges and strategies employed by African American small beauty salon owners. This research aims to bridge this gap by shedding light on the intricacies of business sustainability within this demographic, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of how entrepreneurs navigate these complexities.

The study's significance is underscored by its potential benefits to African American entrepreneurs. By uncovering and analyzing the effective strategies used by small beauty salon owners within this community, the research can offer valuable insights that may empower African American entrepreneurs to enhance their businesses' sustainability. It contributes to the broader knowledge base on business sustainability within diverse communities, bridging the gap between existing research and the practical approaches needed to support the long-term success of African-American-owned businesses.

While the study acknowledges the presence of some sustainability research focused on African American small businesses, it emphasizes the limited nature of this research. Previous studies, such as those by Pertuz and Miranda (2022) and Reimann et al. (2022), touched upon small business sustainability and effective strategies. However, research must explicitly address the unique challenges and strategies required to sustain African-American-owned small beauty salon businesses. This highlights the importance

of this study in addressing the specific dynamics of beauty salon businesses within this demographic and tailoring strategies for their success.

This research sought to fill a critical gap by investigating effective strategies for sustaining African-American-owned small beauty salon businesses beyond five years. The study's potential to empower entrepreneurs in this community and contribute to the broader understanding of business sustainability within diverse communities made it a valuable endeavor. It recognized the complexities faced by African American beauty salon owners and aimed to shed light on strategies that could lead to long-term business sustainability.

Transition

Section 1 explored strategies for sustaining African American-owned small beauty businesses beyond the critical 5-year mark. The plan included systemic integration, strategic planning, and entrepreneurship sustainability, utilizing General Systems Theory as a conceptual framework. Challenges faced by African American businesses included limited education and credit obstacles, business location challenges, limited financial assistance, inadequate government support, and discrimination. Effective strategies involved building relationships, recognizing human capital, implementing community-centric approaches, technology adoption, mentorship, networking programs, government intervention, marketing cultural competence, and innovation.

Section 3 discusses the project's research methodology and the researcher's role and provides insights into methods, design, analyses, data collection techniques steering

the study, and strategies for study completion. Additionally, this section comprehensively presents the study findings and their contributions to professional applications.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

This section of the research project focuses on the methodology employed in this study, outlining the critical role of the project practitioner in the data collection process. In this section, the researcher explores the various components of the methodology, including population, sampling, participants, data collection activities, interview questions, data organization, analysis techniques, and the strategies employed to ensure the reliability and validity of the study.

Project Ethics

Morgan (2022) asserted that a researcher's role is to analyze and apply the information presented in the literature to progress the research method and design, select participants, collect data, explore phenomena, present findings, and formulate conclusions derived from a mass of data sources. In this pragmatic qualitative inquiry study, my role as the data instrument involved developing, designing, and planning the study, collecting the interview responses from participants, analyzing the data, and presenting the results unbiasedly. As a researcher, I do not have and have never had a relationship with this topic, participants, or research area.

The researcher's role in a study involves ethical engagement and compliance with the Belmont Report research protocol. White (2020) noted that the Belmont Report consists of ethical guidelines and principles to adopt when researching human subjects. Anabo et al. (2018) posited that per the Belmont Report protocol, the researcher's responsibility is to insist upon and adhere to moral obligations to respect persons, do no harm, and provide justice in dealing with human subjects. Wendler (2020) articulated that

the Belmont Report provides an ethical frame of reference for the conduct of researchers when engaging human participants.

The Belmont Report protocols provide respect for others, ensuring that all human participants have freedom of choice in making independent decisions. Gupta (2022) noted that the adherence to justice outlined in the Belmont Report protocols is the premise of equal treatment of all human subjects. In this study, I strictly adhered to the Belmont Report in that I ensured impartial participant selection, respect for respondents, and a focus on maximizing study benefits while minimizing risks to all participants throughout this study.

In the research study, the main priorities included protecting participants from harm and obtaining informed consent before commencing the study, which were essential components of research ethics. Engaging in ethical research requires researchers to acquire voluntary participation and informed consent from each participant. I protected the confidentiality and privacy of each participant. When engaging each potential research participant, I explained the interview process to ensure they were comfortable with the nature of the study and the subject matter before presenting the informed consent form for their signature. As I contacted the study participants, each of them were provided with an “informed consent form,” along with documentation outlining the purpose of the study and including any foreseeable risks or benefits. Participants were not incentivized to engage in this study, as the conditions strictly adhered to the informed consent form (see Appendix A).

During this research study, my main priorities revolved around safeguarding the well-being of participants and ensuring the acquisition of informed consent before commencing the study, which was considered a fundamental component of research ethics. This emphasis on obtaining informed consent is consistent with Cypress (2017), who highlights the critical role of informed consent in maintaining ethical standards when conducting interviews or gathering data. The consent form served as a comprehensive guide, providing participants with clear and detailed instructions to ensure the ethical execution of the research. To uphold these standards, each participant provided written authorization, adhering to the stipulated Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements. This process involved collecting consent forms to confirm participants' willingness and capability to participate in the study. Additionally, the consent form encompassed pertinent details about the research study, addressing ethical considerations such as the voluntary nature of participation and the disclosure of compensation, as outlined in Appendix A.

None of the participants granted permission to duplicate business documents. Therefore, no special precautions were needed to handle the documents received (Research Design, 2022). Numeric and alphanumeric coding was used to conceal the identity of study participants to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements established by governing bodies. To maintain participants' confidentiality, access to all data were restricted to me alone. Data and physical findings were securely stored in a locked, fireproof file cabinet within my residence. This restricted access to all data helped to further maintain participants' confidentiality.

Electronic data were stored on a cloud drive, a web-based storage space set up on a remote server, primarily accessible via the Internet, to store and provide access to data securely from anywhere. Encrypting data provides extra security measures to ensure the confidentiality of participant information (Zhao et al., 2019). All electronic and hard copy documents were securely stored and will remain stored for 5 years beyond the approval of this study. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) assigned an approval number and date for this study (approval 02-07-24-118924), which Walden University granted; it remains valid until 5 years after the approval date.

To ensure the confidentiality of study participants, I securely stored the data for 5 years following the approval date. The data collected in this research were stored securely. They will remain securely stored for 5 years, in adherence to Walden University protocol and guidance, aiming to safeguard the rights and privacy of each participant. I will dispose of the data following this timeframe to uphold participant privacy.

Nature of the Project

The most appropriate method for this study was the qualitative approach, which involved exploring participants' behaviors and perspectives and using open-ended inquiries to identify themes (Research Design, 2022). The choice of qualitative methodology aligned with the need for an in-depth investigation of specific incidents in the research. I considered a quantitative method; however, it was deemed unsuitable for this study due to the absence of quantifiable variables. Similarly, a mixed-methods approach was not the best fit, as it combines data from both qualitative and quantitative sources, which does not align with the research's requirements.

The pragmatic qualitative inquiry study design was the most appropriate for this research. Many researchers have employed purposeful sampling within pragmatic qualitative inquiry studies to identify and select participants who can offer data-rich cases for their research (Jahja et al., 2021). Case study research involves exploring various information technology security strategies. It necessitates direct interaction with information technology managers or experts who create and implement these strategies, enabling insights to be gained from their experiences. Phenomenology is a method that examines the shared characteristics among participants who have encountered an unusual phenomenon (Lee, 2021). However, phenomenological research was not the most suitable option for this study, as it focuses on understanding strategies rather than behavior. In the specific context of this study, the pragmatic qualitative inquiry approach was the most appropriate choice, as it closely aligned with the research question and objectives.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

The study focused on African American small beauty salon business owners in the southwestern United States who had successfully extended their businesses beyond five years. Snowball sampling was employed for participant recruitment to leverage existing respondents to identify suitable future participants and enhance participation rates. Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants based on their expertise and Relevance to the study, ensuring comprehensive and credible data collection (Sawarni et al., 2021). My purposive sample consisted of five such business owners. A combination of purposeful and snowball sampling methods was employed to engage and recruit

participants. Once access to participants were secured, effective and cohesive relationships were established by communicating the study's intentions and expectations before obtaining their consent for this qualitative pragmatic inquiry and by conducting all virtual meetings in a confidential space.

Data saturation is the point at which data collection from research participants no longer contributes to the study's information. Mwita (2022) extended this concept by emphasizing that data saturation is gathering data that matches the research requirements. To achieve data saturation, I continuously analyzed participants' responses during interviews, adapting to new inquiries as participants revealed crucial insights, norms, and constructs related to the research topic until no new data were extracted. I reached data saturation with a sample size of five participants.

Data Collection Activities

Researchers strive to explore a research question from diverse perspectives in a qualitative study. Using multiple data collection methods contributes to a comprehensive understanding of leadership within small enterprises (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). The semistructured interview procedure encompasses formulating questions, conducting interviews, and documenting gathered information. By exploring the firsthand experiences of small business proprietors and small beauty salon owners, the purpose was to identify effective strategies for sustaining business operations beyond a 5-year timeframe. Semistructured interviews are expected to yield detailed accounts of participants' lived experiences, facilitating a more comprehensive exploration, and discovering novel insights (Bearman, 2019).

I am the primary data collection instrument in this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study. I utilized online and face-to-face semistructured interviews as sources for the data collection method. The research commenced with interviews involving five African American small beauty salon owners who had sustained their businesses for five years. Data collection procedures included developing interview questions, reviewing archival documents, and subsequent data analysis. Integrating archival documents as a supplementary measure reinforced methodological rigor, aligning with the principles of methodological triangulation.

During the semistructured interviews, six open-ended questions were presented to participants and supplemented by additional clarifying inquiries as necessary (see Appendix B). Open-ended questions were chosen as the primary method of data collection to uncover valuable insights and explore aspects that may not be revealed through closed-ended questions (Neuert et al., 2023). The information gathered during these interviews is critical for gaining a thorough and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under study (Opara et al., 2023). An interview protocol was employed, ensuring that all participants responded to the same standardized set of questions, thus allowing both researchers and interviewees to focus on essential topics. (see Appendix C).

Data were collected from participants' experiences to identify strategies for sustaining small businesses beyond 5 years. Interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes with flexibility based on participant responses (Johnson et al., 2021). Choosing a convenient and comfortable interview location aims to optimize data collection, as

participants are more likely to provide in-depth feedback when at ease. Emphasizing the safe environment, I assured participants of the freedom to speak openly about their experiences and the option to withdraw from the study if they felt uncomfortable (Self, 2021). I obtained permission to audio-record interviews from each participant, ensuring transparency and accuracy through transcription (Abraham et al., 2020). To enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection process, I used open-ended questions to encourage detailed responses.

I recorded audio during the semistructured interviews, followed by transcription using NVivo 14 software (Dhakal, 2022). Taking notes in a journal during interviews also ensured data accuracy. The notes documented participant reactions, minimized preconceptions, and mitigated interview bias. Understanding that misunderstandings and biases could compromise the trustworthiness of research findings was essential, so efforts were made to avoid leading interviewees during notetaking and recording to eliminate potential bias.

A comparative analysis was conducted between themes derived from the literature and those extracted from interview transcripts: this approach and access to archival records aided in identifying effective small business strategies. Archival documents were used as a secondary data source to expand the data pool, providing information not obtained through observations or interviews and allowing for cross-validation of collected data with other instruments (Davidson et al., 2019). Observation unveiled differing interpretations of duties among small business owners and employees, providing triangulation of findings. I minimized distractions to increase my chances of

recognizing participant behavior changes (Faniel et al., 2019). Consequently, researchers observing participants must reduce distractions.

To enhance the credibility of the research study, member checking through semistructured interviews were employed as a quality control mechanism to eliminate misinterpretation. Member checking involved sharing interpretations with participants, allowing them to provide feedback on their responses' perceived understanding. This process aimed to mitigate erroneous understandings, ensuring the recording of accurate results and verifying word choice and interpretation accuracy (Johnson et al., 2020). Data saturation, indicating no emergence of new themes, served as the criterion for completion. Data saturation was achieved with 5 participants; no additional participants were required to reach data saturation.

Interview Questions

Q1: How did you address the challenges of sustaining your beauty salon business beyond five years?

Q2: What key business strategies should African American small beauty salon owners implement to build a sustainable business?

Q3: How did you acquire the expertise needed to develop successful strategies for ensuring the longevity of your beauty salon business for over five years?

Q4: Which strategies significantly improved your business's profitability, endurance, and capacity to maintain your small beauty salon enterprise for over five years?

Q5: What leadership styles did you employ to oversee and enhance employee productivity to sustain your beauty salon business?

Q6: What other information would you like to share regarding sustaining your beauty salon business?

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

Padi et al. (2022) indicated that effective data organization techniques enable the researcher to access all recorded data easily. Researchers use different data organization techniques, such as attaching labels to participants' responses on audio recordings of interviews to safeguard the originality of the data collected (Ajgaonkar et al., 2021; Padi et al., 2022). I used cataloging will be utilized as a system for keeping track of data and emerging understandings. Each study participant's file contained the date and time of the interview, the company documents, transcripts from the interview, and the informed consent. Gao and McDonald (2022) asserted that researchers must maintain the confidentiality of participant information. Using a pseudonym for research participants enables the researcher to maintain confidentiality (Farquhar et al., 2020). Participants were assigned pseudonyms P01, P02, P03, P04, and P05 to represent the five participants. I created Microsoft Word using tables for each interview question to categorize and label all transcribed data. I used code numbers to identify themes and analyze and interpret data for effective data organization. I maintained a logbook to draft notes throughout the interview.

After collecting primary data from participants through semistructured interviews, the subsequent step involved data analysis, aimed at comprehending the gathered

information, transcribing data, and then interpreting findings. According to Lester et al. (2020), thematic analysis involves coding, grouping, and theme creation. Kiger and Varpio (2020) offer six established steps for thematic data analysis: data familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme refinement, theme description, and report generation. Throughout the coding phase, I constantly referenced the participants' responses to confirm data accuracy and identify any potential misinformation, which will contribute to ensuring data validity. (Kiger & Varpio,2020).

In qualitative research, validity is crucial to assessing the appropriateness of the tools, procedures, and data. Triangulation was employed as a data analysis technique, comparing the collected data and existing literature to identify strategies for sustaining small African-American-owned beauty salons for over five years. The thematic analysis involves integrating related data from various transcripts and notes, leading to the classification of critical themes or patterns from multiple data sources and documents (Arije et al., 2021). The authors emphasized the significance of the coding process, which plays a pivotal role in categorizing data to uncover themes. The authors explained that the coding process must be well-defined, rigorous, and consistently applied to ensure corresponding validity and reliability concerns in qualitative research. I integrated my field notes, interview transcript data, archival data from the organization, conceptual framework, and literature about the phenomenon to identify themes and strategies.

This study employed data organization software applications to insert, update, or organize data for a qualitative research study. The participant's interview data was managed using the NVivo 14 data analysis software application, which has been proven

to protect research participants' confidential information in qualitative research (Alam, 2020). NVivo offers a secure environment for safeguarding interview data and confidential private information (Dhakal, 2022). The data included open-ended interview questions between me as the researcher and participants and participants' responses and observations. I manually analyzed data for this research study, encompassing categorization, coding, theme derivation, and data transformation to extract meaningful information. As the researcher, I manually analyzed the differences and similarities in data, facilitating the creation of codes and the identification of the study's overarching themes. My methodology entailed the use of ethical semi-structured qualitative interview techniques.

Responses from interviews, whether verbal or visual, were employed to derive themes and codes for this study. As part of the triangulation method, secondary data sources were incorporated regarding the sustainability success rate of African American small beauty salon businesses beyond five years. This approach aimed to enhance comprehension of pertinent industry data and provide methodological triangulation regarding the strategies employed by African American beauty salon owners in implementing successful measures to sustain their businesses beyond five years. The process involved merging the gathered data documents from secondary sources and each participant's interview into a single database utilizing triangulation. To distill themes from each participant's interview and the online documents retrieved from the organization's website, I adhered to a structured sequence of steps:

1. Data were collected from participant interviews and online organizational resources.
2. Data were compiled within the NVivo 14 data analysis database application.
3. Data were segmented into manageable units to enhance organization.
4. Data were reconstructed into manageable units.
5. Data were interpreted.
6. Data were validated.

These systematic steps aided me in formulating the study's core themes, which subsequently underwent critical evaluation in conjunction with the conceptual framework and existing literature. My strategy mirrored their qualitative data analysis model, which comprised five key steps: compilation, disassembly, reassembly, interpretation, and conclusion of the data.

After coding, the researcher identified critical themes related to the research questions and the conceptual framework and incorporated them to analyze the study's findings. The research question is the focus of the study, and it impacts the selection of various elements of research, particularly data analysis and finding results (Research Design, 2022). I used critical themes identified during the coding process relevant to the research question and the conceptual framework for my study's interpretation of findings and the time for compiling data from each interview varied between 45 to 60 minutes. I audio-recorded interviews and maintained the interview data from each participant. Respective interviews occurred at the participants' businesses or via Zoom, an IRB-

approved online platform (Research Design, 2022). All interviews were transcribed within six days of the interview.

QSR NVivo 14 software helps qualitative researchers organize, evaluate, and store data efficiently (Mwita, 2022). I used N-NVivo 14 software to store and manage data. I implemented a data plan that identifies where, how, and how long the data will be stored and who will have access to it. After five years, I will shred the research data containing the 32-gigabyte flash drive and all physical documents.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Data is considered reliable when comprehensive and precise, devoid of bias and substantial errors associated with misinterpretation, record-keeping inaccuracies, or misreading transcripts (Bevacqua et al., 2020; Harrison et al., 2020). The researcher enhanced the study's reliability by respecting the participants and employing the appropriate research study consent form during the interview protocol. The researcher utilized the participant's consent form (Appendix D) for streamlined communication and employed straightforward interview questions (Appendix B) alongside the interview protocol (Appendix C) as measures to increase the study's reliability and validity. Reliability in the study was addressed by utilizing an audio-recording device to collect data information from participants. Semi-structured interviews and organizational documentation and artifacts were employed to achieve the reliability of the study. Semi-structured interviews ensured the consistent retrieval of core information from each

participant while allowing for flexibility to deeply explore the detailed descriptions of strategies utilized by African American small beauty salon owners.

Member checking occurs when interpretations are relayed to research participants to check for perceived accuracy and reactions, thus increasing a qualitative inquiry (Johnson et al., 2020). Member-checking and data triangulation were integrated into the data collection and analysis phases to enhance the reliability of the study. All study findings were presented impartially. Member checking was used to address the dependability of this study. The researcher ensured member checking by providing the participants with a copy of my interpretations of their answers to the interview questions and asking each participant to verify the interpretation's accuracy.

A study's dependability is established through a methodical, trackable, well-documented research process (Omanović & Langley, 2023). A logical plan was devised to collect interview and archival data from online beauty salon industry resources to enhance the study's dependability. To ensure reliability, member-checking was implemented, with participants verifying the interpretations of the data from the individual in-depth interviews to ensure accuracy in representing their intended messages. The interview protocol collected data consistently by taking notes during participant interviews. Electronic journal entries were created for the participant's data collection, and archival data were collected from online resources.

Validity

Validity in research determines the accuracy of measuring the intended factors and the integrity of research outcomes (Campos Oliveira et al., 2020; Farquhar et al.,

2020). Credibility, confirmability, and transferability are enhanced by accurate analysis. Participants were encouraged to check the validity of their transcript after data analysis. The researcher compared the findings and results based on responses given by the participants. The findings and results were compared based on responses given by the participants. According to Omanović and Langley (2023), credibility aligns interpreted data with participants' experiences. Member checking enhances research credibility by involving the researcher and participants. A member-checking strategy was utilized in a follow-up meeting with participants to validate the accuracy of interview data, improving data validity and credibility while maintaining the trustworthiness of the study's participants.

Data saturation occurs when researchers cannot discover new data (Gioia, 2021). To improve data saturation, data were collected continuously until no additional insights were identified, and data started to repeat, making further data collection redundant and signifying the attainment of data saturation. Data accuracy was verified through member checking, ensuring the validity and integrity of participants' responses by allowing them to confirm or refute the accuracy of such interpretations. This study employed data triangulation by drawing from audio-recorded semistructured interviews and organizational documentation, including data from organizational websites and business Facebook social media pages, further enhancing credibility.

The concept of transferability allowed the methods and procedures employed in my research to apply to other studies. Transferability was achieved by comparing my research context with assumptions from various fields related to my research area,

enabling me to make informed judgments on the suitability of these methods for diverse research contexts. Triangulation enhanced the transferability and validity of the research and its methodologies, aiding other researchers in determining their potential use in similar studies on the same topic. To enhance transferability, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted, documentation was analyzed, and themes were coded and grouped to ensure data saturation. Transferability was ensured by providing readers with sufficient evidence and findings from this study that can be applied to small businesses survival in other companies or industries.

Confirmability pertains to the degree to which external individuals can validate the research and its findings as originating from the data (Mthuli et al., 2022; Subramanian et al., 2022). To improve reliability, researchers use confirmability and triangulation to reduce bias and ensure replicability data validation through NVivo, online tools, and secure record-keeping. Triangulation and NVivo-generated reports were used to enhance confirmability and minimize bias in the study. Confirmability was enhanced by connecting the findings to the conclusions, allowing other researchers to replicate the study. Methodological triangulation was employed to ensure confirmability. Study validity was improved by comparing information from various data sources, including existing interview notes, organizational documents, and public records, that enhanced the understanding of the studied phenomenon.

Data saturation is the point in a sample when no new data is discovered during data analysis, and the researcher encounters redundant information. At this stage, the researcher has confidence that any additional data collected will yield similar results,

validating the emerging themes and conclusions of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Guest et al., 2020). Data saturation occurred when the study participants no longer provided new qualitative information. The triangulation method was employed to test the point of data saturation. The interview data collected during Zoom meetings with each participant was used, along with the same interview protocol questions (Appendix C), to reach the data saturation point. Study participants were contacted and interviewed using both Zoom and in-person methods until the end of data saturation was reached. This ensured that beauty salon industry data were collected until no new codes or themes emerged. The data collection process continued until the data saturation point was identified.

Transition and Summary

This pragmatic qualitative inquiry study explored the strategies employed by African American small beauty salon owners to sustain their businesses for five years. In section 3, I outlined the various elements that supported the completion of this study, encompassing the researcher's role, participant involvement, and the chosen research methodology and design. Two subsections within section 3 were dedicated to the topics of research participants and ethical considerations, encompassing ethical research practices and details related to the study's population and sampling. The remaining three sections within section 3 explored discussions concerning data collection, techniques for data analysis, and considerations regarding the study's reliability and validity. In section four, a review of the research findings from the pragmatic inquiry will be presented, evaluating the practicality and applicability of the conclusions and findings, potential

implications for social change, actionable recommendations, and suggestions for future research endeavors.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

Introduction

This qualitative pragmatic inquiry aimed to answer the following research question: What effective strategies do African American beauty salon owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years? I conducted semi-structured interviews with five African American beauty salon owners who had sustained their business for over 5 years. I assigned each participant with participant numeric codes P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 during the interview process. Campbell et al. (2021) suggested that researchers must clearly understand comprehensive themes, conclusions, and study analysis to identify and interpret themes effectively. After manually creating my initial code book, NVivo 14 was used to organize the collected data and conduct a thematic analysis. This process involved importing the transcripts, reassigning codes, categorizing the transcripts, and identifying patterns and themes within similar contextual groups. Three main themes emerged from my data analysis: (a) continuous learning and adaptation, (b) principles and business ethics, and (c) collaboration and networking. The findings are connected to the conceptual framework and literature from the findings of peer-reviewed studies.

Presentation of the Findings

Three main themes were identified based on the participant's responses to the interview questions: (a) continuous learning and adaptation, (b) principles and business ethics, and (c) collaboration and networking. The findings align with the existing literature drawn from peer-reviewed studies. Integrating client-focused and ethical strategies in African American beauty salons resonates with general systems theory,

emphasizing personalized services, trust-building, and ethical considerations. Participants stress the importance of structured business environments and ethical practices, reinforcing trust and credibility. The study acknowledges the significance of cultural competence in marketing, strong leadership, community engagement, and strategic planning, aligning with insights from relevant literature. The collaboration and networking theme, particularly the building of a supportive team strategy, aligns with general systems theory principles, highlighting the interconnected nature of systems. Participants seeking mentorship and collaborative support contribute to sustained growth. The study also aligns with sustainable entrepreneurship concepts, emphasizing small business establishment, community-centric approaches, and societal impact recognition. This comprehensive connection enriches the understanding of sustained success in African American beauty salon businesses.

Theme 1: Continuous Learning and Adaptation

Strategy 1: Professional Development

Ensuring professional development in an African American beauty salon is integral for sustained success. This commitment enables salon owners to stay abreast of industry trends, enhance staff expertise, and meet evolving customer preferences. The emphasis on ongoing education signals a dedication to quality services, fostering client trust and loyalty. By investing in skills and knowledge, the salon maintains competitiveness and adapts to industry changes, contributing significantly to long-term success and sustainability. P1 and P3 emphasized staying abreast of current industry trends through classes and hair shows. P5 said that customers have unlimited access to

resources that teach them to do many of the services salons provide; therefore, it is critical to attend classes and seminars to maintain relevance as a stylist.

Strategy 2: Financial Literacy

Successfully sustaining an African American beauty salon involves prioritizing financial literacy. This knowledge empowers salon owners to make informed decisions, manage expenses, and strategically invest in growth. Financial literacy is instrumental in obtaining funding, navigating economic challenges, and planning for long-term sustainability. It equips salon owners with the skills to create a financially resilient business model. All participants discussed the importance of understanding finances. P1 said that they were fortunate to have an industry business mentor who showed them the proper way to manage finances and emphasized the importance of staying abreast of the finances of their business. P3 said that they recognized their weakness in handling business finances, so they began to take courses and gained a business partner who specialized in financial management.

Linking Continuous Learning and Adaptation to General Systems Theory

This study prioritizes financial literacy in successfully sustaining an African American beauty salon. This knowledge empowers salon owners to make informed decisions, effectively manage expenses, and strategically invest in growth while addressing funding, economic challenges, and long-term sustainability. The alignment of this theme is evident in the insights shared by participants, such as P1, who noted mentor-guided financial management, and P3, who noted education and partnership to address financial weaknesses.

Drawing a parallel to Von Bertalanffy's (1972) open and closed systems concept in general systems theory, the analogy suggests that understanding the continuous exchange of energy, materials, people, and information in open systems is vital. This understanding enables salon owners to glean valuable insights from their operational environment. For African American small beauty salon owners aspiring to sustain success beyond the typical 5-year mark, adopting effective business strategies informed by the comprehension of open and closed systems, as suggested by Von Bertalanffy and supported by Xia et al. (2020) and Sun et al. (2020), could prove instrumental in enhancing their operations.

Connecting Continuous Learning and Adaptation to Literature

Professional development is essential for staying updated on industry trends, enhancing staff expertise, meeting evolving customer preferences, and fostering client trust and loyalty. Apasrawirote and Yawised (2024) asserted that managers could effectively shift from plan-driven approaches to targeted employee engagement strategies by balancing stability and change, adjusting roles and responsibilities, and fostering trust. Participants, including P1, P3, and P5, emphasized the need for ongoing education to stay relevant in the dynamic beauty industry. P4 noted the importance of recognizing specific talents in employees, building that talent, and placing employees in areas where they will thrive. Financial literacy emerges as a critical element for the sustained success of African American beauty salons, enabling informed decision-making, expense management, and strategic investments in growth. Some participants, such as P1 and P3,

stressed the significance of understanding finances and sought mentorship or education to strengthen financial management skills.

Connecting these study results to current literature on business sustainability, African American small business owners encounter challenges such as a higher likelihood of credit denial, even with comparable creditworthiness (Barkley & Schweitzer, 2023). Supervisory knowledge, capital professional development, and effective financial management influence business success or failure. This aligns with Thrassou et al. (2020) identification of a lack of focused strategies, failure to maintain professional expertise, limited managerial knowledge, and ineffective performance measurement processes as significant causes of business failure.

Arora and Chakraborty (2021) caution against overly hyper-localized strategies, advocating for a balanced approach that combines community-centric tactics with broader market considerations. Mansur and Djaelani (2022) emphasize factors such as operational efficiency, delivery of quality products, and effective pricing strategies as critical for the success of small businesses, regardless of the owner's background. Strategic planning, highlighted by Kobia and Gachunga (2019), emerges as a key driver, enabling enterprises to satisfy customers, enhance product quality, and bolster profitability. The study results align with current literature insights, emphasizing the importance of continuous learning, financial literacy, and strategic planning for sustained success in the African American beauty salon industry.

Theme 2: Principles and Business Ethics

Strategy 1: Client-Focused

African American beauty salon business owners can enhance the likelihood of their enterprises thriving beyond 5 years by providing exceptional services tailored to customers' specific preferences and needs. All five participants expressed the importance of the one-on-one personalized approach as it allows the stylist to focus entirely on the client, understanding the specific needs and preferences. P1 said that because they value their time and their client's time, they developed a formula to provide services while maintaining hair health efficiently. P2 said that fairness and consistency are crucial to customer satisfaction; therefore, they take extra steps to ensure all clients are treated equally regardless of how much money they spend. P3 said that being reliable and consistent have been two of her most significant assets, including being on time and maintaining a consistent price scale while always giving their client one-on-one attention. P4 said that they implemented a personalized appointment-only approach to ensure each of their clients received their undivided attention. P5 stated that the salon environment often determines a customer's experience, so they create a safe, comfortable, welcoming, and professional salon space.

Strategy 2: Business Ethics

Upholding principles and maintaining ethical business practices contribute to building trust and credibility among clients and the local community. Adhering to ethical standards can help mitigate legal risks and protect the salon's reputation. P2 said they have strived to create a structured business environment so that people view their

business as a business with high customer and ethical standards. P3 noted that understanding the foundation of their business is based on understanding the beauty salon industry's health and safety laws and regulations. P5 said they used contracts and boundaries to establish a structured and fair environment to improve consistency.

Linking Principles and Business Ethics to General Systems Theory

Client-focused and business ethics strategies in sustaining African American beauty salon businesses are linked to the holistic approach of general systems theory, as Bellman et al. (2021) noted. The client-centric strategy fosters lasting connections with clients through personalized services, aligning with the systems theory by considering specific preferences and needs within the broader salon system. The business ethics strategy, which involves upholding principles and maintaining ethical practices, aligns with the systematic view of general systems theory. Participants, particularly P2, P3, and P5, emphasize structured and ethical business environments, adhering to laws and regulations, reflecting the interconnected elements within the beauty salon system. This approach builds trust, credibility, and a positive reputation in the local community, aligning with the holistic perspective of general systems theory (Bellman et al., 2021).

Connecting Principles and Business Ethics to Literature

In sustaining an African American beauty salon, the connection between cultural competence in marketing and the principles of client-focused strategies and business ethics falls within the acknowledgment of diverse perspectives. The emphasis on fostering lasting connections through exceptional, personalized services aligns with recognizing varying cultural perspectives in marketing, as highlighted by Fluhner and

Brahm (2023). By adopting client-focused strategies, the salon owners integrate insights from Morris and Tucker (2021) and Adiazmil et al. (2024), who highlighted strong leadership and community engagement as vital for sustainable business models.

The commitment to exceptional services tailored to specific preferences reflects strategic planning's role in aligning businesses with customer needs, enhancing satisfaction, and contributing to community support, as Gonzales-Martinez et al. (2021) emphasized. The principles of business ethics, including upholding principles and maintaining ethical practices, contribute to building trust and credibility among clients, aligning with the notion of considering potential limitations in reaching broader markets in a culturally competent manner. The structured business environment participants advocate aligns with the broader concept of solid leadership and employee empowerment for sustainable business models.

Theme 3: Collaboration and Networking

Strategy 1: Building a Supportive Team

Building a supportive team, including mentorship, is crucial for sustaining an African American beauty salon. Mentorship provides valuable guidance for salon owners navigating various business aspects, fostering collaboration, skill diversity, and a positive work environment. This contributes to increased creativity, productivity, and employee loyalty. The cohesive team, supported by mentorship, effectively addresses challenges, adapts to industry changes, and works towards long-term success, creating a resilient foundation for the salon's sustained growth and endurance.

P1 said they were fortunate to have an excellent business mentor who imparted valuable strategies for effective styling and business ownership. P3 said they sought help in areas where they needed more expertise, such as understanding the business's financial aspect. P4 noted that genuinely making a difference is building a team with support, encouragement, and diverse expertise. Collaborating with like-minded individuals focused on growth and learning creates a thriving environment.

Strategy 2: Fostering Local Connections

Clemons (2024) highlighted the importance of community engagement and customized approaches; the author asserted that these strategies are pivotal in establishing trust, fostering customer loyalty, and generating positive word-of-mouth marketing within the local community. This facilitates local connections, a strategic and essential element for the sustained growth and endurance of the salon. P1 said that they do not need business cards due to their active community involvement and quality of work. They receive all their clients via word of mouth. P5 said that they actively network by referring clients to other specialists for needs they need to be equipped to address, fostering a collaborative and supportive beauty industry community.

Building and maintaining local connections is crucial for the sustained success of an African American beauty salon. Establishing relationships within the community not only increases visibility but also attracts potential clients, contributing to a consistent customer base. Collaborating with neighboring businesses provides opportunities for referrals and partnerships, creating a supportive network. Active involvement in the community fosters trust and loyalty among clients, reinforcing the salon's value.

Connecting locally allows the salon to adapt to changing trends and preferences, ensuring long-term relevance and success.

Connecting Collaboration and Networking to General Systems Theory

The theme of Collaboration and Networking, precisely the strategy of Building a Supportive Team, in sustaining African American beauty salons aligns with the principles of General Systems Theory. This approach emphasizes systems' interconnected and interdependent nature, reflecting the importance of cohesive teams, mentorship, and diverse expertise in creating a resilient foundation for long-term success. The participants' experiences seeking mentorship and collaborative support exemplify the principles of interconnectedness and mutual influence within a system, contributing to the salon's sustained growth and endurance.

Connecting Collaboration and Networking to Literature

The theme of collaboration and networking, as aligned with the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship (Ketprapakorn & Kantabutra, 2019), integrates the perspective provided by Mathias et al. (2020) and Zuofa et al. (2022). Mathias et al. argued that African American entrepreneurs often identify opportunities larger organizations overlook, driving them to establish small businesses. This entrepreneurial endeavor, as emphasized by the participants in constructing diverse and cohesive teams, reflects the principles of sustainable entrepreneurship.

The emphasis on community-centric approaches, targeted financial support, mentorship, and networking, as highlighted by de Bruin et al. (2023), resonates with the theme of collaboration and networking for sustaining African American beauty salons.

Both perspectives stress the importance of diverse and cohesive teams, aligning with the principles of sustainable entrepreneurship. The mentorship element, contributing to salon success, aligns with the broader concept of entrepreneurs embracing sustainability, fostering community well-being, and recognizing their responsibility to positively impact society (Ketprapakorn & Kantabutra, 2019; de Bruin et al., 2023; Mathias et al., 2020; Zuofa et al., 2022). The shared emphasis on creating a business environment beyond profit-seeking highlights the enduring success and positive impact sought by both the theme and the concept.

This subsection explored the themes of continuous learning and adaptation, principles and business ethics, and collaboration and networking. It examined the influence of these themes on the sustained success of African American beauty salon businesses over five years and the connection between General Systems Theory and existing literature. The following subsection, “Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice,” will address the broader implications of the identified themes.

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

The study’s findings have significant implications for the professional practice of African American beauty salon owners in the southwestern U.S. region. Small businesses face a substantial closure rate, with over half shutting down within the initial five years (SBA, 2018b; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). At a heightened risk of failure, African American small businesses are often linked to a need for more understanding of effective business strategies (Lextrait, 2022). This subsection

explores the implications for professional practice. It constructs a theoretical argument highlighting how these findings could contribute to the prolonged sustainability of African American beauty salons, extending their operational viability beyond the customary five-year timeframe.

Five African American beauty salon owners in the southwestern region of the U.S. sustained their businesses for over five years. The interview responses revealed that salon owners use similar strategies to maintain their beauty salon business. The three key strategies identified by participants in this study as advantageous for effectively sustaining their beauty salon business beyond five years are (a) continuous learning and adaptation, (b) principles and business ethics, and (c) collaboration and networking.

The study's discoveries hold significant potential for current and emerging African American small beauty salon owners looking to sustain their business beyond five years. For researchers, these findings offer a foundation for future recommendations on successful business strategies, contributing to the broader literature on small business sustainability. The insights discussed in this study can benefit prospective and existing African American small beauty salon owners and business leaders by applying these ideas to professional practice. Particularly relevant for African American small beauty salon owners operating in the southwestern region of the United States, the identified themes provide valuable guidance for establishing and maintaining successful small beauty salons might benefit from the identified themes while establishing or sustaining a small beauty salon in the southwestern region of the United States.

Implications for Social Change

More than 50% of small businesses need help within their initial five years of operation (Small, 2020). Drawing insights from African American small beauty salon owners who have sustained their businesses for five years revealed the potential for positive social change. Emerging and established African American small beauty salon owners can gain valuable insights into effective strategies for sustaining their businesses. The study suggests positive social change by potentially reducing failures among small African American beauty salons and retaining skilled employees. Providing effective strategies to prospective salon owners fosters a deeper appreciation for long-term opportunities. This positive social change may enhance financial security, create local employment opportunities, and stimulate economic growth. Success for African American small beauty salon owners is more likely to increase with knowledge of effective business strategies, and this study serves as a resource for implementing those successful business strategies beyond the initial 5-year period.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study is on the effective strategies that five African American small business owners used to sustain their businesses for five years. The research findings suggest that implementing effective business strategies such as continuous learning and adaptation, principles and business ethics, and collaboration and networking are critical to sustaining African American beauty salons beyond five years. This study expands the research and knowledge of sustaining African American small beauty salons. It highlights the vital

need to explore the relationship between African American small beauty salon businesses and the need for knowledge of effective sustainability strategies.

Two limitations were identified in this doctoral study. O'Neil (2019) defines limitations as uncontrollable influences that can impact study results and result in inadequacies. According to Gao and McDonald (2022), limitations constrain research findings. The first limitation is the sample size, which may only partially represent some African American small beauty salon businesses in the study's specific region. Another potential limitation could be the accuracy of participant recollection regarding the effective business strategies for sustaining operations beyond five years.

I recommend the following recommendations to address these limitations and enhance the rigor of future research. First, expanding the sample size is crucial for improving the generalizability of findings. Including a more diverse representation of African American small beauty salon businesses in the specific region would offer a comprehensive understanding of the strategies employed by different companies, thereby enhancing the study's external validity. Second, a mixed-methods approach is recommended to mitigate potential limitations associated with participant recollection accuracy. Researchers can cross-verify and triangulate data by combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. Incorporating surveys, interviews, and observational techniques will provide a more robust and nuanced perspective on effective business strategies. Real-time assessments or periodic follow-ups can further illuminate the ongoing practices of the salons, ensuring a more accurate representation of their operational dynamics. Addressing these limitations through the recommended strategies

will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of effective business strategies for sustaining African American small beauty salon businesses and provide valuable insights for academic researchers and practitioners.

Conclusion

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study, I explored and identified effective strategies African American small beauty salon owners use to sustain their businesses beyond five years. Over half of small businesses fail and close within the first five years of startup (Small, 2020). African American-owned small businesses fail at an even higher rate than non-African American-owned businesses (Lextrait, 2022). Lextrait (2022) associated much of the failure of African American small businesses with a need for effective business sustainability strategies.

A deeper understanding of the effective business strategies employed by African American small beauty salon owners to ensure sustainability beyond five years is crucial for enhancing the business prospects of this demographic. This knowledge is essential for existing and potential African American small beauty salon owners and public service organizations seeking to support, uplift, and collaborate with this sector. The research involved gathering data through semistructured interviews and examining organizational documents, including the beauty salons' Facebook pages and website information. Neuert et al. (2023) recommended methodological triangulation to uncover critical themes, and this approach was instrumental in identifying recurring patterns from various data sources. Mwitwa (2022) emphasized that data saturation occurs when no new information emerges, a point observed after collecting data from five participants.

The data analysis revealed three key themes: participants emphasized the importance of effective business strategies such as continuous learning and adaptation, principles and business ethics, and collaboration and networking. Grounded in the broader systems theory, these insights highlight the strategies African American small beauty salon business owners prioritize to ensure the enduring success of their ventures beyond the crucial five-year mark. African American small beauty salon owners must capture the essence of their business's unique traits. By recognizing, tapping into, and customizing strategies, African American small beauty salon owners will lay the foundation for a dynamic and highly motivated workforce, ensuring immediate success and a path to sustained, long-term triumph in business.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study about effective strategies African American small beauty salon owners use to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The research study focuses on effective strategies five African American small beauty salon owners used or used to sustain their businesses. The researcher is inviting five small beauty salon owners who have effectively sustained their company for more than 5 years to be in this study. This form is part of the “informed consent” process to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. The researcher conducting this study is Sherwana Jefferson, a Walden University doctoral student.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to explore effective strategies five African American small beauty salon owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

Procedures:

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

- Participate in an audio-recorded interview lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes.
- Upon conclusion of the interview, I will follow up with you as the participant, ensuring I understand the feedback and responses you provided during the interview. This is also included within the 60- to 90-minute timeframe for interviews with each participant but separate from the interview. This follow-up will last 15 minutes.

Here are some sample questions:

- How effective are the strategies in meeting your business objectives?
- How did you assess the effectiveness of addressing these strategies?
- What strategies contribute to the sustainability of your small business?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Q1: How did you address challenges you faced to sustain your beauty salon business beyond 5 years?

Q2: What are some crucial key business strategies that African American small beauty salon business owners a sustainable business?

Q3: How did you acquire the expertise needed to develop successful strategies for ensuring the longevity of your beauty salon business for over five years?

Q4: Which strategies were significant in your business's profitability, endurance, and capacity to maintain your small beauty salon business for over five years?

Q5: What leadership styles did you employ to oversee and enhance employee productivity to sustain your beauty salon business?

Q6: What other information would you like to share regarding sustaining your beauty salon business?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

You are invited to participate in a research study about effective strategies African American small beauty salon owners use to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The research study focuses on effective strategies five African American small beauty salon owners used or used to sustain their businesses. The researcher is inviting five small beauty salon owners who have effectively sustained their company for more than 5 years to be in this study. This form is part of the “informed consent” process to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. The researcher conducting this study is Sherwana Jefferson, a Walden University doctoral student.

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