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Sustainability Strategies for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises Located in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Henry James Hazel

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and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Sustainability Strategies for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises Located in the

Organization of Eastern Caribbean States

by

Henry James Hazel

MBA, Bangor University, 2014

BA, University of the Virgin Islands, 1993

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

May 2024

Abstract

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are critical business entities, disproportionately challenged, and fail at a high rate. Business owners are concerned with sustainability strategies because they support the operations of their enterprises and mitigate failure. Grounded in the resource-based view and dynamic capabilities theories, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore effective strategies that owner-managers of MSMEs located in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) use to sustain their operations beyond 3 years. The participants were 5 owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS who implemented successful strategies that sustained their operations for more than 3 years. Data were collected using semistructured interviews, publicly available documentation, artifacts, and testimonials, which were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic coding and analysis. The major themes that emerged were strategic approach, managerial competence, leadership effectiveness, and entrepreneurial orientation. A key recommendation is for owner-managers of MSMEs to develop human capital by engaging employees for their input, motivating them with praise and financial rewards, and empowering them through delegation. Implications for positive social change include the potential to generate employment in the OECS and increase disposable income for OECS residents, leading to improved living standards and community wellness in the region.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my late mom (Geraldine Hazel) who fearlessly inspired dreaming and achieving; my loving wife (Melissa Telemaque-Hazel) for her unrivaled support throughout the process; my courageous children (Osaze, Njeri, Osei, and Tahira) who boldly embrace the future; and the people of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States – relentless pursuers of a better quality of life.

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To everyone who helped me, in one way or another, to complete this doctoral research study, I am eternally grateful. They are too numerous to mention.

Special acknowledgment to my wife and best friend Melissa, my biggest cheerleader in this endeavor. In her eyes, I am always the greatest even when I am the least.

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I also acknowledge the participants who graciously granted my request to share their lived experiences as owner-managers of MSMEs. Without the rich data they provided, this research study would not have been possible.

Last, I acknowledge the entire Walden Family including my instructors, classmates, support staff, and the fabulous Critchlow Scholars of my time. The Walden process and environment helped me see my doctorate achievement as not just a certificate but also a 'better me' fashioned by the crucible of an awesome transformative journey.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Background of the Problem

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are critical business enterprises. They are indispensable to national economies, but they fail at a high rate (Jayasekara et al., 2020). MSME failure rates within 3 years can be as high as 80% (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). The general business problem is some owner-managers of MSMEs do not know how to sustain their operations beyond 3 years, resulting in business closure.

MSMEs form the backbone of the economy in countries worldwide and are an important contributor to economic activity (Franco et al., 2021; Jayasekara et al., 2020; Kocherbaeva et al., 2019). Also, MSMEs represent an essential pillar undergirding the national economy, generating most employment and providing income to wide cross-sections of the population (Simba & Thai, 2019). Countries rely on the activities and output of MSMEs to support gross domestic product (GDP) performance. The economic wellbeing of most nationals and residents hinges on the existence and continuing operations of MSMEs.

Sustainability is a strategic concern for MSME owner-managers. Published research on MSME failure factors and how to mitigate them in the context of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) is sparse. This study involved exploring sustainability strategies for MSMEs located in the OECS.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem is that some owner-managers of MSMEs lack effective strategies to sustain their operations beyond 3 years. Therefore, the purpose of

this proposed qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore effective strategies that owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS use to sustain their operations beyond 3 years.

The targeted population consisted of owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS who have implemented successful strategies that sustained their operations beyond 3 years. I used purposive sampling to select five participants and gained access to them through professional associations and social networks after I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. To collect data, I used semistructured interviews, publicly available documentation, artifacts, and testimonials. The conceptual frameworks for this study were Barney's resource-based view (RBV) theory and Teece and Pisano's dynamic capabilities (DC) theory.

Research Question

What effective strategies do owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS use to sustain their operations beyond 3 years?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are beliefs or inferences that are taken as fact without proof and are not part of what is being tested in a study (Alkadash & Aljileedi, 2020). I assumed participants were knowledgeable regarding strategies that support sustainability of their business operations. Second, I assumed participants were willing and honest in terms of providing responses to interview questions. Third, I assumed MSME owner-managers were involved in strategic processes to sustain their business operations. Fourth, I

assumed implementing effective strategies would sustain MSMEs' operations beyond 3 years.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses or imposed restrictions beyond the researcher's control that can affect a study's design, results, and conclusions (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). A key limitation of this study was time as dictated by Walden University's guidelines for study completion. A second limitation was personal funding for necessary travel between islands of the OECS to collect data. A third limitation of this study was participants may have relied on others for management and did not have firsthand information and perspectives. Fourth, participants might have withheld pertinent information about their business strategies and practices.

Transition

I explored sustainability strategies for MSMEs located in the OECS. In Section 1, I provide the background for the problem, address the business problem focus and project purpose, and discuss assumptions and limitations. In Section 2, I review professional and academic literature. Section 3 includes discussions of project ethics, the nature of the project, data collection and analysis, and reliability and validity. In Section 4, I discuss findings and implications for business practice, social change, and further research.

Section 2: The Literature Review

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

A review of professional and academic literature with evidence of critical analysis and synthesis was an important component of this study. Engaging scholarship is crucial to supporting a study, and critical analysis can help support assessing credibility and validity assertions (Dodgson, 2021). I explored extant literature and used research to contextualize my study. Literature reviews are used to address strengths, weaknesses, contradictions, controversies, and inconsistencies (Dodgson, 2021).

I explored perspectives on the RBV theory and DC theory, which were the conceptual frameworks that grounded my study. A conceptual framework is used to understand a research topic or problem through a particular lens and is critical to situating research within existing scholarship and shaping new knowledge construction (Luft et al., 2022; Lynch et al., 2020). Barney's RBV theory and Teece and Pisano's DC theory are complementary and offer constructs that may be viewed by owner-managers of MSMEs as considerations vital to their performance and survivability. Based on the RBV theory, firms should prioritize looking inward to identify and exploit firm-specific and strategically relevant resources above analyzing the competitive environment when seeking to generate above-normal returns from strategizing efforts (Barney, 1986). The DC theory involves the imperative to adapt, integrate, and reconfigure organizational skills, resources, and functional competencies to shifting environments (Teece & Pisano, 1994). The RBV theory is static and deficient because its consideration of strategic factor development and deployment fails to regard the inescapable dictates of the rapidly

changing external environment, and the DC theory compensates for the said limitation (Šmaguc, 2022).

I also explored organizational survivability strategies for MSMEs located in the OECS. MSMEs are disproportionately challenged, but implementing effective strategies can enhance their performance and economic sustainability. Many factors including deficiencies in terms of financial and other resources, entrepreneurial leadership skills, training and education, technology, and enabling business infrastructure contribute to MSME vulnerability and high failure rates (Jayasekara et al., 2020; Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). Effective leadership and management can be used to properly address unique challenges that are faced by MSMEs where financial and external environmental issues hold primacy (Franco et al., 2021; Ng'ora et al., 2022). Good management leadership can be an important antecedent to quality performance at MSMEs, particularly in terms of creating indispensable enabling conditions for their sustained profitability and growth.

My review of literature was comprehensive and systematic. First, I addressed the conceptual framework, including a critical analysis of supporting theories. Second, I critically analyzed and synthesized scholarship pertaining to potential themes and phenomena relating to the study's purpose, which was to explore effective strategies that owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS use to sustain their operations beyond 3 years. Last, I compared and contrasted different perspectives, and evaluated my proposed study with previous research and findings. My aim was to provide a robust and substantiated review of professional and academic literature related to my study on sustainability strategies for MSMEs located in the OECS.

The approach to my literature review involved developing a search using the following keywords: *business sustainability, organizational performance, dynamic capabilities, competitive advantage, business strategy, human resource capital, and entrepreneurship*. I used the Thoreau Multi-Database search tool to identify and access journal articles in the following Walden University Library databases: EBSCOHost, Emerald Insight, Pearson, ProQuest Central, SAGE Journals, SAGE Premier, and Google Scholar. I ensured most sources were peer-reviewed and published between 2019 and 2024. This ensured rigorous research quality for articles used. I used Ulrich's Periodical Directory to verify articles were peer-reviewed. My search strategy included an initial unfiltered scan for a general assessment of the literature landscape. I then proceeded to filter articles that were published within 5 years of my anticipated doctoral completion date. However, I anticipated literature relating to the conceptual framework for my study would not have met time filter criteria; therefore, seminal sources with older dates that were relevant were included. I did not include nonpeer-reviewed articles to avoid data reliability risks. Of the total number of scholarly sources in my research study, 95% were peer-reviewed journal articles, of which 90% were published between 2020 and 2024 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Literature Review Sources

Source	Total	<i>n</i> < 5 years old	% < 5 years old
Peer-reviewed journal articles	88	79	90
Official governmental sources	1	0	0
Books	4	2	50
Total references	93	81	87

Application to the Applied Business Problem

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore effective strategies that owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS use to sustain their operations beyond 3 years. The RBV and DC theories were the conceptual frameworks for this study. RBV and DC theories collectively provide a holistic view of the firm. These theories relate to my research problem of MSME sustainability, providing an appropriate lens through which the phenomenon can be studied. As my chosen conceptual framework, RBV and DC offer constructs that may be viewed by owner-managers of MSMEs as considerations vital to their performance and survivability.

RBV Theory

The RBV theory was first introduced by Wernerfelt as one of the two fundamental and dichotomous perspectives of organizational identity. Wernerfelt's RBV was inspired by Penrosean ideology regarding efficient management of firm resources for successful organizational performance and competitive advantage (Penrose, 1959), and focused on specifying the firm's resource profile for optimal market activities. Wernerfelt (1984) argued there was an inextricable link between profitability and resource management and propounded the indispensability of a strategic approach to managing resources effectively over time. Jay Barney popularized Wernerfelt's RBV concept in his seminal work on strategic factor markets and firm resources and sustained competitive advantage.

The central tenets of Barney's RBV theory are heterogeneity of firms' strategically relevant resources, essentiality of resource exploitation, and sustained

competitive advantage as underpinned by resource value, rarity, inimitability, and nonsubstitutability (Barney, 1991). When seeking to generate above-normal returns from strategizing efforts, looking inward to identify and exploit firm-specific and strategically relevant resources must be prioritized above analyzing external environments.

Environmental factors cannot be a source of more accurate expectations regarding strategic resources given homogeneity of environmental conditions faced by competing firms (Barney, 1986). Required resources to implement strategy hold primacy in terms of cost/benefit considerations of strategy development and implementation. Valuable, rare, inimitable, and nonsubstitutable (VRIN) resources mediate above-normal performance and competitive advantage for firms (Barney, 1991).

DC Theory

The DC theory was coined by David Teece and Gary Pisano as an important and legitimate extension of Barney's RBV theory. The DC theory emphasizes the inevitability of environmental change and the response imperative of organizational adaptation, integration, and reconfiguration of the firm's resources and functional competencies (Teece & Pisano, 1994). Considering the significance of the business environment is crucial and the inevitable rapidly changing business environment demands appropriate organizational response. The firm's strategic dimensions of managerial and organizational processes, present position, and available pathways are validated by the external business environment, and competitive advantage can result from dynamic capabilities rooted in high-performance routines embedded in the firm's processes (Teece & Pisano, 1994). Dynamic capabilities are critical to survivorship adaptation and opportunistic

capitalization on environmental shifts. Resources alone do not deliver the capacity for above-normal profitability and sustainability.

RBV and DC Complementarity

The RBV and DC theories are complementary and provide a holistic view of the firm for performance and competitiveness. The theoretical streams of competitive dynamics and RBV are proximate, and isolated considerations of either result in an incomplete view of the firm (Chen et al., 2021). The significant positive relationship between DC and resource recombination confirms that firms can innovatively and heterogeneously (re)mix strategic resources for greater competitiveness (Muneeb et al., 2023). The valence of RBV increases significantly when it is integrated deeply with competitive dynamics, and extending RBV to include DC can enable firms to not only navigate environmental change but also bolster idiosyncratic resource positions (Chen et al., 2021; Muneeb et al., 2023). Resource recombination achieved through DC can lead to improved efficiencies, strategies, resource usage, and above-normal performance. Moreover, RBV and DC can play important roles in assisting SMEs choose the correct strategies to implement for their businesses and neither theory singularly explains the growth and success of SMEs (Rodriguez et al., 2021). The success factors of SMEs can be properly identified and analyzed within an integrated RBV-DC context. Focusing on resource VRIN attributes (valuable, rare, inimitable, non-substitutable) and the ‘dynamic capabilities’ of their human capital is indispensable to SMEs’ successful performance and sustainability (Chen et al., 2021; Muneeb et al., 2023; Rodriguez et al., 2021).

Gyemang and Emeagwali (2020) examined the relationships among dynamic capabilities, innovation, organizational agility, and knowledge management in achieving maximum performance in Nigeria's telecommunication industry. These researchers found that dynamic capabilities correlate positively with both organizational agility and competitive performance, and knowledge management was also associated with dynamic capabilities. Organizational adaptation and renewal (mediated by dynamic capabilities) in response to changing market conditions are indispensable to performance and growth (Gyemang & Emeagwali, 2020). Ferreira et al. (2022) analyzed the effects of different resource characteristics on small and medium enterprises (SME) competitive advantage and performance and found that the value of SME combined resources and capabilities correlates positively to their competitive advantage. The firm's uniqueness is embodied in the characteristics of its resources which, alone, are ineffectual in mediating successful performance and competitive advantage (Ferreira et al., 2022). Firm resources, both tangible and intangible, are indispensable to their successful performance and competitive advantage (Ferreira et al., 2022; Gyemang & Emeagwali, 2020).

The limitation of both RBV and DC in separately providing a strategic view of the firm is highlighted in the consideration of entrepreneurial orientation, a primal pathway to organizational competitiveness. An examination of the key points of overlap and divergence in the postulates of RBV and Entrepreneurship theories revealed that RBV and Entrepreneurship theories bear a high degree of concordance regarding strategic imperatives but reflect fundamental discordance regarding the significance of considering the competitive environment (Šmaguc, 2022). These findings comport with the postulates

of earlier-mentioned studies. Entrepreneurial orientation to secure and enhance economic performance must regard both the strategic resource base and the external environment of the firm (Ferreira et al., 2022; Gyemang & Emeagwali, 2020; Šmaguc, 2022).

RBV theory and DC theory are complementary and collectively provide a holistic view of the firm for above-normal performance and competitive advantage. These theories can provide an appropriate conceptual framework for exploring sustainable strategies for MSMEs located in the OECS.

Potential Themes and Phenomena

MSMEs are disproportionately challenged but implementing effective strategies can enhance their performance and sustainability. Scholar-practitioners have acknowledged MSMEs' vulnerabilities to unique challenges leading to their less-than-effective performance and non-sustainability (Jayasekara et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021; Ng'ora et al., 2022). Studies show that most factors that inhibit the successful performance and sustainability of MSMEs are common, and the debilitating obstacles are both endogenous and exogenous (Mahender & Dahiya, 2022; Mholongo & Daya, 2023; Ng'ora et al., 2022; Prakash et al., 2021). The liability of smallness can be challenging to overcome and results in a compounding of incapacitating issues that threaten the organizational viability of MSMEs. Understanding the failure factors and obstacles that MSMEs face can help develop successful strategies that owner-managers can implement to support operations, enhance performance, and boost sustainability.

Multiplicity of Failure Factors

The factors affecting the performance and sustainability of MSMEs are many. In exploring problems faced by entrepreneurs and examining the impact of the same on MSMEs, Mahender and Dahiya (2022) found that these entities are challenged with various obstacles including human resource management, access to raw materials, entrepreneur experience, and financing which was the most significant. Mahender and Dahiya's study had a geographical range of 15 countries and assimilated MSME experiences from diverse contexts. Although not generalizable, the findings and conclusions of Mahender and Dahiya (2022) comport with those of other researchers. Research evidence supports the proliferation of failure factors that apply to MSMEs.

Failure factors can overwhelm MSMEs, preclude their growth and competitiveness, and cause their failure. A review of relevant scholarship to critically evaluate why small and medium enterprises (SMEs) fail and to determine methods of improving the business success of these entities revealed that SMEs are especially vulnerable and the many failure factors include limited access to finance, lack of skilled labour, un-competitiveness, and lack of institutional support, innovation, and entrepreneurial skills (Jayasekara et al., 2020). Further, an investigation of the influence of external and internal factors affecting the growth of MSMEs in the poor-performing state of Bihar, India, highlighted 12 major growth-inhibiting obstacles faced by MSMEs including financial issues, labor force challenges, technology inefficiency, poor marketing, and a general lack of good governance practices at MSMEs (Prakash et al., 2022). Prakash et al. aimed to identify the major deep-rooted causes for the un-

competitiveness of MSMEs located in developing states and identify potential solutions for the same. MSMEs face many obstacles to their growth, competitiveness, and sustainability (Jayasekera et al., 2020; Prakash et al., 2022). Failure factor proliferation and situ classification regarding MSME challenges are evident themes (Jayasekera et al., 2020; Mahender & Dahiya, 2022; Prakash et al., 2022).

Leadership Influence

Research has shown that MSME challenges are both internal and external. Franco et al.'s (2021) examination of inhibitors to MSME performance and sustainability revealed that financial and external environmental issues hold primacy among MSME failure factors and effective leadership addresses these unique challenges. This analysis of the influence of failure factors on entrepreneurial resilience was done in the Angolan context and included qualitative techniques on a snowball sample of 133 MSME founders. Franco et al. propounded the indispensability of entrepreneurial resilience (the leader's resilience), which many MSMEs lack, to MSME growth and survival.

The leadership-performance nexus was also highlighted in an earlier study (Kocherbaeva et al., 2019) which addressed the imperative of effective leadership for organizational success and growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Based on critical analyses of the key issues of leadership and leaders, and leadership potential in SMEs, owner-managers play an important role in the success and growth of SMEs (Kocherbaeva et al., 2019). MSMEs led by owner-managers with effective leadership qualities are likely to be more successful and achieve sustained growth (Franco et al., 2021; Kocherbaeva et al., 2019). The established connection between leadership success

and success in doing business reinforces the strategic importance of leadership to MSMEs' successful performance and sustainability. Studies support the primacy of leadership among MSME success/failure factors (Franco et al., 2021; Kocherbaeva et al., 2019).

Other studies evidenced the significance of effective leadership and management and quality human capital for the successful performance and sustainability of MSMEs. Gu et al.'s (2022) assessment of the impact of CEO cognitive trust on MSMEs' marketing innovation is instructive. How CEOs are perceived in terms of competency, integrity, and goodwill relative to the management team was analyzed as a possible antecedent to marketing innovation activities in Chinese MSMEs. Studying a sample of 1770 MSMEs in China, the authors aimed to verify the influence of CEO cognitive trust, and government support, on MSMEs' marketing innovation activities. CEO cognitive trust (as well as governmental support) can influence the availability and management of knowledge resources to innovate the marketing activities of MSMEs (Gu et al., 2022). CEOs play an important role in constructing the collective knowledge of MSMEs and procuring external resources.

Ng'ora et al.'s (2022) examination of the prerequisite managerial skills for successful organizational performance at MSMEs in a Tanzanian context is insightful. These authors used a mixed methods research approach that included thematic analysis and regression analysis on a sample of 60 MSME owner-managers and aimed to understand the managerial competencies MSMEs need for their growth and development. Organizational success at MSMEs hinges on owner-managers managerial competence,

and the requisite range of skills critical to MSME growth and development includes financial management, marketing, human relations, and entrepreneurship (Ng'ora et al., 2022). Proper management and deployment of knowledge resources are critical to spurring MSMEs' marketing innovations and engendering overall organizational success, and leaders' attributes are key in this regard (Gu et al., 2022; Ng'ora et al., 2022). When owner-managers possess the attributes of effective leaders and managers, MSMEs' chances of overcoming their challenges are better.

Human Capital

Other researchers support espoused views regarding management leadership's and human capital's indispensability to MSMEs' performance and survival. Liu et al. (2021) proffered that organizational performance is linked to process management, supplier quality management, and human resource management which, in turn, are directly related to management leadership. These authors conducted a quantitative cross-sectional study that involved 287 MSME restaurants in the Philippines to determine the antecedents of quality performance at MSMEs. Similarly, AlQershi (2021) submitted that SME performance positively correlates with strategic variables including strategic thinking, strategic planning, and strategic innovation, and human capital provides a mediating influence. This conclusion is based on research involving 225 leaders of SMEs in the manufacturing sector of Yemen. Entrepreneurial orientation and human capital development are significantly related to organizational performance (AlQershi, 2021; Liu et al., 2021). Good management leadership is an important antecedent to quality performance at MSMEs, particularly in terms of creating indispensable enabling

conditions for profitability and growth at these disproportionately challenged firms (AlQershi, 2021; Gu et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2021; Ng'ora et al., 2022).

Tracing MSMEs' struggles to critical skills deficiencies highlights the importance of quality human capital to their operations. Silaen and Tulig (2023) examined the role of accounting in managing MSMEs in Indonesia with the aim of understanding the characteristics of MSMEs and determining the minimum level of financial literacy to enable MSMEs to access financing as well as manage their businesses well. Having accounting skills is indispensable to managing MSMEs and the financial literacy of MSME owner-managers is relatively low (Silaen & Tulig, 2023). These findings and conclusions are concordant with those of other researchers, especially regarding the criticality of owner-manager competency and technical capability for successful MSME performance. Adequate human capital underpins successful organizational performance and the inability to access the same is a significant failure factor for MSMEs (Gu et al., 2022; Silaen & Tulig, 2023).

Access to Finance

Inadequate and inappropriate financing is a major performance- and sustainability-inhibiting factor, and accessing appropriate financial and nonfinancial resources can be challenging for MSMEs. Firms' access to finance and social capital significantly influences the improvement of corporate performance, and access to finance has a mediating influence on the association between social capital and improvement in corporate performance (Kijkasiwat et al., 2022). Kijkasiwat et al. examined the influence of financial and social capital on improving the performance of non-listed firms in

Southeast Asian countries, and the mediating role of access to finance between social capital and corporate performance. They aimed to fill a literature gap regarding the examination of factors that may influence and improve unlisted firms' performance in Southeast Asian countries.

Bi et al. (2022) investigated the effects of supply chain financing (SCF) on organizational performance (OP) and the mediating effect of supply chain risk (SCR) in the relationship between SCF and OP. These researchers aimed to address a gap in the literature regarding the effects of SCF adoption on OP in the Chinese context. SCF significantly mitigates SCR which has a strong positive effect on OP, specifically cost performance and operational performance (Bi et al., 2022). SCF is a risk-mitigating tool that strengthens access to credit finance and supports competitiveness. Insufficient finance is a major obstacle to firms' development and effective performance, and nonfinancial resources such as social capital are essential for higher corporate performance (Bi et al., 2022; Kijkasiwat et al., 2022). Although accessing adequate and appropriate resources can be challenging for MSMEs, owner-managers can develop strategies to overcome the same.

Primacy of Finance and Leadership

Financial and leadership inadequacies are primal obstacles that cause other challenges. MSME failure is endemic and MSMEs are plagued consistently with many interrelated challenges including a lack of financial and other resources, a lack of entrepreneurial leadership skills, a lack of training and financial education, and a lack of technology and an enabling business infrastructure (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). Sahoo and

Thakur (2023) proffered supporting views specifically regarding the cruciality of managerial competence for the successful performance and sustainability of MSMEs. On examining barriers affecting supply chain financing (SCF) application to MSMEs in India, Sahoo and Thakur considered that the high cost of traditional financing such as bank loans, corporate borrowings, and letters of credit is prohibitive and that SCF can enhance the performance and growth of MSMEs. This study embodied a qualitative literature to explore and prioritize the various important barriers hindering supply chain financing (SCF) application to MSMEs. Poor cashflow management and working capital management disruption are significant barriers to applying SCF and cultural factors also inhibit to a lesser degree (Sahoo & Thakur, 2023). Many challenges faced by MSMEs are spin-offs of leadership and financial shortcomings and considering suitable options to overcome these obstacles is crucial for their survival (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023; Sahoo & Thakur, 2023).

Innovation

Innovation fueled by dynamic capabilities can be especially important in resource-deficient contexts, and the lack of innovation is a major challenge for MSMEs. This is supported by Octasyuva et al.'s (2022) examination of factors that influence MSMEs' performances and the role of dynamic capabilities in ensuring sustainability. A key consideration of these researchers is that MSMEs tend to be formed out of compulsion whereas opportunity drives the creation of companies. Innovativeness, which is a part of entrepreneurial orientation, is critical to MSME performance and marketing innovation has a significant influence on MSME performance (Octasyuva et al., 2022).

Further, MSMEs invariably lack indispensable entrepreneurial orientation and dynamic capabilities, which precludes their effective adaptation to changing environmental conditions (Octasylyva et al., 2022). Lack of entrepreneurial orientation and dynamic capabilities can be a major performance- and growth-inhibiting factor for MSMEs.

Molina-Sanchez et al. (2022) also espoused views supporting innovation indispensability to MSME sustainability having quantitatively analysed success factors using a sample of 614 MSMEs in Guanajuato, Mexico. Quality, technology, and innovation are the main drivers of company success and appropriate combinations of these factors favour MSME competitiveness and sustainability (Molina-Sanchez et al., 2022). MSMEs must overcome many market challenges for competitiveness and survivability, and being innovative, flexible, and adaptable helps identify and take advantage of net income and growth opportunities (Molina-Sanchez et al., 2022; Octasylyva et al., 2022).

Primacy of Innovation

The primacy of innovation among MSME success factors is supported by other studies. Shahmohammadi (2021) explored the effects of entrepreneurial marketing and organizational entrepreneurship on the performance of small and medium enterprises. The author systematically reviewed existing articles on entrepreneurial marketing and organizational entrepreneurship of small and medium enterprises. They considered the essentiality of looking beyond resources under direct control to other means to compete and grow, and the criticality of the characteristics and values of the main entrepreneur.

Shahmohammadi found that the dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing improve organizational entrepreneurship indicators in small and medium enterprises.

Matekenya and Moyo (2022) demonstrated that entrepreneurial marketing is an innovative financing approach that helps MSMEs grow through entrepreneurship. These authors used the quartile regression quantitative technique to examine the effects of innovation on small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMME) performance in South Africa. R&D expenditures have a positive and significant effect on the performance of larger firms, and introducing new products promotes the performance of smaller ones (Matekenya & Moyo, 2022). This research also highlighted that SMMEs in South Africa struggle because the entrepreneurial environment in that country is not conducive to business growth and development. Innovation, which is underpinned by entrepreneurial orientation, supports successful organizational performance and sustainability and can be a strategic consideration for MSMEs (Matekenya & Moyo, 2022).

Empirical evidence from a European context also supports the criticality of technology and innovation adoption to MSMEs' operations. Fanelli (2021) investigated the impact of new technologies in increasing SMEs' competitiveness and productivity using the quantitative methodology with a sample size of 68 owner-managers of rural SMEs across eight countries in Europe. The researcher found that there is a positive correlation between innovativeness and growth, and size and stage of development are debilitating regarding the adoption of technology. The innovativeness of growing firms is critical to increasing their competitiveness and productivity, and investments in R&D create platforms for new product commercialization. The findings and conclusions of

several studies concord regarding the criticality of innovation as success factor for MSMEs (Fanelli, 2021; Matekenya & Moyo, 2022; Molina-Sanchez et al., 2022; Octasylyva et al., 2022; Shahmohammadi, 2021). Innovation is crucial for the successful performance and growth of MSMEs but adapting to a rapidly changing, unfavorable business environment can be challenging for them.

Other Factors

Several other researchers explored and examined MSMEs' survivability within the context of contemporary business challenges and issues including risk management, innovation and technology, human capital, and competition. Ade et al. (2020) used multiple regression analysis to examine the influence of enterprise risk management practices on the survival of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Lagos State, Nigeria. They found that there is a significant positive relationship between effective risk financing and SME survival and the rate of risk management adoption in SMEs is low. According to Ade et al., the factors militating against SME survivability are embedded in the risks associated with business conduct, and SMEs have a poor approach to practicing enterprise risk management (ERM). Adebisi and Bakare (2019) also conducted a study in the Nigerian context with findings and conclusions that were consistent with those of Ade et al. (2020). Using structural equation modeling for hypothesis testing, Adebisi and Bakare examined the influence of survival strategies on SME sustainability. There is a significant and positive relationship between survival strategies and the sustainability of SMEs and implementing survival strategies is a major challenge for SMEs (Adebisi & Bakare, 2019). MSMEs that do not prioritize implementing risk-mitigating, survival

strategies or contrive superior organizational performance will likely struggle or even fail.

Rupeika-Apoga and Petrovska's (2022) Latvian-based research highlighted similar findings and conclusions to those of the Nigerian studies regarding the criticality of implementing risk-mitigating, survival strategies to support MSMEs' operations. Rupeika-Apoga and Petrovska investigated the main barriers to MSMEs' sustainable digital transformation using a mixed methods approach that included a survey of 425 Latvian MSMEs coupled with qualitative comparative analyses. These researchers found that the most important barriers to MSMEs are IT security issues and inaccessibility to specialists in the external labor market. This view, however, contrasts with the espoused primacy of leadership and human capital (Franco et al., 2021; Gu et al., 2022; Ng'ora et al., 2022), and finance (Franco et al., 2021; Mahender & Daya, 2022; Mhlongo and Daya, 2023) among MSME failure factors. Digital transformation can open new horizons for businesses but MSMEs must overcome challenges rooted in the lack of finances and adequate human capital and select appropriate strategies to capitalize on opportunities.

Summary

MSMEs are disproportionately challenged, and factors affecting their performance and sustainability are many. Several studies confirm proliferation of MSME failure factors that preclude their growth and competitiveness, leading to their failure. MSME challenges are both internal and external, and owner-managers can implement strategies to overcome them (Mahender & Dahiya, 2022; Mholongo & Daya, 2023; Ng'ora et al., 2022; Prakash et al., 2021). Some studies highlight the significance of

effective leadership and management and quality human capital for successful performance and sustainability of MSMEs. Other studies elevate inadequate and inappropriate financing in terms of performance- and sustainability-inhibiting factors. Financial and leadership inadequacies are viewed as primal obstacles that cause other challenges. Many challenges faced by MSMEs result from leadership and financial shortcomings.

Innovation fueled by dynamic capabilities can be especially important in resource-deficient contexts, and lack of innovation is a major challenge for MSMEs (Fanelli, 2021; Matekenya & Moyo, 2022; Molina-Sanchez et al., 2022; Octasyilva et al., 2022; Shahmohammadi, 2021). MSMEs must overcome many market challenges for competitiveness and survivability, and being innovative, flexible, and adaptable helps in terms of identifying and taking advantage of sustainability opportunities. MSMEs must first address challenges rooted in lack of finances and adequate human capital and select appropriate strategies to capitalize on opportunities while effectively managing attendant risks (Adebisi & Bakare, 2019; Ade et al., 2020; Rupeika-Apoga & Petrovska, 2022).

Transition

In this section, I reviewed professional and academic literature and discussed applications to the business problem. Section 3 includes discussions on project ethics, the nature of the project, data collection and analysis, and reliability and validity. In Section 4, I discuss findings and implications for business practice, social change, and further research.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

In Section 3, I describe how I conducted my research and explain the rationale for the methods used. My aim was to demonstrate methodological rigor and replicability. I address project ethics and describe the nature of the project, population, sampling, and participants. Further, I describe data collection, organization, and analysis techniques. I also explain how reliability and validity were addressed. I explain how I systematically gathered, organized, and analyzed data to answer my research question.

Project Ethics

As the researcher, my role was to manage the research process including systematically gathering suitable data to address my study's research question. The primary duty of the researcher is to coordinate all aspects of research to mitigate the risk of methodological failure and research quality compromise, including recruiting potential participants, collecting data from selected participants, and analyzing data to find answers to the study's research question (Busetto et al., 2020; Mwita, 2022). I selected and used appropriate approaches and techniques to develop necessary rapport with participants and collected quality data to support analysis. Collecting data can not only be complex but also can jeopardize an entire research study if not done well (Yin, 2018). Data collection included using semistructured interviews.

In my previous career roles, I developed curiosity about MSME survivability. MSMEs are essential for national economies (Ade et al., 2020; Mhlongo & Daya, 2023), but they are especially vulnerable and fail at a high rate (Jayasekara et al., 2020). Anecdotally, most business enterprises in the OECS fit classification criteria of MSMEs.

I did not hold any position of direct influence over participants, nor have I had any direct involvement with MSMEs in the past. Researchers should ensure participants feel free to share their experiences frankly and honestly (Suwedi-Kapesa et al., 2023). I did not have to address issues relating to positionality that could influence data collection outcomes.

I adhered to Belmont Report standards via respect of autonomy of participants, their wellbeing, and justice. Qualitative studies oblige researchers to address areas of ethical concern which can be complex and require ethical commitment and competency to conduct oversight (Moriña, 2021; Potthof et al., 2023). These issues can include involving potentially vulnerable participants, investigating potentially sensitive topics, and using potentially intrusive or emotionally burdening interview questions (Potthof et al., 2023). I obtained approval from the (IRB to ensure my research was carried out in an ethical manner and complied with Belmont Report protocol. The Belmont Report includes principles and guidelines to help resolve ethical problems that are inherent in conducting research with human subjects (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects in Biomedical and Behavioral Research [NCPHSBBR], 1979). Adhering to the Belmont Report's principles of respect, beneficence, and justice is a key consideration for qualitative researchers (Redman & Caplan, 2021). I upheld standards of ethics in both form and practice.

I followed IRB protocols and obtained informed consent from all participants. Obtaining informed consent is critical to acknowledging participants' autonomy as a show of respect, and effective communication between researchers and participants underpins proper informed consent (Eeckhout et al., 2023; O'Shea, 2022). My process for

obtaining informed consent involved providing participants with information about research and their prospective involvement and ensuring they understood information provided to them, including interview procedures, the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to withdraw at any time after consenting, risks and benefits related to research, and confidentiality. I used the IRB's consent form (see Appendix A) and reviewed it with participants to enhance their understanding of the process. Because informed consent is the ethical cornerstone of research, ensuring participant-comprehension is imperative (O'Shea, 2022). In my study, obtaining informed consent preceded scheduling of interviews to collect data.

Participant procedures for withdrawing from my research project were simple and included verbal or written indication from participants regarding their decision to discontinue the process without explanation. Researchers should help participants understand components of study participation to ensure their autonomy and respect and accommodate their wishes to withdraw without penalty (Fernandez Lynch, 2020; O'Shea, 2022). I stated in the consent form and discussed with participants the voluntary nature of participation and their right to withdraw at any time by email, text, or phone, without explanation or penalty. Researchers can use incentives to secure consent and maintain participation (Fernandez Lynch, 2020). I showed appreciation for participation by giving a US\$20 gift card.

As the researcher, I ensured ethical protection of participants was adequate by masking identity of participants as required by the IRB. To protect names and keep participants confidential, I assigned codes to each participant, (P1, P2, P3, etc.), and

referred to codes in place of their names. Masking entails obscuring identification of people, organizations, and places and is a key feature of beneficence in terms of ethical research conduct (Panos et al., 2021). Any report, presentation, or publication related to my study contained only general patterns and not specificities from data. My arrangements to protect participants' confidentiality also included safely securing interview transcripts for at least 5 years as required by the IRB using a privacy mechanism like a locked box.

Nature of the Project

I used the qualitative method to address my research question. Qualitative research involves exploring, describing, and understanding contextual phenomena (Quintão et al., 2020). This approach was appropriate for my study because I sought to explore, describe, and understand a phenomenon within a specific setting. I used the qualitative methodology to make sense of subjective and socially constructed meanings of the topic. My research design was a pragmatic inquiry that involved individual decision-maker approaches to addressing a real-world problem. Qualitative pragmatic inquiry is used in business research to identify and interpret strategies, develop potential best practices, and analyze complex phenomena within transorganizational contexts, and researchers using this design can also discover intricate themes and mask issues compared to other approaches (Holdo, 2023; Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020; Ramanadhan et al., 2021). This qualitative pragmatic inquiry was inductive.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

The targeted population consisted of owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS who implemented successful strategies that sustained their operations beyond 3 years. When qualitative researchers apply eligibility criteria to decide who participates in their studies, it can increase chances of obtaining rich, nuanced, complex, and detailed data that meaningfully address their research question (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Kraft et al., 2020).

I used purposive sampling to select four to six participants from the targeted population. Purposive sampling involves strategically selecting participants who can provide data that fit the research question parameters, and smaller samples facilitate the requisite particularization of contextual phenomena better than larger ones (Bekele & Ago, 2022; Subedi, 2021). I ensured data saturation to finalize my sample size by collecting data from participants iteratively through semi-structured interviews until no new themes were identified. Saturation is the condition where issues and insights begin to repeat, making further collection redundant (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). I reached data saturation after interviewing four participants and interviewed one additional participant.

My strategies to gain access to participants involved using professional associations and social connections. Using professional associations and social contacts can be an effective strategy to gain access to participants because of existing levels of connection that mediate legitimacy for a meaningful researcher-participant relationship (Wong et al., 2021). I collected data directly from owner-managers of MSMEs that were in the OECS and had operated for more than three years, recruited through professional

associations and social networking connections. Also, I used ‘word of mouth’ to gain access.

Strategies I used to establish a working relationship with participants included sharing information with them about the research project, explaining the process for informed consent, and helping them prepare for the interview by referring to the interview protocol. Establishing a working relationship with participants is critical for both continuing and cognitive access to data sources (Wong et al., 2021). After initial contact with participants, I followed up with them to develop rapport and mutual orientation. These strategies helped build legitimacy and improve participants’ comprehension which resulted in rich, thick data.

Data Collection Activities

As the researcher, my role included systematically gathering suitable data to address my study’s research question. Therefore, I was the primary data collection instrument in my study. A researcher must coordinate all aspects of their research and is responsible for collecting data appropriately to find answers to their research question (Busetto et al., 2020; Mwita, 2022). My data collection process involved semistructured interviews. Qualitative researchers commonly use semistructured interviews to obtain rich, thick data to suit the exploratory nature of their research aim (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022). The semistructured interview was an appropriate tool for my study because it ensured data capture in key areas while allowing participants to bring their personalities and perspectives to the discussion. In qualitative research, the semistructured interview is especially useful because it is informal, uses open-ended

questions, allows the participant to talk without interruption, and facilitates spontaneous follow-up questions (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022).

When conducting my semistructured interviews, I used an interview protocol to help me ensure the consistency of my approach with multiple participants, mitigate bias, and support validity and reliability. Collecting data can not only be complex but also jeopardize an entire research study if not done well and interview protocols are indispensable in that regard, specifically to effectively explore phenomena in real-world situations (Siedlecki, 2022; Yin, 2018). My interview protocol included scripted opening statements, an ordered list of interview questions and prompts for probing, and interview-closing comments. Having clear, detailed procedural steps that were followed consistently when conducting semistructured interviews with participants was important. Appendix B shows the interview protocol that was given to and discussed with each participant in my study. It describes using semistructured interviews to collect data for my study.

To enhance the reliability and validity of my data collection process, I audio-recorded the interview and conducted follow-up interviews with participants to review the interview transcript and my notes to confirm that I accurately interpreted the information they shared. I also triangulated the data collected from the multiple participants in my study and engaged in reflexivity. Qualitative researchers can effectively enhance validity and reliability using strategies including member-checking, mechanical recording, rich data (verbatim transcripts), triangulation, and reflexivity

(Coleman, 2021; Singh et al., 2021). Using these tools and methods can allow readers to have confidence or trust in the study's conclusions and findings.

Interview Questions

I used semistructured interviews to collect the data. The interview questions included the following:

1. What strategies did you use to sustain the operations of your enterprise?
2. What organizational resources did you incorporate in the strategies to sustain the operations of your enterprise?
3. How did you use your human capital in the strategies to address business opportunities and threats?
4. What challenges did you encounter when developing and implementing strategies to sustain the operations of your enterprise?
5. How were the challenges that were encountered overcome?
6. How did you measure success regarding the implementation of strategies to sustain the operations of your enterprise?
7. What other information not already discussed would you like to share?

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

Systems for keeping track of data and emerging understandings in my research project included appropriately labeled password-protected audio and text files, a researcher notebook, research logs and tables, and a reflexivity journal. Indexed collections of textual materials (including interview transcripts), audio recordings, diagrams, maps, and tables can properly facilitate organizing, analyzing, and displaying

qualitative data (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021; Degeling & Rock, 2020). I organized and conceptualized the data collected appropriately to help facilitate immersion, iterative reflection, pattern generation, and interpretations. Qualitative researchers who conduct rigorous, high-quality studies creatively contrive their systematic analytical engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The appropriate data analysis process for my qualitative pragmatic inquiry was Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a suitable, foundational method of qualitative data analysis involving developing ideas, meaning, and understanding of qualitative data through coding procedures (Ozuem et al., 2022). Qualitative researchers use thematic analysis for conceptual and design thinking regarding their studies and can integrate reflexivity to meet the research quality criteria of thoughtfulness and reflection (Braun & Clarke, 2022). My data analysis process involved reflexive thematic analysis which enabled a developing and deepening interpretation of the data collected.

I followed a logical and sequential process, sometimes iteratively, when analyzing the data. Iterative rounds of data engagement and interpretation lead to explanations and insights (Degeling & Rock, 2020). First, I transcribed the audio recording of the data collected. Second, I read and re-read the transcripts and listened to the audio recordings to familiarize myself with the data. Third, I generated initial codes using a color scheme to classify all the data; I subsequently refined the coding in an iterative process. Fourth, I searched for themes. Fifth, I reviewed themes. Sixth, I defined and named themes. Seventh, I abstracted the main findings. Eighth, I interpreted the results. Last, I produced

the report. This logical and sequential approach helped me draw both descriptive and explanatory conclusions.

I used reflexivity to focus on the key themes and correlate them with the literature and the conceptual framework for my study. Reflexivity helps determine final themes for analysis from a universe of potentially many produced at the intersection of the data, the researcher's subjectivity, and theoretical and conceptual frames (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Engaging in reflexivity constantly to even consider studies published since the writing of my proposal helped me lessen the likelihood of underdeveloped themes and analytical foreclosure. Regarding the raw data, I will ensure secure storage for 5 years.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are important research quality criteria, and I addressed these elements appropriately in my study. In qualitative research, reliability and validity are broadly concerned with the issue of trustworthiness or the degree to which others can assess the researcher's honesty in research conduct and reasonableness in drawing conclusions (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021; Coleman, 2021). The dimensions of trustworthiness include dependability for reliability and credibility, transferability, and confirmability for validity (Singh et al., 2021). I addressed these elements to achieve methodological rigor and a high-quality research study. Transparency and understandability are the hallmarks of high-quality phenomenological research (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955).

Reliability

My strategy to address dependability included effusive documentation, an interview protocol, member checking of data interpretation, and an audit trail for detail and transparency. When researchers confirm the accuracy of their understanding with participants, are transparent, and provide detailed descriptions of the rationale for their research and its implementation, they help readers of their studies better evaluate their reliability (Coleman, 2021; Singh et al., 2021). I provided a dependable account of my research process to not only help others understand and evaluate my study aims and objectives but also to repeat my research methodology if they wish to do so. Creating and maintaining meticulous and detailed records of interviews, observations, document searches, and decisions, along with their justifications, made at every stage of a research study supports reproducibility (Degeling & Rock, 2020).

Validity

Ensuring credibility, transferability, and confirmability in my research study supported its validity. To ensure credibility, I performed member checking of the data interpretation, participant transcript review, and triangulation of data. Credibility relates to confidence in the research findings (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). To address transferability in relation to the reader and future research, I used an interview protocol when collecting the data, documented effusively, and provided a transparent account of my data analysis method. Transferability relates to the applicability of the research findings to other contexts and settings and facilitates repeatability (Degeling & Rock, 2020). Helping readers of my study assess the extent to which the inferences made are accurate and well-

founded, and the results and conclusions could be extended beyond the research setting was important. To address confirmability, I probed during interviews, conducted follow up member checking interviews, triangulated data from multiple sources, and performed reflexive commentary. Confirmability relates to the accurate reflection of participants' lived experience in the research findings untarnished by researcher bias (Lemon & Hayes, 2020).

I ensured data saturation by collecting data from participants iteratively through semistructured interviews until no new themes are identified. Data saturation occurs when issues and insights regarding the phenomenon studied begin to repeat making further collection superfluous (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). Reaching data saturation helped assure the credibility, transferability, and confirmability of my study's findings.

Transition and Summary

In this study, I explored sustainability strategies for MSMEs located in the OECS. I stated the problem and purpose and described the nature of the project and related ethics. I used the RBV and DC theories as conceptual frameworks for this study. Further, I addressed assumptions and limitations, explained the significance of the study, and reviewed professional and academic literature. In Section 4, I discuss findings and implications for business practice, social change, and further research, and end with a conclusion.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore effective strategies that owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS use to sustain their operations beyond 3 years. I addressed four core themes during the data analysis: strategic approach, managerial competence, leadership effectiveness, and entrepreneurial orientation. Main themes that emerged as key strategies included strategy planning and implementation, customer value proposition, focus on organizational resources, human capital development and deployment, and organizational change and adaptation. This study's findings can contribute to improvements of strategies owner-managers of MSMEs use to sustain their operations beyond 3 years.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question was: What effective strategies do owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS use to sustain their operations beyond 3 years? I collected data using semistructured interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of this topic (see Table 2).

Table 2*Participant Demographics*

	Gender	Years of experience	Country in OECS	Business sector	Role
P1	Male	31	Saint Lucia	Medical laboratory	Part-owner and managing director
P2	Male	40	St Kitts & Nevis	Food & catering	Part-owner and managing director
P3	Male	22	St Vincent & the Grenadines	Landscaping	Owner and managing director
P4	Female	24	Antigua & Barbuda	Legal	Owner and managing director
P5	Female	13	Commonwealth of Dominica	Financial services	Part-owner and managing director

The four main themes to address the research question are strategic approach, managerial competence, leadership effectiveness, and entrepreneurial orientation. These themes embody overarching patterns of meaning in the data collected and align with those identified in literature in Section 2 (see Table 3).

Table 3*Summary of Data Analysis Themes*

Theme	<i>n</i> of participants who contributed data to theme (<i>N</i> =5)	<i>n</i> of excerpts from data assigned to theme
Theme 1: Strategic approach	5	80
Theme 2: Managerial competence	5	120
Theme 3: Leadership effectiveness	5	98
Theme 4: Entrepreneurial orientation	4	27

Theme 1: Strategic Approach

Strategic approaches to business emerged from data analysis as effective for owner-managers of MSMEs to sustain their operations beyond 3 years. Taking a strategic approach to business is a strategy that enables owner-managers of MSMEs to set performance targets and navigate goal achievement by planning and implementing strategic activities and monitoring and evaluating them. Strategy is a key determinant of organizational success, and when properly formulated and implemented, can be a significant source of performance heterogeneity and sustainability (Dyer et al., 2020; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). Subthemes included strategy planning and implementation, corporate social responsibility, (unique customer value proposition, long-term business aim, and succession planning (see Table 4).

Table 4

Strategic Approach

Subtheme	<i>n</i> of participants who contributed data to sub-theme (<i>N</i> =5)	<i>n</i> of excerpts from data assigned to sub-theme
Strategy planning and implementation	5	18
Corporate social responsibility	3	10
Unique customer value proposition	5	35
Long-term business aim	2	9
Succession planning	2	4

Subtheme 1: Strategy Planning and Implementation

All participants referred to strategy planning and implementation as part of their strategic approach to conducting business. Strategy planning and implementation involved practices such as gathering business intel, formulating and implementing plans to achieve stated goals, and monitoring and evaluating effectiveness of plans. P1 said, “You have to be strategic and plan in advance. We brainstormed, proposed, implemented, monitored, evaluated, and tweaked. Every strategy, every activity was time-bound and monitored.” As P1 noted, planning and implementation processes mediate structure and order, which supports operations of businesses. P1 also conveyed criticality of strategic intent in terms of business decisions and actions and the imperative of managerial support for strategy execution and said, “there was strategy behind having many locations and strategy implementation had to be via the line manager.” According to P2, “If you don’t plan and implement, you will not achieve your goals, [so] we gathered intel to monitor and evaluate our strategies.” P4 addressed how strategy planning and implementation undergirded operations of their business as a vital pillar in terms of strategic approaches to business conduct:

I have had a strategy since I started my business. Once I implemented core strategies, the client base grew. When I felt like giving up during the financial shock in 2010, I went back to the drawing board and developed strategies to move forward. I strategized how to move forward and put everything down on paper.

As P4 conveyed, strategy planning and implementation are indispensable to continuing successful business operations, especially regarding creating and maintaining economic

value. P3 and P5 provided information that comports with P4. P3 stated, “I did a 5-year project and plan, and the 5-year planning worked for me.” P5 shared, “I followed the principles of planning and planned a lot.” Findings showed that strategy planning and implementation is a business necessity that supports survivability of MSMEs.

Subtheme 2: Corporate Social Responsibility

Three participants reported they used the strategic approach of demonstrating corporate social responsibility. Establishing corporate social responsibility began with acknowledging a duty of care toward key stakeholders. Prioritizing needs and expectations of all stakeholders, both internal and external, was also described as necessary for exhibiting good corporate social responsibility. P1 stated, “I understood that having a strong business could help me better serve people and communities, and my business provided a livelihood for 45 staff members and their families.” P2 reported they demonstrated their commitment to corporate social responsibility by giving back to stakeholders:

We gave back to the public and received increased support from the public. We have been known as a business that gives back to the community. When things were bad in the economy, we looked after our customers, and they never forgot that kind act. At the celebration of our 75th anniversary, we rewarded our longest-serving customer with a monetary gift.

P2’s demonstration of corporate social responsibility had strategic intent. They gave back to the public, supported communities in times of need, and became known for being a

business that gave back. P2 perceived this strategy as critical to their organization's goal achievement and overall success.

Like P1 and P2, P5 also acknowledged the imperative and benefit of supporting communities and the public. P5 reported how being pro-social and supportive of stakeholders paid off:

We gave back a lot to our customers and the public. The business became a household name in the country and gained business as a result of giving back to communities. We continually supported communities that we served, and they gave back.

P1, P2, and P5 shared similar information regarding incorporating corporate social responsibility in their strategic approach. Embracing the cruciality of stakeholders by meaningfully supporting them strengthened the strategic approach. These participants used corporate social responsibility as a strategy to help sustain their operations and made gains in the credibility stakes.

Subtheme 3: Unique Customer Value Proposition

All participants reported that they used the strategic approach component of unique customer value proposition to support the operations of their businesses. Offering unique value to the customer was a key determinant of their businesses' success.

Survivability hinged on not only the quality of the products and services provided but also the appropriateness of customer engagement and the extent of product/service differentiation. P2 explicated how they esteemed unique customer value proposition and incorporated the same in their strategic approach to business conduct:

I made sure I satisfied the customers because it was important for the success of the business. Our vision statement includes ‘We are committed to serving generations and creating moments of joy...and giving customers the best quality service’.

P2 linked business success to providing the best service, and acknowledged that their organization exists to not only serve the customers but also satisfy their needs. Quality customer engagement and service helped make the business successful over its 75 years of operation.

P1 and P4 emphasized the criticality of good customer engagement and product/service provision to the economic sustainability of their businesses. P1 shared, “Our service is what allowed us to grow and be a business and survive.” Similarly, P4 explained, “It was about building client relationships to keep the business alive, so as a strategy, I had to build the client relationship.” P5 not only acknowledged the cruciality of making a good customer value proposition but also recounted the dynamic capabilities they brought to bear on delivering the same:

We were flexible in terms of what we offered customers and made their loan repayments as affordable as possible. We emphasized operational efficiency so that customers would not have to wait long, and they came to us because of our quick turnaround time.

Ensuring staff were motivated to go the extra mile to achieve customer satisfaction was critical.

The findings revealed that owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS offered unique value by focusing on customers' needs and expectations and including differentiation in their strategic approach. They considered unique customer value proposition as a business imperative to sustain their operations. Participants empowered their staff through training and motivation to serve customers in a very friendly, courteous, and respectful manner which oftentimes led to repeat business.

Subtheme 4: Long-Term Business Aim

Two of five participants referenced having a long-term business aim. This strategy involved recognizing that the business has a life of its own which must be nurtured over time. P1 discussed the longevity of their business and its status as an entity separate from the owner-manager:

The business should outlast me as owner-manager. We have just gone past 30 years since incorporation in 1993. I did whatever I was able to do to survive those first 3 years, and the business has been successful for the past 30 years.

P1 saw the importance of having a long-term business aim even beyond the years of their involvement as the owner-manager. They not only contrived the business' success over the first 3 years but also mediated its successful operation over an additional 27 years by aiming to have the business continue operating for a long time. Compared to P1, P2 went further than sharing about their long involvement in the business to discuss survivorship beyond the founding owner-manager and the business' growing disposition to succeed over time:

I have been working in the business for the past 52 years and managing it for the past 40 years. My father started the business in 1949 and we are now celebrating the 75th anniversary. Our business has been operating successfully for 75 years with a track record of growth and banks are more willing to work with businesses that have a track record. The business will continue for many, many, many more years to come. It takes time to grow, it's not going to happen overnight.

The contributing participants embraced having a long-term business aim as an antecedent to their businesses' success and survival beyond 3 years. Having a long-term business aim was an important element of their strategic approach to business.

Subtheme 5: Succession Planning

Two of five participants mentioned succession planning as a component of their strategic approach to business. This strategy included owner-managers' willingness to 'let go and step aside' and take deliberate steps to equip potential successors to assume leadership to ensure business continuity. This was a key element of the strategic approach taken to support organizational longevity. P1 referred to succession planning as follows:

I hold many roles that conflict but I recognized my responsibility to develop those roles to become independent of me in the interest of viability and sustainability of the business. I've even started to let it out that I am retiring and that I am very happy for anyone to take on the business.

P1 connected succession planning with the viability and sustainability of the business.

This comports with P1's earlier statement on long-term business aim, "the business should outlast me as owner-manager." P2's experience was different from that of P1 in

that P2 was the beneficiary of organizational succession. P1 shared about succession planning as follows:

My father knew the importance of continuity and stepped back and allowed me and my brother to manage under his guidance. However hard you have worked to build the business up, it will fail if you don't have continuity. As you die, the business dies.

Collectively, P1 and P2 confirmed that succession planning was used as an effective strategy to help sustain the operations of their businesses. Making appropriate provisions for employees to fill vacancies within the business as others pass away, retire, or move on was considered critical to averting business disruption and cessation.

The study's findings indicated that participants affirmed using a strategic approach to business to sustain the operations of MSMEs beyond 3 years. One of the strategies under the ambit of a strategic approach was strategy planning and implementation which involved practices such as information gathering, plan formulation and implementation, and performance monitoring and evaluation for plan effectiveness. Another strategy was corporate social responsibility which began with acknowledging a duty of care toward key stakeholders and prioritizing the needs and expectations of all stakeholders, both internal and external. Unique customer value proposition, long-term business aim, and succession planning were also important pillars of having a strategic approach to business conduct. Meeting customers' needs and expectations and ensuring differentiation supported business survivability. Acknowledging the business' perpetual

life independent of the owner-manager, and effectively planning for succession were other key elements of a strategic approach.

These findings which affirm taking a strategic approach as an effective strategy owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS used to sustain their operations beyond 3 years are consistent with those of previous studies and extend knowledge in the discipline. Organizational performance hinges on strategy, and firms concerned about goal achievement and overall success must operate based on a well-founded business strategy, relying on strong internal and external analysis of the environment in which they carry out their activity (Abdulwase et al., 2020; Ghicajanu, 2021). Taking a strategic approach to business conduct is imperative. Studies conducted in both Nigeria and Yemen showed that SME performance and survival positively correlate with survival strategies and strategic variables including strategic thinking, strategic planning, and strategic innovation (Adebisi & Bakare, 2019; AlQershi, 2021). Owner-managers of successful MSMEs contrived superior organizational performance through a strategic approach to conducting business.

The current findings align with resource-based view (RBV) and dynamic capabilities (DC) theories. An effective strategic approach to business must consider both the firm's strategically relevant resources and its dynamic capabilities that underpin survivorship adaptation and opportunistic capitalization on environmental shifts (Barney, 1991; Teece & Pisano, 1994). Strategy planning and implementation, corporate social responsibility, customer value proposition, long-term business aim, and succession planning support the RBV and DC theories. Thus, the current study findings validate the

use of a strategic approach as an effective strategy to sustain the operations of MSMEs beyond 3 years.

Theme 2: Managerial Competence

All five participants described strategies that can be categorized as managerial competence. Managerial competence is the composite ability of an individual, based on knowledge, skills, and experience, to effectively perform duties including planning, organizing, staffing, controlling, and directing (Kezaabu et al., 2024). The participants who contributed to this theme reported using a total of three managerial competency strategies, as follows: (Sub-theme 1) business acumen, (Sub-theme 2) focus on organizational resources, and (Sub-theme 3) outsourcing and networking. Table 5 indicates the number of participants who reported using each strategy and the number of times each strategy was mentioned in the data. A more detailed discussion of each strategy follows.

Table 5

Managerial Competence

Sub-theme	<i>n</i> of participants who contributed data to sub-theme (<i>N</i> =5)	<i>n</i> of excerpts from data assigned to sub-theme
Business acumen	5	22
Focus on organizational resources	5	38
Outsourcing and networking	3	17

Subtheme 1: Business Acumen

All five participants referenced the need for and/or reliance upon business acumen to support the operations of their businesses. The demonstration of business acumen encompassed a couple of fundamentals. First, it involved knowledge of the art of business in general and savviness regarding the specific nuances related to the type of business. Having business sense can help owner-managers of MSMEs sustain the operations of their business. P5 discussed how having business acumen helped establish their business and demonstrate organizational resilience:

I always said that as a manager, my responsibility is to achieve the goals and objectives of my business. I worked at a financial institution before opening my own business and was able to carry the experience I gained into my own business. My experience is tremendous and it has helped us to bounce back quickly when we had lows.

With their experience, P5 was able to implement operational structures that were critical to the success of their business. P5 attributed the growth and development of their business to the experience they gained while working at a bank for over 24 years, including exposure to strategic planning processes.

The other aspect of business acumen is business qualification. P5 reported, “I have a master’s degree in business administration, and I always followed Henri Fayol’s principles of management.” P5 was able to apply the knowledge acquired from her academic pursuits to satisfy the transactional imperatives of their business. Similarly, P4 was able to leverage prior experience to help run their businesses effectively. P4 stated, “I

came from a firm environment (before starting my business), so I had opportunity to observe.” Being able to accumulate business sense generally, and relevant industry savviness specifically, helped ensure necessary managerial competence to help sustain business operations in a new entity. In contrast to P4 and P5, P1 had no prior business qualification or experience but reportedly saw the need for it:

I had no qualification in business and had to learn business along the way. I learned some of the issues associated with the power of owning a business that I did not appreciate when I started the business. (Eventually), when I looked at something, I looked at the balance sheet both sides and made a wise decision.

P1 recognized that business acumen was a necessity, assessed that they lacked the same, and took appropriate measures to self-equip.

P2 and P3 made poignant statements regarding the utility of business acumen in running their businesses. P2 reported, “You have to understand that when you take in a thousand dollars or two thousand dollars a day, it is not profit.” The basic concepts of accounting are indispensable to successful business conduct. P3 stated, “Our experience guided our decision-making with regard to strategy going forward.” Thus, business acumen helped to support organizational survivability.

Subtheme 2: Focus on Organizational Resources

All five participants provided responses that indicated focusing on organizational resources. Organizational resources participants incorporated in the strategies to sustain the operations of their enterprises included financial resources, human resources, premises and equipment, informational resources, and technology. The availability and

use of resources facilitated strategic determinations and measures relative to managerial competence. P1 related how the use of organizational resources enabled the start and growth of their enterprise:

I got the business started with \$60,000 and my network. This business has grown from 5 employees in 1993 and in one location, to 45 employees in nine locations, and in annual revenues from \$500,000 to \$9 million.

As shown by P1, the scope of enterprise operations and the prospects for continuing economic feasibility hinged on the availability and prudent use of organizational resources. As the business developed, it generated additional resources from profitable operations, including necessary plant and equipment and human capital to deliver quality service that would otherwise not be possible.

Reporting on the criticality of organizational resources to their managerial remit, P2 shared how they had to maintain a large inventory of parts for equipment and machinery. Back-up equipment, back-up machinery, and back-up parts had to be kept to support business continuity. A keen focus on organizational resources was paramount. Similarly, P4 emphasized the cruciality of assessing resource requirements for business functionality when they shared that they concentrated on managing their limited financial resources and explored maximizing the use of technology to help bridge funding gaps. Participants regarded essential resources to support the operations of their enterprises and contrived prudent allocation of the same. Focus on organizational resources was a strategy connected to managerial competence.

Subtheme 3: Outsourcing and Networking

Three of the five participants reported using the strategy of outsourcing and networking as a component of managerial competence. Outsourcing and networking involved hiring out key functions in the enterprise to third parties, collaborating, and interacting with others to make professional connections for information exchange. Through outsourcing and networking, owner-managers could extend the range and scope of their managerial competence and delivery capacity and enhance sustaining the operations of their enterprises. P1 related how networking and collaboration enlarged the pool of informational resources and augmented the service delivery capacity of the business:

The next thing that was important was networks, partnerships, and alliances. As a government lab director, I had developed relationships with suppliers and doctors who are primary clients and when I moved into my business many of them were willing to support. I got business ideas from suppliers and from the various professional associations in which I held membership. Also, when we needed to expand the business into genomic testing, we could not afford it, so we contracted overseas providers to do those tests that we were not able to do and strategically created the perception that we could do any (lab) test required.

Outsourcing and networking connected P1 to strategically important informational resources that were otherwise inaccessible and enabled them to provide products and services that could not be delivered using internal resources alone. Regarding the

assigned value of informational resources, P1 stated, “We use information for evidence-based decision-making.”

P3 conveyed that they depended on outsourcing to enhance the managerial expertise needed to support their operations when they stated, “I got a consultant in business management and did a 5 year projection and plan.” Further, outsourcing and networking were used to address critical human capital deficiencies. P3 reported as follows:

We wanted to make the family an integral part of the business, however, it grew upon us and then we started to outsource a number of stuff such as accounting.

When we began doing pathways and gazebos, we engaged a builder to do it. To put together a presentation to a potential client, we had to outsource it and get a landscape designer or architect who is guided as to what we want included.

Whenever a call for proposal is sent out by any company project, we asked for help, meaning I brought in somebody who wrote projects and did presentations well.

According to P4, using outsourcing and networking was instrumental in growing the client base, and ideating to devise strategies to overcome organizational challenges. P4 shared the following:

Building client relationships came before advertisement, before joining every organization, Rotary, whatever have you. The main driver of the client base was referral, so I listed on platforms like Chambers website. After assessing the

impact of the global financial crisis on my business, I had conversations with my advisors. I had these unofficial advisors who I reached out to from time to time. P4 used professional platforms like Chambers website as a promotional mechanism in place of the traditional forms of advertising to grow their client base. Also, they tapped advisory resources outside of the enterprise to boost their managerial competence and sustain the operations of the business.

Current study findings revealed managerial competence strategies including business acumen, focus on organizational resources, and outsourcing and networking. Business acumen supported operational effectiveness and encompassed general knowledge of the art of business, savviness regarding the specific nuances related to the type of business, and business academic qualifications. Organizational resources that participants focused on included financial resources, human resources, premises and equipment, and informational resources. The availability and use of these resources facilitated strategic determinations and actions relative to managerial competence. Outsourcing and networking involved hiring out key functions in the enterprise to third parties, collaborating, and interacting with others to make professional connections for information exchange. This enabled owner-managers to extend the range and scope of their managerial competence and delivery capacity and enhance sustaining the operations of their enterprises. This theme addressed the study problem and research question by authenticating various strategies owner-managers of MSMEs used to sustain their operations beyond 3 years.

The results are consistent with the scholarship which revealed that managerial competence is a primary antecedent MSMEs' successful performance and survival. Organizational success at MSMEs hinges on owner-managers managerial competence, and the requisite range of skills critical to MSME growth and development includes financial management, marketing, human relations, and entrepreneurship (Ng'ora et al., 2022). This study's findings can help owner-managers of MSMEs implement effective strategies such as acquiring and applying business acumen, focusing on organizational resources, and engaging in outsourcing and networking. When MSME owner-managers apply managerial competence and effectively discharge their duties, both organizational success and longevity can result (Gu et al., 2022; Ng'ora et al., 2022). Therefore, these strategies would help owner-managers of MSMEs and other corporate leaders to sustain the operations of their enterprises beyond 3 years.

The current study findings are consistent with the RBV and DC theories. Managerial competence overlays effectiveness in the key areas of planning, organizing, staffing, controlling, and directing which must regard both the strategic resource base and environmental vagaries for successful business outcomes (Ferreira et al., 2022; Gyemang & Emeagwali, 2020; Kezaabu et al., 2024; Šmaguc, 2022).

Theme 3: Leadership Effectiveness

All five participants described strategies that support leadership effectiveness. Leadership occurs when an individual influences other people, through engagement and connection, to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2022). In an organizational context, this includes being charismatic, individually considerate, and intellectually stimulating

(McCann et al., 2020). Inescapable organizational change in the context of a constantly changing environment requires calculated disruption that is feasible only through leadership effectiveness (Endrejat & Burnes, 2022). The participants who contributed to this theme reported using a total of three leadership effectiveness strategies, as follows: (Sub-theme 1) vision, mission, purpose, and value, (sub-theme 2) human capital development and deployment, and (Sub-theme 3) organizational change and adaptation. Table 6 indicates the number of participants who reported using each strategy and the number of times each strategy was mentioned in the data. A more detailed discussion of each strategy follows.

Table 6

Leadership Effectiveness

Sub-theme	<i>n</i> of participants who contributed data to sub-theme (<i>N</i> =5)	<i>n</i> of excerpts from data assigned to sub-theme
Vision, mission, purpose, and values	4	18
Human capital development and deployment	5	60
Organizational change and adaptation	4	20

Subtheme 1: Vision, Mission, Purpose, and Values

Four participants referred to vision, mission, purpose, and values. These expressions of corporate aspirations ranged from faith-based resolutions to organizational strategic intents and commitments. For P1, awareness of their spiritual purpose was inextricably tied to the vision, mission, purpose, and values of the enterprise:

This is all a spiritual journey for me and we are saving lives and caring for people. Someone said to me, it must be good to be able to help God's greatest creation by doing your work and actually earning a livelihood doing that. I think number 1 (strategy) is having a clear vision and mission and understanding of the business and what the business is to achieve.

As P1's response conveyed, the fundamental tenets of spirituality carried significant valence regarding organizational aims and the values they committed to upholding. They prioritized communicating the organization's vision and mission to both employees and clients. Clear vision, mission, and purpose undergirded the achievement of the enterprise's goals and objectives, and commitment to a set of faith-infused values ensured progression toward the same.

Like P1, P5 proffered that their enterprise's economic sustainability hinged on strategies that were influenced by their spiritual posture:

My responsibility is to basically achieve the goals and objectives of my business. My faith and trust in God was part of that strategy for the growth and development of this small business. I ensured that everything was done with a lot of integrity (and) I must give credit to God first of all.

P5 stated that they prayed a lot for the business, and integrity in their business conduct inured to the benefit of the enterprise. P3 explained that they, too, were purpose-driven and spiritually dependent when ensuring leadership to sustain the operations of their business. According to P3, "I was grounded and focused, and God's guidance was critical to the sustenance of the business." For P3, sustaining the operations of the business

enterprise necessitated maintaining a strong spirituality. P2, on the other hand, emphasized having a sense of direction and core values:

When confronted with challenges, I just made sure I focused on where I would love to go. In terms of core values, first we must trust, respect, then quality products, teamwork, commitment, accountability. You must have a goal and some direction, and upholding our parents' legacy is important.

Based on P2's report, having a declared future destination and a sense of how to navigate towards it helped overcome challenges, and values such as being faithful to the community and upholding the legacy of the parents (founding owner-managers) boosted the motivation and will to continue as a going concern.

Subtheme 2: Human Capital Development and Deployment

All five participants provided information that indicated they used the leadership effectiveness strategy of human capital development and deployment. Human capital development and deployment involved engaging, motivating, empowering, and delegating. Based on participants' reports, owner-managers prioritized the needs and expectations of employees, the ones charged with strategy implementation. P1 explained, "I approach human capital through a process of empowering them through listening, communication, and training, and we had ongoing continuing education and professional development." For P1, human capital development and deployment also encompassed engaging, motivating, and building team spirit:

My hands were in the business with my people working side by side and there was respect and understanding and leadership that came from being with them on

the front line and not somewhere at the end of a phone giving directions. The business itself became a personnel development space for people. We had general staff meetings and staff would feedback to me issues and suggestions that I took to develop new strategies. I recognized entire teams and avoided creating stars because the team is the star.

Thus, P1 described how leadership in their enterprise facilitated providing “rigorous training” and learning opportunities for developing human capital and deploying to support ideation and team-based goal achievements. P1’s approach to human capital development and deployment was complex and integrative. They communicated with and engaged employees, provided learning opportunities, encouraged collaboration, and motivated and inspired.

The lived experiences of P3 and P5 were concordant with that of P1. P3 shared, “My management (leadership) style and interpersonal relationship with the staff made them feel comfortable and this was critical to staff longevity and the quality of work they performed.” Making the staff feel comfortable by being relational inspired performance excellence and loyalty. P5 stressed the importance of human capital to the success of the enterprise:

We placed a lot of emphasis on our human resources as the driving force behind the success. The business was fortunate in that we could boast that our staff were skilled, knowledgeable, and experienced, and had been able to mitigate a lot of threats that came our way. What was critical was a motivated staff as we believed if staff is motivated the business would grow.

P5 not only acknowledged and facilitated development of human resource skills sets but also ensured requisite employee motivation. They used employee motivation as a tool to contrive business success.

P4 described a different experience from the other contributing participants. Whereas P1, P3, and P5 stressed the importance of human capital and recounted initiatives undertaken to develop and deploy them, P4 focused on the difficulty encountered when using this leadership strategy. P4 expounded as follows:

The most difficult issues I had in running my business was how to manage my human capital. My human capital was the weakest part of my business. It was difficult to find and retain good staff. I have had to build the capacity of the human capital. I applied strategies to improve the human capital and used human capital to address business opportunities.

P4 experienced that human capital development and deployment as a leadership effectiveness strategy was complex and agonizing, but also acknowledged its indispensability to the organizational success.

Subtheme 3: Organizational Change and Adaptation

Four of five participants referenced organizational change and adaptation. This leadership effectiveness strategy included confronting the change imperative through acknowledgment of the same and instigating the requisite action to transform. P4 described how they embraced the compulsion to change which emanated from the reverberations of economic shocks:

There has been several iterations of the firm. Economic shocks put us in a position where we had to downsize. I made decisions to rationalize staff, rationalize resources, make adjustments, and do things we had not done before. I made some structural changes which determined who I brought into the firm. A lot of times when something occurs, it almost drives us to the next level.

P4 recognized that inescapable external forces compelled a structural adjustment response for survival and acted accordingly. In response to economic shocks that dealt death blows to their business, P4 implemented changes and adapted to a new level of practice.

Whereas P4's provocation to change and adapt was rooted in the vagaries of macroeconomics, P2's motivation was fueled largely by internal stimuli. P2 explained how they contrived calculated disruption to overcome organizational inertia to succeed and grow. P2 stated, "When my father decided to transition the business from manual labor to machinery, some staff were not willing to change and he had to insist that they use the machinery in order to increase production." P2 saw the importance of insisting on change and adaptation against all odds to secure organizational wellness. Similarly, P1 reflected, "That's what came together in the 'melly mellarge' of the development of our business approaches and strategies and the reforming of them and constant changing, because if we remained constant, we would have died."

The study's findings revealed participants affirmed the use of leadership effectiveness strategies to sustain the operations of their enterprises, which is a critical factor in ensuring the survivability of MSMEs beyond 3 years. One of these strategies

was being true to vision, mission, purpose, and values, the epitomes of organizational solidarity and inspiration. Another strategy was human capital development and deployment which involved engaging, motivating, empowering, and delegating. Providing learning opportunities, encouraging collaboration, and motivating and inspiring employees were key emphases of participants. Organizational change and adaptation was a third leadership effectiveness pillar and encompassed recognizing and embracing the constancy of change by initiating actions to address it.

These findings empirically corroborate leadership effectiveness as a successful strategy owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS use to sustain their operations beyond 3 years and are consistent with those of previous studies and extend knowledge in the discipline. A firm's performance and sustainability pivot on the critical marriage of competent leadership and dedicated, engaged employees (Karaokur Akdag & Çetin, 2022). Leadership effectiveness produces the requisite strength of belief in collective pursuits through processes of choreographed human behavioral adjustment that yield organizational transformation for not only survival but also enhanced performance and even competitive advantage (Ali et al, 2021; Eller et al., 2023; Fedynets, 2022; Turja, 2021). Strategic resource exploitation including maximizing human capital can be an impossible proposition outside of a leadership effectiveness context. An examination of inhibitors of MSME performance and sustainability in the Angolan context revealed that effective leadership properly addresses MSME primal challenges that antecede their failure (Franco et al., 2021). Applying leadership effectiveness is an indispensable law of MSME survivability.

The current findings on the cruciality of leadership effectiveness for MSME sustainability register concordance with resource-based view (RBV) and dynamic capabilities (DC) theories. Effective leadership is the cohesive constituent at the nexus of the strategic resources and dynamic capabilities of firms including MSMEs, which produces sustainability and enhanced competitiveness (Chen et al., 2021; Muneeb et al., 2023; Rodriguez et al., 2021). Organizational solidarity factors (vision, mission, purpose, values), human capital development and deployment, and organizational change and adaptation validate the RBV and DC theories. Therefore, the current study findings authenticate implementing leadership effectiveness as an effective strategy to sustain the operations of MSMEs beyond 3 years.

Theme 4: Entrepreneurial Orientation

Four of five participants described actions and behaviors that can be identified as entrepreneurial orientation. Entrepreneurial orientation is the creative synthesis of aggressive proactivity, sacrificial effort, risk-taking, and innovativeness directed at organizational goal achievement (Nuryakin, 2024). The participants who contributed to this theme reported using a total of three entrepreneurial orientation strategies: (Sub-theme 1) willingness to take risks, (Sub-theme 2) sacrifice, focus, and hard work, and (Sub-theme 3) innovation and technology. Table 7 highlights the number of participants who reported using each strategy and the number of times each strategy was referenced in the data. A more detailed discussion of each strategy follows.

Table 7*Entrepreneurial Orientation*

Sub-theme	<i>n</i> of participants who contributed data to sub-theme (<i>N</i> =5)	<i>n</i> of excerpts from data assigned to sub-theme
Willingness to take risks	4	7
Sacrifice, focus, and hard work	4	7
Innovation and technology	4	13

Subtheme 1: Willingness to Take Risks

Four participants reported using the entrepreneurial orientation strategy of willingness to take risks. According to the contributing participants, willingness to take risks meant that the MSME owner-manager trusted in a source of capability outside of themselves demonstrating confidence and fearlessness and pushing past organizational defensive routines to quickly seize identified opportunities. P1 explained how they demonstrated a willingness to take risks:

It (the business) has been successful for the past 30 years but there is no guarantee that it will remain successful, so we must have faith. I had the faith that I could, and of course I have the knowledge, and I had the courage to do it. You got to have faith that if you do it right, it will succeed.

In assimilating P1's response, it may be perceived that their willingness to take risks was rooted in spirituality including placing trust in a higher-order source of capability. The human competencies of knowledge and courage were augmented with spiritual belief to produce success contriving capability. Although P1 could not be certain that essential

knowledge and courage would yield success, they exercised faith that it would be so.

Also, even though the business “has been successful for the past 30 years”, P2 still needed to exercise faith for present and prospective successful organizational outcomes.

P3 recounted how they seized the opportunity to start their business and continued being fearless and confident regarding successful enterprise performance:

I saw the need for upward mobility, not within the public service, but that I could stand and start my own business. Just yesterday a friend was saying to me, boy you still so brave, you have no fear, and that’s the level of confidence in which I went into business when I resigned from my job.

Thus, P3 conveyed that willingness to take risks, or unhesitatingly seizing opportunities and being fearless and confident, had the purpose of actuating entrepreneurial orientation and contributing to sustaining the operations of their enterprise.

Subtheme 2: Sacrifice, Focus, and Hard Work

Four of five participants indicated that they used the entrepreneurial orientation strategy of sacrifice, focus, and hard work. P1 described the nature of their sacrifice and hard work to sustain the operations of their enterprise as follows:

There were times when I had to humble myself to suppliers when I could not meet their conditions and requirements, and explained to them why and asked them to have the patience and faith to stay with me while I get to a place where I could meet all their conditions. I worked very hard in the business as well because if I wanted my business to succeed, I had to work in the business and not be hands-off.

Based on P1's response, successful business operation was a function of hard work and sacrifice. The business was less likely to succeed if P1 did not hard work and make sacrifices including suffering discomfort in pursuit of favors from suppliers. P3 and P4 also described the sacrificial nature of contriving the success of their respective businesses. P3 stated, "I set out not to fail but to make it, and it took family time and determination to succeed." P4 shared, "I would have given everything to make sure that the business stayed on track." Sacrifice and hard work were entrepreneurial orientation imperatives that helped bolster the businesses' sustainability.

P2 also shared about working hard but stressed the primacy of being focused. P2 conveyed that working hard must be ring-fenced by mental perspicacity for the achievement of desired business outcomes, as follows:

So I stayed focused on really what I wanted to achieve. You have to put the time in, you must have that mindset, be mentally strong and focused on what you want to achieve. And every successful business person will tell you not only working hard, not only staying focused, but also mentally prepare yourself that you will succeed.

P2 ascribed great importance to fixating on goal achievement and overall success as a strategy to support business sustainability.

Subtheme 3: Innovation and Technology

Four participants indicated that they used the entrepreneurial orientation strategy of technology and innovation. P4 explained how they prioritized innovation and

depended on technology as an indispensable component of their enterprise's operating infrastructure:

Before I started my own firm, I researched available technology that was unique to my type of business because I saw that there were particular problems. I kept abreast of technology and what was available to assist me in my work. As a small business, I did not have access to financial and other resources to staff (the firm) like larger businesses, so I determined that technology was key to bridge that gap.

In extracting meaning from P4's contribution, it can be perceived that their business' proper functionality depended on innovation creativity, and technology deployment. P4 innovated their business with technology-based techniques and processes that were more time- and cost-efficient than traditional methods and approaches. The business established a strong Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn presence to promote its service offerings. Regarding the feasibility of operational efficiency in a resource-deficient environment, P4 asserted that they could not provide complete and effective oversight of their business operations without the use of technology. Technology helped keep tabs on all aspects of the operations.

The other contributing participants provided insights regarding the innovation and technology dependency of their business enterprises. P1 shared that in their type of business (healthcare), "innovation and technology is everything" and has undergirded the operations of their enterprise. P2 declared, "I tried to be innovative and diversified my products, and embracing technology was always occurring in our business." According to P3, technology has done well for them even though "we could utilize it more in terms of

social media.” OECS MSME owner-managers used innovation and technology to enable higher levels of operational efficiency which enhanced their sustainability.

Participants disclosed practices and approaches that can be identified as entrepreneurial orientation strategies to effectively support their operations beyond 3 years. Entrepreneurial orientation is demonstrated by using combinations of risk-taking, proactivity and creativity, and innovative attitudes to leverage emerging economic conditions and technological capability (Nuryakin, 2024). Research findings revealed that using the entrepreneurial orientation strategy of willingness to take risks helped MSME owner-managers demonstrate confidence and fearlessness and push past organizational defensive routines to quickly seize identified opportunities. According to the participants, demonstrating a willingness to take risks meant that the MSME owner-manager trusted in a source of capability beyond themselves. Sacrifice, focus, and hard work was also an effective strategy to support enterprise operations. Sacrificing to contrive beneficial outcomes and fixating on goal accomplishment helped strengthen MSME survivability. OECS MSME owner-managers also used innovation and technology as an effective strategy to enhance operational efficiency and overall sustainability.

The study findings affirm entrepreneurial orientation as an effective strategy owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS used to sustain their operations beyond 3 years. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies and extend knowledge in the discipline. The elements of entrepreneurial orientation are critical to MSME performance (Octasyilva et al., 2022). Lack of entrepreneurial orientation precludes MSMEs’ effective adaptation to constantly changing environmental conditions

including economic and technological opportunities and threats. Studies conducted in European, Mexican, and South African contexts showed that entrepreneurial orientation including being innovative, flexible, adaptable, and risk-tolerant drives MSME productivity and competitiveness (Fanelli, 2021; Matekenya & Moyo, 2022; Molina-Sanchez et al., 2022). Owner-managers of successful MSMEs enhanced their performance and growth capacities by adopting entrepreneurial orientation.

The current findings align with resource-based view (RBV) and dynamic capabilities (DC) theories. Entrepreneurial orientation, which encompasses attitudes, actions, and behaviors pertinent to resource allocation, is inextricably linked to dynamic capabilities for necessary and appropriate organizational responses to environmental dictates (Ferreira et al., 2022; Gyemang & Emeagwali, 2020; Octasyilva et al., 2022; Šmaguc, 2022). Having a willingness to take risks, being sacrificial, focused, and hard-working, and embracing innovation and technology, regard both the strategic resource base and the external environment of the firm, supporting the RBV and DC theories. Thus, the current study findings affirm adopting entrepreneurial orientation as an effective strategy to sustain the operations of MSMEs beyond 3 years.

Business Recommendations for Professional Practice

This study's findings are potentially beneficial to owner-managers of MSMEs who need effective strategies to support the operations of their enterprises and mitigate failure. A critical and challenging issue for MSMEs is the liability of smallness which can be difficult to overcome resulting in low viability. They are disproportionately challenged, especially vulnerable, and fail at a high rate (Franco et al., 2021; Jayasekara

et al., 2020; Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). Therefore, identified strategies that owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS use to sustain their operations beyond 3 years offer constructs that may be viewed by owner-managers of MSMEs as considerations vital to their performance and survivability. The discovered strategies enhanced MSME sustainability through processes and discoveries that were rooted in both pre-meditation and chance. They helped improve MSMEs' profitability, increase their competitiveness, and support their longevity. The study was not sector-specific and therefore allowed uncovering strategies applied across various business sectors in which MSMEs proliferate.

The findings may provide current and future owner-managers of MSMEs with practical, effective strategies to remain profitable and viable beyond 3 years. The survivability of MSMEs within the 3-year horizon can be as low as 20% due to a myriad of failure factors (Mahender & Dahiya, 2022; Mhlongo & Daya, 2023; Ng'ora et al., 2022). Owner-managers of MSMEs can apply the strategies used by their successful OECS counterparts to mitigate business failure. These emerged strategies encompass four underlying themes: (a) a strategic approach, (b) managerial competence, (c) leadership effectiveness, and (d) entrepreneurial orientation. Uncovered from the data collected in semistructured interviews, these themes embody appropriate responses to business practice imperatives, having regard for both the strategic resource base and the external environment of the firm. All participants conveyed the high significance of each theme to their current success. Taking a strategic approach, being managerially competent, demonstrating leadership effectiveness, and assuming entrepreneurial orientation are

practical, effective strategies that help support MSME survivability beyond 3 years in the OECS context. Current and future owner-managers of MSMEs must understand the consequence of the identified themes or strategies relative to mediating the success of the study participants. If they prioritize these strategies, the chances of sustaining their operations beyond 3 years could potentially increase.

Based on the study findings, I propose several actions that current and future owner-managers of MSMEs can take to increase their chances of remaining profitable and sustaining their operations beyond 3 years. First, current and/or future owner-managers of MSMEs should take a strategic approach to conduct business. An owner-manager of an MSME can approach starting and running a business either strategically or impetuously. I discovered that all interview participants highly regarded a strategic approach. Being strategic helps connect business decisions, actions, and behaviors with a clear endgame, and is especially vital when goal achievement is elusive. Strategic approaches are platforms for success. Organizational performance hinges on the extent and nature of strategic intentions and concomitant efforts including plan formulation, implementation, evaluation, and modification (Abdulwase et al., 2020). Each MSME owner-manager interviewed conveyed how they had to take a strategic approach to business conduct and contrive goal achievement and overall success. Many MSMEs are formed out of compulsion and do not prioritize taking a strategic approach (Adebisi & Bakare, 2019; Octasylyva et al., 2022; Rupeika-Apoga & Petrovska, 2022). Owner-managers of MSMEs must consider that the aim of a strategic approach is successful

mission achievement. Taking a strategic approach established a clear pathway to goals having regard for the risks and resource requirements.

The second action or recommendation concerns managerial competence. I found that all participants highly regarded the role of business acumen and resource management capability in the successful operation of their businesses. Having the composite ability, based on knowledge, skills, and experience, to effectively discharge the functions of planning, organizing, staffing, controlling, and directing is critical to organizational wellness and overall success (Kezaabu et al., 2024). The remit of management is dealing with complexity which can be acute in MSME contexts. Good management capability mediates creating indispensable enabling conditions for firm profitability and growth and is imperative for disproportionately challenged MSMEs (AlQershi, 2021; Gu et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2021; Ng'ora et al., 2022). Current and future owner-managers of MSMEs must possess the requisite managerial competence for successful organizational performance. Owner-managers of MSMEs must possess general business sense and relevant specific industry savviness. They need to be able to prudently appropriate organizational resources including dynamic capabilities to effectively negotiate the constantly changing environment and remain viable. Managing inescapable operational complexity for profitability and growth is paramount.

The third action that current and/or future owner-managers of MSMEs should take encompasses leadership effectiveness. All interview participants of this study strongly emphasized the criticality of effective leadership behaviors to the success of their businesses. The acclaimed leadership behaviors that undergird the success of OECS

MSMEs include developing and honoring corporate statements, developing and deploying human capital, and embracing organizational change and adaptation. Organizational performance is inextricably linked to process management, supply quality management, and human resource management which, in turn, are directly related to management leadership (AlQershi, 2021). Bringing organization vision, mission, and values statements to life requires effective leadership, and the resultant strength of belief in collective pursuits is key to human behavioral adjustment for organizational transformation leading to survival and enhanced performance (Ali et al, 2021; Eller et al., 2023; Fedynets, 2022; Turja, 2021). Effective leadership is a panacea for the myriad of performance- and growth-inhibiting issues MSMEs face (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023; Sahoo & Thakur, 2023). Without effective leadership, MSMEs are more likely to fail. Successful mandatory organizational transformation for survival can be impractical without the necessary change climate and organizational enabling that can only come from effective leadership (Purnell et al., 2023; Tran & Gandolfi, 2020). Current and future owner-managers of MSMEs should prioritize leadership effectiveness to support their operations.

The fourth action that I recommend is that current and/or future owner-managers of MSMEs adopt entrepreneurial orientation. Most of the interview participants underscored the importance of entrepreneurial orientation in their businesses. Aggressive proactivity, sacrificial effort, risk-taking, and innovativeness must be channeled toward organizational goal achievement to achieve success (Nuryakin, 2024). Entrepreneurial orientation is indispensable to MSME growth and survival, and many owner-managers

are deficient in this area (Franco et al., 2021). Current and/or future owner-managers of MSMEs must adopt entrepreneurial orientation by making sacrifices, being focused, working hard, and embracing innovation and technology to overcome market challenges for survivability and competitiveness. The constancy of change dictates organizational renewal, and consistent innovation in MSMEs is key to their survival (Avdeeva et al., 2021; Hanaysha et al., 2022). The common resource-deficient context of MSMEs demands entrepreneurial orientation of their owner-managers to ensure profitability and sustainability.

Implications for Social Change

This research study explored sustainability strategies for MSMEs located in the OECS and has implications for positive social change (PSC). The study identified effective strategies owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS can use to sustain their operations beyond 3 years. MSMEs are especially vulnerable and fail at a high rate (Franco et al., 2021; Jayasekara et al., 2020; Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). The sustainable operations of OECS MSMEs engendered by this study may generate employment in the respective region and increase disposable income for OECS residents, leading to improved living standards and community wellness. Sustainable business enterprises spur job creation and security and undergird community wholesomeness and national prosperity (You & Fan, 2020). The results of this study portend greater prospects for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within the OECS as the different ethnic, gender, and age groups of the region may more readily access opportunities for economic betterment and social upliftment provided by thriving MSMEs.

This study addressed MSME sustainability which is a strategic concern for not only owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS but also other stakeholders including employees, local governments, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). MSMEs represent the most common type of business venture, accounting for up to 90 percent of all businesses in some countries (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). These critical business enterprises form the backbone of national economies, contributing as high as 70 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and providing up to 80 percent of all employment (Ade et al., 2020; Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). Anecdotally, almost all business entities in the OECS are MSMEs. When applied, the findings and recommendations of this study may support the profitability and survivability of OECS MSMEs and, by extension, job creation, income generation, government revenues through taxation and levies, and community development through their corporate responsibility actions.

While this study's focus was the economic sustainability of MSMEs located in the OECS, related ecological and social sustainability factors are equally relevant to their longevity. The triad dimensions of sustainability (economic, ecological, and social) are intertwined with none holding primacy, and consideration of firm survivability should not be limited to one aspect only (Haywood, 2022; Mc Kim & Goodwin, 2021). This study's findings and conclusions may help create and apply ideas, strategies, and actions that promote the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, institutions, cultures, and societies within the OECS region. This augurs well for sustainability in the broadest context and positive social change in the OECS.

The essentiality of promoting positive social change through conducting relevant, quality research inspired this study on sustainability strategies for MSMEs located in the OECS. Conducting problem-driven research to address business issues that can make a difference in the lives of individuals and communities is crucial (Wickert et al. (2021). This study may help understand and influence thinking and behavior toward creating value equitable to OECS residents thus contributing to positive social change in the OECS region. The findings may enhance appreciation of the phenomenon and empower scholars to appropriate the knowledge gained including imparting the same to students to help them understand concepts related to effective strategies to sustain the operations of MSMEs.

Recommendations for Further Research

This qualitative pragmatic inquiry explored effective strategies owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS use to sustain their operations beyond 3 years. The study population consisted of owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS that have operated for more than 3 years. The small sample size of 5 participants is one of this study's limitations. Another limitation of this study is geographical restriction.

Many different variables influence the survivability of an MSME beyond 3 years. The information provided by participants was based on their lived experiences in owning and managing an MSME. Future researchers should continue exploring effective strategies owner-managers of MSMEs use to sustain their operations beyond 3 years because of their indispensability to national economies. This study unearthed four themes, which were (a) a strategic approach, (b) managerial competence, (c) leadership

effectiveness, and (d) entrepreneurial orientation. Future research can include delving deeper into these themes to understand better their significance to MSME sustainability and how to properly apply them. Also, the inclusion of quantitative methods could potentially expand the knowledge pool and research findings.

Future researchers should consider adjusting the geographical range, sample size, and/or industry focus which may yield different results. Although no independent assessment was done regarding the relative effectiveness of the strategies used, all participants credited the profitability and longevity of their enterprises to the said strategies. Further research should be conducted to examine the correlation between each identified strategy and the businesses' profitability and longevity. Establishing such a correlation may provide a deeper understanding of how owner-managers of MSMEs can mediate sustaining the operations of their enterprises beyond 3 years.

Leadership effectiveness was one of the main themes or strategies discovered in this study. Although participants described leadership behaviors that suggest a disposition to transformational leadership, no formal leadership style assessment was done. Future researchers should consider incorporating such assessments to explore more deeply and broadly the extent of leadership effectiveness on MSME sustainability. The nature and extent of a leader's influence to inspire voluntary actions and behaviors in followers can be complex. Further research that expands the scope of this study to include a leadership style assessment may yield different results.

Conclusion

MSMEs are critical business entities, disproportionately challenged, and fail at a high rate. The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore effective strategies that owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS use to sustain their operations beyond 3 years. The study was grounded in RBV and DC theories.

Participants were five owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS who implemented successful strategies that sustained their operations for more than 3 years. Data were collected using semistructured interviews, publicly available documentation, artifacts, and testimonials, which were analyzed using thematic coding and analysis. Thematic analysis is used for meaning-making from raw data regarding lived experiences of participants (Braune & Clarke, 2022).

The major themes that emerged were strategic approaches, managerial competence, (c) leadership effectiveness, and (d) entrepreneurial orientation. A key recommendation is that owner-managers of MSMEs should prioritize effective leadership to support their operations. Effective leadership is a panacea for MSME performance- and growth-inhibiting issues, and without effective leadership, MSMEs are likely to fail (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023; Sahoo & Thakur, 2023). Other key recommendations include taking a strategic approach to conducting business and prioritizing acquiring general business sense and relevant specific industry savviness. Good management leadership is an important antecedent to quality performance at MSMEs, particularly in terms of creating indispensable enabling conditions leading to profitability and growth (AlQershi, 2021; Gu et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2021; Ng'ora et al., 2022).

Implications for positive social change include the potential to generate employment in the OECS and increase disposable income for OECS residents, leading to improved living standards and community wellness in the region. Sustainable business enterprises spur job creation and security and undergird community wholesomeness and national prosperity (You & Fan, 2020). Results of this study portend greater prospects for diversity, equity, and inclusion within the OECS region. Many different variables influence survivability of MSMEs beyond 3 years. Future researchers should continue exploring effective strategies owner-managers of MSMEs use to sustain their operations beyond 3 years because of their indispensability to national economies. Although MSMEs are disproportionately challenged, implementing effective strategies can enhance their performance and economic sustainability.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in an interview for a study that I am conducting as part of my Doctorate of Business Administration research.

Interview Procedures:

If you agree to be part of this study, you will be invited to take part in an audio-recorded interview about your professional experiences. Opportunities for clarifying statements will be available (via a process called member checking). Transcriptions of interviews will be analyzed as part of the study, along with public documents and records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this study would not pose any risks beyond those of typical daily life. This study's aim is to provide data and insights that could be valuable to people in your profession.

Privacy:

Interview recordings and full transcripts will be shared with each interviewee, upon request. Redacted transcripts with names or sensitive information removed may be shared with my university faculty and my peer advisors. Any reports, presentations, or publications related to this study will share general patterns from the data, without sharing the identities of individual participants or partner organizations. The interview transcripts will be kept for at least 5 years, as required by my university.

Contacts and Questions:

If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Walden University Research Participant advocate via 612-312-1210. Walden University's ethics approval number for this study is 01-29-24-1173544.

Please share any questions or concerns you might have at this time. If you agree to be interviewed as described above, please reply to this email with the words, "I consent."

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Primary Business Research Phenomenon Under Study and Overarching Research

Question

The topic for my research project is *Sustainability Strategies for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises Located in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States*. The overarching research question is *What effective strategies do owner-managers of MSMEs located in the OECS use to sustain their operations beyond 3 years?*

Primary Research Goal to Achieve from This Interview

The purpose of this interview is to explore strategies that were used to sustain the operations of your business enterprise beyond three years.

Introduction

1. Thank you for participating in this study. Your participation in this educational project on the survivability of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) is important. It will help better understand how to support MSMEs, which are indispensable to national economies, in implementing appropriate strategies to sustain their operations.
2. I will be interviewing you and several other owner-managers of MSMEs. So, I hope to have adequate information for this research study. Before we get into the meat of things, I would like to go over just a few things with you.
3. First, you should know that your participation is totally voluntary. So, if I ask a question that you don't want to answer, or if you need to stop the interview at any time, just let me know.

4. Also, with your permission, I will be audiotaping the interview and taking some notes. Later, I will provide you with a transcript of the audiotape along with my notes so you can look at them, review them, and make any corrections that you see need to be made, making sure that we captured what you needed to say accurately.
5. This study may be shared with faculty members and colleague students and in sharing, there will be no mention of your names. Even if I use direct quotes, I will use pseudo names. It might also be used in conferences and professional meetings.
6. I will keep your shared information strictly confidential and safely stored for five years after my study's completion date and then destroy them.
7. Do you have any questions?
8. As you know, we have set about 60 - 90 minutes for this interview. Does that seem to be ok for you? We won't go beyond that time unless you wish to do so.
9. Is audiotaping still fine?
10. Ready to go?
11. Let's get started then!

Initial Probe Questions

1. Please state your name and title.
2. What is your current scope of responsibility within the organization?
3. How would you describe your tenure with the organization?
4. How would you describe the organizational experience of your company over the past several years?

Targeted Interview Questions

While asking these questions, I will watch for nonverbal cues, paraphrase as needed, and follow up on responses with probing questions to obtain more depth.

1. What strategies did you use to sustain the operations of your enterprise?
2. What organizational resources did you incorporate in the strategies to sustain the operations of your enterprise?
3. How did you use your human capital in the strategies to address business opportunities and threats?
4. What challenges did you encounter when developing and implementing strategies to sustain the operations of your enterprise?
5. How were the challenges that were encountered overcome?
6. How did you measure success regarding the implementation of strategies to sustain the operations of your enterprise?
7. What other information not already discussed would you like to share?

Targeted Follow-up Questions

1. Why was the way you used human and other organizational resources so important?
2. Why did the company address the challenges faced in that manner?
3. Why is that approach to strategic planning and strategy implementation so important?
4. Why is strategic management and organizational success measured in that manner?

Targeted Wrap-up Question

1. Is there anything else you feel can be important to this study?

Closing

1. Thank you very much for your time, The information you provided is valuable and will help me successfully complete my study.
2. I would like to schedule a follow-up interview with you to review and discuss the audiotape transcript and my notes to ensure I interpreted your responses accurately.
Would xx date and xx time be okay for you?
3. I will provide you with the transcript and notes at least three days in advance to allow you sufficient time to review.
4. Again, thank you very much for participating in my research study.