

2015

Success Factors of Small Business Owners

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Susan Turner

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Walden University
2015

Abstract

Success Factors of Small Business Owners

by

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MBA, Northcentral University, 2009

BBA, Northcentral University, 2008

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2015

Abstract

Small business owners represent 99.7% of all U.S. employer firms, employ half of the private sector employees, and provide 43% of the total U.S. private payroll. However, 50% of new small business startups fail within the first 5 years of operation. The purpose for this multiple case study was to explore what skills, knowledge, and strategies small business coffee shop owners use to succeed in business beyond 5 years. Systems theory, chaos theory, and complexity theory provided the conceptual framework for exploring the research question of this multiple case study. To identify and explore the factors for maintaining small business' operations, the population for this study was 3 small business owners of 3 coffee shops in Duval County, Florida who sustained their businesses for a minimum of 5 years. The data sources were semistructured interviews, the business' websites, social media information, and site visit observations. Based on methodological triangulation of the data sources, analytical coding, and analyzing the data using mind mapping and software, 3 themes emerged: owner networking and the business as a customer to customer networking venue, business plans' initial challenges and addressing subsequent changes, and a need for marketing differentiation. Potential implications for effecting positive social change include increasing the rate of small business success, and increasing the financial security for owners, employees, employees' families, and their communities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my parents, Dr. Freda Turner and Phillip Turner as well as my brother, Daniel Turner. With the encouragement, love, support, and belief in me from my family, I was able to make a dream a reality.

Acknowledgments

I am very thankful to my chair, Dr. Al Endres whose unwavering patience and guidance got me through even the most difficult of struggles. His keen eye and attention to detail helped me to refine my thoughts and stay focused. I would also like to thank Dr. Yvonne Doll, Dr. Gene Fusch, and Dr. Peter Anthony for their encouragement and valued feedback throughout the process. Finally, I would like to thank the faculty, staff, and my fellow scholars who have been positive, driving forces and a source of motivation in this venture from the beginning.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Jobs created by small business owners stimulate job growth and the U.S. economy; yet, small business owners are failing at alarming rates (Cader & Leatherman, 2011). The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA, 2011) noted that small business owners create 99% of all jobs in the United States however, the U.S. Department of Commerce (as cited in SBA, 2011) reported that 50% of new small business startups fail within the first 5 years of operation. The focus of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore what factors small business owners who have sustained a small business for a minimum of 5 years attribute to the sustainability of their business. Identifying factors that minimize small business owner's failure rates might result in increased job opportunities.

Background of the Problem

Information in the literature related to this study includes the terms entrepreneur and small business owner interchangeably. The word entrepreneur means one who undertakes; entrepreneurs are those who provide goods and services that satisfy needs in the market (Glinskiene & Petuškiene, 2011). The SBA (2012) further defined small business owner as one who takes risks and employs 1-500 employees to provide goods or services. For the purposes of this study, I will also use the terms entrepreneur and small business owner interchangeably.

Often, small business owners launch ventures to drive innovation and create new jobs. Administrators of the SBA (2011) suggested that small business owners represent 99.7% of all U.S. employer firms, employ half of the private sector employees, and

provide 43% of the total U.S. private payroll. Despite the considerable amount of small business owners that embark on business launches, the high rate of failure of new small businesses ventures is a serious problem for employment opportunities in the United States. When owners of small businesses cease operations, their failure contributes to the emotional distress of the owner and all stakeholders such as employees, customers, and suppliers. Identifying and exploring the insights of small business owners who have successfully operated a small business for at least 5 years can provide guidance to aspiring small business owners on strategies to sustain operations longer than 5 years.

Problem Statement

An estimated 660,000 small business owners in the United States failed in 2009 and had to close their businesses (SBA, 2011). Sixty-eight percent of small business owners close their small businesses by the 5th year (SBA, 2011). The general business problem is that individuals often embark on small business initiatives without adequate preparation or information. The specific business problem is that some small business owners lack the skills, knowledge, and strategies to succeed in business beyond 5 years (Neumark, Wall, & Junfu, 2011).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore what skills, knowledge, and strategies small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 5 years. The population for this study was three small business owners over the age of 18 of three coffee shops with 10 or fewer tables in Duval County, Florida who have sustained their business for a minimum of 5 years. The resultant data may contribute to

social change by reducing uncertainty for existing and aspiring small business owners and provide insight into strategies that contribute to sustainability with concomitant increases in employment.

Nature of the Study

The three methods of conducting social science research are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. A researcher selects the method that is appropriate to address his or her research questions and hypotheses. A qualitative strategy enables researchers to explore events and processes, and the quantitative approach provides a protocol for examining relationships and group differences among research variables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Bernard (2012) defined quantitative research as developing and inferring information through numeric outcomes. A mixed-methods approach combines the use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I chose a qualitative method since quantitative or mixed methods approach is not suitable for this study as the focus in quantitative examinations is a statistically validated approach to addressing issues (Zivkovic, 2012).

There are several design strategies of inquiry in qualitative research such as: (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, (c) grounded theory, (d) narrative research, and (e) case study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Phenomenological researchers seek to explore individuals' lived experiences and their shared essence based on shared experiences of a phenomenon. Ethnographic researchers study human groups and seek to explore how groups, organizations, or communities form and maintain a culture. Grounded theory researchers seek to derive a theory grounded in the insights of the participants regarding a

process or interaction (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Narrative researchers explore the experiences of individuals to formulate a narrative story.

For this study, I employed a multiple case study design for exploring what skills, knowledge, and strategies small business owners need and have utilized to succeed in business beyond 5 years. Multiple case study research is useful when addressing how or why type questions rather than questions regarding how many (Yin, 2012). A multiple case study design enables a researcher to provide contextual rich analysis of data bounded by time and place relating to a phenomenon utilizing how and why questions (Yin, 2012). The multiple case study design enables an intensive analysis of multiple individual units such as specific people, groups, or phenomenon to uncover the interplay of factors within each unit (Yin, 2012). For these reasons, the multiple case study is the most appropriate design approach for this study to obtain and explore multiple sources of information to identify new insights into phenomena to address the specific business problem.

Research Question

The research question guiding this study was: What skills, knowledge, and strategies do small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 5 years?

Interview Questions

To learn about a real-world phenomenon, researchers often use in-depth qualitative interviewing techniques to obtain rich information in a natural setting, after a systematic analysis, identification, and development of themes (Yin, 2012). I interviewed a purposeful sample of participants, over the age of 18, who have launched and sustained

a small business coffee shop with 10 or fewer tables for at least 5 years in Duval County, Florida.

The interview questions are below; when needed each interview question included probing follow up questions:

1. What was the motivation to create your own small business?
2. What training or education has prepared you to become a small business owner?
3. What modifications did you make to your initial business plan, strategy, or process during the first 5 years?
4. What community resources did you use that contributed to your success?
5. What opportunities did you find helpful in launching your small business initiative?
6. What were the most significant challenges or barriers you experienced in the first 5 years of opening your small business?
7. How did you address each of the significant challenges or barriers?
8. What types of advertising or marketing techniques did you use?
9. What financial resources did you have access to in launching and sustaining your business?
10. What strategies have you found most effective for motivating your employees to perform better?
11. What other factors that we have not discussed may have contributed to your success?

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of the conceptual framework is to help create a lens in understanding the context of the study and to focus the literature review (Galea, 2012). The conceptual framework allows researchers to provide a structure and collect data to answer research questions. Systems theory, chaos theory, and complexity theory provided the contextual foundation for this study.

Systems Theory

Ludwig von Bertalanffy coined the term *systems theory* in the 1930s after he became dissatisfied with the linear approach to change and growth (Drack & Schwartz, 2010). von Bertalanffy (1972) suggested that all parts of an entity contribute to a functioning system (Dominici & Levanti, 2011; Senge, Smith, Kruschwitz, Laur, & Schley, 2010). Kaine and Cowan (2011) further defined systems theory as a culmination of components that when linked together are equal to or greater than the sum of their parts and serves well when there is an understanding of the system as a whole rather than the behavior of individual components.

Systems theory aligns closely to exploring the factors and unpredictable challenges that a small business owner experiences in launching, managing, and sustaining a small business. The elements that a small business owner must acknowledge might include the competition, finances, regulatory environments, logistic challenges, marketing options, as well as one's experience, education, and leadership skills in running a small business. Systems theory is a relevant construct, as successful small

business owners incorporate many different elements, decisions, and components when starting and successfully sustaining a small business enterprise.

Chaos Theory

Chaos theory first appeared in science and math studies (Ruelle, 1991). Until the 1960s, business leaders did not recognize chaos as a possible obstacle to business success. Lorenze (1963) pioneered chaos theory in 1963, and other researchers have shown that chaos theory is a relevant approach to business and organization management (Huu & Kock, 2011). Chaos theory identifies a complex system as having a number of interrelated parts that are dynamic and constantly changing. Ruelle (1991) noted that one of the early pioneers in the chaos theory concept initially discovered that the idea was so revolutionary that academic professionals would not publish the idea. Chaos theory first appeared in an academic discussion at a professional conference in Italy in 1977 (Ruelle, 1991). This discussion was the first time the public heard about the chaos theory as a possible helpful foundation in understanding that one can manage order by acknowledging and anticipating chaos. Acknowledging chaos in the internal and external environment allows small business owners to make decisions develop and implement strategies that might contribute to their success.

Complexity Theory

Waldrop (1992) defined complexity theory as a system with chaos due to different behaviors. Nicolis and Prigogine (1989) described complexity theory as an idea where different modes of behavior occur in varying environmental conditions. Waldrop, as well as Nicolis and Prigogine, concurred that complex systems must be adaptable, and

individuals must be able to react to change. Complexity theory is a subset of systems theory that appeared in the literature in the 1930s and 1940s (Stacey, 2011). Within the literature of the past two decades, complexity theory challenges traditional management assumptions (Psychogios & Garev, 2012). While managers and leaders depend on existing knowledge, words now have different meanings, and strategies do not exist in linear or historical terms (Lissack, 1999). Small business owners face challenges that include new global marketplaces, differences in cultures, variances in available resources, and interactions with internal and external customers. Grounded in complexity theory, small business owners should interpret new environmental events and adjust accordingly. Change can be chaotic and does not occur in a planned or linear fashion (Lissack, 1999). Long-term forecasting is challenging due to the dynamic evolution of events. With the high failure rate of new small business startups, perhaps understanding complexity theory might contribute to new insights or factors that might be useful to existing or aspiring small business owners on factors relating to successful business initiatives.

Definition of Terms

To facilitate a common understanding of terms throughout the study, the following definitions may help readers achieve a common perspective of individual items.

Business failure: A business failure occurs, for the purposes of this proposal, when the owner does not succeed in business beyond 5 years. In addition, business failure occurs when a business owner files bankruptcy, ceases operations, or is breaking even

with neither a livable income nor a fair return to the investors from the business (Roepga, 2011).

Entrepreneur: An entrepreneur is a person who sets up a business taking on financial risks in the hope of profit (Lawrence, 2014). For the purposes of this qualitative multiple case study, this term is synonymous with small business owner within the context of the literature review section.

SBA: The Small Business Administration (SBA) is a governmental agency that provides resources to assist small business owners in both the startup and growth phases of running a business (Bamford & Bruton, 2011).

SBDC: The Office of Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) is comprised of volunteers who provide management assistance to current and prospective small business owners (Bamford & Bruton, 2011).

Small business: There are variances in the definition of a small business. SBA (2011) defined a small business as an organization with fewer than 500 employees. For the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study, a small business owner is one who begins a privately owned small business and has less than 50 employees.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The assumptions and limitations of the study identify what is out of a researcher's control while the delimitations address the boundaries of this study.

Assumptions

The assumptions within a study allow a researcher to identify assumed truths within the study. Researchers must identify and address possible assumptions to prevent

misrepresentation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Fisher & Stenner, 2011). An assumption of this study was that each participant would respond to the interview questions with truthful answers. Participants may choose to give a dishonest answer fearing the process may lack confidentiality. To mitigate the risk of dishonesty in reporting, I provided a consent form to the participants ensuring them confidentiality of the data they provided.

Another assumption is that a qualitative methodology is an appropriate methodology to explore the factors that contribute to a successful business. Seiler and Kowalsky (2011) described four elements associated with the functioning of a business as: (a) inputs, (b) processes, (c) outputs, and (d) outcomes; it is assumed that the successful small business owner is capable of dealing with these elements.

Limitations

The limitations are potential weaknesses of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Limitations include time restrictions to meet and collect data from the participants and the availability of the participant pool. Another limitation is that collected data may not adequately reflect the views or experiences of all small business owners. The participants were a purposeful sample of small business owners in Duval County who have sustained a coffee shop with 10 or fewer tables for a minimum of 5 years. A limitation may include some inaccuracies as the participants attempt to recall events over the last 5 years. A geographical-restricted sample for this qualitative multiple case study is also a limitation. A purposeful sample of small business owners of a coffee shop with 10 or fewer tables who had sustained the business for a minimum of 5 years in Duval County, Florida was the focus of the study.

Delimitations

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) noted that the delimitations of a study denote items included and items not included. I interviewed coffee shop owners with 10 or fewer tables and located in Duval County, Florida. The bounds of this study were limited to (a) a sample size of coffee shop owners who have sustained their business for 5 years, (b) the limited study location of Duval County, Florida, and (c) the time allotted for conducting the study did not exceed 5 months after receiving Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

Significance of the Study

Malchow-Moller, Schjerning, and Sorensen (2011) demonstrated that small business owners are critical to the growth and health of the U.S. economy as small business owners create the majority of all jobs. Furthermore, Byrd, Ross, and Glackin (2013) noted that small business owners comprise of about 50% of private sector output, employ more than 50% of private sector workers, and create new jobs. Comparing and combining the findings from this study with previous research and the conceptual framework may provide new insights for increasing the success rate for aspiring small business owners.

Contributions to Business Practice

Conclusions from this qualitative multiple case study could help small business owners identify best practices to increase their success rate by exploring the experiences of small business owners living in and operating a small business coffee shop with 10 or fewer tables in Duval County, Florida. The Small Business Administration agencies in

Duval County might use the data to help aspiring small business owners by offering counseling, aid, and financial assistance to start, build, and grow their businesses (SBA, 2014). Additionally, for existing and aspiring small business owners, the data might provide insights to formulate a sound management plan to aid in effective and efficient operation of the business as well as maintaining a competitive advantage to increase profits, sales, and sustainability beyond 5 years (Werner & Herman, 2012).

Ropega (2011) noted that the research literature provides varied information on why small business owners fail. Chong-Yah and Hui-Ying (2011) concluded that the United States has been experiencing the largest economic downturn since the Great Depression. The findings from this study might result in increased success rates for current and aspiring small business owners and contribute to increased innovation and technology.

Implications for Social Change

Despite 785,000 new business launches each year (SBA, 2011), many business leaders close their business due to failure. When a new business leader fails, jobs are lost, and local, state, and national economies suffer. Business leaders who can sustain their businesses can provide employment opportunities, employee benefits, new services, and products to the community. The continued high failure rate of small business owners threatens the economy, stability in families, communities, and local government (Lussier & Halabi, 2010). There is a need for increased attention to small business dynamics because small business owners are crucial to the economy in the United States by business formation, job creation, and wealth building (Lahm, Stowe, Carton, & Buck,

2011; SCORE, 2014). According to Lahm et al., small business owners generate between 60% and 80% of all new jobs in the U.S. Owners of small businesses provide employment to 99% of all U.S. employees (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). Specifically, in Duval County, Florida, there are 23,538 small businesses (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Perhaps the information obtained from participants will provide insights and data to help small business owners identify factors to increase the number of sustainable new small business endeavors. Therefore, identifying and sharing information learned from successful small business owners can lead to both an increasing and faster rate of new business' success for small business owners. An increased rate of success for small business owners might stimulate the growth of business, and the economic well-being of employees and their communities contributing to global and social change.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

A literature review is an essential component in the development of a research study. The purpose of conducting a review of the literature is to enable the researcher the opportunity to learn and build upon existing information relevant to the research question of the study (Neuman, 2011). The research question guiding this study was: What skills, knowledge, and strategies do small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 5 years?

The databases used in the literature search included Emerald Management Journals, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, Management & Organization Studies, LexisNexis Academic, and government databases. Key search words included *small business owner*, *types of small business owners*, *characteristics of*

successful small business owners, failures/challenges of small business owners, small business financing, entrepreneurs, small business startups/planning, small business marketing and small business networking.

I selected these keywords to identify skills, knowledge, and strategies as to why some small business owners are successful when many others fail. I used 168 references in the study. One hundred and forty-three (85%) references are peer reviewed, and 146 (87%) references are less than 5 years old from the anticipated date of Chief Academic Officer Approval.

Conceptual Framework Theories

Systems theory. Systems theory enables researchers to identify interrelationships and parts of the system instead of individual patterns. Ludwig von Bertalanffy used systems theory to examine relationships between events and components (Dominici & Levanti, 2011; Senge et al., 2010; von Bertalanffy, 1972). The literature on the importance of small business owners to the growth of the economy has grown since the 1900s (Ahmad, 2012). Viewing systems holistically allows one to note interactions among elements to understand systemic interrelationships that business owners must understand, improve, and control. General systems theory provides appropriate framing for this qualitative multiple case study.

For a business owner to sustain an operation, there must be an understanding of the interrelations of business needs and activities. Stacey (2011) described systems theory as scientific doctrine of wholeness with a dynamic interaction occurring between the phenomenon and its aggregates. Adaptable business leaders must thrive within various

systems that include some of the following (a) marketing, (b) technology, (c) customer satisfaction, and (d) financial dealings. Exploring the activities of business owners who have sustained their business for at least 5 years may reveal insights for other aspiring business owners. Increased understanding of the interdependencies of sustainability challenges could help organizational leaders implement change (Gharajedaghi, 2011). Using systems theory thinking to include (a) financial actions, (b) internal and external stakeholders, and (c) social and environmental concerns may contribute to sustainable, systemic relationships.

Senge et al. (2010) discussed systems theory suggesting that mental models of (a) assumptions, (b) generalizations, (c) pictures, or (d) images influence understanding of the world. A new business owner does make assumptions and has images of a successful business model. Using systems theory allows one to view a process in terms of how systems and their parts interact. A social structure is not independent or self-reliant. The business owner is dependent on systems of activities that include marketing, networking, and technology; therefore, understanding systems theory is helpful for grounding this study.

Lussier and Halabi (2010) attempted to use systems theory to develop a prediction model for the likelihood of business failure in three countries. The outcome of their 5 years of research identified that a single model was not successful due to variances in regulations, taxes, and customs. This outcome is in alignment with Soojin, Miso, and Joonhwan's (2011) noting that the interactions of many components function together to contribute to a successful system. The focus for this multiple case study was to explore

potential factors that contribute to the sustainability of a new small business launch during the first 5 years. Systems theory assisted in understanding the parts of a business contributing to long-term success.

Chaos theory. Management research of the last decade indicated that there is an enhanced view of leadership and management within organizations. In addition to systems theory, researchers also use chaos theory when seeking to explore and expand the current base of knowledge regarding management behaviors that enhance business effectiveness (Psychogios & Garev, 2012). Lorenz (1963) coined the term chaos theory and, advocated the use of chaos theory in a seminal work he published while studying the unpredictable nature of weather patterns. While chaos theory primarily is associated with natural sciences, other researchers have shown that chaos theory is a relevant approach to business and organizational management (Huu & Kock, 2011).

Gleik (1987) further expanded on chaos theory and demonstrated the relevance of the theory and its applications in social science research. Chaos theory indicates systems are in constant evolution over time and undergo ongoing and unpredictable patterns of fluctuation. Small business owners play a pivotal role in the growth and stability of the economy. Huu and Kock (2011) noted that small businesses are the backbone of every economy. The survival of small businesses is crucial and with instability and chaos in a turbulent business environment, it is important to learn how small businesses' owners can overcome crisis, particularly in the wake of the economic recession beginning in 2008 (Huu & Kock, 2011).

There is a distinct need to develop new perspectives to understand how small businesses' owners survive in turbulent conditions (Huu & Kock, 2011). New approaches that stem from other paradigms such as the chaos theory can provide insights to small business owners on how to deal with demanding and changing business environments. Business systems can be complex, unpredictable, and irregular. Traditional management approaches rooted in regularity and stability are inadequate in addressing the issue of small business survival in uncertain or turbulent environments (Huu & Kock, 2011). Huu and Kock conducted a qualitative multiple case study exploring the application of chaos theory to build a survival model of small- and medium-sized enterprises. Huu and Kock noted that, according to chaos theory, systems continuously self-organize to adapt and invent ways to adjust to the dynamic environment. An alteration in a system's structure, such as the structure of the business, industry/technology, or market/regulation can dramatically influence the behavior of the system. These systems do not lack order, but rather have areas where creativity and innovation happen within the edge of chaos (Huu & Kock, 2011).

Huu and Kock (2011) posited that to deal with dynamic and changing environments, small business owners must be able to take the following steps: (a) diagnosis, (b) action, (c) learning, and (d) growth. Huu and Kock posited that small business owners might benefit from being flexible and being able to alter rapidly their activities based on the environment. In addition, small business owners need to understand the trend of development of the environment (the edge-of-chaos) through strategic partnerships and activities with other players such as (a) other businesses, (b)

bankers, (c) loan officers, and (d) local government. A similar framework to chaos theory is complexity theory since, like chaos theory, the focus of complexity theory is that self-organizing systems are unpredictable, and the individual units are not split and studied in isolation (Psychogios, & Garev, 2012).

Complexity theory. Complexity theory indicates that organizations reflect complex, adaptive systems with many autonomous agents interacting in a non-linear, unpredictable, and ongoing, emergent fashion (Psychogios & Garev, 2012). Weaver (2004) pioneered complexity theory in 1948 after the end of World War II in relation to ongoing operations research and the development of the first computers regarding the war effort. Research in complexity theory has grown in the literature in the last two decades but originated in the foundations of numerous fields such as physics, chemistry, and mathematics. Scholars began to integrate complexity theory into the fields of sciences and business (Pollack, Adler, & Sankaran, 2014). Organizational theorists continue to strive to utilize complexity theory to aid in the understanding of organizational issues (Pollack et al., 2014). In business, there is ongoing instability of the environments in which organizational leaders operate due to a variety of factors such as (a) socioeconomic, (b) cultural, and (c) political issues as well as (a) changing customer needs and preferences, (b) emerging competition, (c) lack of control, and (d) complex decisions (Psychogios & Garev, 2012). These factors lead to the need for small business owners to adopt more sophisticated and structured management practices to maintain sustainability (Psychogios & Garev, 2012).

By adopting a complexity theory perspective, Psychogios and Garev (2012) conducted a multiple case study and sought to explore the patterns of leadership behavior in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that operate within an unstable business environment. A small business owner should be a simultaneous facilitator, negotiator, innovator, or coordinator to adapt to a complex and unstable business environment. A small business owner must adapt to arising circumstances and have a holistic approach to complex decision-making (Psychogios & Garev, 2012). Psychogios and Garev concluded that loose organizational structure, job rotation, intraorganizational relationships, and self-organization are characteristics that may enhance small business leaders' effectiveness.

Rival Theories/Opponents of the Conceptual Framework

There are a variety of theoretical lenses with which a researcher can view a phenomenon. I initially considered contingency theory of leadership for grounding my study. Fiedler (1965) coined the term contingency in the early 1960s as an approach to leadership that focuses on situational and personal attributes and the influence these attributes have on leadership effectiveness. Contingency theory focuses on how factors or contingencies within a small business influence the behavior and leadership styles of the business leaders. da Cruz, Nunes, and Pinheiro (2011) focused on Fiedler's contingency theory, which implies that there is no best style of leadership, but rather an optimal style depends on a particular situation.

Scholars of contingency theory grounded their approaches in early research defining effective leadership behavior and theories developed to focus mainly on the

environment and the behavioral relationship between leaders and their subordinates as well as how conditions occurring within the business make a need for alteration of leadership style to match the situation. da Cruz et al. (2011) posited that the most notable aspects of Fiedler's contingency theory are the use of the model's situational variables and the concept of *leader match*. Contingency theorists such as Fiedler noted that group member performance results primarily from two interacting factors: leadership style and situational variables. Furthermore, some leaders perform better in specific situations but not in all situations (da Cruz et al., 2011). Leadership styles, identified in Fiedler's contingency theory, identify the leader's personality, which is fixed. Therefore, the right style aligns with the right situation. Fiedler formulated a measurement instrument called the *least preferred coworker* (LPC) scale. However, there has been much discussion and multiple perspectives in the literature in what Fiedler's scale measured. Therefore, there remain questions of the construct validity of Fiedler's instrument. (da Cruz et al., 2011). Although contingency theorists met with moderate success, the theory itself has notable weaknesses as the theory's focus is on the leadership situations within the business environment rather than on the leader. Therefore, contingency theory was not an appropriate framework from which to view and explore the skills, knowledge, and strategies that small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 5 years.

I also considered stakeholder theory for grounding my study. Freeman (1984) coined the term stakeholder theory. Stakeholder theory implies that there are responsibilities owed by managers to all those having interest in the business aside from just the shareholders (multifiduciary) and was considered a normative theory at its

inception (Enyinna, 2013). A normative theory of business requires that the business actions of the owner and other stakeholders reflect ethical principles. While stakeholder theory appears to appeal to individuals' moral beliefs in that conducting business is more than just a financial relationship between the business and its shareholders, the limitation of stakeholder theory is the ambiguous nature of its normative status and the lack of clarity regarding its intent (Enyinna, 2013). Enyinna (2013) posited that there are two perspectives that identify stakeholders, those that are committed to simply the smooth operation of the business (strategic) and those wishing to uphold moral imperatives as well (normative). When considering the theory from the strategic perspective, many scholars considered stakeholder theory as immoral or amoral if practitioners do not take normative implications into account (Enyinna, 2013). Enyinna (2013) concluded that while stakeholder theory may have moral implications, it is not ethical since the concept of ethics within the theory is purely hypothetical, therefore not normative. Furthermore, Harrison and Wicks (2013) posited that the concept of value within the stakeholder theory has morphed into only a focus on economic gain rather than actual value. A focus on economic gain rather than on product or service value, in turn, might lead small business owners to ignore or erode their support from the company's other stakeholders (Harrison & Wicks, 2013). Therefore, after further research and reflection, I selected systems theory, complexity theory, and chaos theory as being the most likely relevant frameworks for grounding my study.

Background Information

There are variances in the literature relating to the statistics of small business failures. The leaders of the Small Business Administration (2011) reported that 70% of small business owners' startups survive 2 years while 33% survive 10 years. The Small Business Administration (2011) noted that 50% of small business owners close their small business by the 5th year. While the types of business and statistics vary, identifying factors that contribute to a short-term survival of small business and entrepreneurial launches is necessary to the vibrancy of the U.S. economy. Lussier and Halabi (2010) noted that there is no single theory on the cause of small business owners' failures after launching a small business initiative. Therefore, learning from the success of small business owners who have been successful in maintaining a small business for at least 5 years provided new insights.

Definition of a Small Business Owner

The most standard definition of a small business owner is the proprietor of a firm with fewer than 500 employees (SBA, 2011). The definition of an entrepreneur is a person who sets up a business taking on financial risks in the hope of profit (Lawrence, 2014). Furthermore, an entrepreneur is a profit-seeking agent who creates a productivity-enhancing effort for commercialization or innovation (Parker, 2012). Some researchers use the terms entrepreneur and small business owner interchangeably. The word entrepreneur means *one who undertakes*; entrepreneurs provide goods and services that satisfy needs in markets (Glinskiene & Petuškiene, 2011). Schumpeter, an Austrian-American economist and political scientist, coined the term *entrepreneurship* and added

that entrepreneurs are critical to economic growth (Parker, 2012). The definition of a small business owner varies. Jasra, Khan, Hunjra, Rehman, and Azam (2011) identified a business owner with 100 employees as medium-sized. However, Yang (2012) defined a small business as one with fewer than 250 employees.

While there is no one accepted definition of a small business in the literature, the range of workers appears to be one to 500 employees. While both of the terms are in the literature, not all entrepreneurs run small businesses, and not all business owners are entrepreneurs. There are differences in leadership styles and the manner in which owners run their businesses. For the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study, a small business owner is one who begins a privately owned small business with less than 50 employees. I will focus this study on small business owners and entrepreneurs as defined in the definition of terms section and who have less than 50 employees.

Entrepreneurs and small business owners are vital to the growth and success of the American economy. Small business owners account for 99% of all employers, employ approximately 50% of the private workforce, and provide over 50% of all the private gross domestic product (GDP) in the United States (Bygrave & Zacharakis, 2014; Labeledz & Berry, 2011; Chow & Dunkelberg, 2011). Okafor and Amalu (2010) described entrepreneurship as a vehicle to develop communities and economies. Entrepreneurs, through innovation, develop new products, services, and employment opportunities. SBA leaders (2011) asserted the recession deepened in 2009, and 60% of the job losses were from small businesses. The leaders of the U.S. Small Business Administration (2011) reported the number of business failures exceeds the number of new business starts.

Therefore, insights from the perspectives of small business owners, over the age of 18 residing in Duval County and who own a coffee shop with 10 or fewer tables and maintained a small business for at least 5 years, provided information on factors they attributed to their sustainability.

Small Business Owners

More than 1,500 new businesses start each hour of every working day in the United States (Bygrave & Zacharakis, 2014). However, the concept of small business owners is not widely accepted in many countries. For example, citizens in Germany, France, or Japan prefer working within large, mature organizations and are less likely to launch a new business operation. Within the United States, leaders at the SBA (2011) suggested that small businesses represent 99.7% of all employer firms, employ half of the private sector employees; and pay 43% of total private payroll in the United States. Small business owners transform economies by adding new jobs and innovative products and services.

Small business owners are individuals that conceive, launch, and assume the risk for new economic activities in the form of a business venture. Muhammad, Akbar, and Dalziel (2011) noted that small businesses are as old as the tradition of barter and trade. Yallapragada and Bhuiyan (2011) labeled an entrepreneur or small business owners as a person operating with self-interest, a risk taker resulting in a profit or loss. Surdez, Aguilar, Sandoval, and Lamoyi (2012) described small business owners as individuals who risk financial loss to seek a business opportunity. Growth has resulted from garage business initiatives of Microsoft, Amazon.com, and Apple Computers to Internet

business startups generating revenues from international operations. On a community level, successful small business owners create economic growth through (a) the creation of new products and services, (b) revitalization of communities, (c) new civic alliances, (d) increased job opportunities, and (e) increased tax revenues for local and federal government (Bygrave & Zacharakis, 2014). On a personal level, successful small business owners experience (a) personal rewards, (b) independence, (c) a feeling of pride, (d) intrinsic motivation, (e) self-sufficiency, and (f) a sense of personal success.

Types of Small Business Owners

For the purpose of this study, the definition of a small business owner is a person who sets up a business, takes on financial risks in the hope of profit, and who employs 50 or fewer employees (Lawrence, 2014). Likewise, the SBA (2012) defined a small business is also one that is independently owned and operated, organized for profit, and is not dominant in its field. The literature includes usage of the terms used interchangeably in the literature. Haefliger, Jager, and von Krogh (2010) provided a distinction between *innovator entrepreneurs* and *user entrepreneurs* who became small business owners. An innovator entrepreneur starts a new enterprise. A user entrepreneur first works in an existing industry gaining expertise, acquiring knowledge, experimenting with different paths, possibly correcting flaws, then branches off and launches a new service or product. Taking information and knowledge from one industry to a new industry, results in the creation of new markets, services, and job opportunities. Haefliger et al. provided an example of a user entrepreneur who launched a small business after having access as video game employees to expensive software packages as employees of the firm. These

user entrepreneurs took the knowledge they learned from the video game industry to start a small business, thus creating a new genre for film and gaming enthusiasts. Haeffliger et al. noted that user entrepreneurs continue to develop business ventures from existing markets or industries, creating new jobs and industries.

Characteristics of Successful Small Business Owners

Small business owners add strength to the U.S. economy by increasing employment opportunities. While small business leaders succeed at daily business operations, there is little information about what characterizes successful business owners able to sustain longer than 5 years. Hansen, Shrader, and Monllor (2011) suggested that personal characteristics of small business owners or entrepreneurs include a strong internal locus of control and the need for achievement. Additional personal attributes that contribute to small business sustainability and growth include (a) strong negotiation skills, (b) creativity, (c) hard work, and (d) self-discipline (Sandoval-Caraveo, López-Parra, Surdez-Pérez, Aguilar-Morales, & Corral-Coronado, 2014). Okafor and Amalu (2010) added many successful business owners have an undergraduate college degree, a small family, and have historically worked long hours

Kauanui, Thomas, Sherman, Waters, and Gilea (2010) reported that employees tend to be more creative and happier within environments where the owner creates an atmosphere that incorporates play and spirituality. Kauanui et al. conducted in-depth interviews with 112 business owners and entrepreneurs to examine if a connection existed between successful owners who integrated spirituality and work with business owners who did not develop an integrated lifestyle in the workplace. Kauanui et al. found

that entrepreneurs and small business owners who create a holistic environment that incorporates work and play are no more successful than business owners who keep the two characteristics separate. Miettinen and Littunen (2013) noted that there is a positive correlation between human capital and the success of a small business owner. Human capital includes education, experience, knowledge, skills, and competencies, which are of particular importance in newly launched businesses (Miettinen & Littunen, 2013).

Byrd (2010) identified that the leadership practices of successful and unsuccessful small business owners differed significantly. The focus of Byrd's study was to examine the specific differences between the personal leadership styles of successful and unsuccessful small business owners. The instrument used in Byrd's quantitative study was the Byrd Personal Leadership Inventory (BPLI) (Byrd, 2010). The BPLI measured six personal leadership practices: (a) attending to judgment, (b) attending to emotion, (c) attending to physical sensation, (d) cultivating stillness, (e) engaging ambiguity, and (f) aligning with a vision. Byrd's findings demonstrated that the successful owners in the sample used the six practices more frequently than owners who were unsuccessful (Byrd, 2010).

Transformational leadership addresses creating changes in the values and goals of employees. Small business owners typically have a passion that is contagious to their employees. Goal alignment is a fundamental characteristic of a transformational leader. Goal alignment is crucial, as most business leaders have to expand too many levels of management to ensure an appropriate span of control. A primary factor contributing to the survival of small businesses operations is the skill of the owner in (a) attracting, (b)

training, (c) developing, and (d) retaining productive employees. Conversely, Farrington, Van Der Meer, Venter and Schrage (2012) identified 16 characteristics of a small business owner or entrepreneur. The characteristics included (a) planning and perseverance, (b) persuasion and networking, (c) communication ability, (d) commitment, (e) overcoming failure, (f) self-confidence and loss of control, (g) risk-taking ability, (h) initiation and responsibility, (i) high energy level, (j) tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, (k) creativity and flexibility, (l) knowledge-seeking, (m) continuous learning, (n) financial proficiency, (o) money sense, and (p) business knowledge.

Moreover, Insead (2011) identified having an active social network, interpersonal ties, and the ability to create new connections as essential characteristics of sustainability of a business. Martinez and Aldrich (2011) promulgated networking as useful to the survival, profitability, innovation, and efficiency to small business owners and entrepreneurs. O'Donnell (2014) noted that networking is critical to knowledge exchange, and an increase in small business owners' knowledge led to a higher sustainability rate in their business operations. Most small business owners lack experience, do not have a history of previous success, and need funding information so networking can be of value (Martinez & Aldrich, 2011).

Insead (2011) then conducted a study in India that provides an example of how small business owners use networking to their advantage. Insead chose India due to the diverse environment with a caste system, multiethnic citizens, and 29 spoken languages. Initially, Insead selected 75 participants for the India-based quantitative study. Each

small business owner participant had an undergraduate degree, was an average age of 35 years old, and had 12 years work experience. Additionally, each participant operated an active business-to-business venture an average of 3.6 years. The Insead protocol of the study involved photographing business cards collected by Indian small business with *new people* with whom the small business owner interacted during the 2-month initial research phase. Individuals with whom the participant had no previous interactions in the last 3 years met the *new person* definition. Twelve months later, the researcher launched phase 2 of the study and surveyed 65 of the original 75 business owners/entrepreneurs. Insead examined and researched relationships that the owners formed with the vendors of the business cards. The data findings suggested that 65 business owners had developed 2,092 new person dyad relationships. The reason these business owners reported for developing the new relationships was to advance their business initiatives. The information from the Insead study suggested the importance of networking to expand professional contacts (Insead, 2011). Developing and leveraging business networks provide opportunities for small-business success as noted by (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012).

Martinez and Aldrich (2011) concluded that strong, diverse ties associated with networking reduced uncertainty, contributed to the knowledge of small business owners, increased information on other markets reducing uncertainty, and enhanced knowledge of business owners on sources of available capital. Martinez and Aldrich defined *diversity* as a variety of gender, age, occupation, and industry and pointed out that there are three times when a small business owner benefits from networking. The three times business owners benefit from networking included (a) opportunity development, (b) technology

and organizational creation, and (c) information exchange. Networking might help stimulate interest to small business owners.

Family and close friends are often crucial in the early stage of a new business launch. Some small business owners launch a business initiative, specifically women and minorities if they perceive barriers in the traditional work environment. Opportunities for small business owners often come from personal life events. Fifty percent of small business owners identified their business venture came from ideas from networking contacts and/or innovations, slight variations, or creativity from existing business (Martinez & Aldrich, 2011). Too much reliance on close ties might result in the business failing, so the diversity of the network may be of value to small business owners and entrepreneurs.

Martinez and Aldrich (2011) suggested that as a business owner or entrepreneur grows a business, teams are critical. A random sample of small business owners, who started a business between 1998 and 2000, confirmed that 50% of the study group launched their business start up with the help of others (Marinez & Aldrich, 2011). Small business owners who launched a technology-focused firm typically recruited prior co-workers with diverse experiences for their new business environment (Marinez & Aldrich, 2011). In the exchange stage, the business owners develop relationships with suppliers, customers, and others sometimes exchanging goods and services. Examples of the exchange stage might include operating in an industrial center, working with brokers, networking with volunteer organizations or chamber of commerce, and collaborating with financial institutions. Having diverse relationships and networks provide small

business owners and entrepreneurs advantages from startup throughout the life of the business. Diversity increases the availability of resources and stronger ties for small business owners (Martinez & Aldrich, 2011).

Ahmad, Ramayah, Wilson, and Kummerow (2010) surveyed a sample of 212 Malaysian small business owners using a 7-point, Likert-type scale instrument to identify what competencies had the largest effect on business success. The competencies identified included (a) generic knowledge, (b) motives, (c) traits, (d) self-images, (e) social roles, and (f) skills. Each small business owner in this study owned a stand-alone firm with fewer than 50 employees. The findings from the study identified that successful competencies included networking and building relationships. Ahmad et al. noted that networks were particularly of value in turbulent times when the small business owners were in competition with other similar businesses.

Lussier and Halabi (2010) developed a prediction model of business success. Between 1995 and 2010, Lussier tested the 15 factors for a sustainable small business in the United States and 3 other countries to model the probability of failure of new businesses. Lussier demonstrated that his model did accurately predict the failure of American small business owners, but the model was not useful in the success prediction of the companies in other countries. Reasons for a lack of a general model relate to culture variances, differences in taxes, and regulatory mandates. No further research since the initial 1995 model creation has appeared in the literature on refining the accuracy of the model (Lussier & Halabi, 2010).

Failure/Challenges of Small Business Owners

There is no comprehensive rationale identified in the literature for the high failure rate of small business startups. Le and Raven (2015) noted that small business owners develop their own definition of success and further stated that success is a subjective concept. Most business failures stem from a lack of experience of the business owner (Miettinen & Littunen, 2013). Small business owners also fail because of (a) competition, (b) economic factors, (c) crises, (d) shifts in priorities, and (e) varying expectations (Miettinen & Littunen, 2013). Fahed-Sreih and Morin-Delerm (2012) stressed that a lack of leadership skills contributes to the failure rate of small business owners. Leaders play an essential role in producing an efficient organization (Sakiru, D'Silva, Othman, DaudSilong, & Busayo, 2013).

Small business owners are a vital part of the economy due the creation of the majority of jobs. Fahed-Sreif and Morin-Delerm (2012) concluded that small business owners often lack the array of skills and knowledge business owners need to sustain their business ventures. A new small business owner often has limited workers making it challenging to monitor and maintain all the required transactions for a successful business (Alsaaty, 2011). Hashi and Krasniqi (2011) identified that government regulations, industry conditions, and overall economic conditions may affect the success of a sustainable business. Song et al. (2010) noted that downturns in the economy play a significant role in new business failure. Lussier and Halabi (2010) noted there was no accepted single theory on why small business owners fail, so they developed a business failure prediction model. After evaluation of the model, the authors concluded that the

model failed to identify accurate prediction metrics because the authors had not included various governmental laws, regulations, and other factors (Lussier & Halabi, 2010).

Osei-Assibey, Bokpin, and Twerefou (2012) suggested the majority of the failure challenges relate to the lack of capital. Furthermore, Schiff, Hammer, and Das (2010) noted that a contributing factor to undercapitalization was the failure of the small business owner to estimate the amount of pre-tax income that the business owner must generate to sustain operations and profitability. Inaccurate estimation of pre-tax income that the small business owner must generate often results in an excessive withdrawal of funds that profits do not offset, leading to debt threatening business survival. Conducting a financial feasibility test, which focuses the small business owner's attention on the cash flow from pre-tax profit, might minimize the risk. With the results of the financial feasibility test, the small business owner has a better understanding of how to respond to situations proactively and reduce the risk of future financial hardships (Schiff et al., 2010). Ropega (2011) posited reasons for small business failure including (a) bankruptcy, (b) involuntary termination forced by creditors, (c) voluntary termination by the owner, (d) elective discontinuance, and (e) death of the owner or entrepreneur. Small business owners must maintain sufficient capital to cover start-up costs as well as for growing and expanding operations (Salazar, Soto, & Mosqueda., 2012). Additionally, limited technology integration, marketing knowledge, distribution channels, and skills training may limit the growth and success opportunities for small business owners (Avidor, 2011).

Scheel and Vazquez (2011) noted that it is critical for nascent entrepreneurs and small business owners to develop a strong social network. Small business owners must be

strong and flexible in management and leadership skills to survive with few resources during business startup in a changing business environment. Ropega (2011) noted that many individuals seeking to embark on a small business ownership are unrealistic in their perceptions of how the venture will be sustainable upon start-up. Aspiring small business owners and entrepreneurs overestimate the rate of growth, profit margins, and employment (Avidor, 2011). Failure of the small business venture can pose significant consequences not only for the individual business owner but also to stakeholders and the economy as a whole. Ropega asserted this behavior stems from the individual holding an *inside view* when generating forecasts and during stages of financial planning.

Family involvement in management in a small business startup can also contribute to challenges. The family members' lack of professional competencies, failure to do succession planning, and family members' comprising the board of directors can have an adverse impact on the success of a small business owner (García-Ramos & García-Olalla, 2011). Statistically, only 30% of second-generation of family-owned businesses survive (Lam, 2011). Members of family-owned businesses tend to have a higher level of loyalty and commitment, and act in the best interest of the business, but can also be a potential liability due to work or family conflict (Gilding, Gregory, & Cosson, 2015). Family businesses account for over 50% of employment in the private sector (Tucker, 2011). Sustainability of family-owned businesses has more research than other noneconomic performance measures (Yu, Lumpkin, Sorenson, & Brigham, 2012).

Small business owners must manage business expenses. Too many high expenses have a negative impact on profitability and sustainability. Identifying the most cost

efficient purchases is important. Blavin, Blumberg, Buettgens, Holahan, and McMorrow (2012) reported 65% of small business owners identified health insurance costs as a serious challenge to their ability to maintain profitability. With the passage of the Affordable Health Care Act, managing health insurance costs appears to be of continuing, if not growing in importance (Mariner, Glantz, & Annas, 2012; Rosoff, 2011).

Flores, Ucbasaran, Westhead, and Wright (2010) concluded that small business owners frequently have a confidence bias, which may lead to high failure rates of new businesses. Flores et al. determined that prior business ownership experience influences the level of confidence a business individuals has when starting a business. Flores et al. established this premise after studying a sample of 576 small business owners and finding that nascent business owners do not report confidence to the same degree as experienced owners. With small business owners contributing to the health of the economy, data from the participants of this research may add insights on what factors may help existing and aspiring small business owners in sustaining their small business launches more than 5 years.

Another potential performance characteristic of small business owners relates to their ability to utilize information technology (IT) knowledge. Hang and Wang (2012) identified that small business owners tend to have a low level of IT awareness, experience, and expertise. Wilkin (2012) surveyed 156 Australian small business owners and discovered that 80% of the small business owners did not have a dedicated technology specialist. Similarly, in a study of 50 Czech small business owners, McLarty,

Pichanic, and Srpova (2012) concluded that 50% of the small business owners did not utilize a management information system.

Small Business Financing

Despite the fact that small business owners are essential to providing new jobs to the economy, they continue to suffer high failure rates. Providing financial assistance to new small business owners is a risky proposition for an investor. Financial information on privately held businesses is difficult to obtain, making it difficult for bank lenders to loan money due to the lending risk (Arslan & Staub, 2013). Chi and Lee (2010) published results of bank lending processes for small businesses and concluded financiers use governance as one of many criteria to determine business credit worthiness. Therefore, new small business owners face challenges associated with financing a new business launch (Arslan & Staub, 2013). Furthermore, Salazar et al., (2012) concluded making sound financial decisions is imperative for small business owners, and owners can avoid failure by developing and deploying proper financial strategies that enhance growth and support the firm's objectives. Numerous factors contribute to small business failure such as (a) lack of financial planning, (b) limited access to outside funding, (c) lack of start-up capital, (d) unplanned growth, (e) low financial and strategic projection, and (f) mismanagement of capital.

There are approximately 785,000 new businesses in the United States, and a similar number of businesses owners failing and having to terminate their business operations (Valadez, 2011). Small business owners should collaborate with executives from SCORE, who are counselors to America's small business owners to discuss

financial options during the formative years of business. Members of SCORE are experienced business mentors who have retired and enjoy consulting. SCORE members provide coaching and workshops to help small business owners in the development of a business plan and strategy for sustainability (SCORE, 2014). Small business owners should also seek guidance from the SBA. President Eisenhower created the SBA in 1953 to strengthen the U. S. economy by assisting the viability of small business owners and by assisting small business owners after natural disasters (SBA, 2012). SBA services are located in each state, offers service to small business owners that include the “3Cs”: capital, contracts, and counseling, and provides 23% of prime federal contracts to small business owners. SBA provides services to over 1 million small business owners annually (SBA, 2012).

Yallapragada and Bhuiyan (2011) identified that adequate startup capital is a critical element to small business success. The two types of funding available for small business owners are internal or external resources. External options available for small business owners funding include (a) bank loans, (b) government financing, (c) angel investors, and (d) venture capitalists. It is often difficult for a new small business owner to obtain external funding. Lending agents often view small businesses as a credit risk even when the owner provides an extensive business plan and personal assets as collateral (Neeley & Van Auken, 2012; Degryse, de Goeij, & Kappert, 2012).

Gartner, Frid, and Alexander (2012) noted that obtaining external financing is difficult; therefore, small business owners often use one of two strategies. Use of owner resources is one strategy where a small business owner self-finances the business with

private funds. Owner resources can include obtaining home equity or mortgage loans, savings, or using a personal credit card for expenses associated with the business. In many cases, small business owners find earnings reinvested from the business are not sufficient to meet growing needs, making it necessary to continue using external funding sources (Gartner, et al., 2012).

Bootstrap financing allows small business owners to stretch existing resources without obtaining external financing. The small business owner keeps costs so low that there is no dependence on any external source. Bootstrapping may include delaying self-compensation and using existing household resources, as well as human capital, talent, and moral support from family and friends. Korunka, Kessler, Frank, and Lueger (2010) noted that if a family is not stable, the business might be unstable and possibly fail.

Networking

Networking involves building trust and sharing knowledge, motivation, commitment, and critical reflection. Tang (2011) noted that relationship networking has a positive effect on business success and increases the dynamics of business activities. Networking is the proactive attempt to develop and maintain relationships with others for establishing mutual benefits in work or career. Networking increases the ability of a small business owner to experience increased learning and improved performance. Small business owners can enhance sustainability of their business venture through networking in environmental, economic, and social groups (Sullivan & Ford, 2014; Semrau & Werner, 2014). Since a fundamental challenge facing small business owners in the early stages of venture development is access to resources, networks provide a means of

identifying and acquiring necessary resources (Sullivan & Ford, 2014; Semrau & Werner, 2014). However, as the venture grows, there may be different resource needs suggesting that the small business owners' networks will also need to change to address changing resource requirements. For example, market and industry expertise is critical in the early stages of venture development while increased capital and access to additional human resources to address expansion and market demands are essential as the enterprise grows (Sullivan & Ford, 2014; Semrau & Werner, 2014). Many small business owners are skeptical and may resist networking, as there is the possibility of releasing too much information or inadvertently revealing proprietary information. However, networking may lead to the ability to exploit other business opportunities. By exploiting opportunities in the external environment, small business owners can further contribute to economic growth (Bergh, Thorgren, & Wincent, 2011).

Marketing

Creating market awareness for a new business can be both a financial and time management challenge for a small business owner (Perry, 2014). The name of the business, product, or service should be a prime consideration (Perry, 2014). Ongoing review of trends that can influence the profitability of the business owner is critical. Gammoh, Voss, and Skiver (2011) determined that 50% of new services and products introduced into the market fail to meet targeted financial returns. Box (2011) added that rather than competing directly with competitors, the new businesses owners should adopt aggressive *guerrilla marketing techniques* and create a niche market.

Business owners benefit by developing relationships with customers. Strong communication and relationship skills are critical to small business owners and entrepreneurs (Semrau & Werner, 2014). Communication strategies are influential in determining what to offer and to whom. Small business owners need to search for new, creative ways to accomplish many tasks at limited costs due to limited financial means, as well as time constraints. Therefore, small business owners are increasingly using social media as a platform for their marketing, advertising, and recruitment activities as well as general communications with employees, customers, and network partners (Schaupp & Bélanger, 2014). Social media enable a new form of communication that allows cost-effective connections. Schaupp and Bélanger (2014) posited that social media use in marketing activities generate exposure and increases business traffic at a fraction of the cost of traditional marketing activities. Furthermore, Baird and Parasnis (2011) determined that more than 500 million domestic and international users in 2010 congregated and met on Facebook. The large numbers of social media users suggest (a) consumers are in worldwide locations, (b) consumers enjoy social media, (c) consumers enjoy the interaction, and (d) organizational leaders need to incorporate value in exchange for the customers' time and attention. Schaupp and Bélanger (2014) asserted there is substantial value from the use of social media, but it is not without its downfalls. Some potential weaknesses in the use of social media for a small business owner include: (a) lack of technological competence, (b) customer pressure, and (c) the characteristics of the mobile environment. Social media platforms are an information option to which small business owners should be attentive.

Strategic Planning

Patzelt and Shepherd (2011) defined a sustainable business as an entity that creates profit and typically benefits the needs of others in services or products. For purposes of this proposed study, sustainability includes the factors that help small business owners sustain and grow a viable business entity. Small business owners who work with a mentor and participate in a business *boot camp* or incubate their business have a better opportunity for success. Eddleston, Kellermanns, Floyd, Crittenden, and Crittenden (2013) noted business owners who developed, continuously refined, and updated the strategic business plan experienced less failure than small business owners who had a weak business plan. van Gelderen, Thurik, and Patel (2011) posited that 95% of small business failures are attributable to the lack of strategic business planning.

Strategic management and planning enable owners to position their businesses to outperform competitors when faced with conflicting demands and limited resources (Cordeiro, 2013). van Gelderen (2012) suggested that managers divide large goals into sub-goals and structure goals as performance goals. Strategic planning is the mainstay of every business and provides the direction for forecasting needed resources (Abdalkrim, 2013). Business leaders can achieve a higher rate of sustainability by focusing on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) (Mirzakhani, Parsaamal, & Golzar, 2014).

Strategic planning in the literature has many definitions. One definition is a methodical and continuous process to align a business operation with the mission and vision to capitalize on resources and competitive advantage (Agyapong & Muntaka,

2012). Box (2011) illustrated the concept of strategy as a series of decisions that result in plans that a business leader implements to achieve desired goals. The challenges for many small business owners include how to integrate innovation strategies to sustain long-term growth. Abdaklrim (2013) defined strategic planning as the long-term goals of the business leader that analyzes capabilities to achieve those goals, considers environmental issues that may affect the organization, and finds ways to move the organization forward in a global environment. Gupta and Muita (2013) concluded that strategy is the basis for actions that support the achievement of organizational goals.

To maintain a sustainable business, small business owners must create a business plan and have the flexibility to adapt as market conditions change (Bumgardner, Buehlmann, Schuler, & Crissey, 2011). A strategic business plan is a plan for accomplishing key business goals (Eddleston et al., 2013). Box (2011) conducted a qualitative case study that included 99 small business owners and entrepreneurs in which business owners fit into three categories (a) *differentiators*, (b) *cost leaders*, or (c) *stuck in the middle* when sustaining a business. Box defined *differentiator business owners* as individuals who offer a different product. *Cost leader* business owners offer products at a lower cost than competitors offer with the same products, and *stuck in the middle* businesses offer no competitive advantage. Bressler (2012) suggested small business owners should be able to react quicker to changes because they require reallocation of fewer resources.

Small business owners who operate small businesses account for a significant portion of job creation in the United States that fuels the economy, creates new ideas,

services, and products. However, only 50% of small business owners remain sustainable after the first 5 years (Labeledz & Berry, 2011). Cronin-Gilmore (2012) conducted a qualitative case study design using in-depth interviews to obtain information from a purposeful sample of 20 small business owners in the United States. The Cronin-Gilmore (2012) findings suggested owners of the small businesses require the following elements to remain sustainable (a) have a solid strategic plan, (b) conduct environmental scanning that includes competitive strategies and plans, and (c) increase stakeholder involvement approaches. Additionally, Cronin-Gilmore suggested that while small business owners have knowledge of their product or service, they lack skills to develop a marketing plan. Cronin-Gilmore (2012) agreed with Labeledz and Berry (2011) that small-business owners often fail due to the lack of a long-term strategic plan. Cronin-Gilmore suggested many small business owners only have a plan projected for the first six months of a business launch.

Transition and Summary

The literature supports the need for research on comparing and identifying factors that might contribute to the success of small business owners. There appears to be inconsistent speculation on factors that might contribute to business success. Section 1 contained the business problem and purpose of the study. A review of the literature provided insights from various scholars on information relating to the value of the strategic business plan, financial options for small business owners, and various characteristics of small business owners. Systems theory is a relevant construct as successful small business owners have to incorporate many different elements, decisions,

and components when starting and sustaining a small business enterprise. Likewise, chaos theory is applicable as business is a complex system having a number of interrelated parts that are dynamic and constantly changing. The concept behind the complexity theory relates to business owners' need to interpret new environmental events and adjust accordingly to complex environments. With the high failure rate of new small business startups, perhaps understanding these theories might contribute to new insights or factors that might be useful to existing or aspiring small business owners.

Section 2 provides information regarding the (a) role of the researcher, (b) the selected participants, (c) clarifying the qualitative method and multiple case study design strategy, (d) data saturation criteria, and (e) data collection and analysis process. Section 3 comprises a detailed analysis of the results, implications, and recommendations stemming from the findings.

Section 2: The Project

Small business owners establish approximately 785,000 new businesses each year; however, only 50% will survive the first 5 years (Valadez, 2011). Exploring the experiences of small business owners, over the age of 18, who launched and sustained a business operation for at least 5 years was the focus of this qualitative multiple case study. Section 2 includes detailed descriptions of the qualitative method and phenomenological study design. I described is the role of the researcher, justification on the selection of the participants, and details relating to data saturation. I also provided a detailed description of the data collection and analysis strategies.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore what skills, knowledge, and strategies small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 5 years. The population for this study was three small business owners over the age of 18 in Duval County, Florida of three coffee shops with 10 or fewer tables who have sustained their business for a minimum of 5 years. The findings from the study may contribute to social change by reducing uncertainty for existing and aspiring small business owners and provide insight for strategies that contribute to sustainability with concomitant increases in employment.

Role of the Researcher

A researcher is the primary data collection instrument in a qualitative study. Rowley (2012) reported that a researcher must play a vital role in identifying biases relating to data collection and analysis to ensure that findings are accurate. The role of a

researcher is to produce a convincing explanation of the phenomena under exploration (Carcary, 2011). Controlling researcher bias, understanding, and addressing the influence of one's personal perspectives when interacting with participants, and interpreting meanings are critical as suggested by Chorba (2011). I have never been a small business owner, but I selected the topic because it is an area of interest and the data might contribute to social change because future small business owners might benefit from the *lessons learned* by small business owners who have maintained a business for at least 5 years.

The role of a researcher is to review the literature on the existing knowledge, develop the research method and design, select participants, and collect, analyze, and report findings and conclusions stemming from multiple data sources. I conducted semistructured interviews. According to Qu and Dumay (2011), conducting qualitative interviews requires the researcher to prepare, plan, listen intently, audio record each interview to ensure accuracy, and take notes. In addition to interview data and notes from the interviews, I reviewed participants' websites and social media platforms, obtained archived data from local newspapers and magazine clippings provided by the business owners, and did site visits to observe the business practices and processes at the coffee shops.

A qualitative researcher must be skilled in creating and obtaining information from participants and be flexible to unforeseen happenings (Yin, 2012). A researcher can choose from three types of interview structures (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The selected interview structure affects the role of a researcher. In structured interviews, each

participant responds to the same questions in the same order. Structured interviews allow standardization of the data for a greater degree of comparison.

In semistructured interviews, a researcher relies on a certain number of questions and then guides the conversation based on those questions or a similar set of questions such as probing questions. This approach allows an interviewer to probe topics they feel are relevant until the conversation on a topic fulfills the research objectives. The third interview structure is open-ended interviewing. An interviewer guides the discussion in the open-ended interview structure. I used a semistructured interview protocol for this study.

Bracketing is the process of minimizing personal bias and influence (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Bracketing is setting aside any personal bias, values, and judgments during the research process. I took interview notes, audiotaped each interview, and developed a verbatim transcript to minimize personal bias using bracketing.

Prior to collecting data, I provided each selected participant a copy of the consent form identified as the Participant Consent Form (Appendix A). I ensured all participants understood (a) the right of being able to withdraw from the interview at any time, (b) they were volunteering willingly, and (c) they were aware their confidentiality is permanently secure. I will maintain a copy of each participant's signed acknowledgment of his or her rights in a locked safe only accessible by me for at least 5 years. After that, I will shred all of the hard copies of the participants' consent forms.

I conducted semistructured interviews and asked each participant interview questions in the same order listed in the Interview Protocol (Appendix B). I audio taped

the interviews, took interview notes to reduce bias, and as suggested by Whiteley (2012), developed a verbatim transcription of each interview. To verify my interpretation, I conducted member checking after each initial interview to gather any new information, if applicable, until I reached data saturation. I then coded the interview data. Themes that emerged from the data might provide insights to existing or future business owners who desire to launch and sustain a small business for more than 5 years. I presented the transcribed material from each of the participants in aggregate form to ensure confidentiality of the participants.

Participants

Selection of the participants is critical to the outcome of the data (Leahy, 2011). Gillespie, Chaboyer, and Wallis (2010) noted that the purposeful sampling technique allows the researcher confidence in obtaining valuable information from knowledgeable participants' relating to a phenomenon. The use of a purposeful sample of participants enables the researcher to gather rich data if the participants are in their natural environment and comfortable during the interview. Branthwaite and Patterson (2012) posited that, despite the flexibility in purposeful sampling, one must be aware of three types of sampling errors that can arise in qualitative research. The first sampling error relates to distortions caused by insufficient breadth in sampling (Branthwaite & Patterson, 2012). The second error might result from distortions introduced by changes over time (Branthwaite & Patterson, 2012). The third type of sampling error results from a lack of depth in data collection at each site (Branthwaite & Patterson, 2012).

Small business owners were the focus of this multiple case study and the participants were small coffee shop owners. The population for this study comprised three small business owners over the age of 18 of three coffee shops with 10 or fewer tables in Duval County, Florida who have sustained their business for a minimum of 5 years. All three of the owners were female, each with a minimum of a high school education. SO2 and SO3 each had a college degree. Two of the three participants did not have prior ownership experience, and the other had a failed business experience.

My sample consisted of the owners of three coffee shops. I conducted semistructured interviews until data saturation occurred (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I used member checking and conducted follow-up interviews with each participant until I reached data saturation (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I assumed data saturation occurred when no new data emerged after three interviews with each participant. In preparation for subject selection, I met with a local chamber of commerce official who connected me to small business owners' associations in Duval County, Florida and provided a directory that contained a listing of individuals who have started and supported small business operations. I only interviewed small business owners who have maintained a coffee shop business with less than 10 tables for at least 5 years and listed in the Duval County directory. This directory and information were accessible public documents.

Guided by the protocol described by Cannella and Lincoln (2011), I contacted participants via telephone to seek their willingness to participate in a face-to-face interview. To enhance participant comfort, entice participation, and improve the effectiveness of the interviews, I suggested conducting the interviews at the local library,

in a private conference room away from the workplace. Each of the participants stated that this was not feasible due to time constraints to be away from the business and requested that I hold the interviews in a private location closer to the business. Peterson (2014) supported conducting and recording face-to-face interviews in a public place and offering courtesies such as coffee or tea to show appreciation for the participants' time to ensure participants are in an environment in which they feel comfortable sharing their experience regarding the topic. The positive advantage of conducting face-to-face interviews is that I could observe body language during the interview.

For the participants who agreed to interview and participate in a recorded face-to-face interview as well as follow-up interviews for member checking, I provided a copy of the Consent to Participate Form (Appendix A). All three participants requested a brief personal meeting prior to signing the form rather than corresponding via email. Upon receiving the signed copy from the participant, I scheduled an appointment for 60 minutes for the audio-recorded, semistructured face-to-face interview at a time identified as convenient by the participant. I have included the semistructured interview questions in Appendix B. Prior to starting the interviews, I reminded each participant of the purpose and rationale of the interview and discussed the interview protocol as outlined in Appendix B. I thanked each participant at the conclusion of the interview. I manually transcribed the interviews within 24 hours, and then conducted member checking with each of the participants to ensure data interpretation accuracy. Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) outlined the value of member checking to qualitative researchers as it can obtain rich, in-depth data and help to achieve data saturation. As suggested by

Houghton et al. (2013), I validated the interview data with each participant and then entered the data into the qualitative analysis software tool QSR NVivo 10 that helped me to code the material to identify themes.

Research Method and Design

The focus of this proposed qualitative multiple case study was to explore what skills, knowledge, and strategies small business owners residing in Duval County, Florida who own a coffee shop with 10 or fewer tables, and have sustained a business beyond 5 years attribute to their success. I have provided and justified the proposed method and design below.

Research Method

The research method allows a researcher an appropriate strategy to answer the research question. The three research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Quantitative and qualitative methods differ in research approaches for addressing distinct types of research questions (Venkatesh et al., 2013). During the planning of this study, I reviewed all three methods prior to selecting a qualitative multiple case study design.

The focus of this study was to explore what skills, knowledge, and strategies small business owners over the age of 18 in Duval County, Florida who own a coffee shop with 10 or fewer tables, need to sustain a small business activity for a minimum of 5 years. While small business owners stimulate the economy through job growth, the U. S. Small Business Association (2011) reported that about half of the small business launches fail within the first 5 years of launching. When a small business owner closes their

business, employment opportunities are lost. Insights in the experiences of small business owners, who sustained a small business operation while others failed, might identify success strategies that new or aspiring small business owners could replicate to increase their likelihood of success.

The quantitative researcher assumes that reality is measurable (Smith, 2014). Quantitative research is a structured process, and the collection of data requires the use of valid and tested instruments. Quantitative methodology is appropriate when the researcher desires to examine the relationship among variables using statistical procedures and helpful for measuring differences between samples taken from different populations, and or strata within the same population (Branthwaite & Patterson, 2012). Quantitative research was not an acceptable method as a limitation of the quantitative method is the omission of understanding of the experiences of the small business owners on factors that may have contributed to their success. Quantitative methodology was not an appropriate method to identify factors that have contributed to the success of small business owners who have sustained a small business for at least 5 years. Cosier (2012) noted that quantitative methodology relies on statistics rather than words to predict or differentiate study outcomes.

A mixed-methods approach allows the researcher to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches when a single method cannot provide sufficient insights to understand a phenomenon (Yin, 2012). A mixed-methods approach includes data collection, analysis, and combining closed-ended quantitative and open-ended qualitative facts (Venkatesh et al., 2013). Muskat, Blackman, and Muskat (2012) defined mixed

methods as appropriate when converged data adds depth and new meaning. I did not use the quantitative or mixed methods, as I did not have a need for numerical data to address the primary research question for this proposed study. Focusing on obtaining qualitative data from semistructured interviews of successful small business owners, archival records, third party reports such as newspaper articles, and interview notes comprised the types of data I collected for this study.

I chose a qualitative research methodology for this study. Jogulu and Pansiri (2011) noted that qualitative research gained in popularity in the 20th century. Prior to that, scholars recognized only quantitative research. A qualitative methodology is an appropriate method, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2011) if (a) the problem requires more than a yes or no hypothesis, (b) a large sample may not be available, and (c) themes result from the data. The qualitative approach allows open-ended questions to explore the depth of the participants' thoughts on the phenomena of factors that contribute to the success of small business owners.

Researchers conducting qualitative research methods typically require more time to collect data. The qualitative method, as described by Stake (1995), is flexible by allowing researchers to incorporate unexpected findings. Yin (2012) noted that qualitative research with open-ended research questions provides the best strategy to realize the how or what of an unknown phenomenon. Bailey (2014) noted that qualitative methodology enables researchers to obtain information from the perspectives of multiple participants, and to provide new insights about phenomena relating to *how*, *why*, or *what*. Hanson, Balmer, and Giardino (2011) added that qualitative researchers could obtain

multiple realities from participants to identify and explore emerging themes. The strength of qualitative methodology is that each conclusion links to reliable evidence (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Anderson (2010) stated that qualitative methodology enables researchers the following flexibility for obtaining (a) a comprehensive and in-depth study of phenomena, (b) information through human experiences, (c) researcher can modify and revise research if needed, and (d) findings could apply to other specific settings without generalizing the results. Qualitative researchers often chose this methodology to understand *real life* scenarios (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The qualitative method aligns with the objectives of this proposed study.

I used a qualitative methodology to explore the research question: What skills, knowledge, and strategies do small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 5 years? A qualitative approach was suitable for this study because small business owners, through probing interviews, shared their perspectives on factors they attributed to sustaining a business for a minimum of 5 years when others failed. The qualitative research strategy allows the researcher to explore the experiences of the participants and enables identifying common themes stemming from participants' perspectives of the phenomenon of having owned a small business. The use of qualitative research is best to gain profound insights into the personal experiences and perceptions of the participants (Petty, Thompson, & Stew, 2012).

Research Design

The research design decision is a critical step in developing a research study that links the (a) conceptual/theoretical framework, (b) the research question, and (c) the

research method (Carenza, 2011; Yin, 2012). The research design serves as a plan for collecting, organizing, and analyzing data related to the research question (Wright & Craig, 2011). Moustakas (1994) posited that, in conducting a qualitative study, a researcher might choose between many designs. Therefore, I considered each of the major designs for this qualitative research, which includes (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, (c) grounded theory, and (d) case study (Petty et al., 2012).

Using the phenomenology design allows the researcher to focus on lived experiences of individuals (Moustakas, 2009). The focus of a phenomenological design is to explore the lived experiences and their meanings to a group of people with a shared phenomenon. Phenomenological researchers explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and insights to identify common themes and their relative importance for describing phenomena. Rather than providing a quantitative analysis of their experiences, participants' experiences and their meaning evolve in rich narrative detail.

I did not select the phenomenological study as the design for this research initiative. Moustakas (2009) posited phenomenology designs enable researchers to explore a problem from the lived experiences and perspectives because of reflection resulting in concepts, ideas, and perceptions. Moustakas also added that phenomenological research involves describing one's experiences, ideas, and senses. Phenomenological researchers seek to understand the structures of the lived experience of individuals who are participants in the research. Irvine, Drew, and Sainsbury (2013) noted that the phenomenology design using interviews allows a researcher to explore the essence or precise meaning of lived experiences related to a phenomenon under study.

Researchers use ethnographic strategies to explore patterns of behavior or language of distinct cultures (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Through extended times of observation in an ethnographic study, the researcher observes participants to develop an understanding of a cultural group. Ethnographic design was not appropriate for the study because this study does not include *observations* of (a) humans, (b) societies/cultures, or (c) ethnic groups (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Sangasubana, 2011). The focus of the research was to explore factors that small business owners attribute to the success of sustaining a small business for a minimum of 5 years. While each workplace has a culture, the primary focus of this study was not small business cultures.

Researchers using the grounded theory design seek to create a new theory that explains a social process, action, or interaction (Bryce, 2013). Grounded theory design is appropriate when a researcher gathers information from observations or interviews over an extended period and then generates a theory based on the data to explain one or more phenomena (Bryce, 2013). Grounded theory is not relevant to the research question because I was not concerned with developing new theories but in exploring the relevance of a conceptual or theoretical framework to the practice of business. Therefore, the focus of this study was to use semistructured interviews to probe the experiences of successful small business owners to identify and explore factors that they considered important in their success of sustaining a small business venture for a minimum of 5 years.

A case study design is an adaptable approach for analyzing societal and developmental disciplines (Yin, 2014). A case study research strategy allows the

researcher a tactic to collect information from individuals and groups to describe an understanding of life occurrences. Six of the many case study data collection techniques are: (a) documentation, (b) archival records, (c) interviews, (d) observations, (e) participant-observation, and (f) physical artifacts. Yin (2012) identified that the case study can be a single case or multiple cases bounded by time and location. Case study designs require data collection from two or more sources (Yin, 2012). Since I was to employ semistructured interview questions, archival records, and notes from individuals interviewed, a multiple case study design was the most appropriate.

Population and Sampling

Sampling is a process where a researcher selects a subset of a population to study (Farrokhi & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012). I worked on prior projects with a local chamber of commerce and obtained access to free directories that contain listings of small business owners in Duval County, Florida. In exchange for the Chamber's assistance in identifying small business owners, I agreed to provide aggregate data from the completed study so they may share the study results with their chamber members. Findings from this study may not provide transferability to small business owners outside Duval County, Florida.

The population for this study was three small business owners over the age of 18, owners of three coffee shops with 10 or fewer tables in Duval County, Florida, who sustained their business for a minimum of 5 years. Therefore, from the Duval County directory, I selected a purposeful sample of three small business owners over the age of 18 who own a coffee shop with 10 or fewer tables and sustained the business for at least 5

years. I collected all data using face-to-face semistructured interviews and recorded the interviews using a digital audio recorder. An audio recording of the interviews was to ensure accuracy. Scheduling of the face-to-face semistructured interviews occurred at the time selected by the participants. I also used member checking by conducting follow-up interviews with the participants to ensure I had accurately denoted the participants' meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Scholars share various views on the appropriate number of participants in qualitative studies. In qualitative studies, the sample size is adequate and complete when data saturation occurs during the interviewing process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Data saturation occurs when no new or relevant themes or supporting information emerge during the data collection process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Walker, 2012). Quantitative researchers use a power analysis to identify the needed sample size; however, no such formula is available for a qualitative study (Yin, 2014). A qualitative study provides the researcher an opportunity to explore participants' experiences and insights about a phenomenon. I conducted initial semistructured, face-to-face interviews with the participants and used member checking by conducting follow-up interviews with each participant to gain in-depth information until I achieved data saturation.

I selected a purposeful sample. A purposive sample is a target group of individuals who may have insights and knowledge for an in-depth study. The goal of a researcher selecting a purposeful sampling is to ensure the selected sample yields plentiful, relevant, and valuable information to address the research question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The purposeful sample only included small business owners who had

sustained a business for more than 5 years in Duval County, were over the age of 18, and owned a coffee shop with 10 or fewer tables. The data provided by the small business owners who have successfully maintained a small business for at least 5 years might reduce uncertainty for existing small business owners, as well as provide guidance to aspiring business owners on business sustainability strategies.

Ethical Research

Researchers must protect the confidentiality and general welfare of all participants (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). Ethical research protocols include ensuring (a) proper selection of participants, (b) consenting process, and (c) collection of unbiased data, and (d) data saturation. The process of informed consent requires researchers to provide participants, in writing, the following: (a) a full explanation of the purpose of the study, (b) freedom to withdraw from the study at any time, (c) a comprehensive assessment of the potential risk participants face by participating, and (d) how the participants' identities will remain confidential (Branthwaite & Patterson, 2012). At the beginning of each interview, I reminded all participants that they could willingly withdraw at any time. There were no incentives offered to any participant.

Appendix A contains the consent form that each participant signed and returned to me prior to the scheduling of interviews. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, I will keep the research data in a secure, locked safe for 5 years where only I have access. The Consent to Participate document (Appendix A) provides information on the purpose of the study; introduces the researcher, the participants' right to withdraw from the recorded face-to-face interview at any time, and includes a plan to ensure the

confidentiality of the data and participant identity. Additionally, I advised the participants there are no penalties if they elect not to participate, and there are no benefits, incentives, or rewards associated with participation in the study. The consent form included the researcher's name, telephone number, and email contact along with the name, email contact of the researcher's supervisor from Walden University, and the participant's selection criteria. Information in Appendix (A) includes an estimate of 60 minutes per interview and an overview of the interview structure and protocol. All participants were reminded of their individual data would remain confidential and only aggregate data would be published or shared with others.

Data Collection

The data collection heading for this study contains subheadings describing the instruments and procedures I used for collecting and organizing the data. Data collection is the means by which researchers gain the participant's insights for addressing the research question. To gain both broad and in-depth insights, and to assure the participants' confidentiality, I followed the procedures listed below.

Instrument

Yin (2012) posited that researchers use six common sources of evidence during data collection for qualitative case study research that include (a) direct observation, (b) interviews, (c) archival records, (d) documents, (e) participant-observation, and (f) physical artifacts. In this study, I was the instrument of the data collection (Branthwaite & Patterson, 2012; Yin, 2014). I chose a semistructured interview protocol for this study. A qualitative semistructured interviewing technique allows researchers to explore,

collect, and reconstruct events from the lived experiences and perspectives of participants that one could not obtain from a quantitative research method (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Interviewing techniques share three characteristics. The characteristics are: (a) richly detailed information, (b) questions are open-ended that allows the interviewee to elaborate on answers, and (c) the interviewer does not have to stick to a given set of questions or ask in a given order (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The advantages of conducting interviews for the qualitative researcher include (a) higher response rates, (b) eliminates misinterpretation of the question, (c) location can enhance the comfort level of the interviewee, and (d) body language can be observed. The disadvantages of conducting interviews include (a) time intensive as narrative responses can be long, (b) interviews are typically a minimum of 60 minutes, (c) reliability might be suspect due to researcher bias, and (d) human memory is fragile so accuracy might be suspect if there is a small sample size (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). With the focus of this qualitative multiple case study, seeking insights from small business owners of coffee shops with 10 or less tables and sustained operation for at least 5 years, I collected data by face-to-face interviewing of the participants. Appendix B includes the interview questions and protocol followed. The focus of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore factors that small business owners attributed to the skill of sustaining a small business for a minimum of 5 years. I did not conduct interviews until I received approval from Walden University's IRB. The IRB approval number is 03-23-15-0325254 and it expires on March 22, 2016. I also completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) required training on Protecting

Human Research Participants and my NIH certification number is 885573. The NIH certification expires March 2016.

Data Collection Technique

The focus of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore factors that small business owners in Duval County, Florida noted as helpful in sustaining a coffee shop business with 10 or fewer tables for at least 5 years in Duval County, Florida. The data collection techniques for the study included conducting interviews until I achieved data saturation. In addition to the interviews, I retrieved archival records and third party reports that included newspaper and magazine articles from the business owners, reviewed the business website and social media prior to the interviews, did site visits, and took notes during the interview as secondary sources of data collection. There are three ways of collecting qualitative interview data using open-ended interviews: (a) the informal conversational interview, (b) the general interview guide approach, and (c) the standardized open-ended interview (Patton, 2002). I collected primary data using in-depth, semistructured, face-to-face interviews asking the participants the interview questions as well as probing questions, if appropriate, to give the participant cues to the level of depth that is desirable and allowed them to enhance their response with richer detail (Patton, 2002; Yin, (2014). Probing allows researchers to gather additional information by asking probing questions such as *could you explain more* (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I focused the discussion on the interview questions and asked follow-up questions (Appendix B).

The unstructured interview allows the researcher to have a general topic in mind, but the interviewer has less control and freedom to share their insights. The semistructured interview technique provides the researcher an opportunity to ask questions, listen to the interviewees, and take notes to capture rich insights from participants. The semistructured interview technique allows participants to share their insights on a phenomenon. Supporting the use of semistructured interview protocol, Scaupp and Bélanger (2014) used semistructured interviews to identify factors leading to social media use by small business owners, the dimensions of value of social media for the small business owners, and the metrics to measure this value. Scaupp and Bélanger (2014) noted that the semistructured interview technique offers structure while also allowing flexibility during the interview process. Likewise, Parry (2012) concluded that semistructured interviewing was a good approach to explore and map the development and implementation of green practices in small and microbusinesses. Furthermore, Rubin and Rubin (2012) concluded that a semistructured interview protocol provides the researcher an optimal avenue to focus on the elements that address the central research question. Therefore, I chose the semistructured interview as the data collection technique to explore what skills, knowledge, and strategies small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 5 years.

Member checking is a critical component in qualitative data collection (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I conducted member checking after the initial interview. The member checking involved two brief, follow-up interviews with each participant to provide the participants an opportunity to review my interpretation of their answers to the interview

questions. The member checking technique assures researchers capture the participants' perspectives, insights, and experiences accurately and enables obtaining additional in-depth information to achieve data saturation (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The findings from the data might provide new insights to reduce uncertainty for existing small business owners and help aspiring business owners with strategies that might contribute to business sustainability.

Prior to conducting the face-to-face interviews, I ensured each participant signed the consent form (Appendix A). Using an audio recorder, I conducted at least two audio taped, in-depth, semistructured face-to-face interviews until I reached data saturation. I knew that I had data saturation when I had data redundancy and/or replication of information (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Peterson (2014) encouraged conducting face-to-face interviews since participants may feel comfortable sharing their experience regarding the topic in their own environment.

Data Organization Technique

As participants completed the audio-recorded face-to-face interviews, I used a code to protect the identity of each store owner, for organizing the interview notes and results for each audio-recorded interview. Wahyuni (2012) described this process as *data cleansing*. I assigned each participant a code such as SO1 to indicate interviewee #1, store owner #1 to the first participant upon completion of the face-to-face interview; the second individual interviewed and coded as SO2 to indicate interviewee #2, store owner #2, and so on until I completed all participant interviews, and I achieved data saturation. Only I know the identity of the participants for confidentiality reasons. I locked all raw

study data such as hard copies of transcribed interviews, interview notes, archival reports, third party documents, and internal publications in a secure safe with an electronic combination as well as store electronic data on a password-protected external hard drive only accessible by me. I will maintain the data for a minimum of 5 years. At the end of 5 years, I will shred hard copies of data and electronically erase the research data from my hard drive.

Data Analysis Technique

Best practices of a qualitative study require the researcher set aside all prior experiences and prejudgments as the data analysis process involves searching for all possible meanings through reduction and analysis of specific statements into themes (Yin, 2014). Each interview question aligns with the research question to gather information on what skills, knowledge, and strategies do small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 5 years?

I transcribed the interview data as soon as possible after each interview. Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested transcribing interviews (a) as soon as possible while the interview data are fresh in your mind, (b) to compare transcribed material with interview notes, (c) to capture the data word for word, and (d) to double check with each member to enhance accuracy. I provided each participant the opportunity to partake in the technique known as member checking. Member checking involves brief, follow-up interviews with each participant and allows the participants an opportunity to ensure the accuracy of interpretation of the participant's responses by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As participants identified inaccuracies or added additional

information and insights, I made requested changes and continued until the participants confirmed the transcripts' reflected their perceptions and experiences accurately.

I triangulated the interview data with archival reports, internal publications, the business website, social media, and interview notes using methodological triangulation to ensure validity during the data analysis. There are four types of triangulation: (a) data triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Methodological triangulation is an approach to help readers understand the data. I discussed my intent to use methodological triangulation in further detail in the validity subsection. In the data analysis processes from the interviews, archival records, Internet sources, and notes taken during the interview, I dismantled, segmented, and reassembled the data to develop themes and draw inferences (Wahyuni, 2012).

I used both *mind mapping* as defined by Mattos, Mateus, & Merino (2012), and qualitative analysis software called 2010 QSR International NVivo 10 to assist in identifying themes from the data. NVivo 10 software enables researchers to organize and analyze unstructured data (QSR International, 2012). The data analysis process included: (a) transcribing the recorded interview data verbatim, (b) creating a code logbook for my personal use to identify precise participants, (c) developing codes for the interview data, and (d) using the codes to develop themes. This process helped identify central themes. The themes identified factors that could contribute to the success of the small business owners who maintained a small business for a minimum of 5 years when many others failed. The conceptual framework grounding this study included (a) systems theory, (b)

complexity theory, and (c) chaos theory. Once I coded the data and developed patterns and themes with mind mapping and NVivo 10 software, I compared the emergent themes' alignment with the conceptual framework theories and existing literature.

Reliability and Validity

I used a rigorous process to assure the reliability and validity of the study (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Reliability and validity do not have the same meanings in qualitative research as in quantitative research, but instead rely on semistructured interview protocols to attain commonality and strengthen the validity, consistency, and reliability (Foley & O'Conner, 2013). Reliability and validity are primary concerns in all measurement and are ideals to strive for in the collection, analysis, and reporting of the data (Neuman, 2011). According to Neuman (2011), reliability and validity establish the truthfulness, credibility, and believability of the study. The use of the interview protocol (Appendix B) will help assure the reliability of this study. I was consistent in the data collection process with each participant to minimize bias or processing errors. My lack of knowledge of opening and operating a small business served to minimize any personal bias stemming from related experience.

Reliability

The reliability of a study refers to enabling future researchers to replicate the design to address the same phenomenon, and reaching similar conclusions by using the same procedures and research protocol with each participant (Ali & Yusof, 2011). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) offered that an adequate reliability strategy contributes to *consistency*. Yin (2012) posited that using multiple sources of data or evidence could enhance the

reliability of a case study. In addition, Yin (2012) noted that qualitative researchers could ensure reliability by documenting the steps and procedures as I have done by developing the interview protocol (Appendix B). Member checking also enhances the reliability of the study since member checking involves the use of short follow-up interviews to allow the participants an opportunity to review the researcher's interpretation of their answers to the interview questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Validity

Rigorous qualitative research uses credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria (Cassell & Symon, 2011). Yin (2012) noted that in qualitative research, content validity is more concerned with credibility, trustworthiness, and dependability of the data. Yin noted the validity of qualitative data includes checking and rechecking the accuracy of results throughout the research process. Marshall and Rossman (2011) offered that member checking contributes to the validity of the data by conducting follow-up interviews to confirm the understanding of the research with the participants' responses to the interview questions. I audio recorded the interviews, transcribed each interview immediately, used my personal notes from the conversations, and verified the transcripts' accuracy using the member checking technique. Positive effects from member checking include allowing each participant (a) the opportunity to correct any errors, (b) challenge any perceived inaccurate interpretations, and (c) volunteer additional information (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) asserted that triangulation also assures validity using multiple perspectives and sources of evidence to clarify meanings and verify replication

of interpretations and observations. There are four types of triangulation: (a) data triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Data triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data that involves several different sampling strategies that focus on time, space, or persons. Investigator triangulation is the use of multiple researchers involved in gathering and analyzing data. Theory triangulation is the use of two or more theoretical frameworks to interpret the phenomenon. Using methodological triangulation enables the researcher to understand the data by using more than one method of data collection to ensure the data are reliable and valid. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggested using more than one type of data. Using methodological triangulation, I addressed validity by collecting and comparing findings stemming from multiple sources of data. I assured study validity using archival records, notes from the interviews, and third-party reports to compare information stemming from the different data sources (Wahyuni, 2012). I used descriptive words stemming from the interview data. Following guidance from Denzin and Lincoln (2011), I explained to the participants that I have no background in being an entrepreneur or small business owner and the clarity of their responses are critical to identify common themes stemming from their responses on factors that contributed to the success of their businesses.

To assure the findings are credible, I implemented the following steps: (a) ensure proper selection of the participants with verified knowledge of factors, (b) conduct member checking of the data, (c) incorporate triangulation of the data sources, and (d) compare the interview data to the existing literature and the conceptual framework. I have

reviewed systems theory, chaos theory, and complexity theory as each share the concept of shared visions and interaction as necessary components of success. Systems theory, chaos theory, and complexity theory also support the value small business owners place on expanding their horizons and recognizing the complex systems involved for their businesses to operate effectively and efficiently. Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggested qualitative researchers should reflect on existing theories, the literature, and data to add strength to qualitative research or offer new perspectives for future researchers.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I provided the research method, design, and rationale used in the selection of a qualitative multiple case study to explore factors that I described in the role of the researcher, the participants, and the purposeful sampling technique. I also presented the selected data collection method. I highlighted the ethical aspects, the methods, and processes for assuring reliability and validity of the study. In Section 3, I will include the findings of the study, the significance of the study and potential implications for social change. I will also provide recommendations for action and further study, as well as a summary of the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 3 begins with an introduction that contains the purpose of the study and a brief summary of the findings. Thereafter Section 3 provides (a) a comprehensive discussion of the findings, (b) application to professional practice, (c) the implications for social change, (d) recommendations for professional practice, (e) the implications for social change, and (f) recommendations for further studies.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore what skills, knowledge, and strategies small business owners use to sustain business beyond 5 years. The population for this study was three small business owners of three coffee shops in Duval County, Florida with 10 or fewer tables. The overarching research question guiding this study was: What skills, knowledge, and strategies do small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 5 years? Using methodological triangulation of all of my data sources including the interview data, interview notes, website information, social media platforms, newspaper and magazine articles, and site visit observations, three themes emerged from the research. The themes were (a) the importance of owner networking and the business as a customer to customer networking venue; (b) business plans, initial challenges, and addressing subsequent changes; and (c) a need for marketing differentiation.

Presentation of the Findings

The primary research question that guided this study was: What skills, knowledge, and strategies do small business owners need to succeed in business beyond

5 years? Three themes emerged from the collected data. The themes were: (a) owner networking and the business as a customer to customer networking venue; (b) business plans, initial challenges, and addressing subsequent changes; (c) a need for marketing differentiation. Systems theory, chaos theory, and complexity theory provided the conceptual framework for exploring the overarching research question of this qualitative multiple case study. The theories did align with the literature and themes that morphed in the findings.

Emergent Theme 1: Owner Networking and the Business as a Customer to Customer Networking Venue

Networking is the ability to create lasting and beneficial relationships (O'Donnell, 2014). Martinez and Aldrich (2011) noted that networking increases connectivity with the marketplace and that lack of networking could contribute to business failure. Each of the three participants discussed how others within the community, such as family and friends, assisted with financial resources, local retailers offered discount opportunities in purchasing of supplies, and networking opportunities were available through the SBA. SO1, SO2, and SO3 each acknowledged the importance and value of resources provided by the SBA. All three participants had been, or are currently members of the local Chamber of Commerce, try to attend the small business owners' meetings and socials, and receive mentoring services from the local chapter of SCORE. SO1 asserted that "attending specific networking events sponsored by local business groups and associations was challenging due to long hours and daily *hands on*

involvement in the efficient running of the business”, but expressed interest in more involvement with the SBA and other small business programs in the near future.

Robb and Watson (2012) promulgated that business owners may be able to learn how to increase profitability and sustainability by gaining knowledge from other small business owners at social and professional events. Evidence of community networking, involvement, and engagement were visible in all three coffee shops during site visits in terms of signed photographs of homegrown celebrities, the artwork of local artists, and flyers of upcoming community events. Each of the three participants acknowledged obtaining their initial business loans from local banks and SO2 was a member of the Jacksonville Downtown Investment Authority from whom she received grant money for *build out* expenses.

The business locations were also important in the community as venues for customers to network as well. All three participants provided seating inside and outside the building. While each of the three shops was very small, I noted groups of individuals appeared to be networking. For example, I observed a group of individuals discussing an upcoming Veterans gathering. Another group consisted of mothers who arrived with children in baby strollers. Other guests had their dog with them and appeared to enjoy the coffee shop as a meeting place to network and a place to sit outdoors to chat to network informally. I observed during a site visit and when exploring the business website and various social media platforms that SO1 had a flyer displayed on the front door and numerous postings on Facebook advertising an upcoming open microphone night event where local singers, songwriters, and musicians can display their talents. Each participant

stated that the geographical location of their business contributed to small groups of customers who enjoyed networking at the coffee shop early mornings before work and in the afternoons after work or before/after the numerous beach activities. One of the participants, SO1, also allowed groups to hold meetings during the business day for small events or to rent out the space after hours for meetings or shows as indicated on the business website. All three of the participants noted the importance of community involvement.

Each of the three owners referred to their own networking with community businesses that included the local Costco for food/supplies, banking services, laundry amenities, and floral services as well as enlisting the services of a local coffee roaster. SO3 reported using a local thrift shop to purchase coffee mugs. In the coffee shop of SO3, no two mugs looked alike, and this added charm to the environment. SO1 shopped at the local Goodwill for items that enhanced the shabby chic yet cozy environment. In addition, each of the three participants noted the importance of social media with networking and advertising and utilized social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. SO1 asserted that the use of social media platforms was an initial challenge due to a lack of familiarity with social media and sought guidance from friends, family, and younger employees to gain a more technological and competitive advantage. The theme regarding networking aligned to the literature and systems theory in that networking involves many aspects of the daily business operations between internal and external customers and the environment. The implications of these findings

center on the interrelations of business needs and activities for sustainability of the business.

Emergent Theme 2: Business Plans, Initial Challenges, and Addressing Subsequent Changes

All three participants confirmed they did have a business plan when they launched the business and that they learned from trial and error as well as from suggestions of (a) friends, (b) bankers, (c) family members, (d) the SBA and (e) members of SCORE that the initial business plan and strategy needed modifications. Each of the participants indicated a very basic knowledge of accounting procedures and financial planning in the initial stages of business ownership and sought the help of family and friends to learn how to become more adept in these areas. Two of the three participants (SO1, SO2) expressed concern over initial low profitability the first 2 years as a challenge mainly resulting from the economic downturn. SO3 noted a larger issue with maintaining a failing business while launching a new venture, which led SO3 to close the first business.

All three of the coffee shop owners initially lacked financial resources to advertise their business in local papers and flyers and had to rely on patrons seeing the coffee shop and stopping by out of curiosity. SO1 had worked at the business before taking over and changed the name. SO1 had struggled to rebuild the customer base as many of the original customers had stopped frequenting the establishment due to “lack of interest and dedication of the previous owner.” Word of mouth was one of the primary sources of initial advertising for all three participants. Each of the three participants noted

overcoming the challenge of how to attract customers after they established credibility as a legitimate business, built up the brand, and gained the trust of the local community. SO1 and SO2 noted successfully addressing the challenges of rebuilding the customer base and attracting new customers resulting from utilizing social media in marketing and advertising efforts.

Each of the three participants mentioned that initial challenges involved a high rate of employee turnover and hiring the right people. SO1 noted that the coffee shop industry is a transient business and tends to attract younger workers or those that do not have a commitment to stay for a prolonged period, resulting in the loss of time and financial resources involved with recruiting efforts and training. SO1 employs family members. Martinez and Aldrich (2011) noted that family members typically have higher levels of commitment to the family owned business. All three participants expressed a need to improve their interview process to make better hiring decisions and get the *right fit* of employees for the job as well as the culture of the business. SO1, SO2, and SO3 asserted that coaching and mentoring services provided through SCORE and other business organizations were valuable resources for improving their selection and hiring processes.

All three participants noted the importance of the challenge of keeping staff motivated and happy. SO2 shared that “open dialog and clear communications of expectations are critical.” SO2 also asserted that being involved on a personal level and being supportive of employees reduces turnover as the employees feel personally invested in the business. SO2 offers motivational rewards and incentives as well as

celebrating holidays with the employees. Each of the participants asserted that teamwork is very important in keeping employees motivated and happy. Each storeowner spends a great deal of their time at the business working alongside their employees and sharing the responsibility of everyday duties from preparing drinks and food to cleaning and stocking. Storeowners also spend time conducting ongoing training for employees. Each coffee shop owner believed that while running an efficient business is important, it should also be fun.

During the member checking process both SO2 and SO3 related that a business challenge was that they were initially unaware of who their niche customers were. After opening their businesses, they started defining their niche market. The coffee shop owners SO1 and SO2 are somewhat similar in that their client base includes working adults in an industrialized area or students who stop by the coffee shop with their laptop using the coffee shop free Wi-Fi Internet. SO3 noted a larger volume of bicycle riders, mothers with strollers, adults interested in music, local art, and consumers who are attending local beach events. SO1 and SO2 reflected that, after some time of being in business, they were able to capitalize by adjusting hours and days to when they might expect the most clientele. Parnell, Lester, Zhang, and Mehmet (2012) found that small business owners with niche markets have the most success.

Another key challenge for SO1, SO2, and SO3 was their small coffee shops are very small. SO1, SO2, and SO3 stated that they lacked sufficient refrigerated and dry storage space for the consumables and necessary stock. SO1 identified that it was “more cost effective to make regular COSTCO trips for supplies rather than to attempt to stock

inventory.” SO3 had a self-serve table so customers could get coffee and unlimited refills; cream, plastic forks, napkins, spoons, and coffee mugs from the dining room rather than try to use precious space for storage of these types of items. The noted advantage was the customers could order at one location, pay at the cash register in another location, and obtain their coffee and condiments in a separate location that could decrease service cycle time.

Each of the three participants related increased awareness of seasonality after opening their businesses. SO3 asserted that because the location is a Florida based beach community oriented, and many of the customers walked their dogs, biked, or pushed strollers during nice weather, it was imperative to have outside seating in addition to insider seating. All three of the participants indicated that they needed to make changes in menu offerings as the client base grew such as salads and lighter fare in the summer and hearty soups during the cold, rainy months. I noted changes in menu offering on upgraded menu boards during site visits as well as updates posted on the business website and various social media platforms. Seasonality was an additional challenge for SO2 and SO3 because of limited parking space. The participants defined seasonality as holidays, cold or rainy weather, and school breaks.

SO2 upgraded equipment to offer a larger variety of hot and cold beverages as well as increasing menu items such as salads for the hotter months and hot sandwiches and soup during the cooler months. Each of the store owners had an extensive menu with offering of pastries, muffins, and sandwiches and a variety of hot and cold beverages. SO1 realized the cost and time of ensuring adequate ice production was a challenge,

which led to using plastic, reusable ice cubes in an ice water container as noted by reviewing the owner's Facebook page. Each participant indicated the need to include healthier options such as gluten free and low calorie products since many individuals are now becoming more health conscious. Offering specialty coffees and teas for holidays helped attract additional business in the cooler months associated with rain.

Each of these innovative strategies helped the coffee shop owners acquire an identity and attract customers for sustainability. The owners' awareness of the types of customers who are attracted to their business is consistent with Hunter's (2011) publication that business owners need to stay involved, know their customers, and be aware of the cycles and trends affecting their business.

The theories grounding this study included systems theory, chaos theory, and complexity theory. Systems theory as described by von Bertalanffy (1972) aligned closely to challenges identified by the participants in sustaining a small business on ensuring all the parts of running a business were connected. The participants' descriptions of the constantly changing environment also aligned to the literature and Lorenz's (1963) chaos theory and complexity theory. Nicolis and Prigogine (1989) described complexity theory as a concept where different modes of behavior occur in varying environmental conditions, which the participants acknowledged due to seasonal changes in profitability. Chaos theory aligned to the theme business plans, initial challenges, and addressing subsequent changes as small business owners identified unpredictable events relating business and management practices.

Emergent Theme 3: A Need for Marketing Differentiation

A business owner can achieve differentiation by ensuring that their product or brand stands out in the market as unique and is difficult to replicate by competitors (Alstete, 2014). Leaders achieve differentiation of a brand or product through (a) competitive pricing, (b) enhancement of products, (c) location of the business, (d) brand recognition, (e) excellent customer service, and (f) product customization. Box and Miller (2011) concluded the most successful business strategy for small companies is *focused differentiation*. Consumers evaluate their experience based on similar experiences or product characteristics and do not engage in activities or purchase products that share unlike characteristics (Jhang, Grant, & Campbell, 2012). Jhang et al. (2012) concluded product positioning to be effective by managing customers' emotions to achieve more favorable acceptance of a product.

SO1, SO2, and SO3 reported they were initially fearful of the big chain coffee shop competition. Within 5 miles of the 3 coffee shops are two major coffee shop chains. Unlike the chain coffee shops, SO1, SO2, and SO3 used innovative marketing and advertising strategies to attract customers and enhance customer involvement over time. For example, SO1 adjusted the original name of the business to include coffeehouse to set the shop apart from the more prevalent grab and go type coffee shops. SO2 believed she set herself apart from large, chain coffee shops in that she has email lists in which she emails coffee cards. SO2 advertises a coffee subscription opportunity for roasted beans delivered to home or office as well as gift cards. SO2 also engages in face-to-face marketing with local businesses by handing out menus and samples for a more hands on

approach. In addition, SO2 partners with the local arena football teams, providing bagels and tea in exchange for advertising on billboards at games. SO2 has coupons printed on the backs of season ticket for the various local sporting events as this is more visible than newspaper ads.

All three participants used social media platforms and websites to advertise and share new coffee, tea, and cold beverage offerings. SO1 has a staff favorite pick of the month. SO1's selections include unique names that she has chosen for the beverages to gain a competitive advantage through product differentiation. Complexity theory was appropriate for exploring the theme a need for differentiation regarding factors that contributed to the success of small business owners, as the small business owners were aware of the need to operate in a complex, nonlinear, and often unpredictable manner and offer difference of services while operating in a competitive environment.

Other Relevant Findings

Success and sustainability were very important to each of the three participants as was passion and dedication to the business venture. SO1, SO2, and SO3 all had very similar ideas regarding what leads to small business success. All three participants described customer service and a sense of community as being the most critical elements in their ability to sustain the coffee shop business longer than 5 years. SO1 described customers as *family* knowing most, if not all, regular customers by name as well as their usual order. All three owners appeared to have close customer relationships that perhaps a larger chain store could not achieve. Two of the three coffee shops owners, SO1 and SO3, had a sitting area with sofas and chairs for establishing a cozy environment for

customers who sit inside to chat. Some of the customers had their laptops and appeared to be conducting business or perhaps doing school work. The environment was clearly comfortable for customers. Miles (2013) posited that excellent customer service can result in customer loyalty. Regular communications with customers through emails and by recognizing them contributes to strong relationships. SO3 noted that developing customer relationships and networking is more powerful and cost effective than putting money into marketing initiatives. Each of the three participants reported the importance of support of family and friends, involvement of family members in the business, and encouragement. All three participants asserted that while a business background is very helpful, friendliness, hospitality, and a welcoming spirit were key catalysts for achieving customer satisfaction.

When addressing the interview question regarding the motivation behind owning and operating a small business, each participant had unique insights. SO1 had worked for the original owner of the business for several years, and when the owner wanted to retire and close the shop, SO1 purchased it. SO1 realized that the business needed to remain as originally established in the community because relationships had developed, as it was the neighborhood coffee shop.

SO2 expressed always wanting to be a small business owner and the desire to own a coffee shop was based on passion rather than a hands off approach in a business that is not of interest. SO2 asserted that the passion and dedication that drives her business stemmed from an interest in developing and maintaining long-term relationships and involvement in the community.

SO3 had previously bought a franchise, but quickly concluded that with the downturn of the economy, this purchase was a bad decision. SO3 realized that no amount of work that she put in would get the business thriving to her satisfaction. SO3 determined a better solution would be to appeal to a larger group in an area with lower startup expenses and a more suitable market. The failure of SO3's prior business endeavor is in conflict with the findings of Alasadi and Sabbagh (2015) who posited that many business owners start their own business due to expertise and success they acquired previously.

When asked what the best advice they could offer to future small business owners, the participants responded:

SO1: "Have a good attitude and radiate your passion and dedication to your business and the customers." SO1's motto is: "The start to a great friendship begins with a cup of kindness."

SO2: "Do not offer what everyone else is offering. Set yourself apart from the crowd. Keep it local with great products and fresh quality."

SO3: One should "learn from your mistakes. Just because something did not work out the first time, do not give up. Give the customer what they want and a great experience and they will return with friends."

Applications to Professional Practice

My findings, conclusions, and recommendations could provide possible solutions to address small business owners' need for suggested business practices, and strategies to sustain their businesses while providing revenues for supporting the local economy.

Business leaders can use the applications of this information to professional practice in (a) planning a launch of a new business, (b) planning on the hiring and training of employees, (c) marketing and outreach strategies, (d) networking and knowing when to network, and (e) when to outsource for supplies to sustain the business. Small business owners may find the themes of (a) owner networking and the business as a customer to customer networking venue; (b) business plans, initial challenges, and addressing subsequent changes; and (c) a need for marketing differentiation of value in establishing a small business in Duval County, Florida.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change includes the potential to increase the rate of small business success which can result in hiring and retaining skilled employees, increasing financial security for owners, employees, and employees' families, as well as financial support and employment opportunities for the local community. Additionally, this information might be useful for members of the Chamber of Commerce to share with owners of new small business startups and educational leaders who teach information on issues that relate to sustaining a small business.

Recommendations for Action

Three recommended actions for other small business owners are (a) to understand the value of internal and external networking, (b) to identify, prioritize, diagnose, and remedy business problems; and (c) to recognize the need for differentiation. I recommend that small business owners pay close attention to the results of this study as networking within the community, with other small business owners, and

members of professional organizations such as the SBA and SCORE can heighten their chances of success by providing additional resources, tools, and guidance to overcome uncertainty and challenges involved with small business ownership. New and aspiring business owners can benefit from the results of this study by developing a robust business plan. Furthermore, the need for consistent innovation and increased customer satisfaction, while staying abreast of new business trends, can help small business owners *stand out* in the marketplace. I will provide the three participants with a summary of the published results and findings as well as provide the data, in aggregate form, to the local Chamber of Commerce.

Recommendations for Further Study

Recommendations for further research include focusing on different sizes of small business in different industries and varying geographical locations. Future researchers should also consider studying small business owners who have increased profitability and examine the relevance of gender and age variances of the small business owners through quantitative designs. Moreover, focusing on each of the specific themes identified within this study, (a) owner networking and the business as a customer to customer networking venue, (b) business plans, initial challenges, and addressing subsequent changes; or (c) a need for marketing differentiation would provide more specific areas for additional research. Future research in such areas could help business and government leaders provide continued support and resources to their local economy and communities.

Reflections

I have learned much about small business owners during my research, the hours that I spent with the participants, and during my time in the Walden DBA program. I initially struggled in finding small business owners who had time to spend with me, but the three individuals who accepted my invitation offered tremendous energy and insights. I could see their pride and motivation of launching and sustaining their own business. Designing and implementing this study has enlightened me in numerous ways: (a) how to conduct interviews, (b) how to use the literature to expand my knowledge, and (c) how these three women give to society beyond serving coffee.

Summary and Study Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore what skills, knowledge, and strategies small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 5 years. The population for this study was three small business owners in Duval County, Florida of three coffee shops with 10 or fewer tables who have sustained their business for a minimum of 5 years. Section 3 provided (a) a comprehensive discussion of the findings, (b) application to professional practice, (c) the implications for social change, (d) recommendations for professional practice, (e) the implication for social change, and (f) recommendations for further studies.

My data sources included (a) participant interview data, (b) interview notes, (c) information from the participants' Internet website and social media, (d) archived data from local newspaper and magazine clippings provided by the business owners, and (e) observations from site visits of the the business practices and processes at the coffee

shops. As described by Walker (2012), I assured data saturation when I did not noted new information emerging after member checking. After I coded and analyzed the data, three primary themes were apparent: (a) owner networking and the business as a customer to customer networking venue, (b) business plans, initial challenges, and addressing subsequent changes; and (c) a need for marketing differentiation to sustain a small coffee shop business longer than 5 years. Systems theory, chaos theory, and complexity theory provided the contextual foundation for this study. Systems theory aligns closely to exploring the factors and unpredictable challenges that a small business owner experiences in launching, managing, and sustaining a small business. As indicated by chaos theory, acknowledging and preparing for chaos in both the internal and external environments can enable small business owners to reach robust decisions, and to develop and implement robust strategies for assuring increasing their likelihood of success. As related to complexity theory, the successful small business owners identified and interpreted new environmental events, and adjusted their business plans and operations accordingly.

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Appendix A: Participant Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study involving small business owners in Duval County, Florida to identify what skills, knowledge, and strategies small business owners have used and need to succeed in business beyond 5 years?. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

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

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore experiences of small business owners who have launched and maintained a business operation for at least 5 years in Duval County, Florida.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I invite you to:

1. Please read and sign this consent form within 3 business days of receipt.
2. Participate in an interview that I will audio record lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes that held in a private conference room at the local library.
3. Provide archival records such as profit, loss, and cash flow statements, if available and third party reports such as newspaper and magazine articles.
4. Respond honestly to all of the interview questions.
5. Respond to follow-up questions if further explanation is needed to confirm understanding of your answers
6. Participate in follow-up interviews to review the transcript interpretation of the recorded interview and provide your feedback to ensure that I have transcribed the interview accurately, interpreted the answers to the interview questions correctly, and

provide further in-depth information. I estimate the follow-up interviews will require approximately 30 minutes.

Some sample questions are:

1. What was the motivation to create your own small business?
2. What training or education has prepared you to become a small business owner?
3. What modifications did you make to your initial business plan, strategy, or process during the first 5 years?
4. What community resources did you use that contributed to your success?
5. What opportunities did you find helpful in launching your small business initiative?
6. What were the most significant challenges or barriers you experienced in the first 5 years of opening your small business?
7. How did you address each of the significant challenges or barriers?
8. What types of advertising or marketing techniques did you use?
9. What financial resources did you have access to in launching and sustaining your business?
10. What strategies have you found most effective for motivating your employees to perform better?
11. What other factors that we have not discussed may have contributed to your success?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the

study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

No discomfort should result by participating in the study. I will ask you to share personal insights into what skills, knowledge, and strategies small business owners have used, and need to succeed in business beyond 5 years? Being in this study would not pose a risk to your safety or well-being.

The potential benefits of this study might provide aspiring small business owners strategies that you have implemented in launching and sustaining a business operation.

Payment:

There are no payments or gifts associated with voluntary participation in the study interviews.

Privacy:

I will keep all information confidential. I will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. I will keep the data secure by keeping all data in a secure and private location. I will keep the data for a period of at least 5 years as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now or, if you have questions later, you may contact me by telephone. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. In addition, the IRB approval number is 03-23-15-0325254 and it expires on March 22, 2016.

Title of the study: Success factors of small business owners

Please print or save this consent form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

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

Only include the signature section below if using paper consent forms.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

I will use the following interview protocol:

Upon obtaining the names and contact information of small business owners who have launched and maintained a small business for at least 5 years, I will email a request for an interview. The email request follows:

Dear Participant,

As a small business owner who has launched and maintained a small business for a minimum of 5 years, I am requesting that you participate in a doctoral study regarding factors that contribute to small business success.

If you agree to participate in this study, I ask you to allow me to interview you for no longer than one hour as well as two follow-up interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes. I will hold the interview in a private conference room at the local library. Your participation in this doctoral study is strictly voluntary. The purpose of this study is to explore experiences of small business owners who have launched and maintained a business operation for at least 5 years in Duval County, Florida. I have attached the consent form that outlines the procedures that I will follow for this study as well as the interview questions for your review.

I will keep any information that you share confidential and the data from all the interviews will be presented in aggregate format. I plan to conduct my interviews from XXX to XXX and if you would provide me a good time and phone number to call you, I would be grateful.

You are free to contact either my faculty chair or myself by clicking reply all or directly emailing me.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Susan Turner

2. Upon receipt of acknowledgement of the volunteers willing to participate, I will ensure that I obtain the signed Consent to Participate documentation from each participant prior to the interview. I will store all materials relating to this study in a locked safe for a minimum of 5 years. No one else will have access to the data other than me.
3. I will meet with each participant at the time/date that the volunteer designates. I will remind each participant that he/she may withdraw from the study at any time and that all

data will remain confidential. I will thank each participant for volunteering his or her insights. I will remind each participant that the focus of the interview will relate to success factors of small business owners. I will ask the following questions as well as probing questions as needed to get more in-depth information:

1. What was the motivation to create your own small business?
 2. What training or education has prepared you to become a small business owner?
 3. What modifications did you make to your initial business plan, strategy, or process during the first 5 years?
 4. What community resources did you use that contributed to your success?
 5. What opportunities did you find helpful in launching your small business initiative?
 6. What were the most significant challenges or barriers you experienced in the first 5 years of opening your small business?
 7. How did you address each of the significant challenges or barriers?
 8. What types of advertising or marketing techniques did you use?
 9. What financial resources did you have access to in launching and sustaining your business?
 10. What strategies have you found most effective for motivating your employees to perform better?
 11. What other factors that we have not discussed may have contributed to your success?
4. Upon the completion of the initial face-to-face interview and follow-up interviews, I will send the following thank you letter to each participant:

Dear <Participant>:

I wanted to take the opportunity to say thank you for participating in my research study on success factors of small business owners. I recognize you are very busy and truly appreciate your time and effort. I am currently assembling and exploring the data and looking for themes. I will provide you with a summary of the results of my findings upon completion of the research and final approval of the study. Thank you again for sharing your insights!

Sincerely,

Susan Turner
Doctor of Business Administration Candidate
Walden University