

2018

# Strategies for Sustainability of Nonfranchise Casual Dining Restaurants

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Kristin Burke Martin

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Strategies for Sustainability of Nonfranchise Casual Dining Restaurants

by

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MS, Averett University, 1996

BS, Virginia Commonwealth University, 1991

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

Walden University

October 2018

## Abstract

In the United States, over 50% of restaurants fail within the first 5 years of operations resulting in approximately \$2.1 billion annually in lost national sales revenue. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the strategies used by owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants to ensure sustainability longer than 5 years. The study was grounded in Porter's 5 forces framework as a lens for identifying effective strategies that promote restaurant sustainability. The data collection process comprised gathering data and information via semistructured interviews with 3 owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants in the mid-Atlantic region who sustained their restaurants for longer than 5 years. Also, a review of archival records, including restaurant websites, newspaper advertisements, social media, and promotional documentation ensued. Member checking ensured the accuracy of participant responses in the data analysis process, and methodological triangulation was used to increase understanding and validity of data. Three themes emerged from data analysis: offering quality food and exceptional service, respecting and encouraging employees, and participating in day-to-day operations. The findings of this study promote positive social change by supporting local farmers, providing nutritious food to consumers, developing positive community relationships, and providing a safe place to socialize and meet friends.

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## Dedication

I want to dedicate this Doctoral Study to my hero, my dad, David L. Burke. He was my inspiration for getting my doctoral degree. He was always encouraging my sisters and me to shoot for the moon. I know he is smiling from heaven knowing that he raised a wonderful woman before going to be with his true Father, God. I cannot wait for you to watch from heaven as I walk across the stage and become Dr. Kristin Burke Martin. Thank you, Daddy, for pushing me beyond my limits.

## Acknowledgments

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Parsa, van der Rest, Smith, Parse, and Bulimic (2015) and the National Restaurant Association [NRA] (2012) revealed that approximately 30% of new restaurants opened each year between 2000 and 2010 in the United States failed. Although more than 50% of restaurants fail in the first 5 years of operation, costing \$2.1 billion annually in lost national sales revenue, sustainable restaurants are the top economic contributors to the United States economy and are the second-largest private-sector employer (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2017; Cha & Borchgrevink, 2014). Exploring the strategies that some nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners use to ensure sustainability may increase the success rate of other restaurant owners. I employed a qualitative multiple case study to examine the phenomenon of strategies used by nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners that contribute to business sustainability beyond the first 5 years of operations.

### **Background of the Problem**

American consumers spend 47% of their household food dollars on dining out contributing to restaurant industry sales in excess of \$798.7 billion in 2017 (NRA, 2017). Consumers spend approximately half of their disposable income on dining out inspiring current and aspiring restaurant owners to discover ways to entice consumers. However, inadequate strategic planning by owners in the restaurant industry may result in a restaurant's failure within the first 5 years of operations (Gummesson, 2014). Restaurant failures generate a loss in sales revenue, impacting the national economy, in excess of \$2.1 billion annually, and nonfranchise restaurants are 15% more likely to fail than

franchise restaurants (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2017; Parsa, Gregory, & Terry, 2010).

Economic fluctuations and consumer needs impact businesses, including restaurants, requiring the owners to create strategic plans (Burns, 2014). Thus, it is essential that restaurant owners identify underlying strategies that enhance customer delight and loyalty throughout each business cycle (Jana, 2014; Ong, Lee, & Ramayah, 2018). Between 2014 and 2016, 70% of all U.S. restaurants were single-unit operations, and the restaurant industry employed one out of every ten working U.S. citizens (NRA, Facts at a Glance, 2017; Parsa et al., 2015). The restaurant industry contributed approximately 4% to the Gross Domestic product in 2016 (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2017; NRA, Pocket Factbook, 2017). The outlook for restaurant employment growth in 2017 was expected to be 30% lower than in 2016 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; NRA, Restaurant Economic Snapshot, 2017). The research study is valuable in determining what successful strategies are used by owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants to maintain business sustainability that will, in turn, support the U.S. economy by assisting other restaurant owners.

### **Problem Statement**

In the United States, over 50% of restaurants fail within the first 5 years of operations (Harris, Gibson, & McDowell, 2014). Restaurants that fail within the first 5 years of operations result in approximately \$2.1 billion annually in lost national sales revenue (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2017; Cha & Borchgrevink, 2014). The general business problem is the inability of some nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners to

compete and sustain a profitable business. The specific business problem is that some owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants lack strategies to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify the strategies used by owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years. I sought data from five nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners in the mid-Atlantic region that have sustained operations for more than 5 years. Nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners may find the strategies discovered throughout the research study helpful in sustaining their business. The implications for positive social change may include restaurant owners supporting local farmers, donating unused food to community food banks, providing nutritious food to consumers, developing positive community relationships, as well as, providing a safe place to socialize and meet friends.

### **Nature of the Study**

I used the qualitative method to explore the phenomenon of strategies used by owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants to sustain their business beyond 5 years. Researchers use qualitative methods to obtain evidence of human behaviors through observations or inquiry (Baškarada, 2014). Researchers use statistics in quantitative research to test hypotheses and create numerical interpretations of human behaviors ignoring critical factors that cannot be quantified (Barnham, 2015). Quantitative research methods were not appropriate for this research study because the goal was to identify specific strategies owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants

employed to remain successful, not quantify data and test hypotheses. Archibald, Radil, Zhang, and Hanson (2015) stated that researchers use mixed methods to collect, analyze, and incorporate inferences from both quantitative and qualitative data into a single study. Therefore, mixed method research was not the most suitable design for the research study as it includes a quantitative component. Upon review of the qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research strategies, the qualitative method was the most appropriate choice for this research study.

Case study design was more advantageous over other qualitative research designs when researchers have limited, or no control over behavioral events and the research focuses on a contemporary set of events (Yin, 2017). Also, case studies involve the collection and analysis of data obtained through inquiry of individuals' knowledge and experiences surrounding the specific phenomenon researched, which was appropriate for this research study. Therefore, I used a case study design to explore the research phenomenon of strategies used by owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants to sustain their business beyond 5 years. Researchers use a phenomenological design to explain the social and psychological aspects of a phenomenon through the lived experiences of people (Sousa, 2014). The phenomenological research design was not appropriate for this research study because the goal of the research study was to identify the effectiveness of specific strategies employed by owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants to remain sustainable beyond 5 years, not explain social and psychological aspects. Researchers that focus on the cultural framework of social interactions use the ethnography research design, which was not appropriate for my study



since the participants are nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners, not a specific cultural group (Ellis, 2015). Researchers use the narrative research design to understand the lives of individuals as told through their stories (Yin, 2017). In the research study, the individual lives of participants were not explored because the emphasis was on strategies restaurant owners use for restaurant sustainability.

### **Research Question**

The research question for the proposed research study was: What strategies do owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants use to ensure business sustainability beyond 5 years?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies do you use to recruit and retain employees?
2. What strategies impacted your decision to open the restaurant?
3. What strategies did you use to choose this location for your restaurant?
4. What strategies do you use to create loyal customers?
5. How do you use strategies to manage the restaurant operations?
6. What challenges or barriers do you face when implementing your strategies?
7. How do you overcome challenges in implementing your strategies?
8. What are your competitive advantages?
9. What else would you like to share about your strategies that contributed to the sustainability of the business?

## Conceptual Framework

I used Porter's (1979) five forces for the conceptual framework of the research study. Porter (1979) classified five forces that impact an industry's success: (a) barriers to entry, (b) substitutes, (c) bargaining power of suppliers, (d) bargaining power of buyers, and (e) competitive rivalry. Porter (2008) later narrowed the five forces framework further to evaluate threats at the individual business level versus an industry-wide lens. The concept tenets transformed from evaluating the five forces impact on an industry (e.g., restaurant industry), in Porter's (1979) earlier seminal work, to assessing the effect of five forces on an individual business such as the classical Rosa's Pizza, in Porter's (2008) seminal text.

The five forces of Porter's (2008) theory pertained to the research study since evaluating internal and external threats assist owners in the restaurant industry by identifying effective strategies that promote restaurant sustainability. Porter (2008) created the five forces framework to assist managers in learning how to evaluate internal and external threats and promote strategies to neutralize those threats. Mandabach, Siddiqui, Blanch, and Vanleeuwen (2011) explained internal and external environments (i.e., restaurant management, customer satisfaction, and service quality) are key factors for evaluating the success of a restaurant. Restaurant sustainability is contingent on meticulous strategic planning and effective implementation of the plan (Rosalina, Poulstona, & Goodsira, 2016). The five forces framework applied to the research study through the increased understanding of what owners in the restaurant industry view as

internal and external threats to their business. Also, restaurant owners may use the knowledge of internal and external threats to outline strategies for sustainability.

### **Operational Definitions**

In the operational definition section of the research study, I provided clarifying definitions. The terms included in this section may be easily confused without further explanation. The following are definitions of terms that I used in the research study:

**Casual dining restaurant:** Casual dining restaurants include full service, sit down restaurants that offer moderately priced food items and a casual dining atmosphere (Dziadkowiec & Rood, 2015).

**Competitive rivalry:** Competitive rivalry exists when businesses use the same type of resources to compete in the same market and for the same products (Chen, Liu, & Wu, 2016).

**Hospitality industry:** The hospitality industry includes service sector businesses such as hotels, restaurants, managed food services, catering, and tourism (Arroyo-López, Cárcamo-Solís, Álvarez-Castañón, & Guzmán-López, 2017).

**Nonfranchise restaurant:** A nonfranchise restaurant is a restaurant that is not owned by a parent company or required to sell a specific product/service in a particular location. A restaurant owned by one or several people, not a company, is a nonfranchise restaurant (Koutroumanis, Watson, & Dastoor, 2012).

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

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are facts considered to be true; however, sufficient evidence to support the belief does not exist (Thomas, 2017). The three assumptions formed before data collection were discovered to be accurate assumptions. The first assumption that proved to be true was that restaurant owners could accurately describe the strategies utilized to sustain the business beyond 5 years of operations. The restaurant owners interviewed provided informal strategies used to promote sustainability. The second assumption that proved to be true was that participants in the study would provide comprehensive and truthful responses to interview questions. The participant restaurant owners were very passionate about the success of their restaurants and provided very detailed comprehensive and truthful responses during the interviews. The third assumption that proved to be true was that participants in the research study would understand the questions asked. During the interviews, the restaurant owners asked clarifying questions to the interview questions asked; however, after clarification, the restaurant owners were very forthcoming and understood the interview questions.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are a potential weakness of a research study (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2018). The first limitation of the research study was that the population chosen for the study might not represent a comprehensive collection of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants offering varying cuisines. Although the data collected from the nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners included varying types of food, the data did not include

ethnic cuisines. One nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owner of a Chinese restaurant, included in the study population, declined to participate due to language barriers. I recommend including restaurant owners of ethnic cuisines to participate in further research. The second limitation was that participants might be cautious about disclosing information regarding the successes and failures of their business. The third limitation was the exclusion of owners of unsuccessful nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants may limit the research breadth. After data collection, I still agree that the exclusion of owners of unsuccessful nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants limits the research outcome. The inclusion of owners of failed nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants should be included in further research. The combination of successful and failed nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants in the study may conclude varying themes and conclusions. A final limitation was that a researcher could not transfer the study results to other locations. The limitation of data collection in the mid-Atlantic region does limit the population of available nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners which in turn may limit themes and conclusions. Expanding the geographic location to surrounding cities and counties may discover other themes and conclusions. I did mitigate the limitations by collecting data from several sources such as interviews, field notes, and websites. However, further research including varying restaurants offering ethnic cuisines, failed nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners, expanding the study geographic location may further mitigate the limitations.

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations define the scope or boundaries of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The first delimitation of the research study was the use of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants. The research study did not include insight from owners of franchise restaurants. Expanding the research population to include franchise restaurants may have changed the outcome of the research study due to diverse requirements for managing a franchise restaurant such as restrictions on products offered and the inability to independently change policy and procedures. A second delimitation was the geographic location of the research study. The research study did not include insight from owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants beyond the mid-Atlantic region. The consequences of the phenomenon may be far-reaching to other geographical areas; however, the focus of the research study was nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants operating in the mid-Atlantic region for more than 5 years.

## **Significance of the Study**

As discussed by Cha and Borchgrevink (2014), sustainable restaurants are the top economic contributors to the United States economy and are the second-largest private-sector employer in the nation. Unfortunately, about 50% of restaurants are not sustainable beyond 5 years of operations (Parsa et al., 2015). Added pressure is placed on nonfranchise restaurant owners as they retain all of the operational and financial risk associated with sustaining a restaurant (Hamstra, 2017). This study may be significant because a deeper understanding of strategies owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants use to ensure business sustainability beyond 5 years in the mid-Atlantic region

could increase the success of existing and aspiring nonfranchise restaurant owners which, in turn, will increase economic growth in the community.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The purpose of this study was to explore strategies owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants use to ensure business sustainability beyond 5 years. Continual economic, regulatory, and environmental changes necessitate proper internal control strategies to alleviate internal and external threats (Luciana & Nedelcu, 2015). Owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants should assess the effectiveness of internal controls regularly due to continual fluctuations in external threats (Frazer, 2016). Restaurant owners may use the information included in the research study to gain the knowledge of effective business strategies, contributing to restaurant survival and sustainability.

### **Implications for Social Change**

In the research study, I provided a better understanding of business strategies that restaurant owners used for restaurant sustainability. Restaurants are extremely important in job creation and economic growth. The prediction is that the restaurant industry would create at least 1.4 million jobs between 2012 and 2022 (NRA, 2015; Parsa et al., 2010). Alka and Midha (2015) discussed the importance of employment and an individual's feelings of self-worth. Feelings of self-worth promote an individual's self-esteem through the ability to support themselves and others (Alka & Midha, 2015). In addition to self-worth, stable employment promotes better physical and mental health in society, not just compensation for necessities (Dillon, 2016). The implications for positive social

change may include restaurant owners supporting local farmers, donating unused food to community food banks, providing nutritious food, developing positive community relationships, as well as, providing a safe place to socialize and meet friends.

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

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies utilized by owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants located in the mid-Atlantic region that create sustainability beyond 5 years. I reviewed literature pertinent to the study topic and research question to assist in establishing direction for the study. The literature review is a comparison of articles, books, and other scholarly works embracing a subject matter (Wee & Banister, 2016). Onwuegbuzie and Weinbaum (2017) and Yin (2017) described the literature review as a creative combination of similar great works from numerous scholars that analyze, synthesize, and provide further knowledge. The focal point of the literature review relates to business strategies, specific strategies that nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners use to sustain their business. For this study, I reviewed the following concepts; (a) *entrepreneurship*, (b) *franchise and nonfranchise restaurants*, (c) *business success factors*, (d) *business failure factors*, (e) *Porter's five forces framework*, (f) *strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT)*, (g) *total quality management (TQM)*, (h) *strategic risk*, and (i) *strategic planning*.

I used the several databases in the literature search including Emerald Management ABI/INFORM Global, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Hospitality & Tourism Complete, ProQuest, ScienceDirect, and government databases. Specific search



tactics included search words with various combinations of *restaurant failure, restaurant success, nonfranchise restaurants, franchise restaurants, restaurant sustainability, entrepreneurship, business sustainability, business success factors, business failure factors, corporate social responsibility, financial performance, strategic risk, strategic planning, food consumption in tourism, local foods, total quality management, SWOT analysis, Porter's five forces framework* and *customer satisfaction*. I selected these keywords to identify the skills, knowledge, and strategies utilized by nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners to remain sustainable beyond 5 years. The research study included 227 references composed of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, dissertations, government websites, and web pages. Of the 227, 205 (90.3%) were sources published from 2014 to 2018. A total of 200 (88.1%) of referenced sources were peer-reviewed articles. I obtained articles from the Walden University library, government sites, and other peer-reviewed journals.

### **Relevant Theories and Supportive Concepts**

**Porter's five forces framework.** Porter's five forces framework is an excellent tool to analyze business strategies. Porter's (1979) five forces framework vary depending on the specific industry and economic conditions during the strategic planning process; although, the five forces remain the same (Grigore, 2014). The five forces framework include the bargaining power of buyers, bargaining power of suppliers, the threat of new entrants, the threat of substitutes, the degree of rivalry.

The bargaining power of buyers refers to the influence consumers have on price, quality of service and products (Porter, 2008). Consumers can create competition within

an industry to fulfill their own needs (Hu & Yang, 2016). Customers have the power to make demands of a business. Customers use their negotiating power by demanding higher quality and lower prices from a business (Musonera & Weber, 2018). Restaurant owners must be perceptive to the needs and requirements of customers to create loyalty (Bayani & Crisanto, 2017).

Bargaining power of suppliers refers to influential suppliers, including labor, that acquires more of the value for themselves by charging higher prices, limiting quality or services, or shifting costs to industry participants (Oyadomari, Silva, Neto, & Diehl, 2017). Suppliers have the authority to adjust prices according to supply and demand. If demand is high, suppliers may increase prices elevating the cost to businesses. Restaurant owners must obtain quotes from several suppliers to ensure they are receiving the best possible price for products and services (Mittal, Krejci, & Craven, 2018; Oyadomari et al., 2017).

Threats of new entrants, businesses, to an industry or market area leverage existing capabilities and cash flows that upset competition. The new entrants put pressure on prices, costs, and market share (Hu & Yang, 2016). Restaurant owners must find methods to overcome obstacles that impede a competitive advantage due to the high level of restaurant industry competition. One obstacle to alleviating the threat of new entrants is creating product differentiation that helps establish consumer brand loyalty. Another hurdle to overcome is obtaining adequate capital requirements required for a start-up business (Grigore, 2014). Implementing effective operating strategies assists

restaurant owners in providing quality products and services that will stand out among competitors (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018).

The threat of substitutes exists as there are unlimited substitutes in most industries, especially the restaurant industry. Consumers have options to visit alternative businesses or buy another product. For example, a consumer has the option to dine at home or another restaurant. Restaurant owners must develop strategies to eliminate defective products and services, build customer loyalty, and remain competitive in the industry (Dessain & Fishman, 2017). A business owner must evaluate product or service differentiation and switching costs for consumers (Milimu & Theuri, 2017). Switching costs are costs that a consumer is willing to incur to go to another business due to a particular business' inferior customer service or poor product quality. The higher the switching cost, the less probability a consumer will go to another business. For example, a restaurant that offers a diverse product and superior service will continually compete and gain market share (Milimu & Theuri, 2017).

The foremost objective of a strategic plan is to establish the best approach to managing competition or the degree of rivalry (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018). Competition is a beneficial mechanism for determining sustainability. Sources of competition must be known (Salim, 2017). A restaurant owner must determine where the restaurant fits within the competitive environment. Porter (2008) narrowed the focus of the five forces framework from an industry perspective to an individual business perspective within a particular industry. Strategically positioning a business within a specific industry by developing defenses against competitors is essential for sustainability. As industries

change, business owners use strategic positioning to improve business opportunities.

Business owners must rank the order of the five forces from most important to least important within a given industry when forming a strategic plan through benchmarking exercises and scenario planning (Lehr, Lorenz, Willert, & Rohrbeck, 2017).

Before the strategic planning process, restaurant owners must evaluate the impact the five forces have on the business. Restaurant owners need to assess the threat of new entrants, the bargaining power of customers, the bargaining power of suppliers, the threat of substitute products, and the competition among related businesses. A restaurant owner must determine the elements that set the business apart from other restaurants (Genoveva & Siam, 2017).

**SWOT analysis.** Genoveva and Siam (2017) took the five forces framework a step further and incorporated a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis. A SWOT analysis is a method for a business owner to document its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to develop a competitive evaluation (Luciana & Nedelcu, 2015). The risks may include internal threats such as employee dissatisfaction that influences service quality. External threats may include competition and economic conditions (Mondal, 2017). By defining these characteristics, a business owner may use this information to create a successful strategic plan. A SWOT analysis is a valuable tool for business owners and management to apply in evaluating the current situation of the business and determine how to allocate resources optimally for sustainability (Mirzakhani, Parsaamal, & Golzar, 2014). Restaurant owners may wish to include all employees in a brainstorming session to define the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities,

and threats allowing for a broad spectrum of information from front-line employees to management (Hladchenko, 2014). When creating strategic initiatives to reduce risk, restaurant owners use a SWOT analysis to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the business.

A SWOT analysis is instrumental in conjunction with Porters' five forces framework. Restaurant owners use the five forces framework to assess the threats from the competitive advantage standpoint and assist with strategic planning. A restaurant owner must re-evaluate the five forces framework and the SWOT analysis before each strategic planning session; preferably annually, as the characteristics of each element may change over time (Luciana & Nedelcu, 2015).

Strategic planning is an essential part of business success. A SWOT analysis is key to determining the link between internal and external factors and a business' competitive situation (Gupta & Mishra, 2016). However, a business owner using a SWOT analysis alone will not obtain a thorough perspective on the effectiveness of strategic plans. Restaurant owners using a SWOT analysis, in tandem with other analytic tools, such as Porter's five forces framework, obtain a comprehensive representation of a strategy's success (Barboza & Rojo, 2015). Öneren, Arar, and Yurdakul, (2017) used a combination of SWOT analysis and Porter's five forces framework to evaluate restaurant success.

**Total quality management.** Business owners use Total Quality Management (TQM) at the organizational level that encompasses all functions of the business (Ahmed, 2017; Andrei, 2016). Also, business owners use TQM to promote service excellence

through teamwork, customer-focused quality, and continuous improvement to achieve customer satisfaction and loyalty (Andrei, 2016; Androniceanu, 2017; Ong et al., 2018). For TQM to be successful, a business owner must perceive the need for change and be open to creating a superior business (Pattanayak, Koilakuntla, & Punyatoya, 2017). The following eight principles are required for a business owner to build a business that is committed to TQM: (a) understand the needs of customers, (b) management commitment to TQM, (c) total employee involvement in decision-making, (d) process approach to identifying processes that require improvement, (e) identification of processes that are intertwined impacting each other, (f) continuous improvement approach to operations, (g) management by facts, not by emotion, and (h) supplier quality standard requirements (Andrei, 2016).

Essential requirements for implementing TQM are management and employee involvement, communication, and training (Arroyo-López et al., 2017; Assarlind & Gremyr, 2016; Ngambi, & Nkemkiafu, 2015; Zylfijaj & Pira, 2017). Business owners and managers use elements of TQM to reduce variability in product quality and performance (Midor & Zarnovský, 2016). The reduction in the variability of the product and service may lead to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty (Muhammad, Mohsin, & Lina, 2016). Business owners use TQM to identify the needs of consumers and assist employees in discovering methods to consistently create customer satisfaction (de Menezes & Wood, 2015). Consumers patronize businesses highly rated in quality and customer satisfaction (El Khouly & Fadl, 2016; Pattanayak et al., 2017). Therefore, it is

essential for restaurant owners to implement TQM measures that focus on quality and customer satisfaction.

Satisfied employees reduce organizational turnover averting losses and provide better service quality (Carter & Baghurst, 2014; García-Bernal & Ramírez-Alesón, 2015). An employee's organizational commitment influences job performance and service quality. The emotional attachment an employee develops within an organization or business creates superior service resulting in a competitive advantage over similar businesses (Ahmed, 2017). Employee satisfaction influences optimal service performance creating customer satisfaction and loyalty (Liu, Chou, Gan, & Tu, 2015; Ogbonnaya & Valizade, 2018). A positive correlation exists between staff empowerment and the financial performance and sustainability of a business. (Arroyo-López et al., 2017; Ngambi & Nkemkiafu, 2015; Ogbeide et al., 2017). Therefore, the need for employee involvement in the strategic planning is critical. The visibility of management in the day to day operations of a business helps employees to have overall job satisfaction. Continued management interactions with staff illustrate the manager cares about what the employees do every day and increases employee morale (Swartout, Boykin, Dixon, & Ivanov, 2015).

Management and staff must establish a common definition of quality products and services (El Khouly & Fadl, 2016; Nadarajah & Syed, 2014; Zylfijaj & Pira, 2017). The individual definition of quality may differ greatly. Thus, a common definition is critical as poor quality will impact the business' competitive advantage and reputation detrimentally affecting profitability and sustainability (Tohid, 2015). El Khouly and Fadl

(2016) stated that a business' profitability is superior when the employees believe in the quality of products and services offered.

Customer focused management and employees implement the elements of TQM effectively (Zylfijaj & Pira, 2017; El Khouly & Fadl, 2016). A business owner must implement a culture of quality for all employees (Dushica & Sonja, 2018). Once the business has quality as its organizational culture, employees will incorporate quality into every aspect of their job (Calvo-Mora, Pico'n, Ruiz, & Cauzo, 2014; Jaca & Psomas, 2015; Tohid, 2015).

TQM impacts all aspects of the business including delivery and pricing (de Menezes & Wood, 2015; Ngambi & Nkemkiafu, 2015). Ngambi and Nkemkiafu (2015) stated that business owners must perform a TQM review annually to determine if modifications to products and services are required to remain competitive and sustain customer demands. Management models and strategies must be flexible to adjust to changes in the competitive environment and continuous improvement (Nadarajah & Syed, 2014; Zylfijaj & Pira, 2017).

To successfully implement TQM in the service industry, management must identify barriers to the implementation of TQM and employ strategies to overcome those obstacles. It is extremely important for restaurant owners to know the barriers to TQM in the service industry which are known to be: (a) the attitude of employees toward quality; (b) the employees' resistance to change; (c) the high turnover at the management level; (d) the human resource barrier; (e) the inadequate use of empowerment and teamwork; (f) the lack of communication; (g) the lack of continuous improvement culture; (h) the lack



of coordination between departments; (i) the lack of proper training and education; (j) the lack of top-management commitment; (k) the lack of benchmarking; and (l) the lack of adequate planning (Jaca & Psomas, 2015; Mosadeghrad, 2014; Tohid, 2017). A business owner can successfully implement TQM if a majority of the barriers are overcome (Talib & Rahman, 2015; Tohid, 2015). Successful implementation of TQM requires an all-encompassing entrepreneurial culture of understanding the needs and wants of consumers and continuously promoting customer satisfaction (Cătălin, Bogdan, & Dimitrie, 2014; Jaca & Psomas, 2015).

Restaurant owners that use a combination of Porter's five forces framework, SWOT Analysis, and Total Quality Management (TQM) obtain a good foundation for determining the path to follow to become and remain profitable (Harrington, Chathoth, Ottenbacher, & Altinay, 2014; Hladchenko, 2014). Since 2000, researchers realized that one concept or theory alone did not provide an efficient business strategic plan (Harrington et al., 2014; Hladchenko, 2014). Harrington et al. (2014) and Hladchenko (2014) began utilizing a combination of concepts and methods to create more comprehensive and practical strategic plans.

### **Small Business Owners**

Small business owners and entrepreneurs assist the local economy by creating employment opportunities, economic revitalization, and economic growth (Bonito, Daantos, Mateo, & Rosete, 2017; Bristow & Jenkins, 2018; Halabi & Lussier, 2014). Frid (2015) and Halabi and Lussier (2014) posited that a small business owner's success is dependent on financing, human resources, operation and production, marketing and

sales, customer service, and management skills. In addition to small business success factors, entrepreneurs learn by doing. Investing time and money in an entrepreneur venture may be daunting; however, an individual will reap the benefits of business ownership if they are willing to learn from successes and failures (Dias & Teixeira, 2017).

It is essential for entrepreneurs to recognize the most cost-effective method to raise capital for the business for short-term and long-term goals (Kirkwood, 2016). To remain competitive, a small business owner must research the best compensation package for employees to recruit and retain good, responsible employees with the same goals as the business (Feng, Wang, & Saini, 2015; Larkin, Pierce, & Gino, 2012). The owner, not just front-line staff, must understand the entire operation to ensure the efficiency of equipment, supplies, and workflow. Entrepreneurs should recognize the current and potential customers that the business wants to maintain and reach with the marketing and sales approach (Jayawarna, Jones, Lam, & Phua, 2014). Customer service is an essential element of a successful business. A business owner aims to gain a high level of customer loyalty through optimal customer service (Ahmed, 2017; Ong et al., 2018). Depending on the type of business and the need for information technology, a business owner may want to invest in technology to remain competitive with other similar small businesses (Purnama & Subroto, 2016). The owner of a small business has a huge responsibility of managing which encompasses leadership, strategic planning, and overall supervision of the business (Amisano & Anthony, 2017).

Chen and Elston (2013) surveyed small restaurant owners that possessed previous experience in the restaurant and hospitality industry. A very small percentage (1%) of the respondents to the survey indicated they had formal training in restaurant operations. Approximately 45% of the respondents indicated most employees were family members. Small restaurant owners contributed to the success of their restaurant to making good business decisions, being honest, and providing excellent customer service (Chen & Elston, 2013). Bobera, Leković, and Berber (2017) confirmed the findings of Chen and Elston's (2013) study.

One common theme among entrepreneurs is the emphasis on commitment to strengthening society and community (He, Standen, & Coetzer, 2017). In the first few years of operation, entrepreneurs may face obstacles such as resource needs (i.e., financial, human, and technological), management processes (i.e., methods to manage resources), and knowledge deficiencies (i.e., lack of experience) (Lougui & Nyström, 2014). The SBA instituted a website with resources and tools to assist entrepreneurs with general operational questions to aid in entrepreneur success (SBA, 2017).

### **Franchise and Nonfranchise Restaurants**

**Franchise.** Entrepreneurs elect to open a franchise business primarily for financial profitability. Madanoglu, Lee, and Castrogiovanni (2013) provided evidence that, regardless of internal and external risk adjustments, the financial profitability of franchising business owners consistently outperformed that of nonfranchise business owners. Therefore, entrepreneurs prefer operating a franchise due to its profitability and risk sharing.

In addition to financial profitability, individuals elect to open a franchise due to their lack of managerial expertise and financial constraints (Hamstra, 2017). Franchising offers the individual the ability to utilize franchise capital, strategic plans, management, and resources (Park & Jang, 2017). Franchise capital and outstanding financial performance are key incentives for individuals seeking to open a restaurant (Ribeiro & Akehurst, 2014). Brand recognition, lower risks of failure, easy set-up, and customer loyalty are additional advantages of franchising (Ribeiro & Akehurst, 2014; Salar & Salar, 2014).

An individual must evaluate their risk appetite and the importance of brand differentiation before rendering a business decision. Franchisor risk sharing is a great motivation for franchising over non-franchising. Franchisees share overall risk with the franchisor which is an enormous incentive for individuals that are risk averse (Rohm, 2002). Carrying or internal costs are susceptible to economic shocks which make franchising more attractive than nonfranchise because the franchisee can share those costs with the franchisor reducing the personal outlay of funds (Rohm, 2002; Rohm, Tarasi, & Popa, 2013). Entrepreneurs are also inclined to seek franchise over nonfranchise opportunities due to the extent of organizational advantages (Gonzalez-Diaz & Solis-Rodriguez, 2012; Rohm et al., 2013).

Although franchising appears to be an easy business decision, disadvantages of franchising do exist. Franchising requires a large amount of capital for start-up fees and ongoing franchise costs (Rohm, 2002). A franchisee must adhere to strict franchisor guidelines allowing for minimal autonomy or independence (Gonzalez-Diaz & Solis-

Rodriguez, 2012; Rohm et al., 2013). If autonomy is a motive for an individual, then a nonfranchise business venture may be the optimal choice.

**Nonfranchise.** Depending on the primary objective of a nonfranchise business owner, he/she may appreciate having full control of the daily operational oversight, planning, and strategic implementation. Nonfranchise business owners are required to maintain constant contact with managers and employees to ensure all aspects of the business are adequately governed (Park & Jang, 2017). Unlike franchise business owners, nonfranchise business owners retain the entire risk associated with running a business (Rohm, 2002). The nonfranchise business owner must personally provide funding for additional staff resources (Hamstra, 2017). Lazányi (2015) documented that financing for start-up businesses is one of the most difficult factors for an entrepreneur. Respondents in the Lazányi's study stated the inability to obtain adequate financing provided the most concern for failure. Business owners must establish and evaluate strategic plans before opening a business or failure is likely to occur (Lazányi, 2015).

Obtaining start-up capital is the most challenging task for a nonfranchise entrepreneur, especially restaurant entrepreneurs, due to the lack of a business plan and profitability history (Baradwaj, Dewally, & Shao, 2015; Bewaji, Yang, & Han, 2015). Often nonfranchise restaurant entrepreneurs will solicit private financial sources, such as family money since external financing results in high-cost terms (Frid, 2015). Nonfranchise restaurant owners retain the start-up capital requirements and full risk associated with business ownership which may be an enormous burden for entrepreneurs.

Nonfranchise restaurant owners can select and foster relationships with suppliers through personal interactions and communication (Mittal et al., 2018; Teller, Kotzab, Grant, & Holweg, 2016; Venkatesha & Bino, 2014). Nonfranchise businesses, such as restaurants, can work with local farmers for produce and meats reducing the transit and carrying costs of supplies. The ability to utilize local suppliers and support the community are advantages of nonfranchise businesses (Paciarotti & Torregiani, 2018; Preiss, Charão-Marques, & Wiskerke, 2017). In addition to supporting local suppliers and the community, nonfranchise businesses, especially restaurants, rate higher in-service quality by consumers than some franchise businesses within the United States (Jean Jeon, Dant, & Gleiberman, 2014; Bristow & Jenkins, 2018).

Owning a franchise or a nonfranchise business has advantages and disadvantages. Every individual possesses their optimal level of work/life balance, job satisfaction, and stress levels that influence the decision to own a franchise or nonfranchise business (Prottas & Thompson, 2006). An individual must evaluate the risks, opportunities, and goals of investing in either a franchise and nonfranchise business.

### **Business Success and Failure**

Small business is the backbone of the United States, providing 46% of non-farm, gross domestic product and approximately 73% of employment creation (Cordeiro, 2013). However, 49% of small businesses fail in the first five years of operation due to inadequate business owner experience and the lack of strategic planning (Harris et al., 2014; Perry, 2014; SBA, 2017). Harris et al. (2014) stated that a small business is not

sustainable if the owner has only one of the two essential requirements; (a) operational experience, and (b) strategic planning expertise.

**Leadership.** Management capabilities are paramount to a restaurant's success. Effective management creates an efficient organizational structure, superior products and services, rapid growth management, and satisfied employees (Basri, Rashid, Abashah, & Samah, 2017). Success requires clear initiative and attention that drives all activities of a business including influencing employees towards a common goal (Isam, Rehman, & Ahmed, 2013). A restaurant owner may have established strategies; however, if the owner/manager is unwilling or unable to provide the sufficient attention to the restaurant operations, it will fail (Parsa et al., 2010). A success factor for TQM is an adequate measure for a restaurant owner to minimize management issues (Talib & Rahman, 2015).

Muthia and Krishnan (2015) defined transformational leaders as those who encourage their followers to progress and to perform beyond the standard expectation. The essential characteristics of transformational leadership include: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individual consideration (Muthia & Krishnan, 2015). A good transformational leader becomes a role model by encouraging employees to view problems from different perspectives and treating individuals uniquely to develop his/her strengths which will promote enthusiasm about the business's mission (Antonakis & House, 2014; Carleton, Barling, & Trivisonno, 2018; Choi, Kim, & Kang, 2017).

Transformational leadership is more closely aligned with TQM as it motivates employees to strive to be the best which in turn will enhance the profitability and

sustainability of the organization (Deichmann & Stam, 2015). Business management that engages in the transformational leadership style promote customer satisfaction and quality initiatives (Potgieter & Mawande, 2017; Prasad & Junni, 2016) by motivating employees to strive for improvement and work towards a common organizational goal (Aleksic, 2016; Carleton et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2017)). Also, management uses these appreciative leadership behaviors (i.e., emotional, relationship-based interactions) to encourage improvement initiatives from employees (Potgieter & Mawande, 2017; Stocker, Jacobshagen, Krings, Pfister, & Semmer, 2014). Stocker et al. (2014) explained that employees value a simple acknowledgment of a job well done by uttering a sincere thank you as demonstrated by the nature of appreciative leadership (employee perspectives) and intra-individual effects (daily leader-employee appreciation).

While it is notable that employees appreciate positive acknowledgment from supervisors, employees professed that the most significant positive feedback is from peers and customers (Stocker et al., 2014). The rationale for the impact of peer to peer and customer to employee appreciation is that the frequency of direct interaction with fellow employees and customers is higher than with supervisors. However, Stocker et al. (2014) described the continued importance of management's verbal appreciation of employees as it enhanced an individual's feeling of worth. Employee job satisfaction in small to medium businesses positively correlates with transformational leadership styles (Aleksic, 2016; Kebede & Demeke, 2017).

Servant leadership style is closely related to transformational leadership as a servant leadership style promotes unity and stewardship within the business without the



exertion of power (Peterlin, Pearse, & Dimovski, 2015). By empowering and supporting employees to achieve business goals collectively, servant leaders create loyal followers. Everyone in the organization works together and is accountable to each other for creating a successful operation (Peterlin et al., 2015). Carter and Baghurst (2014) illustrated that a servant leader not only created loyal followers but pushed employees to become leaders themselves. The participants in the study acknowledged that servant leaders promote ethical behaviors through kindness and understanding. These traits encourage employees to offer superior customer service and quality.

Transactional leaders motivate employees through performance incentives and punishments (Aleksic, 2016; Deichmann & Stam, 2015; Prasad & Junni, 2016). The essential characteristics of transactional leadership include rewarding employees that reach required goals and punishing employees who do not reach their required goals (Aleksic, 2016). Transactional leaders motivate employees by appealing to their self-interest such as money and recognition (Sik Cho & Jung., 2014).

Per Sik Cho and Jung (2014), transactional leadership, or manage by exception, may also be a useful tool for restaurant owners depending on the organizational structure. Transactional leadership may be suitable for a production-oriented organization where management rewards employees that meet specific operational goals. Sik Cho and Jung (2014) performed a study on the use of the transformational and transactional leadership styles in U.S. and Chinese companies to ascertain if culture influences leadership style. Management within U.S. companies frequently used the transformational leadership style when implementing TQM whereas, management within Chinese companies frequently

used the transactional leadership style when implementing TQM (Sik Cho and Jung, 2014). Therefore, Sik Cho and Jung (2014) concluded that cultural differences do influence leadership styles. Dartey-Baah (2015) posited that a combination of both transformational and transactional leadership is effective depending on the type of business and employees.

Motivating employees through means other than financial support is important for management to incorporate into the business. Maintaining motivated employees will assist the business owner in maintaining stability through a reduction in turnover, increasing performance and promoting strategic goals (Basri et al., 2017). The struggle for business owners and management is determining what factors motivate the employees. Motivation depends on a person's likes and dislikes (Hazra, Sengupta, & Ghosh, 2014). Therefore, continuous employee motivation is difficult for a business owner. A leader must determine the best approach to motivate employees using rewards and recognition.

### **Service Environment**

Cha and Borchgrevink (2014) discovered four underlying dimensions of a service environment: (a) service vision, (b) supervisor support, (c) service training, and (d) reward and recognition. Business owners in the service industry must be cognizant of the dimensions of a service environment to promote sustainability (Liu et al., 2015). The following section explains the dimensions of a service environment.

**Service vision.** Cha and Borchgrevink (2014) postulated that business owners have the responsibility to specify clear service goals and objectives for the business.

Management must stress the importance of clear service goals that emphasize service excellence and quality (Liu et al., 2015). All employees of a restaurant must understand that patrons have a choice to visit other restaurants with superior service, products, and atmospheres (Tripathi & Dave, 2016). Therefore, a service vision of quality and excellence is essential to restaurant success.

**Supervisor support.** Restaurant management support includes the extent managers offer employees with service-work related assistance (Cha & Borchgrevink, 2014). Supervisor support is essential for all employees, especially employees that have direct customer contact. Employees working with supportive supervisors tend to establish higher quality customer engagement, provide superior service quality, and have lower work-related stress (Ling Suan & Mohd Nasurdin, 2016).

**Service training.** Service employees must obtain very detailed training regarding the products offered, responsibilities within the restaurant, and methods to provide excellent customer service (Cha and Borchgrevink, 2014). Restaurant owners must implement service training for employees and managers. Arroyo-López et al. (2017) provided details of the impact employee service training has on customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and business profitability. Employees that receive service training are more likely to understand the direct link between customer expectations, service quality offered, and customer satisfaction (Raja, Irfan, Akhtar, Muhammad, & Asad, 2014). Specific variables for clients may differ between types of restaurants; however, employees that provide customer-oriented service and that are well versed in anticipating

the needs of customers will create customer satisfaction and delight (Arroyo-López et al., 2017).

**Reward and recognition.** The creation of policies and procedures for paying employees that offer excellent customer service is critical for restaurant management (Cha & Borchgrevink, 2014). Reward and recognition, both financially and emotionally, have a positive correlation with employee engagement (Iqbal, Shabbir, Zameer, Khan, & Sandhu, 2017). Therefore, it is imperative for business owners and managers to determine the best approach to employee reward and recognition that will reduce turnover and create satisfied employees.

**Employee satisfaction.** Motivation and incivility in the workplace impact employee performance (Cho, Bonn, Han, & Lee, 2016). Incivility in the workplace has been proven to increase employee turnover rates. Incivility can occur between employers and employees, employees and supervisors, and staff and customers (Ling Suan & Mohd Nasurdin, 2016). These types of hostile interactions impact the employee's motivation creating stress that trickles down to interactions with clients (Ling Suan & Mohd Nasurdin, 2016). Unhappy employees lead to unhappy customers (Cho et al., 2016).

Frontline employees are those that have interactions with the customers and are essential in establishing a good image that attracts loyal customers. Managers have a significant impact on the attitudes and service quality of employees affecting business profitability performance (Melián-González, Bulchand-Gidumal, & González López-Valcárcel, 2015). Gabriel et al. (2016) characterized the employee's perceptions of their employer and atmosphere in the workplace as a service climate. One of the best

approaches to restaurant success is for management to emphasize the critical value of service quality and climate (Dushica & Sonja, 2018).

**Customer loyalty.** Verbal and non-verbal (e.g., touching the patron while engaging in conversation) actions and customer satisfaction are positively correlated. For example, a waiter touching a patron or crouching down to talk with a patron enhanced customer behaviors as it illustrated interest and personal interaction (Lin & Lin, 2017). Lin and Lin (2017) observed the interactions of two waitresses with customers over a period of time to determine the personal behavioral impacts between employees and patrons. Verbal and non-verbal communication between the waitresses and the customers regarding their satisfaction with the meal and experience increased the chances that the customer would order additional items such as coffee, tea, and dessert, and leave larger tips (Lin & Lin, 2017).

Employee satisfaction impacts customer experiences and loyalty through quality service experiences (Melián-González et al., 2015; Ogbonnaya & Valizade 2018). Carter and Baghurst (2014) obtained evidence that small family-owned restaurants with satisfied employees in the foodservice industry provided better customer service creating customer loyalty. Also, owners of family-owned restaurants should evaluate the pay scale frequently to ensure that employee pay is comparable to competitors thereby reducing employee turnover and retaining satisfied employees (Liu et al., 2015).

Competitors are unable to entice another restaurant's loyal customers since those customers are willing to pay more for superior service quality and products (Kandampully, Zhang, & Bilgihan, 2015). Therefore, it is essential for restaurant owners

to understand what is required to create customer loyalty (Ong et al., 2018). Active customer engagement is a successful method for creating customer loyalty (Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, & Saks, 2015). Offering a coupon or free item for clients who are willing to provide thoughts and insights to help make the restaurant a better place to visit may create customer loyalty. Also, obtaining information from Generation Y (individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2000s) is critical. As of 2017, Generation Y included college-aged people (18 to 25 years old). The preferences of this age group of people are crucial to inspiring customer loyalty in the future (Kandampully et al., 2015). Therefore, a good marketing strategy for business owners is to cater to Generation Y for sustainability in the future.

**Customer delight.** Satisfaction is an intensely positive emotional state, and customer delight is an experience that exceeds a customer's expectations (Ball & Barnes, 2017). In the highly competitive restaurant industry, only focusing on customer satisfaction and meeting customer expectations are not adequate to create long-term customer loyalty (Ong et al., 2018). Sophisticated customers expect to be delighted (Wang, Wang, & Tai, 2016).

Barnes, Collier, Howe, and Hoffman (2016) investigated the impact of customer delight on a business' profitability by implementing an element of surprise, the effects of the emotion joy, and employee involvement with management practices. Barnes et al. (2016) concluded that surprise and joy contribute to a high level of customer delight. Management must establish long-term strategies to promote employee efforts that

continually delight customers and provide service excellence to promote sustainability (Barnes et al., 2016).

**Service quality.** Employees that form an emotional attachment to a business are more committed to the business's prosperity (Ahmed, 2017). An employee's organizational commitment influences job performance and service quality. Employees with high organizational commitment are valuable assets to organizations since they promote excellent customer service due to the belief themselves that the product and service are well worth the time and effort to make and serve (Ahmed, 2017). Employees that have an emotional attachment to an organization provide superior service creating customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Marketing decision and orientation are essential elements of a successful small business. Business owners must have the ability and knowledge to collect and analyze customer and competitor information (Perry, 2014). Perry (2014) stated that small businesses might have an advantage over large businesses with regards to obtaining individualized knowledge from employees regarding marketing and customer preferences. Perry (2014) provided evidence that offline communication such as flyers, newspaper advertisements, and community coupons were the most effective marketing tools for small businesses.

**Competition.** Small business owners must know the internal and external environment of the business and possess the expertise to forecast operations and revenues (Cordeiro, 2013). Albuquerque, Filho, Nagano, Junior, and Philippsen (2016) stated that unprepared businesses are likely to close during the infancy stage due to limited

resources and changing economic conditions. The competitive environment and product differentiation impact a restaurant's success or failure (Katona, 2015). A business owner that is unable to adapt to or anticipate market trends will most likely cause the business to fail (Invernizzi, Menozzi, Passarani, Patton, & Viglia, 2017). A restaurant owner must implement strategies that will facilitate continuous adaptation to changes in the market to remain sustainable.

### **Strategies for Business Success**

Strategy occurs when leadership deliberately prepares a conscious set of guidelines to determine the future decisions within the organization (Mintzberg, 1978). Planned and unplanned (e.g., emergent strategies) strategies are two methods of strategic implementation within business operations. Neugebauer, Figge, and Hahn (2016) postulated that business owners design strategies that are useful for forecasting normalcy within a business. Also, business owners must create emergent strategies to manage critical unplanned disruptions (Neugebauer et al., 2016). Frid (2015) posited that uncommon, unplanned events happen on the front-line of a business; therefore, planning at the top management or business owner level, is not always effective since they do not see the day to day operations. It is crucial that business owners and managers have the ability and thorough operational knowledge to implement both planned and emergent strategies to ensure sustainability (Frid, 2015).

Henry Mintzberg (1992) envisioned strategy to include five components, known as the 5 Ps of strategy. It is imperative that business owners incorporate the 5 P's of strategy, evaluate strategic risk, and monitor the strategic plan for business sustainability.



The 5 P's of strategy are as follows: (a) plan for future events, (b) ploy to outperform the competitors, (c) pattern events the business owner employs to obtain a competitive advantage over time, (d) position by determining the best fit for the business within an industry or environment, and (e) perspective of all employees is essential and incorporate in day to day operations of the business.

**Strategic risk.** Price, service quality, and use of local products are the most important factors for consumers when choosing a restaurant to visit (Scozzafava, Contini, & Casini, 2017). Per research performed by Scozzafava et al. (2017), consumers are three times more likely to frequent restaurants that offer local products on the menu than those restaurants that do not advertise and use local products. Restaurant owners that promote the use of local products in their restaurants have a competitive advantage over restaurant owners that do not promote the use of local products (Paciarotti & Torregiani, 2018; Scozzafava et al., 2017; Sharma, Moon, & Strohbahn, 2014). Trends in the restaurant industry over the last decade have been the consumers' preference for restaurants that offer local products on the menu (NRA, 2015). Community support and freshness are a leading factor for restaurants purchasing local products to use in their restaurant (Preiss et al., 2017). In addition to utilizing local markets for produce and meats, restaurant owners show pictures of local farmers and farms in their restaurants to illustrate the conscious decision to assist local farmers and the community (Bristow & Jenkins, 2018; Sharma et al., 2014). Consumer perception of a restaurant is positively affected by business owners' marketing tactics of support for the local community (Bristow & Jenkins, 2018; Campbell & DiPietro, 2014; Paciarotti & Torregiani, 2018).

The use of technology and social media by business owners and consumers has increased competition drastically over the last decade (Musonera & Weber, 2018; Schaupp & Bélanger, 2014). Restaurant knowledge is essential in the consumer decision-making process regarding food, experience, and price (Seo et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important for restaurant owners to provide informative advertising and marketing including pictures of food, staff, and the restaurant allowing consumers to establish familiarity and associated risk with the restaurant (Seo et al., 2013). Consumers seek additional information about a restaurant from social media reviews of past customers which may or may not be favorable (Seo et al., 2013). Lack of familiarity tends to create indecisiveness for consumers and increases the need for additional information regarding food offerings, food quality, service quality, and price.

In addition to supporting local communities, restaurant owners are increasingly pushed to participate in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities (Albus & Ro, 2017). Kim and Kim (2014) found that restaurant owners incorporating CSR activities into daily business operations saw an increase in profitability and customer loyalty. The lack of CSR activities may hinder restaurants profitability due to increased reputational risk (Kim & Kim, 2014). Over the last decade, due to consumer demand, an increase in business owners incorporating CSR activities into long-term strategic planning occurred (Williams, 2014). The CSR activities include “recycling and composting of products such as glass, plastic, metal, cardboard, and soil and second, the use of energy- and water-efficient equipment” (Perramon, Alonso-Almeida, Llach, & Bagur-Femenías,

2014, p. 9). Perramon et al. (2014) discussed the importance of including CSR practices within a restaurant's strategy to ensure profitability and sustainability.

Peng, Bilgihan, and Kandampully (2015) provided details of the importance of restaurant owners appealing to college-age students. The reason for appealing to this age group is that they are in the transition between childhood and adulthood. With increased disposable income, an individual develops spending habits and brand recognition (Peng et al., 2015). College student participants frequented the same restaurants signifying loyalty. In addition to commitment, college students surveyed preferred restaurants that offer a relaxing and enjoyable atmosphere. It is crucial for restaurant owners to utilize this information when creating a marketing campaign to attract individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 (Peng et al., 2015).

**Strategic planning.** Strategic planning is a fundamental component of managing a business (Burn, 2014). Gkliatis and Koufopoulos (2013) defined strategic planning as a roadmap for improving the performance of the business. According to Porter's five forces framework, business owners must understand how to avoid common mistakes, how to identify potential obstacles, and how to implement successful strategic planning (Dobbs, 2014). Mistakes that restaurant owners make include the following: (a) doing the same thing that everyone else is doing and thinking it provides a competitive advantage, (b) not identifying the business's competitive advantages, and (c) not having a strategy at all (Harris et al., 2014; Perry, 2014).

Prior to making any changes, the business owner must determine how the competition is implementing new products and services and learn from the competitor's

mistakes and successes (Dobbs, 2014). A business owner must accurately define a target population of customers and create a strategic plan around that target population (Gkliatis & Koufopoulos, 2013). A business owner that successfully identifies and thwarts potential obstacles will build a host of satisfied customers and increased profitability.

Strategic planning occurs when restaurant owners, management, and employees systematically plan for future events (Harris et al., 2014; Perry, 2014). Strategic planning includes an evaluation of the business, the industry, competitors, opportunities, and value chains. The strategic planning process should take place annually and evaluated quarterly to ensure the business's production, competition, and opportunities have not changed. If changes exist, a business owner must make adjustments to the strategic plan to accommodate the changes (Dobbs, 2014).

A supplier's input is essential to a product or service's success. Restaurant owners create sustainability by offering differentiated products with high switching costs (Katona, 2015; Teller et al., 2016). Customer involvement in establishing product differentiation aids the business owner in developing products that consumers desire (Katona, 2015). Restaurant owners use these factors to generate a competitive advantage for the business (Cheng, 2013). First and foremost, a business owner must prepare formalized strategies that create a competitive advantage within the industry and take advantage of competitors' weaknesses (Porter, 2008).

Exceptional customer service that delights customers and builds strong customer loyalty is a competitive advantage for restaurants. The attention to details makes a vast difference in customer service quality (Bolton, Gustafsson, McColl-Kennedy, Sirianni, &

Tse, 2014). Thus, if customer service is faulty or not exceptional, the customer may not provide a referral (Wall-Mullen & Envick, 2015). The business owner, management, and employees must continually provide outstanding service to deepen the relationship with customers and establish loyalty. Service and quality inconsistency are detrimental to restaurants and cause failure (Attri & Kushwaha, 2018; Bolton et al., 2014). Restaurant owners should incorporate methods of providing exceptional customer service and quality into strategic plans.

Ogbeide, Böser, Harrinton, and Ottenbacher (2017) provided research to support stimulating business growth through management support and empowerment of employees creating employee satisfaction which builds customer loyalty. Open communication between employees and management is essential for building a team environment (Rosalina et al., 2016). It is equally necessary that management demonstrate care for employee growth by continuously training employees. Business owners that promote a team environment create a sense of belonging and satisfaction for employees (Kruja, Ha, Drishti, & Oelfke, 2016).

Restaurant owners must create standard operating procedures (SOPS) to provide employees with step-by-step operational instructions to ensure consistency and compliance with regulations (Barbé et al., 2016). Restaurant owners use SOPs as a training tool, to stay organized, to establish accountability, to ensure food and employee safety, and to avoid reputational risk of critical health violations (Chen & Lin, 2015). Monitoring and employee empowerment are critical elements of the effective implementation of SOPs and internal controls. Employees with a sense of empowerment

have the confidence to report violations by fellow employees and management, without repercussions (Mutnuru, 2016). Mutnuru (2016) posited that business operations are more efficient when management uses SOPs and internal controls.

Another required element required for efficient business operations is excellent communication. Awareness of language barriers among employees is important in reducing communication conflicts (Khaja et al., 2015). Therefore, it is very imperative that SOPs include information in languages that all employees may understand. Pictorial representations along with descriptions will help to mitigate language barriers (Khaja et al., 2015).

### **Transition**

The overarching research question for this study was: What strategies do owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants use to sustain their business beyond 5 years? Section 1 contained the introduction, background of the problem, problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions/limitations/delimitations, the significance of the study, and a review of the professional and academic literature. Furthermore, section 1 contained the fundamentals for nonfranchise restaurant owners for sustainability, including the strategic risk and planning. Also, in section 1 I expanded upon the knowledge gained from relevant literature reviews based on the conceptual framework of the study.

In section 2, I included a restatement of the purpose and a description of my role as the researcher in the data collection process, the participants' selection process, and the ethical protection process. Also, I included the description of the research method and

design, the sample, the data collection instrument, the data collection techniques, the data organization techniques, and the description of the data analysis method of the study. In section 3, I included an overview of the research findings, the application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for further study, the researcher's reflection, the summary, and the conclusion.

## Section 2: The Project

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify the strategies used by owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years. I sought data from five nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners in the mid-Atlantic region that have sustained operations for more than 5 years. Nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners may find the strategies discovered throughout the research study helpful in sustaining their business. The implications for positive social change may include restaurant owners supporting local farmers, donating unused food to community food banks, providing nutritious food to consumers, developing positive community relationships, as well as providing a safe place to socialize and meet friends.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher's role in a qualitative multiple case study is to collect and analyze data obtained from study participants (McLure et al., 2014). Researchers conducting qualitative case studies attempt to gain insight and understanding of the phenomenon from participants through interviews, member checking, and review of archival data (Cronin, 2014). Excessive familiarity with the subject matter and participants could impede the objectivity of the study causing bias and data validity concerns (Teusner, 2016). My career and educational background were in finance, specifically risk management, forecasting, budgeting, and process improvements, not the restaurant industry. Although familiar with the local restaurants included in the research study, I did not have any experience in restaurant management or ownership, nor did I have any



relationships with the potential participants in the research study. The lack of intrinsic knowledge of restaurant ownership reduces the extent of researcher bias (Raheim et al., 2016). I used an interview guide known as an interview protocol to ensure the same questions were asked in a similar manner to each of the participants to mitigate researcher bias during the semistructured interviews (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Also, I performed member checking of the interview audio transcriptions and notes to verify the accuracy of data obtained during the semistructured interviews and eliminated assessing the data through my personal lens (Birt et al., 2016). Lack of intrinsic knowledge, the interview protocol, and member checking are approaches to reducing the probability of researcher bias.

The researcher's role related to ethical research practices and protocols is to ensure the protection, privacy, and confidentiality of participants (Hammersley, 2015). Researchers must provide clear and understandable information and exercise ethical principles to protect human participants involved in a research study (Tait, Teig, & Voepel-Lewis, 2014). The basic ethical principles of the research study, as described in the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects in Biomedical and Behavioral Research [NCPHSBBR], 1979), are (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and, (c) justice. As a requirement for IRB approval, I completed the web-based training for adherence to ethical requirements and the protection of human research participants through the National Institute of Health (NIH), obtaining NIH training certification number 2650465. As the researcher, I conducted introductory discussions and the informed consent process to provide the prospective participants with

detailed information regarding the study to make an intelligent decision whether or not to participate in the study. Treating all participants with the utmost respect and providing detailed background information regarding the research study allowing the individual to make an informed decision whether to participate voluntarily is essential. In addition to respect for persons, researchers must express beneficence to participants or protect them from harm (Ruch, 2014). Participants with similar characteristics should be regarded as equals to ensure the principle of justice is followed (Dal-Ré, Katsanis, Katsanis, Parker & Ayuso, 2014). I preserved confidentiality and minimized risk or harm to each participant by using codes for the participant names.

The rationale for a researcher to use an interview protocol is to reduce researcher bias and increase data reliability and validity (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Researchers conducting semistructured interviews use an interview protocol as a script and guidelines for the face-to-face interviews (Dikko, 2016). The interview protocol lists the interview questions in a logical order to subsequent questions for ease of transition (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I used an interview protocol when I conducted the interviews, transcribed the participant's responses, and employed member checking for data quality and validity.

### **Participants**

The participants in a qualitative multiple case study must meet eligibility requirements within the scope of the population. The criteria for the research study were owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants who used successful strategies to remain sustainable beyond 5 years. I contacted the Treasurer's to obtain a list of all

restaurants in operation as of December 31, 2017, in the mid-Atlantic region. I requested the date each restaurant began operations. I determined which restaurants were franchise or non-franchise establishments by reviewing the International Franchise Association website. The initial date of operations for each restaurant was not available on the documentation received from the Treasurer's Office. Therefore, I used information on the restaurant's website and called the restaurant owner to determine the length of time in operation. After I arrived at the total number of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants in the mid-Atlantic region operating beyond 5 years as of December 31, 2017, I chose five restaurant owners to contact for participation in the research study.

I contacted potential participants through a personal visit to the restaurant to introduce myself and provide an overview of the research study and the informed consent process. Follow-up discussions with potential participants took place via telephone to ask for willingness to participate in the study. Speaking to potential participants by face-to-face or telephone is more personable and effective than electronically in acquiring participation in a research study (Hershberger & Kavanaugh, 2017). Nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners, volunteering to participate in the research study received an informed consent form via e-mail further explaining the informed consent process and requesting a signature from the restaurant's owner volunteering to participate. Once I received the signed informed consent from each participant, I scheduled face-to-face interviews at mutually agreeable times and locations which were at the participants' restaurant promoting trust and consideration of the participants' schedule.

## **Research Method and Design**

The focus of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners in the mid-Atlantic region use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. In this section, I described the process leading to the choice of a qualitative multiple case study approach for the research study. Also, I provided details regarding the research method and design used for the research study.

### **Research Method**

I selected a qualitative method to explore the phenomenon of strategies utilized by owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants that sustained their business beyond 5 years. Researchers employ the qualitative method to obtain evidence of human behaviors through observations or inquiry centered on themes identified through a literature review of similar subject matter (Baškarada, 2014). Researchers use statistics in quantitative research to test hypotheses and create numerical interpretations of human behaviors that ignore critical factors that cannot be quantified (Barnham, 2015). A quantitative research method was not appropriate for this research study because the goal was to explore the specific strategies nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners employed to remain successful, not quantify data and test hypotheses. Archibald et al. (2015) stated mixed methods research is used to collect, analyze, and incorporate inferences from both quantitative and qualitative data into a single study. Therefore, mixed method research was not the most suitable design for the research study as it encompasses a quantitative component. Upon review of the qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, a qualitative method was the most appropriate choice for this research study.

## **Research Design**

Case study design is more advantageous over other qualitative research designs when researchers have limited, or no control over behavioral events and the research focuses on a contemporary set of events (Yin, 2017). Also, case studies involve the collection and analysis of data obtained through inquiry of individuals' knowledge and experiences surrounding the specific phenomenon researched, which is appropriate for this proposed research study. Therefore, I used a case study design to explore the research phenomenon of strategies used by owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants to sustain their business beyond 5 years. Researchers use a phenomenological design to explain the social and psychological aspects of a phenomenon through the lived experiences of people (Sousa, 2014). The phenomenological research design was not appropriate for this research study because the goal of the research study was to identify the effectiveness of specific strategies employed by owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants to remain sustainable beyond 5 years, not explain social and psychological aspects. Researchers that focus on the cultural framework of social interactions use the ethnography research design, which was not appropriate for my study since the participants were nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners, not a specific cultural group (Ellis, 2015). Researchers use the narrative research design to understand the lives of individuals as told through their stories (Yin, 2017). In the research study, the individual lives of participants were not explored because the emphasis was on strategies restaurant owners used for restaurant sustainability.

When a researcher achieves data saturation, the study contains sufficient information for others to easily replicate (Fusch & Ness, 2015). A researcher reaches data saturation when examination of numerous data sources provides no new information (Ando, Cousins, & Young, 2014). I took the following steps to ensure data saturation. First, I asked probing questions in face-to-face interviews and conducted follow-up interviews as needed. Second, I employed the member checking technique. Third, I reviewed websites, social media, and promotional documentation relating to the specific nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant. I repeated these steps until I reached data saturation as described by Fusch and Ness (2015).

### **Population and Sampling**

The population of the qualitative multiple case study was five nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants operating beyond 5 years in the mid-Atlantic region. I contacted the Treasurer's office to obtain a list of all restaurants in operation as of December 31, 2017, in the mid-Atlantic region. From this list, I determined which restaurants were franchise and nonfranchise establishments by reviewing the International Franchise Association website. The initial date of operations for each restaurant was not available on the documentation received from the Treasurer's Office. Therefore, I used information on the restaurant's website and called the restaurant owner to determine the length of time in operation. I determined which of the nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants have been operating longer than 5 years as of December 31, 2017. To determine if the nonfranchise restaurants are casual dining, I visually inspected the restaurant and menu to establish which nonfranchise restaurants in the mid-Atlantic

region offered full service and moderately priced food items. The list of restaurants in the mid-Atlantic region did not contain more than five nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants. Therefore, I selected 100% of the nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners to contact for the research study.

The research study included a sample of 100% of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants located in the mid-Atlantic region. A purposeful sampling technique was not required as there were only five nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants located in the mid-Atlantic region. However, if there were additional nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants in which to select a sample, a purposeful sampling would be required. Robinson (2014) defined a sample as a subset of an entire population that includes individuals who meet certain criteria related to the research topic. Researchers conducting qualitative studies use purposeful sampling as a method of selecting a sample to obtain a broad range of information and knowledge about the research topic (Elo et al., 2014). The purposeful sampling technique in qualitative research is an advantageous method of obtaining information from participants who can provide detailed information to answer the research question (Palinkas et al., 2015). Researchers use purposeful sampling to generate data validity and credibility based on the phenomena presented in a study (Palinkas et al., 2015). The sample consisted of five restaurant owners who meet the following criteria: (a) owning and operating only one restaurant; (b) the restaurant is nonfranchise; (c) the restaurant offers casual service dining; and, (d) the restaurant has been sustainable for 5 years or longer as of December 31, 2017.

I contacted five owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants in the mid-Atlantic region to determine willingness to participate in the research study. Assuming all five owners of the nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants participated; I planned to conduct semistructured, face-to-face interviews with all five restaurant owners. However, all five nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants were not willing to participate. Because a total of five nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants existed in the study location, I selected the entire population to contact for participation. I was able to obtain informed consent from a sample of three nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners to participate in the research study. I interviewed all three participants to gather sufficient data. Fusch and Ness (2015) described member checking as a method for researchers to ensure data saturation. I used member checking to ensure questions and answers from face-to-face interviews did not provide any new data.

### **Ethical Research**

As a primary instrument for the research study, I developed an informed consent process ensuring the highest level of ethical standards regarding human participants in a research study by requesting that each participant volunteering to acknowledge and sign a consent form. In compliance with the IRB and Walden University, I required a signed consent form from each participant volunteering for the research study. Informed consent obtained from participants prior to data collection is critical to provide potential participants with a foundation of the study (Check, Wolf, Dame, & Beskow, 2014). I used the informed consent form to ensure participants acknowledged that I did not offer incentives for participation in the research study. The sample of participants included



individuals that acknowledged and signed the informed consent form. If a participant withdrew from the research study after signing the informed consent form, I would include the information collected before the participant's withdrawal in the findings. No participants withdrew from the research study after signing the informed consent form. Before data collection, I applied for and received Walden University IRB's approval (Approval No. 05-22-18-0190000). Upon approval from the IRB, I began collecting information through semistructured interviews, member checking, and review of websites and social media.

I developed, for the research study, procedures and processes to ensure the ethical protection of participants. The fundamental responsibility of the researcher is the protection of participants' privacy and well-being throughout the study (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015; Yin, 2017). I provided the informed consent form to potential participants. The informed consent form provided potential participants with the following information: (a) background of the research study, (b) the tasks associated with participating in the research study, (c) examples of interview questions, (d) information that participation is strictly voluntary, (e) the method of withdrawing from participation after data collection begins, (f) any risks and benefits associated with participating in the research study, (g) the fact that participation does not include payments or gifts, and (h) contact information for any questions or concerns on behalf of the participant. A researcher must preserve and safeguard participants' responses in a manner that eliminates any discriminatory factors and protects participant privacy (Tripathi, 2016). Reports created from the research study do not provide the identities of individual

participants. Also, details that might identify participants, such as the location of the restaurant will remain private. I used codes such as R01, R02, and R03 when referring to participants to protect their privacy and am storing research data in a secure location in a locked cabinet for a minimum of 5 calendar years, as required by the university.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The research study was a qualitative multiple case study. In a qualitative study, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I was the primary data collection instrument throughout the research study. Researchers use semistructured interviews to ask probing and clarifying questions to gain an understanding of the knowledge of the participant (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). I employed semistructured interviews to acquire extensive information regarding the phenomenon studied. Holmberg and Madsen (2014) posited that interviewing face-to-face establishes rapport and allows the researcher to view non-verbal clues to questions asked through body language. However, Zhang et al. (2017) suggested that face-to-face interviews pose a disadvantage to accurate data collection as participants are more guarded when answering interview questions face-to-face instead of online or by telephone. I used an interview guide known as an interview protocol to ensure the same questions were asked in a similar manner to each of the participants to mitigate researcher bias during the semistructured interviews (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The interview protocol for the research study is in Appendix A.

The member checking and documentation (e.g., websites, social media, and promotional documentation) were secondary data collection instruments used to

strengthen data reliability and validity through the use of multiple sources (Carter et al., 2014; Yin, 2017). Member checking is a technique used by the researcher to verify his/her interpretations of the participants' answers to the interview questions are accurate. The researcher listens to the audio of the first interview and document the interpretations of the meaning behind the participants' interview question answers after the first interview (Harvey, 2015). A second interview or meeting to discuss the researcher's interpretations of the answers from the first interview took place with the participants to create additional dialogue as described by Birt et al. (2016). I employed the member checking technique and documented the review to reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

### **Data Collection Technique**

Castillo-Montoya (2016) posited that researchers use an interview protocol (Appendix A) as a script and checklist of items to examine while conducting an interview. I used an interview protocol when conducting interviews with participants and member checking to continue the discussions with participants to ensure data saturation. I requested that participants review the interview summaries to ensure accuracy; to increase the reliability and validity of the collected data (Morse, 2015).

In a qualitative case study, the predominant data collection technique is the interview (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). The benefits of the interview as a data collection technique include the ability of researchers to perform an in-depth evaluation of the study phenomenon based on participants' responses and gain new insights not known prior to the interview (Lamont & Swidler, 2014). Marshall and Rossman (2014) posited that the

semistructured interview is an ideal technique for attaining comprehensive knowledge from participants pertaining to the research question. One disadvantage of the use of a semistructured interview is the potential inability to accommodate the participants' schedule to conduct the interview (Rahman, 2015). Another disadvantage of a semistructured interview is the potential that a participant misunderstands the question and provide inaccurate answers (Yin, 2016). The benefits of semistructured interviews outweigh the challenges.

Owen (2014) postulated that analysis of public and internal documentation provides further validity to data obtained from interviews. Yin (2017) stated there are advantages and disadvantages to analyzing documentation in case study research. The advantages of a documentation review in case study research include the stability of the information, unobtrusive, exact, and broad coverage (Owen, 2014). The disadvantages of documentation review in case study research include retrievability, access, biased selectivity and reporting bias (Yin, 2017). Keeping in mind the advantages and disadvantages of using documentation review in the research study, I reviewed restaurant websites, newspaper advertisements, promotional brochures, and social media to reach data saturation.

To ensure a successful interview, a researcher must build trust and rapport with participants by creating a comfortable environment that promotes open dialogue (Hawamdeh & Raingar, 2014). The researcher should be self-aware of tone and body language when interviewing to promote good social interactions (Collins & Cooper, 2014). At the beginning of the interview, I spent the first five minutes speaking

informally with the participants to provide personal and research background to reduce apprehension about speaking openly during the interview. I explained the rationale for recording and notetaking during the interview and obtained verbal approval from each participant to audio record the interview. Researchers take notes of the main topics and subtopics during an interview, also known as key-points notetaking, for memory recall and to code themes revealed (Christie, Bemister, & Dobson, 2015). With permission, I audio recorded the interviews with all participants. Also, I took detailed notes during the interviews. These measures to create an open line of communication assisted in creating trust and rapport with the participants as discussed by Hawamdeh and Raigangar (2014).

Member checking took place after interviewing participants. Member checking involves summarizing the information obtained in an interview and obtaining feedback from the interviewee to ensure all information summarized is accurate (Birt et al., 2016). I scheduled another meeting with the participants to go over my interpretation of the answers to the interview questions. In addition to the interviews, I reviewed archival data for each restaurant included in the sample. The archival records include restaurant websites, social media, newspaper advertisements, and promotional brochures. The participants did not provide any business plans or financial data.

Researchers code research data into categories based on similar characteristics known as themes (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). I used coding to identify emergent themes from the interview and archival data with the use of NVivo 12 software. I identified specific themes by manually sorting the data according to similar elements noted from the research and NVivo software.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Study participant confidentiality is the responsibility of the researcher (Saunders, Kitzinger, & Kitzinger, 2015). Participant confidentiality was the utmost priority during the research study. I assigned each participant a code such as R01 for the first participant interviewed face-to-face, and R02 for the second participant interviewed face-to-face, and so on. I maintain data in password-protected research logs on the computer which were backed up on a thumb drive. I secured the computer, thumb drive, and any hard copies of research data in a locked cabinet for a minimum of 5 years. At the end of 5 years, I will delete all electronic data and shred hard copies of study data.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis process for a qualitative multiple case study includes (a) data compilation; (b) organization and mapping; (c) identification of themes; (d) comparison to literature; and (e) conclusions (Yin, 2017). Flick (2014) and Mayer (2015) described data analysis in qualitative research as a critical process of reviewing and scrutinizing data obtained from interviews, field notes, and websites. The data analysis process occurred after the completion of interviews, member checking, and review of archival data for the research study.

Triangulation of data happens when a researcher obtains data from more than one source creating data reliability and validity (Mayer, 2015). Researchers use triangulation to avoid bias that may occur when participants are unresponsive or are emotional to a researcher's question (Anney, 2014). Researchers use methodological triangulation to cross-check data from multiple sources to enhance the reliability and validity of a study

(Manganelli et al., 2014). I used methodological triangulation through transcribing notes, reviewing comments from websites, and inputting data into NVivo 12 to aid in grouping responses, and identifying themes.

NVivo is a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software platform that researchers use to compare and contrast interview responses and segregate into core and subsequent themes (Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014; Zamawe, 2015). Other QDA software programs such as ATLAS.ti and Leximancer exist; however, researchers widely use NVivo in qualitative research studies (Sotiriadou et al., 2014; Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016). I used the NVivo 12 software program to code data from interviews, field notes, and websites and created reports that improved the quality of the research study data. Through the use of methodological triangulation and the NVivo 12 software platform, I obtained data segregated into themes. I compared the data from the semistructured interview, restaurant documentation, and websites from the NVivo 12 output to the literature reviewed. Based on the comparison, I determined if the themes discovered throughout the research study correlated to previous similar case studies or if emergent themes existed.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Qualitative research involves triangulation of data to guarantee reliability and validity (Noble, 2015). Including participants with knowledge of the qualitative research phenomenon promotes reliability and validity and aids in eliminating bias (Yin, 2017). I described the reliability and validity of qualitative research in the following sections.

## **Reliability**

Qualitative research reliability is the depth of consistency from uncovering commonalities between words and data (Baker, 2014; Baškarada, 2014). Qualitative research studies are more difficult to create reliable information than quantitative studies since the research data is not easily calculable (Morse, 2015). To guarantee the reliability of a qualitative research study, the researcher must provide substantial detail of each phase of the study method, design, and data collection (Noble, 2015). A researcher uses interviews to provide the participants' flexibility in answering the interview questions (Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013). Interview data compilation for qualitative case studies includes audio recordings, transcription, member checking, and field notes (Mayer, 2015).

Dependability in a qualitative research study indicates reliability (Morse, 2015). Researchers accomplish dependability when fellow researchers can replicate the study method and design with the same conclusions (Baškarada, 2014). The interview protocol is used by researchers to increase the dependability of interview data as the researcher has a guideline for conducting the interview assuring the interview questions align with the study research question (Dikko, 2016). Incorporating triangulation and member checking in a case study, a researcher increases the dependability of the case study by confirming the accuracy of fieldwork data (Carter et al., 2014). I described in detail the rationale for selecting the qualitative multiple case study, the interview protocol for the semistructured interviews, interview results, and methods used to obtain documentation for each non-franchise, casual dining restaurant included in the research study.



## **Validity**

Researchers employ study validity through the accuracy and trustworthiness of the data reported to mitigate researcher bias (Yin, 2017). Qualitative research validity is the measure of how the researcher's findings relate to the phenomenon or the appropriateness of data obtained through qualitative research (Baker, 2014; Lawrence, 2015). Also, the sample selected by researchers must include participants that can provide accurate information about the study phenomenon to ensure validity and credibility (Suen, Huang, & Lee, 2014). Mayer (2015) stated that validity measures include member checking and triangulation. Researchers use methodological triangulation to cross-check data from multiple sources (Manganelli et al., 2014). I addressed the issues of reliability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability in this study.

Elo et al. (2014) described credibility as the extent to which research data addresses the intended focus of a qualitative study. Study participants must meet specific criteria adding credibility to a research study (Suen et al., 2014). Verifying interview data through member checking, the researcher establishes data credibility (Cope, 2014). To establish credibility, I described in detail the rationale for selecting the qualitative multiple case study, the interview protocol for the semistructured interviews, participant criteria, interview results, and methods used to obtain documentation for each participant nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owner.

Transferability of data is described by Fusch and Ness (2015) as the process researchers use to organize, describe, conduct, and finalize data so others can duplicate

the study. However, Marshall and Rossman (2014) stated the reader ultimately determines whether the study is transferable. To ensure transferability the research study, I outlined the specific steps I used to obtain research data, compile the results, verify data accuracy, and form conclusions.

Fusch and Ness (2015) posited that accuracy or confirmability of data is essential for any research study. Member checking involves summarizing the information obtained in an interview and obtaining feedback from the interviewee to ensure all information summarized is accurate (Birt et al., 2016). Researchers use QDA software platform to segregate interview response into themes, since manual coding of interview responses is not as precise (Sotiriadou et al., 2014; Zamawe, 2015). I used member checking, follow-up interviews, and NVivo 12 coding software to ensure the data and themes I discovered were accurate.

Researchers reach data saturation when no new data or themes emerge from the examination of numerous data sources (Ando et al., 2014). Fusch and Ness (2015) postulated that a researcher arrives at data saturation through the richness and abundance of information obtained from study participants regardless of the sample size. I took the following steps to ensure data saturation. First, I asked probing questions in face-to-face interviews and conducted follow-up interviews as needed. Second, I employed the member checking technique. Third, I reviewed advertising, websites, and social media pertaining to the participants' restaurants. I repeated these steps until I reached data saturation.

### **Transition and Summary**

The purpose of this case study was to establish what strategies owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants use to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years. In section 2, I supplied details surrounding the role of the researcher, including ways to mitigate researcher bias. I provided an overview of the methods I used to select the sample of participants suitable to answer the research question and the rationale for selecting a qualitative multiple case study as the optimal research design. I presented a breakdown of data collection and data analysis techniques.

Moreover, I described the manner in which I ensured data reliability and validity throughout the study. In section 3, presented the findings of the data from the interviews, data collection and data analysis. I provided details of how the information presented in my study applies to the professional practice, the impact of social change, and recommendations for action and future research. Finally, I provided a study summary and offered conclusions revealed in the study.

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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies used by owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years. I engaged owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants in the mid-Atlantic region to obtain insights on strategies used to remain sustainable beyond 5 years of operations. Semistructured interviews and analysis of social media and promotional documentation were the data collection techniques utilized to discover emergent themes associated with the purpose of the study. The findings revealed five emergent themes: (a) offering quality food and exceptional service, (b) respecting and encouraging employees, (c) participating in day to day operations, (d) receiving support from family, and (e) maintaining good supplier relationships. In section 3, I will present the research study findings from the interviews, social media, and promotional documentation review.

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

The overarching research question for the research study was: What strategies do owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants use to ensure business sustainability beyond 5 years? Five themes emerged from the semistructured interviews, review of social media and promotional documentation. Per review of the list of restaurants in the mid-Atlantic region, only five restaurants were nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants and met the criteria of the research study. I, personally, visited each of the five restaurant owners to introduce myself and explain the informed consent process. After three days, I contacted each restaurant owner via telephone to answer any questions regarding the

informed consent form and to request participation. Of the five nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners, I obtain informed consent and participation in the research study from three nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners. The remaining two nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners declined my request to participate in the research study. One restaurant owner who declined my request to participate in the research study was skeptical of the study and privacy. The other restaurant owner declined my request to participate in the research study due to a language barrier. As there were a total of five nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants located in the mid-Atlantic region, I was unable to select additional restaurant owners to contact for participation in the study. Three out of five nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners participated in the study and were interviewed. The participants did not provide any internal business documentation, besides menus and promotional brochures. Therefore, I analyzed data from the participant restaurant websites, Facebook, Yelp, and TripAdvisor. To preserve each participant's privacy, I used the codes of R01, R02, and R03 to represent each of the three participants.

Once the interview transcription and member checking processes were completed, I employed the *Word Frequency* analysis tool within the qualitative software NVivo 12 to organize and code the data collected from interviews, websites, social media, and promotional documentation. The data analysis uncovered the following strategic themes: (a) offering quality food and exceptional service, (b) respecting and encouraging employees, (c) participating in day to day operations, (d) receiving support from family, and (e) maintaining good supplier relationships. Table 1 provides an illustration of the

Word Frequency and themes from the semistructured interviews and restaurant websites, Facebook, Yelp, and TripAdvisor.

Table 1

*Frequency of Themes for Nonfranchise, Casual Dining Restaurant Owners Strategies for Sustainability*

Theme	<i>n</i>	% of frequency
Offering quality food and exceptional service	45	42.1%
Respecting and encouraging employees	30	28.0%
Participating in day to day operations	14	13.1%
Receiving support from family	12	11.2%
Maintaining good supplier relationships	6	5.6%

*Note.* *n* = frequency.

### **Theme #1: Offering Quality Food and Exceptional Service**

Restaurant owners must be perceptive to the needs and requirements of customers to create loyalty (Ong, Lee, & Ramayah, 2018). Each of the three restaurant owners interviewed stressed the importance of catering to customer needs and requirements. R01 asserted that reasonable prices for the mid-Atlantic region and high-quality food are requirements of the restaurant's clientele. Also, R01 emphasized the significance of listening to customer expectations and desires. R02 stated that the quality and taste of the food offered must be superior to that which an individual can prepare at home or that which other restaurants serve. Also, R02 declared that consistency in the food and service offered are customer requirements. The research conducted by Attri and Kushwaha (2018) supports R02's assertion of required consistency. Attri and Kushwaha

(2018) discovered that the consistency of food and service are pivotal to a restaurant's success. R03 expressed the importance of catering to the needs and requirements of customers by making the customer feel appreciated, providing courteous service, listening to the customers' requests, and providing a home-like atmosphere. Also, R03 postulated that the restaurant adds chef specials to supplement the menu. The Chef Specials are requests from loyal customers. R01, R02, and R03 indicated the majority of the created menu items are from family recipes. The family recipes only include quality, fresh ingredients. The food is fresh and tastefully prepared to suit the needs and requirements of customers. Also, R02 and R03 declared that they acquire most of the recipe ingredients from local farmers. Review of comments on the restaurants' websites and social media from previous patrons of R01, R02, and R03 supported the claims offered by the participants. The principal comments were the quality, great, delicious, tasty, savory, and outstanding food and service provided by all three of the restaurant included in the study.

Price, service quality, and use of local products are important factors for consumers when choosing a restaurant to visit (Scozzafava et al., 2017). Per research performed by Scozzafava et al. (2017), consumers are three times more likely to frequent restaurants that offer local products on the menu than those restaurants that do not advertise and use local products. Restaurant owners that promote the use of local products in their restaurants have a competitive advantage over restaurant owners that do not promote the use of local products, including shorter supply chains (Bristow & Jenkins, 2018). Trends in the restaurant industry over the last decade include the

consumers' preference for restaurants that offer local products on the menu (Paciarotti & Torregiani, 2018). Community support and freshness are a leading factor for restaurants purchasing local products to use in their restaurant (Preiss et al., 2017). Consumer perception of a restaurant is positively affected by business owners' marketing tactics of support for the local community. (Paciarotti & Torregiani, 2018).

The participant restaurant owners discussed the significance of recognizing the customers' negotiating power as discussed in Porter's five forces framework. Social media has enhanced the customer's negotiating power through consumer feedback either negative or positive (Musonera & Weber, 2018). Customers have the power to make demands. Customers use their negotiating power by demanding higher quality and lower prices from a business. Satisfaction is an intensely positive emotional state, and customer delight is an experience that exceeds a customer's expectations (Ball & Barnes, 2017). R01, R02, and R03 realize that satisfying customer requirements contribute to the success of their restaurants.

Kang and Sung (2016) posited that building customer long-term relationships through employee engagement and emotion are important for business sustainability. Employee satisfaction impacts customer experiences and loyalty through quality service (Melián-González et al., 2015; Ogonnaya & Valizade, 2018). R01, R02, and R03 stressed the importance of providing customers with high-quality food and outstanding service. R03 further mentioned that long-term employees recognize customers and treat them as a family, enhancing customer service delight. Also, R03 conveyed that menu prices will increase before quality food and service diminish. Customers patronize



businesses highly rated in quality and customer satisfaction (Pattanayak et al., 2017). All participant restaurant owners communicated that the best marketing tactics are satisfied customers. The feedback from patrons on social media positively correlated with the responses from the participants. Review of the restaurant websites, social media, and promotional documentation confirmed the details regarding the importance of quality food and exceptional service provided by the restaurant owners.

### **Theme #2: Respecting and Encouraging Employees**

Each of the three restaurant owners stressed the importance of good, dependable employees. For the interview question regarding the strategies to obtain and retain employees, the overarching theme was to respect and encourage employees. R01 through R03 acknowledged the difficulty of retaining employees in the restaurant industry; therefore, the importance of paying good employees well. Ogbonnaya and Valizade (2018) concluded that employee satisfaction increases job engagement, service quality, and reduces employee turnover. Also, Ogbeide et al. (2017) posited that employee empowerment and management support stimulate business growth. R03 declared the restaurant offered full-time employees paid two weeks' vacation. R01, R02, and R03 stressed the importance of respecting employees and encouraging two-way communications by listening to their needs and wants. All participants affirmed they treat employees like family promoting employee satisfaction. Covella, McCarthy, Kaifi, and Cocoran (2017) found that the leader-member exchange (LMX) and employee engagement were positively correlated and reduced employee turnover. R03 further explained their strategy includes open communication with employees and allowing

employees the opportunity to express their creativity and provide recommendations for improvement. R03 declared that one kitchen employee has been with the restaurant for over 25 years, and another front-line employee has been with the restaurant for 15 years. Leaders or managers that promote employee self-esteem and encouragement have a higher tendency to retain dedicated employees (Potgieter & Mawande, 2017).

The recognition of the internal threat (Porter, 2008) of employee turnover assisted the restaurant owners in finding the optimal strategies to mitigate the threat of employee turnover. The participant restaurant owners affirmed the importance of involving all employees in brainstorming sessions to define the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats allowing for a broader spectrum of information. Respecting and encouraging employees was the pinnacle theme discovered through discussions with the participants since restaurant sustainability is not possible without reliable employees that share the restaurant owner's vision. Mitigating the internal threat of employee turnover as discussed by Ogbonnaya and Valizade (2018) is consistent with the conceptual framework and scholarly literature regarding Porter's five forces framework.

Review of feedback on the restaurants' websites and social media from previous patrons of R01, R02, and R03 regarding employee attention, courtesy, caring, and hospitality exemplify the participant restaurant owners effect of promoting employee engagement and satisfaction. The fundamental comments were very positive from patrons regarding employee engagement. The comments on the restaurant websites and social media supported the outcome of the participant's enthusiasm for respecting and encouraging employees.

**Theme #3: Participating in Day to Day Operations**

Service management involvement in operations is important in providing employee support for service quality expectations and procedures to ensure consistent quality service (Chi, Chen, Huang, & Chen, 2018). One of the best approaches to restaurant success is for management to emphasize the critical value of service quality and climate (Dushica & Sonja, 2018). R01, R02, and R03 emphasized the value of food and service quality through daily interactions with kitchen and front-line employees. R02 and R03 ensure at least one owner is present every time the restaurant is open. R01 ensures that a family member is available when the owners are not present at the restaurant. All participant restaurant owners are actively involved in operations supporting a smoothly flowing operation. Also, the participant restaurant owners discussed the significance of rewarding employees that show initiative through hard work and those offering process improvements. Although key to the restaurants' sustainability, all participants indicated it is stressful to be present at the restaurant all the time; however, being hands-on managers demonstrates support for employees.

Carleton, Barling, and Trivisonno (2018) defined transformational leaders as those who encourage their followers to progress and to perform beyond the standard expectation. The essential characteristics of transformational leadership include: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individual consideration (Muthia & Krishnan, 2015). All participant restaurant owners signified the transformational leadership style by encouraging employees to express themselves, promoting process improvements, creativity, and rewarding quality service.

A good transformational leader becomes a role model by encouraging employees to view problems from different perspectives and treating individuals uniquely to develop his/her strengths which will promote enthusiasm about the business's mission (Carleton et al., 2018). Choi et al. (2017) postulated that transformational leaders or leaders that are collaborative with employees and operations tend to have superior team effectiveness. The transformational leadership style exhibited by the participants has contributed to the sustainability of the restaurants. Review of the restaurant websites, social media, and promotional documentation confirmed the details regarding the restaurant owners' passion for participating in the process of providing an inviting, homelike restaurant that consumers want to visit.

#### **Theme #4: Receiving Support From Family**

The emotional support and cohesiveness of family in entrepreneur ventures magnify the degree of business success as it reduces the entrepreneur's feelings of solitude through offering access to family social networks (Edelman, Manolova, Shirokova, & Tsukanova, 2016). All three participant restaurant owners discussed the importance of a supportive family. Family members either work at the restaurants owned by the participants or family members assist with restaurant financing. R02 indicated the husband and wife share the responsibilities of the restaurant. They described the business decision to open the restaurant as a family venture. R01 and R03 inherited the restaurant ownership from parents.

The involvement of family in restaurant operations for nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants is not surprising. Elston and Chen (2016) posited that generally small

independent restaurant owners indicated most employees were family members. Arroyo-López et al. (2017) obtained evidence that small family-owned restaurants with satisfied employees in the foodservice industry provided better customer service creating customer loyalty. All three participants restaurant owners expressed the importance of treating employees and patrons like family. Comments provided by previous patrons on the restaurants' websites and social media included the words family, friends, and supportive. Review of the restaurant websites, social media, and promotional documentation confirmed the details regarding the restaurant owners' passion for exemplifying a homelike atmosphere and treating the customers like family.

#### **Theme #5: Maintaining Good Supplier Relationships**

Supplier and business partnering is important for both the supplier and the business as it supports efficiency for both supplier and buyer (Teller, Kotzab, Grant, & Holweg, 2016). R02 and R03 postulated that good supplier relationships are essential to the success of their restaurant. R02 stated the supplier provides good resources, including access to recipes and training. R03 specified that they have worked with the same supplier and sales representative for the past 12 years and are considered part of the staff. The sales representative understands the restaurant's needs which increases efficiency and reduces costs. R01 did not provide information regarding the supplier. A supplier's input is essential to a product or service's success. A good relationship with a supplier will reduce expenditures by eliminating switching costs (Katona, 2015).

Porter's (2008) bargaining power of suppliers refers to influential suppliers. Nonfranchise restaurant owners can select and foster relationships with suppliers through

personal interactions and communication (Mittal et al., 2018). Nonfranchise businesses, such as restaurants, can work with local farmers for produce and meats reducing the transit and carrying costs of supplies. The ability to utilize local suppliers and support the community are advantages of nonfranchise businesses. The relationship that R02 and R03 have with their suppliers supports Porter's (2008) bargaining power of supplier. The review of the restaurant websites and social media did not uncover any support for or against the theme of good supplier relationships.

One surprising finding that resulted from the interviews with participants was that all three participant restaurant owners indicated they had limited previous experience in restaurant operations besides working in the kitchen or serving. Although the research literature supported the fact that many restaurant owners had limited previous restaurant experience, it was surprising to hear. A study conducted by Bobera et al. (2017) concluded that a very small percentage of small restaurant owners had formal training in restaurant operations. R01, R02, and R03 indicated the best operational strategies were trial and error. Once an approach was successful, the participant restaurant owners continued the plan and adjusted over time, as required. The participant restaurant owners provided details that were contrary to a study by Rosalina et al. (2016). Rosalina et al. (2016) discovered that restaurant sustainability is contingent on meticulous strategic planning and effective implementation of the plan. All three participants indicated there are no formal strategic plans for their restaurants which is more aligned with a study conducted by Mboko (2018) study. Mboko (2018) discovered that small business owners (e.g., restaurant owners) managed through informal strategic plans and contributed the

success of their restaurants to making good business decisions, being honest, and providing excellent customer service.

### **Implications of Findings**

The study findings revealed five emergent themes: (a) offering quality food and exceptional service, (b) respecting and encouraging employees, (c) participating in day to day operations, (d) receiving support from family, and (e) maintaining good supplier relationships. All five themes confirmed the knowledge in the subject of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant operations, and sustainability as noted by Ogbonnaya and Valizade (2018), Ong et al. (2018), and Carleton et al. (2018). Each of the three .0participant restaurant owners implied the significance of catering to customer requirements, employee empowerment and satisfaction, and the use of transformational leadership style to enhance customer loyalty. The review of restaurant websites, social media, and promotional documentation also supported the significance of providing a safe, homelike restaurant atmosphere which supported claims made by Wellton, Jonsson, and Walter (2018).

Mboko (2018) discovered that small business owners (e.g., restaurant owners) managed through informal strategic plans and contributed the success of their restaurants to making good business decisions, being honest, and providing excellent customer service. Although the study findings confirmed by Mboko's (2018) assertions of small business owners managing by informal strategic plans and Bobera et al.'s (2017) claims of small business owners having limited operational experience, my study findings of informal strategies and limited restaurant owner experience were surprising. The

restaurant industry is extremely competitive (Dessain & Fishman, 2017) and the participant restaurant owners did not maintain formal strategic plans or have extensive restaurant operational experience but were able to maintain sustainability beyond 5 years.

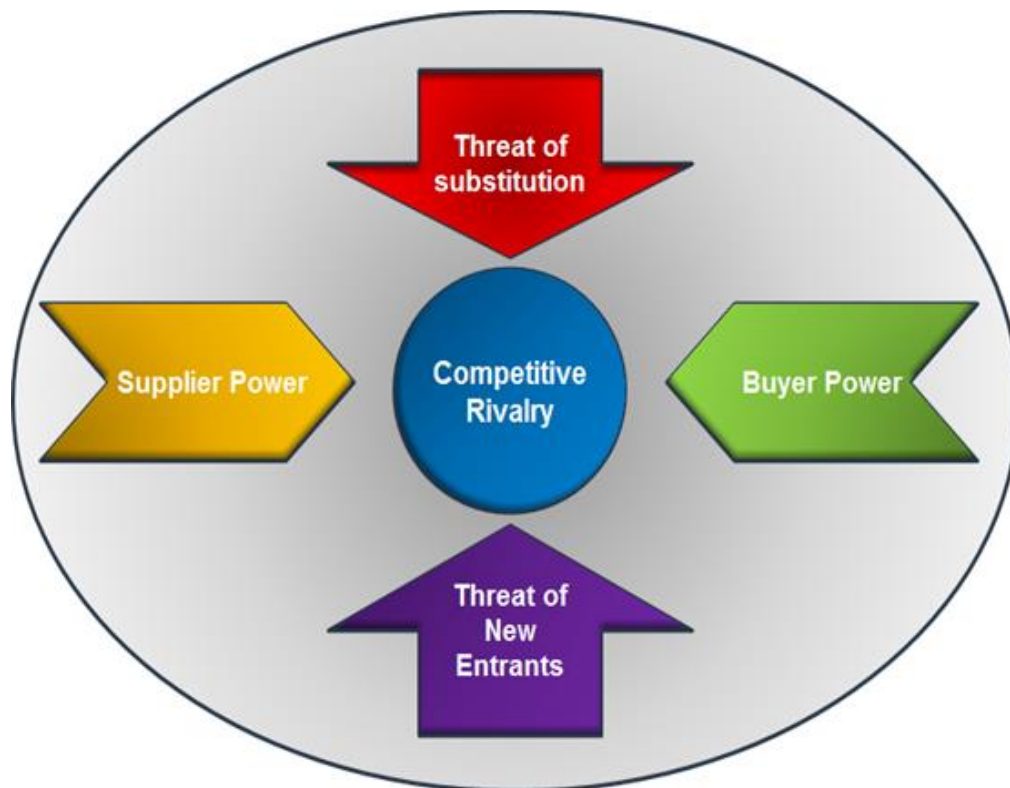
### **Applications to Professional Practice**

Nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners, small business owners, and entrepreneurs may benefit from this study by furthering their knowledge of strategies used to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years of operation. Business owners must know their sources of competition as competition is a beneficial mechanism for determining sustainability (Salim, 2017). A restaurant owner must determine where the restaurant fits within the competitive environment to improve business opportunities (Porter, 2008). Strategically positioning a business within a specific industry by developing defenses against competitors is essential for sustainability (Arroyo-López et al., 2017).

The conceptual framework for this study was Porter's five forces theory. The five forces of Porter's (2008) theory pertained to the research study since evaluating internal and external threats will assist owners in the restaurant industry by identifying effective strategies that promote restaurant sustainability. Porter's (2008) five forces framework pertained to the research study since evaluating internal and external threats assists owners in the restaurant industry by identifying effective strategies that promote restaurant sustainability. Researchers have long recognized Porter's five forces theory as a tool to support business sustainability (Grigore, 2014). Before the strategic planning process, restaurant owners must evaluate the impact the five forces have on the business. Restaurant owners need to assess the threat of new entrants, the bargaining power of



customers, the bargaining power of suppliers, the threat of substitute products, and the competition among related businesses. A restaurant owner must determine the elements that set the business apart from other restaurants (Genoveva & Siam, 2017). Figure 1 illustrates Porter's five forces framework.



*Figure 1: Porter's Five Forces Framework. From Marketing Theories – Explaining Porter's Five Forces, by Professional Academy Blog and Advice, 2017. Reprinted with permission.*

Although the participant restaurant owners established they do not have formal strategic plans for their restaurants, the study discovered informal strategies used by all three participants that incorporate Porter's five forces framework. The following information provides support for other restaurant owners to use Porter's five forces

framework. I describe how the bargaining power of buyers, bargaining power of suppliers, threats of new entrants, threats of substitutes, and the degree of rivalry may be mitigated based on the results of this study.

The bargaining power of buyers refers to the influence consumers have on price, quality of service, and products (Porter, 2008). Customers have the power to make demands of a business. Customers use their negotiating power by demanding higher quality and lower prices from a business. Restaurant owners must be perceptive to the needs and requirements of customers to create loyalty (Bayani & Crisanto, 2017). Each of the three restaurant owners interviewed stressed the importance of catering to customer needs and requirements by observing and listening to customer expectations and desires. All three participants observe and tailor service to the customers since the restaurant owners are actively involved in the day to day restaurant operations.

Bargaining power of suppliers refers to the influence suppliers have on charging higher prices, limiting quality or services, or shifting costs to industry participants (Oyadomari et al., 2017). The relationship that R02 and R03 have with their suppliers has increased efficiencies and reduced supplier costs. Effective communication and a good relationship with the supplier influences Porter's (2008) bargaining power of supplier and is important knowledge for other restaurant and business owners.

Threats of new entrants refer to the potential of new business within the same location or market that create competition by putting pressure on prices, costs, and market share (Hu & Yang, 2016). As noted by Bolisani and Bratianu (2018), product differentiation assists in establishing customer loyalty and mitigates the influence of

competition. The study participants contribute their restaurant's success to loyal customers, product differentiation, quality food, and service. All three participants revealed that creating customer delight through product consistency and offering food that is created using local meats and vegetables created customer loyalty. Quality, consistency, exceptional service, and local products contribute to R01's, R02's, and R03's success and mitigation of the threat of new entrants to the market area.

The threat of substitutes refers to the consumer's ability to visit an alternative business or buy another product. A business owner must evaluate product or service differentiation and switching costs for consumers (Milimu & Theuri, 2017). The higher the switching cost, the less probability a consumer will go to another business (Dessain & Fishman, 2017). R01 specifically stated that the food offered at the restaurant must be consistently high quality, and the final product cannot be something the average consumer can create at home, therefore, eliminating the threat of substitutes. R01, R02, and R03 explained that offering a diverse product and superior service will set their restaurants apart from other restaurants mitigating the threat of substitutes.

The degree of rivalry refers to the level of competition that exists within the industry or location (Porter, 2008). Strategically positioning a business within a specific industry or location by developing defenses against competitors are essential for sustainability (Salim, 2017). All three study participants contributed restaurant sustainability to the limited number of full-service restaurants in the mid-Atlantic region. The sizable number of loyal customers mitigates the extent of competition, per the study

participants. However, the degree of rivalry continues to push the participant restaurant owners to offer extraordinary quality food and services.

The findings of the study may help other nonfranchise casual dining restaurant owners or potential owners with insight that will assist with remaining sustainable beyond 5 years. The study establishes that quality food and service must be the foremost element that sets a restaurant apart from other similar restaurants. Also, quality food and service must be consistent to create loyal customers. Loyal customers are a business' most important and economical marketing strategy (Jana, 2014).

### **Implications for Social Change**

Small business owners and entrepreneurs assist the local economy by creating employment opportunities, economic revitalization, and economic growth (Bonito et al., 2017; Halabi & Lussier, 2014). As discussed by Cha and Borchgrevink (2014), sustainable restaurants are the top economic contributors to the United States economy and are the second-largest private-sector employer in the nation. Restaurants are extremely important in job creation and economic growth (Halabi & Lussier, 2014). The success of current and potential restaurant owners strengthens the local, state, and national economy through sales and tax revenues.

The findings of this study may promote positive social change by encouraging current and aspiring restaurant owners to partner with local farmers. The study findings illustrated that successful nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners increase sustainability by using quality local products. Price, service quality, and use of local products are the most important factors for consumers when choosing a restaurant to visit

(Scozzafava et al., 2017). He et al. (2017) postulated that a common theme among entrepreneurs is the emphasis on commitment to strengthening society and community. Wellton et al. (2018) posited that restaurants providing a safe, home-like atmosphere enhance recurring patronage. The attributes noted by previous customers of the nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants in the mid-Atlantic region evidenced that creating a safe place to gather develops positive community relationships.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Qualitative case studies assist prevailing and future researchers with recommendations that may be used to expand on generalizations of previous researchers (Tsang, 2014). The successful nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners may have the opportunity to expand beyond the current the mid-Atlantic region. My research findings supported the research performed by Melián-González et al. (2015) and Iqbal et al. (2017) that managers have a significant impact on the attitudes and service quality of employees affecting business profitability performance. Liu et al. (2015) posited that employee satisfaction influences optimal service performance creating customer satisfaction and loyalty. My study also supported the assertion that restaurant owners must be perceptive to the needs and requirements of customers to create loyalty (Bayani & Crisanto, 2017). For this study, I identified the following recommendations for aspiring and existing restaurant owners aspiring to remain sustainable beyond 5 years of operations (a) focus on using local meats and produce, (b) encourage and promote employee creativity within restaurant operations, (c) formalize strategies that are

effective in the sustainability of the restaurant, and (d) restaurant owners should never cut quality of food and service for profitability.

The first recommendation for restaurant owners is to focus on using local products. The responses from participants indicated that restaurant owners that promote and use local products contribute to customer loyalty. All three participants revealed that creating customer delight through product consistency and offering food that is created using local meats and vegetables created loyal customers. The findings of my study corresponded with the research performed by Scozzafava et al. (2017) that concluded consumers are three times more likely to frequent restaurants that offer local products on the menu than those restaurants that do not advertise and use local products. Restaurant owners that promote the use of local products in their restaurants have a competitive advantage over restaurant owners that do not promote the use of local products (Bristow & Jenkins, 2018; NRA, 2015; Scozzafava et al., 2017; Sharma et al., 2014). Also, trends in the restaurant industry over the last decade have identified the consumers' preference for restaurants that offer local products on the menu (NRA, 2015). Community support and freshness are a leading factor for restaurants purchasing local products to use in their restaurant (Preiss et al., 2017). Therefore, it is my recommendation that restaurants use local products to create recipes.

The second recommendation for restaurant owners is to encourage and promote employee creativity within restaurant operations. The responses from participants stressed the importance of good, dependable employees. To ensure a low turnover, the participants emphasized respecting employees and encouraging two-way communication

by listening to their needs and wants. All participants affirmed they treat employees like family promoting employee satisfaction. The study findings corresponded with research performed by Covella et al. (2017) that found that the leader-member exchange (LMX) and employee engagement were positively correlated and reduced employee turnover. Therefore, it is my recommendation that restaurant owners and managers engage in LMX and encourage employee feedback and creativity to reduce employee turnover and promote employee satisfaction.

The third recommendation for restaurant owners is to formalize strategies that are effective in the sustainability of the restaurant. Neugebauer et al. (2016) postulated that business owners should design strategies that are useful for forecasting normalcy within a business and assist with managing critical unplanned disruptions. The findings of the research indicated that the participants did not have formal, written strategies for daily operations. Therefore, it is my recommendation for the development of formal, written strategies will benefit current restaurant owners by documenting what strategies are advantageous and assist forthcoming restaurant management in maintaining sustainability.

The fourth recommendation for restaurant owners is never to reduce the quality of food and service to increase profitability. The study participants postulated that menu prices would increase before quality food and service diminish. Customers patronize businesses highly rated in quality and customer satisfaction (El Khouly & Fadl, 2016; Pattanayak et al., 2017). All participant restaurant owners communicated that the best marketing tactics are satisfied customers. Therefore, it is my recommendation for

restaurant owners to promote enthusiasm about the business's mission of quality with all restaurant employees as expressed by Antonakis and House (2014).

I will disseminate the results of this multiple case study to participants, restaurant and entrepreneur associations, and local administrative offices. The participants, Chamber of Commerce, and the Treasurer's Office in the mid-Atlantic region will receive a summary of the research results. Also, I will develop and submit an article for publication to hospitality, entrepreneur, and management journals.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify the strategies used by owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years. The findings of the study provided a foundation for other researchers to explore how nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners can remain sustainable. Conducting further qualitative research of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants outside of the limitations of the mid-Atlantic region may uncover additional themes not recognized in this study. Also, additional qualitative research of unsuccessful nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants may increase the breadth of research data.

One surprising assertion made by all three participant restaurant owners was the limited previous experience in restaurant operations besides working in the kitchen or serving. Although the research literature supported the proclamation that many restaurant owners possessed limited previous restaurant experience, it was unexpected to hear. A study conducted by Bobera et al. (2017) concluded that a very small percentage of small restaurant owners had formal training in restaurant operations. The participant restaurant



owners discovered the best operational strategies by trial and error. Once an approach was successful, the restaurant owners continued the strategy and adjusted it over time, as required. The participant restaurant owners provided details that were contrary to a study by Rosalina et al. (2016). Rosalina et al. (2016) found that restaurant sustainability is contingent on meticulous strategic planning and effective implementation of the plan. All three participants indicated there were no formal strategic plans for their restaurants which is more aligned with the Bobera et al. (2017). Bobera et al. (2017) discovered that small restaurant owners contributed to the success of their restaurant to making good business decisions, being honest, and providing excellent customer service. Additional recommendations for future research include analysis of restaurant owner education and management experience in the restaurant industry, review of failed restaurant strategic plans, or lack thereof, and broadening the research location outside of the mid-Atlantic region.

### **Reflections**

I chose to study nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant strategies for sustainability because I, like most American consumers, spent 47% of their household food dollars on dining out contributing to restaurant industry sales in excess of \$798.7 billion in 2017 (NRA, 2017). During the data collection process, I had the opportunity to conduct semistructured interviews with three nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners operated a sustainable restaurant beyond 5 years. I gained knowledge which has deepened my understanding of the nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant operation. The location of my study is the community in which I live. The mid-Atlantic region is rural,

but growing quickly with commercial establishments. I aspire to assist restaurants, and other businesses within my community, to understand strategies that may help with operational sustainability.

### **Conclusion**

Although more than 50% of restaurants fail in the first 5 years of operation, costing \$2.1 billion annually in lost national sales revenue, sustainable restaurants are the top economic contributors to the United States economy and are the second-largest private-sector employer (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2017; Cha & Borchgrevink, 2014). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify the strategies used by owners of nonfranchise, casual dining restaurants to ensure sustainability beyond 5 years. Three nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners in the mid-Atlantic participated in this study. Five emergent themes were revealed: (a) offer quality food and exceptional service, (b) respect and encourage employees, (c) involvement in day to day operations, (d) support of family, and (e) good supplier relationships. To establish methodological triangulation, I used semistructured interviews, transcription notes, reviewing comments from websites, and inputting data into NVivo 12 to aid in grouping responses, and identifying themes aided in understanding strategies used by nonfranchise, casual dining restaurant owners to remain sustainable. The conceptual framework of Porter's five forces framework helped to guide the scope and data analysis for the study.

The participant restaurant owners in the study established they do not have formal strategic plans for their restaurants; however, the study discovered informal strategies used by all three participants that incorporate Porter's five forces framework. Porter's

five forces framework requires a business owner to evaluate the bargaining power of buyers, bargaining power of suppliers, threats of new entrants, threats of substitutes, and degree of rivalry. Ultimately, quality food and service are pivotal requirements for restaurant sustainability. A restaurant owner must formulate strategies to maintain consistent quality food and service to create loyal customers and sustainability. Sustainability, in turn, may promote positive social change by supporting local farmers, donating unused food to community food banks, providing nutritious food to consumers, developing positive community relationships, as well as, providing a safe place to socialize and meet friends.

I recommended that existing and aspiring restaurant owners adopt and align operational strategies with Porter's five forces framework including aspects of TQM. Effective leadership at all levels of a restaurant's operation promotes sustainability and provides a vision for the creation of optimal strategies and mitigates risk. More importantly, restaurant owners must understand and cater to customers' needs and wants to create delight and loyalty. In turn, customer delight and loyalty foster restaurant sustainability.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions and Interview Protocol

The open-ended interview questions that will assist in answering the research question are as follows:

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies do you use to recruit and retain employees?
2. What strategies impacted your decision to open the restaurant?
3. What strategies did you use to choose this location for your restaurant?
4. What strategies do you use to create loyal customers?
5. How do you use strategies to manage the restaurant operations?
6. What challenges or barriers do you face when implementing your strategies?
7. How do you overcome challenges in implementing your strategies?
8. What are your competitive advantages?
9. What else would you like to share about your strategies that contributed to the sustainability of the business?

### **Interview Protocol**

- I. I will introduce myself to the participant.
- II. I will present the consent form, go over the contents of the consent form, and answer any questions or concerns from the participant.
- III. I will provide the participant a copy of the consent form.
- IV. I will obtain a verbal agreement to record the interview. I will turn on the recording device. I will ask the participant to state their agreement to be recorded again with the recording device on.

- V. I will follow the procedure to introduce the participant with a pseudonym/coded identification and note the date and time.
- VI. I will begin the interview with question #1 and follow through to the final question.
- VII. I will follow up with additional questions if needed.
- VIII. I will end the interview sequence and discuss member-checking with the participant.
- IX. I will thank the participant for their part in the study. I will reiterate my contact information for any follow-up questions and concerns the from the participant.
- X. End of the interview protocol.