


2016

Small Business Leaders' Perceptions of Strategies Facilitating Positive Performance in Government Contracts

Tamara P. Williams
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Tamara P. Williams

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2015

Abstract

Small Business Leaders' Perceptions of Strategies Facilitating Positive Performance in

Government Contracts

by

Tamara P. Williams

MA, Webster University, 2013

MS, Troy University, 2005

BS, Central Michigan University, 2001

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

April 2016

Abstract

Past performance ratings of government contractors are becoming a critical pathway to the \$300 billion of contract dollars Congress sets aside for small businesses annually. This was a descriptive study exploring leadership strategies small business leaders use to attain positive performance ratings in government contracting, viewed through the lens of the principal-agent theory. The exploration occurred by interviewing 21 small business leaders located within 30 miles of Washington, DC, with favorable performance ratings on at least 3 government contracting opportunities. Clustering themes according to Moustakas's modified van Kaam helped organize, analyze, interpret, and provide meaning to participant accounts of the phenomenon. Findings revealed 5 overall themes: (a) leadership strategies that influence positive performance ratings, (b) behavioral or trait-based attributes of leaders, and (c) understanding bureaucratic dynamics and contract requirements, (d) resource-based capacity as an impediment, and (e) competitive intelligence as a valuable resource. The findings indicated a need for leaders to adapt approaches to contract performance that is appropriate for the situation as agencies implement the procurement process differently. The identification of strategies that positively influence performance ratings may increase the longevity of small businesses participation or excite the proliferation of small businesses aspiring or struggling to increase performance. Findings may also encourage various business leaders within socioeconomic groups to gain access to federal set-asides.

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Dedication

I dedicate this to Carlton Patrick Rollocks and Wilfred Rollocks, two of my biggest supporters. At the time of Carlton's passing in 2005, I was in the beginning stages of my academic journey; the love and encouragement from him as my oldest sibling touched me deeply and has always remained with me. I know in my heart he is still with me and cheering me on. My grandfather Wilfred Rollocks taught me to read and write at a very young age and incited a passion for lifelong learning. After his passing 1 month before Carlton also in 2005, I became committed to continuing the path of education to make him proud. That early education laid the foundation for my academic success today. My family is my life; without their support and encouragement, this process could have been more difficult. My grandmother Lizzie B. Rollocks, parents Robert and Patricia Williams, brother Robert P. Williams III, nieces, and nephews, Carlton Jr., Nicole, Kimberly, Camille and Aaron, were all instrumental and involved in seeing me through to completion. The love and support kept me going.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The United States small business participation is critical to continued economic recovery. Effective procurement is an increasingly important subject for businesses (Dimitri, 2013). Significant contributions defining leadership development strategies have primarily included resources for large corporations. Organizational behavior and leadership characteristics are necessary drivers in small enterprises reaching successful long-term performance in a dynamic and evolving system (Ates & Bititci, 2011). When discussed in the context of performance outcomes, success involves the effective integration and implementation of environmental, social, and financial performance measures (Ameer & Othman, 2012). This study pertains to measuring small business leaders' performance outcomes in government contracts.

To maintain positive performance in any business, organizations' leaders hold an important responsibility in achieving this goal. In 2010, the United States federal government made a concerted effort to improve contractor performance by providing feedback to firms through completing Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System (CPARS) reports (Hiles, 2015). In May 2010, the Office of Federal Procurement Policy designated CPARS as the single government-wide system that all government agencies now use for entering evaluations (U.S. General Accounting Office [GAO], 2014).

The CPARS system is a government-wide system that collects, documents, and houses contractor performance information used by agency decision makers when considering past performance in competitive procurements (GAO, 2014). Developing

small business leaders through integrated and disciplined approaches is becoming increasingly important (Mirocha, Bents, LaBrosse, & Rietow, 2013). Deficiency in research addressing small enterprises and performance initiatives in the federal government has indicated a need for further exploration. Ample effective leadership styles exist for small business practitioners; this study discovered various strategies that leaders of small businesses used that contributed to their positive performance in government contracts. Findings also indicated barriers to positive performance related to attaining subsequent contracting opportunities.

Background of the Problem

Since the Small Business Act of 1953, the central priority for the Small Business Administration (SBA) has been to improve fund flowing to small businesses (SBA, 2014b). As small businesses account for approximately 65% of new U.S. jobs created, government contracting dollars have become a vital resource for small enterprises' contribution to the economy (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012). Acknowledging small businesses significance to Americas economy, Congress appropriates approximately \$300 billion to small businesses each year (Bublak, 2014). Only 22% of all appropriated dollars equates to contract awards to small businesses, and deficiency in meeting statutory goals may jeopardize small business existence (Bail, 2010). Small business owners have been essential to federal government agencies both domestically and internationally (Bublak, 2014). Realizing small businesses pertinence to participation in government contracting predates the SBA.

Despite the SBA's established goals, government contracting resources are still unavailable for small businesses. Since the early 1990s, success has become a business trend that has changed demands placed on business. A need for improvement became recognized in the evaluation processes of a contractor's proposed solutions. In 2013, Bradshaw and Su acknowledged that the lack of past performance data contributed to program failures, cost overruns, and schedule delays. Fundamental shifts in how companies operate have led to a renewed focus on leadership necessary for creating high-performing organizations (Tideman, Arts, & Zandee, 2013). Leading organizations to perform at high levels has not been enough to produce positive past performance ratings; therefore, small business leaders have had to change how the organization operates to exceed expectations of key participants in the rating process (Hiles, 2015). As of 2012, the failure rate for organizational change initiatives was 95% (Decker et al., 2012). The emergence of leadership for success has created an information gap germane to leadership and successfully implementing performance measures in organizations (Metcalf & Benn, 2012). Information available includes small businesses history and role in government contracting; however, current research omitted knowledge about strategies available to assist small business leaders' attainment and positive performance in government contracts. Addressing this gap in research served as the focal point.

Problem Statement

Approximately \$517 billion, or 25%, of federal discretionary spending goes to contract awards (GAO, 2014; Johnston & Girth, 2012). Incentivizing poor performing contractors cost the government between \$15 and \$40 billion to fix defective acquired

systems (Girth, 2014; Shull, 2013). These data include the 23% of the contract award dollars each year Congress sets aside to incentivize small business participation in government contracting opportunities (Snider, Kidalov, & Rendon, 2013). The general business problem is that some small business contractors lack contract business leadership strategies that increase performance in government contracts. The specific problem is that some small business contractors lack strategies to achieve positive performance ratings while performing in government contracting.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive research study was to explore strategies small business leaders have used to attain positive performance ratings in government contracting. I gained this understanding by interviewing small business leaders located within 30 miles of Washington, DC, with favorable CPARS, past performance ratings on at least three government contracting opportunities. Implementing strategies that increase small business performance in government contracting influences social change through enabling business leaders to create new jobs, increase contributions to the government tax base, and improve the well-being for the unemployed job base this group can employ.

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive research study was to explore strategies small business leaders use to attain positive performance in government contracting. The population consisted of small business leaders in a 30-mile distance of Washington, DC. A qualitative method with a descriptive design provided the basis for exploration and interpretation into small business leaders' lived experiences. Qualitative research is an

inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Shields & Rangarjan, 2013). The selected method allows researchers to summarize comprehensively specific events experienced by groups of individuals (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). The data collection technique combined a researcher-created socioeconomic questionnaire and in-depth face-to-face semistructured interviews of small business leaders within 30 miles of Washington, DC. Purposeful sampling was the sampling method used to recruit small business leaders through e-mailed invitations to participate. Researchers use qualitative research methods to describe research informed by explanatory, critical, thorough investigations when attempting to understand multifaceted and complex events (Leko, 2014). A qualitative design provided sufficient information to learn about strategies some small business leaders use for positive performance ratings in government contracting. The intention was not to use statistical analysis to test theories or provide solutions to identified problems based on individual experiences and statistical analysis. Therefore, quantitative and mixed-methods research approaches did not fit the primary purpose, to discover common behaviors through the participants' wisdom.

Implementing a descriptive design allows data retrieval explored from members within the desired setting through semistructured interview questions to understand a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Shields & Rangarjan, 2013). The generic method affords researchers opportunities to advance theories by deviating from methodological prescriptions (Kahlke, 2014). A descriptive design suited this study to explore small business leaders' perceptions about strategies used to attain positive performance ratings

in government contracting. Quantitative methods involve examining relationships between specific variables to answer questions of who, where, how many, and how much (Harrison, 2013). The intent of the study was not to test objective theories by examining the relationship between variables (e.g., Polit & Hungler, 2013); therefore, a quantitative research approach did not fit the primary purpose of this study. Mixed methods involve the combination of two types of data, qualitative and quantitative, in a single study (Harrison, 2013). Researchers mix qualitative and quantitative data for instrument and theory development or to address both exploratory and confirmatory questions within the same research inquiry (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Neither of these rationales rendered a mixed method approach appropriate for this study. Probing social situation as a part of the group to understand unfamiliar cultures (e.g., Brown, 2014) was not the purpose; therefore, an ethnographic research study would not assist in answering the research question. A case study design is also not suitable for exploring a communal experience, as it did not permit divergent questioning into the phenomenon researched. A phenomenological design did not allow the development of research designs that fit the epistemological and particular research questions (Kahlke, 2014). This section offered a brief discussion of possible methods. I will discuss the method and design in detail in Section 2.

Research Question

The central research question was as follows: What leadership strategies do small business leaders use to achieve positive performance ratings in government contracts?

Interview Questions

The 10 interview questions supported the fundamental research question. The inquiry involved probing the data necessary to explore leadership strategies small business leaders use that facilitate positive performance ratings in government contracts.

Q1: What leadership strategies do you find most effective for achieving positive performance ratings in government contracts?

Q2: What leadership behaviors do leaders/managers employ that are attributes to positive performance ratings in government contracts?

Q3: How do these attributes influence contract performance ratings?

Q4: How does the contractor–government relationship impede or affect performance ratings?

Q5: What are the impediments or obstacles that small business leaders face when performing in government contracts?

Q6: What resources do business leaders use to assist in achieving positive performance ratings in government contracts?

Q7: What restrictions, if any, discourage small business representatives from achieving positive performance ratings in government contracting opportunities?

Q8: What additional information can you provide to improve leadership effectiveness in small businesses' contracting performance?

Q9: What programs and information will help leaders of small businesses seeking to improve performance ratings in government contracts?

Q10: What programs or information do you suggest to leaders of small businesses seeking to obtain government-contracting opportunities?

Conceptual Framework

Jensen and Meckling's (1976) principal-agent theory served as the conceptual framework for this study. This section offers a brief overview with a more detailed explanation provided in the review of the professional and academic literature. The principal-agent theory offers a context for shaping and managing contract interactions to expound the performances amid two actors in agreement (Awortwi, 2012). The principal-agent theory derives from contract law and defines a contractual relationship in which a party engages with another to perform services on its behalf, usually for a fee. When applied to contracts, the principal-agent theory has broad implications, but the focus is on the respective relational assignments (Steinle, Schiele, & Ernst, 2014).

The principal-agent model includes a few assumptions. As an economic theory, opportunism is the fundamental concept (Steinle et al., 2014). Relational characteristics create a dynamic where both parties pursue their interest resulting in conflicting goals between the principal and the agent (Fernandez, 2009). If divergent or conflicting goals exist, the principal will respond by monitoring the agent in an attempt to align the agent's behavior with the principal's interest. The presumptuous results encompass a positive contractual relationship cultivating mutual trust developed upon successful goal attainment and responsiveness to principal's interests (Fernandez, 2009). The principal-agent theory provides evidence to explain the relationship behavior between the principals and agents concerning managing contracts (Witesman & Fernandez, 2013).

This description thereby served as a plausible framework to assess strategies available for small business leaders to attain positive performance within the contractual relationship context between the two parties.

Definition of Terms

The following are definitions of operational terms used in the study:

Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System (CPARS): An evaluating tool used for government-wide past performance reporting, mandatory for all government contracts (Federal Acquisition Regulation [FAR], 2014a).

Federal Business Opportunity (FBO): FBO serves as the federal government's primary electronic single point of entry for all open-market contracting opportunities that exceed \$25,000. The FBO website is available at <https://www.fbo.gov> (FAR, 2014c).

Governmentwide point of entry (GPE): GPE is the single point where the government publically synopsis business opportunities exceeding \$25,000. As a public website site, the GPE offers access to any interested companies or individuals (FAR, 2014b).

North American Industry Classification System (NAICS): NAICS codes are size standards the SBA established for small business concerns. The NAICS code describes item categories provided (e.g., supplies vs. services). The codes also qualify small businesses for preferences or eligibility under government programs and procurements (FAR, 2014e).

Set-aside: A set-aside identifies the reservation of acquisitions for the exclusive participation of a particularly identified small business concern. Set-asides occur when an

opportunity is open to all small businesses or for a single acquisition or class (e.g., women-owned small business set-aside). They also occur in total or partial set-aside opportunities (FAR, 2014d).

Small business concerns: United States business entities that adhere to SBA-established standard employing fewer than 500 employees and less than \$7 million in annual receipts (SBA, 2014c).

Success: Creative thinking strategies crucial to long-term development, successfully directing a company through success related requirements (Newman-Storen, 2014). Success-related requirements include social, legal, political, economic, environmental, ethical practices, employees, and customer concerns (Ameer & Othman, 2012). For this research, performance is used to describe the measure of success. Therefore, in some literature the word *sustainability* is used; however, for the purpose of this study *success* and *performance* were substituted.

System for Award Management database: A centralized system the government uses to house certain contracting, grants, and other assistance-related process information for prospective businesses and federal awardee contractors (FAR, 2014b).

Women-owned small business concern: A small business entity where stock ownership by one or more women constitutes 51% company ownership. For consideration in federal acquisitions programs, one or more women must control the daily management and business operations (FAR, 2014b).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

As critical scholarly research components, relevant assumptions, limitations, and delimitations for this descriptive study transpired from the epistemologically social constructivist paradigm (e.g., Kahlke, 2014). Considering clearly articulated elements helped set aside biases and inhibited concerns that may have otherwise surfaced and compromised credibility. This section includes situations and circumstances that influenced or impeded methods and data analysis.

Assumptions

Assumptions are essential uncontrollable elements significant to a study. Identified assumptions encompass aspects necessary for the study to exist (Simon, 2011). Assumptions identified presented important features requiring rectifying. I anticipated that participants selected had the experience necessary to answer the central question. Carefully selected individuals and volunteers that could withdraw from the study at any time addressed assumptions that participants would answer questions honestly and that their opinions and insights would contribute to the research base. Collaborating with industry practitioners, subject matter experts, and participants with extensive experiences ensured credibility (Yang, Kumaraswamy, Pam, & Mahesh, 2010). Selection criteria included purposefully sampled small business leaders who successfully performed on government contracts with experiences meaningful to the exploration.

Limitations

Limitations are uncontrollable potential events that can affect the methodology and conclusions (Simon, 2011). Limitations included applied information, generalized for

all contracting opportunities, as well as limited available literature examining leadership and government contracting performance. The interview questions did not permit delineating differences between contract types or government industry classifications. Therefore, conclusions are not specifically applicable to all contract types or all services. The fact that service delivery among local United States governments may differ (Witesman & Fernandez, 2013) created the possibility that the findings constrained generalizability. I addressed this limitation by collection data at only one federal government level. Government contracting is a vast field; therefore, results, as applied to one industry, may not be generalizable to all sectors. Information does not include insight into the applicability among the varying contract types that exist. Finally, limitedly available information on variables that affected performance and government contracts, particularly small business concerns, created limitations for a thorough qualitative discussion regarding published literature within the last 5 years.

Delimitations

Delimitations included controllable characteristics originating from chosen objectives and define anticipated boundaries (Simon, 2011). The study focused on small business leaders located within 30 miles of Washington, DC, knowledgeable about potential impacts that business strategies presented on government contract performance. Regional restrictions for participants were factors that may affect members outside the sampling area and research scope. Restricting participants to small business leaders means that participants' subordinates could not provide their experience and perceptions of selected participants' management style and performance.

Significance of the Study

Public procurement is a relatively new manifestation to academic research (Flynn & Davis, 2014). *Government contracting* is a common term for United States public procurement. Findings served to uncover various strategies employed by small businesses that contribute to positive performance ratings on government contracts. Noteworthy contributions to leadership developments offered insights on how to improve contracting performance. Historically, many findings primarily contributed to large corporations; the resulting effect is a deficiency in information available for practical use by small business leaders (Mirocha et al., 2013). Findings from this study contribute to deficient research for small firms.

Contribution to Business Practice

The information may be useful for small business leaders and government contracting officers in decision making in make-or-buy decisions. Implications for practical application of findings resulting from this research fills gaps in leadership education and provide business leaders and managers with information from industry practitioners desiring to participate in government contracting opportunities. The articulated findings serve as contributions to the limited empirical literature on leadership strategies and contract performance measurement.

Implications for Social Change

Since 2008, the U.S. economy has relied heavily on employment opportunities offered through small business participation (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012). Discovering potential solutions to business problems surrounding this phenomenon is a beginning

contribution to limited informational resources on small business performance in government contracting. The identified strategies that contribute to small businesses' participation in government contracts offer more insight into ways to increase performance and contracting opportunities for various classifications encompassed under the broad small enterprises umbrella. Minority-owned, women-owned, and veteran-owned firms comprise examples where minority government contractor representation may not mirror senior executive representation in federal government agencies (C. R. Smith & Fernandez, 2010). This research helped identify ways to bridge gaps in representation that may offer opportunities to add value to local economies through employment creation. The result correlates to improved well-being for the base this group can employ.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The structured literature review includes research within 5 years of publication on prominent themes to help answer the central question. The literature search strategy included a search in all Walden University Library online databases to include Thoreau Multiple Database Search, ProQuest, and all EBSCOhost databases. Keyword classifications using the primary terms identified were *success*, *agency relationships*, *principal-agent relationships*, *leadership*, *government contracting performance*, *purchasing and supply management*, and *small business performance*. The literature review begins with a history of public procurement and small business goals that serve as a background for research. An overview summarizing the primary principles related to the conceptual lens and research on leadership from various aspects such as styles, small

business, and contractor performance follows. This section concludes with relevant scholarly literature discussing leadership and contract performance ramifications. The total survey included 85 sources, which included 79 peer-reviewed articles, five government sources, and one book (see Table 1).

Table 1

Literature Review Reference

Source	Referenced literature	No. less than 5 years old at graduation date	% peer-reviewed and less than 5 years old at graduation date
Peer-reviewed journal	79	78	99
Government sources	5	4	80
Seminal Books	1	1	100
Total	85	83	98

Contracting and Public Procurement

Government contracts, public procurement, and federal contract describe government entities' overarching premise for buying goods and services. These terms include supply chain management aspects under procurement. Procurement definitions vary in scope in relation to supply chain management, and terms are often industry specific (Miemczyk, Johnsen, & Macquet, 2012). Enhancing supply chain perspectives produces innovative procurement techniques (Gianakis & McCue, 2012). Procurement and sourcing decisions typically concern internal buying processes. The processes relate primarily to direct suppliers (i.e., dyadic relationships) and include specification, vendor selection, contracting, ordering, expediting, and evaluation (Miemczyk et al., 2012). The literature review includes a discussion of procurement as a supply chain subsection to understand thoroughly how performance strategies manifest in government contracting.

Contracting involves buying supplies and services from private contractors as an alternative to internally providing in-house services (Awortwi, 2012). Many terms used throughout the study are interchangeable expressions used to describe the phenomenon. For example, purchasing as well as supply activities within dyads involve trade-offs or transactions and long-term relationship development with other parties (Miemczyk et al., 2012). Contracting out at all levels throughout the federal government is a routine practice (Lu, 2013). Theory and policy indicated that competition catalyzed enhanced efficiency in public contracting. Government contracting officials did not always procure supplies and service-based competition or governing policy (Joaquin & Greitens, 2012). Awarding government contracts was often noncompetitive (Johnston & Girth, 2012). Decisions to procure supplies or services reflected choices stemming from individual requests or urgent needs. Agency goals and policies, combined with contracting officials' decision to acquire supplies or services, resulted in conflicting views. Therefore, to meet established contracting goals, public procurement officials based decisions on the need to use expedient measures (Snider, Kidalov, & Rendon, 2013). Using convenient measures often promoted these noncompetitive awards (Johnston & Girth, 2012). Scholars questioned the constitutionality of relationships and outsourcing between the government and its largest contractors such as Lockheed Martin and Halliburton (K. N. Brown, 2011). In 2010, robust policies existed that required procurement professionals' adherence when making business decisions about contracting out government goods and services. Most government outsourcing lacked systemized accountability, and as courts and scholars

began to understand relationship characteristics, practices remained unchallenged (K. N. Brown, 2011).

Various collaborative efforts encompassed many elements that ultimately influenced decisions and outcome of contractual agreements. Government initiatives to enter contractual arrangements with companies whose goals aligned with theirs became significant. Conversely, due to business dynamics, nonprofit and for-profit organizations had conflicting interests that resulted in a different contractual relationship with the government (Witesman & Fernandez, 2013). Government procurement and small businesses lack research regarding successful leadership strategies measured by organizational performance. Understanding strategies small business leaders employ, while considering the contractual relationship between the government and small businesses within the principle-agent framework, was the primary goal of this study.

Organizational perspective. The literature reviewed included public contract performance from various organizational aspects. These elements encompassed universal meaning describing the contractual relationship germane to both the government and the contractor. Apart from the many regulations that governed the public procurement process, an equally important dynamic was the contracting decision-makers who provided input into the contractual relationship between parties. As a subcategory to procurement, purchasing functions incorporated fundamental public procurement elements in organizations. To account for the different management competencies dimension, business leaders should situate procurement practice on an organizational level as well as a national context (McKevitt et al., 2012). Significant research identified

structured purchasing function and examined how the organization's size influenced purchasing unit designs within a company (Glock & Broens, 2013). Provider competition was difficult to achieve, costly to sustain, and contracting decisions may not have included contract management costs (Johnston & Girth, 2012). Insufficient administrative resources for efficient contracting threaten cost-effective outsourcing (Johnston & Girth, 2012).

This section provided additional information and insight into strategies for business leaders and its impact on government contract performance. Derived evidence filled research information gaps on public procurement and contributed to the body of knowledge. Public procurement elements included management competencies, supply management, organizational structure, and information technology (Gardenal, 2013; Gianakis & McCue, 2012; Glock & Broens, 2013; McKevitt et al., 2012). Other significant elements included administrative resources devoted to managing the market. Resources dedicated to managing the market resulted in pitting market management objectives against contract design, implementation, oversight, and accountability, which entailed actual, often overlooked expenditures (Johnston & Girth, 2012). In public procurement, resources appeared in many forms. In addition to managing contracting markets, other organizational aspects affected public procurement. For example, contract negotiations and final award determinations included many factors, such as considering the supplier's cost structure throughout the contract cycle (Dimitri, 2013). Additionally, management capacity served as the weak link in determining efficient contracting processes (Joaquin & Greitens, 2012).

Human capital and contracting officers. Human capital was an essential element to organizations' contracting processes. Active and normative practices in public procurement highlighted government buyers' management competencies and distinguished procurement professionals according to their skills (McKevitt et al., 2012). German municipalities' highlighted that organizational size, measured by the number of inhabitants, employees, and purchasing volume, influenced the structural variables in various ways (Glock & Broens, 2013). Contracting officers were integral in make-or-buy decisions (McKevitt et al., 2012). Government leaders settled for provider preference and relied heavily on vigilant monitoring and evaluation activities (Joaquin & Greitens, 2012). A similar conclusion was that agency goals and policies presented conflicting views that require alignment in an attempt to meet established contracting goals (Snider et al., 2013). This observation substantiated Joaquin and Greitens's (2012) finding. Even though government decision making officials relied on oversight and monitoring, control became nearly nonexistent at various government levels (Joaquin & Greitens, 2012).

Studies included a typology of conditions that gave rise to the human elements that could potentially create, enhance, inhibit, and sustain markets from which government procurement officials purchased goods and services. The information revealed theories and governing policies behind public sector contracting needs for products and services. However, organizational factors that influenced the contracting process outside the prevailing policies rendered these principles inapplicability for practical application.

Contracting Goal for U.S. Small Businesses

Small business goals have been the driving force behind small business participation in government procurement since instituting the SBA through the Small Business Act of 1953 (SBA, 2014b). Small business goals materialized around the 1940s resulting from deficient contracting opportunities for small enterprises during World War II (SBA, 2014a). Applicable government contracting goals and guiding principles materialized in 1997. These objectives strived for guaranteed fair distribution in federal government contracting opportunities. In 2013, the government set aside 23% of all procurement dollars to award to small businesses (GAO, 2014). The federal government had explicit policies emphasizing promoting small enterprises through contracting. Complicated programs, goals, set-asides, and preferences for various distinct groups amalgamated results (Snider et al., 2013). Since 1984, government contract dollar awards to small and minority-owned businesses had increased (Federal Procurement Data System-Next Generation, 2011). With this increase, the push to adhere to established programs created acquisition environments centered around convenience measures taken by potentially overworked government procurement personnel (Snider et al., 2013). Researchers began to examine racial representation and gender representation in federal agencies. Positive relationships existed between the organizations' minority representations and the government agency's contract dollars awarded to both minority- and women-owned small businesses (Fernandez, Malatesta, & Smith, 2013).

Principal-Agent Theory

The principal-agent theory originally derived from contract law and its application to formal contractual agreements and has applicability to a variety of management contexts (Witesman & Fernandez, 2013). Supply chain management was one example where the theory cultivates appropriate application. Scholars became interested in using principal-agent theory to understand how participants managed risks, aligned incentives, and forged relationships (Fayezi, O'Loughlin, & Zutshi, 2012). Supply chain management had many aspects, and procurement was an essential element in system operation processes (Giunipero, Hooker, & Denslow, 2012; Tate, Ellram, & Dooley, 2012). The principal-agent theory served as an appropriate construct for describing small business leaders' and managers' behavior and performance on government contracts within this context. The theory was a framework for shaping and managing contract interactions to expound performance descriptions for two actors in an agreement (Awortwi, 2012). The principal chooses an agent because the principal lacks the expertise and resources to produce the service in-house and determines if contracting out the services costs is advantageous. Ultimately, the principal hires an agent, and the two parties agree to contract terms including compensation for work performed.

Principal-agent theory in public contracting. Researchers applied the principal-agent theory to studies involving procurement to describe broad contractual relationship scopes (Awortwi, 2012; Etro & Cella, 2013; Tao & Jingjing, 2011). Studying behavioral choices under incentive contracts involved analyzing monitoring capacity levels to determine value and commission (Tao & Jingjing, 2011). The theory later became useful

for examining local governments' effectiveness in managing relationships with private contractors in Ghana (Awortwi, 2012). A competition analysis between research and development firms indicated how market competition relates to incentive contract choices for managers with hidden productivity (Etro & Cella, 2013). Although researchers heavily applied the theory to procurement, public procurement is a relatively new research topic and a growing phenomenon. Therefore, the function the principal-agent theory has played to date is relatively unknown (Flynn & Davis, 2014). Literature published since 2011 on government contracts indicated that advantages existed to applying the principal-agent theory to government contracting and contractor performance. An example involved identifying a gap in research and presenting viable frameworks from which to investigate public procurement studies (Flynn & Davis, 2014). Many scholars applied the principal-agent theory to government contracting and cited numerous advantages for doing so.

Goal alignment. Principal-agent theory elements focused on determining hidden productivity costs and encourage creative ways for principals to measure and compensate agents by minimizing those costs to the principal (Coletta, 2013). The agency theory provides insights for relationship engineering within supply chains, where social, political, legal, and behavioral dynamics dominate (Fayezi et al., 2012). Politics tends to dominate preaward contract functions; however, within this arena, other dynamics affect performance and range goals facing agencies and contractors. Examining the factors affecting goal attainment in public sector performance contracts included a focus on Denmark's central government performance contracts. The findings indicated that a

crucial factor in performance on government contracts is whether agencies control the formulating and meeting goals (Binderkrantz, Holm, & Korsager, 2011). Therefore, to improve contracting initiatives, a concentration should be on enabling government leaders to secure ambitious and relevant performance objectives (Binderkrantz et al., 2011).

Researchers explored goal alignment through rigorous contract monitoring involving different performance aspects using numerous surveillance tools, for example, performance objectives and measures (Witko, 2011). Performance contracts present a solution to the goal complexity and goal ambiguity. Performance management examinations combining incentive analysis through performance contracts with executive contracts for agency heads revealed the systems to be ideal for focusing managerial attention on performance (Binderkrantz & Christensen, 2012). The dynamic presented the complex contractual relationship from the principal-agent theory perspective. Different national contexts or other public sector organization types may reach the same conclusions.

Manage risks and advantages of applied theory. The principal-agent theory has limitations and risks identified by authors researching the topic. For example, an overemphasis on economic drivers has become significant weaknesses in agency theory use (Heracleous & Lan, 2012). The underlying premises behind the principal-agent theory must remain intact when applying to diverse contexts, which require broadened conceptions of essential elements (Wiseman et al., 2012). Inductive approaches used to identify context-specific differences between principal-agent and governance structures

failed to produce principal-agent relations with applicability to varied institutional contexts (Wiseman et al., 2012).

Forge relationships and behavior. Applying the principal-agent theory to supply chain management revealed interdependency between the principals and the agents, who often swapped roles within the relationship (Fayezi et al., 2012). Supply chain management theories comprised an appropriate comparison to public procurement research. Closely connected management-specific theories were suitable for use alongside established psychological and economic theories for studying organizations and markets (Flynn & Davis, 2014). Procurement became a supply chain management subfield. The subcontext was necessary because principal-agency theory elements such as information sharing and incentivization served to explanation relationships and behavior contract alignment (Fayezi et al., 2012). Principal-agency research integrating universities as government organization support revealed adverse selection as cynical implications materializing early in relationships (Rasmussen & Gulbrandsen, 2012). The problem lied in finding appropriate agents for delegation (Rasmussen & Gulbrandsen, 2012). The authors applied the theory to a program that operated in a complex situation with multiple principals and agents. The requirement entailed government support programs to adhere to goals and rationales for programs funding sources and balance various stakeholders (Rasmussen & Gulbrandsen, 2012). Conforming stakeholders' goals as a concept aligned with the premise (Fayezi et al., 2012). A corresponding principal-agent model for green supply chain management provided a framework based on the theory (Kai, Wei, & Meng-lin, 2014). The model was suitable for comparing and

analyzing knowledge sharing characteristics between enterprises in green supply chains. The design allowed practitioners to explore features that affected various parameters and changed contract formation conditions. These parameters helped identify and build upon different characteristics established by the analysis and design, based on principal-agent theory (Kai et al., 2014). The valuable, usable framework was suitable to analyze different management systems using the model.

Procurement officials within public organizations found it difficult to develop long-term relationships with suppliers that allow optimization in pursuing their respective goals (Gianakis & McCue, 2012). Relational contracting relied upon a structured agreement, which means the relationship was more than between just two parties (Never & de Leon, 2014). Trust was crucial to ensuring all individuals sought mutually beneficial solutions so the relationship would continue (Never & de Leon, 2014). While the literature indicated difficulties in forming relationships, the findings also indicated the importance of relational contracting for successful contractual performance and completion.

Rival theories and opponents of the principal-agent theory. Numerous theories stood out for their predominant use in public procurement research. However, two became most prominent: the theory of auctions and competitive bidding and principal-agency theory (Flynn & Davis, 2014). Based on historical United States contracting regimes, relational contracting and the stewardship model typified classical contract law (Van Slyke, 2007). The theories addressed significant discussion underlining contractual relationships highlighting the similarities shared. For example, primary factors

underlining the principal steward relationship included goal congruence, mutual trust, and benefit (Witko, 2011). Within the principal-agent theory, researchers revealed that managers frequently contacted and communicated with their vendors despite having clear structured and formally written contracts (Lamothe & Lamothe, 2012b). The contact alluded to the prospects that actual contractual relationships deviated from theories discussed.

Formal written agreements such as those drafted within the principal-agent theory context contained influencing factors such as service characteristics, market conditions, and vendor ownership (Lamothe & Lamothe, 2012b). These factors differed from more relational agreements that contained influence from management style such as reputation, management capacity, and continuing relationship expectations (Lamothe & Lamothe, 2012b). When discussing success, the factors and activities allowed by the principal-agent theory relationship may not permit flexibility. Limitations characteristically exist that are historically requisite for maintaining such a relationship.

Relevant work from the contractor perspective came from authors who explored public contracting for human services based on the impact on the contractor rather than the government (Never & de Leon, 2014). A focus on relational contracting by Never and de Leon (2014) involved viewing the event from the trust theoretical framework. Viewing the relationship expanded Van Slyke's (2007) instrumental work in examining relationships between government agencies and contractors and contended that relationships between public bodies and entrepreneurs often more closely resemble principal-steward relationships. The descriptive findings indicated that government

agencies were unreliable to human service nonprofit companies that enabled the nonprofits to adhere to predetermined contractual responsibilities (Never & de Leon, 2014). The contractor bore the burden to reduce their financial or human capital (Never & de Leon, 2014). Goal alignment and establishing rapport became important factors for satisfactory performance. The government's standing and approval was a significant factor dictating the contractor's approach to leading and managing their organization to adjust performance to please the principal.

Measures of Performance

Past performance as it relates to government contracting is an evaluation factor comprised of work experience, relevant experience and how well the company performed (Hiles & Wells, 2015). Researchers argued favoring a positive relationship between success and financial performance because success efforts improved economic benefits by enhancing relevant organizational aspects (Lee & Pati, 2012). Information derived from the literature analysis indicated a deficiency in universally accepted performance standards or methodologies for measuring, assessing, and monitoring the company's progress toward successful performance. Corporate interest in successful performance resulted from environmental and social scandals, government regulations, and greater consumer concern for ecological issues (Makipere & Yip, 2008). Performance was measurable in at least three ways: economic, environmental, and social. An analysis by H. Walker, Miemczyk, Johnsen, and Spencer (2012) substantiated the findings and identified social or societal, ecological, and economic dynamics as primary successful procurement and supply chain aspects.

The literature on success indicated inconsistencies in successful performance, as outcome measurements surfaced from varying perspectives. One investigation to identify strategies related to corporate performance included organizations whose leaders reported corporate success practices to examine their impact on financial performance (Ameer & Othman, 2012). Sampling 100 top global corporations confirmed that companies whose leaders place emphasis on success practices had higher economic performance (Ameer & Othman, 2012). Economic performance as measured by return on assets, profit before taxation, and cash flow from operations was comparable to companies without such commitments in some activity sectors (Ameer & Othman, 2012). Another approach to examining corporate performance from an economic performance perspective showed limited focus on the service industry (Lee & Pati, 2012). Using the Pacific Sustainability Index to sample 196 companies from 12 industries ultimately exposed a direct relationship between the environmental, social sustainability factors and market performance. A multi-industry empirical study centralized to purchasing managers identified trends, methodological challenges, and research gaps from sampled articles contained published throughout the *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management* (H. Walker et al., 2012).

Engaging in processes of transforming corporate leaders to enhance contributions to larger successful development delivered successful value beyond financial growth (Kiron et al., 2013; Tideman et al., 2013). For some industries, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification programs facilitated this process. One empirical test assessed factors that influence U.S. companies decisions on adopting Leadership in

Energy and Environmental Design certification programs (Gauthier & Wooldridge, 2012). Publicly available information provided support for the argument that imagination drives Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design adoption among organizations (Gauthier & Wooldridge, 2012). Additionally, the work contributed to investigative literature that determined successful innovation adoption (Gauthier & Wooldridge, 2012). No matter how organizational leaders approached successful growth, the research showed high potential for implementing successful programs. Many company leaders proceeded with incorporating success initiatives because resources and capabilities resided internally; however, the ability to add value depended upon supporting routines (Perego & Kolk, 2012). Unconventional methods were organizational leaders' responsibility to determine the best course forward to achieve successful progress for a company's future.

Successful Procurement Performance

Successful procurement appeared most frequently defined as the pursuit of successful development objectives through the purchasing and supply chain process (H. Walker et al., 2012). The most common definition was applicable, as no universal definition of success or successful procurement performance existed. Successful procurement is a growing phenomenon. Concepts used to explain successful supply chain management were applied to explore strategies facilitating positive performance in government contracting (Giunipero et al., 2012). The traditional primary focus of successful procurement was reducing costs (Giunipero et al., 2012). Initiatives included avoiding cost overruns through contract management through contractor performance.

The exploration of small business performance included minimizing cost overruns through leadership efforts.

In examined studies, researchers explored performance objectives that included price supporting the success of upstream supply chains (Ageron, Gunasekaran, & Spalanzani, 2012). More importantly, the theoretical framework developed for successful supply management focused on suppliers and their firms' involvement in formulating and managing a successful business. Giunipero et al. (2012) later substantiated the findings of Ageron et al. (2012). Management initiatives and government regulations primarily dictated purchasing and supply chain success efforts (Giunipero et al., 2012). A hindrance to performance initiatives for many companies included investments in success during economic uncertainty (Giunipero et al., 2012).

Success for organizations included critical areas that collectively created a systemic, strategic focus that helped foster successful growth for stakeholders and agencies. It was unclear if business leaders pursued success measures to benefit the group. For example, environmental purchasing and supplier management were early trends for many organizations. Upon initial implementation, external pressure toward environmental responsibility pressured many organizations to pursue environmental success (Tate et al., 2012). Executives acknowledged their naivete by reporting lacking consistency in selecting and implementing successful performance activities at the chief-executive-officer (CEO) level (Giunipero et al., 2012). Researchers began to contribute to the literature on performance from nonfinancial perspectives to devise methods for measuring successful leadership (Lourenço, Callen, Branco, & Curto, 2014). Based on

performance outcomes, successful leadership involved the interaction between environmental performance, social performance, and financial performance (Ameer & Othman, 2012). Senior leaders tended to capture success policy and practices by adopting dedicated language and financial auditing processes (Perego & Kolk, 2012). That allowed them to ensure they met their own commercial and professional objectives through reporting (Boiral & Gendron, 2011). The questionable reporting alluded to a trend that organizational leaders would incorporate and report successful progress for financial gain or to retain stakeholders' trust.

Leadership Performance

Leadership is a subject that includes many topics, and theories continue to emerge as leaders face circumstances dissected by researchers seeking to stay abreast with changes in practitioners' experience. Common themes from the literature reviewed provided explanations to perceptions of business leaders incorporating strategies facilitating positive performance ratings on government contracting opportunities applicable to principle-agent theory characteristics. The themes commonly applied to the principle-agent theory signified the ability of leadership and positive performance to manifest within that framework. Ultimately, leadership is inclusive and emergent and promotes initiatives for growth and stability.

Findings from literature published within the last 5 years enhanced transformational leadership research through a sustainable leadership theory (Tideman et al., 2013). Authors suggested measuring successful performance by the creation of long-term shareholder value by embracing opportunities and managing risks stemming from

economic, environmental and social issues (Makipere & Yip, 2008). Leadership and organizational performance is broad in scope. It recognized the disruptive and transformational changes that occurred in business and society, given the modern complexity context and stakeholder interdependence requirements (Tideman et al., 2013). Leadership theories researched from an organizational performance perspective indicated a dependence on collective goals and objectives (Khan & Adnan, 2014). Using available resources have been highlighted as effective strategies for achieving those leadership goals and objectives (Khan & Adnan, 2014).

Performance and leadership continued to evolve as important business essentials. Many questions surrounded strategies small business leaders used and what constituted a good leader. Since 2011, findings indicated that ethical and lasting leadership tools helped organizational leaders improve performance and respond to consistent global and economic changes (McCann & Sweet, 2014). A good leader for successful performance should be able to transition from a culture of power and control to a culture of exhibiting open-mindedness, moral courage and a high degree of self-knowledge (Tideman et al., 2013). The changes in leadership perceptions evolved from a mindset that grandeur past successes and indicate that future challenges may be entirely different (Tideman et al., 2013). Findings in Tideman et al. (2013) were similar to those rendered by McCann and Sweet (2014), and both indicated a required shift in culture and mindset to solve future problems.

Leadership behavior for successful performance. Behavioral theories assisted in describing the behaviors leaders used to interact with others, including followers.

Within the influencing environmental sustainability context, leaders high in intellectual stimulation encouraged subordinates to think about environmental issues for themselves (Robertson & Barling, 2013). Leaders accomplished this through encouraging subordinates to question long-held assumptions about their own and their organization's environmental practices and address environmental problems in an innovative manner (Robertson & Barling, 2013). The interaction required to facilitate successful change through leadership included establishing durable personal relationships both inside and outside the organization by working collaboratively with others (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012). When discussing organizational behavior impacts, Robertson and Barling (2013) focused on how leaders and leadership behavior affected the workplace and the ability to foster employees' behavior to pro environmental change. The information was necessary because it replicated and expanded knowledge derived from transformational leadership studies and provided a link between transformational leadership and leadership for success.

When explored through the strategic leadership and neo-institutional theoretical frameworks, Strand (2014) classified a small group of individuals who occupied top positions within their organizations with the power to facilitate successful change. When exploring ways in which responsible leadership influenced organizational processes and outcomes, Doh and Quigley (2014) linked responsible leadership by explicating the pathways through which responsible leaders influence outcomes at multiple levels within organizations. The linkage led to descriptions of two pathways through which leaders and their organizations exhibited responsible leadership behaviors and action (Doh &

Quigley, 2014). The two ways occurred through knowledge sharing and dissemination or psychological enrichment or both.

The results from surveyed business leaders indicated that leadership behaviors for successful performance employed a long-term view and advocacy for continuity (Tideman et al., 2013). The survey also revealed that while exhibiting open-mindedness, moral courage, and extraordinary self-knowledge, these behaviors flowed through the mindset centered in consciousness, and continuity (Tideman et al., 2013). Business leaders could install this position proactively to realize external opportunities that may have otherwise gone unrealized without incorporating the strategic level position (Robertson & Barling, 2013). Leaders who exhibit individualized consideration displayed compassion and empathy for employees' well-being and help employees develop their potentials and skills (Tideman et al., 2013). Comparing successful business factors and leadership theories revealed that leaders must fundamentally change the way they think, that is, their mindset or consciousness (Tideman et al., 2013). In doing so, leaders established close relationships with followers within which they could transmit their environmental values, model their environmental behaviors, and raise questions about environmental assumptions and priorities.

Leadership styles for successful performance. Examining existing leadership styles revealed two prominent leadership styles supporting relevant traits for successfully implementing corporate social responsibility and successful performances in organizations (Metcalf & Benn, 2013). The leadership styles discussed maintained similarities in associated behaviors and how they affected the organization's human

complex system. Traits and outcomes emphasized prominent leadership styles associated with success collectively supported various impacts on performance within a company. For example, transformational, complexity, and emergent style leadership were suitable because the behaviors varied and offered the most appropriate platforms for exploring new ideas (Metcalf & Benn, 2013). Servant leadership is similar to transformational leadership in success and organizational performance research. Transformational, servant, and spiritual leadership theories contained behaviors and outcomes consistent with the framework for leading the transformation to performance excellence (Latham, 2013a, 2013b). Perceptions of transformational leadership and servant leadership styles had a high correlation. However, principal servant leadership perceptions included empowerment foster satisfaction, commitment, and intention to stay in volunteer service organizations (Schneider & George, 2011). The authors above provided information critical to success in leadership research as the information provided viewed the phenomenon through the complex systems theory to measure leadership effectiveness within complex adaptive organization systems. Both leadership theories correlate to long-term success, performance outcomes (Graves, Sarkis, & Zhu, 2013), and value for multiple stakeholders (Latham, 2014). Therefore, this literature review emphasized transformational and servant leadership theories in successful performance.

From a government perspective, Strand (2014) described success implementation as intricate processes promoting concrete environmental, economic, and social concerns. Leaders and leadership are elements that make or break the organizations adaptivity to complex systems that interact with it (Metcalf & Benn, 2012). Therefore, the focus was

on highlighting leadership styles and behaviors for complex organizational systems and processes that affected performance within the principal-agent theory framework to influence performance.

Transformational leadership. Through transformational leadership, leaders used their relationship with subordinates to control them intentionally and encourage them to engage in workplace pro environmental behaviors (Robertson & Barling, 2013).

Transformational leadership had ties to leadership for successful performance through a link to innovation this leadership style encouraged (Metcalf & Benn, 2013). This facilitated exploring the theory that transformational leaders communicated clear and coherent environmental visions under their responsibility. In leading for success, leaders led by sharing their environmental values with employees to demonstrate commitment to addressing environmental problems (Graves et al., 2013). More important, the results provided substantial support to the conclusion that positively related environmental transformational leadership to employees' motivation to perform (Graves et al., 2013). Significant findings consistently linked success and leadership elements to performance. The analysis and subsequent connection provided insight into performance achievements, which related to the purpose of this study.

Studies that explored leadership for successful performance through the transformational leadership theoretical lens emerged with a common finding, pro environmental behaviors (Robertson & Barling, 2013). When evaluating leadership from a successful corporate brand, the results were consistent. The guiding principles behind the successful corporate brand leadership concept included personal values such as

fairness, trustworthiness, and concern for the environment and communities (Stuart, 2013). When analyzing all elements previously discussed, the themes that emerged were consistent whether addressing environmental, economic or social concerns.

Servant leadership and successful performance. Servant leadership is a phenomenon in which leaders establish follower growth as the top priority (Schneider & George, 2011). A link existed between considering stakeholder needs and psychological benefits to members through the leaders commitment to creating value for the community (Doh & Quigley, 2014). Servant leadership played a role in success, as it had close ties with transformational leadership with overlapping characteristics between the two theories (Latham, 2014).

In an organization, a servant leader served his or her employees, customers, and community to help people develop, strive, and flourish (Gupta, 2013). The servant leadership philosophy, which emphasized leading in a successful manner, was most appropriate for measuring performance from a successful approach as opposed to short-term economic gain (Gupta, 2013). From a normative perspective, servant leadership required leaders to recognize their moral duty constructively to improve the larger communities in which they operate (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012). From a social business perspective, Gupta (2013) explored servant leadership in success. The underlying objective was also the same criterion by which performance evaluation played a part, which was to create social benefits. Social benefits aligned with performance in government contracting, where contractor performance benefited both the principal and the agent. Organizations leaders that supported the public sector by performing services

for them limit focused on growing followers, increasing efforts to creating value, and preserving the principal's interest. The focused responsibility in relationships and people took priority over the tasks. Servant leadership had many behaviors that align with success concepts; however, critics contended that behaviors neglected concern for products. The results included neglected product output, goal setting, and vision creation (Gupta, 2013). Although researchers noted possible downsides to servant leadership, there has yet to be a consensus among them. The reasons stemmed from varied traits and behaviors and a lack of unanimity regarding a theoretical framework for researching.

The literature analysis on success in leadership revealed deficient documentation within the principal-agent theory framework. The uniformity in premises among researchers was that performance and success in leadership did not have precise definitions. The review involved an attempt to clarify success in leadership through characteristics and definitions from varying perspectives and leadership styles to find common attributes.

Small business leadership. Leadership is an important responsibility in an organization. When discussing small business in leadership, especially in public contracting, it was important to consider the size and classification. In public sector contracting, small business is an entity that employs less than 500 employees and averages less than \$7 million in annual receipts (SBA, 2014c). Researchers continued to debate the role in job creation attributed to small business (Neumark, Wall, & Zhang, 2011). United States small businesses received preferences for contract awards through diversity goals to companies owned by disadvantaged groups, such as Native Americans,

women, and disabled veterans (Snider et al., 2013). Leadership in small enterprises is a heavily studied topic. The increasing information on the subject indicated different leadership behavior views within organizations that vary with the situation or circumstance encountered (Psychogios & Garev, 2012). Complex business environments were an example of situations above. The infused theories indicated that in order for leadership styles to correlate with positive organizational performance, leaders might have had to adopt a hybrid leading style. The sophisticated leadership styles identified that nurture organizational effectiveness occurred. Loose organic structures, employee empowerment, and self-organization materialized as the most prevalent behaviors to enhance business effectiveness (Psychogios & Garev, 2012). Complex business systems existed in multiple environments. Relating complex system proved useful as they almost mirrored the environmental uncertainties that companies (agents) entered when adapting to government (principal) needs.

A study on small businesses leaders' traits and skills in Lebanon revealed that a commitment to attaining excellence was the significant factor in their success (Fahed-Sreih & Morin-Delerm, 2012). In Bangladesh, small businesses engrossed primary employment avenues and achieving organizational goals was critical (Kayemuddin, 2012). While researchers focused on participants from different countries, the findings may have generalizability, as leadership is a universal theory. The potential for various findings in previous studies included culture, participants, evaluation method, and sampling size (Fahed-Sreih & Morin-Delerm, 2012). A multiple regression analysis sampling 206 small businesses conducted by Yan and Yan (2013) involved investigating

the relationship between leadership, organizational citizenship behavior, and innovation in small firms. Some organizational citizenship behavior elements had a significant and positive relationship with change (Yan & Yan, 2013).

When discussing successful performance related to leadership, Avery and Bergsteiner (2011) concluded that companies whose leaders placed an emphasis on success, which included leadership factors as an essential element, flourished in various countries. When compared to the shareholder first approach, extensive evidence existed to show that successful practices were the likely indicator to enhancing business performance (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). Diversity in leadership and including minorities in senior executive positions resulted in a greater percentage of small businesses receiving contracting opportunities (Fernandez et al., 2013). Successful leadership features adhered to import worldviews, mindsets, beliefs, and attitudes embodied by both leaders and followers (Tideman et al., 2013). These elements became important progressions of relevant skills to facilitate leadership transformation for successful development. However, in some organizations, bureaucratic structures, and key performance indicators drove corporate performance initiatives (Strand, 2014). Successful performance was contingent upon more than just leaders' ability to implement effective strategies and includes small business leaders' ability to maneuver bureaucratic environments in which the manager operated. Problems arose for small business leaders supply networks attempting to modify or even maintain structure by implementing a successful procurement strategy.

Women in small business leadership. Women's representation had increased, and scholars had taken an interest in how female business leadership affected business outcomes (Matsa & Miller, 2011). Gender and ethnic concerns incorporated stereotypes, group interactions, role expectations, and power differentials into leadership style and organizational culture. In 2013, the government sought to conduct business with women-owned firms and sets aside 5% of total prime and subcontract dollars for women-owned small businesses (Snider et al., 2013). In women-owned business entities, the combined women ownership must amount to at least 51% (Matsa & Miller, 2011). The social and ethnic values that women held entail documented differences in corporate directors' preferences and values (Adams & Funk, 2012). Trends should encourage the inclusion of women. For example, women-owned firm's leaders downsized their workforce less than their male counterparts did during the Great Recession (Matsa & Miller, 2011). Women in business and leadership had their place and contributed to business, yet historically women were substantially underrepresented in corporate leadership (McDonald & Westphal, 2013). As the exploration continues to develop, recognizing the impact on leadership styles, the need to include different skill sets in leadership, and embracing socioeconomic groups may materialize. In an attempt to explain gender differences in owners, noncontributing factors included age, education, or net worth (Matsa & Miller, 2011). Women leaders had greater concern for their workers well-being, often sacrificing short-term profits. Women owners willingness to compromise suggested a difference in the manner or style in which women led as being the difference in their success. Company leaders recognized including women and minorities in leadership positions as

essential practices. Gender and culture in leadership represented important topics because these values helped mold individuals' identities and, therefore, affect the choices made and how they led.

Performance Measurement and Outcomes in Public Contracting

Government officials maintain past performance reports as a determining factors in vendor responsibility. Although compliance levels with reporting requirements had improved, the compliance rates with reporting varied considerably by organization (GAO, 2014). The principal-agent theory has a framework for monitoring various contract outcomes, which included performance measurements. The concepts and methods, as mentioned previously in supply chain management and public procurement, retained transferability and applicability. A greater goal alignment between public and nonprofit organizations meant that nonprofit organizations leaders could demonstrate high reliability in performing work for government entities, thereby resulting in a higher effectiveness level (Awortwi, 2012). Substantial factors discussed involving vendor performance impacts entangled the government's close cooperation with its contractors, in addition to political connections (Lamothe & Lamothe, 2012a). The untraditional relationship between the government and the contractor aligned with Awortwi (2012), who concluded that the most significantly perceived contractual performance indicators are contractor selection and contract monitoring.

Considering reflected activities and behaviors presented in the principal-agent relationship, universal, nondiscriminant performance measures existed (Witesman & Fernandez, 2013). An e-procurement model for public contracting authorities to quantify

procurement performance benefits assisted the industry by measuring how e-procurement contributed to increasing organizational performance (Gardenal, 2013). Goal alignment was an important factor in measuring and predicting successful government contractor performance irrespective the size, company or contract type. Contracting performance was a byproduct resulting from trade-offs existing between different aspects contained within the contracting relationship (Awortwi, 2012). In exploring contracting effectiveness and government's performance, performance management included a focus on correlations between various factors the authors selected to investigate (Chaturvedi & Gautam, 2013). The results framework document process rendered positive impacts on several key high-performing organizations indicators (Chaturvedi & Gautam, 2013). The findings showed that the initiative had the potential to contribute toward civil servants performance orientation. The efforts also helped government agency leaders push specific agendas for reforms and good governance.

Performance measuring from the government perspective, the rating official almost invariably relates to principal-agent theory concepts. Since 2011, studies included discussions on performance within the principal-agent theory context (Awortwi, 2012). Some addressed performance specifically as it related to government contracting (Chaturvedi & Gautam, 2013) while others incorporated dynamics such as political connection impacts on vendor performance (Lamothe & Lamothe, 2012a). All researchers reviewed independently contributed to the body of knowledge in some form. When addressing elements focused on answering the central research question, however, authors failed to specifically addressed strategies for leaders of government contractor

organizations to attain positive performance ratings within the principal-agent theory framework.

Contract Performance Leadership Ramifications

In 2013, the government set aside approximately 23% of all contracting dollars to small businesses. Poor performance ramifications were and are still detrimental to small business participants. When performance suffered, immediate performance or a contractual agreement breaches occurred (Jacobi & Weiss, 2013). In assessing default remedies for contract breaches, an economic determination motivated renegotiating the contract, or seeking default remedies (Jacobi & Weiss, 2013). The decisions encompassed allowances for immediate performance or present a future payment value from court proceedings (Jacobi & Weiss, 2013).

Performance rating implications. Positive performance ratings and contractor performance systems were critical for continued opportunities for entrepreneurs, as contracting officers sought experienced and qualified business partners to achieve its objectives (Bradshaw & Su, 2013). Creating performance measures had positive implications on the federal decision makers' capacity to manage contracts successfully (Amirkhanyan, 2011). These factors made positive performance an imperative goal for government contractors because a requirement for increased accountability became created by performance measurement (Amirkhanyan, 2011). Multiple findings showed that the government reporting system and processes for analyzing and reporting performance lacked the capacity to provide effective results (Amirkhanyan, 2011; Bradshaw & Chang, 2013). Regardless of accuracy, the information helped government

officials determine whether a contractor received future work (Bradshaw & Chang, 2013). Notwithstanding the deficiency in performance reporting, performance reporting is public information once published. The records became public and viewable by any interested party. Therefore, a negative impact on poor performance ratings potentially extended beyond the lost revenue from government contracting opportunities. As discussed previously, procurement officials considered past performance reviews in source selection processes.

Adversarial relationships. Building coalitions with the principal company facilitated positive attributes to successful performance and aligned with the principal-agent theory theoretical framework. Success in procurement supply chain processes included creating value for multiple stakeholders and the principal (Latham, 2014). Communication and organizational structure predominantly influenced mutual relationships that relied heavily on perception (Grudinschi, Sintonen, & Hallikas, 2014). Collaboration and partnerships were essential to public service procurement (Grudinschi et al., 2014). Both variables substantiated and extended the research conducted by Plane and Green (2012), who concluded that value for both buyers and suppliers emerges when maintaining a successful collaborative relationship.

While literature existed that helped emphasize the connection between the government and contractors existed, adverse relationship implications were unclear and undefined. Contradictory procurement approaches did not necessarily precluded collaborative relationship maturation (Plane & Green, 2012). Striving to create such a relationship may prove more valuable to both parties.

Contractual ramifications. Since 2012, suspension or debarment actions in U.S. acquisitions nearly doubled (Lasky, 2013). The ramifications for poor performance became critical and possibly detrimental to business leaders. Potential contract consequences included suspension or debarments, which were serious matters to small firms. Creating and implementing comprehensive values-based ethics and compliance program as recommended was the best way for government contractors to avoid suspensions and debarment (Lasky, 2013). Other statutory powers available to the government for implementation against underperforming contractors included terminations. Terminations for convenience under a traditional fixed-price contract allowed the government to breach contract terms legally when it benefits the government (Korman, 2014). The legal breach subsequently entitled the contractor to recover certain costs (Korman, 2014). However, terminations for default became available for enforcement when a contractor defaulted on contractual agreements between the parties. In terminations for default, the contractor became liable for assessed claims for replacement products, price increases, and administrative costs (GAO, 1994). Small firm performance has been weaker throughout this economic recovery than during any other recovery since 1973 (Chow & Dunkelberg, 2011). The financial repercussions to terminations usually meant the difference between small business growth or death.

Summary

An exhaustive literature review revealed that studies conducted in government contracting and small business has left a gap in research on strategies for small business leaders and their role in achieving positive performance in government contracting.

Previous researchers omitted information on leadership styles and government contractor performance. However, extensive research with an expansive scope exists for small business capacity and leadership styles and how these dynamics relate to organizational performance. In particular, researchers addressed aspects related to small business participation in government contracting and the lacking small business representation in government contracting opportunities. Also addressed was contractor performance outside, however, independent from contracting and comparing or contrasting leadership theory or leadership styles related to performance and success.

The content within the themes selected included studies reviewed from 2011 to 2014 addressed each critical research question element. With the paucity of research on strategies for achieving positive performance in government contracts, the articles selected, taken both individually and mutually, did not offer a solution to the central research question. As previously mentioned, the structured literature review included an emphasis on each theme discussed as it related to a pertinent descriptive elements. Each relevant part was essential to answering the central research question of how perceived strategies facilitate positive performance in government contracting opportunities. Themes revealed included leadership's role in (a) building collaborative working relationships, (b) aligning goals with the principal (government) to create value for both parties, and (c) implementing actions to create long-term value and growth. The importance of small business leaders maintaining positive performance in government contracting emerged as a significant problem because long-term ramifications for small businesses whose income relied solely on public contracting opportunities exist. The

information gathered will help fill gaps in business research to couple with collected data to answer the question.

Transition and Summary

Section 1 began with the foundation and background to cultivate and understand historically, how the business problem emerged as an important topic for research. The problem and purpose statements expanded the scope and purposefulness and indicated the direction of this study. The nature of the study included a brief objective for selecting a qualitative method and descriptive design. The research question and conceptual framework explained the central question and the theoretical lens. Operational definitions defined technical terms. Based on the descriptive paradigm, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations assisted in identifying and setting aside biases. The significant results from the study include detailed descriptions and value to businesses and contributions for improved business practices and positive social change. Section 1 concluded with an academic literature review.

The results contain elements to fill gaps in literature on performance in government contracting opportunities. Section 2 provides greater understanding and rationale for the method, design and procedures followed to conduct the study using a systemic approach. Section 3 includes the findings, discussion on the prospects for application in professional practice, and implications for social change.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 summarizes the research process for this qualitative descriptive study. The information serves as a roadmap in describing how I explored strategies small business leaders used for positive performance ratings in government contracting. Restating the purpose, this section explains my role as a participant observer and data collection instrument. Participant selection method and design is discussed in detail. The discussion also includes how I ensured data saturation. The population and sampling section justifies how and why the participants will benefit the study and explains the chosen sampling technique. Important details underlining an exhaustive discussion expanding on ethical considerations and protecting participants' rights embody this section. The data collection and data analysis processes followed Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam systemic approach to collecting and organizing data. I conducted the study in accordance with the constraint established by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the ethical protection of research participants. The approval number is 05-12-15-0481984, expiring May 11, 2016. The process for ensuring reliability and validity throughout the study and a transition to the following section concludes this section.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive research study was to explore strategies small business leaders use to attain positive performance ratings in government contracting. I gained this understanding by interviewing small business leaders located within 30 miles of Washington, DC, with favorable CPARS, past performance ratings on

at least three government contracting opportunities. Implementing strategies that increase small business performance in government contracting influences social change through enabling business leaders to create new jobs, increase contributions to the government tax base, and improve the well-being for the unemployed job base this group can employ.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative methods include structured, exhaustive, holistic examinations of a phenomenon. As the researcher, my role involved obtaining evidence by the descriptive research processes and following a systemic method to collect, organize, and analyze information to answer the central research question (e.g., Moustakas, 1994; Shields & Rangarjan, 2013). I ensured successful data attainment that did not compromise the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1974) regulations on the protecting human subjects. I incorporated open-ended questions in the interview protocol to uncover as much about the participants and their situations as possible (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Following Leko (2014), using semistructured interviews in natural settings with participants helped me uncover unforeseen discoveries and opportunities for further exploration.

The descriptive focus through asking general questions about the perceptions and experience, gaining another's perspective, demands that participants receive some information about the phenomenon from the researcher beforehand (Englander, 2012). With 13 years of federal experience, including 9 years working as a warranted government contracting officer, I have obtained industry expertise from a government standpoint with a professional connection the phenomenon. My responsibility as a

contracting officer has included soliciting small businesses for government contracting opportunities. I have worked directly with Washington, DC, area business owners and leaders to facilitate positive working relationships between the government and contractors to meet established contractual and performance goals. I am a contracting officer who maintains a Federal Acquisition Certification-Contracting Level III certification that awards contracts and serves as the lead negotiator and final contractor performance evaluator on government contracts.

My experience and professional involvement in government acquisitions created potential bias during data collection. My professional relationship with the target population increased the degree to which bias may have manifested. Insider investigators tend to limit the scope of their inquiries only to discover what they think they do not know (Chenail, 2011). I followed Chenail (2011) and promoted objectivity by opening up questions to encompass what I did not know to limit bias based on my in-depth personal involvement in government procurement. Because qualitative research results include descriptive analyses that increased susceptibility to biases, an effort was made to ensure objectivity in data collection and interpretive analysis activities.

Participants

Participants were small business leaders, including CEOs, presidents, owners, or general managers, located within 30 miles of Washington, DC. To qualify to participate, business leaders required positive performance ratings on at least three procurement opportunities in the CPARS. As qualitative researchers (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Khoshnava Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi) have demonstrated, in qualitative research, a

researcher's involvement encompasses all stages of the study from defining a concept to design, interview, transcription, analysis, verification, and reporting the concepts and themes. In this study, my tasks involved finding and selecting participants who reported having particular experiences correlated with the phenomenon, which for some studies can be a difficult task (e.g., Englander, 2012). Clear articulation of criteria existed to select participants. Incidentally, standardized and preestablished criteria that dictated how to accomplish the task did not exist (Moustakas, 1994; Shields & Rangarjan, 2013).

To identify participants, I searched for companies registered on FBO, a public website and the federal government's primary GPE for all open-market contracting opportunities that exceed \$25,000 (FAR, 2014c). Every government contractor aspiring to conduct business with the federal government can register on this public website. The FBO site provided a starting point to gather participants as it maintains data about contract awards and business classifications for each business receiving an award. The System for Award Management database maintains information on all contractors that do business with the government. Every business must register with the system before contract award. The System for Award Management database identified the NAICS codes to determine and ensure I included various socioeconomic categories under the small business umbrella. The SBA's (2015) Dynamic Small Business Search Database and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2015) Vendor Information Pages online government websites house publicly available contractor data also served as resources for finding participants from various socioeconomic groups. I focused on small businesses with at least three positive CPARS ratings. CPARS represents the government-wide

electronic performance reporting for firms that perform in contracts awarded to them by the government. The system assists government officials in ensuring the government does business with companies that have provided quality goods and services within budget and on time (GAO, 2013). The preliminary questions distributed required participants to exhibit knowledge of CPARS and identify contracts awarded to them resulting in positive CPARS database reports (see Appendix C).

I invited members to participate through e-mail communication (see Appendix A). E-mail assists in expanding recruitment when research information is accessible by posting e-mail requests for participants on relevant websites (Cook, 2012). Recruiting participants online helps researchers by eliminating the constraints and inability to reach participants with valid, highly specialized knowledge (Brandon, Long, Loraas, Mueller-Phillips, & Vansant, 2014). Using e-mail requests to recruit participants capitalizes on a shared resource that serves as a significant component to business owners (Truong et al., 2013). Screening questions probed during solicitation ensured all participants met criteria for participation and identified socioeconomic categories (see Appendix C). A preliminary telephone conversation with each respondent helped establish a working relationship. Interviewees require time to warm up when beginning the interviews and establishing a rapport enhances comfort level when speaking with the researcher (J. Smith et al., 2011). The goal was to have a conversation that evolved into thematic expressions through collaborative interaction (Van Manen, 1990). The collaborative interaction allowed probing for an elaborate explanation or the exploration of new themes that may have emerged during the interview (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Establishing a

working relationship and providing preparation information before the meeting increased the chances for sincere responses of comprehensive accounts from participants.

Research Method and Design

The chosen method and design for the research was a qualitative descriptive study. The method and design developed from the business problem statement, which indicated the study would involve a qualitative descriptive exploration to understand strategies that contribute to small businesses' positive performance ratings in government contracts. The following subsections include descriptions and rationales for implementing specified research methodology and design strategy for conducting this study.

Method

Successful qualitative research features notable descriptions for method selection (Bansal & Corley, 2012). Qualitative research methods have their origins in social and behavioral sciences and serve to explore human science research and leadership behavior to understand the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Shield, & Rangarjan, 2013).

Researchers use the qualitative method to help uncover unanticipated findings or avenues for further exploration through facilitating open-ended investigations (Leko, 2014).

Therefore, the method selected to explore participants' lived experiences helped bridge gaps in performance and leadership research and its role in government contracting.

Advantages existed for conducting qualitative research as opposed to mixed-methods or quantitative research. For this study, the primary advantage was the ability to bring understanding to business issues involving human values and beliefs (W. Gordon, 2011). Mixed methods research in leadership provides a way to advance theory (Stentz,

Plano Clark, & Matkin, 2012). This study lends to an exploratory design to understand how successful leaders function in small businesses but not research to advance theory. Although mixed-methods research was a viable option for leadership research, qualitative research was the most suitable for this study type. A purely quantitative approach may not have captured the cultural contexts and vast leadership topics that qualitative research fosters (Stentz et al., 2012). The qualitative method involved highlighting perceptions of participants who had experience the phenomenon, which corroborated the reason for selecting the qualitative method over the quantitative or mixed-method designs to conduct the study.

Research Design

Business research involves observing applied principles practiced by analyzing viewpoints relative to new perspectives. As a result, the descriptive research design emerged as an appropriate qualitative method for investigating business phenomena. Knowledge comes from the individual's perceptions, focusing on discovering the nature of specific events to establish meaning to a phenomenon (Lambert & Lambert, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher becomes more interested in instances or essences than the factual status (Van Manen, 1990). For this reason, I chose a descriptive design for this study. The research design selection afforded a juncture to unveil what participants perceived as strategies that facilitate positive government contractor performance. Using emerging questions allowed the required data retrieval from participants' viewpoint (Moustakas, 1994). Exploring lived human experience, I described how performance strategies manifest in small business leaders to identify, and elaborate on, the

phenomenon's essential structures (Sousa, 2014). Descriptive research involves applying thematic analysis to detect actual behavior, attitudes, or real motives of the people being studied (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Elements revealed from extrapolating personal knowledge from the participants helped me understand the phenomenon to explore solutions viable for practical use.

A phenomenological study was less appropriate than all other qualitative designs for investigating the business phenomenon. Ethnographic research design had potential for the study. However, the intent did not include immersing myself in a social situation by probing the everyday lives, conduct, and societal movements as a whole (A. Brown & Iacono, 2012). The design facilitates understanding how groups and their individual members see themselves, and how the phenomenon affects them as a group. This study did not explore how groups and their individual members see themselves. A narrative design was not suitable because the approach provides an advantageous tactic for describing an individual's life story that is not conducive to obtaining perspectives from groups or organizations as a whole (Gill, 2014). Case study designs are most suitable for studying complex systems in business research because they allow for data collection from multiple levels, perspectives, and sources over an extended period (Yin, 2009). The research focus limited a case study design as it lacked the capacity to integrate and explore complex systems. In grounded theory, researchers construct theories based on the data collected as opposed to interpreting phenomena to obtain an exact picture. As an approach that involves an attempt to develop a theory, the grounded theory method did

not provide the appropriate opportunity to collect data with the rigor expected for the study.

Population and Sampling

Through qualitative inquiry, I used purposeful sampling to ensure the appropriate population contributed to answering the central research question. Any purposeful sampling technique may be used in a qualitative descriptive design (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). In purposeful sampling in qualitative studies, the researcher selects participants who have pertinent information on the subject to help understand the phenomenon explored (Suri, 2011). The sample of business leaders selected ensured participants understood the topic under study and had valuable perspectives (i.e., Robinson, 2013). Following Moustakas (1994), interviewing 21 participants proved important for purposeful sampling to ensure adequate participants within the population understood the phenomenon through their lived experiences. The target population was small business leaders, defined as CEOs, presidents, owners, or general managers who had completed at least three government procurement opportunities receiving positive past performance ratings. Interviewing leaders employed by companies with positive past performance ratings as determined by a contracting officer helped identify themes in business strategies as they pertained to small business performance and government contracting opportunities. The target population and sample size was critical to answering the central question and exploring strategies that facilitate successful small businesses performance in government contracting opportunities.

The qualitative descriptive study involved semistructured interviews with at least 20 small business leaders. The critical criterion that the participants required business leadership experience helped to ensure they had lived the experience (Moustakas, 1994). When identifying participants, the aim was for potential selectees to have at least a general knowledge about the phenomenon. Knowledgeable participants potentially offer experienced insight into the general structure even with their identities protected (Englander, 2012). Communicating perceptions from participants who had lived the experience provided significance to outcomes, accounts, and data quality (Bansal & Corley, 2012). The interview place and setting were necessary, as the consideration could have affected the relationship between the interviewer and the participant and data collection (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Following Moustakas (1994), I created an environment where the participant sensed enough comfort to share openly and honestly. Interviews were conducted at a location of the participant's choosing or over a securely recorded telephone line. Ideally, the locale had little background noise to minimize distraction, allow for precise recording, and foster a safe and nonthreatening environment for the participant (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). For this study, a familiar setting to the participant or a mutually agreed meeting place offered the most advantageous environment conducive to sharing.

Interviewing 21 participants ensured saturation. Saturation, along with other factors, determines most qualitative sample sizes. Saturation is the point at which a researcher determines that no new thematic codes exist (Morse, Lowery, & Steury, 2014). Data saturation is the point where the interviewer has obtained sufficient information

from the field, and interviews cease to reveal new data (Coenen, Stamm, Stucki, & Cieza, 2012), meaning no new thematic coding occurs, and the study will be replicable. Saturation was appropriate for this descriptive study because it contains an ideal guideline for purposive sampling, as discussed in the Population and Sampling section (e.g., J. L. Walker, 2012). A high likelihood exists for reaching saturation when the participants selected are rich in information that leads to the uncovering of events experienced (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). No single factor existed that dictated the saturation rate using qualitative data collection methods. Therefore, to increase the chance of achieving saturation, I continued interviews until no new information was obtained from participants. I interviewed 21 participants.

Ethical Research

To ensure adherence to ethical considerations, I began by educating myself on ethical principles in research by completing the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research (2013) Human Research Protections training (see Appendix B). Ethical principles guide how human science researchers interact with participants (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers have a responsibility to ensure the adherence to ethical practices (Vanclay, Baines, & Taylor, 2013). Identified issues pertinent to the study required were communicated to the IRB to establish a plan to manage them. While completing the IRB form, I directed particular attention to identified principles that addressed ethical concerns explicit to the topic.

Details such as the given location, participation time, population, instrument used for data collection, and methodology emerged as relevant facts identified to the IRB. The

procedures for obtaining subjects' voluntary informed consent included a step-by-step process for subjects to withdraw from the study, keeping participants anonymous, and assuring participants' confidentiality protection ensured adherence to ethical principles. The process followed the ethical principle of justice, which involves bearing the burdens and receiving the benefits of research. A checklist included information regarding the release of results to the subjects and explained how I intend to use the data collected. I identified participants by numbers to protect anonymity and will maintain the data in a safe place for 5 years to safeguard participant's confidentiality. After 5 years, I will delete the consent forms and interview documentation. Vanclay et al. (2013) noted that many principles maintain general and universal applicability throughout research. The summarized steps below, as outlined in the informed consent, ensured adherence to ethical principles:

1. I fully disclosed the purpose and use of this study to participants.
2. I obtained informed consent in writing from participants.
3. A volunteer could withdraw by writing and signing their intention to withdraw on the consent form.
4. As a voluntary study, I did not offer incentives for participation.
5. I will maintain the data in a safe place for 5 years.
6. The findings do not include participant's names, titles, or company names.

Data Collection

This study involved exploring strategies small business leaders use to attain positive performance in government contracting through a descriptive qualitative

examination. Descriptive research requires collecting data in a methodical manner to satisfy requirements (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). The requirements include developing questions to guide the interview process, collecting data, and organizing the data in a systemic way (Moustakas, 1994). The following three sections details data collection methods to answer the central question: the (a) data collection instrument, (b) data collection technique, and (c) data organization techniques.

Data Collection Instrument

The data collection instrument included a 10-minute researcher developed preinterview questionnaire for qualifying prospective participants to gather socioeconomic data (see Appendix C) and general preinterview questionnaire to obtain perceptions of perceived strategies small business leaders use to attain positive performance ratings in government contracting. As an interviewer, I served as the primary data collection instrument to obtain information through open-ended interview questions I developed for the study (see Appendix D). Typical data collection methods in descriptive qualitative research include interviews and the most common involve semistructured interviews (Kahlke, 2014). Comparable to naturalistic conversation, semistructured interviews allow a rapport, communication between friends, which allows the participant to recount their life experience (J. A. Smith et al., 2009; Madill, 2011). I used semistructured open-ended interviews with predetermined questions through which participants could provide full descriptions of their experiences. The instrument chosen allowed a flexible forum for communication to substantiate the lived experiences and understand how small businesses leaders perceive strategies that facilitate positive

performance ratings in government contracting. Semistructured open-ended interviews involving business leaders are a viable option for exploring leadership behavior (Bublak, 2014; Holloway, 2013). I developed interview guide (see Appendix D) to increase the opportunity to facilitate a comfortable interaction that enabled participants to provide an exhaustive account of their experiences (e.g., J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Predetermined questions allowed the freedom to explore issues that arose spontaneously and sought clarification when required (e.g., Doody & Noonan, 2013). The data collection questions included a script (see Appendix D) as a reminder to share critical details about the study and explain informed consent (e.g., Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). General questions designed to collect participants' detailed views helped me interpret their communicated meaning. The questions resulted in extensive description extraction from participants' lived experiences.

Data verification and the ability to replicate such studies by reassessing the findings in different contexts are important considerations for researchers. Reliability includes the measure of consistency, strategies employed to measure, become dependent upon the data collected, and findings analyzed (Fan & Sun, 2014). Descriptive qualitative researchers achieve data reliability by establishing the dependability through peer review and consensus of respondents' themes (Kisely & Kendall, 2011). The participants previewed the data collection instrument before the interview to prepare. After the interview, participants reviewed the data from their interviews to make additions or corrections.

Validity exists as the most fundamental concern in any measurement situation (Fan & Sun, 2014) and signifies the robustness and accuracy of findings generated (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). Validity is essential because it addresses the accuracy of research results (Moustakas, 1994). An advantageous method for ensuring data validity in qualitative research involves transcription review (Kisely & Kendall, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Transcript review method ensures accuracy in recording what the participant stated by allowing the interviewees to review independently their interview transcripts and discuss any discrepancies (Kisely & Kendall, 2011). The data collection method using semistructured interviews served as an additional legitimacy. The participant's final analysis assessment for accuracy and concurrence assisted in ensuring truthful account and intended meaning of perceived experiences.

Data Collection Technique

Small business representatives solicited for notification via e-mail emerge through public contact information retrieved from the Federal Business Opportunities, System for Award Management, Dynamic Small Business Search, and Vendor Information Pages websites. Following Englander (2012), face-to-face and telephone interviews emerged as the most suitable techniques to obtain the depth required for this qualitative study. Disadvantages to conducting face-to-face interviews include participants not having the time to devote to discussing their experiences or not being comfortable with participating in an audio-recorded interview (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Constraints exist in finding and reaching participants willing to participate, but electronic correspondence will help

eliminate these restrictions (Brandon et al., 2014). An inexperienced or novice data collector may collect unusable data because they poorly manage and conduct interviews (Van Manen, 1990). Other problems novices encounter include challenges remembering issues, remaining focused, and accidentally leading the participants (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). While disadvantages exist for the data collection technique, many advantages also exist. For example, conducting semistructured interviews allow the data collector to change the order of questions if required or if the flow warrants (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The technique provides an opportunity to obtain richer nuances and fruitful responses from participants (Englander, 2012). Adequate question and interview structure permits an interviewer to evoke a comprehensive account of participants lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The strengths for conducting semistructured, open-ended interviews face-to-face or by telephone outweigh the weaknesses. The following paragraphs describe the technique used to collect data through a step-by-step process. The first four steps applied to the interview preparation phase, followed by the interview process phase and then the transcript review process.

First, potential participants with high specialist knowledge received an invitation to participate via e-mail (see Appendix A). E-mail recruitment increased access to interviewees (Brandon et al., 2014). The screening questions I developed ensured all volunteered participants met criteria for participation (see Appendix C). Second, a preliminary telephone conversation with each respondent established a working relationship. The goal was to make them comfortable with sharing their experience openly and honestly (Moustakas, 1994; J. A. Smith et al., 2009; Van Manen, 1990).

Third, following the confirmation of a commitment, the respondents received critical details of the study and interview questions. An explanation of informed consent provided the details necessary to assist in preparing for the interview (e.g., Doody & Noonan, 2013; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Fourth, we agreed on a safe, relatively quiet, nonthreatening environment for the interview that was the participant's choice (e.g., Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Fifth, during the interview process, the predetermined questions allowed me the freedom to explore issues that arose spontaneously and sought clarification when required (e.g., Doody & Noonan, 2013). Following Jacob & Furgerson, (2012) I developed a script (see Appendix D) that served as a reminder to ask pertinent questions, share critical details, and address important interview elements. A recording devices and light journaling were used to collect information from the interviews for transcription during the data organization phase. Volunteers are likely to agree to audio recording the interview, although it may take them time to feel comfortable about speaking freely (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Recording data strictly by writing notes may cause a novice interviewer to miss critical details reported by participants' (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Therefore, I only created a written record noting key terms and audio recordings to ensure detailed accounts to gave accurate meaning to participants' experiences (e.g., Bansal & Corley, 2012).

The sixth and final step involved a transcript review. Moustakas (1994) suggested that researchers validate collected data by having participants examine the descriptions. Reliability occurs by establishing data dependability through peer-review and consensus

(Kisely & Kendall, 2011). To ensure process validity (Fan & Sun, 2014), robustness, and accuracy (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013), I provided participants with transcribed data to review, correct and approve before organizing and analyzing.

Data Organization Techniques

In qualitative research, data organization begins when the researcher receives transcripts and contemplates the methods and procedures for analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers have an obligation to act with integrity, be fair, conduct their research properly, avoid conflicts of interest, and minimize moral hazards (Vanclay et al., 2013). Keeping a research log helped record insights gained from reflection or discerning patterns (e.g., Moustakas, 1994). The regular recording of descriptions and commentaries proved helpful when analyzing data (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Following White, Oelke, and Friesen (2012) I used electronic matrices using the NVivo system to organize data for theming, visual displays, streamlined summarization, and simplification in reorganization. The NVivo software contains tools that help the researcher manage and organize data (Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014). Software is appropriate for both documentation and to develop systematic folder structures and file naming conventions (Margarian, 2014). Therefore, I imported transcribed documents directly into the software and organized through researcher-developed folders. The folders contained labels identifying themes and participant perspectives. Organized records and information will remain in a secure location to protect the participants. Information housed on a computer contained secure password protection. Transcripts and nonsecure information

did not include identification information. I will keep all raw data in a secure and protected location for 5 years. After 5 years, I will destroy the data.

Data Analysis Technique

Qualitative researchers must devise creative ways to present their data because qualitative data are not readily conducive to synthesis or reduction into tables (Bansal & Corley, 2012). The moment the researcher receives transcribed interviews, the data organization process begins (Moustakas, 1994). For a descriptive study, the researcher determines how the data are organized (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Moustakas (1994) created an applicable philosophical framework for qualitative research. Therefore, using NVivo to pinpoint themes and provide annotation for codes and categories, I used Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam method data analysis to organize and analyze the information. Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam method analysis includes seven steps to code, group and cluster transcribed interview data collected from participants into major themes. Summarized into five steps, procedures included (a) extrapolating horizontalized statements relative to the question, (b) using horizontalized statements to list the units of meaning, (c) clustering units into themes, (d) develop textural descriptions of experience into clustered themes, and finally (e) integrating textural descriptions into meaning and essence (Moustakas, 1994).

Matrices served as a means to extract and guide themes into a visual display (White et al., 2012). Attention to familiar terms from significant topics identified in the literature review and conceptual framework helped compose major themes for analysis. The analysis phase included published literature since the writing the proposal to offer

new information and help complete the comprehensive analysis with information published within the same year. NVivo data analysis software was suitable for compiling and clustering data. The software provided a critical view, serves to interpret the data, and provides a way to draw conclusions about the findings to tell a story (e.g. Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014). NVivo provided the best opportunity to gain an accurate account of perceived small business leaders' experience who had been effective in employing strategies leading to positive performance ratings in government contracts.

Reliability and Validity

Establishing quality in a doctoral study involved ensuring articulated finding exist mutual reliability and validity. A significant perceived weakness exists in qualitative inquiry centers on research validity and reliability (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). Techniques to improve quality include objective transcript reviews combined with meetings with participants to discuss inconsistencies to attain accord (Kisely & Kendall, 2011).

I used the study design to determine how to improve quality. The two essential parameters for establishing quality were reliability and validity. Researchers use methods retrieved from existing qualitative research that has established different criteria to assess the rigor. Reliability and validity have been uncertain and in many instances not applicable in qualitative research (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). I used the most common methods to check reliability and validity as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The subsequent sections include steps taken to address and achieve rigor in this qualitative descriptive study.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research encompasses elements of validity and reliability denoting the findings value and believability (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested four strategies to address credibility: prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, and transcription review. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation gathered from multiple sources increases research credibility (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Ensuring credibility using these methods requires researchers to spend sufficient time ensuring the data collected from participant experiences embrace a full understanding.

Different frameworks help researchers achieve credibility. Following J. Gordon and Patterson (2013), I proliferated credibility through a combination of in-depth interviews with activities and artifacts such as nonproprietary documents that add depth and richness. The measures described increased plausibility that would not have been complete if I only conducted interviews. I collaborated with industry practitioners such as small business leaders who had successfully performed in government contracting opportunities (e.g., Yang et al., 2010).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which a researcher shows findings have applicability in other contexts or settings. In qualitative research, transferability also refers to generalizability through thoroughly describing context and assumptions central to the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Research users and applicable professionals are in a better position than me to determine where to transfer the results of this study.

Generalizability serves as a comprehensive framework for measuring reliability and validity by encompassing other methods (Fan & Sun, 2014). Qualitative researchers can enhance transferability by thoroughly describing the research context and the assumptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Schou, Høstrup, Lyngsø, Larsen, and Poulsen (2012) studied questions in qualitative research that increased instances for transferability in study conclusions. I strived for generalizability by ensuring thoroughness in context descriptions.

Thoroughness includes vigorous content account, with examples and appropriate quotations from interview transcripts to allow readers to consider their interpretations (Houghton et al., 2013). Three elements identified helped the audience understand the reasons and methods behind the careful selection of informed and experienced participants. The three components included (a) descriptions of participant selection decision, (b) the context for connection to research, and (c) the relationship between my knowledge as the researcher and the phenomenon (e.g., Schou et al., 2012). Careful consideration of each element above increased reliability and validity through a cumulative attempt to set the stage for research users and professionals who might consider transferring the findings to other platforms.

Dependability

Dependability refers to producing similar interpretations from all participants (White et al., 2012). Dependability occurs by accounting for changing settings and describing how the changes influence or alter how a researcher approached a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, when conducting interviews, an interviewer may

respond differently to each participant, often as a reaction to interviewees' demeanor and comfort level (Rodham, Fox, & Doran, 2013). The steps identified in subsequent paragraphs will increase methodology replication with a larger population or by future researchers.

The data collection technique requires thoroughly describing strategic level planning to adjust to changing contexts that occur within research (White et al., 2012). When coding the transcribed data, I used searches for multiple words or phrases containing the same meaning to capture key phrases. Using multiple searches assisted in adjustments for differences in dialect among participants to ensure accurate accounts by noting key semantic relationships (White et al., 2012). As an independent researcher, I examined both the process and the product to evaluate accuracy and determined whether the data supported the findings, interpretations, and conclusions (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail, documented changes that occurred, along with any adjustments to my approach throughout the process (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, explaining subsequent factors that affected outcomes provided a clear framework to produce the same results when replicating.

Confirmability

Confirmability closely correlates to dependability because both concepts require the researcher to document changes in processes for transparency and replicability. Confirmability refers to the degree to which one can substantiate the results. Maintaining an auditing trail in both the data collection and analysis demonstrated accurate, comprehensive records of approaches and activities employed (White et al., 2012).

Perpetuating this auditable footprint allowed for dialog between me and the data that facilitated a truthful representation of activities throughout the data analysis process (e.g., Rodham et al., 2013). The selected means for ensuring confirmability allowed me to grasp shortcomings and contradictions to check and recheck the data throughout the study. Participants reviewed transcribed data for accuracy (Kisely & Kendall, 2011). As identified in addressing dependability, an independent researcher examined the data to help substantiate interpretations and conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Using audit trails provided a substantial methodological reference that satisfied the intent to ensure the selected framework, themes, methodology, and interpretations fell within the context to which they belong.

Transition and Summary

The information discussed in Section 2 outlined methods used to conduct this qualitative descriptive study to exploring strategies some small business leaders use to attain positive performance ratings in government contracting. Section 1 served as the foundation for the study and included a thorough literature review for exploring strategies that facilitate positive past performance ratings in government contracting opportunities. The foundation and background prescribed accounted for the business problem history. Section 1 also included the problem and purpose statements, nature of the study, research question, conceptual framework, and a discussion of listed and defined operational definitions. To identify and help set aside bias, Section 1 included assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and significance, and detailed explanations addressing value and application to business processes. Section 1 concluded with a comprehensive

academic literature review.

Section 2 detailed the systemic process for exploring strategies small business leaders use to attain positive performance ratings in government contracting by understanding small business leaders experiences. This section began with restating the purpose and describing my role as the researcher. The discussion on participant selection allowed for greater understanding and rationale for the sampled groups that contributed by providing significant accounts of their experience. The Research Methodology and Design section included reasonings for selecting and using the identified strategy. The Population and Sampling section included a discussion on how and why the population interviewed was suitable for the study and details about the sampling technique used. Ethical considerations underlined the actions taken to protect participants' rights during the data collection, analysis, and presentation phases. The data collection and data analysis subsections emphasized the systemic approach to collecting, analyzing, and organizing data. This section concluded with outlining the actions used to ensure reliability and validity throughout the study.

This study involved an attempt to fill gaps in literature pertaining to strategies small business leaders use to attain positive performance ratings in government contracting. Section 1 and Section 2 respectively included the foundation for the study and outlined methods for exploring small business leaders lived experiences. Section 3 includes the findings and discusses the prospects for application in professional practice and implications for social change.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 1 provided a foundation and background of the study, which introduced the topic and problem chosen to solve the applied business problem. The review of the literature provided an immersing discussion into the literature pertaining to the problem. Section 2 summarized the entire research process commissioned to conduct the qualitative descriptive study. Section 3 identifies themes and summarizes leadership strategies small business owners used for positive performance ratings in the federal contracting arena. In addition, this section includes the delivery of a presentation and report of the findings from the data gathered. Section 3 concludes with the impact these findings have on social change and a plan of action for practitioners to practically apply information the study availed.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive research study was to explore strategies small business leaders used to attain positive performance ratings in government contracting. The gathering of interview data from small business leaders in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area revealed five overall themes associated with the findings from the study. These themes included (a) leadership strategies that influence positive performance ratings, (b) behavioral or trait-based attributes of leaders, (c) understanding bureaucratic dynamics and contract requirements, (d) resource-based capacity as an impediment, and (e) competitive intelligence as a valuable resource. The analysis of the themes of the study revealed that behavioral, value-based, and trait-based leadership characteristics are essential in leading government contracts. The leadership

behaviors described by participants based on their experiences closely aligned with both transformational and servant leadership. I also found that bureaucratic structure and system and past employment or project performance of the contractors influenced the positive procurement process and performance ratings among government contractors. The subtheme of communication appeared to be an important factor in understanding the needs of the clients, which is essential to gaining trust and confidence. These elements supported the need for the contractors to establish a positive working relationship with government agencies.

Presentation of the Findings

The qualitative descriptive research questions constructed developed an understanding of leadership strategies small business leaders deemed successful in facilitating positive performance rating for their organizations while performing on government contracts. Data were obtained to answer the central question: What leadership strategies do small business leaders use to achieve positive performance ratings in government contracts? These data provided the information that the following sections are structured around. This question was explored using the following 10 interview questions posed to 21 leaders during face-to-face interviews:

Q1: What leadership strategies do you find most effective for achieving positive performance ratings in government contracts?

Q2: What leadership behaviors do leaders/managers employ that are attributes to positive performance ratings in government contracts?

Q3: How do these attributes influence contract performance ratings?

Q4: How does the contractor–government relationship impede or affect performance ratings?

Q5: What are the impediments or obstacles that small business leaders face when performing in government contracts?

Q6: What resources do business leaders use to assist in achieving positive performance ratings in government contracts?

Q7: What restrictions, if any, discourage small business representatives from achieving positive performance ratings in government contracting opportunities?

Q8: What additional information can you provide to improve leadership effectiveness in small businesses' contracting performance?

Q9: What programs and information will help leaders of small businesses seeking to improve performance ratings in government contracts?

Q10: What programs or information do you suggest to leaders of small businesses seeking to obtain government-contracting opportunities?

In seeking answers to the central research question, five themes emerged in the thematic analysis I performed for the 21 interview transcripts. These themes included (a) leadership strategies that influence positive performance ratings, (b) behavioral or trait-based attributes of leaders, (c) understanding bureaucratic dynamics and contract requirements, (d) resource-based capacity as an impediment, and (e) competitive intelligence as a valuable resource. In this section, I will present the themes and subthemes with verbatim textual support from the participants.

Theme 1: Leadership Strategies that Influence Positive Performance Ratings

Theme 1 emerged from the aggregation of 11 subthemes or the thematic categories explaining the strategies for positive performance. These subthemes include (a) perseverance of organizational leadership, (b) communication skills of contractors, (c) emotional intelligence of project managers, (d) business insights, (e) good understanding of the bureaucracy, (f) demonstration of long-term quality performance and effective working relationship, (g) continuous organizational improvement, (h) accountability of actions and commitments, (i) integrity of the organization, (j) competitiveness, and (k) available mentors (see Table 2). The necessity to manage identified relational dynamics of social, political, legal, and behavioral dynamics expressed by participants in Theme 1 to include its subthemes aligned with elements defined by Fayezi et al. (2012), where insights for relationship engineering within supply chains were found to dominate. Each theme is presented and substantiated in this section.

Table 2

Leadership Strategies that Influence Positive Performance Ratings

Subthemes	No. of occurrence	% of occurrence
Perseverance of organizational leadership	16	76
Effective Communication skills of contractors	14	67
Demonstration of long-term quality performance and effective working relationship	6	29
Emotional intelligence of project managers	6	29
Business insights of leaders	5	24
Good understanding of the bureaucracy	5	24
Continuous organizational improvement	2	10
Accountability of actions and commitment	2	10
Integrity of the organization	2	10
Competitiveness	2	10
Availability of mentors	1	5

Perseverance of organizational leadership. This subtheme received 16 out of the 21 total sample population or 76%. Participant 10 talked about the perseverance character of a leader. Participant 10 defined a leader who perseveres as someone who keeps on trying despite experiencing failures. Participant 10 further described this character as the ability of a person to “deal with rejection and failures.” Participant 10 also described perseverance as a work attitude. Participant 10 justified,

Being a hard worker, being able to just keep going when things are tough. A lot of people want to call it quits or just don’t have the work ethic. I think that if you want to be successful, you have to have that work ethic. You have to have that drive, just to keep working.

This leadership attitude relates to procurement in the government as a process that typically observes specification, vendor selection, contracting, ordering, expediting, and evaluation (Miemczyk et al., 2012). Along with the observance of this process, contractors are obligated to comply with the necessary accreditations and documentation of past successful services that would support their competency to provide the needed contract services. The participants in the study reported that being persistent to comply with the requirements means engaging in trade-offs to win the contract, to meet performance measures, and potentially to acquire more future contract projects. This observation has been cited as norm in government procurement activities (Lu, 2013; Miemczyk et al., 2012).

Participant 15, a female leader, used the term “tenacity” to define the perseverance of the leader in “withstand[ing] all the rejection along the way.” The

participants who identified persistence to continuously engage in the procurement process without the assurance of winning the service contracts believed that with the routine practice of the federal government to engage in service contracting, even small and less competent contractors can acquire government projects. For Participant 16, a female leader, leaders in this business hurdle legal and contractual engagement to “secure either your certifications or the contracts themselves.” Participant 16 stated, “Every single time, I believe, you will experience at least one setback. Most of them unexpected.” Participant 16 shared how she managed project refusals that sometimes are offensive:

In order to be successful, you have to continue regardless of how you may feel about fairness or accuracy in the rejections. My experience was that when I was being certified, I would be rejected at every turn and, with those rejections, things would be said that were absolutely not true and sometimes offensive. I had to just continue, not talk about it with everybody and disengage, but rather remain engaged, quickly respond, and continue on the path. I think that too many people stop when they are hurt or when things are really hard or unfair. They believe there’s nothing you can do and you just stop, but I believe that there’s always something you can do and you just keep going.

Participant 15 stressed that perseverance is associated with “confidence in yourself to know that you can offer the government something they need that will help them.” This means that the longer the contractor demonstrates his or her abilities to provide service, the higher the chance he or she could win future government projects. Participant 15 said that perseverance of a leader can be observed in the following manner: “multitasking,

having the ability to juggle all the phases of obtaining work, performing work, monitoring personnel, monitoring contracts, just juggling all the balls that are required.” As long as these competencies are demonstrated, they believed that they would be selected to undertake certain projects.

Perseverance can be considered a legitimate strategy in the successful performance of government service contracts because awarding of government contracts does not observe service-based competition (Joaquin & Greitens, 2012; Johnston & Girth, 2012). This means contractors who may not be necessarily competent but are available to provide service out of urgency can benefit from this procurement system. Leaders who are engaged in contracting business may need to demonstrate that they can provide service at the most convenient time and urgent needs of the procurement officials (Johnston & Girth, 2012).

Participant 19, a male leader, also explained that persistence is a prerequisite attitude of leaders who engaged in bureaucracy. He described that the government transactions have several setbacks. He said, “There’s just a lot of bureaucratic challenges and you have to be able to roll with those and move forward and you have to be able to inspire other people to follow you and persevere despite these things.” The case of Participant 19 showed a typical long-term project requiring thorough reviews and evaluation of service activities and expected outcomes. Long-term and large projects are often confronted with bureaucratic challenges, which could take several months and years for contracts to be awarded. Participant 6, a female leader, shared that leaders must have the perseverance to undergo the government processes:

Perseverance would be the first factor that comes up, and having faith. It is a slow process. They make it very clear, 18-24 months is kind of what they put out there to new businesses to say this process can be up to 18-24 months before you obtain federal business. There are many small businesses that have gone beyond that date in their efforts to obtain government contracts.

Effective communication skills of contractors. In this second subtheme 16 participants, or 67% (see Table 2), identified the uniqueness of government officials and the ability to exhibit varying communication styles as a strategy to success. Participant 11 associated effective management to the communication skills of the leader. Participant 11 described this skill as the ability of leaders to engage in open dialogue where expectations of the job are articulated. Participant 11 offered a strategy in demonstrating effective communication with the client. He said,

One of the things I find that's helpful is having a schedule of deliverables. A plan of action and milestones that you review with the client regularly. That way there is no expectation differences between what the client thinks they're going to get and what you're going to provide. I think that's probably the most vital piece there. I've seen a lot of times with other companies where there's a total mismatch and the government client gets very upset and they say, "I'm never going to give any more work to this contractor again because they didn't deliver what I wanted." I think a lot of that is just tied to communication, and regular communication.

Several studies confirmed that effective communication influences healthy working relationships, particularly in engagements requiring collaboration between two or more stakeholders (Grudinschi et al., 2014). Collaboration and partnerships were components identified as fundamental to public service procurement in previous research (Grudinschi et al., 2014); this study provided evidence that leaders may need to strengthen the communication system to maintain a successful collaborative relationship (Plane & Green, 2012).

Communication skill of leader is also demonstrated in dealing with the subordinates. Participant 11 shared that leaders should communicate to their staff the “deliverables and expectations from the client.” He also shared that communication is necessary in ensuring that employees will coordinate effectively in providing the needs of the client. He said, “I think communication is key in making sure you support the client and then also support your staff.” Participant 11 said that employees should be aware that in the “contract environment . . . you can lose your job the next day just because your contract comes to an end.” Participant 11 stressed the following:

If you have your people in mind and you keep them informed of where you are in the lifecycle of the contract, and what you’re doing to try to secure the next follow on contract, or what information you may need from them to make sure you win more work so they can continue employment with your company.

Participant 2, a male leader, explained that communication skill is essential for leaders to articulate their vision, mission, and goals to the subordinates as well as the organization. Participant 2 figuratively used examples of miscommunication in the

NASA mission to illustrate the need for leaders to communicate in order to complete the mission. He said, “So a leader has to be able to communicate that from top to bottom so that everyone buys into it.”

Demonstration of long-term quality performance and effective working relationship. Six participants, or 29% (see Table 2), stressed that long-term quality performance and an effective working relationship are related and that leaders who were longtime contractors of the government projects have good understanding of the government working environment. Participant 18, a female leader, shared that for most of their government contracts, “relationship, quality of service and making a difference are the most effective for long term relationship and positive performance ratings.” Participant 1, a male leader, added that it is “helpful to have a good understanding of what these different people’s perspectives and motivations are in there so that you can work together.” Participant 1 added that there are novice contractors who had performance issues because of their inability to consider the perspectives of the government officials. Participant 11 said,

Where they have a really narrow view only from their own perspective. They don’t take any consideration what the impact of their actions are on the other side. They don’t look fully upon whatever is going on the other side. If it’s not them it’s a plane casting thing. In a long term, factors for effective long term performance, they need to be able to see from the other perspectives of this one point.

Participant 2, a male leader, considered performance and effective working relationship as effects of networking and relationship-building of the contractors with the government agencies. Participant 2 described contracting business as “nothing more than a collection of people.” He believed that “if you’re not able to network and develop those relationships, not only within the organization but external relationships then you’re not going to be able to move forward.”

Emotional intelligence of project managers. Six participants 29% (see Table 2) also identified this subtheme as a strategy for positive performance ratings. Participant 12, a female leader, considered emotional intelligence a necessary leadership quality a leader must possess. Participant 12 compared the relevance of emotional intelligence and having Ph.D. degree. She said, “The Ph.D. makes a difference and opens the doors and doing high-quality work makes a difference, but I think the emotional intelligence is such an important piece of doing good work. Participant 12 explained that EI is a requirement in dealing with client. She cited an example:

. . . just in terms of consultation skills and working with a client, being able to read them, being able to ask questions in a way that they feel safe enough answering, so I can really get to the bottom of what the issues are, developing relationships, sometimes pairing with internal people to consult, and able to not compete, but appreciate the differences and work together. I think a lot of it is emotional intelligence stuff.

Participant 17, a male leader, implicated the relevance of the leaders’ ability to relate with his or her staff as well as with the clients. Participant 17 said, “It’s the ability

to relate personally with people to be successful, and that, it's mostly your employees, as well as the government people on the other side." Participant 17 shared that success for him is "spend[ing] time talking to these people about things that are important to them as well as the government, the actual contract issues."

Participant 17 associated interpersonal skill with emotional intelligence. He said that contractors may need to "learn to interface and communicate with these people on a human being to human being level." He believed that emotional intelligent leader understands the psychological and emotional concerns of leaders involved in the contracting projects.

Business insights of leaders. Participant 13, a male leader, cited that leaders in the contracting business must have foresight of the possible needs of the clients. He said,

You must have obvious insight into what needs of the customer are, so you have an understanding of what the customer needs are, how to meet those needs, and how to effectively translate what they are asking for in an RFP [request for proposal] or specification or capabilities design document, and translate that into what truly is the desired outcome.

Participant 13 shared that clients may be unable to articulate the specifics of the works. He said that the leader must be able to understand and define these needs. Participant 13 further explained,

Everybody's perception of a good chocolate chip cookie is different, so you need to understand what it is that the customer's really, truly after. If the Navy, they might say their version of a chocolate chip cookie is Chips Ahoy chocolate chip

cookie, whereas the Army Special Operations Command might be something that's like hot, gooey, right out of the oven. You need to have an insight into what it takes to make and meet those customer expectations to make a valuable product, because the responsibility, it goes beyond just making a product.

In the words of Participant 20, leaders who have business insights are visionary leaders. Participant 20 considered visions as essential blueprint business plan of organizations that intend to engage in government projects. Participant 20 said,

I think that there are two leadership factors that are very important. Actually there are two more when I think about it. The first one is vision. When you own a business or you lead a business, you need to have a vision of the services that you're going to provide.

Business insights also mean the competency of leaders concerning the required work, working arrangement, and financial benefits out of the contract without sacrificing the quality of work. Participant 5, a male leader, described business insights to be valuable in the sustainability of firms engaged in government contracts. He said,

One is, you have to have a clear understanding of the work to be done. That means for both the government and the contractor- the business. . . . The second piece is . . . understanding what the contract compliance requirements are. Last but not least . . . is the budget controls. Everybody complains about the bleeding out of a contract. Nine times out of 10, either somebody asks for something that wasn't planned. In a lot of cases, you're contracting us or they're contracting us and not even know it. You end up having to clean this up at the back end. Those

are the main areas that I think are. . . . A good leader, on the business side, understands these challenges and then ensures that they're being met.

Good understanding of the bureaucracy. Six of the participants or 29% (see Table 2) claimed that government scheme had unique systems of engagement that requires flexibility, compliance, competency, and interpersonal skills from the leaders. Participant 3, a male leader, shared that contracting organizations must be flexible to adapt with the changes in the policies and services that may be required from them. He said, "A business owner needs to get a fine tune or adjust our services to meet the demands and/or actually get ahead of the demand that's coming." Participant 9, a male leader, also shared that in addition to leadership skills, the organization must have a leader "that has worked in the federal government and understands government contracts."

In understanding the bureaucratic system of government, leaders may need to acquire relevant experiences with these agencies. Participant 20, a female leader, believed that experiences are essential in operationally implementing the government contracts. Participant 20 described that a visionary leader may not be enough to be successful in the contracting business environment. She explained, "There are people who have great vision but they can't figure out how to implement or bring to reality the vision that they have. That operational aspect is very important, and I think they go hand in hand." Participant 8 a female leader, also supported this claim by stating, "Having someone on the team not only with the leadership skill sets and business skill sets, but someone that has worked in the federal government and understands government contracts."

Continuous organizational improvement. Participant 2, a male leader, implicated the organizational success to the ability of leaders to sustain organizational improvement. He believed that competition with other contractors require professional standard and continuous education. Participant 2 articulated that flexibility of the changes requires leaders to upgrade knowledge and skills continuously to compete with other contractors. He said,

You have to continuously renew your education, particularly in government because, well, it changes... it fluctuates, legislations change, procurement rules change, administrations change, directors change, Congress says we're not going to fund a particular program, that has a ripple effect. So you have to be continuously renewing yourself, and informing those below you, or those that follow you the same way. You have to have training.

Participant 9, a male leader, figuratively described continuous improvement as the willingness of the leader to “stay[ing] hungry and being able to, or really excited about new opportunities and willing to take risks.” He shared that “complacency or getting comfortable in a current position is not a contributor to future success.” Participant 9 shared the organizational mission in relation to sustaining organizational improvement.

Participant 9 said,

We always have to be striving to do more and do better, deliver better on the contracts that we actually have, winning more contracts that might be outside our geographic or technical scope. We always have to be pushing forward for new experiences.

Accountability of actions and commitment. Leaders who had long-term and continuous positive performance ratings on projects with the government demonstrated accountability with their past and present engagements. Participant 20, a female leader, shared that there are leaders who initially demonstrated their commitment to comply with the project deliverables but are unable to comply with the project provisions such as time and quality of the services rendered. Participant 20 described that “a successful leader, you must be accountable, not only for yourself as the CEO, but for your team and your company and the people who perform for your company.” Participant 21, a male leader, reiterated the value of accountability by stressing the ability of the leaders to operationalize contract plans and activities through a willingness to work beyond extended hours. Participant 21 said,

I think in addition to those two factors, the integrity, and the confidence is the drive. The leader . . . or the business owner has to have the drive that you have to put in the grind. You have to put in the hours; you have to put in the work in order to be successful. For long-term success, you have to see it. Part of the vision is how to sustain that over time. You need to be willing to grind and put in the work that it takes to get to the point of being a true, successful entrepreneur doing business with the federal government.

Integrity of the organization. Participant 21, a male business leader in contracting environment, shared that the integrity of the leader and the organization would yield trust and confidence from the “federal government as we’re pursuing federal contracts.” Participant 21 claimed,

Integrity is the foundation. . . . It builds your character and it allows clients and other contractors and peers to want to work with you based on who you are and the likability of knowing that you're going to do the right thing always. It's easy to get influenced, especially when you have great opportunities that you may not have had before, staring you in your face. Having that integrity is the background or the backbone of being of a great leadership factor.

Integrity for Participant 4, a male leader is "Being straightforward with either the COTR or contract officer when there is an issue. Not trying to hide if there is a problem."

Organizational competitiveness. Participant 21, a male leader, utilized the word "confidence" to associate the ability of leaders to compete during the procurement process. Participant 21 explained that competition is evident among small and large businesses that aspire to win government contracts. He said, "They have may have the financial capacity or the human capital or the bonding, per se. As such, it can be daunting or intimidating if you will."

Participant 9, a male leader, added that the leader must understand the "competitive environment." Participant 9 explained that several like-minded institutions are

seeking understanding that you might be going after similar opportunities, what their strengths and weaknesses might be, the kind of angles that they would be taking on a particular opportunity, and also how those competitors align with our understanding of the client. It's kind of a subset of the understanding of the customer, which is the competitive environment, going after that work.

This subtheme contradicts the perspectives of other contractors who claimed that as long as they demonstrate their perseverance, winning government contracts are relatively possible. The contradictions reflected in the experiences of the participants in this study support the contentions of Brown (2011) who stated that most government outsourcing lacked systemized accountability. Decisions of contractual agreements in the federal government clearly indicate that procurement practices of several officials are based on subjective indicators of quality services. This procurement practices could yield significant political issues in general and government services incompetence in particular (Witesman & Fernandez, 2013).

Available mentors of organizational leaders. Participant 14, a male leader, associated professionally prepared contractors with the availability of mentors. He believed that mentor “groom...successful contractors and successful bidder.” Participant 14 claimed that mentors “will really help your leadership.”

Theme 2: Behavioral or Trait-Based Attributes of Leaders

Theme 2 emerged from the aggregation of eight subthemes (see Table 3), which refers to behavioral or trait-based leadership affecting positive government contractor performance. These subthemes include (a) collaborative leadership, (b) empowering and guiding others, (c) building relationship and trust, (d) driving for results, (e) care for others, (f) integrity, (g) decision-making competency, and (h) emotional intelligence. Each theme will be presented and substantiated in this section.

Table 3

Behavioral or Trait-Based Attributes of Leaders

Subthemes	No. of occurrence	% of occurrence
Collaborative leadership	9	43
Empowering and guiding others	7	33
Building relationship and trust	6	29
Emotional intelligence	6	29
Driving for results	4	19
Care for others	4	19
Integrity	4	19
Decision-making competency	2	10

Collaborative leadership. This leadership behavior stressed the importance of teamwork in the organization. Nine or 43% (see Table 3) of participants mentioned this subtheme. Participant 8, a female leader, described collaboration as “cohesive leadership working together...toward accomplishing [our] goals and setting goals.” She stressed that the team could work together with shared goals. Participant 8 explained, “I think goal setting is critical to the growth, especially when small businesses start getting close to becoming other than small.” Participant 6, a female participant, used the term “people skills” to implicate the ability of a leader to work along with the members of the team. Participant 6 described this behavior as follows:

You have to be focused on people to be successful in this business. Whether it is talking with potential teaming partners, whether it’s meeting and greeting government officials to answer the point of hiring staff either for your corporate office or hiring staff that’s going to be working for your company on a contract within the federal government. If you cannot reflect the comfort of having people

skills as the leader of your company, your success rate gets questionable at some point in time.

This people skill was supported in the work of Plane and Green (2012) and Grudinski et al. (2014) who implicated the importance of collaboration and partnerships in public service procurement. These studies claimed that organizational significance of contractors and government agencies emanates from their collaborative partnership whereby government officials actively communicate their service specifications and needs.

Participant 9, a male leader, shared that collaboration had been a challenge for his leadership. He saw the importance of collaboration in “increasing the efficiency of the processes that we have so that things are done faster and better.” Participant 9 further explained that the expertise of individual members is crucial in the successful performance of any contract endeavors. He said,

The technical approaches that we bring to the table, specifically the design of the project that we bring on top of what USAID or what state would have, how we use the consultant, that’s how we really try to bring our own style to the opportunities and that way distinguish ourselves.

Empowering and guiding others. In addition to collaboration, a successful leader in government contracting who collaborates with members of the team incorporate empowerment and guidance in leading the employees. Participant 5, a male business leader, shared that employees perform their responsibilities when they are empowered and properly guided. He explained, “They have to understand that you can delegate tasks

you can delegate authority to do something, but you cannot delegate responsibility.”

When empowering employees, the leader could easily offer clear guidance “as to what it is that needs to be done on every single government contract that you’re performing on.”

Participant 5 further stressed that leaders may need to “ensure that they understand that relationship associated with responsibility.”

Participant 4, a male business leader, implicated the need for the leaders to empower employees in solving relevant project issues. He shared that their organization recognizes the knowledge and skills of every employee and provides these employees the opportunity to contribute and participate in accomplishing tasks as well as in resolving issues. Participant 4 said that they ensured “we cover issues that each others are having to see if someone else has experienced that so we can do lessons learned, as well as try to build a team within the managers.”

These findings relate to the ability of leaders to establish robust personal affiliations both internal and external the company by operating collaboratively with others (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012). Strengthening of working relationship with the stakeholders requires the leader to mentor and guide employees who are in charge of completing the contract projects (Robertson & Barling, 2013). This leadership characteristic aligns closely with elements of transformational leadership.

Building relationship and trust. According to six participants or 29% (see Table 3) in the study, trust is built from an effective working relationship. Participant 9, a male leader, implicated that client-based organizations had leaders who valued positive working environment with the contracting parties. He said that leaders gained positive

working relationship when clients trust them. He said, “[leaders should] work to develop and cultivate trusting working relationships with people within the customer organizations.” He further shared,

We try to deliver to our product but also connect with our clients to understand what their needs are and make sure that what we are delivering is what they need. Over time, this builds a trust based relationship, which helps to navigate when inevitable bumps come up.

Participant 12, a female leader, implicated that leader who builds positive working relationship provides positive feedback is beneficial in their work. She explained,

The building relationships is key, not just for managing the contracts, but for doing good work where people want you to come back because they trust you and I can answer your questions, and they’re more open because especially in organization development work, you really need that from your client.

Participant 9, a male leader, stressed the relationship between trust, respect, and positive working relationship. He explained that when there is trust and respect, employees working along with leaders strive to pursue the vision of the organization and deliver expected responsibilities. Participant 9 said, “We differentiate ourselves from the field with that not settling for good enough in delivery.”

Participant 9, a male leader, stressed that “good working relationships with our client representatives over a long period of time” is an indication of the performance of the organization and the effective qualities of a leader. He said that “strong professional

working relationship... helps to address challenges from a position of mutual trust and respect, rather than firefighting in crisis management.”

Emotional intelligence. A participant identified the “the capacity of the [leader] to be aware of, control, and express one’s emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically.” Participant 20, a female leader, stressed that emotional maturity of leaders is essential in the management of people who may have a limited understanding of the project including the challenges the leaders take in the managing individual differences. She said that an emotionally intelligent leader handles competently those employees who are uncaring, struggling, and emotionally incompetent in an adult-like organization.

Driving for results. Only four or 19% (see Table 3) of the participants identified the results-oriented leadership behavior. Participant 12, a female leader, considered “results-focused” characteristic of leader who remain engaged in the contract business. For her, “bigger companies” with several employees requires guidance to demonstrate “confident excellent work with high standards, and that’s results-focused.”

Care for others. Four or 19% (see Table 3) of the participant emphasized the importance of value-based leadership particularly the leader’s care for his or her subordinates. Participant 18, a female leader, considered “genuine care and concern” for employees as an essential characteristic. She shared that empathy for others motivate the employees to work with the leaders. Participant 8, also a female leader, considered “caring about your employees” influence their performance thereby facilitating success. Participant 8 explained that employee retention and positive performance are results of

the leaders' ability to demonstrate care and empathy. She shared the experiences of her company:

In the case of this company, we have two all hands meetings with our employees to bring them together and also to know about the company, the leadership, where the business is and where we're going in the future, and how they can be engaged to help in our growth.

Integrity. Four or 19% (see Table 3) of the participants shared the importance of integrity of the leader. Participant 18, a female leader, said, "I think the primary one is integrity and honesty." She explained, "If you do not have integrity, do not have honesty, whatever else you do, it's not going to work." Participant 18 associated integrity with trust, loyalty, and positive relationship with the client and subordinates.

Participant 7, a male leader, shared his views about honesty and positive performance from the organization. He said that an honest leader reduces employees' fear, which gives them more time and opportunity to contribute to the organization. Participant 7 demonstrated this scenario by stating,

to be honest with people, let them know exactly where you are, what the expectations are, to be clear. One of the other behaviors is to make sure that you control the organizational stress by allowing them to do the things that they need to do to get the job done and not have to worry about whether they're going to get paid or whether their vacations are going to come, but make sure all those things are taken care of so they can then function on the mission at hand of giving the

best possible things, not things, but the best possible effort into accomplishing the goal of transcribing Veterans medical reports.

Decision-making competency. Making decisions is a primary role of every leader. Two or 10% (see Table 3) of participants communicated this sentiment. Participant 2, a male leader, emphasized that “decisiveness” of the leader is essential in the delivery of efficient output. He explained, “People get hung up on not making decisions and it causes a backlog, a jam, or it causes procurement failures or performance failures.” Participant 2 stressed that decisiveness demonstrate the ability of leaders to influence others and achieve accountabilities.

Participant 3, a male leader, implicated decisiveness to risk-taking. Participant 3 shared that inherent in running a business is the associated risk that any leader should take. Participant 3, a male leader, shared that while risk “start[s] to multiply thereafter... a leader still has to move the company forward and to teach folks how to get through those situations that may go not in their favor.” Participant 3 further described that leader must “understand[ing] how to get to your win and having better averages, rather than going after the shotgun approach that many people would do, so more focused marketing and sales.”

Theme 3: Understanding Bureaucratic Dynamics and Contract Requirements

Two of the themes in this study identified positive relationships with the client as an essential leadership attributes that contractors have to build and maintain to yield positive performance ratings consistently in the business. However, in building positive relationship with the contracting professionals, the participants identified that leaders in

the contracting business have to demonstrate abilities to comply all contract provisions as well as those unwritten request from the contracting government officials (see Table 4).

Table 4

Understanding Bureaucratic Dynamics and Contract Requirements

Subthemes	No. of occurrence	% of occurrence
Communication	16	76
Understanding bureaucratic dynamics	12	57
Positive relationship and trust	10	48
Fulfillment of contract provisions	10	48

Communication. Bureaucracies are shown in the pattern of communication that government officials adapted. Sixteen or 76% of the participants believed that communication bridges the information gap between two or more stakeholders. According to Participant 12, a female leader, contractors struggle to deliver quality products and services because contracting officials are “lazy about communicating clearly about what they want, so you respond to the RFP, and you often find out that what they want is quite different from the RFP.” Participant 9 added that communication is a major issue in the government procurement process particularly during proposal evaluation. He said that while the contracting officials provide “feedback on the proposals that we submit... we sometimes wonder how much is really genuine feedback.” Participant 9 further added, “The feedback that we get back is sometimes contradictory within itself or it’s not very clear or very helpful.” Participant 9 stressed that government procurement process conveyed evaluation results that are difficult to understand. He said, “It feels like there’s more going on than just what the letter, the word on the page. That makes it harder for us to understand the client.”

Participant 5 explained that constant communication is essential in understanding the needs of the client. However, frequent communication with the contracting officials may have a negative side. He said that these officials may get “comfortable with your contractor and they’ll make changes.” Participant 5 shared that additional task may be accommodated but “we need permission to do that from the contracting officer.” He implicated that this relationship only demonstrates the control of the contracting agency.

Participant 14, a male leader, supported the claims of other participants that establishment of effective communication and positive working relationship are related. He said that unsatisfied clients are less communicative of their needs and wants. Participant 14 shared that to minimize bad reputations, his company ensured that they establish communication and respectful relationship with government officials. Participant 14 said, “If you just don’t have that relationship, understanding, or respect between each other to have a successful project.”

Understanding bureaucratic dynamics. Twelve or 57% (see Table 4) of the participants in this study described that contract works of the participants with the government were successful because they have in-depth knowledge of the government system. Participant 1, a male participant, described the relationship of the contractor and government agencies. He said, “The buyer has all the power. The seller has less power. Sets all the rules. Sets all the timelines.” Participant 1 further shared that the government agencies imposed their rules and that the responsibilities of the contractors are to comply whatever and whenever order the contracting officials have. In further describing the relationship between the contractor and the government, Participant 1 said, “The

contractor becomes out of the second class citizen.” He described that when contractors do not win bids on contracts, the government officials refuse to provide debriefings to unsuccessful offerors.

Participant 11, a male leader, described the bureaucratic system that contractors have to understand. He shared that there is thin line difference between government service and commercial needs of the contractors with the government agencies. He said, “It may be a little be different but, there’s a significant sensitivity about what is inherently governmental can only be performed by a government civilian, and then what’s the basic commercial in nature.” Participant 11 implicated that this type of working relationship impedes the “contractors’ ability to provide its sound advice and input to work products.” Contractors are resources often dependent on the government for clarification, which affects their overall performance. Participant 11 described, “It’s hard to give the government sage advice if you’re only being given half of the story and you’re trying to produce a coherent and cogent product for them.”

Positive relationship and trust. Ten or 48% (see Table 4) of the participants implicated that government procurement process is favorable to contractors who they have established positive relationships and trust. Participant 14, a male leader, understands that in addition to the expertise and service pricing, almost all government agencies would want to award projects to contractors whom they had positive work experiences and trust. He believed that just like his leadership direction, the government would wish to procure service from sellers who valued the integrity of their work. He said, “I tend to try to do business with people I know and trust, as far as commercial or

government, because at the end of the day you guys are going to spend a lot of time together.”

Participant 5, a male leader, explained that relationship and trust are unwritten criteria in the selection of project contractors. He said,

The stronger your relationship between the contractor and the government... the clear[er] understanding of roles and responsibilities, clear[er] understanding of what it is that you're trying to achieve, clear[er] understanding of what it's going to take to achieve that, either through work planning or some other form of planning.

Participant 21, a male leader, stressed that trust is “the most important relationships that can be made from both a tangible and intangible position.” Participant 21 explained that the binding agreement between two parties necessitate the need for trustful exchanges to fulfill binding accountabilities. He justified that “There's a trust that goes on between the two that understood.” Participant 2, a male leader, described government contracting as a “marriage.” He said, “If there's not trust in that marriage, it's going to manifest itself in the performance. Lack of trust, lack of communication, personality clashes, the government being overbearing or trying to force the contractor to do certain things.”

Trust was also mentioned by Participant 13, a male leader, as the foundation of a strong positive working relationship. Participant 13 shared that there are small contractors who passed the initial qualification screening but are unable to deliver quality products and services. Participant 13 shared that government officials procure contract services to contractors to whom they entrust their careers. He said, “I'm not going to choose you as

my contractor because you have a perceived risk and it could impact my career.” He further explained,

Government acquisition officers and program managers quite often select companies based on how they think that that company could impact their career, and not on the product itself, and they don’t care about the end result or what gets the best stewardship for the taxpayers’ money or anything else.

Fulfillment of contract provisions. Ten or 48% (see Table 4) of the participants implicated that the contractors must have the knowledge and experiences in fulfilling the provisions of the contract works. Participant 14 shared that this is the reason for the government procurement officials to select organizations with owner or business partner who were previously employed in the government agencies. Participant 14 claimed that training staff or groups of experts who would fulfill specific functions in the government is timely and costly for the government. Government procurement ensured that with limited resources, contractors can deliver the required services. Participant 14 believed that contractors must “meet the contractual requirement... you are not supposed to go beyond that. You are not supposed to go less than that.”

Five of the participants shared that positive contract performance is largely dependent on the ability of the contractors to maintain legal boundaries between the contractors and government employees. Participant 17 stressed that contractors are not government employees and could not directly utilize government resources and access the nonpublic information. Participant 14 shared,

I've seen some people try and deliver above and beyond what's in the contract by saying, "We want to deliver more. We want to do better," but that will only get you in trouble. You just have to understand the industry that you are in. In government, we are not Silicon Valley, free-wheeling people that are just out there. We are not research and school. We are very strict. That contract is very clear.

Two of the participants who identified that shared goals influence positive working relationship between contractor and government agency implicated their desire to complete the project requirements in agencies that were not aligned with their organizational goals and objectives. Participant 16, a female leader, shared,

We have a government employee right now who is the type of person who is never satisfied and my goal is for him to finish the work with us. No more than that. Just that we'll actually be able to finish and get paid for the work. Other government employees we actually enjoy working for and have shared values looking at the work as something that we're doing collaboratively. So, the type of government employee that's accepting the work is critical to the style of reporting of company success.

Theme 4: Resource-Based Capacity as an Impediment

The fourth theme emerged from the need of the contractors to fulfill all available resources for use during the completion of the contract work. The participants enumerated human, monetary, raw materials, and other relevant capital necessary in winning a government contract projects. Participant 6, a female leader, articulated human

resources as “people skills.” Participant 8, also a female leader, reflected that skills and knowledge of the staff behind the contract work are invaluable to contractors. Participant 8 enumerated knowledge and experiences in “in the federal government and understands government contracts.”

Financial resources are amounts of money used by managers to pay goods and services for the production of services. All participants agree that financial resources are essential requirement during the procurement process. Participant 20, a female leader, shared that the government is interested in evaluating the project proposals and how the organization would fund the project activities. Participant 20 differentiated the large and small business contractors according to their overhead cost and the relevant project pricing quoted during the request for proposals. Participant 20 shared, “Small businesses are sometimes considered to be cheaper than big businesses. We’re not going to pay you as much because you’re small. The larger companies may have larger overhead, bigger office space.”

Raw materials are the elements used directly to deliver service products. Participant 21, a male leader, enumerated “equipment, materials, or supplies” necessary for use of the people working under contract. Participant 1, a male leader, stressed “time and materials (T&M)” as essentials in the completion of the project. Participant 1 that these factors should be enumerated in the project proposal. Participant 1 considered this as “huge expenses...that is critical for us to be able to do that work.”

Other relevant capital that are essential in the delivery of quality and efficient product includes agency intelligence, competitive intelligence, and bidding strategies.

These capital are intangible and requires the social and emotional intelligence of the leaders in small contracting organizations. Participant 14, a male leader, considered available “mentors” as a resource that can be used during the competitive bidding process. Participant 14 said that mentors could help the leaders in the preparation of project proposals. Mentors can be personnel or leaders within the government procurement panel who can help groom the leader and the company.

Capitalization to finance quality work. All 21 participants 100% in the study perceived that government procurement officials have strong biases in awarding large and complicated projects to large contracting companies that can afford to hire competent staff and finance expensive materials. Participant 20, a female leader, said, “There is an unspoken, sometimes spoken preference for larger businesses” in awarding government projects. Participant 20 shared the common misconception concerning “Small business, sometimes the perceived “S” for small equals stupid.” She further stressed that on the contrary less prioritized and limited budget projects are awarded to small business contractors. Participant 20 shared the common responses of the government when asked about their project rejection. Participant 20 said, “Small businesses are sometimes considered to be cheaper than big businesses. We’re not going to pay you as much because you’re small. The larger companies may have larger overhead, bigger office space.”

While the organization of SBA was to ensure that organizations with limited financial resources are given equal opportunities to participate in the government bidding process, Participant 21, a male leader, believed that these organizations have still to prove

their sources of funds to justify their capabilities to undertake the government service. Participant 21 said that small business contractors that were serious in attending project biddings initiated fund sourcing to support the resources needed for the production of the service contracts. Participant 21 used the term “bonding” or service bond required when awarded with a project. Participant 21 said, “You will not be able to perform on most construction projects without it [bond].” According to Participant 21, SBA offers assistance to small businesses in the use of lending institutions that can provide basic funding requirement or bonds of the project. Participant 21 explained,

. . . financial institutions . . . that provide loans and lines of credit that will allow small businesses to be able to manage the operations or start the operations. Build the operations. By having the cash flow or the capital necessary to sustain while the government is paying within a net fourteen or net thirty or sometimes even later. It gives them the ability to perform.

Participant 3, a male leader, stressed the importance of financial capital of the organization to sustain the operation of the business with consideration of the potential delays of the service payment. Participant 3 said that on the part of the business leaders, “need to understand that they need to have at least a quarter’s worth, if not two quarter’s worth of dollars for all the employees that they’re going to have, and not be weary of that cash flow.” Participant 3 considered the people an asset of the organization and that losing these valuable assets would mean losing opportunities to acquire future projects.

Theme 5. Competitive Intelligence as a Valuable Resource

All participants in the study articulated an intangible but very relevant resource of the organization that is crucial in winning a project. These participants enumerated these intangible assets as knowledge of the working environment and requirement, bureaucracy, system, and working dynamics necessary to succeed in highly volatile work services. Eight of the participants verbatim identified that the veteran or retired personnel who started their own contracting business after their government service were at the advantage of having a competitive edge over other contractors. In fact, Participant 4 recalled the 2010 GAO decertification order to “fraudulent small disabled vet-owned businesses within the system, and veteran-owned small businesses.” Participant 4 shared that there are legitimate veteran-owned businesses that demonstrated their competency to bid and deliver services to the government. Participant 4 explained that accusations came from the bidding competitions, which projects are mostly awarded to veteran-owned businesses. Participant 4 shared the experience.

They were holding subcommittee hearing with the small business and the VA [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs]. Vet Force, at the time I was on the board, was invited to talk to that very issue. Vet Force invited me to talk to the subcommittee because we had actually submitted a bid that that very situation occurred.

Knowledge of the industry through experience. Sixteen or 76% (see Table 5) of the participants reiterated the importance of working experiences either as a former government employee or as working professional from large government contractors.

Participant 10, a male leader, considered knowledge of the industry as an asset when hiring employees. He said that while there are tangible resources that can be enumerated when identifying essential resources for successful business, working experiences in the industry would help employees and potential leaders understand the dynamics and the unspoken yet required works to complete and satisfy the procurement officers. Participant 10 shared how these intangible resources can be acquired.

I think a good way to start is to work for a large firm and be successful at that firm and work for a successful firm. It can be any firm that's successful in government contracting, and gain the experience under the tutelage or what have you, under the training of someone that's already been successful doing that.

Whether it's a global firm or whatever firm, to learn it.

Table 5

Competitive Intelligence as a Valuable Resource

Subthemes	No. of occurrence	% of occurrence
Knowledge of the industry through experience	16	76
Network	13	62

Participant 11, a male leader, reiterated how veteran-owned businesses successfully acquire and complete small or large government contracts. Participant 11 equated “knowledge of the industry” with “network.” Participant 11 explained, “I think for a small business, you’re only as good as your network.” Participant 11 further explained, “If you don’t have military experience, it’s the people you’ve found through the years working with. Then also, your client base and the ones you’ve worked on site with.” He termed this asset as “intelligence on opportunities that are coming out.”

Leaders are using this intelligence in hiring employees, making inquiries of bidding requirement, and implementing effective strategies to win the bid projects.

Participant 15, a female leader, supported this contention by stressing the importance of “mentoring.” She said that while formal trainings are essential, successes in this type of business “rely on large businesses or more experienced businesses, colleague to colleague, learn as you go training on this.” She further claimed that knowledge of the industry comes from “a formal or informal mentor protégé relationship with a more experienced firm.” She believed that “most small businesses learn from another business.”

Participant 19, a male leader, also identified the mentor- protégé program as an essential opportunity that SBA leaders have invested to “to have larger experienced contractors partner up and mentor a small, inexperienced protégé company.” Participant 19 further claimed that small and large contractors’ relationship are equally beneficial as small organizations will have the opportunity to learn and earn from the partnership while large organizations will earn more credentials in the government contracting services.

Network. Thirteen or 62% (see Table 5) of the participants identified network as a valuable competitive intelligence. Participant 11, a male leader, said that for “small business, you’re only as good as your network...networking is the key.” Participant 13 also agreed, “Networking is pretty much the only thing that works.” Participant 13 shared how a government procurement process show biases to an established network of contractors. He shared a verbatim statement from the procurement officer, “Our goal is to get you companies out here talking to each other and networking so that you can come

together as a team to offer us a better product.” Participant 13 further added that establishing a network would need insightful and personal relationship with the customer.

Participant 16, a female leader, described competitive intelligence as the ability of the organization to utilize existing networks to learn, partner, and experience the government contract service. Participant 16 believed that leaders who valued effective strategies resort in identifying trusted partners. However, “They’re also very difficult to find because the atmosphere is so competitive.” She explained that competition emerged in the industry because of “government funding cutback, which becomes more difficult for companies to sustain their own workforce and help other companies.” Participant 16 stressed that to have a competitive edge; leaders need “networking and confidence have to come across to be seen by another company or the government.”

Applications to Professional Practice

This study contributes to the understanding of the nature of the relationship between the government and the contractor and the contractor’s employees. The desire to treat the contractor as part of the team is understandable, but government employees must realize the potential risks they impose on the government and contractor if they allow special treatment in any number of situations. The small business community’s improvement in contract performance may occur through government leaders’ improvement in understanding challenges. Resulting from this understanding requires movement toward initiatives to create objective and relevant performance standards (Binderkrantz et al., 2011). In this study, the contractors demand collaboration, partnership, and communication to make their work effective while performing their

tasks. However, as stated, there are associated risks inherent in sharing the resources including exchanges of nonpublic information.

As two organizations collaborate to perform certain government tasks, organizational rules and regulations are applied. For instance, government employees are subject to federal laws and regulations, as well as any applicable government agencies' rules. Contractor personnel are employees of a contractor, they are subject to the laws that apply to all individuals the terms and conditions of their individual contracts with their employer and the applicable terms and conditions of their employer's contract with the government. This study articulates the relevance of the leadership strategies in contracting business with considerations of existing bureaucracies and how they apply to various situations that may arise within the government-contractor relationship.

The procurement practices rely on awarding service contracts to trained former government employees who possess in-depth knowledge of the government system. In many cases, contractor personnel were once members of the active duty or civilian service. This study reminds the boundaries between former government employees who served as entrepreneurs and the present procurement officials. The findings of the research unearthed a plethora of variables that retain standard functionalities essential to creating sustainable solutions for government contractors and in public procurement through positive performance. Many small business leaders conceptualize a business strategy for 6 months or less (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012). The findings support the need for continued education and research into the effects of long-term planning and practices and provide solutions to strategies for firms to implement. As the government adopts

sustainable procurement programs, they gain the influence to stimulate mimetic behavior for other levels of government and other sectors (Grob & Benn, 2014). The study results provide some proven strategies for implementation in aiding the success of small and women-owned small businesses as the integration of sustainable strategies evolve in support of successful practices. The collection of information derived from the study offers effective methods available for mimicking in small businesses contemplating or in the early stages of the public procurement process.

To increase the range of contracts that incorporate performance, an essential element becomes to engage with existing and prospective contractors who avail themselves to incentivization to develop innovative solutions (Erridge & Hennigan, 2012). This study has enhanced the body of knowledge in a burgeoning field of public procurement by researching strategies that increased the chances of achieving sustained success for small business owners that conduct business with the government. The results of the study revealed that both small business representatives and government officials need more training and access to information. The information should increase the understanding of the leadership strategies that exist, how to employ those strategies and how these strategies impact contract performance ratings.

The literature review revealed that a relationship between small business and leadership styles and a correlation of the two variables to organizational performance. The findings from this study might help leaders and managers understand and employ contributing strategies for success. The successful strategies provide a baseline to aid small business leaders in increasing the level of service provided to the government. An

increased level of output may result in increasing their competitive advantage, performance markers, and sustainability of their businesses within the industry. Understanding strategies to both articulate to the government and subsequently practice during contract performance provides content that helps strengthen many small business leaders and government contracting officer's position in making decisions on contract award.

Implications for Social Change

Since the inception of this study, issues in the public procurement has been a challenge (Flynn & Davis, 2014). In this study, I have documented the essential leadership factors affecting the success of the business contracting as well as the leadership attributes necessary in providing positive government performance. A noteworthy contribution of this study was that leadership attributes in the small business administration require combination of trait-based, value-based, and outcome-based leadership. These leadership attributes offer positive insights in improving contracting performance. For instance, communication was identified as a contributing factor in the success of the business. Meaning leaders should strategically embrace policies within and outside their organization to communicate with various stakeholders concerning relevant specifications of the government projects.

The discovery of solutions based on the findings of this study contribute to the deficiency of resources for small business sustainability in government contracting. In industrialized nations public procurement accounts for a substantial share of gross domestic product that makes it imperative to economic development for the government

to utilize this potential (Preuss, 2011). The identification of mechanisms that bridge the gap in representation offers the opportunity to add value to local economies through employment creation. Small businesses retain a great deal of responsibility in the economy as the technological lead in the global marketplace resulting in one-third of all new patents issued (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012). The participants provided recommendations to enhance performance results, which may encourage various business leaders that fall within socioeconomic groups with access to federal set-asides. Minority-owned, women-owned, and veteran-owned firms comprise examples of minority representation of government contractors may benefit from the implementation of identified strategies that predict future success.

As highlighted previously in the study, the American economy continues to rely on the employment opportunities offered through small business participation (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012). The identification of leadership strategies that contribute to successful performance outcomes of some small businesses in federal contracts provides a perspective for aspiring or struggling companies to increase contract performance and may excite the proliferation of participation in contracting opportunities. Findings may also encourage various business leaders within socioeconomic groups to gain access to federal set-asides. The implementation may ultimate result in an improved quality of life for the American workers these groups can employ.

Recommendations for Action

The intent of this study was to provide lived experiences of small business leader's perception of reality of the impact of leadership strategies in the performance of

government procurement opportunities. The results can be used to expand research to advance social change in the acquisition process of the government contract services. Through the understanding of the procurement practices particularly the leadership factors influencing the success of government contracts, government leaders could take actions in harmonizing the system in a way that truly fosters a fair, competitive, objective, and outcome-based procurement process. The role, definition and measurement of performance remains for the most part unclearly defined in the U.S. government-contracting arena. This study offers viable evidence to leaders and managers who serve as strategic decision makers within their organizations. This study demonstrated that different agencies implemented the procurement process differently. The harmonization of the policies through the restructuring of procurement laws and regulations that negatively impact small business participation and performance could significantly guide leaders in the government to act ethically.

The insight provided by participants indicated that the government procurement system may need to classify projects according to scope, budgets, and intricacies of the required deliverables. The resulting themes and codes formed indicate that it is highly critical for leaders to adapt leadership practices that are deemed appropriate for the situation. In this study, various factors from different leadership theories emerged in the analysis. This indicates that in cases where suppliers have less power to intervene in the process, they must be flexible enough to support the demands of the clients in order to comply the project requirements and earn future project approval.

Public procurement positions as a significant contributor to achieving sustainable development and continues to gain positive initiatives towards this evolution in other countries (Melissen & Reinders, 2012). History contributes to sustainable change by creating mechanisms for feedback available to employ variations of future organizational practices (Prywes, 2011). The information provided through this research provides practitioners with a view of successful practices to employ in future attempts. First, leaders and managers should recognize available sustainable practices and distinguish how they differ from their current behaviors. Second, leaders and managers should assess the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating resources into daily business functions. Last, leaders and managers should develop a strategic plan for implementing any contemplated changes that include training and education for successful practical application.

The data obtained from this study proves beneficial for leaders and managers at every level. Public procurement professionals may also benefit from the information through understanding best practices to consider when evaluating capabilities of potential offerors. I will seek to disseminate the findings through professional publication such as *Journal of Contract Management*, *Journal of Supply Chain Management*, *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management*, *Journal of Public Procurement* and the *Journal of Contract Management*. The propagation of finding through small business workshops and conferences offers a means to reach the small business community with proven best practices.

Recommendations for Further Research

This present study contributes to the understanding of the contractor-government relationship that supports employment. However, while the study assumes that participants would articulate significant impact in the lives of their employees through jobs and improvement of their well-being, it was unfortunate that I could not find concrete articulations and evidence of how these contracts influence the lives of the employees. The future study may seek to highlight the effects of contract service to the lives of the contractor employees. An investigation of such would support the significance of the small business administration in improving the wellbeing of the employees.

The study also explored perceived practices from the account of small business leaders. The foundation of the research arose from the gap in literature in the budding field of public procurement. The lack of available information on variables affecting performance and government contracts as they related to small business concerns created limitations for the qualitative discussion of current literature. As Bradshaw and Chang (2013) suggested, the government should standardize past performance databases and agree on quantifiable metrics to capture objective data. As Hiles (2015) highlighted, simply perform at high levels is not been enough to produce positive past performance ratings. Future research examining actual variables through a quantitative or mixed method correlation study measuring specific strategies and contract performance of small businesses should address this limitation. Exploratory sequential designs apply elements of qualitative and quantitative approaches in separate segments of the study but begin

with the collection and analysis of qualitative data; the quantitative data then builds on the initial qualitative results (Stentz, Plano Clark, & Matkin 2012). For example, a researcher may consider measuring specified strategies and actual ratings to determine how specific variables correlate to contract performance ratings.

Currently, evaluation is hampered by the lack of adequate tools for government officials to collect, analyze, and report relevant past performance information (Bradshaw & Su, 2013). Insight into past performance information from the federal government's perspective is rarely represented (Hiles & Wells, 2015). Research that explores how government officials perceives or defines positive contractor performance and how those perceptions correlate to performance ratings may provide further insight into strategically available advancements of small business leaders. Despite the performance of small business administration in Washington, D.C., several procurement issues have been observed. Future researchers may need to determine specific policy issues that are detrimental to the government roles in public service.

The limitations included the restrictions on generalized data for all contracting opportunities or contract types. The population for this study consisted of small business leaders in the Washington DC Metropolitan area. A larger scale exploratory study of the specific contract types and strategies that facilitate positive performance may further assist small companies that perform within specific industries. Sustainability implies long-term practices and measurements of performance. The current study omits consideration for any period for success measurement. Exploring successful practices over a significant period, a case study may capture a long-term perspective of strategic

planning in small businesses.

Reflections

The research process has been a humbling and exciting experience. When embarking on this project I felt overwhelmed because of the size and complexity of writing a doctoral level research project. As I continued to immerse myself in the literature, the experience turned into more of a journey. The opportunity to meet and interview business leaders gave a greater understanding of their challenges. As a Contracting Officer for the federal government working in the DC area, this was my first experience seeing procurement from the perspective of small business owners’.

Many of these individuals worked around the clock and had some eye-opening feedback about the phenomenon. Echoed throughout the industry is the lack of understanding from government of how decisions influence small business. The other echoed is the lack of accountability of government officials. Actions based on personal motives may mean the survival or detriment of a small business. For any wrongdoing, the government official may receive a promotion or transferred to another section. There is not accountability for improper or critical actions that result in a small business failing.

The government can facilitate the success of its small business contractors by improving regulations and treatment of small businesses in the acquisition process. Through fostering relationships small businesses leaders can obtain strategies for sustained success. My professional position has constituted protecting the taxpayer, which meant being on the other side of the negotiation table with small business leaders. The semistructured open-ended interviews forced a connection with the interviewees as I

listened to their experiences. I obtained insight into their trials and tribulations of striving for success in conducting business with the federal government.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Small business participation is essential to the recovery of the U.S. economy. Understanding the significance of small business participation to the economy, the government increases funding flow to small businesses by making tax dollars available to them through government contracting opportunities. The government spends resources getting small businesses contracting dollars. However, the industry lacks information for small business leaders to help them be successful once contracts are obtained. To contribute to this deficiency in literature for small business leaders, I explored strategies small business leaders use for positive performance ratings on government contracts by interviewing 21 small business leaders located within 30 miles of Washington, DC, with favorable performance ratings on at least three government contracting opportunities.

Using thematic analysis, I found behavioral, value-based, and trait-based leadership characteristics are essentials in leading government contracts. In this study, I realized that contractors are an integral part of government activities. However, it is often difficult to distinguish between contractors and civil service employees as well as the responsibilities attached for each stakeholder. This qualitative descriptive study enhances research in the emerging field of effective procurement (Dimitri, 2013). The findings provide new information on leadership strategies available for small business leadership to implement to increase success in government contract performance. The information fills gaps in leadership education, provide business leaders and managers with

information from industry practitioners desiring to participate in government contracting opportunities, and contribute to the limited empirical literature on leadership and contract performance measurement. As a business topic in its infancy, it is anticipated that continued research would increase scholarly insight, and add to the body of knowledge for small businesses.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

Dear Name Will Be Inserted Here,

My name is Tamara Williams and I am currently a doctoral student at Walden University. I am investigating strategies small business leaders use to obtain positive performance ratings in government contracting by understanding at least 20 small business leaders experiences.

I would greatly appreciate your participation.

This would involve completing a demographic questionnaire, which will take about 10 minutes and participate in an interview, which would take about 45 minutes in a private meeting room at the location of your choosing most convenient for you. Interviews will be conducted at a time that is convenient for you.

The information from the demographic questionnaire and interviews will be kept strictly confidential and no one who participates will be identified in any of the study's report that I prepare.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to email me at xxxxxx.xxxxxxxxxx@waldenu.edu or give me a call at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

If you are interested in participating in the study and/or would like to recommend another small business leader located within 30 miles of Washington, DC, with a favorable performance rating on at least three government contracting opportunity to be a participant in this study, please complete the questions below in a reply email to me.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and assistance with my research project.

Sincerely,
Tamara Williams

If you are interested in participating in the study, please complete the questions below in a reply email to me at xxxxxx.xxxxxxxxxx@waldenu.edu:

1. What is your name?
2. What is your company's socioeconomic status? (Please select by bolding your answer)
 - a. Small Business
 - b. 8a
 - c. Women-Owned
 - d. Veteran Owned Small Business
 - e. Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business
 - f. HUB Zone Small business

g. Alaskan Native

h. Other _____

3. What is your contact information?

Appendix B: National Institutes of Health Certificate



Appendix C: Classification Questionnaire

Directions: Please answer the following classification questions

1. Are you registered in Fedbizops? _____
2. Are you registered in System for Award Management? _____
3. How many CPARS ratings has your company received?
 - a. 0
 - b. 1-5
 - c. 5-10
 - d. More than 10
4. What NAICS code have you used when providing supplies/services to the Government? _____
5. Select the socioeconomic category of your company (you may select more than one)
 - a. Small Business
 - b. 8a
 - c. Women-Owned
 - d. Veteran Owned Small Business
 - e. Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business
 - f. HUB Zone Small business
 - g. Alaskan Native
 - h. Other _____
6. How would you define success?

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Introduction

- Welcome participant and introduce myself.
- Explain the general purpose of the interview and why the participant was chosen.
- Discuss the purpose and process of interview.
- Explain the presence and purpose of the recording equipment.
- Outline general ground rules and interview guidelines such as being prepared for the interviewer to interrupt to assure that all the topics can be covered.
- Review break schedule and where the restrooms are located.
- Address the assurance of confidentiality.
- Inform the participant that information discussed is going to be analyzed as a whole and participant's name will not be used in any analysis of the interview.

Discussion Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive research study is to bridge gaps in information by exploring strategies some small business leaders use to achieve positive performance ratings in government contracting by interviewing at least 20 small business leaders located within 30 miles of Washington, DC, with a favorable performance rating on at least three government contracting opportunity.

Discussion Guidelines

Interviewer will explain:

Please respond directly to the questions and if you don't understand the question, please let me know. I am here to ask questions, listen, and answer any questions you

might have. If we seem to get stuck on a topic, I may interrupt you. I will keep your identity, participation, and remarks private. Please speak openly and honestly. This session will be tape recorded because I do not want to miss any comments.

General Instructions

When responding to questions that will be asked of you in the interview, please exclude all identifying information, such as your name and names of other parties. Your identity will be kept confidential and any information that will permit identification will be removed from the analysis.

Interview Questions

Q1: What leadership strategies do you find most effective for achieving positive performance ratings in government contracts?

Q2: What leadership behaviors do leaders/managers employ that are attributes to positive performance ratings in government contracts?

Q3: How do these attributes influence contract performance ratings?

Q4: How does the contractor–government relationship impede or affect performance ratings?

Q5: What are the impediments or obstacles that small business leaders face when performing in government contracts?

Q6: What resources do business leaders use to assist in achieving positive performance ratings in government contracts?

Q7: What restrictions, if any, discourage small business representatives from achieving positive performance ratings in government contracting opportunities?

Q8: What additional information can you provide to improve leadership effectiveness in small businesses' contracting performance?

Q9: What programs and information will help leaders of small businesses seeking to improve performance ratings in government contracts?

Q10: What programs or information do you suggest to leaders of small businesses seeking to obtain government-contracting opportunities?

Conclusion

- Discuss the transcription review process with participant, ask and answer any questions, and thank the participant for his or her time.