

2017

# Strategies Small Business Owners Use for Long-Term Existence

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Sherman Humphrey

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2017

Abstract

Strategies Small Business Owners Use for Long-Term Existence

by

Sherman E. Humphrey Jr.

MAOM, Ashford University, 2012

BS, Simpson University, 2010

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

September 2017

## Abstract

More than 90 of every 100 new businesses fail within 5 years. The need to explore ongoing strategies that provide low-cost alternatives can prove invaluable to cash-strapped new business owners. Exploration of relationships among a group of stakeholders essential to business success provided data in this case study. Those stakeholders include the owner, the customer service personnel and the consumer. Without the consumer, all other business activities would cease to be necessary. Five business owners and five employees from Redding, California participated in 2 separate focus group interviews. The conceptual framework for this case study was to explore the specific business problem, the lack of low-cost strategic resources, and initiatives to facilitate continued existence of new small businesses. The focus group interviews were conducted in 2 separate settings using notes and Audacity voice recordings. Through personal notes and the use of NVivo 11 data was disseminated and provided rich information on at least four themes. Major themes were customer retention, creating teamwork, building relationships, and communication to create business sustainability. Having communities in which businesses thrive allows for greater job opportunities and increased community revenue. The impact of empty storefronts in cities throughout America and the loss of community identity necessitate the need for the strategist to continue to attempt to provide resources and strategies to business owners everywhere. The social change impact occurs when SBOs who recognize their business provides structure to the community seek out ways to increase sustainability.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work to my wife (Sandra Humphrey) who has been a constant strength to me throughout this process. She continues to be the love of my life and has been with me every step of the way. I also would like to thank my Lord and Savior for his strength and ever-present help! Without these two constants in my life, this would not have been possible.

## Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge and thank my Chair Dr. Robert Miller who is a facilitator of men. He has encouraged and offered guidance with the patience of Job, thank you, sir! I also would like to thank my second chair Dr. Carrol Ann Faint who provided detailed information on needed changes and encouragement that was priceless to me. Thank you, both for your care of me! To Dr. Hockin who I am sure must have shaken his head a time or two, thank you for your patience.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small business owners (SBOs) provide 65% of all jobs in the United States (Allen, Ericksen, & Collins, 2013). Nearly 50% of jobs gained by new start-ups suffer because 86% of new businesses started today will close within a year, and in most cases, will cease to exist within 5 years (Haltiwanger, Jarmin, & Miranda, 2013). Small business owners fail to reach the 5-year sustainability mark because of a lack of low-cost strategic resources (Haltiwanger et al., 2013). Stakeholders such as customer service personnel and consumers whose retention provides a significant component in small business success need addressing (Shah, Kumar, & Kim, 2014). Exploring the connection between low-cost strategic resources to increase consumer retention and creating long-term survivability for small business entrepreneurs provided the purpose of this study.

### **Background of the Problem**

SBOs lack the strategies to motivate work performance for sustained commercial success (Haltiwanger et al. 2013). Customer retention suffers due to lack of consumer loyalty because customer service personnel often lack the motivation to build meaningful customer relationships (Braun, Schweidel, & Stein, 2015). Current business owners often fail to scan work environments and provide needed leadership to facilitate sustained business success (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). SBOs often seem unsuccessful in developing strategic environments sensitive to customer retention (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Business owners fail to realize the value customer service personnel (CSPs) bring to the long-term existence of their companies (Shadid & Azhar, 2013). SBOs need new

ideas and innovation to provide sustainability, an element that remains incomplete and unaddressed within employee motivation and productivity (McEdwards, 2014). Owners continue to struggle with CSPs role in developing organizational sustainability (Shahid & Azhar, 2013; Siu, Zhang, & Yau, 2013). Efforts to increase worker motivation and develop sustainable business strategies to retain needed customer loyalty continue to suffer from small business owner's inability adequately to address workplace motivation (Mohammed, Bhatti, Jariko, & Zehri, 2013). As small business failure continues above 85% (Hopkins, Lipin, & Whitham, 2014) strategies connecting employees to ongoing customer retention are almost non-existent. Creating strategies to increase worker motivation leading to customer retention and providing owners with significant business sustainability yielded the foundation and background for this study.

### **Problem Statement**

Eighty percent of small businesses fail in the first year, suggesting the need for new strategies and initiatives (Hopkins et al., 2014). Customer retention or habit purchasing add \$58 million a year to small business, and creates business stability, compared to; \$62 million lost when adding new customers contributing to business failure (Shah, Kumar, & Kim, 2014). The general business problem is SBOs' lack of low-cost resources to retain customers negatively affects the ability of businesses to exist. The specific business problem is some SBOs lack low-cost strategic resources and initiatives to facilitate continued existence.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore SBOs' lack of low-cost strategic resources and initiatives to facilitate continued existence. Sustained business performance motivates employees in providing increased customer retention (Shaw, Park, & Kim, 2013). The population selected for this proposed study was five SBOs and five of their employees in Redding, California. Five SBOs participated in semistructured interviews, exploring possible strategies to motivate employee performance. These five SBOs and five employees took part in separate focus group interviews and provided possible strategies to motivate employee performance. SBOs from a variety of small businesses were the focus group along with the five employees. Public documents such as web sites, company brochures, and news articles provided a second form of documentation. This study contributed to social change by providing insights into improving work performance, leading to customer retention, and increased business profit impacting local communities (Shadid & Azhar, 2013). The results of this study were intended to impact the local business environment by contributing to SBOs strategies for sustainable performance. Increasing sustainability should increase local tax revenue, provide consistent local jobs, and create positive environmental impacts on local economies.

### **Nature of the Study**

I used the qualitative method for this study. The qualitative method allowed for the exploring of the specific business problem of SBOs and their lack of low-cost strategic resources to facilitate continued existence. McNulty, Zattoni, & Douglas (2013)

suggested the defining characteristics of qualitative research consider the natural settings, data collection methods, and some respondents. The quantitative and mixed methods approaches would have encumbered the process and inhibited strategies for new business owners by limiting new knowledge to the presence or absence of a new phenomenon. Quantitative research is the systematic evidenced-based examination of distinguishable phenomena via statistical, mathematical or computational techniques (Yin, 2014). The mixed methods approach integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze data creating a lengthy discovery process (Johnson, 2015). The case study design provided analytical generalization using the corroborating information to modify, reject, or advance new ideas and concepts (Yin, 2014).

Research regarding the natural settings provided data for this case study design to transform old institutionalized forms of organizational change (McNulty et al., 2013). The intensified scope of the case study allows for a closer exploration of links as in determining natural results of strategic business decisions (Kermani, 2013). The ability to somewhat focus on a small number of cases made the case study the desired design. Dresch, Lacerda, and Cauchick (2015) suggested the case study enables exploration of interactions among groups such as CEOs, employees, and customers. Other designs such as phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and narrative research do not provide the flexibility of a case study (Yin, 2014). Johnson (2015) suggested a pragmatic method in qualitative case studies was the process of interviewing. Interviewing collects data on individual's opinions, attitudes, life experiences, and behaviors. Interviews provide a face-to-face interaction to assist in gaining an understanding of what one believes, how

one behaves, and what one values. Phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and narrative research either encumber the process or do not allow for the desired richness to present this case, thus the choice of a case study.

### **Research Question**

The central research question was: What specific low-cost strategic resources and initiatives can SBOs engage in to facilitate continued existence?

Participants shall give written consent; the following is the written consent form.

### **Letter of Consent**

#### **Confidentiality Agreement Invitation to Participate in a Research Study**

If you are between 18 and 100 years old and you currently own or work for a new small business that is more than five years old, I would like to invite you to participate in my doctoral research study. *Strategies SBOs Use for Long-Term Existence*. Your participation collectively represents a broad range of individuals critical to small business success. The message that follows is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

I, Sherman Humphrey, a Doctoral Candidate at Walden University, am conducting this study. I ask that you will openly answer the questions to assist in providing future benefits to other SBOs and their employees.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of low-cost strategies that can assist in an increase of sustainable business performance for SBOs.

#### **Procedures:**

I will be using a voice recording device to provide a reliable transcription of the data collected during the interview. Your participation is voluntary and focus group participants will receive a follow-up transcription of what they have said to provide member checking and accuracy of the information they have provided.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision whether or not you want to be in the study. No one at your place of work will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study, you may stop at any time. Remember that to protect your name, address, or contact information; you will be assigned a number to maintain privacy, except myself and members of the focus group.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The risks associated with this study are minimal in that you will be asked to volunteer at least 30-45 minutes to complete this focus-group interview. The information gathered in this focus-group interview may help improve small business success by understanding the strategies successful small business owner employ. While I do not anticipate any problems, should the need arise for professional counseling, referral to local psychological counselors provided at participants expense, and free online services at <http://www.elderwisdomcircle.org>.

**Compensation:**

I will provide a \$5 Starbucks card as compensation for all who complete participation in this study. Starbucks card will be provided at the end of the collection of focus group interviews.

**Confidentiality:**

Any information you provide will be kept completely confidential. I will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Additionally, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study. While I as the researcher do not anticipate any such action, the normal reporting of any such information about criminal activity or life threatening abuse will be reported to the authorities. I ask all participants to keep what is discussed during focus group interviews confidential.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now by replying to this invitation. Or if you have questions later, you may contact me via phone (530) 941-5355 or email GOSPELGUN59@GMAIL.COM. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 3121210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 02-07-17-0394823, and it expires February 6, 2018. For your records, if you would like a copy of your consent form, I will provide a photocopy to you.

**Statement of Consent:**

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

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Print name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Interview Questions**

1. In what type of business are you employed?
2. What or who is the first priority of your business?
3. What employee performance strategies increase customer retention?
4. How do these strategies improve customer retention?
5. What impact does employee motivation have on business success?
6. What low cost strategies or resources have improved your performance?
7. Who do you consider as the primary stakeholders in your business?
8. What challenges do you encounter in the continued existence of your business?
9. What strategies continue to provide improved work performance and lead to customer retention for your business?
10. What additional information can you provide to help me understand business success?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this case study was to explore the specific business problem, the lack of low-cost strategic resources, and initiatives to facilitate continued existence. Stakeholder theorists explore strategies to motivate, create retention, and

improve profitability (Verbeke & Tung, 2013). Doh and Quigley (2014) suggested stakeholder theory adds moral and ethical considerations to provide communications among varying groups of stakeholders. Stakeholders include customers, employees, governments, investors, local communities, partners, private organizations, regulatory authorities, and suppliers (Doh & Quigley, 2014). SBOs who address multiple groups of stakeholders can increase sustainability. Sustainability increases through improved work performance (Karakas, Sarigollu, & Manisaligil, 2013), leading to increased customer retention (Verbeke & Tung, 2013) and knowledge needed to succeed (Schwepker & Schultz, 2015).

Understanding what matters when making business decisions that create sustainability is an essential element of stakeholder theory (Schaupp & Bélanger, 2014). When the needs of the *primary stakeholder* are comprehended; stakeholder theory can then provide a basis for developing effective long-term sustainability planning (Martelo, Carmen, Castro, & Cepeda-Carrion, 2013). Understanding that over 50% of small business start-ups fail within 5 years provides a foundation for discovery. Stakeholder theory can best address the discovery of low-cost strategies by collecting personal lived experiences (Hopkins et al., 2014; Kumar, Bhagwat, & Xi, 2015). Therefore, an effort was made to collect personal lived experiences of SBOs and their employees. Customer service personnel connected to what I consider the most valuable of all stakeholders, the consumer.

The small business owner seeking sustainability might need strategies that identify relevant stakeholders. Stakeholders can represent identified customers who,

when retained, can provide for sustained business practice. The influence customer service personnel (CSP) pose to small business success enhances the need to identify strategic initiatives SBOs can apply to create sustainability.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Benevolent leadership:* Benevolent leadership is leadership rooted in ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, positive engagement, and community responsiveness (Karakas et al., 2013).

*Customer retention:* Customer retention provides superior service to retain SBOs consumers and maintain customer loyalty (Tatikonda, 2013).

*Employee value:* Employee value is the contributions of the employee in providing business success, measured in the effect on culture, beliefs, behaviors, and values that contribute to business success (Potocan, Mulej, & Nedelko, 2013).

*Environmental scanning:* Environmental scanning means the political, environmental, social-cultural, and technical aspects of the business: providing strategies for organizational development and change (Cheng, Kadir, & Bohari, 2014).

*Motivated work performance:* Motivated work performance provides a core set of values, beliefs, and ideas expressed through organizational culture and exhibited by a set of committed human resource practices (Allen et al., 2013).

*Servant leadership:* Leadership effectiveness that emphasizes moral, emotional, and tacit relational behaviors that create ethical organizational climates that moderate relationships (Liden, Wayne, Chenwei, & Meuser 2014).

*Sustainable strategies:* Sustainable strategies include strategic operations such as market and non-market processes for long-term business success (Mirocha, Bents, Labrosse, & Rietow, 2013).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are; information assumed true but without evidence; first, I assumed all participants would answer the questions honestly. Second, I assumed that the case study provides the best approach for gaining the desired information. Third, I made the assumption that SBOs desire low-cost strategic initiatives to provide business sustainability. Developing strategies for business success continues as a primary focus of organizational development (OD) and organizational change (OC). This study explored possible strategies SBOs may employ to facilitate sustained business performance. I as a researcher sought to provide SBOs with possible resources and initiatives that connect customer retention, and employee motivation to sustained business performance. The connection between the customer and employee facilitates strategies employed by SBOs to create sustained business performance (Martelo et al. 2013). The data collected, using a semistructured technique with at least five SBOs and at least five employees, provided only a small picture and is assumed to offer insight into possible long-term solutions to small business sustainability. I assumed all participants would provide accurate and truthful answers to interview questions. The use of semistructured interviews, documents, and member checking provided in-depth responses for analysis.

**Limitations**

Limitations are facts and information outside of one's control. The first limitation was my inability to generalize results to all organizations. The second limitation was my inability to control or predict the participants' capacity to recall strategies during the interview process. The third limitation was the size of the case study and the limited geographic area the study encompassed. As the clinician, I provided possible strategies SBOs may employ in providing long-term sustainability to local communities. Through focus group interviews, I hoped to obtain possible strategic initiatives valuable in facilitating sustained business performance. I identified strategies as well as, potential gaps in valuing the employee's contribution to ongoing, sustained business performance.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are the boundaries or restrictions used to focus the case study (Yin, 2014). First, I used only five SBOs who have been in business from Redding, California and five of their employees to provide separate focus group interviews. Second, the study consisted of only small business leaders and employees who had been in business 5 years or more. Third, I provided a small incentive of a \$5 Starbucks card to assist in maintaining participant honesty. The use of only five small business leaders and their employees who had been in business 5 years assisted in setting the boundaries and restrictions of the case study and the use of a \$5 Starbucks card helped to ensure honesty.

## **Significance of the Study**

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

This study contributes best to business practice by informing business leaders on how to sustain their businesses using low- cost strategies and resources. Studies on branding, sustainability, management styles and more have failed to focus on the operations and relationships between the primary stakeholder, “the customer,” and the CSP. Sustainability today is more than just adding profit to the company (Kumar et al., 2015). SBOs seeking ways to provide long-term existence to business should begin by focusing on the customer (Kumar et al., 2015). Dawkins (2014) suggested positive sustainability begins by addressing the primary stakeholder. The goal of this study was to provide new low-cost resources to encourage customer retention and provide employees with greater job satisfaction leading to increased job performance. This study contributes to the implementation of stakeholder business planning by providing effective, sustainable, low-cost strategies to new SBOs.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The proposed study establishes a hierarchy of stakeholders leading to effective environmental, economic and social sustainability planning. Dawkins (2014) proposed understanding how differing stakeholders react to given situations can allow for more deliberate plans and actions to govern small business sustainability and create greater stakeholder buy-in. For example, when personnel sense their value they in turn value the consumer leading to increased sustainability (Allen et al., 2013). The buy-in leads to

organizational planning that provides long-term sustainability measures connecting the customers with CSP.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The specific business problem was some SBOs lack low-cost strategies and initiatives to facilitate sustained business performance. Small businesses make up the majority of job creation each year (Allen et al., 2013). Small business failure each year exceeds 50%, and of 100 new start-ups, only seven survive more than five years (Hopkins et al. 2014). Failure of these small businesses leads to job loss and loss of federal, state and local tax revenue. More than 50% of jobs each year created by small business start-ups get lost by those going out of business (Hopkins et al., 2014), creating negative impacts on communities (Dawkins, 2014). The current literature includes differing management approaches that introduce strategies that can prove costly to SBOs (Duval-Couetil, 2013). The high cost of implementation creates resistance from SBOs already stretched financially. However, low-cost strategies and initiatives to properly identify primary stakeholders and the value they provide seem vague. Primary stakeholders include consumers and customer service personnel (Verbeke & Tung, 2013). The employee can be pivotal in building customer retention aiding in building business sustainability (Chun-Juei, Chong-Wen, & Conley, 2015). Intimidation of employees and misunderstanding their value underestimates their significant role in business failure (Akella & Jordan, 2013). An upside-down management approach leads to facilitation instead of intimidation (Wertz, 2013). Whisnant and Khasawneh (2014) indicated valuing the employee using holistic models such as servant leadership creates

empowerment and leads to customer retention. The fundamental goal of business is meeting the demands of shareholders gained through the acquisition of customers (Cun-Juei et al., 2015). Stakeholder theory and servant leadership in practice measures what consumers want using flexible bottom-up approaches and empower tacit knowledge mining from personnel leading to improved sustainability (Schwepker & Schultz, 2015). Organizations having loyalty to employees and consumers have the ability to frame-the-game and build around the community (Martelo et al. 2013; Paharia, Avery, & Keinan, 2014). This literature review provides understanding in valuing frontline personnel who have direct contact with consumers and provides possible low-cost business strategies for SBOs' who value their stakeholders and who desire sustainability.

The literature review incorporates 107 peer-reviewed references; 95 or 88% of the sources are peer-reviewed and were published within the last 5 years. Search engines such as Business Source Complete, Emerald Management, SAGE Publishing, and ABI/Inform Complete were used extensively to provide a background on small business development. SBOs needing low-cost strategic initiatives lack access to resources to create long-term business success. Discovering possible explanations for the lack of small business success provided the strategy for this literature exploration.

Consumers, employees, and management provide a core group of stakeholders that assist in creating business sustainability (Harrison & Wicks, 2013). Leaders and their style of management can influence employee behavior, environments, and increase employee value (Braun, Schweidel, & Stein, 2015). The literature on sustained business practices includes stakeholder theory, customer retention, servant leadership, and

employee value. Small business practices also include environmental scanning, motivated work performance, and suggest possible low-cost strategies to increase business longevity. The literature review concludes with an overview of the information and a reason for why this study is needed.

### **Stakeholder Theory**

Alvarez, Moreno, and Mataix (2013) defined stakeholder groups into two categories primary and secondary, Primary stakeholders engage in direct trade and economic transaction. Secondary stakeholders represent those the company indirectly affects through economic transactions and trade. Alvarez et al. (2013) suggested primary stakeholders are those needed by the organization to survive. CSR organizations connect with both sets of stakeholders in varying ways to provide ongoing sustainability for the company. Stakeholders provide connections through a series of networks affecting environmental, economic, and social activities on a global and local basis. Alvarez et al. (2013) indicated strong stakeholder relationships could help perform essential functions in successful sustainability efforts. The approach allows for corporate retention management (a systematic effort encouraging employee lifetime loyalty) (CRM) to work from a posture of integrated sustainability instead of a defensive posture. Valuing the stakeholder provides a sharing or building of joint value creation. Together stakeholders provide ideas for innovation, and CSP provide access to innovative voices and ideas. Alvarez et al. (2013) proposed using an analytical hierarchy process (AHP) to value stakeholder contributions to innovations.

The customer provides valuable information that fills both the primary and secondary component in stakeholder sustainability management. One must understand the pivotal role primary stakeholders provide and consider the customer as the primary stakeholder, which can lead to hierarchy development. The consumer in touch with Customer Service Personnel can provide critical information on issues affecting sustainability. AHP approaches to stakeholder theory allow for mathematical measurement of outcomes and possible sustainable scenarios and assists in categorizing stakeholder value (Alvarez et al., 2013). Valuing stakeholder contributions to long-term sustainability provides a needed foundation to build a stakeholder hierarchy that can prove critical to long-term existence. Adopting such a model can allow for a more refined and manageable approach to sustainability efforts. Future research can provide critical data and enhanced learning and practices in ongoing profitability.

Bradford, Earp, and Williams (2014) indicated the top three sustainable initiatives most desired by stakeholders, stewardship, society, and community development. Community development a belief by CSP and consumers the business owes the local community dew benevolence in sustainability initiatives. Bradford et al. (2014) suggested sustainability as a three-legged stool consisting of social, environmental, and economic initiatives. Bradford et al., (2014) suggested one sustainability element agreed upon by stakeholders was the importance of managing risk in products. Stakeholders believed employee welfare and development were essential through training and communication and proved essential to sustainability. The overall findings suggested individuals who discern companies exhibiting these characteristics were more likely to

purchase goods from those companies (Bradford et al., 2014). Sustainability is still an issue in infancy, and further evaluation is needed to develop set standards. Ongoing research and efforts to improve sustainability could prove effective if greater buy-in occurred. The need for further examination suggests sustainability is still in a state of flux. Defining sustainability proves elusive, and the need to explore further suggests ongoing research initiatives. Although elusive, the suggestion here is stakeholders have value and approach sustainability differently than corporate leaders. Leaders who facilitate efforts in extracting ideas regarding innovation and new work procedures should add to competency leadership in their fields of expertise (Taneja & Toombs, 2014).

Calton, Werbane, Hartman, and Bevan (2013) proposed capturing markets instead of creating new social ventures. Instead of corporate greed driving business solutions, moral imagination (a duty or obligation to communities) creates new product ideas and usage to resolve societal sustainability. The moral imagination process creates value among varying stakeholders who have differing objectives and brings them together to achieve shared value. The goal of an imaginative moral process is to create business sustainability. Creating such opportunities means developing social networks, and creating trust within groups of community stakeholders. The effort to develop strategic resources and strategies begins by moving the center of change off of the organization and onto the community of stakeholders. The removal of traditional systems thinking is essential in utilizing the imaginative moral resource and effectively meeting market segment demands. Reframing new ideas into the word innovation instead of the word

change can lead to greater work performance when personnel sense improved work or innovation changes others' lives (Calton et al., 2013). In the same way changing the way organizations define and think about change can lead to greater innovation and new ideas that make better lives for the entire community in which the small business exists. Future efforts will change the way organizations contemplate the less fortunate and shift the moral point of view to sustainable efforts such as improved living and working conditions.

Some organizations discounts stakeholders who have minimal capital; such organizations fail to reach those who can contribute to ongoing sustainability (Calton et al., 2013). Stakeholders on limited income provide organizations with unique opportunities to provide community products and eliminate poverty. Building partnerships at the lower end of the global pyramid could provide a new opportunity for social as well as economic sustainability.

Carlton and Downs (2014) suggested the valuing of stakeholders through financial reports could help change the focus of corporate trustee duties. Carlton and Downs also proposed three criteria to establish a firm's value of the stakeholder (SV). Identifying corporate concern for stakeholders, assessing stakeholder concerns, and building those concerns into a corporate financial model identified through accounting practice forms *stakeholder value*. Since past corporate responsibility efforts have focused on maximizing shareholder profit, the measurement of SV through accounting practices allows for the identification of shareholder maximization. Carlton and Downs (2014) indicated stakeholder value as irrefutable benefits to the firm. Carlton and Downs also

suggested the stakeholder model values employees, customers, the environment and corporate citizenship. Carlon and Downs also indicated internal stakeholders do talk about CSR activities as internal stakeholders they gain an understanding of operational goals and routines. Carlon and Downs further indicated having a valid accounting process assist in establishing the value stakeholders provide to the shareholder. Some corporations established as non-profits could still benefit by identifying major contributors or stakeholders with greater value (such as the consumer) in connection with business longevity. The identity of primary groups of stakeholders needed for company survival and secondary stakeholder groups who draw upon the resources of the company can prove invaluable.

Categorizing stakeholders into differing groups such as primary and secondary assist in establishing the hierarchy, I have described. Hierarchy addresses those who add the most value to the company and create sustainability. Addressing the primary stakeholder first allows for ideas that change product offerings, company performance and production activities to increase profits. Carlon and Downs (2014) identified SV as irrefutable; the need to address SV can prove beneficial to organizational sustainability. Suggesting two categories of stakeholder, primary and secondary lays a foundation for exploring ways to build a stakeholder hierarchy. Once established those stakeholders most valuable to a firm's continued existence can have recognition in building longevity. Sustained business practice begins by addressing the most critical stakeholder the consumer (Carlon & Downs, 2014).

## **Sustained Business Strategies**

Sustained business strategies begin with customer retention. Customer retention begins by providing superior service to retain consumers and maintain customer loyalty (Tatikonda, 2013). To provide superior service, an understanding of consumer needs and expectations provides an essential component in organizational success. Organizational success is measured by the consumer when organizational personnel provide service to reach sustained outcomes. Understanding how to address customer concerns in the context of organizational sustainability becomes paramount. Chun-Juei, Chong-Wen, and Conley (2015) suggested sustainability builds upon consumer's ideas and expectations. These ideas and expectations of the consumer shape organizational behaviors that cross cultural and institutional mission statements to provide ongoing customer loyalty. Understanding, the consumers' needs is achieved through sensitive personnel in direct contact, via the Internet or in person that can define and meet consumer concerns (Weber, Thomas, & Stephens, 2015). Chun-Juei et al. (2015) proposed building successful sustainability relies on the development of services sensitive to meeting customers' ongoing needs and expectations.

**Measuring consumers.** Epstein and Buhovac (2014) illustrated what people were willing to pay (WTP), and what people were willing to accept (WTA) and provided tools for assessing and measuring new ideas and their economic impacts. Martelo et al. (2013) suggested brand equity lies in the minds of the consumer. The control over stakeholder groups lies with the power of the CEO (Shaari, Areni, Grant, & Miller, 2014). The suggestion here is about the value of individual stakeholders and the possible

function they perform in creating sustainability. Ellis and Keys, (2015) proposed the shareholder as the most valuable asset, but without the consumer the company would cease to exist. Surroca, Tribo, and Zahra (2013) suggested confirmation of marketing strategy through repeated purchasing of goods from stakeholders provided legitimacy to corporate activities on retention. Therefore, the primary stakeholder becomes the customer, the most valued asset of any company. The customer most likely is in contact with the second most valued stakeholder, the front-line personnel CSPs. Retrieving the knowledge then of the employee becomes valuable since they have direct interactions with the primary stakeholders. Assarlind and Gremyr (2014) indicated employers could increase personnel service performance by valuing the work life of the individual worker. Businesses like Google, who provide lunch, time for doctors' appointments and more list among the top 100 companies to work for in the world. Mirocha et al. (2013) proposed developing a 360 feedback loop (a communication tool that allows feedback of information) where learning, firm culture, ethical, and moral corporate social responsibility enhances business outcomes and provides a base to begin engaging CSPs. Servant leaders use tools such as learning, firm culture, ethical, and moral corporate social responsibility for more positive organizational outcomes rather than bottom lines to build CSP relationships. Assarlind and Gremyr (2014) suggested a company's value in intangible assets such as employee relationships, expertise, intellectual property, and business processes, outweighs its value in inventory, factory, and receivables. The goal is to provide initiative and strategies SBOs can easily assimilate into practice for success. Homburg, Stierl, and Bornemann (2013) proposed examining past small businesses

performance to build on new ideas. The past failure of 80% of all small businesses' then calls for a change in the way leaders approach sustainability and longevity. Servant leadership provides flexibility in meeting such organizational outcomes essential in early stage development.

**Early stage development.** Zolin, Kuckertz, and Kuatonen (2011) indicated the use of individuals who had strong ties to the business owner have good and bad consequence. Good for early stable positioning of business strength, but poor when the knowledge of the individual fails to keep pace with growing business demands and must be let go. I counter the value of ongoing business education and employee development can counteract those deficits. When SBOs are aware from the beginning what areas need improvement learning environments can counteract the lack of knowledge (Glaub, Frese, Fisher, & Hoppe, 2014). Dullemond, van Gameren, and van Solingen (2014) suggested trust between consumer and CSPs provide a foundation to build sustained customer loyalty and retention. The success of any program will need buy-in from those in charge who can facilitate cooperation among the stakeholders. Dawkins (2014) proposed a more pragmatic engagement into acceptable stakeholder communications the notion that allowing for differing voices to have an audience provides the beginning for participation. Recognizing the importance of stakeholder input should drive efforts in addressing legitimate concerns. Dawkins (2014) suggested current corporate engagement is inadequate and does not readily appear in stakeholder theory. Absent from corporate engagement; a list or outline of actions needed by the corporation to engage the stakeholder is needed. Dawkins (2014) indicated corporations fail to fulfill obligations

and deliver stakeholder value. Stakeholder value possibly found using tenets of good-faith found in many labor laws.

Small business leaders who acknowledge stakeholder value hear the voice of those silent in many corporate decisions. Engagement of the stakeholder has to adopt methods by which leaders can engage without sensing a lack of control. The definition of leadership from a stakeholder perspective should be one of facilitation. The ability to create a means of respect in communicating provides an example of how good-faith in stakeholder engagement works. The process allows opposing voices to negotiate valuable points of interest and come to a consensus. Consensus creates needed buy-in and assists in unanimous work performance and sustainable outcomes. Dullemond et al. (2014) proposed meeting the challenge of providing workplaces where teams can find success means providing the needed tools for success. Leadership develops work performance and increases customer retention and begins with leadership styles that facilitate sustainability.

### **Servant Leadership**

The basic goal of most businesses is the acquisition and retention of customers to meet shareholder needs (Siu et al., 2013). Carlon and Downs (2014) suggested leadership styles such as LMX (Leader-member exchange) increased work performance, profitability, and trust. However, *Benevolent Leadership* rooted in ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, positive engagement, and community responsiveness fits more into a *servant leadership* style (Karakas et al., 2013). The description of virtue ethics provides another viewpoint that can characterize servant leadership as a style suited to lead in the

transformation of the business pyramid (Chakrabarty & Erin Bass, 2015). The pyramid where information once flowed completely downstream now needs knowledge and new ideas to flow upward. Ideas and information collected from stakeholders especially essential to small business survival the consumer.

Carter and Baghurst (2014) suggested a servant leadership style empowered and facilitated worker involvement and increased customer retention and earnings. Servant leadership's effectiveness emphasizes moral, emotional, and tacit relational behaviors (Liden et al. 2014). Ethical behavior creates ethical organizational climates that moderate these relationships (Liden et al. 2014; Washington, Sutton, & Sauser, 2014). Mittal and Dorfman (2012) indicated five characteristics guide servant leadership, egalitarianism, moral integrity, empowerment, empathy, and humility. These five characteristics dominate servant leadership across the cultures and prove significant traits and attributes in guiding others. While the strategy for long-term business success identifies stakeholders, the beginning belongs to those in charge and what new ideas they are willing to accept. Harrison and Wicks (2013) suggested there is still debate over which stakeholder is the most important, but without the consumer, all other stakeholders seem irrelevant. New business owners seeking low-cost (HR) strategies and initiatives can begin by acknowledging the two most valuable assets a company has, its employees and its customers. Leadership provides a significant role in sustained business outcomes and practice.

Choudhary, Akhtar, and Zaheer (2013) proposed *transformational leadership* had more impact on learning and thus seemed more effective than *servant leadership*.

Choudhary et al. further suggested both concepts of leadership had minimal similarities and the main differences were the focus on the leader. I would suggest both leadership styles are similar in many ways including concern for others, empowerment, the building of trust and more. Choudhary et al. (2013) analyzed both leadership styles based on learning outcomes failing to consider such outcomes as profit, turnover, personnel performance, and sustained outcomes. The study also dominated by male respondents could have skewed the results as well. Choudhary et al. (2013) concluded influencing followers both transformational and servant leadership styles, encourage, empower and allow for 360 feedback.

Christensen, Mackey, and Whetten (2014) suggested leadership provides a significant role in *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)*. While the business leader provides plans and models, CSR provides the context within which those decisions get made. Corporate Social Responsibility is a community-based function of corporate leadership affecting all the internal and external stakeholders with regards to financial, environmental, firm diversity and fair treatment of employees. Christensen et al. (2014) proposed while CSR addresses the way organizations define financial, social, economic and environmental concerns of the company. The CSP within these organizations carry out CSR mandates that need addressing. Christensen et al. (2014) indicated while CSR has received much press, the addressing of specific individuals or personnel within the organization has failed inadequacy. Christensen et al. (2014) suggested consideration of a servant leadership style that addresses the concerns of organizational sustainability. Christensen et al. also proposed three categories needed to address, individual leader

skills, processes, and theories on shared or distributed leadership. Christensen et al. (2014) suggested servant leaders focus on operating a purposeful and responsible business instead of just for profits. The contribution by individual personnel provides value in long-term organizational sustainability and value.

### **Employee Value**

Employee value values the contributions of the employee to provide business success. Business success measured in the effect on culture, belief, behavior, and values that contribute to business success (Potocan, Mulej, & Nedelko, 2013). Servant leadership draws out tacit knowledge and facilitates increased work performance and profitable business outcomes (Aritz & Walker, 2014). Unlike many current management styles that can lead to failure for SBOs valuing an employee's contribution increases business performance (Braun, Schweidel, & Stein, 2015).

**Failure.** Poor management styles induce intimidation, humiliation, criticism, and fear, significant characteristics in the creating of poor performance in frontline personnel (Akella & Jordan, 2013). Akella and Jordon (2013) suggested a hostile work environment characterizes bullying. Liu, Hu, and Cheng (2015) suggested servant leaders serve to empower and facilitate employees. In cultures where the employee has lifelong value commitments to work still exist (Chang, Wang, & Huang, 2013). The need for an increased Human Resource (HR) practice that values the employee continues to plague SBOs needing strategies for prolonged sustainability (Allen et al., 2013). Servant leadership and HR practices valuing the employee have increased work performance and enhance organizational effectiveness (Karakas et al., 2013). Kaifeng, Lepak, Jia, and

Baer (2012) suggested valuing human capital is essential to business success. For this reason, an exploration of successful actions and strategies provides the foundation for this qualitative case study.

**Valuing.** Svarer (2011) explored sanctions and unemployment insurance benefits to determine the function poor pay and lack of value had on worker motivation. Svarer (2011) discovered engagement and rewards provided motivation for improved work performance, but the effects had a short life. Harcourt, Hannay, and Lam (2013) suggested unemployment occurred for three reasons, poor performance, misconduct, and redundancy. Two of the three performances and misconduct addressed through a *bottom-up* approach could reduce business cost and increase profitability. Business leaders known to create business values based on social strategies provide ongoing employment and value to the employee and show increased profits (Homburg et al., 2013; Kawamura, 2013). Hopkins, Mallette, and Hopkins (2013) described valuing the employee as self-empowerment that provides for strategic renewal. Schwepker and Schultz (2015) suggested valuing the employee, and their commitment increases customer retention and earnings. Ya-Ling and Shari (2013) indicated satisfied customers increase profits. Holistic management styles such as servant leadership empower the employee and increase performance. Eisenbeib and Brodbeck (2014) suggested ethical leadership defined by personal action in relationships, leading by example, and 360 communications best described moral leadership qualities or characteristics. Su (2014) contended ethical management increased and encouraged intellectual exchange and increased profitability. Servant leadership then provides a more holistic model where ethical leadership seems

more readily on display. Servant leadership then scans the environment for solutions and positive outcomes that build longevity.

Carlson and Downs (2014) suggested the valuing of stakeholders through financial reports could help change the focus of corporate trustee duties. Carlson and Downs further suggested three criteria to establish a firm's value of the stakeholder (SV). Stakeholder Value begins identifying corporate concern for stakeholders, assessment of stakeholder concerns, and building those concerns into a corporate financial model identified through accounting practice. Carlson and Downs (2014) suggested stakeholder value as irrefutable benefits to the firm. Carlson and Downs moreover indicated stakeholder model values employees, customers, the environment and corporate citizenship. Successful stakeholder assessment or valuation achieved through environmental scanning.

### **Environmental Scanning**

Environmental scanning *defined* means to scan the political, environmental, social-cultural, and technical aspects of the business: providing strategies for Organizational Development and change (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). The ability to create organizational sustainability relies on understanding the community of consumer's, their environment and meeting their needs. Goals achieved through increased performance and environmental scanning to increase consumer sensitivity.

Bradford et al. (2014) indicated community development led the list of priorities when it came to consumer expectation. Thus, a need for organizations to continually scan for changes affecting business outcomes. The customer service personnel (CSP) in

direct contact with the consumer where changes occur then provide influence in negotiation or communication (Alin, Iorio & Taylor, 2013). Adair et al. (2013) suggested influence reshapes a person's attitudes and behaviors. Adair et al. (2013) suggested negotiation research has mainly ignored social influence on negotiation strategies. The social environment continues to add a significant component to ongoing business success where Aguinis and Glavas (2013) suggested CSR involves every structure within the business. Identification of primary stakeholders proves an essential element in creating business structures where consumer need earns acknowledgment.

Alvarez et al. (2013) defined stakeholder groups into two categories: primary stakeholders engage in direct trade and economic transaction. Secondary stakeholders represent those the company indirectly affects through the economic transaction and trade. Alvarez et al. (2013) suggested primary stakeholders are those needed by the organization to survive. Braganza, Stebbings, and Ngosi (2013) suggested Corporate Retention Plans (CRP) only work when changes occur throughout the system, not with individual resources. I would argue, the value of the individual is overlooked and misunderstood. Braganza et al. (2013) proposed the power of change lie within the network of stakeholders of which individual Customer Service Personnel (CSP) need involvement. I would again argue that a defining of a stakeholder hierarchy could provide the grounds for establishing the connections needed to formulate the consumers' needs and expectations.

Calton et al. (2013) indicated two-thirds of the world preferred companies whose sustainability efforts seemed aimed at broader community issues. The broader issues of

the community shared when consumers come into contact with service personnel in everyday face-to-face service matters. Queen (2015) identified core stakeholders for consideration (a) consumers, (b) competitors, (c) government, (d) NGOs, (e) investors, (f) supply chain partners, (g) employees, and (h) society. The entire group encompasses a list of stakeholders. This group of stakeholders persists in influencing organizational strategies including green, political, and other unique outcomes that provide sustainability to the community. Cusumano (2013) suggested a small checklist to ensure startup success they include, (a) key management personnel, (b) appealing markets, (c) persuasive new product or service, and (d) evidence of customer need. SBOs who continually scan stakeholder environments can achieve increased service performance by CSP.

### **Motivated Work Performance**

Motivated work performance organizational success stemming from a core set of values, beliefs, and ideas. Expressed by the organization through organizational culture and exhibited by a set of committed *HR practices* (Allen et al., 2013). Human Resource practices guided by servant leadership can manifest in increased performance and profit. The organizational success achieved when valuing human and social capital (Perkins, 2012). Robledo, Peterson, and Mumford (2012) suggested successful leadership developed new ideas, created innovation, and improved performance.

Many new start-ups developed out of necessity rely on cross-cultural virtual teams. El-Sofany, Alwadani, and Alwadani (2014) suggested the leadership of virtual teams required both hard and soft skills, experience and flexibility in meeting

organizational and individual team member demands. Fernandez-Feijoo, Romero, and Ruiz (2014) suggested differing stakeholders provide varying levels of influence throughout the organization. Servant leadership has the flexibility to create motivation among the varying stakeholder groups. Florea, Cheung, and Herndon (2013) suggested the employee provided the foundation for sustainable business practices. The term sustainability refers to the long-term continued ability to maintain the performance of both current and future generations. The employee provides vital internal stakeholder information leading to ideas and innovations that meet and in some cases exceeds customer and community expectations. Florea et al. (2013) suggested human capital to have a strategic value that creates enhanced work performance. The appreciation of human capital enables employees to sense the value of their contribution to the social networks connected to sustainability. Appreciation values the mindset, practices, and contributions to the employee inspiring sustained enhanced work performance. Florea et al. (2013) suggested economic sustainability provides job security, reduces financial risk while providing a living standard for personnel. Florea et al. (2013) suggested enhanced (HRM) practices increase the sustainability and longevity of the organization. Strategic sustainable initiatives can provide the small business start-up with essential tools for viability.

### **Sustainable Strategies**

Sustainable strategies include strategic operations such as market and non-market processes for long-term business success (Queen, 2015). Procedures may include strategies such as the upside-down approach, holistic management, flexibility and

building respect. All described approaches connect directly to leadership and the most effective style in which to achieve the connections needed between company and consumer.

**Upside-down approach.** The study introduces a thought of upside-down management style that emphasizes facilitation instead of intimidation in creating increased work performance (Washington et al., 2014). Through the lens of stakeholder theory, the study involves semi-structured interviews with five local business owners and five local employees. Research thus far has focused on external causes of employee dysfunction the growing trend is one of valuing employee contribution from within (Chang et al., 2013). Human resource strategies, where the employee has value, have demonstrated broad success throughout differing cultures especially in Asian cultures (Paillé, Chen, Boiral, & Jin, 2014). Shaw et al., (2013) suggest, however, that HRM belongs only to the large firms (Shaw et al., 2013). Shaw et al. (2013) used theoretical cases to exhibit how the loss of human capital affected organizational performance. Wertz (2013) indicated engineering improved work performance could increase profitability much like a *bottom-up* approach might accomplish. Workers fear unemployment and insensitive practice of pay below a living wage a more holistic approach becomes desirable.

**Holistic approach.** The Small Business Association (SBA, 2014) indicated 80% of all new businesses fail in the first 18 months. That means of 100 new start-ups only 20 will survive 18 months, and 50% of that number will fail in five years (Hopkins et al., 2014). Miska, Stahl, and Mendenhall (2013) suggested the ability to adapt to local social

and environmental conditions provided sustainability for new entrepreneurial start-ups or SBOs. The ability to engage CSPs on level footing is where the connecting of stakeholders through servant leadership begins. The process of building sustained long-term success lies in developing lasting relationships (Carter & Baghurst, 2014). Pless, Maak, and Waldman (2012) suggested stakeholders and CSR are interwoven into the relationship of stakeholders and provide a foundation for holistic management styles. Holistic management styles such as servant leadership provide needed flexibility.

**Flexibility.** Mittal and Dorfman (2012) suggested flexibility allows for adaptability in an ever-changing business climate, and that means tapping the knowledge of personnel closets to our most valuable asset the customer. Dawkins (2014) suggested bottom-up strategy as an inside-out approach known as enterprise logic, the logic that accounts for company similarities or heterogeneity. Executives and managers who engage in the bottom-up process allow for what Zhang, He, and Zhou (2013) described as the exchange of tacit knowledge. Javernick-Will (2012) suggested four factors related to knowledge sharing: resource-sharing, intrinsic motivation, global incentives, and social motivations embody significant roles in tacit knowledge exchange. Tacit knowledge exchange starts by valuing the employee directly involved with ongoing business success. SBOs will in many cases employ friends, and family members when starting out to protect themselves from losses. Building respect in the early stages of a start-up can provide significant commitment from both consumers and personnel's expectations.

**Building respect.** Scheers and Botha (2014) discovered 43% of customers from supermarkets in Africa seemed disgruntled with employee service; managers discounted

the findings ignoring customer complaints. Discounting feedback can have adverse consequence. Schwepker and Schultz (2015) indicated delayed feedback did not improve worker performance. Tebeian (2012) described an individual's tacit knowledge and work performance as two of the most valuable assets a company possessed. Ignoring or delaying feedback had a negative consequence, but if monitored through personnel, feedback provided immediate notification and response times for organizations (Schwepker & Schultz, 2015).

Access to immediate knowledge of possible problems allows for flexibility in feedback measures to counter negative threats to a new business. Most SBOs exist in small local neighborhoods. The ability to identify threats quickly through personnel in touch with local customers can allow for what Paharia et al. (2014) described as framing-the-game. Framing-the-game uses tools and conditions to alter consumer motivation in making ongoing purchasing decisions. This adaptability signals a need for managing processes that allow executives and managers to meet the changing demands. Polanyi (2012) suggested the need to think outside current models to serve the consumer, and the group of stakeholders seemed the only way to satisfy marketing challenges. Knox and Van Oest (2014) suggested met demands both socially, financially and environmentally prevented churn or loss of capital because of consumer departure. Consumers provide stability in the early stages of business growth and throughout organizational existence.

### **Literature Review Overview**

Aguinis and Glavas (2013) suggested three categories of consideration for building effective core CSR: (a) job security and benefits, (b) career outcomes, and (c)

changing the world or making it an effective place. Adair et al. (2013) proposed reshaping someone's thinking or the picture within their minds was a product of strategic influence. In the same way, redefining stakeholder importance can lead to effective planning and sustained performance. The strategy adds minimal cost to small business entrepreneurs and yet adds stability in developing high-performance work and business cultures. Akella and Jordan (2013) suggested the old standard of employment-at-will where threats and intimidation embody significant roles to induce performance, no longer builds stakeholder value (SV) or community.

Providing 65% of all new jobs (Allen et al., 2013), small businesses across communities must understand the SV to improve performance and maintain sustainability. Alvarez et al. (2013) indicated primary stakeholders are those needed by the organization to survive. Understanding the essential function, primary stakeholders perform and considering the customer as the primary stakeholder leads to hierarchy development. When communicating with Customer Service Personnel, the consumer can provide critical information on issues affecting sustainability. The style of leadership can influence, empower, encourage and set goals to achieve organizational outcomes between these two groups.

Aritz and Walker (2014) proposed servant leadership built bridges between consumers and customer service personnel through collaborative leadership. Collaborative leadership frames business outcomes around the community and the business. SBOs who can shape the business to meet the needs of its primary stakeholders will add holistic value (HV) in providing sustained performance. Cross-cultural

leadership needs to communicate, influence, and empower. The leadership styles readily accepted across cultures those of collaborative and benevolence. Both styles create trust among group members allowing effective communication and participation. Servant leadership mirrors both styles empowering and creating important trust characteristic of effective teams. SBOs who view their business as a part of a community; can shape and influence through leadership.

Taneja and Toombs (2014) indicated an increase in profit when leaders continually scanned the business environment. Servant leadership styles who then scan the business environment can provide collaborative solutions to create increased business performance. Increased business performance can lead to sustainability and increase the likelihood of business success. SBOs needing strategic alternatives to facilitate business performance can create the advantage through environmental scanning. Scanning to become aware of consumer needs and expectations and providing personnel with positive incentives. Making an impact upon communities and individuals everyday lives can provide motivation (Aritz & Walker, 2014). The essential element of building the community is a collaborative effort.

Braganza et al. (2013) suggested CRP only works when changes occur throughout the system, not with individual resources. In that sense, servant leadership builds on the cooperation of many voices to build business performance and develop the community. The value comes in understanding the influence of each of those voices. For instance, consumers request new products and increase demand through product purchasing. However, the employee also provides a substantial contribution in building performance

and sustainability. Assarlind and Gremyr (2014) inferred a company's value in intangible assets such as employee relationships outweighed its value in inventory, factory, and receivables. The employee constantly provides service and receives knowledge from the SBOs most valued stakeholder, the consumer. If the business is a small convenience store, restaurant, small surgery center, or any other business, what transpires between the consumer and customer service personnel can define or destroy the business. Reducing turnover then becomes essential to survival and sustained performance Assarlind and Gremyr (2014). Consumer acquisition and retention, essentials in business sustainability, prove necessary to achieving long-term success. Business owners equipped with understanding on how to retain and maintain consumers through service personnel can advantage their organization. The outcome of increased and retained consumers is improved business performance or success.

Calton et al. (2013) suggested capturing markets a process that creates value for varying stakeholders who have differing objectives and brings them together to achieve shared value. Creating such opportunities means developing social networks creating trust within the group of community stakeholders. For the small business owner, the effort begins by moving the center of change off of the organization and onto the community of stakeholders. Developing relationships between the consumer and the company will take the effort of customer service personnel. From an AHP perspective the two most important stakeholders then become the consumer and the customer service personnel. Measuring the value of these two groups translates into the financial reports and performance of the new business (Carlton & Downs, 2014). Leadership that works in

collaboration with both groups then provides the third member of the AHP. Servant leadership style proves valuable in creating the needed connections among these groups.

Carter and Baghurst (2014) indicated servant leadership seeks to empower, build personal relationships, create loyalty, establish trust, commitment, and create growth. Creating passion in one's work motivates customer service personnel in job performance. Servant leadership facilitates work commitment by providing living wages, creating trust, and loyalty. Consumers and personnel buy-in and respond through commitment, improved customer service, loyalty, and lifelong buying habits. Servant leadership provides a more holistic approach that engages others and creates ongoing commitment (Carter & Baghurst, 2014). Holistic approaches can include virtue ethics and lifetime management (Chakrabarty & Erin Bass, 2015; Chang et al., 2013).

Building a community over a lifetime describes virtual ethics (Chakrabarty & Erin Bass, 2015). Lifetime management builds success by developing into the community (Chang et al., 2013). A servant leadership style manages from this approach where actions taken create lifetime effects on the business. One such business in my community began over 25 years ago and has staff that started then and still works today. Employees have purchased homes, raised families and provided service to the community. Small business leaders wanting to provide sustained performance could increase performance in such a way. Choudhary et al. (2013) suggested transformational leadership provided increased effective models than servant leadership removing some of the emotion from managing. However, servant leadership provides a personal touch creating a sense that service belongs to the individual (Chang et al., 2013). Providing

effective performance can include a 360-degree feedback loop where consumers need, expectations and desires receive attention.

Chun-Juei et al. (2015) indicated sustainable performance builds on meeting consumers need, expectations and desires. Sensitive personnel provide an essential element in meeting consumer expectations. Product offering sensitive in meeting customers' needs is attached directly to direct marketing personnel (Chun-Juei et al., 2015). The customer service personnel (CSP) provide critical connections between consumer expectations and company product services. Chun-Juei et al. (2015) suggested customer service personnel continue to provide the connections that improve relationships and significantly increase their role in sustainability.

The indication of the importance consumers' provide in sustainability continues to warrant possible strategies to enlist key personnel. Personnel such as the CSP, who remain in direct contact with consumers and vendors on a daily basis. These CSPs help to create new ideas and product services taking ideas from consumers and other external stakeholders that provide the community of stakeholders with ongoing benefits. These ongoing benefits led to sustainability through customer acquisition and increased loyalty (Chun-Juei et al., 2015). Providing service to the community instead of just the individual shareholder then has value.

The stakeholders, unlike the shareholder, care about the community and carry a lifetime of commitment. The new small business owner wanting to increase the likelihood of sustainable performance can create ongoing loyalty by building communities (Dawkins, 2014). Valuing primary stakeholders who add sustainability

during early development provide essential elements in a SBOs tools for success. SBOs who develop and improve work performance and customer retention seem more likely to succeed. Dawkins (2014) suggested the ability to engage and meet ongoing consumer demand means appreciating and developing the actors who touch them every day. The function SBOs perform within the economy proves vital.

Hopkins et al. (2014) indicated SBOs represent 99.7% of all employer firms in the U.S. The indication has devastating implications for the economy and labor. SBOs continue to seek effective business strategies to engage in small business success. Hopkins et al. (2014) suggested powerful marketing strategies helped achieve greater success and included a list of possible strategic areas such as networking, alliances, and stakeholders. The information suggests that stakeholders instead of shareholders should become the primary focus of SBOs because it encapsulates all other areas of market strategy. Engagement of the stakeholders should lead to effective networking, alliances, and marketing strategy to engage the primary stakeholder the consumer. Without the consumer, all other business decisions become null and void. SBOs could benefit than from a start-up evaluation.

Cusumano (2013) suggested a small checklist to ensure startup success they include, key management personnel, appealing markets, persuasive new products or services, and evidence of customer need. The question new small business ventures can ask themselves is; am I meeting, or can I provide a service to this community? Three key elements of customer service perform compelling roles as it relates to customer retention and stakeholder theory. One, management matters; two; strategy matters, and three; how

that relates to consumers and customer service personnel matters. Venture capitalist want to know if SBOs can re-think strategy in times of stress to engage in more sustainable management practices (Cusumano, 2013). Once committed to engaging in a small business venture, the focus should then turn to primary stakeholders.

Dawkins (2014) indicated current efforts by business owners fail to meet the needs, desires, and expectations of the consumer. Stakeholder theory values the voice of those silent in many decisions. Engagement has failed to adopt methods by which leaders can engage without sensing a lack of control. The definition of leadership from a stakeholder perspective should be one of facilitation. The ability to create a means of respect in communication gets provided in the notion of good-faith stakeholder engagement. The process allows opposing voices to negotiate valuable points of interest and come to a consensus. Consensus creates needed buy-in and assists in unanimous work performance and sustainable outcomes. Stakeholder considerations prove invaluable in sustainability, innovation, and profitability. Guidelines to provide a more clear approach on how to engage stakeholders continues to be elusive and needs addressing.

Doh and Quigley (2014) suggested stakeholder groups or teams create significant long-term success. SBOs can add sustainable performance by acting as a team with the communities in which they live. Once established, SBOs' decisions should include a focus on what impact on the community any decisions would have. Some suggested prioritizing relationships with those who matter (Doh & Quigley 2014; Gilabert, 2014). Small business failure represents a serious impact on jobs, the environment and

communities in which they serve. Gilabert (2014) observed five reasons small businesses fail; (a) not enough product demand, (b) dysfunctional management practices, (c) declining market, (d) no reserves, and (e) lack of unique value. Equipping business owners and leaders with engagement strategies that increase financial performance and engage self-management teams can build unique value. The value created using, servant leadership styles that engage both the consumer and the customer service personnel comprising the top three organizational stakeholders. Working in collaboration with one another, these individual stakeholders should add significant strength to sustained business performance (Dullemond et al., 2014).

Providing team members with the tools and setting goals helps to establish desired results. Duval-Couetil (2013) proposed low-cost alternatives such as the development of learning outcomes, use of stakeholders and how to best allocate resources could prove invaluable. Duval-Couetil (2013) suggested current literature failed to address SBOs' success holistically. Holistic management would use the natural resources occurring in and around a small business start-up. Resources such as IT technology, community events, treatment of personnel stylized to meet the community's needs provide a more holistic approach. Duval-Couetil (2013) indicated entrepreneurial educational tools to equip SBOs to fail to meet expectations. However, future educational strategies can find improvement through the presentation of an increased holistic approach synthesizing a world method style of action using, an application of best practices.

Best practices include styles and types of leadership such a servant or ethical leadership. Eisenbeib and Brodbeck (2014) suggested ethical leadership defined by

personal action in relationships, leading by example, and 360 communications best described ethical leadership qualities or characteristics. Again these characteristics indicate small business success as a community event instead of individuals acting alone. Stakeholder theory and servant leadership styles provide ethical examples of ways to best communicate and develop community sustainability. Both describe a 360 format of communication that needs to develop for business success. SBOs seeking success should strategize on how to develop best the 360-degree communication between consumer and owner to create a sustained business performance. The practice means to value the social and human capital of the group of stakeholders (Florea et al., 2013). Employees who perform critical task provide value and assist in building successful performance.

The majority of organizational transition continues to fail, failure, because of a deficiency in procedures to actively engage primary assets. Organizational leaders have continued to approach sustainability from a top-down approach an approach that continues to meet with more failure than success. Business leaders concerned with providing economic, environmental and social sustainability to the community should begin valuing the employee. The employee provides the internal stakeholder connection enabling transitional organizational success. Florea et al. (2013) suggested practices geared at harnessing the value of this business asset would succeed in providing a sustainability model acceptable environmentally, economically and socially.

### **Summary**

The literature review has provided evidence that indicates a new direction in the way the majority of SBOs approach sustained business performance. Information that

once flowed downstream from corporate heads or SBOs attempting to build successful businesses needs to reverse itself. The suggestion that holistic management styles facilitate interaction between consumer and the company become self-evident. This qualitative study proposed to explore the 7% of small business leaders and their employees to determine practices that have worked in providing sustained performance. The objective was to fashion a model to test against current business performance norms.

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 1 indicates how SBOs lack the capital and skills to engage in long-term sustainability activities. I provided a background, problem statement, purpose statement, and nature of the study. A section of relevant research questions, conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, and a section on delimitations. Finally, sections regarding the significance of the study, a literature review, and transitional summary concluded Section 1. Section 2 describes the project, purpose, the role of the researcher, and the participants. Therefore, I provided a description of research, method, design, population sampling, ethical research, data collection, technique, and organization. Along with data analysis, study reliability and validity the investigator then transitions into section three. In Section 3 I present the findings, implications, and recommendations generated from the data collected from the study.

## Section 2: The Project

Small business owners needing ideas and creative ways to provide longevity for their company seek low-cost resources and ideas that meet their needs (Calton et al., 2013). The population selected for this proposed study was five SBOs and 5 of their employees in Redding, California. Five SBOs participated in semistructured focus group interviews, exploring possible strategies to motivate employee performance. These five SBOs and five employees took part in separate focus group interviews and provided possible strategies to motivate employee performance. This study aimed to link stakeholder theory and servant leadership to customer retention and personal engagement that provides long-term existence to small enterprises (Carter & Baghurst, 2014). From a pragmatic view, the solutions allow for low-cost implementation and planning to provide ongoing support to the nation's largest labor contributor (SBOs). Duval-Couetil (2013) suggested the resources needed to increase SBOs strategic knowledge appeared non-existent. Duval-Couetil also indicated resources such as time; money and expertise lacked applicable approaches for assimilating strategies into practice. While programs exist, the cost and application of additional strategies lack in research to create effectiveness. The objective was to provide options to reduce the failure rate of SBOs and create sustainability solutions that contribute to the existence of entire communities.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore small business owner's lack of low-cost strategic resources and initiatives to facilitate continued existence. Sustained business performance motivates employees in providing

increased customer retention (Shaw et al., 2013). The population selected for this proposed study was five SBOs and five of their employees in Redding, California. Five SBOs participated in semistructured focus group interviews, exploring possible strategies to motivate employee performance. These five SBOs and five employees took part in separate focus group interviews and provided possible strategies to motivate employee performance. SBOs from a variety of businesses comprised the focus group along with the five employees. This study should contribute to social change by providing insights into improving work performance, leading to customer retention, and increased business profit (Shadid & Azhar, 2013). The results of this study were intended to impact the local business environment by contributing to SBOs' strategies for sustainable performance.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as the analyst was to gather data using semistructured focus group interviews followed by an analysis of collected data to determine possible patterns and themes (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) further suggested pattern matching can provide strength to internal validity. Garside (2014) indicated qualitative research as information needed to cover the framework of quantitative studies. Discovery of patterns among collected data assists in forming mental images or boundary objects for desired outcomes (Alin et al., 2013). Repeated patterns of success strengthen the validity of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). The objective was to discover resources and initiatives from the personal experiences of participants in small entrepreneurial businesses.

Having owned a small business, I could have used low-cost strategies in customer retention and business sustainability. Harrison and Wicks (2013) suggested strategies and initiatives to build stakeholder value and empower the small business owner in effective sustained business decision-making seemed almost non-existent. Using a semistructured focus group interview technique with organizations that have lasted beyond 5 years allowed flexibility in responses and helped to eliminate some personal bias (Sarker, Xaio, & Beaulieu, 2013). I followed the Belmont Report requiring confidentiality of all names of individuals and businesses unless otherwise authorized for use.

Ali and Yusof (2011) and Tsang (2014) indicated criteria needed for validating qualitative studies in four categories, internal validity (data results accredited to treatment), external validity (the ability to observe results), reliability (the ability to replicate results), and objectivity (the ability to remain bias-free). Yin (2014) proposed using logic models, triangulation of data, and rival explanations to validate qualitative studies. The use of a semistructured focus group interview technique allows the flexibility to gather in-depth information from participants about personal experiences that can lead to greater organizational success (Sarker et al., 2013).

Interview protocol included a set of research questions (see Appendix B, p. 100). The interview process included two focus group interviews to remove the fear of reprisal (Yin, 2014). Group one consisted of informative individuals such as managers or owners of small businesses (Johnson, 2015). The second group consisted of five employees of the small businesses owners who provided crucial information. A voice recording device

was used to gather data possibly lost with just pen and paper was used (Yin, 2014). Marshall and Rossman (2015) suggested alternative methods to preserve confidentiality such as a numbering system or numbers where P-1, P-2, P-3, etc. represent names of subjects. The objective of the interview protocol was to achieve commonality adding to consistency and reliability (Foley & O'Conner, 2013). Group members met eligibility requirements as described above and in the participant's section.

Public documents such as web sites, company brochures, and news articles provided a second form of documentation (Dresch et al.2015; Garside, 2014; Yin, 2014). Brochures, news articles indicate businesses provided a commitment to the consumer offering products with the consumer as a direct recipient of marketing. Business owner P-6 list as a cornerstone in the business community and has several community awards. Taking committed action to improve customer retention assist in providing business sustainability (Glaub et al., 2014). Owners, employees, and companies provided participation as described in the following section and public documentation provided information, as well.

### **Participants**

The population selected for this proposed study was five SBOs and five of their employees in Redding, California. Five SBOs participated in semistructured focus group interviews, exploring possible strategies to motivate employee performance. These five SBOs and five employees took part in separate focus group interviews and provided possible strategies to motivate employee performance. The criteria for participation in the study consisted of gathering data from those within the field of study (Harrison &

Wicks, 2013). Sarker et al., (2013) suggested using those such as, SBOs who have had success navigating the first five years in small business and employees from those businesses to enrich the case study. A case study sample size can consist of three or more cases and in some instances only a single study (Marshall & Rossman 2015). Therefore, a sample size of five SBOs in Redding, California, and five business employees aligned with case study requirements (Siu et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). Each participant owned or worked for a small business over five years old. The intention was to conduct separate semistructured focus group interviews with the five business owners and five of their employees. I used personal contacts to gain access to SBOs and their employees to collect data.

As a previous small business owner, I was in contact with many different individuals who own small businesses and worked in small businesses. Marshall and Rossman (2015) proposed using possible personal resources to gain access to willing participants. Trotter (2012) suggested using participants such as business leaders who have had long-term success. Yin (2014) indicated possibly using successful participants to extract critical data. Having worked, managed and owned small businesses in the past, I had some working knowledge of small business success. As a small business owner, low-cost strategies and initiatives that build customer loyalty would have proven beneficial.

### **Research Method and Design**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore the specific business problem of small business owner's lack of low-cost strategic resources and

initiatives to facilitate continued existence (Harrison & Wicks 2013). Unlike quantitative studies that analyze numerical data to discover cause and effect, a qualitative study provides a sense of lived experiences (Sarker et al., 2013). Lived experiences provided for discovery of strategies and initiatives SBOs engaged in to motivate their employees to provide increased customer retention (Tsang, 2014). A mixed methods approach uses both quantitative and qualitative methods but would have created a lengthy process not suitable for this study (Garside, 2014; Yin 2014). This qualitative study should contribute to social change by improving work performance, leading to customer retention, and increased business profit (Shadid & Azhar, 2013). The results of this study are intended to impact the large and small business environment by contributing low-cost strategies and initiatives for sustainability.

### **Method**

Three methods are used for gathering data; qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Sarker et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). While the mixed methods study provides data both qualitatively and quantitatively, and a quantitative study provides more skeletal (or outline) data, a qualitative case study provides live data that can quickly assess and sense information and possible change (Trotter, 2012). Qualitative case studies allow for possible thought provoking changes in business strategies (Schwepker & Schultz, 2015). In the area of customer retention and employee performance, new owner business strategies often strive to sustain the business ((Knox & Van Oest 2014). The owner needing additional strategies can benefit from such rapid information (Schaupp &

Belanger, 2014). As the investigator, I have provided knowledge that can improve the sustainability of small business.

### **Research Design**

Research designs such as grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative studies require lengthy data collection, thus delaying vital information that can prove essential in building sustained organizational function (Yin, 2013). Data is collected through semistructured focus group interviews, documents, and triangulation of data from the differing sources (Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Sarker et al., 2013). A case study using a semistructured focus group interview technique provides for focused data collection that can add to validity and reliability (Sarker et al., 2013). Exploring personal values of stakeholder groups can provide possible low-cost solutions to slow, and even prevent ongoing small business failures.

The grounded theory researcher seeks to establish a theory or confirm a hypothesis (Bailey, 2014). Ethnography analyst seeks to develop a theory from existing evidence (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Phenomenology researchers describe phenomenon occurring from events and must be free of preconceptions (Sarker et al., 2013). Narratives research includes historical views and can extend over long periods of time (Yin, 2014). Use of a case study is not to confirm hypotheses or develop a new theory, but rather to explore new alternatives. Having personal experience in working, managing and owning a small business, I am not free of preconceptions and narratives. The other methods quantitative and mixed methods would simply take too long to develop to be effective. The case study that develops richness and depth through

personal inquiry becomes the most effective method of addressing problem resolution. Problem resolution resulting in providing sustainable solutions to SBOs (Marshall & Rossman 2015; Sarker et al., 2013).

Dresch et al. (2015) suggested case study allows for exploration of interactions among groups such as CEOs, employees, and customers. A case study provides in-depth investigation through interviews, artifacts, and secondary sources. Adding to the validity and reliability of case studies, Dresch et al. (2015) suggested the model allows for a more holistic exploration of meaningful real-life events. A case study analyst explores causal links, real-life context, and the intervention and evaluates possible outcomes. Single and multiple case studies provide useful tools in assessing possible support or contest of model or theory. Dresch et al. (2015) suggested in creating triangulation the case study should cut vertically through the organization to obtain data at all levels. Case study assists in explaining operational links and frequency that occur over time. One problem existing with the case study is the ability to establish the external validity or generalize problems, but in qualitative inquiry, one seeks transferability, rather than generalizability by triangulating through multiple data sources (Dresch et al. 2015).

### **Population and Sampling**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore SBOs lack of low-cost strategic resources and initiatives to facilitate continued existence. The population selected for this proposed study was five SBOs and five of their employees in Redding, California. Five SBOs participated in semistructured focus group interviews, exploring possible strategies to motivate employee performance. These five SBOs and

five employees took part in separate focus group interviews and provided possible strategies to motivate employee performance. The use of five SBOs in Redding, California met the criteria for the qualitative case study (Garside, 2014; Tsang, 2014). The five SBOs and five employees took part in separate focus group interviews and provided possible strategies to motivate employee performance. SBOs from a variety of businesses comprised one group along with the five of their employees comprising the other group.

Johnson (2015) and Yin (2014) suggested a sample size of one to ten and that two or three could prove sufficient if the theory is straightforward. Trotter (2012) suggested case study sample size is sufficient when continued interviews would yield only redundant or saturated data. Bailey (2014) and Boesch, Schwaninger, Weber, and Scholtz (2013) suggested purposeful sampling allowed the analyst/investigator to determine the participants and select those who could make more in-depth contributions. The possibility exists to achieve sufficient data saturation by using five business owners and five employees as one case can prove sufficient as suggested by (Dresch et al. 2015; Yin, 2014). The process of interviewing should follow an organized means to collect and retrieve data.

I attempted to conduct focus interviews with the five SBOs at their place of business at times convenient for them to provide adequate time to answer the interview questions. I attempted to interview the employees at a place and time convenient for them to feel comfortable and secure in answering the interview questions. In an effort to meet everyone's time constraints I provided an alternate location other than the place

of business to meet and collected data there. I recorded the interviews using the questions from the list of research questions (see Appendix B). I analyzed data using current and relevant computer software to eliminate possible bias.

### **Ethical Research**

Johnson (2015) and Yin (2014) suggested ethical research begins by protecting participants from harm, protecting confidentiality, and by gaining consent. Developing trust, protecting anonymity, and protections from possible harm help to ensure integrity (Johnson, 2015). I earned my certification from the National Institute of Health Office of Extramural Research required engaging in research involving human subjects (see Appendix, B).

Upon receiving Walden University and IRB approval to conduct my research, I made initial contact with potential participants by telephone. The purpose of the telephone call: explained the purpose of the study and where to meet. Consent forms described in (see Appendix, A) were signed by each participant. The study did not include any children and to the best of my knowledge any other vulnerable group.

Within the consent form, I described monetary incentive; explained contact information, the purpose of the study, and any anticipated risks. One provided a \$5 Starbucks card as compensation for all who completed participation in this study. Starbucks card was provided at the end of the collection of interviews. The possible increase in small business survivability and increased profitability provide incentives to SBOs to acknowledge the study. The employees should benefit from increased knowledge about employee and employer relationships. Participants also received

information about the voluntary nature of the study, and the ability to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Those who agreed to participate in the study provided written consent at the time of interviews. To protect participant identity, one used code numbers as identifiers for participants such as P1 and P2. I intend to keep all information secure on a password-protected flash drive and in a locked storage cabinet in my home, for a period no less than 5 years. After that time, I will destroy information linking participants to the study, shredding all hard copy data and erasing all electronic data information to protect participants' information.

### **Data Collection**

Sarker et al. (2013) described the difference in the use of an instrument and technique; instruments collect the data of what, and how problems receive resolution. Data technique includes the way data is collected such as interviews, semistructured interviews, focus groups, and documentation (Sarker et al., 2013). Johnson (2015) suggested a pragmatic way to use the qualitative case study was the process of interviewing. Interviewing collects data on individual's opinions, attitudes, life experiences, and behaviors. Interviews can provide a face-to-face interaction to assist in gaining an understanding of what one believes, how one behaves, and what one values. Johnson (2015) suggested two styles of data collection interviews or questioners assisted data in increasing generalization. In a situation where understanding strategies and possible problem solution and resolution increase in need, direct interviews with decision-makers can provide a lived experience (Johnson, 2015). There is a need to include a second form of documentation, as well.

Bailey (2014) suggested methods of in-depth interviewing, group discussions, use of experts and documentation assist in providing reliable qualitative case studies.

External documentation such as public documents, web sites, company brochures, and news articles provided a second form of documentation (Ali & Yusof, 2011). Aguinis and Glavas (2013) suggested these sources could also include areas where businesses have assisted the community areas such as volunteer work.

### **Instruments**

Data collection took place using semistructured focus group interviews as an instrument for collecting information (Dresch et al. 2015; Marshal & Rossman, 2015). Consistent small business failure over 50% (Hopkins et al., 2014) and the role successful strategies perform in longevity, for example, customer retention, provide the framework for this study (SBA, 2014). Ali and Yusof (2011) suggested meeting the demand of academic rigor within qualitative studies means reporting results accurately and eliminating possible bias. Dresch et al. (2015) suggested case study provides in-depth investigation through interviews, artifacts, and secondary sources and can consist of the investigator's observation and personal interviews. I, as the primary instrument, used a set of semistructured focus group interview questions as mentioned in section one to collect data (Marshal & Rossman, 2015; Yin, 2014). I collected data using three data collection methods, pattern matching, explanation building, and logic models (Ali & Yusof, 2011; Marshal & Rossman, 2015). I did not need to modify previous focus-group research questions because a pilot test was not required. The original research questions

and interview protocol was used to the intent to use personal semistructured focus group interviews (Marshall & Rossman 2015; Yin, 2014).

The interview protocol (see, Appendix B) consisted of semistructured questions varying to accommodate the interviewee and included questions and varying degrees of adaptation (Johnson, 2015). The interview consisted of 10 focus group questions found in (Appendix B). The interviews took approximately 30 to 45 minutes allowing participants to answer openly. A semistructured focus group interview process using one central question and diverse open-ended questions guided the research (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). The semistructured interview design was to gain insight and understanding of the interviewee (Johnson, 2015). The objective of the semistructured interview process was to achieve commonality adding to consistency, reliability, and transferability (Foley & O'Conner, 2013).

I asked each participant to review a transcript of the collected data to provide validation and feedback resulting in member checking of the information. Member checking assisted in ensuring data accuracy and reliability (Johnson, 2015). The use of member checking helped in setting aside possible bias of the researcher to obtain a rich, in-depth, reliable set of data (Yin, 2014).

### **Data Collection Technique**

For this case study, the use of semistructured interviews, and documents provided a technique to collect and analyze data (Marshall & Rossman 2015; Yin, 2014). I digitally recorded semistructured focus group interviews as a technique to assure consistency in capturing SBOs and employees strategies on success (Dresch et al. 2015;

Marshal & Rossman, 2015). The advantage of using semistructured interviews allowed the capturing of more in-depth information and ideas as suggested by (Dresch et al. 2015; Yin; 2014). The disadvantage of semistructured interviews was the small demographic the study covered. Demographic information included the length of ownership or employment, and sustainability strategies providing context (Johnson, 2015; Marshal & Rossman, 2015). The study did not include all relevant small businesses but should provide insight on sustainability and performance. Johnson (2015) suggested personal transcription of data soon after interviews provided clarity on critical issues leading to greater reliability. Johnson (2015) suggested selecting candidates with critical knowledge helps to eliminate possible inadequate data collection. To provide accuracy, credibility, and transferability, I recorded all interviews as a means to provide added member checking (Dresch et al. 2015; Sarker et al., 2013).

### **Data Organization Techniques**

As a technique, I used semistructured focus group interviews to collect data, and, assemble field notes (Bailey, 2014; Yin, 2014). I recorded all conversations with participant approval digitally (Bailey, 2014; Johnson, 2015). Numbers were given identifying participants as suggested by (Sarker et al., 2013; Yin, 2014) to protect participants' privacy. Bailey (2014) suggested qualitative validity and reliability rested upon triangulation of data, saturation, trust, and applicability. All four were achieved through the use of interviews, recordings, and IT data devices (Bailey, 2014; Johnson, 2015; Yin, 2014). Journals, notes and all relevant information shall be kept in a locked safe in my house for 5 years, after which all copies and recordings shall be destroyed.

## **Data Analysis**

Four types of triangulation can occur in qualitative studies, data triangulation: investigator triangulation: includes multiple researchers in an investigation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation (Marshal & Rossman 2015; Yin, 2014). Triangulation of data enriches, refutes, confirms and explains the collection of information (Sarker et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). I used time, space, and persons as data sources to create triangulation (Marshal & Rossman 2015; Johnson, 2015). Triangulation minimizes the bias of measurement, sampling, and procedural by combining individual and group research that covered limited populations where some pressure may occur in data collection (Sarker et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). Software such as NVivo 11 provided the opportunity for the investigator to code text, organizing data into clusters of information to assist in the extrapolation of data meaning (Johnson, 2015; Marshal & Rossman 2015).

The objective was to identify themes and patterns of successful strategies SBOs can employ to generate greater success (Bailey, 2014; Yin, 2014). Interpretation of data themes should provide SBOs with needed strategies to experience improved navigation strategies in developing business performance (Bailey, 2014). Semistructured interviews, documents, and member checking provided the in-depth responses for identifying and interpreting the data.

## **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity test the design of the case study to establish credibility, trustworthiness, conformability and data dependability (Yin, 2014). Three types of data construct, internal, and external provide validity in case studies ensuring dependability

(Yin, 2014). Sarker et al. (2013) suggested construct validity used multiple sources to create a chain of evidence. Internal validity builds from a series of matching patterns and through addressing rival explanations (Yin, 2014). External validity uses theory in single case studies and replication logic in multiple case studies (Johnson, 2015). Reliability of case study rest upon others ability to duplicate the analysts' findings (Yin, 2014).

Validity and reliability provide the necessary elements to ensure the credibility and dependability of the case study.

### **Reliability**

Reliability, the assurance another researcher, can duplicate the findings from the original study, or dependability (Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Yin, 2014). Obtaining reliability comes when the same procedures reveal the same results through triangulation of data (Dresch et al. 2015; Perez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013). Yin (2014) suggested reliability might produce similar results in different circumstance as well. Well-documented study others can follow; provides transferability and assist in achieving reliability (Ali & Yusof, 2011; Yin, 2014). Rich, concise documentation allows another analyst the ability to repeat research results (Johnson, 2015; Yin, 2014). The difference in quantitative and qualitative reliability is that the investigators' is the tool or instrument in the qualitative study. I conducted semistructured focus group interviews following the protocol described in (Appendix, C) to collect data and documentation. The intention was to conduct interviews with those who contain critical knowledge associated with the research question and making use of member checking (Bailey, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2015).

The reliability process included returning to participants and confirming or member checking interpretation of participants' responses (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Building trust or credibility using tools such as NVivo 11 created a more robust process identifying themes, words, and patterns (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Triangulating data using interviews, documentation, and member checking provided for dependability (Johnson, 2015; Yin, 2014).

### **Validity**

Ali and Yusof (2011) suggested validation achieved through accurate methods of inquiry, produce authenticity, credibility, and trustworthiness. Authenticity, credibility, and trustworthiness in a case study include in-depth investigation through interviews, surveys, artifacts, and secondary sources (Dresch et al. 2015). The data can consist of the research observation and personal interviews that describe outcomes and provide transferability (Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Yin, 2014). Yin (2013) suggested single cases can provide validity in a case study.

Documentation of the steps used in data collection is necessary to retain validity (Yin, 2014). The design of the case study is to reveal patterns that build or threaten stability (Yin, 2014). Through triangulation of data or vertical slicing as prescribed by (Dresch et al. 2015) validity can remain intact for the qualitative case study. Data triangulation strengthens qualitative validity in the case study (Ali & Yusof, 2011; Dresch et al. 2015; Yin, 2014). The use of multiple sources such as artifacts, interviews, and documentation assist in building case study validation (Yin, 2014). I used multiple sources of data; focus group interviews, documentation, and member checking to

triangulate data to provide validity and data saturation (Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Yin, 2014). Data saturation met when further data collection became repetitive and would reveal no new data (Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Yin, 2014). I interviewed five SBOs and five employees to try and achieve saturation.

### **Transition and Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore the specific business problem of SBOs' lack of low-cost strategic resources to facilitate continued existence. Section two provided a discussion on how to collect data and provided analysis for reliability and validity. In section three, I will present the findings, implications, make recommendations generated from the data collected from the study, and offer any areas of new research. This study should contribute to social change by improving work performance, leading to customer retention, and increased business profit (Shadid & Azhar, 2013). The results of this study are intended to impact the business environment by contributing to SBOs' strategic sustainability practices in creating long-term existence.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Overview of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore small business owner's lack of low-cost strategic resources and initiatives to facilitate continued existence. The findings included conclusions that addressed all of the research questions, references to literature review, data, and evidence that related to findings to a larger body of literature on the topic, including the conceptual framework and literatures on effective business practices. Themes, patterns, and relationships found provide the information discussed in this section. In addition, I provided a discussion on any outliers or discrepancies discovered in the data and address findings of the research questions.

Eighty percent of small businesses fail in the first year, suggesting the need for new strategies and initiatives (Hopkins et al., 2014). Customer retention or habit purchasing add \$58 million a year to small businesses' and creates stability, compared to \$62 million lost when having to add a new customer that contributes to failure (Shah, Kumar, & Kim, 2014). The need by small business leaders to discover strategies and initiatives that provide sustainability for long-term existence of small business can provide meaningful jobs, tax benefits, and build culture throughout the global community. The central research question is: What specific low-cost strategic resources and initiatives can SBOs engage in to facilitate continued existence?

#### **Presentation of the Findings**

Five business owners and five employees participated in two separate focus group interviews from businesses older than 5 years. Two employees withdrew and their

information has not been included. The remaining 8 participants, however, provided rich data analyses that provided a substantial foundation for the major themes. Major themes included customer retention, creating teamwork, building relationships, and communication to create business sustainability. The owners and their employees all received a private analysis of the recorded interviews to verify the accuracy of reporting and provide member checking. Program software NVivo 11 was used to provide word queries that helped identify frequent themes (see Appendix D). The names of all participants shall remain private; they are referred to as pseudonyms such as P1, P2, and P3 as codes to protect individual privacy. The study also included documentation such as public documents, web sites, company brochures, and news articles (Aguinis & Glavas, 2013; Ali & Yusof, 2011; Bailey, 2014). Low-cost strategic resources and strategies provide tactical ideas that create business sustainability (Taneja, Sewell, & Odom, 2015). The owners and their employees provided the following low-cost strategic resources and strategies that have provided ongoing sustainability for their business.

Bertalanffy's (1972) third theory systems philosophy described the re-orientation of thought on world views of business theory. Old business thinking placed a priority on the shareholder and owners while sustained business success, according to the focus group, relied upon customer retention. Without the consumer or someone to purchase the product; everyone else becomes irrelevant to business success. Providing customer service that creates loyalty or returns proves vital to business sustainability. Schaupp and Bélanger (2014) suggested an understanding of the consumers' needs provided essential

strategies for business sustainability. The following questions asked during the interviewing process provided the following responses and themes.

### **Interview Questions:**

1. In what type of business are you employed?
2. What or who is the first priority of your business?
3. What employee performance strategies increase customer retention?
4. How do these strategies improve customer retention?
5. What impact does employee motivation have on business success?
6. What low-cost strategies or resources have improved your performance?
7. Who do you consider as the primary stakeholders in your business?
8. What challenges do you encounter in creating continued existence of your business?
9. What strategies continue to provide improved work performance and lead to customer retention for your business?
10. What additional information can you provide to help me understand business success?

### **Theme: Customer Retention**

I attempted to gather information from a cross section of businesses to provide relevant data in a search for strategic resources across employment fields. Owners and employees from a general merchandise retailer, an online software company, a home style Chinese food restaurant a general contractor construction company, and a specialty food shop provided data. I also used public records, news articles, and web sites for these

businesses as a second form of documentation. In this section, I have eliminated names, and businesses names to protect all participants. Each participant received a copy of their own report and provided member checking to assure the accuracy of what was transcribed. While the answers may vary among the groups, the consumer was at or near the top of the list of every group member. Tatikonda (2013) suggested customer retention begins by providing superior service to retain consumers and maintain customer loyalty.

When asked about the number one priority of any business P1-P9, with the exception of P-7, indicated the consumer or customer as their first priority of the business. Customer retention, employee value, and environmental scanning create improved work performance that directly affects business sustainability (Allen et al., 2013; Cheng et al., 2014; Karakas et al., 2013; Liden et al., 2014; Mirocha et al., 2013; Potocan et al., 2013; Tatikonda, 2013). As indicated by P1-P9 strategies to build customer relationships provided a significant strategy in maintaining business success and improving customer retention.

Hopkins et al. (2013) suggested providing SBOs with a strategic outline to allow them the flexibility to achieve overall business goals that benefit and bring value to the business and community. The strategy outlines achieved by having a formalized training or orientation of business processes were described by P6 and P7. P1 suggested achieving the goal of customer retention lies within the ability of the business to make the consumer feel at home. P1-P9 indicated the connection between business success and

sustainability begins with the consumer. Customer retention begins then with an effort to create teamwork among the group of employees.

### **Theme: Creating Teamwork**

Akella and Jordon (2013) indicated bullying characterized a hostile work environment. Motivated employees, however, sense the need to care about and meet the needs of the consumer. P7 and P8 used words like essential and extreme to demonstrate the impact motivated service and teamwork have on the consumer. This relationship building between employees and service personnel creates loyalty in the consumer. When consumer demands and expectations receive care, repetitive purchasing occurs. Chun-Juei, Chong-Wen, and Conley (2015) suggested sustainability builds upon consumers' ideas and expectations; motivated employees provide the type of atmospheres where consumers sense they are heard. Listening and understanding consumer needs comes out in the service provided by service personnel. Given that strategies can sometimes seem expensive to implement, having low-cost alternatives provided simply by creating increased motivation of work staff; and developing teamwork increases the need to explore ways to motivate customer service personnel.

Kaifeng et al. (2012) indicated valuing human capital as an essential element in business success. As indicated here; teamwork and customer loyalty prove difficult to balance, but the outcome can lead to greater profit and sustainability. Potocan et al. (2013) measured business success by the effect on culture, belief, behavior, and values. Culture is at the heart of small business success because owners identify the behaviors of the consumer and the needs of the community. Braun et al. (2015) suggested valuing the

consumer and customer service personnel leads to increased business performance and success. The need to remain pro-active and to continually scan the environment for changes then becomes apparent. Proactive scanning assists in building positive relationship among stakeholders.

### **Theme: Building Relationships**

Employees, as well as owners, concede making the customer feel at home creates retention; building customer relationships help to create retention and sustainability. Relationships develop loyalty needed for repeated purchasing of products and service. Kumar et al. (2015) suggested long-term business existence, and customer relationships seemed tied together. P1 – P9 suggest that service personnel who have direct contact with the consumer provide this element in building sustained business processes. Understanding how low-cost relational strategies work proves essential.

Having the knowledge of what one needs to have has minimal effect if one does not understand how to implement the process. Making the customer comfortable through service and care creates a feeling of belonging. Dawkins (2014) indicated this type of service allowed for deliberate planning. Deliberate planning assists in framing-the-game, or creating a strategy. Having service standards that say to the consumer we care about you. P3 Suggested having a live operator to answer incoming customer calls provided the human touch needed to create customer loyalty. P1-P9 suggested prioritizing the needs of the consumer indicated care. The impact becomes clear to business survivability. Having low-cost strategies that empower the employee to provide excellent

customer care leads to retention and sustainability. Low-cost strategies then provide the architecture for communicating and creating sustainability.

### **Theme: Communication to Create Business Sustainability**

Low-cost strategies prove essential for SBOs who in the beginning seem strapped with tight budgets to meet financial needs. Respondents P4 and P7 offered excellent insight into low-cost strategies that have proven valuable in creating customer loyalty. Public documents and news articles indicate some of these businesses as cornerstones of the community and some have received community service awards indicating their preference in the community. Having a formula for new personnel or house policies where everyone works from the same set of ideas when it comes to customer service proves essential. Dawkins (2014) proposed a framing-of-the-game to create a sense of customer attention. When service personnel act and work as a team, it allows for what Dawkins describes as framing. Strategic Framing then occurs when customer service personnel make communication connections that build customer relationships and provides sustainability. What surprised me was the thinking on primary stakeholders as described in question seven.

Many of the respondents suggested the owner of the business as the primary stakeholder. Even after some clarification of whom stakeholders might be those who answered as owners remained as owners. The question that arises is one of; who is needed if the consumer is absent? The need to have a style of holistic leadership to capture the demands of the consumer becomes evident. A servant leadership style as indicated by Carter and Baghurst (2014) empowers and facilitates worker involvement

and increased customer retention and earnings. Servant leadership's effectiveness proves valuable in moral, emotional, and tacit relational behaviors (Liden et al. 2014).

Washington, Sutton, and Sauser (2014) suggested ethical behavior creates ethical organizational climates that moderate these relationships to empower employee performance, and extract tacit knowledge. Employee tacit knowledge can prove valuable to the business owner as they strive to build relationships with the consumer and product personnel. Repeat product purchasing creates the first step in meeting the ongoing challenges of business sustainability.

Influence, changing the environment, guiding the outcomes; Adair et al. (2013) proposed influence such as customer care or charitable work reshapes individuals' attitudes and behaviors, or cultural values. Carlon and Downs (2014) indicated stakeholders such as the consumer and the customer service personnel had irrefutable benefits to the firm. Owners and employees alike from this group of respondents confirmed the need to provide relationship building strategies and resources. Strategies that build customer loyalty address their needs and build service personnel coordination through teamwork; provides low-cost resources that sustain the business. Modeling values towards employees, customers, the environment and corporate citizenship define successful environmental scanning (Carlon & Downs 2014). Taneja and Toombs (2014) confirmed this assessment in their definition of environmental scanning that provides ongoing strategies to organizational development. From a pragmatic perspective, many of the solutions for business success belong to those who lead and have direct contact with what is considered as the consumer.

Focus group respondents from top to bottom emphasize the need to build relationships both in the community with the consumers and among service personnel. Carter and Baghurst (2014) suggested relationship building provided sustained long-term success of the business. Paharia et al. (2014) suggested having a personal touch with consumers as most of the respondents here; helped identify threats to the business and allowed a business to frame-the-game. Strategic framing is the ability to quickly adapt to changing needs of the consumer and service personnel. As described before; this study introduces an upside-down management style that emphasizes facilitation instead of intimidation in creating increased work performance (Washington et al., 2014). A management style that emphasizes servant leadership involves both the community and personnel in response to successful business outcomes.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

I asked 27 different owners to participate in this study of which only five positively responded. The indication that owners have busy schedules becomes apparent in scheduling even brief times to engage with them. The need to provide critical strategies and resources that have ready availability becomes apparent. Allen et al. (2013) suggest SBOs provide 65% of all jobs in the United States. Haltiwanger et al. (2013) indicated 86% of new businesses would close within five years. The need to provide quick, low-cost, strategic resource solutions then becomes valuable in creating sustained business and providing local communities continuity in development. Local communities starved for jobs and revenue can provide guidance for new business owners in helping to develop positive business and community outcomes. Local communities

with empty storefronts become hindrances to nearby business owners and threaten positive development. An extended interview with one of the owners provided valuable information on new business start-up. The owner's first business provided the first-hand experience of what happens when an owner is completely new to an industry and has no knowledge of the business. The owner suggested a lack of understanding created much more work; spending 14 and 16 hour days to lower cost and create profitability. The owner's spouse worked a second job to pay for needs at home. The owner recommended any new business owner spend time working and understanding the business before start-up. The understanding of business expense and how to work as a team proved invaluable in building the second business.

Themes such as customer care, teamwork, relationships building and communication provided core elements of business success. Servant leadership provided the style of leadership that encompasses each of these themes. Mittal and Dorfman (2012) indicated some of the characteristics of servant leadership include egalitarianism, moral integrity, empowerment, empathy, and humility. Servant leadership looks beyond the business and into the community; the effort is to evolve the business into a contributing factor in local communities. Documents indicate businesses provide jobs, tax revenue, and become embedded in community culture providing cornerstones for other business development. Owners who have that knowledge can plan and make adjustments as the business grows and ages. In this sense, owners can as Paharia et al. (2014) described frame-the-game. Framing-the-game allows as P1 through P9 described

owners to develop business processes that mold the business into the community establishing it and providing ongoing existence.

New business owners equipped with these low-cost strategies and resources should have increased successful outcomes to business sustainability. If an increased success rate of only 1% - 5% is obtained; the number of jobs and increased local revenue should prove invaluable. Each of the owners and employees come from successful businesses. Customer care is at the top of low-cost strategies, building employee relationships that create teamwork prove to sustain the business practice. Successful owners have developed atmospheres where consumers feel welcomed and sense appreciation from service personnel. The need to think outside current models to serve the consumer, and meet the challenges of business growth means understanding the value of those involved and is the only way to satisfy marketing challenges (Polanyi, 2012). Knox and Van Oest (2014) suggested action meeting demands both socially, financially, and environmentally prevented loss of capital because of consumer departure.

### **Implications for Social Change**

This study contributes best to business practice by informing business leaders on how to sustain their businesses using low- cost strategies and resources. Studies on branding, sustainability, management styles and more have failed to focus on the operation and relationship between primary stakeholders the customer, and the customer service personnel. The two focus group studies conducted indicated the positive relationship between the consumer, the customer service personnel, and management. Many of these owners survived during the economic downturn in 2008; their insight to customer care

and enhanced relationship building among service personnel provided sustainable outcomes. Dawkins (2014) suggested positive sustainability begins by addressing primary stakeholders; in this case focus group respondents including personnel suggested the owner as a primary stakeholder. The implications here suggest positive outcomes begin with leadership; thus the style of leadership that focuses on the community of stakeholders and ongoing development seems essential. Shadid and Azhar (2013) indicated contributions to social change began by providing insights about improved conditions and creating sustainable futures. Focus group respondents indicated the greatest need for successful businesses was to create teamwork. Teamwork or creating habits service personnel and owners use to enhance business productivity and profitability act together to increase sustainability (Shah et al. 2014). Therefore, working together as a team, led by servant leadership, acts in ways to improve not only customer relationships but also provides community development. Positive community development can help to serve the community by embedding the business into the community culture.

### **Recommendations for Action**

New SBOs should consider the important relationship created between customer service personnel and the consumer. Relationships build trust and loyalty between the small business and the community. As demonstrated by the focus group; when customers feel welcomed they return. Repeat purchasing provides sustainability for new business owners. The business owners in this group of respondents indicated implementation of customer-focused ideas that proved invaluable to their success. Having formulas in

training service personnel, providing personal care in service, and creating a welcoming feeling among customers and service personnel. P6 suggested creating an atmosphere where the consumer feels at home; while P4, P6, P7, and P9 all indicated teamwork provided an invaluable service in making the customer feel welcomed. Shah et al. (2014) proposed the cost to retain a customer was less than the cost of gaining a new customer. Old customers tell others about the business creating advertising that cost nothing. Repeat customers continue to provide stability for the business and cost little or nothing. Customer service is so vital to business Dawkins (2014) indicated business success begins by evaluating the role of customer service; as indicated by the focus group customer service has proven invaluable to continued business existence. The value working together as a team has value, as well.

Study respondents indicating teamwork proved valuable. P4 suggested teaching a system provided for continuity in work performance and provided stability in customer expectations. P6 indicated teamwork helped meet the challenge of providing service that more than met the needs or desires of the consumer. P4 suggested customer service started with Under-promising and then over-delivering or creating expectations in the consumer and then exceeding those expectations. The relationship between customer service personnel and the consumer allows for the business owners to review the needs of the consumer and meet those needs through the service of personnel. New SBOs wanting to provide sustainability should consider and develop strategies that empower service personnel and create a sense of importance and belonging.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

The value obtained from excellent customer service also provides an ongoing need to understand this relationship and tactics business owners can use to increase performance. Customer service personnel who sense they have value provide superior service as indicated in many of the responses throughout the focus group interviews. The need to explore what specific low-cost strategies such as, increased pay, building teamwork, job security and more can provide greater definition to positive actions. Whisnant and Khasawneh (2014) indicated applying servant leadership lead to a valuing of the employee and lead to the use of holistic models that created customer retention. Further study into how this relationship works and develops than seems warranted.

### **Reflections**

I have had my own business and worked for business owners before. The clarity of employee value became clear when leaving a business I was managing, consumers began telling me they would not return. Upon asking them why the response was overwhelming; the service they had received and they were afraid would cease. If my actions created such loyalty, what was the loyalty worth and why was it important to the community. Consumers in most small towns across the world and the U.S. want to feel welcomed. Each community has its own culture, and when businesses settle into that culture, a dynamic relationship develops that leads to sustainability. Consumers do not want businesses to fail; instead, they want them to meet their demands. Many of the respondents in the focus group agreed that building an atmosphere where individuals felt at home built customer loyalty. P6 and P7 indicated providing a sense of belonging

helped to increase repeated consumer buying habits. In culture, repeated habits become the behavior, the beliefs, and the value of the community. The one item that surprised me the most was the question asked about the most important stakeholder.

Even after clarification what constituted groups of stakeholders most of the group said not once but twice the owner. P1 in responding to this question and question 10 provided insight on how the role of the owner could create stability or instability. The owner's role was 24 hours a day seven days a week. When no one else was there, the owner had to attend to all the needs. If an alarm went off at 2 in the morning, the call went out to the owner. The thought came to me regarding the relationship between the customer service personnel, the consumer, and now the owner becoming triangular. The success of the business then seems to revolve around the relationship between the owner, service personnel, and the consumer. In the middle; the customer service personnel relays the wants and desires to the owner, and returns, in service to the consumer, the owner's response. When the community is served, each of these individual stakeholders receives attention. Meeting these demands is no easy task and will take a concentrated effort by each individual group to succeed.

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

As a small business owner, my initial focus was my product offering. Service and the consumer relationships proved to be of minimal concern. However, as the business increased, understanding how to maintain the success of the business seemed fleeting. Soon I began reflecting upon what made previous businesses I worked for successful. In my mind, I had a clear revelation of the relationships between customer service personnel

and the consumer. The lifetime of previous work leads to turning the focus outward instead of inward and determining what task now needed attention. Focusing on the relationship between management, service personnel, and the consumers lead to 10 plus years of business. Dawkins (2014) suggested understanding this relationship provided the beginning of a successful business. Most SBOs only consider what they are attempting to sell constantly inundated with resources and strategies that cost hundreds of dollars make success when struggling seem impossible. However, when SBOs realize their most valuable assets to business sustainability are free; then success becomes much more realistic. Alvarez et al. (2013) indicated primary stakeholders as those needed by an organization to survive. When owners realize those stakeholders as customer service personnel and the consumer; then establishing a relationship can prove invaluable. Owners who understand this relationship should no longer feel threatened about business survivability and concentrate their efforts on providing motivated service that leads to customer retention.

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## Appendix A: (NIH) Certificate of Completion

## (NIH) Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Sherman Humphrey** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants.”

Date of completion: 01/14/2014

Certification Number: 1357053

## Appendix B

### **Research Question**

The central research question is: What specific low-cost strategies and initiatives can small business owners engage in to provide sustained business performance?

### **Interview/Survey Questions**

Hello,

My name is Sherman I am collecting data to discover improved strategies small business owners can employ to improve performance and increase customer loyalty. This interview will consist of 11 individual questions and should take about 30 to 45 minutes.

The focus group shall receive a second set of nine questions in the follow-up of individual questions lasting about 30 to 45 minutes. With your written consent, we will begin consent form found in the research section.

### **Central Questions**

The central research question is: What specific low-cost strategic resources and initiatives can small business owners engage in to facilitate continued existence?

### **Interview Questions Location**

Participants shall give written consent, the consent form found under heading research question, Section 1.

### **Interview questions:**

1. In what type of business are you employed?
2. What or who is the first priority of your business?
3. What employee performance strategies increase customer retention?

4. How do these strategies improve customer retention?
5. What impact does employee motivation have on business success?
6. What strategies have improved your performance?
7. Who do you consider as the primary stakeholders in your business?
8. What challenges do you encounter in creating continued existence of your business?
9. What strategies continue to provide improved work performance and lead to customer retention for your business?
10. What additional information can you provide to help me understand business success?

### **Interview Protocol**

Interview protocol will include a set of research questions found in Section 1. The interview process shall include three focus group interviews to remove the fear of reprisal (Yin, 2014). Group one shall include managers or owners of small businesses (Johnson, 2015). The second group shall consist of five employees of the small businesses owners (Johnson, 2015). Finally, the third group shall consist of both groups in one focus group interview to gather a mix of personal experiences (Sarker et al., 2013). The use of a voice recording device to gather data possibly lost with just pen and paper (Yin, 2014). Group members shall receive numbers such as P-1, P-2 to maintain confidentiality (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). The objective of the interview protocol is to achieve commonality adding to consistency and reliability (Foley & O'Conner, 2013). Group members must meet eligibility requirement as describe in participants section.

**Interview Protocol:**

- The first step is to call businesses owners who have been in business 5 years or more.
- The second step is to send out consent forms and schedule interviews.
- The third step is to inform the participants that the data will be recorded using a voice recording device to maintain accuracy.
- The fourth step is to notify participants that only I as the researcher will have access to the voice recorded data and will verify what participants have said with a follow-up document for them to check what they have said is accurate.
- The fifth step each participant will be assigned a number to maintain privacy.
- The sixth step is to inform participants that there will be two separate focus groups, one with managers and owners and one with employees to protect privacy.
- The seventh step, if any potential participants have any questions before the study they can contact me at (530) – 941 – 5355, and I will be glad to answers them.
- The eighth step, I ask all participants to keep what is said during focus groups interviews confidential.
- If you agree to participate in this study, simply return the consent form, and I will contact you for a formal focus group interview.

## Appendix C

**Letter of Cooperation****Letter of Cooperation from a Research Partner**

Community Research Partner Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

Dear Sherman E Humphrey Jr,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Strategies Small Business Owners Use for Long-Term Existence within the Insert Name of Community Partner. As part of this study, “I authorize you to invite employees of this organization to participate in a focus group,” and allow you to speak to individual employees about potential participation. Participants will be allowed to review a copy of the final draft to provide member-checking of collected data to insure accuracy. Individuals’ participation will be voluntary and at each of our own discretion.

We understand that our organization’s responsibilities include: Providing you with a list of employees with whom you may speak to in regards to participation in the study. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I understand that the student will not be naming our organization in the doctoral project report that is published in Proquest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization’s policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student’s supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Authorization Official: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the email, or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verify any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).

