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Key Strategies to Entrepreneurial Sustainability in the Information and Communications Industry

Agabi Godwin Onugba
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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Agabi Godwin Onugba

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2026

Abstract

Key Strategies to Entrepreneurial Sustainability in the Information and Communications

Industry

by

Agabi Godwin Onugba

MBA, University of North Florida, 2008

BS, University of Calabar, 2002

Qualitative Pragmatic Inquiry Business Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

February 2026

Abstract

Many businesses in the information and communications industry fail within the first 5 years, yet the existing empirical research has not sufficiently explained how surviving businesses achieve long-term sustainability. Startup business leaders are concerned about the high failure rate and the lack of evidence-based strategies that support sustained operations beyond 5 years. Grounded in Porter's five forces theory, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to identify and explore successful strategies that information and communications industry startup business leaders use for long-term business sustainability beyond 5 years. Purposeful sampling was employed to select six startup leaders in the Dallas–Fort Worth, Texas metroplex information and communications industry, whose businesses had sustained operations for at least 5 years. Data were collected using semistructured interviews, publicly available industry reports, and published company statements. Four principal themes resulted from the thematic analysis: (a) operational and financial sustainability; (b) human capital and organizational capability; (c) market, innovation, and competitive strategy; and (d) customer-centric strategies. A key recommendation for startup business leaders is to institutionalize strategic agility by making agile management systems integral parts of their organizations. The implications for positive social change include the potential to promote innovation, benefiting business owners, employees, and the broader community.

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Section 1: Project Foundation

Background of the Problem

Twenty-one percent of U.S. businesses across all industries close within their first year of operations (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2024a). In the second year of existence, an additional 9% of U.S. businesses close, whereas 6% more of these ventures close in the third year of operations (BLS, 2024a). Forty-eight percent of all U.S. businesses do not operate through their fifth year (BLS, 2024a). The U.S. information and communications industry has an average closure rate of 56% within the first 5 years of operations, and 71% of these startups started in 2013 but stopped operating before 2024 (BLS, 2024b).

Researchers opined that (a) weak management teams (Argaw & Liu, 2024; Kessler et al., 2012), (b) the lack of industry experience (Argaw & Liu, 2024; Cassar, 2014), (c) unattractive markets with low profitability for new business entrants, (d) lack of innovative or appealing products or services, (e) lack of flexibility in strategy and technology, and (f) the liability of newness are the primary reasons for business startup closures (Argaw & Liu, 2024; Cusumano, 2013). Thus, new business exits are predominantly involuntary (Argaw & Liu, 2024), and with proper strategic planning, founders and business leaders of startups can surmount business obstacles and attain the long-term sustainability of their ventures (Argaw & Liu, 2024). By identifying successful strategies for startup founders, specifically those in the information and communications industry, the current study sought to aid these founders in initial strategic planning and business sustainability.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem was that some information and communications industry startup business leaders lack successful strategies for long-term business sustainability beyond 5 years. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to identify and explore successful strategies information and communications industry startup business leaders used for long-term business sustainability beyond 5 years. The target population for the project included startup business leaders in the information and communications industry whose businesses had operated for at least 5 years, indicating effective long-term sustainability strategies. A purposeful sampling method was used to select a minimum of six participants. Eligibility criteria included serving as a startup business leader in this industry and leading a company that had maintained operations for over 5 years through the implementation of long-term sustainability strategies.

Qualitative research methodology was appropriate for this research project because qualitative research is exploratory, and the phenomenon needed exploration to understand the underlying interplay of factors. Furthermore, qualitative research is best suited to understanding human behavior, answering “why” and “how” questions, thereby making the methodology appropriate for the current research project (see Bailey, 2014; Gill, 2024; Lewis, 2015). The pragmatic inquiry research design was appropriate for this project because the design addresses real-world problems that require practical solutions, focusing on contextual relevance and ensuring that the research findings are relevant and applicable to the setting in which the problem exists (see Ramanadhan et al., 2021). The

data for the project were collected from semistructured interviews with participants who had substantial experience of not less than 5 years. The data analysis process was thematic analysis. Member checking, data saturation, and data triangulation were used as part of the analysis process. Porter's (1979) five forces model was the conceptual base of this research. Porter developed a model called Porter's five forces that provides a system for assessing the competitive position of a company on key constructs.

Project Research Question

What successful strategies have information and communications industry business leaders used for business sustainability beyond 5 years?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are preconceptions believed to be accurate and a basis for the research conclusions but lack verification (Tufford & Newman, 2012). First, I assumed that all information provided by the research participants was accurate. The second assumption was that the interview questions were clear and understandable to participants, yielding the data necessary to determine project findings. Third, researcher bias was mitigated and insignificant to the research outcome.

Limitations

Research limitations are those characteristics of design or methodology that influence the interpretation of the research findings (Thain, 2023). The limitations of the current study were the constraints on generalizability, applications to practice, and/or utility of findings resulting from the choice of study design and/or the method used to

establish internal and external validity (see Kornbluh, 2015). There was a time constraint dictated by the time available to complete this academic program. However, the research problem was such that it is possible to dedicate many more years and even a lifetime to this topic. The qualitative pragmatic inquiry findings may also be context specific and not easily transferable to other settings or populations.

Business Project Ethics

As the researcher, I was responsible for carrying out the data collection. The data collection process involved designing the data collection method, conducting interviews, and ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the data (see Lim et al., 2025; Santinele Martino et al., 2024). The data for the project were collected from semistructured interviews with participants who had substantial experience of not less than 5 years. See Appendix A for the interview questions. The data analysis process was thematic analysis. I also managed and organized the data for analysis, adhering to ethical guidelines, and I obtained necessary approvals from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

I ensured that participants completed an informed consent form stating their voluntary participation in the research project (see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 1979). Ethics permeates the entire research process (Kolstoe & Pugh, 2024). Because participation in the current research project was voluntary, participants were free to withdraw their consent at any time during the research process by communicating their desire to do so. Research participants' notification by electronic mail, telephone, or any other convenient and reliable mode of communication regarding

their intent to withdraw from the research project would have been sufficient. Research participants would have been immediately removed from the research project as instructed, upon receipt of such communication, up until publication of the final project document. I offered participants no incentive to engage in this research project other than the opportunity to contribute to knowledge in the field.

The Belmont Report outlined three fundamental ethical principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (USDHHS, 1979). These principles guide researchers in ensuring participants' dignity, rights, and welfare (USDHHS, 1979). The Belmont Report's principles had a direct impact on my research. The principle of respect for persons emphasizes informed consent, ensuring that research participants fully knew the study's purpose, risks, and benefits (see USDHHS, 1979). The principle of respect for persons also highlights the need to protect vulnerable populations or persons with diminished autonomy, such as children, prisoners, economically disadvantaged individuals, cognitively impaired individuals, older individuals, pregnant women, and fetuses (USDHHS, 1979). My research did not involve any vulnerable population. The principle of beneficence required that I maximize potential benefits while minimizing harm to my research participants, do a careful risk assessment, and adhere to ethical decision making in my research design (see USDHHS, 1979). Being in this research project did not pose risks beyond those of typical daily life. Finally, the principle of justice ensures equitable selection of participants, avoiding exploitation of vulnerable groups and ensuring fair distribution of research benefits (USDHHS, 1979). I selected my participants from among entrepreneurs in the information and communications sector

who had sustained their businesses for over 5 years. Participants did not enjoy any benefits beyond the opportunity to contribute to knowledge in the field. By adhering to the principles of respect for people, beneficence, and justice, I upheld ethical standards and enhanced the credibility and integrity of my research project.

I concealed the participants' identities in the research process and the final paper (see Li et al., 2025). I did not include in the research records any information that could be used to identify participants, such as participants' names and contact information. Participants were given pseudonyms. These pseudonyms were random names chosen by participants. The nature of the research did not require participants to divulge any sensitive information, whether of personal or business nature. However, when participants disclosed any sensitive information, this information was kept confidential in accordance with ethical and legal research standards (see Li et al., 2025). Notification that I was an entrepreneur was necessary so that participants would not divulge any information they considered business secrets or related to their competitive advantage. The storage period for data generated during this research project was a minimum of 5 years; in further efforts to protect participants, I stored the data in a secure password-protected hard drive. During the research process, the data were stored and analyzed using a secure password-protected laptop. The adherence to all ethical standards prescribed by the IRB was paramount. My research project IRB approval number was 03-11-25-0406085.

Evidence-Based Integrative Review

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to identify and explore successful strategies startup business leaders in the information and communications industry used for long-term business sustainability beyond 5 years. With this literature review, I aimed to present to readers a summary of the body of knowledge existing on the research topic and describe where this research project lay in the existing body of knowledge. With this research project, I contributed to the existing body of knowledge while avoiding duplications. Google Scholar, ABI/INFORM Complete, Business Source Complete, Emerald Management Journals, and PsycINFO were some of the search engines and databases used to identify journal articles referenced in this research project. Keywords for journal article searches included the following: *entrepreneur, business startup, entrepreneurship, business survival, small business, Porter's five forces, lean startup, and strategic planning*. I drew the relevant reference materials from more than 800 initial sources.

Businesses constitute the cornerstone of economic growth, job creation, and innovation; however, their inherent volatility presents challenges to sustainability. Consequently, identifying strategies that promote long-term business success and survival remains critical. At both national and local levels, governments and institutions have implemented initiatives aimed at fostering new business development and sustainability (Iwasaki et al., 2022; Lerner & Malmendier, 2013; Rahmawati et al., 2025). The establishment and sustenance of businesses contribute to job creation, wealth accumulation, technological advancement, and improvements in the standard of living

(Lerner & Malmendier, 2013). Supporting this view, cross-national studies have demonstrated that countries with greater barriers to new business entry tend to experience weaker economic performance and higher levels of corruption (Djankov et al., 2002). Increasingly, scholars are examining startup development and sustainability from multiple perspectives (Argaw & Liu, 2024). Startups play a particularly significant role in employment generation, as nearly all net annual job growth is attributable to them (Branson, 2014; Haltiwanger, 2012). Despite their contributions, startups remain highly volatile and experience elevated exit rates (González et al., 2024).

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to identify and explore successful strategies that startup business leaders in the information and communications industry use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The information and communications industry was selected because it attracts a high number of young entrepreneurs (Marcu & Balteanu, 2015). For the purpose of this research project, the information and communications industry was defined as businesses engaged in software development, programming, web applications, e-commerce, and social networking, or those with substantial operations in these domains.

In this integrative literature review, I organized the discussion into three primary thematic sections—public policy and entrepreneurship, the dynamism of entrepreneurship, and leadership and business performance—each contributing to the understanding of startup sustainability. In the first section, I group and analyze research on government interventions, financing mechanisms, and regulatory challenges, highlighting the mismatch between policy design and entrepreneurial needs. In the

second section, I explore entrepreneurship's collaborative and unpredictable nature, focusing on stakeholder roles, innovation ecosystems, and the necessity of strategic partnerships, as illustrated through case studies. In the third section, I examine how relational leadership, talent, and experience influence business performance, drawing on theoretical and empirical studies to differentiate the roles of innate ability and learned competence in entrepreneurial success. I conclude the review by linking these insights to the qualitative, exploratory nature of the current research project, emphasizing the appropriateness of a pragmatic inquiry underpinned by Porter's (1979) five forces framework.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this project was Porter's (1979) five forces. Porter developed a model called Porter's five forces that provides a system for assessing a company's competitive position on key constructs. To develop strategy, business leaders must understand the nature of competition within their industry and how it affects their organization's situation (Porter, 1979; Rahmawati et al., 2025). Under the model, the nature and extent of competition in an industry depend on five forces (Rahmawati et al., 2025). The forces are "the threat of new entrants, the bargaining power of customers, the bargaining power of suppliers, the threat of substitute products or services, and the rivalry among existing competitors" (Porter, 1979, p. 137). Porter's five forces model applied to the current research project because, with the formation of a new business, the five forces play a role in business sustainability whether the manager is aware of these forces or not (see Pangarkar & Prabhudesai, 2024).

Understanding the five forces enables startup managers to identify their weaknesses and strengths, and develop strategies. A new business faces the threat of newer entrants that will contest for market share and the prospects of customers bargaining down prices, thus reducing profits. Additionally, there is the risk of suppliers of materials or labor holding the new business to ransom due to supplier bargaining power. Startups face the threat of losing market share because of disruptive technology (Loredana, 2024). Startup managers have to compete with their counterparts in entrenched businesses for market share and, in the process, face the possibility of retaliation (Setyoko & Nurcahyo, 2023). Understanding an industry based on the five forces enables a manager to know the weaknesses and strengths of being a startup (Budiyoko et al., 2024). Thus, with this understanding, managers may be positioned for better strategic planning to improve on weaknesses while using strengths to take advantage of opportunities in the market (Mizik & Balogh, 2022). Porter's five forces model applies directly to this research project by offering a framework through which startup managers, business development consultants, and entrepreneurial educators can assess the competitive pressures that influence their business viability and sustainability, thus enabling informed planning toward long-term success.

Porter (1979) stated that with an understanding of how these five competitive forces interplay within an industry and their impact on an organization, the business could adopt either of three strategic postures. The organization may use its capabilities to take a defensive stance against competition, or it may take the offensive, making strategic moves that improve the firm's position and dislodge the balance of the competitive forces

(Porter, 1979). Furthermore, the firm may take a position that enables the prompt exploitation of anticipated shifts in the balance of the competitive forces (Porter, 1979). Porter states how businesses can position themselves strategically to defend against competition, purposefully reshape industry forces, or quickly adapt to market shifts. Organizations can enhance their long-term viability and maintain a strong market presence by harnessing competitive advantages, innovation, and strategic foresight.

New Entrants

With the formation of a startup, business leaders and managers must plan to protect the business from losing market share to newer entrants. There is no substantial threat of new entrants if an industry presents many obstacles to prospective entrants, and a newcomer can expect a fierce reaction from the entrenched businesses (Pangarkar & Prabhudesai, 2024). New players bring to an industry, capacity and resources that they use to compete with the established companies for market share (Porter, 1979; Segura et al., 2023). Various barriers to entry reduce the threat of new entrants in an industry. Economies of scale is an obstacle to entry (Porter, 1979). Economies of scale leaves new entrants with the option of mass producing or experiencing a cost disadvantage (Porter, 1979). Also, when products are highly differentiated, new entrants have to face the challenge of strong customer loyalty to the entrenched businesses (Porter, 1979). A huge capital requirement is another barrier to entry, particularly when the capital is unrecoverable and for upfront expenses (Porter, 1979). A startup business leader must understand this scenario to sustain the business through the volatile early years and subsequently.

There are additional barriers to new entrants. Cost advantages unrelated to economies of scale may be observable in entrenched businesses, thus posing a further barrier to new entrants (Porter, 1979). These cost advantages may be due to the learning curve, experience curve, and patents (Porter, 1979). Other reasons for cost advantages include existing inflation that was absent when the entrenched business made its entry, the established business' access to superior raw materials or technology, better location, and government subsidies (Pangarkar & Prabhudesai, 2024; Porter, 1979; Segura et al., 2023). Porter (1979) noted that inaccessibility to distribution channels is another barrier to entry. In addition, through regulatory policies, governments create barriers to new entrants to an industry (Pangarkar & Prabhudesai, 2024; Porter, 1979). Notably is in the oil and solid minerals extraction industry where governments in various countries place different levels of limitations and even prohibitions (Porter, 1979). Governments use license requirements and extraction standards to inhibit entry into the industry (Porter, 1979). Therefore, these barriers challenge startup business leaders, underscoring the importance of thorough strategic planning and resource allocation to navigate these complexities.

Powerful Buyers and Suppliers

A critical factor influencing industry profitability is the bargaining power of raw material providers and buyers of a business' products. Porter (1979) emphasized that suppliers can significantly increase their selling prices when they face little or no competition. Similarly, the study by Pangarkar and Prabhudesai (2024) shows that highly price-sensitive end-product buyers force companies to absorb higher raw material costs

without allowing companies to raise prices. Ruhm et al. (2012) further supported this by noting that price elasticity in competitive markets empowers buyers to hold down prices. Pizzini and Vansant (2024) explained that raw material suppliers with pricing power due to limited competition, directly impact businesses' profit margins by increasing input costs that cannot be easily passed onto end consumers. In markets where substitutes are readily available, and consumers consider both the cost and quality of a product, the ability to maintain higher prices is compromised (Capps & Gao, 2023). Moreover, the combined purchasing power of large buyers or influential retailers can lower wholesale prices, exacerbating the downward pressure on industry profits (Porter, 1979). The interplay between raw materials suppliers' price increases and end-products buyers' price sensitivity impact overall profitability, necessitating businesses to devise strategic approaches to manage costs and optimize pricing structures (Porter, 1979; Šimonová et al., 2024). Business leaders should thus adopt cost-control strategies, strengthen supply chain relationships, and improve pricing models to sustain their business.

Substitute Products

The availability of substitute products is a challenge for startup business leaders. When and where buyers can find substitute products, a business must place a cap on how high it can increase prices and a minimum level it cannot go below on quality (Porter, 1979). An increase in price or reduced quality makes alternative products or services more attractive to consumers. The availability of substitute products results in an industry being more competitive and less profitable. Around 2014, there was a sharp drop in crude oil prices (Patidar et al., 2024; Sen et al., 2023). This price fall was the result of various

factors. One significant factor was the United States, a major consumer, increasing its domestic crude oil exploration (Patidar et al., 2024; Sen et al., 2023). Increased domestic exploration reduced the United States' oil dependence on the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Patidar et al., 2024; Sen et al., 2023). The United States also exported its oil, further driving down the global crude oil price (Patidar et al., 2024; Sen et al., 2023). Thus, the United States crude oil is a substitute that increased competition within the global industry and reduced the industry's profitability (Patidar et al., 2024; Sen et al., 2023). Global crude oil price per barrel fell from an average of \$109 in 2012 to \$54 in the first half of 2015 (Macrotrends LLC, n.d.). Similarly, renewable energy is increasingly substituting nonrenewable energy consumption, contributing to the reduced profitability of crude oil, natural gas, and coal extraction, as well as other nonrenewable energy sources (Atabani et al., 2012; Suryaningsih & Irhas, 2014). Consequently, the availability of substitutes intensifies competition and erodes profitability within industries.

The Struggling (Jockeying) Among Current Contestants for Market Share

Intense industry rivalry reduces profitability. The greater the competition for market share among entrenched businesses, the less profitable the industry is (Porter, 1979). Rivalry may come in the form of product introduction, especially the introduction of disruptive technology, aggressive marketing, and price competition (Pangarkar & Prabhudesai, 2024; Porter, 1979). Rivalry is high in saturated industries, where the industry growth is stagnant, where products are undifferentiated with customers incurring little or no switching costs, and where fixed costs are high, or goods are perishable, thus

necessitating a high sales turnover for profitability (Porter, 1979). Other reasons for jockeying among existing businesses include high capacity among industry participants, thus causing supply to exceed demand (Porter, 1979). Supply exceeding demand pushes prices down (Ruhm et al., 2012). Also, high exit barriers that huge sunk costs may cause, make participants remain in the industry and become more competitive (Porter, 1979). The United States steel industry is a good example of intense industry rivalry (Popescu et al., 2016). Over the past decades, United States steel industries have faced increased competition from foreign manufacturers who flood the United States market with foreign government-subsidized products, thereby reducing the sector's profitability (Popescu et al., 2016). When founded in 1901, United States Steel Corporation was the largest business enterprise ever launched, with an authorized capitalization of \$1.4 billion (United States Steel Corporation, n.d.). As of the first quarter of 2025, United States Steel Corporation's market share in the United States and globally is smaller than its foreign competitors ArcelorMittal, Nippon Steel, and Sumitomo Metal Corporation (United States Steel Corporation, n.d.). Intense competition continually challenges the profitability and market position of businesses within industries.

Business Problem Scholarship Evidence

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to identify and explore successful strategies startup business leaders in the information and communications industry used for long-term business sustainability beyond 5 years. Twenty-one percent of U.S. businesses across all industries, close within their first year of operations (BLS, 2024a). In the second year of existence, an additional 9% of U.S.

businesses close, whereas 6% more of these ventures close in the third year of operations (BLS, 2024a). Forty-eight of all U.S. businesses do not operate through their fifth year (BLS, 2024a). The U.S. information and communications industry has an average closure rate of 56% within the first 5 years of operations and the percentage of these startups started in 2013 but stopped operating before 2024 is 71% (BLS, 2024b). Similar to the United States, the 5-year sustainability rate for enterprises created in 2018 and still active in 2023 in the United Kingdom is a dismal 39% (Office of National Statistics, 2024). Also, the United Kingdom information and communication industry had a business closure rate of 10.5% in 2023 (Office of National Statistics, 2024). These statistics underscore the need to understand and replicate the strategies employed by startup leaders who have successfully navigated the volatile business landscape. This research project contributes to the broader discourse on entrepreneurial resilience and sustainability by identifying these sustainability practices.

The success or failure of startups depends on several critical factors but heavily on strong management and leadership, which influence these critical factors. Elements relevant for success in startups include strong management, an attractive market, a compelling new product or service, strong evidence of customer interest, and flexibility in strategy and technology (Freitas et al., 2024; Ioanid & Iliescu, 2023; Pomegbe et al., 2023). However, flexibility in strategy and technology is attributable to management's competence (Freitas et al., 2024; Ioanid & Iliescu, 2023; Pomegbe et al., 2023). How compelling the product or service turns out, determines customers' interest, and is directly linked to management's ingenuity (Freitas et al., 2024; Ioanid & Iliescu, 2023;

Pomegbe et al., 2023). In essence, management's strength interplays with the other elements, either creating them or taking advantage of them to attain business success (Freitas et al., 2024; Ioanid & Iliescu, 2023; Pomegbe et al., 2023). Similarly, other researchers have concluded that startups fail because of poor leadership (Bowen et al., 2009; Cressy, 2006; Dalakoura, 2010; Njanja et al., 2010).

Other researchers have examined other critical factors impacting a startup's success or failure. Cressy (2006) stated that most firms close down in the first few years of operations. New businesses' likelihood of failure rose steeply to a peak at the 18th to 24th months of existence and then fell gradually to converge on a small, long-run failure rate (Cressy, 2006; Storey, 2011). Cressy focused on three perspectives of determinants of business sustainability, namely, the diversification approach to balancing risk and return, uncertainty in the business environment, and human capital. Cressy provided a theoretical model to explain how a mix of human capital, financial capital, and risk aversion determines profitability and a firm's ability to remain in operations. The researcher contended that the introduction of a disruptive technology might enhance a startup's sustainability in an industry dominated by large enterprises (Cressy, 2006). Also, capital availability and market opportunities enhance firms' sustainability prospects (Cressy, 2006). Cressy stated that managerial ability and attitude to risk determine how well the firm performs in the competitive market. The better the management, the higher the marginal return for the risk level (Cressy, 2006). The better the management, the less the marginal cost of growth (Cressy, 2006). However, Cressy acknowledged the role of uncertainty in startups sustainability. If factors beyond the control of the manager play a

part in a business' survival, then a more sympathetic approach to business failures should be adopted (Cressy, 2006). The severely critical approach to small business failure in the United Kingdom's bankruptcy laws are thus unnecessary (Cressy, 2006). Cressy highlighted that startup sustainability depends on the interplay of financial capital, human capital, and strategic risk-taking, with effective management enhancing growth amid external uncertainties. Innovation and diversification are key to balancing risk, but limited resources and market access heighten vulnerability. Cressy advocated for adaptive strategies and reconsidering bankruptcy policies, emphasizing resilience and informed decision-making in navigating early-stage challenges.

Researchers have examined other critical factors impacting a startup's success or failure. Khan et al. (2014) studied 943 new business founders to determine how motivation and adverse founding conditions affect the founders' decision to discontinue their startups. Khan et al. measured self-efficacy, perceived competition intensity, and goal commitment in determining startup disengagement one year after inception. Khan et al. in justifying the need for the research stated that startup creation is related to new market sectors creation, social benefits, employment, productivity, innovations, and economic growth (Bruce et al., 2015; Rauch & Rijdsdijk, 2013). Founders invest significant resources in startups, and by disengaging, these founders may be losing out on opportunities. However, Khan et al. stated that where founders do not disengage when necessary, such individuals may be overconfident about their abilities and self-efficacy has been observed to be one reason many people start businesses. Goal commitment is essential for the attainment of high performance and high industry competition adversely

affects new businesses (Khan et al., 2014; Porter, 1979). Khan et al. observed that goal commitment and self-efficacy had an inverse relationship with disengagement. However, goal commitment does not stop entrepreneurs from packing up when competition is high.

Researchers have also examined the role of management actions and tailored government policies in business sustainability. Njanja et al. (2010) studied micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Kenya. The aim of the study was to determine the factors affecting the performance of these MSMEs. Njanja et al. stated that management's actions were instrumental in organization's sustainability or failure. Executives including the chief executive officer have a significant influence on MSMEs' performance (Freitas et al., 2024; Ioanid & Iliescu, 2023; Njanja et al., 2010). Micro businesses were observed to have the least elaborate organizational structure (Njanja et al., 2010). However, on average, all categories of MSMEs equally applied directing and staffing functions, though the control function varied among the different MSME categories (Njanja et al., 2010). Njanja et al. concluded that the critical management factors for sustainability differed among the MSME types. Thus, necessitating the tailoring of government policies to the peculiarities of these MSME types, rather than creating blanket policies for all MSMEs (Njanja et al., 2010; Ozioma-Eleodinmuo, 2015).

Researchers have looked at the phenomenon of startup failure from different perspectives. In a study examining whether insurance provision reduced entrepreneurs' effort to avoid failure, Ejrnaes and Hochguertel (2013) concluded that insured entrepreneurs were 2% points more likely to become unemployed subsequently compared with the uninsured. However, only 0.6% points were caused by moral hazard. Ejrnaes

and Hochguertel investigated unique features of the voluntary Danish unemployment insurance scheme available to the self-employed. Similarly, Storey (2011) argued that existing theories on the performance of startups suffer major limitations and lack validity. Networking, education, learning, attitudes, and prior experience only explain business growth without providing explanations for periods of declines or flat line performance (Storey, 2011). Both expansions and contractions characterize most startups, and many of those rapid growth startups have a spurt of growth, followed by either zero growth or market exit (Storey, 2011). Similarly, Coad (2013) evaluated the claims that business exits are not failures, because they may constitute voluntary liquidation, and are learning opportunities. Coad stated that the assertion is bias affecting entrepreneurship research, with the repackaging of failures as successes. Coad concluded that the majority of business exits are unsuccessful and that business closures, even voluntary liquidations, are in reality business failures.

Business Topic Scholarship

Public Policy and Entrepreneurship

Governments create public subsidy programs and implement policies to encourage entrepreneurship and business sustainability, recognizing startups' crucial role in economic recovery and job creation while also addressing the significant risks posed by their high failure rate to overall economic growth. Alonso-Nuez and Galve-Górriz (2012) analyzed how public subsidy programs to promote the creation of companies, affected the created companies' sustainability and profitability in Aragon, Spain. The study was over a period of 5 years from 2001 to 2005. Alonso-Nuez and Galve-Górriz

considered whether these government programs created economic inefficiencies by transferring resources from tax paying industries to those receiving subsidies. Alonso-Nuez and Galve-Górriz stated that information asymmetry between startups' executives and commercial lenders inhibited startup executives' access to finance. Thus, necessitating the creation of these government policies. Some variables considered by Alonso-Nuez and Galve-Górriz included the gender of the chief executives, company size, legal structure, profit margin, and debt structure. Subsidized and unsubsidized companies did not show significant differences in sustainability and this conclusion was made using bivariate probit econometric modeling (Alonso-Nuez & Galve-Górriz, 2012). Therefore, Alonso-Nuez and Galve-Górriz stated that there was no evidence for or against public programs as instruments of company sustainability. The need for a model or some form of mentorship to guide startup entrepreneurs is necessary to reduce the current high failure rate (Argaw & Liu, 2024; De-Esteban-Escobar et al., 2025; Ding et al., 2022). The United States and United Kingdom governments acknowledge the significance of startups in economic recovery (Noronha & Pillai, 2025). Thus, these governments put in place policies and measures to create conducive business environments (Gulotty, 2022). Startups' job creation rate outpaces that of existing businesses, and startups are responsible for nearly all net job growth yearly (Argaw & Liu, 2024). Considering the job creation of startups, one then can understand the significant impact of the high startup failure rate on the economy and the lives of citizens.

The United Kingdom government implements various support programs to attract international startups and entrepreneurs and foster business growth. These support efforts

include access to mentoring programs such as the United Kingdom Trade and Investment Global Entrepreneurship Programme, and making the United Kingdom corporation tax rates one of the lowest in the G20 (Deloitte, n.d.; Great Britain & Northern Ireland, Department for Business & Trade, 2025). The United Kingdom Trade and Investment Global Entrepreneurship Programme attracts and supports international entrepreneurs looking to establish and scale their businesses in the UK (Great Britain & Northern Ireland, Department for Business & Trade, 2025). The program provides mentorship, funding strategies, networking opportunities, and visa endorsements to help startups thrive in the UK's business ecosystem (Great Britain & Northern Ireland, Department for Business & Trade, 2025). Another support effort of the government of the United Kingdom is the provision of funding for startups and entrepreneurs, through working with the private sector (Great Britain & Northern Ireland, Department for Business & Trade, 2025). These initiatives collectively position the United Kingdom as a global hub for startups and entrepreneurial success.

The effectiveness of building industrial parks to attract technology companies is an approach that researchers have questioned. Cerf (2013) took a critical look at the idea of government building industrial parks with the aim of attracting technology companies, and concluded that the strategy was largely ineffective without other factors conducive to business. Adequate and qualified workforce, availability of capital funding, and the availability of market demand for products, are pertinent to startups and business success, and should be considerations in attracting technology companies (Cerf, 2013; Mozaleva et al., 2023).

Startup entrepreneurs experience challenges in securing conventional or government-backed loans. Hopson and Hopson (2014) stated the difficulty of startup entrepreneurs getting conventional loans or government-backed small business administration SBA 7(a) loans. Hopson and Hopson further reported on the use and availability of rollover funds also known as, a Business Owners Retirement Savings Account (BORSA). BORSA often is the only available source of substantial financing for startup entrepreneurs. Antonenko et al. (2014) observed a trend in which startups source funding through online crowdfunding platforms. Angel investors account for 70% of investments in new ventures, and angels invest before formal venture capitalists and fund about 100 times more seed-stage high-tech firms than venture capitalists (DeGeneres, 2010; Romani et al., 2013).

Public policies that foster entrepreneurship are often inadequately designed using a one-size-fits-all approach, failing to account for sector-specific differences. Nathan and Vandore (2014) performed a detailed mixed-method analysis, combining rich enterprise-level data with semistructured interviews with London's tech city's firms and its wider ecosystem. The researchers focused on policymakers' cluster programs designed to accelerate development. The researchers tracked firm and employment growth over a three-year period and identified several distinctive features; arguing that the existing policy mix embodies some inadequacies. Kiskis et al. (2015) analyzed the effectiveness of public policies created in Lithuania and Estonia for the biotechnology and information and communications technology (ICT) industries, and asserted that most developed and emerging economies create and implement public policies aimed at fostering

entrepreneurship. However, support schemes and policies are not streamlined to the differences between the various technology fields (Kiskis et al., 2015). In use is a one-size-fits-all approach to the development and implementation of these support schemes and policies; however, because public policies do not meet the peculiarities of biotechnology and other long business cycle startups, these fields experience setbacks (Kiskis et al., 2015). Whereas in the ICT sector, product developments rarely exceed 18 months and are considered failures if the products do not attain competitiveness in less than three years (Kiskis et al., 2015). Kiskis et al. observed that product development cycle in biotechnology lasts a minimum of 7 to 10 years. In the United States, this product development phase cost from \$250 million to \$300 million, which far outweighs the average cost of a product development in ICT (Kiskis et al., 2015). Kiskis et al. concluded that if public policies are to be effective in fostering entrepreneurship in the biotechnology sector, these public policies must be streamlined to the unique characteristics of the sector. The findings are generalizable in that for public policies to be effective they must meet the peculiar needs of the different business sectors. Thus, policymakers should create policies based on the peculiarities of the various sectors for policies to effectively foster entrepreneurship.

Policymakers differentiate entrepreneurial activities from small and medium-sized enterprises to better tailor policies; however, policymakers should also consider firm age rather than solely focusing on business size. Cumming and Fischer (2012) made a differentiation between entrepreneurial activities versus small and medium size enterprises, stating that policymakers have made this distinction in order to focus policies

on promoting entrepreneurial activities. In a similar study, conducted on businesses in the United States, Haltiwanger et al. (2013) concluded that startups and young firms, unlike mature small businesses, are vital sources of job creation but that these young firms are inherently volatile, with a high exit rate. Haltiwanger et al. further concluded that policies that target businesses of a certain size, while ignoring the role of age, would likely have limited success in improving net job creation.

Advising relates positively to sales growth, patents, finance, and alliances for publicly funded programs on business advising services affecting firms' success and survival (Cumming & Fischer, 2012). Cumming and Fischer found a significant robustness of the effect of advising hours on sales and finance. Salzsieder and Cornell (2013) looked at the United States, Jumpstart Our Business Startup (JOBS) Act. Although Salzsieder and Cornell's research focus was the accounting profession, the 30 researchers concluded that the JOBS Act improved access to capital through initial public offering (IPO), crowd funding, and mini-public offerings.

Dynamism of Entrepreneurship

Collaboration among economic actors, strategic partnerships, and customer involvement are essential in venture creation. Puhakka (2012) while studying the technology industry, described the nature of entrepreneurship, stating that the business environment is tumultuous and dynamic thus making it almost impossible to predict the future based on the past. Puhakka provided an analysis of the Octopus program. The Octopus program, lasting from 2002 to 2010, was a live testing environment aimed at aiding the development and creation of new ventures in the mobile application services

sector in Finland (Puhakka, 2012). Puhakka conducted the study with the objectives of understanding how economic actors collaborate in new venture creation, and to understand the process of creating a competence block in new venture creation. Puhakka listed economic actors as innovators, financiers, entrepreneurs, industrialists and customers. Entrepreneurship involves seeing opportunities as events unfold and building ambitions and goals based on these events (Puhakka, 2012; Zankl & Grimes, 2024). Puhakka stated that the entrepreneur has to build strategic partnerships with stakeholders, to take advantage of events; to understand the customers, the market, and technology, and thus create trade. Entrepreneurship is problem-solving where at the onset, the rules, goals, and solutions are unknown but have to be discovered within the competency block of the economic actors, as the venture unfolds. Puhakka further stated that customers are pivotal in the process of developing innovations and business opportunities. Innovators and entrepreneurs are distinct though they could merge in some circumstances (Puhakka, 2012). Innovators use technology to create innovations, whereas entrepreneurs develop these innovations further into economically viable ventures (Puhakka, 2012). Puhakka stated that all economic actors must be present and behave favorably for the new venture to proceed. In the absence of any economic actor or the lack of appropriate behavior, other economic actors will be discouraged from going ahead with the new venture (Puhakka, 2012). Puhakka observed that the Oulu region, location of the Octopus program was among the most important mobile technology development areas globally. However, the Oulu region was concentrated on research and development, making an advanced technology system but a low economic system (Puhakka, 2012). This

observation reinforces a need for a mix of factors influencing business sustainability, as observed in Porter five forces.

Leadership and Business Performance

Relational leadership fosters shared responsibility, trust, and innovation; and leadership development at all organizational levels is essential for competitive advantage; in a dynamic business environment. Dalakoura (2010) in his study used data from 112 firms in Greece, to identify among other things, how leadership development impacts firm performance. Because of the dynamism of the business environment, to stay competitive, organizations have to develop leaders at all levels (Dalakoura, 2010).

Dalakoura looked at various literature and contended that leadership today is relational and a shared responsibility thus the need for leadership development at all organizational levels. The traditional topdown approach to leadership is ineffective today, because of the turbulent business environment warranting leadership acumen at all firm-levels (Dalakoura, 2010; Goyal et al., 2024). Leadership acumen at all organizational levels is essential where the distance in the organizational pyramid is wide, thus making a top-down approach bureaucratic, slow and ineffective (Dalakoura, 2010). Leadership development at all organizational levels creates a sense of shared responsibility while at the same time fostering the initiative and innovation needed for the development and sustenance of competitive advantage (Dalakoura, 2010). Dalakoura's reference to the relational approach to leadership and leadership development holds a strong relationship with the transformational leadership approach. The relational model supports mutual

respect, trust, and collective responsibility in organizational goal accomplishment (Dalakoura, 2010).

Leadership affects a business' performance. Business leaders are key to strategy execution and the maintenance of competitive advantage; thus, business leaders are among the most expensive group of workers to replace (Bonini et al., 2024; Jo & Shin, 2025; Tiruwa & Dikshit, 2025). The main reasons why leaders and managers leave include bad bosses, unethical or illegal business dealings, consistent disrespect, disempowerment, lack of career development, and overly aggressive goals without the requisite tools, staff, information, budget, authority, planning or access, which result in high frustration, frequent failure, and high manager turnover (Holland, 2005; Kangas et al., 2018; Tiruwa & Dikshit, 2025). Poor compensation especially compared to the industry average, boredom, and decline in organizations' performance, all lead managers into finding better employment options elsewhere (Holland, 2005; Kangas et al., 2018). Startups and businesses, in general, can retain their human capital by avoiding these pitfalls, thus sustaining competitive advantage and better positioning their organizations for better performance (Bonini et al., 2024; Dalakoura, 2010).

Two factors worth considering are experience and talent and how they impact entrepreneurial success. Eesley and Roberts (2012) conducted a study on how experience and talent impact entrepreneurial performance. The researchers attempted to answer the question of whether the successful performance of serial entrepreneurs is due to experience or talent. Using a data set with multiple observations of founding attempts per individual, the researchers generated a measure of entrepreneurial talent (Eesley &

Roberts, 2012). The researchers concluded that when the current market or technology is familiar, experience dominates, whereas, for unfamiliar venture context, talent is more important (Eesley & Roberts, 2012). Moreover, individuals with experience and talent handle both familiar and unfamiliar aspects and may overall perform better than individuals having only either experience or talent (Banu & Katyayani, 2021; Eesley & Roberts, 2012; Vuong & Nguyen, 2022). In explaining how experience contributes to entrepreneurial success, Eesley and Roberts mentioned Steve Blanks, who founded several smaller ventures of which his accumulated knowledge enabled him to create the highly successful startup, Epiphany. On the contrary, Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg of Apple Inc. and Facebook respectively, are examples of talent (Eesley & Roberts, 2012). With their innate abilities, these two entrepreneurs were successful in their initial ventures and went ahead to build other successful ventures (Eesley & Roberts, 2012). Eesley and Roberts (2012) observed that initial failures of less talented entrepreneurs discouraged such entrepreneurs from making further startup attempts. Similarly, entrepreneurs show increased passion as they progress in their venture (Banu & Katyayani, 2021; Eesley & Roberts, 2012; Vuong & Nguyen, 2022). Thus, a disproportionate number of successful ventures were the initial or subsequent ventures of talented entrepreneurs (Eesley & Roberts, 2012). This observation questions the relevance of learning from experience. Entrepreneurs should learn from experience, and the less talented entrepreneurs' success prospects should improve with more experience (Eesley & Roberts, 2012). However, the experience becomes irrelevant if discouragement sets in, making the less talented entrepreneur make no subsequent entrepreneurial

attempts after an initial failure (Eesley & Roberts, 2012). Eesley and Roberts concluded that there is no blueprint for entrepreneurial success, but that strategic approaches should be contingent on industry and technological contexts.

Summary

This research contributes to guiding entrepreneurs in developing strategies for business sustainability, especially startup entrepreneurs in the information and communications industry. Nearly all net job growth yearly is attributable to startups (Argaw & Liu, 2024; Branson, 2014; Haltiwanger, 2012). Thus, there is a need to tackle the problem of startup closure. The research is a qualitative pragmatic inquiry, and Porter's five forces model is the conceptual base of this research. The sampling method is purposeful sampling. The sample consisted of six startup business leaders in the information and communications industry. Qualitative research methodology is appropriate for this research project because qualitative research is exploratory, and the phenomenon needs exploration to understand the underlying interplay of factors (Bailey, 2014; Gill, 2024; Lewis, 2015). As a qualitative research project, research reliability and validity must be considered and attained, as well as credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability.

Section 2: Primary and Secondary Industry Data Analysis

Nature of the Project

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry, I explored successful strategies information and communications industry startup business leaders used for long-term business sustainability past 5 years. The target population for the project included startup business leaders in the information and communications industry whose businesses had operated for at least 5 years, indicating effective long-term sustainability strategies. I used a purposeful sampling method to select six participants. The purposeful sampling method enabled the choosing of participants who could provide rich, insightful data to address the research question (see Stratton, 2024). My choices of research method and design were intended to enable me to answer the research question: What successful strategies have information and communications industry business leaders used for business sustainability beyond 5 years?

Method and Design

My research method was qualitative, and my research design was the pragmatic inquiry. Qualitative research is exploratory, and when the phenomenon needs exploration to understand the underlying interplay of factors, qualitative methodology is appropriate for the research (Gill, 2024; Ninnoni et al., 2023). The phenomenon addressed needed exploration, which made qualitative methodology appropriate for this research project. Furthermore, qualitative research is best suited to understanding human behavior, answering “why” and “how” questions, making the methodology appropriate for the current study (see Gill, 2024). The pragmatic inquiry design was appropriate for this

project because the design is used by researchers to address real-world problems that require practical solutions, focusing on contextual relevance and ensuring that the research findings are relevant and applicable to the setting in which the problem exists (see Ramanadhan et al., 2021). The data for the project were collected from semistructured interviews with participants who had substantial experience of not less than 5 years. The data analysis process was thematic analysis. To ensure credibility, reliability, and validity, I adopted the following qualitative research techniques: triangulation, member checking, audit trails, consistent interview protocols, data saturation, and reflexivity.

Reliability

Ensuring data reliability in qualitative pragmatic research requires careful planning and execution because strategies to establish trustworthiness and rigor are essential for credible findings (Nowell et al., 2017). To ensure reliability, I included triangulation, member checking, audit trail, a consistent interview protocol, data saturation, and reflexivity. Triangulation enhances research rigor, credibility, validity, and reliability by viewing a phenomenon from different perspectives and gathering information from multiple sources (Kawar et al., 2024). I used data from interviewing participants and publicly available documentation to achieve triangulation. Member checking is a qualitative research method that enhances credibility by allowing participants to review and validate transcript summaries and interpretations to ensure their perspectives are accurately reflected (Ramanadhan et al., 2021). I ensured that

participants reviewed my transcripts and interpretations of their interview responses to ensure I accurately represented their perspectives.

I maintained an audit trail by keeping detailed data collection, coding, and analysis records. I also clearly documented decision-making processes to ensure transparency. Data were kept secure by password protection in an external storage hard drive, and I will keep the interview transcripts for at least 5 years. I interviewed participants using Zoom. I used Nvivo, a data analysis software, and Microsoft Excel. I followed a consistent interview protocol by asking all participants the same open-ended questions. However, my follow-up questions depended on participants' responses to the initial questions, ensuring flexibility for deeper insight. Data saturation within the research context implies attaining the depth and breadth of information (Christou, 2025). To attain data saturation, I ensured the participants chosen were entrepreneurs whose startups had existed for at least 5 years, therefore indicating the participants had sufficient experience to provide substantial information for data saturation. The number of research participants was increased until data saturation was reached, with no new codes or themes emerging.

The data analysis process also involved reflexivity, ensuring that biases, assumptions, and decision-making processes were documented to minimize subjective influence on data interpretation. Reflexivity also involves maintaining and regularly reviewing the trail of ideas, thereby aiding a researcher in observing and curtailing bias in the study (Ramanadhan et al., 2021). Reflexivity was important as I am an entrepreneur and had some biases.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

The target population for the project was startup business leaders in the information and communications industry whose businesses had operated for at least 5 years, indicating effective long-term sustainability strategies. I used purposeful sampling to select six participants. Eligibility criteria for choosing participants included serving as a startup business leader in the information and communications industry and leading a company that had maintained operations for over 5 years by implementing long-term sustainability strategies. The purposeful sampling method enables choosing participants who can provide rich, insightful data to answer the research question (Stratton, 2024). Purposeful sampling enables the collection of data that are relevant and insightful to the research question while avoiding the impracticality of examining an entire population (Stratton, 2024). By intentionally selecting participants with substantial knowledge or lived experience related to the phenomenon under investigation, researchers can generate rich, context-specific data that foster a deeper understanding of the topic and answer the research question (Gill, 2024; Stratton, 2024). Also, purposeful sampling enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings by focusing on participants who can address the research question while fully reflecting the identified population (Stratton, 2024).

I gained access to the participants through LinkedIn connections. I networked in the information and communications industry entrepreneurs' community to identify prospective participants and dialogued with interested participants, developing a relationship conducive to performing objective research. In further effort to develop a

relationship with participants, I engaged in transparent, ethical dialogue, clearly communicating the purpose of the research project, confidentiality measures, and how I would use the insights. I also respected participants' time and contributions by engaging in well-structured communications and being flexible with scheduling. I informed participants that they would be contributing to a better understanding of entrepreneurial sustainability, and I offered to share the preliminary findings (themes they helped shape) and the final findings. My finance and business background enabled me to ask relevant questions, resulting in participants sharing insightful information relevant to answering the research question. With six participants who best represented the research topic, there were answers to the research question and data saturation within the context of this qualitative research. Data saturation implies attaining both the depth and breadth of information to the point of diminishing returns (Christou, 2025). Research participants were working in the Dallas–Fort Worth, Texas, metroplex or did business there. Dallas–Fort Worth has a thriving information and communications industry, making it an excellent location to find suitable research participants with ample years of experience.

Data Collection Activities

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry, I served as the primary data collection instrument and used semistructured virtual interviews, qualitative data analysis software, and member checking in my data collection activities. The semistructured interview format was preferred because this format is flexible and consists of several key questions on what to talk about but also allows the researcher or participant to diverge for details or clarifications (see Pinho & Moreira da Silva, 2025; Ruslin et al., 2022). Follow-up

probing questions were used during the interviews when there was a need for the participant to provide more details. The semistructured interview format enables the researcher and participant to generate valuable information that may not have been thought of or not have been previously considered important (Pinho & Moreira da Silva, 2025; Ruslin et al., 2022). An interview protocol was used to ensure consistency in the interview process with each participant. The interviews were via Zoom and lasted approximately 30 minutes. It is important not to stretch the interview too long so as not to lose the participant's attention. The interview questions, 7 in number, were unambiguous, did not lead participants, and could not generate a yes or no answer. I reviewed publicly available published industry reports, company websites, and published company statements as secondary corroborating data. A computer software, Nvivo 15 and Microsoft Excel, were used for data analysis. Nvivo is suitable because it is easy to use and compatible with various software and hardware (Allsop et al., 2022). Member checking was conducted at the interview and results levels to increase the accuracy and validity of the research project. I made the interview transcripts and interpretations available to participants through member checking to gain their opinions on the accuracy of data interpretation. The interview protocol is in Appendix B and listed in the Table of Contents.

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

I organized the research data using a laptop and computer software. By entering and analyzing data in a data analysis software, themes, patterns, trends, and conflicting information are noted, enabling the generation of codes (Allsop et al., 2022; Ramanadhan

et al., 2021). I used the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo 15, for data analysis. NVivo is suitable for qualitative data analysis because it is easy to use and compatible with various software and hardware (Allsop et al., 2022). My qualitative data analysis method was thematic analysis; I identified, analyzed, and interpreted patterns of meaning in the data. I employed an integrated system comprising research logs, reflective journals, and cataloging/labeling frameworks to ensure methodological rigor and analytical clarity in this qualitative research project. Using each tool uniquely deepened my engagement with the data and surfacing emergent themes.

Using the research log, I maintained a chronological record of recruitment activities, interview schedules, and data handling steps. The research log also enabled me to track participant engagement trends, interview conditions, and follow-up actions (member checking). Furthermore, the research log functioned as an audit trail that enhanced transparency and dependability throughout my research process. Using a reflective journal, I documented my insights, evolving thematic interpretations, and shifts in perspective post-interview. A reflective journal enables the maintenance of a trail of ideas and information and enhances experiential learning (Ramanadhan et al., 2021). The reflective journal supported my reflexivity by allowing me to examine assumptions, positionality, and emotional responses. With the aid of my reflective journal, I engaged in iterative thinking and coding, reinforcing alignment between data and developing categories.

My cataloging and labeling system involved organizing transcripts using participant pseudonyms. With cataloging and labeling, it is easier to identify patterns,

thematic clusters, and actionable insights grounded in context (Allsop et al., 2022; Ramanadhan et al., 2021). I gave each participant a unique identification number to protect participants' privacy and conceal their identity (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). These unique identification numbers applied to all recordings, transcripts, and documents.

I ensured data saturation, data trustworthiness, and data triangulation. I achieved data saturation by selecting sufficiently experienced entrepreneurs with startups over 5 years old and increasing participant numbers up to six, when no new codes or themes emerged; I heard the same types of responses from participants repeatedly, indicating redundancy. Indications that a researcher has reached saturation include when responses start becoming predictable or repetitive across participants, coding framework feels complete and new data neatly fits into existing codes, additional interviews or documents yield diminishing returns, and peer debriefing and member checks confirm that the researcher's findings thoroughly reflect participants' perspectives (Christou, 2025; Kwar et al., 2024). Data saturation within the research context implies attaining the depth and breadth of information (Christou, 2025).

After reviewing transcripts with participants, I utilized NVivo and Microsoft Excel to categorize words and phrases for commonalities to enable the data to be segmented. I segmented the data into primary and secondary groups. My comparison of transcribed data with interview notes and member checking enabled the ascertainment of triangulation and the trustworthiness of the data.

After reviewing transcripts with participants, I utilized NVivo and Microsoft Excel to categorize recurring words and phrases, enabling data segmentation into primary and secondary groups for more precise thematic analysis. I cross-referenced transcribed interviews with detailed notes taken during data collection to ensure trustworthiness and data triangulation. Additionally, I conducted member checking by inviting participants to review the preliminary summaries and interpretations of their responses. This involved sharing synthesized themes and select excerpts with each participant, allowing them to validate whether the data accurately reflected their intended meaning and experiences. Their feedback confirmed the integrity of the findings, clarified ambiguous responses, and enhanced the contextual depth of the emerging themes. This multi-level verification helped to establish credibility and reinforced the robustness of the analysis. Data triangulation increases the generalizability of the findings (Kawar et al., 2024). Data triangulation involves using multiple data sources in an investigation to produce an understanding that is rich, robust, comprehensive, and well-developed (Kawar et al., 2024). In this qualitative research project, data triangulation does not imply generating identical data across participants. Triangulation instead involves the generation of robust data encompassing all facets of the phenomenon under study (Kawar et al., 2024).

My qualitative research method is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is instrumental when a researcher works with interview transcripts, open-ended survey responses, or text-based data and wants to understand how people think, feel, or experience a phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Strunel & Cordoba, 2025). When using a thematic analysis, the researcher aims to uncover recurring ideas or concepts

across participants' responses, interpret how those ideas relate to the research question, and generate a rich, detailed, and nuanced understanding of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Strunel & Cordoba, 2025). Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis was a foundation for my identifying and interpreting salient themes. However, I did not strictly follow the authors' steps. In this research project, I used NVivo and Microsoft Excel throughout the process. After transcribing the interviews, reading the transcripts multiple times enabled me to gain an immersive understanding of the data, and in the process, capture early impressions, potential patterns, and emerging concepts. I assigned codes and initial themes to meaningful units of text relevant to the research question, subsequently reviewing and clustering the initial themes and subthemes into broader categories. Conceptualizing the relationships between codes and emerging thematic clusters was done using visual mind-mapping. I critically assessed each proposed theme to ensure that coded extracts fitted the theme, and the theme reflected the whole dataset; either revising, discarding, or merging weak or overlapping themes. Quotations from participants supported my assignment of clear names and definitions to themes. I developed a thematic map to depict the final structure of themes, ultimately synthesizing them into a coherent narrative of the research results, interpreting the significance of the themes in relation to my research question, conceptual framework, and literature review. Using Porter's five forces conceptual framework, I generated a deep interpretation of the themes. Using each theme to answer the research question, I identified points of convergence or divergence between my findings and prior research, demonstrating how the themes extended, supported, or challenged established theories.

Additionally, I highlight insights that may contribute to both theoretical development and practical applications in the field.

Summary

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry, I explored long-term sustainability strategies employed by startup business leaders whose businesses had operated for over 5 years in the information and communications industry. Using purposeful sampling, I selected six experienced entrepreneurs for semistructured interviews conducted via Zoom. Microsoft Excel and NVivo 15 are the software I used for thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework to identify, code, and interpret emerging themes. I used triangulation, member checking, audit trails, and reflexivity to ensure data credibility, trustworthiness, and reliability. I utilized reflective journals, research logs, and a labeling system to enhance transparency, protect participant identities, and deepen engagement with the data. Upon determining the final themes, I analyzed them in the context of Porter's five forces model, providing insights that supported and extended existing theories and contributed to practical understanding in the field.

Section 3: Data and Professional Practice

Project Results

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to identify and explore successful strategies that information and communications industry startup business leaders used for long-term business sustainability beyond 5 years. The research question guiding the project was the following: What successful strategies have information and communications industry business leaders used for business sustainability beyond 5 years? Thematic analysis of interviews and documentary evidence revealed four principal themes: (a) operational and financial sustainability; (b) human capital and organizational capability; (c) market, innovation, and competitive strategy; and (d) customer-centric strategies.

Theme 1: Operational and Financial Sustainability

All six participants stated that cost management and resource optimization are foundational to sustaining business operations. P1 stated that in the first few years of starting the business, she and other leaders had to take on more than one role: “For example, someone combined operations with human resources, and another person combined sales with product development.” All six participants stated that operational efficiency was critical for extending their cash flow and allocating funds to innovation. Implementing automated systems across human resources, operations, accounting, finance, and other business areas was a definitive factor in reducing overhead and improving their bottom line. Annual reports from leading SaaS firms highlighted strategic

investments in cloud infrastructure and process automation to achieve superior cost structures (Software Equity Group, 2025) and support current participants' assertions.

Carefully managing costs and using resources efficiently are direct countermeasures to the forces of rivalry among existing competitors and the bargaining power of customers, allowing businesses to achieve a cost advantage (Porter, 1979). Similarly, established business practices and literature on lean management and strategic cost analysis indicated that operational efficiency is a primary source of competitive advantage (Foggetti et al., 2025). These operational and financial strategies establish a foundation that sustains daily business activities and enables the allocation of resources toward innovation, long-term growth, and sustainability. The current study findings suggest that operational and financial sustainability function as stabilizing mechanisms, enabling sustained strategic decision making even beyond the initial startup phase. Operational and financial sustainability preserve strategic flexibility, allowing business leaders to respond to competitive threats, invest selectively in innovation, and avoid dependency on external financing that may not be readily available. Operational and financial sustainability reduces exposure to competitive shocks, thereby strengthening long-term sustainability rather than merely preventing early failure.

Theme 2: Human Capital and Organizational Capability

All six participants indicated that technical talent is a critical asset, a significant source of competitive tension, and a determinant of success, especially during the first 5 years of business and beyond. P1 stated that "human resource is the greatest asset of a business, you could tie sustainability and a company's fortunes to the employees you

have ... the cost of error drastically goes down because your people are competent.”

Participants described their top challenge as attracting and retaining highly skilled employees. Investment in professional development is an effective retention tool.

Employer branding materials and major information and communications companies’

Environmental, Social, and Governance reports align with this focus on human capital,

acclaiming their innovative cultures and investment in employee growth (Ren & Cheng,

2024). Within Porter’s (1979) model, this strategy mitigates the bargaining power of

suppliers (i.e., skilled employees) by reducing their incentive to leverage outside

employment offers. This linkage between talent management strategies and a core tenet

of competitive industry analysis extends the knowledge from foundational human

resources studies, illustrating how organizational culture can serve as a defensible barrier

against competitors (Banu & Katyayani, 2021).

By investing in human capital and fostering organizational capability, businesses secure the skills necessary to execute strategies and build the talent base required to innovate, adapt to market changes, and sustain competitive advantage over the long term.

Participants’ narratives suggest that human capital and organizational capability

strategies operate as mechanisms for organizational learning and adaptive capacity,

which are necessities in environments needing rapid problem solving, continuous skill

upgrading, and coordinated decision making. These findings indicate that organizational

capability, developed through leadership quality and cultural coherence, enables

businesses to respond effectively to technological change and competitive rivalry,

thereby supporting sustainability beyond 5 years.

Theme 3: Market, Innovation, and Competitive Strategy

All six participants stated that businesses achieve sustainability by proactively positioning themselves in the market and continuously innovating, and the participants emphasized making this approach a major focus from inception rather than adapting it passively. Proactive market positioning involves the business taking deliberate, strategic actions to shape how customers, competitors, and other stakeholders perceive it. All participants reported using constant environmental scanning and agile development not to imitate competitors but to identify market gaps they can take advantage of and differentiate their offerings. Both P1 and P2 stated that their proprietary technology created a moat that protected them from competitors and substitutes. Public data on information and communications companies corroborate this assertion, with their SEC filings justifying significant research and development expenditure as a strategy for market leadership and defense against obsolescence (Mazzi et al., 2025).

Innovation as a strategy for market leadership aligns with Porter's (1979) five forces model by showing how innovation can alter the industry structure by changing how value is created, delivered, and captured, thereby directly reducing the threat of substitute products and the intensity of competitive rivalry. Also, corroborating is the work of scholars like Bari et al. (2022) on dynamic capabilities, underscoring that innovation is the central engine for achieving and maintaining a competitive position. By proactively positioning themselves in the market and continuously innovating, businesses create a defense that protects them from rivals and generates the momentum needed for sustainability. Participants used these strategies to reshape competitive dynamics rather

than merely respond to market pressures. By redefining value propositions, participants' sustained innovation reduced rivalry and substitution threats, supporting long-term sustainability in line with Porter's framework.

Theme 4: Customer-Centric Strategies

All research participants stated that customer integration from business inception is a potent strategy for ensuring business sustainability and reducing customer churn. Participants described strategies focused on becoming indispensable to their customers' operations, thereby creating significant switching costs for customers. P2 emphasized that their product development was directly tied to their key clients' strategic roadmaps, thereby ensuring long-term alignment and further reducing customer churn. This practice is detailed in customer success case studies published by leading business-to-business software vendors who frame customer-centricity as a core retention strategy (Hinterhuber et al., 2022; Vargo & Lusch, 2017). The strategy of customer integration aligns with Porter's model by effectively diminishing the bargaining power of buyers, as highly integrated and satisfied customers have less motivation and ability to negotiate or churn (Hinterhuber et al., 2022; Porter, 1979; Vargo & Lusch, 2017). This finding confirms established marketing paradigms such as the service-dominant logic, which posits that cocreated value leads to stronger, more sustainable relationships (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). Adopting customer-centric strategies from inception strengthens client relationships, reduces churn, and creates enduring value that enables business sustainability. Participants' narratives suggest that customer-centric strategies support sustainability by stabilizing demand and reducing exposure to substitution and rivalry. By closely aligning

offerings with customer needs, leaders protect revenue streams and sustain competitive advantage.

Collectively, the findings confirm the lasting relevance of Porter's five forces model as an evaluative tool for understanding competitive pressures businesses face within their first 5 years and beyond. The findings align with existing studies that emphasize cost leadership, innovation, and talent management as pillars of strategy. However, the findings extend knowledge for the business practitioner by moving the model from a static diagnostic to a dynamic strategic playbook, demonstrating that each of the five forces can be actively managed and mitigated through specific, actionable strategies in the various business areas, including operations, human resources, innovation, and customer relations. The demonstration that entrepreneurs can actively manage each of the five forces challenges a passive interpretation of industry structure and shows that entrepreneurs can proactively reshape their competitive environment (Kim & Mauborgne, 2015; Porter, 1979). This dynamic application aligns with more recent strategic literature, such as the concept of "blue ocean strategy", by illustrating how innovation and value creation can make competitive forces less relevant (Kim & Mauborgne, 2015). Thus, this research project provides a synthesized framework that connects Porter's classic competitive analysis with modern entrepreneurial action.

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

From the findings of this research project, I offer actionable insights for business leaders, particularly those in the information and communications industry, highlighting the importance of strategic management of operations, talent, innovation, and customer

relationships in achieving sustainability. Based on my findings, I present a synthesized framework that integrates Porter's (1979) classic competitive analysis with modern entrepreneurial action. I reframed Porter's model from a classic static diagnostic to a dynamic strategic playbook that informs professional practice in today's modern, fast-changing markets, by demonstrating that business leaders can proactively influence the five competitive forces.

Business leaders must prioritize operational and financial sustainability, running their businesses efficiently and generating revenue that covers expenses, leaving surplus reserves for reinvestment and contingencies. Operational and financial sustainability are foundations for resilience and growth. This finding supports Foggetti et al. (2025), who found that operational efficiency is a primary driver of competitive advantage in high technology sectors. Lean operations, automation, and prudent cost structures enable organizations to free resources for innovation and market expansion (Foggetti et al., 2025). Business leaders should therefore institutionalize process automation, agile budgeting, forecasting, and continuous monitoring of key performance indicators (KPIs) to sustain liquidity, enable strategic flexibility, and improve profitability. Business leaders can automate processes across the functional areas of their business at minimal cost, leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI), yet yield a very high return on investment. For example, in the finance department, businesses can create real-time dashboards using AI to track KPIs and strategic goals, thereby reducing labor costs while increasing effectiveness by eliminating the human error factor. The applicability of AI also extends

to other functional areas, including operations, marketing, sales, HR, information technology, legal, customer service, and research and development.

The research project's findings also underscore the strategic value of human capital and organizational capability as core sources of competitive advantage.

Participants' emphasis on cultivating skilled, adaptable teams aligns with Bari et al. (2022), who posited that dynamic capabilities, especially talent agility, drive corporate sustainability. Investing in employee development and fostering an innovation-oriented culture can reduce turnover and enhance creative problem-solving (Ren & Cheng, 2024). Leaders should embed structured learning systems, mentorship programs, and recognition programs within their organizations to foster both technical depth and organizational commitment (Jo & Shin, 2025). It is important to recognize that human capital encompasses not only employees but also business owners and partners. The competencies and alignment of these founding members are critical to a business's success. Whether each founder or partner possesses the necessary expertise and genuinely shares the business's vision significantly influences the business's ability to launch successfully, sustain operations, and ultimately survive in the long term (Dost, 2025).

One cannot overemphasize the role of innovation in shaping market structure, creating differentiation, and sustaining operations. Continuous environmental scanning and agile product development enable firms to preempt competitive threats, transforming Porter's (1979) threat of substitutes into opportunities for rebranding. This finding corroborates Kim and Mauborgne's (2015) blue ocean strategy perspective, which states that innovation and value creation can render competition less relevant. Business

practitioners should cultivate internal innovation pipelines, strategic partnerships, and R&D investments that align technological advancement with customer needs and industry evolution (Kim & Mauborgne, 2015). With this value creation architecture, businesses can maintain their strategic positioning and thus ensure business sustainability.

Customer-centric strategies are another pillar of sustainability. This finding supports the work of Hinterhuber et al. (2022) and Vargo and Lusch (2017), who emphasize the co-creation of value as a source of enduring competitiveness within the service-dominant logic framework. Integrating customers into product development and aligning business roadmaps with client objectives reduces churn and strengthens long-term relationships (Hinterhuber et al., 2022; Vargo & Lusch, 2017). Practitioners should operationalize customer success frameworks, utilize data-driven feedback loops, and personalize engagement to enhance relational equity and boost long-term profitability.

Collectively, these contributions from my research project extend existing theory and professional practice by showing that today's business leader is a strategic entrepreneur and their role is not merely reactive but must actively reshape industry dynamics. This research project offers business leaders a validated framework for sustaining competitiveness through the proactive management of the five forces. This insight aligns with Rahmawati et al. (2025), who argued that firms achieving sustainability do so through adaptive and anticipatory strategies that continuously manage environmental uncertainty. For the research-scholar community, integrating Porter's (1979) model with dynamic capability and service-dominant logic perspectives enriches

the theory of strategic management. It opens avenues for cross-disciplinary inquiry into business sustainability. Implementing these evidence-based recommendations can help businesses in the information and communications industry transition from survival to sustainable growth, while contributing to the broader field of entrepreneurial strategy and practice.

Based on the findings of this research project, I propose several recommendations for business leaders as follows:

1. Leaders should institutionalize strategic agility by making agile management systems integral parts of their organizations, integrating operational, financial, and market intelligence, thus enabling rapid decision-making in complex and volatile environments.
2. Investing in human capital as strategic infrastructure is essential; therefore, leaders should develop competency-based training, promote cross-functional collaboration, and reward innovation to sustain a culture of continuous improvement. Additionally, they should ensure that their co-founders possess the necessary competencies and genuinely believe in the organizational vision.
3. Building innovation ecosystems is equally critical, requiring the creation of collaborative networks among employees, customers, and industry partners to accelerate idea generation and reduce time to market, supported by R&D investments that address unmet market needs and enhance technological differentiation.

4. Leaders should operationalize customer integration by moving beyond just transactional engagement with customers, and aligning customer success metrics with organizational KPIs, using analytics to anticipate customer needs, and strengthening switching barriers through value co-creation.
5. Additionally, business leaders should adopt a dynamic strategic framework by applying the extended Porter's five forces model, identified in this research project, as a strategic management tool to continuously diagnose and mitigate threats through deliberate operational, human, and market interventions.
6. Strengthening governance and learning systems through performance dashboards and knowledge-sharing mechanisms will help translate experience into institutional knowledge, thereby enhancing organizational capability and sustainability.

Implications for Social Change

The findings from this qualitative pragmatic inquiry have implications that go beyond business profitability and operational efficiency to the broader domains of community development, institutional strengthening, and societal well-being. The results highlight how business sustainability, overall and specifically within the information and communications industry, can drive positive and enduring social change through innovation, employment creation, human capital development, and technological advancements.

Sustainable business practices identified in this research project can directly contribute to reducing unemployment rates and enhancing community stability. As

businesses survive beyond 5 years, they generate consistent and stable income for employees and owners, nourish the growth and sustainability of ancillary businesses, and promote equitable economic growth (Foggetti et al., 2025). This myriad of effects supports local economies, reduces dependency on public assistance, and fosters self-reliant communities (Bachtiar et al., 2023; Foggetti et al., 2025). Businesses in the information and communications sector create jobs and help employees develop their skills; therefore, business leaders who institutionalize sustainability strategies foster income security for individuals and households.

How business leaders manage and develop their workforce has implications for social change also. The research project's findings confirm that human capital and organizational capability are drivers of business sustainability. When leaders value and prioritize employee training, development, and mentorship, they not only reduce turnover and improve productivity, but they also contribute to building a culture of learning and empowerment (Bari et al., 2022; Foggetti et al., 2025). This culture promotes upward mobility and skill democratization, factors that help individuals transition from low-skill employment into managerial and technology-driven roles, thereby reducing social and economic inequality.

Businesses that embrace transparency, fairness, and respect for human dignity contribute to a positive business culture that extends into the broader society. By embedding ethics into decision-making and aligning corporate goals with customer and community needs, business leaders can model integrity and social responsibility (Banks et al., 2022). This alignment fosters public trust in private enterprise and contributes to an

inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem that values both social and economic outcomes. It is pertinent to note that when businesses fail to uphold these principles, the result is a breakdown in trust, communication, and mutual respect, which are conditions that often underlie instances of workplace violence.

Innovation as a sustainability strategy has societal implications that extend beyond business performance and the bottom line. Businesses that develop innovative solutions can address critical social challenges, such as access to information, education, healthcare, communication, and e-commerce, in underserved communities. Through responsible innovation, these businesses become agents of technological diffusion and social inclusion, thereby improving the overall quality of life (Li et al., 2023). A good example is places that would otherwise be cut off from the rest of the world, accessing social media via phone for news, information, and even income generation.

At the institutional level, the findings from this research project indicate that when businesses implement sustainability strategies, they contribute to the development of stronger, more resilient economic institutions. These businesses form a foundation that serves as a stabilizing anchor during economic downturns and disruptions, such as those caused by global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or technological shifts, as seen in the dot-com bubble burst of 2000 to 2001 (Glavas & Visentin, 2024; Reeves & Fox, 2025). Businesses anchored in sustainability practices, operational and financial sustainability, human capital and organizational capability, market, innovation, and competitive strategies, and customer-centric strategies, played a critical role in strengthening societal resilience amid these downturns and disruptions. In this way,

business sustainability contributes to societal resilience by ensuring that communities maintain access to essential services, employment opportunities, and innovative solutions during times of uncertainty (Foggetti et al., 2025; Reeves & Fox, 2025). Notable is the shift in work practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, as people transitioned to remote work using video conferencing and collaboration platforms, as well as e-commerce platforms for purchasing groceries and other daily necessities, due to social distancing restrictions.

For the research-scholar community, this research project underscores the transformative potential of business and entrepreneurship as mechanisms for social change. By linking Porter's five forces model with contemporary theories, such as dynamic capability and service-dominant logic, this project reframes business and entrepreneurship as a socially embedded activity capable of reshaping behaviors and cultures. The findings encourage scholars and practitioners to explore further how business sustainability strategies can influence social systems, leadership ethics, and policy frameworks that support inclusive economic participation.

Collectively, these implications for social change reveal that business sustainability overall and in the information and communications industry extends far beyond profit margins. When business leaders implement the strategies identified in this research project, they create organizations that not only survive and succeed but also generate multidimensional value. The resulting social benefits include reduced unemployment, empowered workforces, digital inclusion, economic stability, safer workplaces and communities, and ethical business ecosystems. Thus, this research

contributes to positive social change by offering a roadmap through which business leaders and scholars can transform economic activity into a platform for human advancement and community resilience.

Recommendations for Future Study

Future researchers can expand on this research project by addressing its methodological and contextual limitations. My sample consisted of six business leaders within a specific geographic area and industry. Increasing the sample size and including participants from other geographic locations and industries would provide a more robust understanding of business sustainability (Stratton, 2024). Future researchers may opt for a quantitative or mixed-methods approach, as these methods can complement the qualitative design by statistically testing relationships among constructs such as operational efficiency and return on investment (Kawar et al., 2024). Future researchers could focus their studies on lean startup, service-dominant logic, shared value creation, or other value-centric innovation topics related to business sustainability, thus advancing practical, theory-informed strategies that business leaders can apply. Similarly, considering the business life cycle, whether in the inception, growth phase, or maturity, and how sustainability strategies evolve in relation to the business life cycle, would be beneficial. Researchers could also study the moderating effects of digital transformation and AI. Also, cross-cultural comparison may reveal the impact of institutional and regulatory environments. Future researchers could explore the intersection of gender, leadership orientation, and governance structures, examining how these factors influence the implementation of sustainability strategies. Addressing these areas would deepen the

body of knowledge and further inform practice on how business leaders can navigate competitive forces and achieve sustainability.

Conclusion

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry, I explored the strategies that business leaders in the information and communications industry used to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. I analyzed the data thematically within the framework of Porter's five forces. I collected the data through semistructured interviews and supporting documentation. My analysis revealed four principal themes: (a) operational and financial sustainability; (b) human capital and organizational capability; (c) market, innovation, and competitive strategy; and (d) customer-centric strategies. Based on my findings, I concluded that efficient resource utilization, continuous investment in talent, innovation ecosystems, and deep customer engagement are key drivers of business sustainability. For the research-scholar community, this research project underscores the transformative potential of business and entrepreneurship as mechanisms for social change. By linking Porter's five forces model with contemporary theories, such as dynamic capability and service-dominant logic, I reframed business and entrepreneurship as a socially embedded activity capable of reshaping behaviors and cultures. I contribute to professional practice by offering, in this research project, a practical framework that enables business leaders to institutionalize strategic agility, strengthen governance systems, and foster a learning-based organizational culture. Business sustainability depends on a proactive strategy, adaptive leadership, and human-centered innovation, which is the key message of my research project. Business leaders who apply these principles to their strategic and

operational models can see their businesses not only survive but also succeed while creating positive social impacts.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you employ to stay in business for the first 5 years?
2. What strategies did you employ for business sustainability?
3. How did you determine the success of your strategies?
4. What challenges did you experience when implementing your strategies?
5. What strategies do you employ to manage the threat of new competitor entrants into the marketplace?
6. How have you sustained and expanded your market share?
7. What other information can you provide to prospective founders of startups in the information and communications industry?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Action	Script
<p>Introduce the interview and set the stage—often over a meal or coffee.</p>	<p>“Hello, thank you for taking the time to participate in this research study. I appreciate the criticality you attach to the expected findings, and I hope to add to the literature that develops strategies to entrepreneurial sustainability. I have been working on a degree for a Doctor of Business Administration for the past few years. In this study, I am exploring the strategies business leaders in the information and communications industry use to stay in business past 5 years .”</p> <p>“A few weeks ago, you agreed to sign an informed consent form. Do you have any questions for me or any matter that requires my attention? This interview is confidential, and your identity and that of your organization shall remain anonymous and represented by codes.”</p> <p>“I will collect data using semistructured interview questions. The idea is to allow you to explain any strategies, events, and memories that answer the interview questions. During your narration, I may prompt you for further explanation and details.”</p> <p>“I will need to record your responses so that I do not miss anything.”</p> <p>“Note that you may rescind your decision to participate in the research anytime.”</p>
<p>Ask Interview Questions to get in-depth responses. Listen for nonverbal cues. Paraphrase as needed.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What strategies did you employ to stay in business for the first 5 years? 2. What strategies did you employ for business sustainability? 3. How did you determine the success of your strategies?

Action	Script
	<p>4. What challenges did you experience when implementing your strategies?</p> <p>5. What strategies do you employ to manage the threat of new competitor entrants into the marketplace?</p> <p>6. How have you sustained and expanded your market share?</p> <p>7. What other information can you provide to prospective founders of startups in the information and communications industry?</p>
<p>Schedule transcript review either by phone or email.</p>	<p>“In a few days, I will need your assistance in authenticating my understanding of your responses to the interview questions as part of the research process. You may adjust the script or add to your initial responses if needed. I will send the transcript by email, and we can discuss it by phone if you agree.”</p>
<p>Introduce a member checking review and set the stage.</p>	<p>“Thank you for agreeing to meet me today to finalize what I heard from you during the interview and the meaning I have provided for each response.”</p>
<p>Wrap up the interview by thanking participants.</p>	<p>“Your contribution to this doctoral research has been most impressive, and I thank you very much for helping me to achieve the doctoral degree. I hope you will find the research findings beneficial to your organization and professional development.”</p>