

2018

# Small Business Owners' Strategies for Success

Ovuefelomaloye London Onyenego  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Ovuefelomaloye London Onyenego

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Small Business Owners' Strategies for Success

by

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MBA, University of Phoenix, 2007

BS, Drexel University, 2004

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2018

## Abstract

Small businesses represent 99.7% of all employers in the United States and account for 63% of new jobs; however, 50% of small businesses fail within 5 years of operation. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies that some small restaurant owners used to succeed in business for longer than 5 years. The sample population for the study was the owners of 3 small restaurants in the northeastern region of the United States who have a minimum of 5 years' experience in operating a successful business. Chaos theory provided the conceptual framework for the study. Data collection methods were semistructured interviews and review of company documents and archival records. Member checking of interview transcripts was used to strengthen the credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness of the findings. Based on the methodological triangulation of the data sources and using the van Kaam process, themes emerged. The principal themes that emerged were networking, customer satisfaction, and leadership. The findings from this study may contribute to positive social change by providing strategies that small business owners need to be successful and possibly improve the prosperity of the community and local economy.

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## Dedication

To God be all the glory. I dedicate this doctoral study to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ for the riches of his immeasurable grace in my life. To the Holy Spirit, my greatest teacher. To my wife and children, Elizabeth, Gabrielle, and Joseph for your love, patience, support, and encouragement throughout my doctoral journey. Also, to my late parents, Mr. James Onyenego and Mrs. Abete Onyenego for bringing me to this world. To my siblings Iyomi, Emmanuel, and Victoria who have been very supportive of my life endeavors.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

### **Introduction**

Small business owners remain a crucial driving force of U.S. economic health, but, small business owners are failing at shocking rates (Small Business Administration [SBA], 2016; Turner, 2015). Small businesses account for 54% of all sales, 50% of the private workforce, and 64% of net new jobs in the United States (Campbell & Park, 2017; SBA, 2016). Aleksandr, Jaroslav, Ludmila, and Pavla (2016) emphasized that small business leaders have a positive influence on gross domestic product (GDP). However, 50% of new small businesses fail by the end of the first 5 years of operation (Tanej, Pryor, & Hayek, 2016). My purpose in this multiple case qualitative study was to explore strategies that some small restaurant owners used to succeed beyond the first 5 years opening their business in the northeastern region of the United States.

### **Background of the Problem**

In 2013, there were 28.8 million small businesses in the United States (SBA, 2016). Small businesses are the key drivers of the economy of the United States (Dahmen & Rodríguez, 2014). Small businesses, as defined by the Office of Advocacy created by Congress in 1976, are businesses with fewer than 500 employees (SBA, 2014). Between 1993 and June 2013, small businesses accounted for 63% or 14.3 million new net jobs (SBA, 2014). The SBA specified that small business leaders represent 99.7% of all employers in the United States, and small businesses account for 49% of the payroll in the private sector (Pacter, 2014).

The influence of small businesses on the GDP has been positive (Aleksandr et al., 2016). However, many small businesses fail to succeed beyond the first 5 years (SBA, 2016). The practice of poor management strategies or the absence of management strategies by business owners can result in a negative business performance. The study by Panicker and Manimala (2015) indicated that some small businesses fail because of incompetent management strategies and stated that implementation of effective business strategies can lead to a success beyond 5 years.

### **Problem Statement**

The high failure rate of small businesses in the United States creates unemployment, reduces income tax revenues, and negatively affects the GDP (Dahmen & Rodríguez, 2014). From 2004 to 2014, an average of 78.5% of new small businesses in the United States failed within 1 year, and 50% of small businesses failed within 5 years of operations (SBA, 2016). The general business problem that I addressed in this study was that small business failure results in a financial loss for owners. The specific business problem that I addressed in this study was that some small restaurant owners lack strategies to succeed beyond 5 years.

### **Purpose Statement**

My purpose in this multiple case qualitative study was to explore strategies that some small restaurant owners used to succeed beyond 5 years. The target population for the study was the owners of three small restaurants in the northeastern region of the United States who have a minimum of 5 years of successful business. The findings of this study might contribute to social change if small restaurant owners apply useful strategies

to minimize business failure rates. Successful small restaurant operation may reduce unemployment, increase new job opportunities, increase contributions to local tax revenue, and improve the human and the economic situations in the community (Shukla & Shukla, 2014).

### **Nature of the Study**

The three research methodologies are (a) qualitative, (b) quantitative, and (c) mixed method (Yin, 2014). In qualitative research, researchers explore complex phenomenon using open-ended questions and observations to collect data (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). Qualitative researchers use concepts, assumptions, and methodical guidelines to identify and develop the themes of a study (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). In contrast, in a quantitative study, the researcher relies on statistical analysis of numerical data for testing hypothesis or for explaining cause-and-effect relationships between variables (Cairney & St Denny, 2015). In a mixed-methods study, the researcher combines both qualitative and quantitative techniques in one study (Jang, Kim, & Jung, 2016). To explore the small restaurant owners' leadership strategies for successfully sustaining businesses beyond 5 years, I did not test hypotheses which is part of a quantitative study or the quantitative part of a mixed methods study. I chose to use a qualitative methodology as most suitable for this study.

The four principal qualitative research designs that a researcher can use for study are (a) narrative, (b) phenomenology, (c) ethnography, and (d) case study (Zou, Sunindijo, & Dainty, 2014). In the narrative method, the researcher focuses on an individual and centers on *who*, *where*, and *when*, as against the *how* and *why* of the

business (Zou et al., 2014). Narrative research was not appropriate for this study because I was not exploring stories of *who*, *where*, and *when* of individuals and businesses. Researchers use a phenomenological design to understand the participants' insights of lived and shared experiences (Zou et al., 2014). Phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study because participants' experiences and worldviews were not the focus but strategies. Cincotta (2015) indicated that researchers use ethnography to explore the culture of certain groups of participants over a long time in natural settings for in-depth understanding. An ethnographic design did not apply to this research because the study was not about the culture of participants but strategies. I selected a multiple case study design to explore strategies that small restaurant owners use to succeed in business beyond 5 years. Yin (2014) stated that researchers should select a case study if they want to answer questions about how or why in contrast to how or what phenomenon. In a multiple case study, researchers gather and evaluate data from different types of participants to help address a specific business problem (Yin, 2014).

### **Research Question**

The research question guiding my study was: What strategies do some small restaurant owners use to succeed beyond 5 years?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies have you used to be successful in the past 5 years?
2. Of the strategies mentioned in Question 1, what were the top strategies you used that contributed to the success of your restaurant during the first 5 years?



3. What strategies helped you to increase your customer base during the first 5 years?
4. What challenges have you faced when trying to implement strategies for your restaurant? These challenges could be outside or within the organization.
5. How did you address each of the barriers or challenges?
6. What else you would like to share regarding strategies of the success of your restaurant?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework used for this study was chaos theory. Chaos theory was pioneered by a meteorologist, Lorenz, in 1963 as a mathematical concept (Lorenz, 1963). Banik and Bandyopadhyay (2015) and Thamizhchelvy and Geetha (2015) indicated that chaos theory is a deterministic system; however, the advance knowledge of the initial condition must be established to have a predictable result. Chaos theory is complex system that creates and regulates itself through the connection of several parts that are dynamically nonlinear and constantly changing (Bechtold, 1997). Chaos theory's initial conditions involve many random variables; thus, long-term forecasts of favorable outcome are difficult (Thamizhchelvy & Geetha, 2015).

For this study, chaos represents the fluctuations, uncertainties, shifts in the environment, and customers' needs that cannot be accurately predicted. Bechtold (1997) suggested a continuous strategic planning that includes all organizational members as an organizational process. Bechtold indicated that such an approach may increase an

organization's knowledge, ecological fit, and flexibility as it changes to a sound business strategy.

Using chaos theory could enable me to understand the strategies that some small restaurant owners use in the northeastern region of the United States identify and implement for the success of the business beyond the first 5 years of operation. The expectation of, and planning for, the realities of chaos in both the internal and external environment could enable small restaurant owners to make and implement the strategies that may contribute to their success.

### **Operational Definitions**

*A small business:* A small business is a company with fewer than 500 employees (SBA, 2014).

*Organizational leadership:* Organizational leadership is an activity that involves influence on followers and initiation of strategies for achieving common set goals (Ionescu, 2014).

*Small Business Administration:* The Small Business Administration (SBA) is an autonomous governmental agency that provides resources to small business owners about business operations (SBA, 2014).

*Strategic leadership:* Strategic leadership provides vision and direction for their business growth and success (Norzailan, Othman, & Ishizaki, 2016).

*Strategic planning:* Strategic planning is a process of formulating and implementing strategies which require significant leadership involvement (Marx, 2015).

*SWOT analysis*: Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis is an examination of a business internal strengths and weaknesses against the opportunities and threats that the business faces externally (Mirzakhani, Parsaamal, & Golzar (2014).

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

Assumptions and limitations of the study identify the factors that are beyond the control of a researcher. Assumptions are realities that I assume are facts but cannot prove (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Limitations are potential weaknesses in the study (Connelly, 2013). Delimitations are controls that a researcher could manipulate within certain margins in the study (Yin, 2014).

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions in the study were facts I believe as true but cannot verify (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To prevent further examination or enquiry, a researcher must identify and address probable assumptions in the study. I assumed that all participants would respond truthfully to interview questions. I assumed that an adequate number of small restaurant owners in the northeastern region of the United States who have succeeded in business beyond 5 years would be willing to participate in the interview. I assumed that small business owners who I selected as participants have knowledge of strategies to succeed in business beyond 5 years.

#### **Limitations**

Some limitations exist in every study. Brutus, Aguinis, and Wassmer (2013) posited that limitations are possible weaknesses that influence of in-depth understanding

of the study. The first limitation was the restricted time to meet and gather data from participants. The second limitation was that the data collected from the small restaurant owners who have succeeded beyond 5 years in the northeastern region of the United States may not represent the view of all small business owners in the region. The third limitation was that bias may exist in the study as small restaurant owners could overstate answers to questions. The fourth limitation was that some participants may not be able to accurately remember events during the past 5 years.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are restrictions or boundaries a researcher intentionally imposes on a study to narrow the focus (Yin, 2014). The first delimitation was that the focus of the study was on small restaurants with employees fewer than 500 as defined by SBA (SBA, 2014). The second delimitation was the geographical location of the study. The selected participants for the study include small restaurant owners in the northeastern region of the United States who have succeeded in business a minimum of 5 years.

### **Significance of the Study**

For this qualitative study, I explored the strategies that small restaurant owners use to succeed beyond 5 years of being in business in the northeastern region of the United States. The high failure rate of small business owners is alarming; yet, information on the strategies that contribute to small business owners' success beyond 5 years of operation is limited. The economic health of Pennsylvania is determined by small businesses because the businesses are the driving force of the state's economic growth (SBA, 2015; Shukla & Shukla, 2014).

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The findings from this qualitative multiple case study may help small business owners recognize the strategies for the success of restaurant businesses in the northeastern region of the United States. The data from this study may be useful for small business owners and leaders in the northeastern region of the United States to identify and deploy the needed strategies for success. In addition, data from this study may be used to identify challenges that business owners faced and addressed when implementing strategies.

### **Implications for Social Change**

In 2013, Pennsylvania small businesses employed 2.4 million people or 46.9% of the private workforce (SBA, 2016). Small businesses are the source of income and benefits for millions of employees in Pennsylvania. Yet, small businesses continue to experience high failure rates (Dahmen & Rodríguez, 2014). The implication for social change included the potential for small restaurant owners in the northeastern region of the United States to identify and implement successful strategies to reduce small business failure rates. The lower failure rate could reduce unemployment rates, increase new job opportunities and contributions to local tax revenue, and improve the economic situation in the community (Shukla & Shukla, 2014).

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

My purpose in this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that small business owners used to succeed in business beyond 5 years. A literature review provides basis for researchers to identify, understand, and build on current

materials relevant to the research question (Turner, 2015). Callahan (2014) suggested that researchers use a literature review to clearly frame their study, use the appropriate procedures for documenting the study, and analyze results.

For this study, the databases I used to collect peer-reviewed articles for the study in the Walden Library included ABI/INORM, Emerald Management Journals, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, Management & Organization Studies, Management & Organization Studies, SAGE Premier, and Government databases. The key words that I used in searching these databases included *small business owners, types of small business owners, chaos theory, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, participative leadership, SWOT analysis, leadership strategies, leadership styles, perceived small business failure factors, perceived small business success strategies, innovations, importance of networking, and corporate social responsibility*.

The keys that I selected for the literature search helped me to identify the leadership strategies that some small business owners used to succeed in business while large numbers of others fail. For the study, I used 110 references, of which 103 (94%) were peer-reviewed, and 95 (86%) were published between 2014 and 2018.

### **Chaos Theory**

Bechtold (1997) indicated that chaos theory is a model that helps organizations develop new strategies for the natural growth of the business and to accomplish its potential. Chaos theory, as a model for strategy development, cannot be understood in isolation of general system theory (Bechtold, 1997). A system is a set of parts that

interrelate with one another and function as a whole unit (Bechtold, 1997). According to Bechtold (1997), chaos is an evolutionary system and it sees a system as constantly evolving in complexity that cannot be changed. Although a dynamic system appears chaotic, yet its identity, integrity, history, and sense of purpose are preserved within its margins and control its evolution and growth (Bechtold, 1997).

A meteorologist, Lorenz, coined the term *chaos theory* in 1963 while working on a model for weather predictions (Adams & Stewart, 2015; Lorenz, 1963). Chaos theory has its root in the study of nonlinear dynamic systems and unpredictable fluctuation (Adams & Stewart, 2015; Jafarov, Zeynalov, & Mustafayeva, 2016; Thietart & Forgues, 1995). Banik and Bandyopadhyay (2015) indicated that chaos theory is a deterministic system with no random involvements, and the outcome is completely determined by their initial settings. Chaos theory may be defined as a complex system that creates and regulates itself through the connection of several parts that are dynamically nonlinear and constantly changing (Bechtold, 1997). During the last 30 years, interest in chaos systems has increased among researchers of variety of disciplines including natural sciences, sports, economics, and business organizations (Adams & Stewart, 2015; Thietart & Forgues, 1995).

Thietart and Forgues (1995) argued that organizations are chaotic systems because they face counteracting forces. The forces that promote stability in an organizational system include planning, structuring, and controlling; in contrast, the forces that push for instability in the system comprise innovation, fresh initiative, and experimentation (Bums, 2016; Thietart & Forgues, 1995). The existence of

experimentation, innovation, and discrete initiative in the organization create instability and tends to push the firm out of planned objectives (Thietart & Forgues, 1995).

Organizations have disruptions and instability when its leaders explore new ideas. As the organization leaders experiment with new strategic innovative ideas or by allowing enough resources to explore areas of growth, the enterprise must create various responses and unknown demands from the competitive environment (Thietart & Forgues, 1995).

Chaos theory involves a constant strategic planning by business leaders to address the rapid fluctuations, uncertainties, and shifts in the environment in organizations (Bechtold, 1997). Bechtold indicated that such an approach may increase an organization's knowledge, ecological fit, and flexibility as it changes to a sound business strategy. Chaos theory is a useful tool for small business leaders to identify strategies to manage the challenges of complex, dynamic, and cannot predict customer requirements (Adams & Stewart, 2015). Chaos theory is a useful tool that helps business leaders identify strategies that will prepare their businesses for unpredictable events. For this study, chaos theory is a valuable tool for small restaurant owners in the northeastern region of the United States to identify sound strategies for the success of the business beyond 5 years.

### **Rival Theories/Opponents of the Conceptual Framework**

Fiedler's (1965) contingency theory of leadership is the opposing theory for this study. Fiedler first coined the term *contingency* in the early 1960s as a leadership approach for situational or personal traits of the leader and the influences of the traits on leadership success (Moreno-Gómez & Calleja-Blanco (2018). Contingency theory posits



that a leader's competence is reliant on the leader's personal traits or behaviors as it relates to numerous situational factors (McCleskey (2014). According to contingency theory, a leadership style depends on the various internal and external factors or exigencies that exist in a small business (Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). McCleskey (2014) and Zigarmi and Roberts (2017) argued that small business situations naturally fluctuate, and different leadership behaviors are essential based on the circumstances at hand, and that a *best* style of leadership does not exist.

Researchers using contingency theory have continued to ground their approaches in examining effective leadership behavior on the earliest Fiedler's theory. The researchers' theories are fixated on the situation and the behavioral relationship between leaders and their subordinates and how the leadership styles match the existing situation. Thompson and Glasø (2015) posited that Fiedler's contingency model clarifies that leadership effectiveness is contingent on the interaction between the style of the leader and workplace environmental factors. Zigarmi and Roberts (2017) argued that the use of situational variables and the concept of right leadership style model are the most notable aspects of Fiedler's contingency theory. Thompson and Glasø (2015) and Zigarmi and Roberts (2017) posited that some leaders are more effective and efficient in certain situations but not in all situations. Fiedler (1965) suggested that leadership style and situational variables are the two interacting factors that affect group member performance results.

The leadership styles, as indicated in Fiedler's contingency theory, are about the leader's inflexible personality which fits the environmental situation. Boehe (2016)

specified that Fiedler formulated the least preferred coworker (LPC) contingency model as a measurement instrument for the relationship between traits and the effectiveness of leadership. Although there has been much discussion and several perceptions in the literature in what exactly Fiedler's scale measured, the rationale for Fiedler's LPC instrument has not been fully addressed (Boeche, 2016).

Although contingency theory has been a popular conception of leadership, notable flaws exist in the theory in dealing with its consistency, continuity, and conformity (McCleskey (2014). The flaws include (a) the focus is on the business environment leadership situations instead on the leader and (b) a poor internal uniformity, conceptual inconsistencies, and uncertainties. For this study, contingency theory was not the theory used in the conceptual framework to explore the strategies that small business owners use to be successful in business beyond 5 years.

### **Background Information**

The 28 million small businesses in America account for 54% of all sales in the United States (Campbell & Park, 2017; Criscuolo, Gal, & Menon, 2014; SBA, 2016). Campbell and Park (2017) noted that small businesses contribute 50% of a state private workforce and 64% of the net new jobs in the United States. Although small businesses remain an important driving force of the U. S. economy, the SBA (2016) reported that 78.5% of new establishment from 2004 to 2014 survived 1 year, whereas 33% survive 10 years or longer. The SBA (2016) and Tanej et al. (2016) noted that 50% of small business owners close their small business by the fifth year. The high failure rate of small businesses is because of a variety of factors including lack of financial resources and poor

leadership strategies (Bishop, 2015; Campbell & Park, 2017). The survival of startups and existing small businesses are crucial for the vitality of the U.S. economy (Dahmen & Rodríguez, 2014). Hence, recognizing features that may contribute to both the short-term and long-term survivability of small business are necessary. Turner (2015) noted that small businesses continue to fail after launching, yet no theory addresses the cause of small business owners' failures after starting the small business initiative. Lack of formal and practical strategies and resources are the main causes of small business failures (Taneja, Pryor, & Hayek, 2016). Learning and gaining insights from small business owners who have been successful for at least 5 years may provide new perceptions.

### **Small Business**

The U.S. SBA was instituted in 1953 by an act of Congress because of the increasing importance of small businesses in the U.S. economic growth (Dahmen & Rodríguez, 2014; Wiid, Cant, & Roux, 2016). Dahmen and Rodríguez (2014) referred to small business owners as an essential component of the U.S. development. The Office of Advocacy of the SBA defined a *small business* as an independent business having between 1 to 499 employees (SBA, 2014; 2015; 2016). The SBA used the numerical definitions for all for-profit industries in government programs and contracting in size standards. The size standards are very large size (500 and more employees), large size (200 to 500 employees), medium size (50 to 200 employees), small size (fewer than 50 employees), and micro size (fewer than 10 employees). The size standards are vital for SBA's financial assistance and other programs of benefits to qualifying small businesses including Federal government procurement contracts (Mackin, 2015).

The SBA also categorizes small businesses by industry, employees, and annual sales (Salas-Fumás & Sanchez-Asin, 2013). Another feature for defining small businesses by the SBA (2014) includes profit orientation, independent ownership, size in the industry, prior year average number of employees, and average annual revenue during the immediate past 3 years. Besser (2016) and Salas-Fumás and Sanchez-Asin (2013) claimed that researchers' inconsistent findings regarding small business failure are because of the varieties of the small business definitions. The term *small business* that I used for this qualitative multiple case study is a privately-owned profit-oriented business organization with fewer than 50 employees. The knowledge of the strategies that small restaurant owners in the northeastern region of the United States use to be successful for at least 5 years will be of significant benefit to the success of startups.

### **Small Business Owners**

The concept of small business ownership is similar in different countries. For example, the findings of studies in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia revealed that individuals start small business initiatives for reasons including (a) being one's own boss (59%), (b) monetary benefits (50%), (c) the emerging market (44%), (d) being unsatisfied with large firms (36%), and (e) rivals against former employers for lack of opportunities (15%) (Hefer, Cant, & Wiid, 2015). In the United States, small businesses generate 50% of the GDP (Chhabra & Pattanayak, 2014; Criscuolo, et al. 2014; Thornton, & Byrd, 2013), provide 49.2% of private sector jobs, and represent more than 99% of U.S. employer companies (Dahmen & Rodríguez, 2014).

The U.S. SBA defined a *small business* as one that is independently owned and operated, which is not dominant in its field of operation (SBA, 2014). To qualify as a small business in the U.S., the business entity must (a) have a place of business in the United States, (b) be organized for profit, and (c) must operate principally in the U.S. or provide a significant contribution to the U.S. economy by paying taxes using American made products or labor (SBA, 2014).

Dahmen and Rodriquez (2014) noted that small business owners played critical roles in the U.S. financial recovery. Dahmen and Rodriquez and Memili, Fang, Chrisman, and Massis (2015) indicated that small business owners promote economic growth in the U.S. by creating new jobs, as well as pioneering products and services. As a result, the SBA and Small Business Development Center (SBDC) continue to provide assistance to small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs throughout the United States and its territories. The U.S. SBA was initiated in 1953 to provide support and growth of American small businesses through training, business counseling, education programs, and low-interest loans (SBA, 2016). The SBA (2014) provides all these resources to help small business owners start, build, and grow businesses according to its mission statement.

The personal initiative of the small business owners is significant for the success of their small businesses (Frese, Hass, & Friedrich, 2016). A small business owner's strategies and desires to succeed are greatly impacted by his or her strategic orientation (Weber, Geneste, & Connell, 2015). Weber et al. (2015) noted that the success of the small business owners is contingent upon his or her commitment to excellence and

pursuit of set goals. Weber et al. argued that small business owner's strategies and desires for growth motivates his or her strategic positioning for success. Bygrave and Zacharakis (2014) noted that successful small business owners in a community provide new civic associations, create new products and services, create job opportunities, and create tax revenues for local, state, and federal governments.

Turner (2015) indicated that entrepreneurs or small business owners are individuals operating businesses with self-interest and assuming risks resulting in either a profit or loss. Turner described small business owners as individuals who seek business opportunities for self-sufficiency and the sense of personal success. An entrepreneur's goal is to exploit areas for potentially profitable opportunities which include new products, new services, raw materials, and new markets (Canter & Dopfer, 2015); Sahut & Peris-Ortiz, 2014), whereas a small business owner's goal is to make money to support his or her family (Turner, 2015). According to Sahut and Peris-Ortiz (2014) and Turner (2015), small business owners mostly provide services to an existing market, whereas entrepreneurs introduce new products or services to new markets.

### **Small Businesses in the State of Pennsylvania**

Small businesses significantly affect Pennsylvania's economy (SBA, 2016). In 2013, small business leaders in Pennsylvania employed 2.4 million or 46.9% of the private workforce (SBA, 2016). The SBA (2016) noted that in the second quarter of 2014, 6651 startups were created and generated 22,431 new jobs. The firms having fewer than 100 employees had the largest gain (SBA, 2016). According to the SBA (2016), Pennsylvania business ownership by demographic group includes African American-

owned (27.1%), Hispanic-owned (52.8%), and minority owned (36.7%) businesses. In the third quarter of 2015, Pennsylvania small businesses grew at an annual rate of 2.5% when compared with the overall U.S. growth rate of 1.9% (SBA, 2016).

In 2013, 13, 943 or 89.1% of small businesses in Pennsylvania generated 35.6% of export revenues (SBA, 2016). On May 1, 2017, Abram's Bed LLC, a Pittsburgh-based company, doing business as The Safety Sleeper was named the small business exporter of the Year by the U.S. SBA at the U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C. (SBA, 2017). Rose Morris, Abram's Bed LLC's president and inventor of The Safety Sleeper received the award on behalf of her company (SBA, 2017).

The central focus of the Pennsylvania keystone opportunity zone (PKOZ) initiative is to encourage community development across the state through tax elimination. PKOZ proposes the elimination or suspension of specific state and local taxes within certain underdeveloped and underutilized areas and communities in the state (Pennsylvania Keystone Opportunity, 2017). As of January 31, 2015, the PKOZ created 9,968 jobs and invested \$1,516,737,216 in private capital into the PKOZ properties (Pennsylvania Keystone Opportunity, 2017). The PKOZ ascertains the impacts of small business in the community they operate due to the keystone opportunity zone.

### **Small Business Effect on the Economy**

Haron, Yahya, and Haron (2014) and Karadag (2015) stated that small businesses play a vital role in the economy of nations through job creation, community development, as well as a rise in GDP, entrepreneurship, and innovations. Across the United States, the three small employers' industries are professional, scientific, and technical services

(SBA, 2015). Criscuolo et al. (2014), Haron et al. (2014) and Inyang (2013) indicated that SMEs comprised more than 90% of businesses globally and accounted for more than 50% of employment and 50% of the world GDP. Since 1982, the number of small businesses in the United States increased by 49% and since 1990 added 8 million new jobs whereas larger businesses were eliminating 4 million jobs (SBA, 2014). There are more than 600,000 small business franchises in the United States, accounting for 40% of all retail sales (SBA, 2014). The small businesses in America occupy 30% to 50% of all commercial space or 20 to 34 billion square feet (SBA, 2014). Small businesses represent 99% of employer businesses in the United States (Pryor, 2014). Anastasia (2015) and Nelson (2015) noted that small businesses with fewer than 100 employees have the largest gain in small business employment. This statistic does not include 27 million nonemployer businesses (Anastasia, 2015). The U.S. Census Bureau defined a *nonemployer small business* as one that has no paid employees, has annual revenue of \$1,000 or \$1 in a construction industry, and pays federal income taxes (Pryor, 2014; U. S. Census Bureau, 2013). In 2013, the small business sector makes up 97% of companies exporting goods from the United States and 33.6% of total exporting value (SBA, 2016). Small businesses are demographically established by men, women, minorities, and veterans and are critical to the economic growth of the United States (Anastasia, 2015; Nelson, 2015).

The SBA provided various definitions of small businesses. The earliest definition of *small businesses* offered by the SBA focused on industries and size standards (Anastasia, 2015). The size standard was based on the North American Industry



Classification System (NAICS) (Anastasia, 2015). The measurement used to ascertain size standard must include one of the following: (a) average number of employees during the past 12 months, (b) average annual revenues during the past 3 years, (c) size of assets reported in the firm's four quarterly financial statements for the immediate past year, or (d) fewer than 500 employees, and fewer than 21.5 million dollars annual revenue for service and manufacturing organizations (Anastasia, 2015; Salas-Fumás & Sanchez-Asin, 2013). The numerical identifiers by industry include (a) manufacturing and mining industries (500 employees or fewer), (b) wholesale trade (100 employees), (c) construction (\$36.5 million annual income), (d) trade contractors (\$15 million annual income), and (e) agricultural – (\$0.75 million annual income) (SBA, 2014; 2016; 2018).

In 1953, the SBA was established by the U.S. federal government to provide support to the small businesses through counseling, training, education, and low-cost loans (Anastasia, 2015). As noted by Anastasia (2015) and Elmansori (2014), small businesses were economically disadvantaged with poor capacity to solicit fund; and lacked strategies for start-up and growth. The SBA provides supports to individuals to start small businesses to stimulate the economy, and small businesses are responsible for over 99% of all businesses, creating two of every three jobs in the United States (Anastasia, 2015; Dilger, 2017; SBA, 2014). Although the different definitions of *small businesses* cause researchers to have inconsistent findings, according to Anastasia (2015) and Dilger (2017), the Small Business Act is a crucial turning point for small businesses. The Act characterized small businesses using number of employees, revenues, net worth, and any other factors such as industry size, independence, and non-dominance considered

appropriate for researchers to reduce the confusion in defining small businesses (Anastasia, 2014; Dilger, 2017).

Currently, a *small business* is defined as an independently owned for-profit firm, operating in the United States, having significant contributions to the U.S. economy through taxes or employments, and it must not be dominant in his field of operation (Anastasia, 2015); SBA, 2014). A small business may be a sole proprietorship, partnership, entrepreneur, or such as any other legal form (Anastasia, 2015; SBA, 2014).

Since the 2007 to 2009 U.S. economy downturn, President Obama referred to small businesses as the backbone of the American economy (Dahmen & Rodriguez, 2014). President Obama encouraged small businesses owners to support the economic recovery (Dahmen & Rodriguez, 2014). Without question, small business owners played a vital role in the U.S. financial recovery and success. As a result, the SBA and SBDC have increased efforts to help small business owners to grow and be successful (Dahmen & Rodriguez, 2014; SBA, 2014). Despite the importance of small businesses to the economy, small business failure rate remains very high (Dahmen & Rodriguez, 2014). Various sources including Dahmen and Rodriguez and the U.S. Census Bureau revealed that the small business failure rate is at 50% during the first 5 years of operation.

### **Small Business Owner Failure Factors**

For this study, I used chaos theory as the lens to view the phenomenon of small business failure. Business failure has been described in the literature in different ways Dias and Teixeira (2017). Dias and Teixeira noted that small businesses can be forced out of business due to financial insolvency, or the business does not provide sufficient return

on investment. Ucbasaran, Shepherd, Lockett, and Lyon (2013) identified small business failure from different perspectives including cessation of business ownership, discontinuity of the company because it has not met a minimum threshold for economic viability and involuntary closure because of bankruptcy.

Turner (2015) argued that most business owners fail due to lack of experience, competition from rivalries, economic issues, location, under or over capitalization, economic or personal crises, and lack of focus. Abdolmalaki, Gholipour, and Ma'roofi (2016) noted that small business owners' failures are due to (a) a lack of target market or customers, (b) no determined commercial location, (c) a lack of advertisement, (d) a poor pricing strategy, (e) a lack of distribution channel strategy, (f) a lack of adequate planning, and (g) a lack of motivation. For this study, the definition of business failure is an involuntary closure irrespective of what may have caused the small business owner to liquidate the business assets.

In his comprehensive literature review, Lussier (1995) developed 15 characteristics of the failing and successful small businesses from 20 past researches about factors that cause small businesses failure or success. The small business traits of failure or success include (a) industry experience, (b) capital, (c) partners, (d) education level, (e) age of the owner, (f) planning, (g) management experience, (h) record keeping and financial controls, (i) economic timing, (j) family business experience, (k) staffing, (l) marketing skills, (m) minority-owned, (o) use of professional advisors, and (p) timing of product/service (Halabi & Lussier, 2014; Marom & Lusier, 2014). Since 1995, the Lussier prediction model was noted by researchers and valuable in many countries

including the U.S., Singapore, Chile, and Israel (Halabí & Lussier, 2014; Marom & Lussier, 2014). According to Halabí and Lussier, and Marom and Lussier, the Lussier's prediction model was used to predict success or failure of small businesses in (a) Singapore (86%), (b) Israel (85%), (c) Croatia (72%), (d) the U.S. (70%), and (e) Chile (63%). Halabi and Lussier (2014) suggested that researchers have the privilege of manipulating the attributes as related to the study, timespan, and physical location.

Small business owners fail for lack of capital (Byrd, Ross, & Glackin, 2013). Byrd et al. posited that access to credit is critical for the survival of small business owners. In the United States, lack of access to sufficient intermediate and long-term capital by small business owners to support working capital by the small business owners is an obstacle to entry or expansion (Byrd et al., 2013; Frid, 2015).). Kozan and Akdeniz (2014) noted that small business owners rely deeply on personal or family resources to support working capital. Anastasia (2016) noted that lack of access to capital by small business owners makes them economically disadvantaged and leads to a failure before 5 years in operation.

Longenecker and Insch (2018) argued that a business success is motivated by the role leaders play in producing an efficient and viable organization. Small business leaders face challenges that deter the success and growth of their businesses (Mutoko, 2014). Turner (2015) stressed that a lack of leadership strategies for a successful operation of the business contributes to the high failure rate of small business owners. Turner posited that many small business owners lack a display of strategies and knowledge that business leaders need to successfully operate the business venture. Ulvenblad, Berggren, and

Winborg (2013) suggested that the business insight of informed entrepreneurs and non-informed entrepreneurs inspires how they approach business communications. Ulvenblad et al. noted that business knowledgeable entrepreneurs exhibit better communications and adapt quicker than the uneducated. Ulvenblad et al. claimed that an informed entrepreneur possesses elaborate skills and strategies for growth and success.

### **Small Business Owner Success Strategies**

Successful small businesses are vital for a nation's economic growth (Bhuyan & Pathak, 2017). Turner (2015) noted there is a lack of information about what characterizes successful small business owners longer than 5 years in business. Turner (2015) suggested that a strong internal focus and quest for achievement are the personal characteristics of small business owners. Also, personal traits which contribute to the small business growth and success include (a) strong negotiation skills, (b) creativity, (c) hard work, and (d) self-discipline (Sandoval-Caraveo, Lopez-Parra, Surdez-Perez, Aguilar-Morales, & Corral-Coronado, 2014; Turner, 2015). Small business success in literature is controlled by numerous factors including the personality of the small business owners and motivation to succeed (Gupta et al., 2013). Marom and Lussier (2014) posited that both small business owners and other stakeholders are concerned about the survival of the business.

There is no universal definition of small business success (Gupta et al., 2013). Farrington (2014) indicated that a small business's nonfinancial and financial performance indexes are used to determine an entrepreneurial success. Halabi and Lussier (2014) suggested the model for a successful small business includes (a) working capital,

(d) record keeping, (c) planning, (d) business owner's strategic sets, (e) business ownership history, and (f) marketing strategies. Philip (2011) proposed that management experience, business environment, product offering, and business practices are critical factors for small business success.

Anderson and Ullah (2014) argued that small business success is the degree to which the organization's goals were met or exceeded. Despite the varieties of definitions of small business success to different individuals, small business owners understand the meaning of a successful business (Frese et al., 2016; Le & Raven, 2015). Weber, et al. (2015) revealed that small business researcher measures of success include (1) growth of the business, (2) annual turnovers, and (3) profits. For this study, small business success refers to a small business that has operated beyond 5 years with profitability and growth (SBA, 2015).

### **Leadership**

Leadership is critical to the success of the small businesses (Jaouen & Lasch, 2015; Longenecker & Insch, 2018). Postma and Zwart (2015) posited that small companies need guidance to thrive in the complex business environment. Kazmi and Naaranoja (2015) noted that business leaders are the builders and reformers of the business's internal environment; and develop efficient connections between organizational process and the teams' learning capacity. Leadership is essential for influencing followers and allocating the resources efficiently to fulfill the organization's objectives (Antonakis & House, 2014). Researchers on leadership styles have different findings because no one form fits all. Rost (1993) revealed 221 distinct leadership

concepts and definitions. There are transformational (Prasad & Junni, 2016), transactional (Deichmann & Stam, 2015), situational (Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017), strategic (Antonakis & House, 2014), participative (Wang & Yang, 2015), and servant styles (Beck, 2014). However, this study's main focus was on transformational, transactional, and participative leadership styles.

Birasnav (2014) and Prasad and Junni (2016) revealed that transformational leaders focus on transforming and inspiring followers by addressing their basic needs. Transformational leaders earn followers' trust and confidence as the leader is regarded as a role model (Birasnav 2014; Prasad & Junni, 2016). Transformational leaders provide followers a sense of purpose in values, ideas, and interest (Prasad & Junni, 2016; Tourish, 2014). The characteristics of transformational leaders include (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation and, (d) individual consideration (McCleskey, 2014). Idealized influence shows the level of trust, respect, and identity the followers have for the leader as he or she provides a clear business goal (McCleskey, 2014). Inspirational motivation is the degree to which the leader communicates a compelling shared value and visions of the organization to the followers (Prasad & Junni, 2016). Intellectual stimulation involves the leader encouraging and challenging followers to take risks for the business goals (Zacher, Pearce, Rooney, & McKenna, 2014). McCleskey (2014) noted that transformational leaders positively affect organizational performance by influencing followers.

Transactional leader focus is on an exchange of rewards with the followers (McCleskey, 2014). McCleskey indicated that leaders achieve performance objectives,

complete tasks, and achieve organizational goals by rewarding followers. Prasad and Junni (2016) reported that transactional leaders' focus highly on contractual agreements, set standards, identify targets, clarify responsibilities, rewards for targets, and correction for failure to meet objectives. Deichmann and Stam (2015) explained two dimensions of transactional leadership includes (a) management by exception and (b) contingent rewards. Management by exception refers to when leaders only intervene to correct the mistakes the followers made (Nguyen, 2014). In contrast, contingent rewards provide subordinates rewards for achieving set goals or discipline for failing to meet goals (Deichmann & Stam, 2015). Transactional leaders increase performance levels by setting clear goals and expectations, offering constructive feedback, and providing commensurate rewards for meeting goals (Prasad & Junni, 2016).

Ferraris (2015) argued that participative leadership enhances an employee's performance by encouraging subordinates to contribute to a decision-making process. Ferraris indicated that participative leadership is an effective team-building leadership style that promotes creativity and productivity in an organization. Participative leadership gives both managerial and non-managerial subordinates feelings of empowerment (Li, Huo, & Long, 2015). Wang and Yang (2015) claimed that a participative leadership style encourages employee job satisfaction.

Yang (2015) suggested that business leaders adjust their leadership style to meet different situations and business needs. While transformational leadership is appropriate for influencing and building followers, transactional leadership develops task-related



activities to improve performance (McCleskey, 2014). The ability to exhibit the right leadership style that can motivate and inspire employees is the leader's problem or challenge. Franco and Haase (2017) argued that participative leadership has similarities to relation-oriented leadership. Both leadership styles inspire subordinate and allow them to participate in the decision-making process (Franco & Haase, 2017).

### **Creativity and Innovation**

Innovation is vital for the success of all businesses (Alam & Dubey, 2014; Freeman, 2014). Freeman noted that companies either fail or thrive to the level that leaders promote innovative plans. Small business leaders should create plans that include new business models to address the quickly evolving disruptive technologies and social networking culture. Freeman proposed that effective business leadership strategies help businesses thrive. Holzmann and Golan (2016) explained that creativity and innovative ideas small business owners lead to a competitive advantage over rivals. Creativity, according to Doran and Ryan (2017) and Holzmann and Golan, is a process which enables the generation of new concepts for achieving set goals. Doran and Ryan (2017) and Holzmann and Golan (2016) posited that creativity is an important portion of innovation. Holzmann and Golan posited that creativity relies strongly on leadership ability to motivate subordinates to recognize opportunities and generate new strategies for the success of the business. A small business owner's creativity is an intrinsic drive to accomplish task and identify strategies in creative thinking (Holzmann and Golan, 2016). Geer-Frazier (2014) posited that the modern world of business requires leaders who are dynamic in contrast to the old leadership style of one style fits all. Geer-Frazier argued

that a business leader must strategically direct the complexity of the decisions that support set goals to succeed in the modern business environment.

Kazmi and Naaranoja (2015) argued that senior managers' inability to strategically think negatively impacts the business' performance. Kazmi and Naaranoja indicated that strategic leadership is the spirit of a company's thinking procedure, taking commensurate actions, inspiring subordinates, and other team members to achieve competitive advantage. Strategic thinking, according to Kazmi and Naaranoja, does not come naturally, but strategic thinking skills develop through a learning process. Strategic thinking leaders explore and analyze various situations of the business and develop plans of action to address them based on set goals (Kazmi & Naaranoja, 2015). Small business owners and managers need to think strategically in an uncertain economic environment to thrive. Strategic thinking is a critical business operation strategy for increased business success (Kazmi, Naaranoja, Kytola, & Kantola, 2016).

Dunne, Aaron, McDowell, Urban, and Geho (2016) noted that success and failure of small businesses are strongly impacted by innovation. A small business owner's ability to innovate is vital to their business competitive advantage and continuous growth (Bello & Ivanov, 2014; Dunne et al., (2016). Dunne et al. argued that small business leader's behavior impacts the development of innovation at both individual and business level. According to Dunne et al. (2016), the success of innovation requires the collective efforts to utilize knowledge, skills, and information that inspire new strategies to grow products and services. Holzmann and Golan (2016) suggested that a small business owner's innovation strategy must include (a) exploration and exploitation of competences, and (b)

market and technology stimulus, (c) internal and external sourcing of aptitudes, and (d) product and process innovation. A small business owner that chooses the innovation strategy for his or her business must promote these four areas and establish the needed structure that supports the innovative process (Holzmann & Golan, 2016). Doran and Ryan (2017) noted that innovation is the acceptable implementation of creative ideas.

### **Social Media**

Jones, Borgman, and Ulusoy (2015) explored the impact of social media on the economy through small businesses. By developing social media strategies, small business owners are creating new channels of communicating with their customers (Schaupp & Bélanger, 2014; Sheth, 2018). According to Balan and Rege (2017) and Schaupp and Bélanger (2014), the business owner can use social media for recruitment, marketing, customer relationship management, and employee communication. Jones et al. (2015) and Schaupp and Bélanger (2014) identified that the benefits of the internet and social media to small businesses operations in a recent survey include (a) business exposure, (b) increased customers traffic, (c) lower cost of advertisement, (d) improved relationships with customers, (e) improved ability to reach customers worldwide, and (f) increased local presence in the community.

Jones et al. (2015) revealed that small businesses could use social media to effectively communicate and obtain feedback from a sample of broad potential and current customers with ease. Using social media, small business owners can reach a full range of customers cheaper than what it usually cost with traditional marketing methods (Jones et al., 2015; Sheth, 2018). Social media use by small business owners

generates a larger customer base than the conventional marketing strategy (Balan & Rege, 2017; Jones et al. 2015; Schaupp & Bélanger, 2014). Social media requires no physical office for their advertising, marketing, and networking activities like the traditional model (Schaupp & Belanger, 2014). Lepkowska-White (2017) and Schaupp and Belanger (2014) emphasized there is a significant benefit from the use of social media, however, social media has some shortcomings. Some possible weaknesses, according to Schaupp and Belanger (2014), include (a) inadequate technological competence and (b) consumer pressure. Small business owners should pay attention to social media platforms as a business strategy.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility**

Williams (2014) revealed that corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the last 7 decades has progressed from a generalized corporate philanthropy that benefits external business to that of creating sustainable value for all stakeholders. Williams used the philanthropic strategies of two leaders including John Mackey, chief executive officer (CEO) of Whole Foods and Bill Gates, the founder and chairman of Microsoft and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Williams (2014) noted that John Mackey, CEO of Whole Foods, grew a \$45,000 capital asset company to an \$8 billion capital asset in 35 years. According to Williams (2014), John Mackey's business idea was to satisfy all stakeholders including customers, employees, investors, vendors, communities, and the environments by adding value to each of them. Mackey's philosophy of conscious capitalism is a strategic business leadership philosophy for the common good. Mackey created sustainable value for all

stakeholders with 5% of Whole Food net profits used for CSR projects in the community and the world (Williams, 2014). Jones, Willness, and Glavas (2017) and Williams (2014) noted that corporate sustainability is attainable through adequate involvement in environmental integrity, social justice, and economic growth also known as the *triple bottom* line. Jones et al. and Williams highlighted that CST initiatives are planned to address stakeholder expectations about social, economic, and environmental issues.

Bill Gates, as a business leader has the comprehensive understanding of the business role in the society (Williams, 2014). In 2008, Bill Gates addressed the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and he outlined his business philosophy of creative capitalism (Williams, 2014). Although Gates supports capitalism, he is concerned about the billions of needy individuals in the world (Williams, 2014). According to Williams (2014), Gates emphasized caring for others. In the last 20 years, Microsoft has donated over \$3 billion in cash and software to enhance healthcare and reduce extreme poverty and offered training in management skills in underdeveloped communities worldwide (Williams, 2014). Also, Microsoft researchers assist individuals with less education and literacy in underdeveloped nations globally (Williams, 2014). The corporate social responsibility efforts by the leadership could improve the organization's reputation, appeal to customers, and potential employees (Jones et al., 2017; Lin-Hi & Blumberg, 2016; William, 2014).

## **Strategic Planning**

Dibrell, Craig, and Neubaum (2014) and Cordeiro (2013) posited that strategic planning allows small business owners to attain competitive advantage over rivals when faced with conflicting demands and inadequate resources. Cordeiro researched the strategic development of small business owners that succeeded or failed. Dibrell et al. and Cordeiro noted that small businesses fail because of poor, or the lack of, strategic planning. Mirzakhani et al. (2014) postulated that small business leaders can achieve higher rates of success by focusing on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of the company. Wheelen and Hunger (2008) developed a strategic planning model (SPM) (Cheng, Kadir, & Bohari (2014). The SPM includes (a) environmental scanning, (b) strategy formulation, (c) strategy implementation, and (d) strategy assessment (Cheng et al. 2014).

Abdalkrim (2013) and Ali (2018) defined strategic planning as the long-term goals abilities analysis, scanning for environmental issues that may impact the business, and finding ways to correct and to move the organization in the right direction by the business leader. According to Ali (2018) and Bucci (2014), strategic planning is a focus on the internal and external environments, finding opportunities for business goals ahead and setting plans to achieve the goals. Kachaner, King, and Stewart (2016) defined strategic planning as the deliberate preparedness strategy by the business leader to identify and consider possible threats, disruptions, and opportunities. Strategic planning is vital for businesses to stay in operation as resources are earmarked appropriately to

achieve goals (Abdalkrim, 2013; Wolf & Floyd, 2013). Kachaner et al. argued that there is no universal approach to strategic planning.

Kachaner et al. noted that businesses which benefit most from strategic planning have in common: (a) explore strategy at the different level, (b) continuously reinvent the polite discourse, (c) engage the entire organization, and (d) invest in execution and monitoring. Felype, Fernandes and Antonio (2017) and Gupta and Muita (2013) suggested that strategic planning is what supports the attainment of the company's goals. Wolf and Floyd (2013) indicated that strategic planning allows business leaders to have a sense of direction for successful operation.

Kah Marn, Hin and Bohari (2016) suggested that the quest for business ownership prevents many small businesses from strategic planning. Kah Marn et al. noted that many SMEs' desire to maintain a small-scale operation is what stops them from engaging in strategic planning. According to Kah Marn et al, a growth driven small business leader inclines to engage in strategic planning.

### **Service Climate Excellence**

Cha and Borchgrevink (2014) conducted a study identifying the relevance of a service climate in restaurant businesses. Cha and Borchgrevink (2014) surveyed 452-line managers from 31 different foodservice organizations. Cha and Borchgrevink identified four dimensions of service climate as strategies for success including: (a) service vision, (b) service training, (c) supervisor support, and (d) reward and recognition. Cha and Borchgrevink suggested that the concept of service visions must be a clear goal and drive performance in the business. The service vision must continually highlight the

importance of high-quality service and excellence. Service training is providing adequate training on the products and services the business offers, the expectation of employees giving excellent customer service, and the ways employees can satisfy angry customers (Cha & Borchgrevink, 2014). Supervisor support is the level of help that employees get in their service performance (Cha & Borchgrevink, 2014).

In the restaurant industry, supervisor support is critical to the services being provided. Reward and recognition are approaches for celebrating employees for exceptional services (Cha & Borchgrevink, 2014). Reward and recognizing line managers and employees is a managerial policy and practice that inspires an excellent climate for service (Cha & Borchgrevink, 2014). Wang (2015) noted that a service climate positively influences customer loyalty. Wang indicated that employee observations of a positive service climate inspire quality performance to improve a customer's commitment to the business. In contrast, an environment of an incompetent service climate can create poor customer service by employees; customers will be unsatisfied and not be loyal to the company (Wang, 2015).

### **Marketing**

Dzisi and Ofori (2014) revealed that a sustainable marketing strategy is a critical element for SME's increased performance and growth. Dzisi and Ofori (2014) and O'Donnell (2014) argued that SMEs can improve performance by using marketing strategies regarding product awareness and market share. According to Kozan and Akdeniz (2014), small business owners lack marketing strategies.



Campbell (2017) identified 10 local marketing strategies that work for businesses. They include (1) manage your business in search engines, (2) target local social media users, (3) participate with online professional groups, (4) sponsor community events, (5) follow-up with customers, (6) register with local business directories, (7) cross-promote with other local businesses, (8) commence a referral program, (9) introduce yourself to local media, and (10) host an experience event. Campbell noted that small business owners should attract potential local customers to patronize the products or services. Campbell referred to the ten regional marketing strategies as *local marketing*.

Bonney, Davis-Sramek and Cadotte (2016) and Perry (2014) argued that creating market awareness for products and services is a financial burden on the small business owner. Saucet and Cova (2015) suggested that small business owners may adopt word of mouth marketing strategies which include guerrilla marketing, viral marketing, and buzz marketing. Markovic, Iglesias, Singh and Sierra (2018) noted that small business' confidence on word of mouth marketing strategy is a natural and non-structured marketing strategy.

Mohr (2017) revealed that buzz marketing is a promotional bearing that is centered on taking full advantage of word-of-mouth (WOM) and the process influence the attitudes of individuals. Mohr noted that WOM may occur by face-to-face, a phone communication, or email. WOM marketing approach is targeted to a certain group as a result, it is more cost efficient than traditional advertisement. WOM marketing strategy functions in an informal and nonstructured atmosphere (Mohr, 2017). Mohr (2017) indicated that the individual's small business owners may influence include subordinates,

customers, suppliers, friends, and trade association members. WOM marketing is an effective strategy that small business owners can use to increase customer base and chances for success.

### **Transition**

Section 1 of the doctoral study included the background of the research problem, the high failure rate of small businesses in the United States. Section 1 also included the business problem statement, purpose statement, and the nature of the study which showed why I chose a qualitative method and multiple case study design. Also, section 1 included (a) the research question and interview questions that guided my study, (b) the conceptual framework that formed the basis for literature review, (d) the operational definitions of terms not in standard dictionaries, (e) the assumptions that were true but could not be verified; limitation that were outside the researcher's control, and delimitations that were within the margins of the study, and (f) the significance of the study to business best practice and positive implication on the society. Section 1 concluded with a professional and academic literature review that focused on existing literature relating to chaos theory, small businesses definitions, small business ownership, small business effect on the economy, perceived small business failure factors, perceived small business success strategies, creativity and innovations, importance of networking, and marketing strategies.

In Section 2, I provided information on (a) the purpose of the study, (b) the role of the researcher as responsible for data gathering, (c) the selected participants by the researcher, (d) a comprehensive discussion of the research methodology and case study

design, (e) the criteria for data saturation, (f) ethical research without bias, (g) data collection tools, (h) data organization technique, and the reliability and validity of data in the study. In Section 3, I included (a) the purpose statement, the research question, and the detail of findings, (b) the implication for social change, on businesses, and professional practices. I concluded the section with recommendations for further study and reflections on my experiences in the study.

## Section 2: The Project

Section 2 includes the purpose statement, the description of the role of the researcher, the criteria for participants selection, the selected research method and research design for exploring strategies that some small restaurant owners use to succeed beyond 5 years in the northeastern region of the United States. This section also includes population and sampling details, qualitative research ethical issues, the data collection process, data analysis methods, and ways for establishing reliability and validity.

### **Purpose Statement**

My purpose in this multiple case qualitative study was to explore strategies that some small restaurant owners used to succeed beyond 5 years. The target population for the study was owners of three small restaurants in the northeastern region of the United States who have a minimum of 5 years of successful business. The findings of this study may contribute to social change if small restaurant owners apply useful strategies to minimize business failure rates. Successful small restaurant operation may reduce unemployment, increase new job opportunities, and improve human and the economic situations in the community (Shukla & Shukla, 2014).

### **Role of the Researcher**

Abma and Stake (2014) posited that the role of the researcher in a qualitative case study design is to create detailed descriptions and analysis of phenomenon based on multiple cases. In this qualitative study design, I was the data collection instrument (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). As the researcher and the primary data collection instrument for the study, I explored existing literature on the business problem, selected

the suitable research method and design, and selected participants as well as collected and analyzed the data. I collected data using a semistructured face-to-face and one-on-one interviews with profitable small restaurant owners who have succeeded in business. The one-on-one interview format may help achieve an in-depth exploration of sensitive topics (Morgan, Ataie, Carder, & Hoffman, 2013).

In semistructured interviews, a researcher is guided by a certain number of questions, along with probing questions or follow-up questions. This approach allows the interviewer to ask relevant probing questions to accomplish the research objectives. I took comprehensive notes and transcribed taped interviews verbatim to minimize personal bias. The interview protocol is in (Appendix B). Foley and O'Conner (2013) posited that an interview protocol allows researchers to realize consistency and increase the reliability of the research.

The Belmont Report (1979) summarized three basic ethical principles including (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice to guide research involving human subjects (Adams & Miles, 2013; U.S. DHHS, 2015). I followed the guidelines stipulated in the Belmont Report and treat participants as independent agents in the study.

My role as the researcher was to recognize ethical problems such as confidentiality and biases involving data collection and analysis to ensure accuracy of the findings (Koch, Niesz, & McCarthy, 2013). Bias in a study can be curtailed through a methodical process known as bracketing (Koch et al., 2013). Koch et al. (2013) defined *bracketing* as the putting aside of personal bias, principles, and judgments to minimize personal influences and bias in a study. Heale and Forbes (2013) and Yin (2014) noted

that methodological triangulation helps researchers reduce personal bias and involves collecting and analyzing data from numerous sources. To achieve credibility and reliability of findings, I used methodological triangulation for the study.

The researcher's cultural and experiential background include biases, values, and ideologies that can deter the understanding of findings (Park, Caine, McConnell, & Minaker, 2016). My role with this topic stems from my perspective and experience as the owner of a small nonprofit business and a professional chartered accountant. My career entails extensive interactions with small business owners, and my awareness of the challenges encountered by small business owners has resulted in the desire to explore strategies small business owners used to succeed in business beyond 5 years.

The researcher is accountable to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden university for ethical standards established by the university (Oder & Pittman, 2015). In the research, I followed all the guidelines stipulated by the IRB to ensure that the research data and findings are free of bias. Walden University's IRB approved the study before I started the data collection process.

### **Participants**

Cleary, Horsfall, and Hayter (2014) indicated that a participant's selection in a qualitative study must be consistent with the conceptual framework and the research questions. The participants are to provide reliable and focused data on the research questions for the researcher to provide a unambiguous account of the phenomenon (Cleary et al., 2014). Kazadi, Lievens, and Mahr (2015) specified that a purposeful selection of multiple participants by the researcher facilitates the gathering of valuable

data to enhance data identified in the literature review. In the study, I purposefully selected three small restaurant owners as participants for interviews. The eligibility criteria that I used for selecting the study participants included (a) the participants had to be owners of small restaurants business of at least 18 years of age; (b) the restaurant business had to be successful by the end of the first 5 years from being in business; and (c) the small restaurants had to be in the northeastern region of the United States. Prior to selecting the study participants, I obtained approval from the Walden IRB to ensure that ethical principles and procedures are not violated.

The format for the data collection was semistructured interviews and member checking until data saturation was reached (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Koelsch, 2013). Member checking, according to Koelsch (2013), is for the persons who provided the information to validate whether the researcher has accurately reported their stories. After the initially recorded interview, I interpreted the taped data and shared the interview data summaries with the participants for validation. Data saturation is achieved when participant responses to all pre-determined and follow-up questions starts to contain no new information, new coding, or new themes for the study (Cleary et al., 2014; Doody & Noonan, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015).

To increase visibility and gain access to prospective participants, a researcher must use different strategies (Bryson, Quick, Slotterback, & Crosby, 2013). Nudzor (2013) indicated that a researcher's profession and perceptions influence ways of gaining access to participants. I picked the prospective participants from trade associations and a directory of individuals who started small restaurants businesses in the northeastern

region of the United States. The data of small restaurant businesses in the publicly available directory included the names of the small restaurant owner, name of the business, address of the small business, e-mail addresses, and a telephone number. I contacted all the selected small restaurant owners by a telephone call to make the intent of the study known and follow this by an e-mail to the address that I obtained from the public directory. To qualify, a participant must have been in business a minimum of 5 years, and the business must have been the northeastern region of the United States. The e-mail contained a letter of invitation (Appendix D) and consent form (Appendix A) that were signed by participants who agreed to participate in the study and returned to me via email. To ascertain prospective participants received the e-mail, I followed up with a telephone call. In this call, I provided additional information about the study and address any additional concerns.

Abma and Stake (2014) suggested that building a working relationship between the researcher and participants promotes an atmosphere for effective participation. Prior to the interview, I arranged to have a brief one-on-one personal meeting with each participant to discuss more about the purpose of the study and the participants were free to ask any question about the study. My purpose in the meeting was to educate the participants about the study before signing the consent form. After I received a copy of the signed consent, I scheduled face-to-face audio recorded semistructured interviews at a convenient time specified by the participants. The predetermined semistructured interview questions (Appendix C). Prior to the semistructured interviews, I promised the participants their identities and data shared in the cause of the interview will be kept



secure in a locked cabinet. I ensured that all preconceived ideas about participants were set aside by being open minded and offer to share the research findings with them.

### **Research Method and Design**

My focus in this qualitative multiple case research study was to explore the strategies that small business owners in the northeastern region of the United States use to succeed beyond 5 years. Kastner, Antony, Soobiah, Straus, and Tricco (2016) noted that after researchers develop research questions, the researcher should select the appropriate research method and research design to answer and analyze the research question.

### **Research Method**

Fassinger and Morrow (2013) identified qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods as the three research methodologies to address a research question. Qualitative researchers explore complex phenomenon by using open-ended questions to collect data (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). Qualitative researchers use concepts, assumptions, and methodical guidelines help identify and develop the themes of a study (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Allen (2015) and Marshall and Rossman (2016) suggested that researchers use a qualitative research methodology to obtain an in-depth knowledge of human behaviors and the reason behind such behaviors. Qualitative researchers ask *why* or *how* questions, and the outcome is beyond the researcher's control (Yin, 2014).

Qualitative methodology is useful for researchers to obtain new insights about phenomena relating to *how*, *why*, or *what* from multiple participants' perceptions (Bailey, 2014). Yin (2014) suggested that open-ended qualitative research questions offer the best strategy to address the *how* or *what* of an unknown phenomenon. Allen (2015) and

Fassinger and Morrow (2013) claimed that qualitative methodology allows researchers to obtain (a) an in-depth knowledge of the phenomena, (b) the human experiences of participants, (c) the ability to manipulate and revise research as needed, and (d) the conclusion can benefit other specific settings without generalization of results. For this study, I chose to use a qualitative methodology because qualitative approach allowed me to use one-on-one interviews to collect, analyze, and interpret data pertaining to the strategies that small restaurants owners in the northeastern region of the United States use to succeed beyond 5 years.

Quantitative methodology is suitable when a researcher uses a statistical analysis of numerical data without an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Allen, 2015; Groeneveld, Tummers, Bronkhorst, Ashikali, & van Thiel, 2015). Franz, Worrell, and Vögele (2013) noted that quantitative researchers evaluate variables, formulate and test hypotheses, and analyze findings. Quantitative research is best when the researchers want to investigate the relationship amongst variables with the help of statistical procedures, strata that exist in a population, or between samples from a different population (Thamhain, 2014). Quantitative researchers generate numeric measures for active comparison, ranking, and collection of quantifiable data that can lead to repeatable processes (Thamhain, 2014). Thamhain (2014) indicated that quantitative researchers rely on the numerical data, in contrast to words of the participants, to predict study conclusions. Quantitative research was not an acceptable method for the study because I was not evaluating variables and testing hypotheses but identify strategies that small business owners used to succeed beyond 5 years. The limitation of the quantitative

methods were the reasons small business owners lack strategies that might contribute to the success of their businesses beyond 5 years.

A mixed-methods combines both qualitative and quantitative methods in one study (Jang et al., 2016; Yin, 2014). A mixed-methods research includes the collection of data, analysis of statistical data, and the combination of closed-ended quantitative and opened-ended qualitative evidence (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Christ (2014) suggested that mixed-methods are ideal for researchers that aim for triangulation standards but involve a significant amount of time and resources to collect and analyze huge data. I rejected a mixed-methods approach for the study because I was not testing hypotheses which are part of a quantitative study or the quantitative part of a mixed methods study.

### **Research Design**

My purpose in this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies small business owners used to succeed in business beyond 5 years. Marshall and Rossman (2016) noted that in conducting a qualitative study, a researcher may choose from different designs include (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, (c) narrative, and (d) case study.

Researchers use a phenomenological method to understand the insights of lived and shared experiences of a group of people about the phenomenon (Chan & Walker, 2015; Zou et al., 2014). Chan and Walker (2015) and Conklin (2013) noted that researchers use phenomenological design to explore participants lived experiences, ideas, and insights to establish relevant common themes to describe the phenomenon. I did not

select the phenomenological approach for this study because I did not plan to obtain individual's lived experiences, but I am interested in knowing the strategies small business owners used to succeed in business beyond 5 years.

Ethnography is used for exploring the patterns and traits of shared cultural value of a group of participants (Campbell-Reed & Scharen, 2013). Farren (2014) indicated that the ethnography design is useful when a researcher observes an event in a natural setting. Jerolmack and Khan (2014) suggested that ethnography is the study of participants' cultures via close observation, explanation, and reading artifactual records. I rejected the ethnography design for this study because I was not be exploring cultural traits and value of participants, but the strategies being used.

A narrative design is valuable when the focus of a study is about one individual or a particular group to recollect stories and to examine experiences within a specific timeline (Yin, 2014; Sandelowski, 2014a). A narrative design was not suitable for this study because the focus of my study was not about life stories of participants, but instead to explore strategies small restaurant owners used to succeed in business beyond 5 years.

Case design allows researchers to explore either single or multiple phenomena that may involve people of groups, the environments, or organizations. Single case studies are focused on one person, organization, or an event whereas multiple case studies involve the study of different unit of groups, persons, or organizations (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) indicated that case study research involves (a) descriptive, (b) explanatory, and (c) exploratory components. Descriptive case studies are suitable for explaining events and their specific setting (Hall & Jurow, 2015). Explanatory case

studies entail exploring causality to ascertain the cause and effects of the event (Yin, 2013). Exploratory case studies allow researchers to define research questions and hypotheses to explore the answers from prior literature (Hibbert, Sillince, Diefenbach, & Cunliffe, 2014). For the study, I chose an exploratory multiple case study design to explore the strategies small restaurant owners used to succeed beyond 5 years.

Cleary et al. (2014) and Doody and Noonan (2013) noted that data saturation is achieved when no new data or themes emerge from semistructured interviews questions. Yin (2014) posited that research interviews with participants must continue until all follow up questions add no new data. I continue to ask participants follow up questions until no new data or themes emerged from the data collections and analysis process.

### **Population and Sampling**

A qualitative research method allows researchers to make sampling decisions that may represent a research population (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar & Fontenot, 2013; Robinson, 2014). The population for this qualitative study is based on a purposeful sampling method (Kazadi et al., 2015). Brewis (2014) and Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbin (2015) suggested that a purposeful sampling for the case study allows a researcher to select participants who may have insights and in-depth knowledge about the phenomenon. A purposeful sampling increases research credibility and validity, and ensures the selected sample yields enough, relevant and valuable information to answer the research question (Robinson, 2014; Yin, 2014). For this study, I selected a purposeful sampling method to allow me to gather rich data from participants that meet the set criteria.

The criteria that I used for selecting participant included: (a) the participants must have been owners of small restaurants business of at least 18 years of age; (b) the restaurant business must have been successful by the end of the first 5 years; and (c) the small restaurants must have been in the northeastern region of the United States. I conducted the interviews face-to-face at convenient locations chosen by the participants, at their business in a private room with a closed door. Namageyo-Funa et al. (2014) indicated that participant recruitment may be influenced by the interview location.

Fusch and Ness (2015) and Morse (2015) posited that the participant selection intent should be to gather enough data for redundancy and saturation. Morse (2015) and Morse, Lowery, and Steury (2014) indicated that data saturation occurs when additional participants no longer provide new answers to the questions previous participants have answered. Saturation helps ensure that adequate and quality data collected support the study (Morse, 2015; Morse, Lowery, & Steury, 2014). In this study, I used methodological triangulation and member checking to ensure data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Koelsch, 2013).

### **Ethical Research**

Dresser (2013) noted that the university's IRB that sets the standard for conducting ethical research. Abernethy et al. (2014) posited that a researcher is obligated to comply with the human participant ethical guidelines established by the IRB. The Belmont Report (1979) identified three basic ethical principles including: (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice to guide research involving human subjects (U.S. DHHS, 2015). To ensure that I followed all ethical requirements, I started data collection

immediately after the Walden University approved the study IRB (No. 03-12-18-0590518).

I contacted all selected participants by a telephone call to make the intent of the study known and followed this with an e-mail. The e-mail included the informed consent form that explained the purpose of the study, the preservation of data confidentiality, the types of information collected, and the description of the interview process (Appendix A). The informed consent form included a request for the participants to electronically sign *I consent* and to reply via an e-mail. I reminded all participants that they can voluntarily withdraw at any time without penalties by either a telephone call or an e-mail. I reminded participants of the absence of any incentives, benefits or rewards for taking part in the study. I informed participants that the results and findings will be emailed to them.

To ensure the participants' data privacy and confidentiality during the data collection process, randomly selected numeric codes were assigned to all participants as identifiers. The identifiers were *Participant SB1 through Participant SB3*. Mitchell and Wellings (2013) suggested that the names, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, and business names of participants should remain confidential to protect their privacy. Ethical issues are essential to consider when conducting interviews (Mealer & Jones, 2014). All participants were reminded by the researcher that their individual information will remain confidential and kept secure for 5 years with password access restricted to the researcher. After 5 years, all data will be shredded to protect the participants.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

In a qualitative study, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Qualitative study data collection instruments may include semistructured interviews, observations, official business documentation, archival records, and physical artifacts (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy 2013). For this study, I was the primary data collection instrument. I used semistructured interviews and documentation to collect data to gain new insights about the effective strategies that small restaurants owners in the northeastern region of the United States used to be successful beyond the first 5 years of operations.

Başkarada (2014) suggested that semistructured interviews are essential for in-depth investigations and explorations for identifying new insights about a phenomenon. Fleming, Phillips, Kaseroff, and Huck (2014) indicated that semistructured interviews involve open-ended, follow-up, and probing questions to ensure reliability, consistency, and data saturation. For this qualitative study, I used a list of six open-ended interview questions (See Appendix C) in a face-to-face semistructured interview format. Başkarada (2014) noted that a semistructured interview format gives participants the opportunity to express personal experiences and ideas freely.

In a qualitative study, it is important for the researcher to collect data from more than one source using different methods (Himmelheber, 2014). Another data source I used for the study was company emails and records that the participants were willing to give and publicly available documentation such as advertisement, brochures, and internet searches. I collected the documents immediately before and after the interviews. Yin



(2014) noted that documents from different sources are important to use as supporting evidence. I methodically searched the company websites, social media, advertisements in the local newspapers, and promotional brochures for evidence to corroborate the participant's responses. Burau, and Andersen (2014) and Gorissen, van Bruggen, and Jochems (2013) noted that triangulation in qualitative study involves validating data from different sources.

For this study, I used member checking to ensure reliability. When a researcher uses member checking, he shares the summaries of the recorded interviews with participants and allows them to offer their thoughts about the interpretations to minimize the chances of misinterpretations (Anney, 2014; Vance, 2015). Member checking is a process by which participants correct and approve the accuracy of researchers' summaries of the audio recorded interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested that member checking helps ensure the accuracy of participants' responses. Simpson and Quigley (2016) indicated that member checking process contributes to the credibility of the findings of the study.

### **Data Collection Technique**

This qualitative study research question is what strategies do some small restaurant owners use to succeed beyond 5 years? Lampropoulou and Myers (2013) and Yin (2014) indicated that data collection for qualitative study may include semistructured, open-ended questions interviews, official documentation, archived records, and direct observations. For this study, I used interviews, official company documents, and archival records as data collection sources. I used semistructured, face-

to-face interviews with open-ended questions in accordance with an interview protocol (See Appendix B) until data saturation is achieved.

Yin (2014) noted that using an interview data collection technique has some advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of using interview techniques include (a) allows participants to express lived experiences and share their insights on a phenomenon (Baškarada 2014; Doody & Noonan, 2013); (b) an interview technique is an opportunity for gaining insight into new ideas as the researcher listens and observes participants' responses (Kurz, Elliott, & Roach, 2015); and (c) the interview centers directly on the topic of study (Yin, 2014). The disadvantages of using an interview data collection technique includes (a) inaccurate responses due to poor recall capability (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Yin, 2014) and (b) the researchers' bias may influence poorly articulated interview questions (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Another data collection source was the official business documents that the participants were prepared to release after the interviews and any publicly available documents. According to Burau and Andersen (2014), researchers collect business documents to supplement and triangulate data from a variety of sources. Fusch and Fusch (2015) posited that triangulation of data from different sources enhances the trustworthiness of the data collection process and findings of the study. Yin (2014) posited that official business documents are significant corroborating evidence when data are gathered from different sources.

Some of the advantages of official business documents include (a) the stability of business documents that can be reviewed repeatedly (Yin, 2014); (b) documentations

may contain the exact names, references, and details of a phenomenon (Yin, 2014), and (c) business documentations are good for corroborating interview responses (Yin, 2014). Business documentation disadvantages include (a) the materials collected may be an inaccurate account of events (Yin, 2014) and (b) the participants or the representatives may deliberately withhold documents about the business operations (Yin, 2014).

Archival records were the third data collection source I used for this study. I obtained archival records through a systematic search of the business website, newspaper advertisements, and promotional leaflets for evidence to corroborate the participant's responses (Lampropoulou & Myers, 2013; Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) noted that archival records help researchers ensure the reliability of evidence from different sources.

Some advantages of archival records include (a) archival records are available in public domain (Yin, 2014); (b) historical data can be analyzed to reflect current events (Yin, 2014). Disadvantages of archival records include (a) the records may be too old to be relevant for the study (Yin, 2014); (b) archival records may be a source of a variety of unrelated materials with problems finding relevant data (Yin, 2014).

The data collection process started soon after I received the IRB's and my Committee's approvals for the study. I searched trade association journals, chamber of commerce websites, and public directories for the names, telephone numbers, and email addresses of small restaurants that have been successful beyond 5 years in the northeastern region of the United States. I called the participants who agreed to participate in the study to schedule a brief meeting about the study. I emailed the consent forms to the participants who agreed to take part in the study immediately after the initial

meeting. As soon as I received the signed consent forms from participants who agreed to the interview, I contacted them via telephone or e-mail to schedule the location, the date, and the most convenient time to meet for the interview. Prior to the interview date, I called the potential participant who signed and returned the consent form to confirm the participants the location, date, and time.

Before the interview process starts, I gave each participant the signed consent forms for review and comment (See Appendix A) and collected them. I scheduled the face-to-face interview with each participant for approximately 60 minutes. I informed every participant that the face-to-face interviews were to be audio recorded in a quiet location with the participant. I ensured that participants' information was kept confidential and anonymous during and after the interview process by creating a specific code as an identifier for each participant. Paull, Boudville and Sitlington (2013) noted that the confidentiality of participants should be kept secured in various ways including storing the information in locked fireproof cabinets or saving data on an external hard drive with password protection. Access was limited to the researcher only. I destroy and shred all contributors' data 5 years after the completion of the study.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the study's findings, I conducted member checking (Anney, 2014; Harvey, 2015; Houghton et al. 2013). I conducted member checking by sharing the summaries of audio recorded transcripts with the participants to review for accuracy to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Harvey (2015) suggested member checking minimizes the chance of misinterpretations of participants' interview responses.

### **Data Organization Technique**

The data organization technique for this study included the recording of face-to-face interviews with my Lenovo voice recorder and iPad Mini voice record as a back-up. Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) noted that every interview should be recorded with at least two audio recording devices to avoid loss of data. I used a notepad and pen to document the location, date, day, and time of the interview. To preserve the confidentiality and privacy of the participants, I assigned codes such as *Participant SB1 through Participant SB3* to every participant. Mitchell and Wellings (2013) recommended that information that may be used to identify participants such as names, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, and business names should remain confidential to protect their privacy. All electronic data on external drive was password protected. Also, I ensured that a locked cabinet drawer storage for all hard copies of the transcribed interviews, business documents, and archival records. All data collected remained locked in a safe storage at least 5 years to meet Walden University minimum requirements for preserving research records. After 5 years, I will shred all hard copies of data collected, as well as electronically erase and destroy data from my hard drive.

### **Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, researchers use methodological triangulation for data analysis (Yin, 2014). Heale and Forbes (2013) and Yin (2014) recommended using methodological triangulation to strengthen research findings from multiple data sources compared to the weakness of one data source. Yin identified four types of triangulation including: (a) data triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory

triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation involves the implementation of different data collection techniques to help validate constructs of the case study (Cairney & St. Denny, 2015; Gorissen et al. 2013, Yin, 2014). For this study, I used methodological triangulation to analyze data from semi-structured interviews and other data mentioned in the data collection techniques.

To help identify the central themes for this qualitative study, I used qualitative software referred to as NVivo 11 (QSR International, 2015). NVivo 11 is a useful tool that researchers can use to analyze unstructured data to find themes for the study. NVivo 11 is a user-friendly software and has Microsoft Word document capability (Castleberry, 2014). I used NVivo 11 to organize and analyze the transcribed audio recording of the participant's responses, business official documents, and archival records to find the appropriate themes for the study. As a data analysis tool, I used NVivo 11 software to identify redundant themes within the transcribed data as an indication of data saturation (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015). When conducting the data analysis, I focused on identifying themes. The themes were about strategies that contributed to small businesses owners' successful operation for a minimum of 5 years when many other small businesses failed in the northeastern region of the United States. The theory used in the conceptual framework to guide the study was chaos theory (Adams & Stewart, 2015; Lorenz, 1963). Bechtold (1997) noted that chaos theory allows organizations to develop new strategies for natural growth. Soon after I coded the data and develop themes using NVivo 11 software, I compared the conceptual framework theory with the emerging themes and existing themes in the literature.

## **Reliability and Validity**

Kornbluh (2015) posited that reliability and validity are two concepts that relate to the accuracy, steadiness, and trustworthiness of the study. Foley and O’Conner (2013) indicated that the meanings of the words reliability and validity are different in qualitative research than quantitative research. However, researchers rely on semistructured interview protocols to obtain unity and strengthen the validity, consistency, and reliability of findings (Foley & O’Conner, 2013). Kornbluh (2015) noted that reliability and validity are two primary measurement tools for collecting, analyzing, and reporting research data through member checking and triangulation. For this study, I used reliability, validity, credibility, transferability, and confirmability to establish the rigor of qualitative research in the study (Venkatesh et al., 2013).

### **Reliability**

To guarantee the reliability of this study, I used the interview protocol (Appendix B). Yin (2014) claimed that qualitative researchers could ensure reliability by following an established protocol for the study. Kornbluh (2015) explained that reliability helps future researchers to repeat the design to address the same issue and obtain the same or similar findings using the same sample. Reliability is the degree to which data collection processes reflect consistent findings, free of error and free of bias (Lakshmi & Mohideen, 2013). The reliability of a case study was achieved using multiple sources of data (Yin, 2014). Also, I used member checking to increase the reliability of the findings. Andraski, Chandler, Powell, Humes, and Wakefield (2014) and Yin (2014) noted that member checking improves accuracy and adds reliability to a research. According to

Andraski et al. (2014), member checking is a useful tool for decreasing misinterpretation of data. The member checking process allows participants to review and approve the summaries of the audio recorded interview to enhance the reliability of the results (Harvey, 2015).

### **Validity**

Qualitative validity involves credibility, confirmability, and transferability standards (Cope, 2014). Zohrabi (2013) noted that validity is the correct interpretation of data. In contrast to quantitative validity, qualitative validity includes credibility, authenticity, and dependability (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

### **Credibility**

Cope (2014) indicated that credibility of the study and the findings are vital. Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, and Pearson (2014) noted that credibility is the level at which participants believe or trust the research conclusions. To establish credibility, I followed interview protocols, as well as check and recheck data for accuracy of the results. I used member checking for the summaries of interview and triangulation of data sources (Houghton et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). To enhance the credibility of the study results, I used methodological triangulation of the several data sources and member checking (Gorissen et al. 2013; Harvey (2015).

Methodological triangulation occurs when researchers use multiple data sources (Baillie, 2015; Harvey, 2015). Data sources for the study included interviews, official business documents, and archival records. I collected the official business documents and archival records to corroborate and validate the interviewee's responses (Houghton et al.,



2013). Harvey (2015) and Marshall and Rossman (2016) posited that member checking allows participants to review, correct, and approve the audio recorded summaries to avoid misunderstanding of the interviewees' responses. I audio recorded and transcribed the interviews. For this study, member checking involved the participants of small restaurant owners' approval of the summaries to ensure accuracy.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent to which qualitative study methods and findings can be applied to another frameworks or settings (Cope, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Houghton et al. (2013) and Weis, and Willems (2017) noted that in qualitative study, transferability is the ability to transfer findings to another context or similar situation without changing the findings. Thelwell, Wagstaff, Rayner, Chapman, and Barker (2016) posited that transferability of a study is contingent on the careful judgement of the reader. To enhance transferability of the findings, I provided thick descriptions of context to include research methods and interview protocols for researchers to form judgments regarding the study (Houghton et al., 2013). The extent of transferability of the findings is the prerogative of the reader and future researchers, not the researcher (Thelwell et al., 2016).

### **Confirmability**

Cope (2014) and Houghton et al. (2013) advised that confirmability in qualitative study involves objectivity and accuracy of the data, void of the researcher's bias or opinion. Cope (2014) noted that researchers may use interviews, follow-up questions, methodological triangulations, and member checking to enhance confirmability. To

enhance confirmability of this study, I used interviews, follow-up questions, methodological triangulation, and member checking. Marshall and Rossman (2016) indicated that new strategies can be identified by reflecting on current theories, the literature, and data free of preconceived bias. For this study, I explored research questions during interviews, obtain official business documents, and archival records to develop themes for the study. Baillie (2015) noted that the exploring of research question with multiple data from various sources enhances confirmability.

### **Data Saturation**

Fusch and Ness (2015) noted that researchers may use various techniques to collect data from participants until data saturation is achieved. Data saturation occurs when probing and follow-up questions no longer add any new information (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). For this study, I used interviews, probing questions and follow-up questions until data saturation was reached. In addition, I used methodological triangulation to obtain data saturation. Baillie (2015) and Harvey (2015) described methodological triangulation as a researchers' use of multiple data sources to support data saturation.

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 2 included a description of purpose statement, criteria for selecting participants, research method, and research design. In section 2, I also included the justification in the selection of a multiple qualitative case study to explore strategies that I described in the role of the researcher, the participants, and the purposeful sampling

technique. I also discussed data collection method, data analysis, ethical issues of the research, and the process for establishing reliability and validity.

Section 3 included a presentation of findings application to professional practice, the implication for social change. In section 3, I also included recommendations for actions, recommendations for further research, reflections, and conclusion.

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

#### **Introduction**

My purpose in this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some small restaurant owners use to succeed beyond 5 years. The overarching research question that guided my study was: What strategies do some small restaurant owners use to succeed beyond 5 years? The target population for the study was three small restaurants in the northeastern region of the United States who have a minimum of 5 years of successful business operations. To identify themes for this study, I used methodological triangulation of data sources including semistructured interview data, interview notes, direct observations, local newspaper articles, social media platforms, and websites. Five themes emerged from the study including (a) networking, (b) customer satisfaction, (c) leadership, (d) marketing strategies, and (e) operation strategies.

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

The principal research question for this study was: What strategies do some small restaurant owners use to succeed beyond 5 years? Five themes emerged from the study including (a) networking, (b) customer satisfaction, (c) leadership, (d) marketing strategies, and (e) operation strategies. Chaos theory was the conceptual framework that I used for exploring the overarching research question for this study. Chaos theory aligns with existing literature and themes generated in the findings.

#### **Emergent Theme 1: Networking strategy**

Networking strategy was the first theme that emerged from participants' responses. All the participants mentioned that networking helped promote business

growth (See Table 1). O'Donnell (2014) defined *networking* as the aptitude to create perpetual and valuable relationships. Networking is a useful platform that small business owners with limited resources use to build relationships with customers at reasonable costs (Williams, 2014).

Table 1

*Networking Strategies*

Groups	Number	%
Networking	3	100
Social media	2	67
Neighborhood connections	2	33

The participants revealed how networking provided opportunities for growth and success for their businesses. Every one of the three participants discussed how family members, friends, and neighbors in the community got involved in the business via social media and neighborhood connections. Participant SB1 and Participant SB3 mentioned that they operate in a large city in the northeastern region of the United States, and for any small business to thrive, it must be directed toward a segment of the population and community it operates. The participants noted that social media was the platform that they used to get the attention of younger generations. Arnaboldi, Azzone, and Sidorova (2017) and Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) described social media as a useful internet platform for real-time communication between the firm and consumers about new products and services and information to address customer concerns. A review of participants' websites revealed that participants SB1 and SB3 use various social media platforms including Facebook, Yelp, GrubHub, Twitter, and Instagram for networking.

Participant SB1 noted that his business is involved in neighborhood activities as a way of giving back to the community. Participants SB2 highlighted that although social media platforms are important for driving traffic to my business, customers are the ones that control the social media. He added that business owners can only present his or her products and services on the social media platform, but customers control how the products and services are perceived by their comments. Participant SB2 stated that small businesses in the northeastern region of the United States are part of the community in which they operate, and the owners should be interconnected with other businesses owners for networking. Participant SB2 noted that neighborhood networking assisted the firm in building and increasing clientele since it started the business.

All participants explained that client referrals and being part of social networking provides their firms' persistent growth and name recognition. Referred customers are more likely to remain loyal to the business and less expensive than customers who walked in through the door or by traditional advertisement (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). Participant SB1 mentioned that the firm had enjoyed growth over the years through word of mouth. He noted that his regular customers bring new customers. The participants explained that the importance of networking could not be overemphasized for small businesses that want to thrive and be successful.

### **Emergent Theme 2: Customer Satisfaction Strategies**

Customer satisfaction is the second theme that emerged from interviewing all the participants. All participants revealed that customer satisfaction is one of the major strategies used for the success of the business. Each of the participants mentioned food

quality, quality of services, and listening to customers' needs (See Table 2). Izogo and Ogba (2015) and Anderson and Ullah (2014) noted that small business owners because of their business size have the advantage of being close to their customers.

Table 2

*Customer Satisfaction Strategies*

Groups	Number	%
Food quality	3	100
Quality of services	3	67
Listen to Customers	2	33

All participants agreed that quality of food and services are vital for customer satisfaction in a restaurant business. Participant SB1 shared that he gives his new customers the opportunity to critique the foods and services offered in the restaurant and whenever a customer is not satisfied, there are no charges. Participant SB1's online review of the quality of food by a customer was "don't pay unless you like it said the owner." Participant SB1 stated that keeping customers happy, especially the regular customers, has become a culture of the restaurant and that's what makes it successful. Participant SB3 mentioned that one of the top strategies of the restaurant is the quality of the food being served in the restaurant. One customer posted "the food quality is very good." Participant SB2 mentioned that foods must meet quality control to be on customers' tables. Bujisic, Hutchinson and Parsa (2014) noted that customers' loyalties are predicated on the quality of food and taste.

Quality of services is another strategy that all participants alluded to during the interview. Quality of service is one of the top reasons why many customer customers

prefer to patronize a business. A study about service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty in automobile repair services sector by Izogo and Ogba (2015) concluded that service quality in a business is a significant predictor of customer satisfaction and loyalty with unrelenting commitment. Participant SB1 noted that customer service is more important than food quality in a service-oriented environment. He said that when customers notice a disrespect in the way employees or the owners conduct themselves, it is annoying to them and probably may not come back. He noted that one unfavorable review by a customer could drive away some current and potential customers from the business. A search of the web about Participant SB2 revealed 406 reviews in Yelp with 4.75 stars out of 5. One customer wrote ‘The customer service is great and cannot really find anything negative to say.’ Participant SB3’s online review on Yelp was, “I’m big on customer service, and this was impressive.” According to Kumar and Reinartz (2016), exceptional customer services are essential to keeping customers satisfied and loyal. The indicators of quality services include: employees’ body languages, sensitivity, politeness, and professional behaviors when attending to customers (Bujisic et al., 2014). Participant SB2 discussed the challenges of meeting all customers’ needs. He said that some customers are difficult to be satisfied with any standard of customer services. One of the best strategies to deal with such difficult customers is to be patient and listen to them. He noted that a negative review from such a customer might create problem for new customers. All owners agreed that quality of service improves through constant training of employees and listening to customer’s needs.



Two of the participants said that listening to customers is a strategy for achieving customer satisfaction is supported by existing literature. According to Koehl, Poujol, and Tanner (2016), listening to customers and meeting the consumers' needs are important for winning customer trust and satisfaction. Participant SB2 said that one of the strategies for growing his business is to listen to his customers because customers have the *buying power*. Participant SB3 noted that listening to customers is one of the top priorities of the business. According to Epler (2014), it is vital to listen to consumer perceptions because they want to be heard and their needs met. The two participants agreed that happy customers are the one who brings more customers with word of mouth (WOM) which is in alliance with existing literature. WOM strategy may arise by face-to-face, a phone call, or email (Mohr (2017). Al-alak (2014) suggested that small businesses develop customer trust and loyalty by listening and identifying customers' need and ensuring they are met.

### **Emergent Theme 3: Leadership Strategies**

The third theme that emerged from participants' responses was leadership. The two leadership strategies identified included business knowledge and strategic business planning (See Table 3). Jaouen and Lasch (2015) noted that leadership is vital to the success of the small businesses. Leadership is the ability to influence followers and initiate strategies for accomplishing common set goals (Antonakis & House, 2014; Ionescu, 2014).

Table 3

*Leadership Strategies Breakdown*

Strategies	Number	%
Business knowledge	3	100
Strategic business plans	3	100

All the participants indicated that it is crucial for the leader to know the business well. Participant SB1 emphasized the need for the owners to have a thorough knowledge of their business so they are not disconcerted with the complexity of operations and leading employees. He mentioned that he initially struggled with leading employees and managing the restaurant business. He said, “I was on the brink of failure because of my inept leadership strategy.” He noted he had to join a Restaurant and Lodging Association in the northeastern region of the United States for access to free materials about restaurant operations to educate himself. He added that improved knowledge of his business helped in decision making, hiring, and leading employees. Participant SB2 alleged that he created a conducive environment for members of staff and leaders to working amicably. Participant SB2 said, I know my mission and I focus on it so I am not distracted by the ultimate result. Participant SB2 noted that he had experience operating a restaurant before starting his own because he worked in a start-up restaurant and bar for approximately 10 years. He mentioned that his success strategy had been the ability to hire and mentor the right employees for set goals. Prasad and Junni (2016) noted that leaders create a sense of purpose, self-worth, ideas, and interest with followers. Participant SB3 stated that he started his restaurant business without prior experience but was determined to succeed. He noted that he initially relied on trials and errors but

realized he needed to know more. He said he decided to research more on the strategies that successful restaurant owners have used. He alleged, that was when his leadership, management, and operational strategies became effective and successful. He added that he encourages employees' suggestions at every stage of decision making in support of existing literature. Wang and Yang (2015) noted that a participative leadership style inspires employee job satisfaction. Ferraris (2015) stated that participative leadership increases an employee's performance by encouraging employees to participate in a decision-making process.

Every one of the participants agreed that having strategic business plans was important to the success of their business. According to Abdaklrim (2013), strategic business planning is how business leaders establish goals capabilities analysis, appraise any environmental problems that may negatively impact the business, and look for ways to address and move the business in the right path. According to Bucci (2014), strategic planning is orchestrated on the internal and external environments, looking for business opportunities and establishing plans to realize the goals. Participant SB1 said, "I was operating without strategic plans and with no sense of drive." He added his business was not growing as envisioned, and he had to change course. He mentioned he had to engage a consultant to help in evaluating the internal strengths of the business and the external challenges. A business document review showed that he hired a consultant to help plan how to move the business positively forward in the third year of the business. He indicated that strategic plans accorded him the opportunity to grow successfully. Participant SB2 stated that he strategically planned the kind of food served in the

restaurant and the pricing policy. He noted that he regularly faces stiff competition from food trucks and carts where he is located which he refers to as opportunists. He said that for his business to stay competitive and successful, he resolved to serve a half portion of a meal at lower prices and occasionally a full course meal at half prices to new and loyal customers which aligns with the existing literature. Strategic planning, according to Kachaner, King, and Stewart (2016), is a deliberate strategy by business owners to recognize reasonable threats, interruptions, and opportunities for their businesses. Participant SB3 highlighted that he ensured his plans revolve round all areas of the business both internal and external. He added that strategic plans were vital to the growth and success of the business since it started. He noted that annual forecast has been a process in the business and did not invest in anything not in the plan. Gupta and Muita (2013) and Wolf and Floyd (2013) stated that strategic planning is useful for business leaders to have a sense of direction for the successful operation and fulfill the company's goals.

#### **Emergent Theme 4: Marketing Strategies**

Marketing strategies was the fourth theme that emerged from participants' responses. All participants discussed that importance of marketing for the success of their business. Creating awareness, online platforms, and business brochures were the three marketing strategies mentioned by the participants (See Table 4). According to Dzisi and Oforu (2014), sustainable marketing strategies are vital for increasing performance and growth of small firms. Campbell (2017) identified search engines, social media,

community events, and referral programs as marketing strategies that work for businesses.

Table 4

*Marketing Strategies*

Groups	Number	%
Creating awareness	3	100
Online platform	2	67
Business brochures	2	67

Dzisi and Ofofu (2014) maintained that effective marketing strategies create product awareness, and it generates increased customer traffic flow to business. All participants stated that creating awareness was necessary for keeping the business successful. Participants agreed that social media marketing is the most effective platform for creating awareness. Participants SB 1 and SB3 stated that social media was the most cost-effective platform for creating awareness about business products and services. The participants mentioned that online reviews by customers on both Yelp and Grub Hub have been positive. All participants agreed that consumers' online reviews help potential consumers get information and decide about restaurants to visit. Participant SB1 added, "social media marketing platforms frequently change with technology." He mentioned that social media marketing platform operate with uncertainties and the outcome may not be as envisioned, hence he operates with an open mind daily. Participant SB2 said that he struggled initially to get consumers to his store and did not have enough funds for traditional advertisement in the newspapers. Participant SB2 stated that he almost closed shop before trying online social media, and it worked for his business. Participant SB2 noted that a social media marketing strategy is a low-cost platform for creating awareness

for his firm compared to traditional marketing. Participants SB1 and SB3 mentioned that word of mouth was the initial marketing strategy used by their firm. Word of mouth marketing strategy is a natural and non-structured strategy available to a small business struggling to survive, and it is supported by a body of knowledge (Mohr, 2017). Word of mouth is an effective marketing strategy that small business owners use to increase clientele for the success of their business. Word of mouth marketing includes guerrilla marketing and buzz marketing (Saucet & Cova, 2015). Participants SB1 and SB2 discussed that the business still uses traditional brochures to disseminate information about the business to the community. The participants explained that the older consumers still prefer print media to online. The hard brochure copy is easily reached compared to online. Participant SB1 noted that all existing and potential customers are not computer literate, as a result, a business brochure that details products and services is used for marketing. Although, social media marketing is cost-effective, the initial cost can be a financial burden on the business owners, and this is supported by the body of knowledge. Perry (2014) noted that creating product and service awareness puts a financial burden on small business owners.

#### **Emergent Theme 5: Business operations strategies**

The fifth theme to emerge from participants' responses was business operations strategies. All participants agreed that operations strategies were key to the success of their business. All participants identified location, service climate, and quality of food inventory as strategies (See Table 5). Scur and Heinz (2016) noted that a business operations strategy is a blend of various firms' decisions and activities that positively

impact performance in the future. A business operation strategy is a lens for a firm's plan to develop, accomplish, and sustain its competitive advantage (Coleman, Cotei, & Farhat, 2013).

Table 5

*Business Operations Strategies Breakdown*

Strategies	Number	%
Location	3	100
Service climate	3	100
Quality of food products	2	67

All three of the restaurant owners agreed that location was one of the top strategies for their success. All participants alluded that small business owners, especially restaurant owners, start at a good location with easy to access for parking which is supported by existing literature. Banwo, Du, and Onokala (2015) emphasized that the location of business could have an enormous impact on working capital, customers, and workers. Participant SB1 said that a location with parking and easy accessibility contributed to the business success. Further, Participant SB1 noted that he waited patiently for about a year to find the location of the business, and it has been a good decision. He added that starting a restaurant at a practical location was critical because of the initial costs involved. The costs of decorating, constructing the kitchenette, installing freezers, and buying furniture for the restaurant operation that were fixed costs. Participant SB3 mentioned that the current location is accessible by public transportation which is excellent for both customers and employees. Participant SB2 stated that the restaurant is clearly visible and accessible to customers. He added that the location has

excellent parking for customers and employees. These responses by all participants for the success of their businesses align with existing literature. Walker (2013) noted that visibility and accessibility are critical factors to consider in choosing a restaurant. According to Babajide (2012), the size of a small and medium enterprise, location, and growth are interrelated.

Service climate is the employees' observation of supervisor's practices and actions about customer service (Ram, Swapna & Prabhakar, 2011). Cha and Borchgrevink (2014) noted that service climate must include a service vision that appeals to customers, training of employees, rewards and recognition, and supervisor's support to be effective. All participants indicated that the service climate was critical to the success of their business. Participant SB1 said that the success or failure of a restaurant could be traced to the service climate in existence. He noted that employees are constantly reminded of the importance of maintaining a good service climate. In addition, he noted that outstanding employees are recognized for excellent service climate monthly as a motivating factor. My review of Participant SB1's documentation supported this claim. The document disclosed that employees who have displayed excellent service climate for the month were recognized and given a financial reward. Participant SB2 noted that employees are constantly trained on the importance of an efficient service climate, and it has brought about employee's job satisfaction and increased job performance. Participant SB3 stated that the business and its employees are known for an excellent service climate. A customer review on Yelp said, "The service is really friendly and pretty efficient." He mentioned that his customers come back because of their excellent service



climate which is supported by the body of knowledge. Customers observe and evaluate the quality of employees' service delivery and make their decision regarding his or her experiences (Wang, 2015). According to Wang, there are relationships between customer service climate, customer loyalty, and business growth.

Two participants mentioned that the quality of food products used in cooking in their restaurants is significant. Roy, Hall, and Ballantine (2017) noted that restaurant owners and suppliers create an atmosphere of trust. Participant SB1 said we buy the best available food items and do not cut corners. He added, we only purchase fresh food products from reliable and trusted vendors and get them refrigerated here in the restaurant. We do not buy frozen or raw items from our suppliers. This helps us to know what we are serving our customers. In addition, he said, I make that all suppliers comply with food safety regulations to meet standards. Participant SB1 stated that the business maintains at least two licensed suppliers at any time to avoid product shortages. He echoed the importance of having more than one food product supplier. He said it helps to compare the costs of the same items from different vendors before ordering to cut costs. Participant SB3 noted that every food product passed through a quality check before being purchased from suppliers. He said that he only deals with trusted and licensed suppliers. He said that he does not want any consumer to get sick from food poisoning which may result in an unknown outcome. Participant SB3 mentioned that food products are a mixture of both fresh and frozen items. My observations and documentation review showed that the business personnel checked items being delivered to ensure they meet the standards.

### **Other Relevant Findings**

Honesty, hard work, and love of the business were significant to each of the three participants. Every one of the three participants emphasized that the business owner must be honest about the company and their personal lives. Participant SB1 stated that honesty is important to him because many of the customers know him personally and his company. He said, he is well known in the section of the city where he operates in the northeastern region of the United States, and with the advent of camera phones and instant messaging of information, an iota of dishonesty in the face of a customer could destroy long built reputations. Participant SB2 mentioned that hard work and love of the business are his driving force for success. He said, hard work does pay! He expressed that hard work and love of the company helped him over the years in maintaining good relationships with his customers in the community. Participant SB3 stated that honesty, passion, and love of the business are what motivates every day in the business. These findings are supported by a body of knowledge as noted by Ganguli and Chatterjeed (2017) that honesty, hard work, truthfulness, and passion are moral values that help the individual to succeed.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The findings in this study might be significant to small professional businesses in the northeastern region of the United States. The small business practices are the driving force of the U.S. economy and 64% of the new jobs, but many failed to survive (Campbell & Park, 2017; SBA, 2016).

The findings in the current study might provide the required solution to the high failure rate of small businesses and financial loss for owners in the community. The data obtained from the participant interviews have the potential to provide the needed help to aspiring, new, and struggling small business owners to succeed beyond the first 5 years. Successful small business owners beyond 5 years suggested that (a) networking, (b) customer satisfaction, (c) leadership, (d) marketing strategies, and (e) operation strategies are relevant strategies to small professional business practice success. The findings from the study filled a gap in the body of knowledge and built on existing literature pertaining to the strategies small business owners need to be successful. To be successful, small business owners in the northeastern region of the United States have to develop the minimum required understanding of the findings and implement the strategies in the study.

### **Implications for Social Change**

In 2015, Pennsylvania small businesses employed 2.5 million people or 46.7% of the private workforce (SBA, 2018). Although small businesses create jobs and are the source of income for millions of employees in Pennsylvania, they have a high failure rate in the first 5 years (Dahmen & Rodríguez, 2014). The aspiring, new, and struggling business owners that recognize and implement the findings in the study might experience successful operations and financial security.

The implications for positive social change include the potential for small businesses owners to review the findings in this study and implement strategies to increase a success rate beyond 5 years. The increase in the success rate of small

businesses could result in increasing new job opportunities, reducing unemployment, increasing owners' and employees' financial security, increasing revenue for the local community, and improving the economic situation in the community.

### **Recommendations for Action**

My purpose in this multiple case qualitative study was to explore strategies that some small restaurant owners used to succeed beyond 5 years. The findings provided in the study might contribute to the successful operation of small businesses beyond the first 5 years. The five recommendations for action to owners of small businesses are (a) to appreciate the value of networking, (b) to understand impact of customer satisfaction, (c) to have leadership at the top, (d) to recognize the value of marketing, and (d) to have sound business operations strategies.

I recommend that new, aspiring, and struggling owners of small professional business owners pay attention to the results in the current study for successful operations and business growth. Networking on social media and the neighborhood is essential for recognition. Customer satisfaction is achieved via proper service etiquette, quality of food being served, and the ability to listen to the customer's needs. Leadership with strategic plans and knowledge of the business is required for success. Marketing on social media platforms is useful for creating awareness. Operations strategy must be transparent with the location, service climate in the business, and inventory of quality food products. In addition, I will disseminate the summary of the published results and findings to all participants and the complete copy to the local Chamber of Commerce and SBDC in the northeastern region of the United States. In addition, I will offer to present the findings at

academic conferences, minority small business owners forums, and leadership conferences.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study was limited to small business owners in the northeastern region of the United States that are not an adequate representation of practicing businesses. My recommendation is to include a larger size of participants from different geographical locations in addition to the northeastern region of the United States. My recommendations for future study may focus on each specific theme identified in the study. Although in this multiple qualitative case study data saturation was achieved with three participants, quantitative studies can be used to examine the relevance of small business owners according to age, gender, and race in a future study. Participants personal bias and the restricted time for data gathering were other limitations. I recommend that future study involves an extensive time frame. Future researchers on the case study should consider other methodologies or designs to examine small business owner's strategies for successful operations beyond the first 5 years.

### **Reflections**

This doctoral study has availed me the opportunity to value time management, persistence, self-discipline, and focus. I have acquired considerable knowledge about small business operations and owners through my interaction with the three owners. I initially had problems finding small restaurant owners who would accept my invitation to participate in the study until three of the seven I invited agreed and signed the consent form as participants. The three participants were excited to provide insights into

strategies for sustaining their business beyond the first 5 years. In addition to the five strategies that emerged in this study, all participants indicated that hard work and honesty, as well as love of the business, were reasons for their success.

### **Conclusion**

My purpose in this multiple case qualitative study was to explore strategies that some small restaurant owners used to succeed beyond 5 years. The target population for the study was the owners of three small restaurants in the northeastern region of the United States who have a minimum of 5 years of successful business. My data sources included (a) participants' interview data, (b) interviews notes, (c) participants' website information, (d) information from participants' social media platform, (e) direct observations from site visits, and (f) official business documents. I gathered data using methodological triangulation of data sources until data saturation was reached (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation occurred when additional data no longer yielded new information (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Five themes that emerge as findings of the study were (a) networking, (b) customer satisfaction, (c) leadership, (d) marketing, and (e) operations strategy. The extensive discussions of the findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for professional practice, reflections, and recommendations for further studies are in Section 3 of this study. Chaos theory (Lorenz, 1963) was the conceptual framework for this study. According to Adams and Stewart (2015), chaos theory is a valuable tool for small business leaders to identify strategies to address the challenges of complex and dynamic

nature of business operations that makes it difficult to predict customer needs which align with the business plans.

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## Appendix A: Participant Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study involving small business owners in the northeastern region of the United States to identify what strategies small business owners use to succeed in business beyond 5 years. The researcher is inviting small business owners that have been successful for 5 years or longer in the northeastern region of the United States. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

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

### **Background Information:**

My purpose in this study is to explore what key strategies contribute to small business owners achieving success by the end of the first 5 years of being in business.

### **Procedures:**

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

1. Please read and sign this consent form within 3 business days of receipt.
2. Participate in an interview that I will audio record approximately 40 - 60 minutes at the quiet location of your choice.
3. Provide company documentations of profit and loss, and cash flow statements, if available, and third-party reports such as newspaper and magazine articles for collection.
4. Respond honestly to all the face-to-face interview questions.
5. Respond to follow-up questions if further explanation is needed to confirm the

understanding of your answers.

1. Provide your feedback to ensure that I have transcribed the interview accurately, interpreted the answers to the interview questions correctly, and provide further in-depth information.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at Walden University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time through either telephone call, e-mail or verbal notice.

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

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

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

**Payment:**

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

**Privacy:**

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

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now or, if you have questions later, you may contact me by telephone. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. In addition, the IRB approval number is 03-12-18-0590518 and it expires on March 11, 2019.

**Title of the study: Small Business Owners' Strategies for Success**

Please print or save this consent form for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

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

Printed name of participant .....

Date of consent .....

Participant's signature.....

Researcher's signature .....

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Upon receipt of acknowledgement of the volunteer's willingness to participate, I will ensure that I obtain the signed Consent to Participate documentation from each participant prior to the interview.

1. I will meet with each participant at the time/date he or she designates
2. I will thank each participant for volunteering his or her insights.
3. I will remind each participant that he/she may withdraw from the study at any time via either telephone call, e-mail or verbal notice and that all data will remain confidential.
4. I will remind each participant that the focus of the interview will relate to success strategies of small business owners.
5. I will store all materials related to this study in a locked safe for a minimum of 5 years. No one else will have access to the data other than me.
6. I will inform the participants the importance of audio recording the interview.
7. I will turn on the audio tape recorder and properly note the date, time, and location.
8. I will thank each of the participants at the end of each interview session for their time and participant in the study.



### Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you used to be successful in the past 5 years?
2. Of the strategies mentioned in question 1, what were the top strategies you used that contributed to the success of your restaurant during the first 5 years?
3. What strategies helped you to increase your customer base during the first 5 years?
4. What challenges have you faced when trying to implement strategies for your restaurant? These challenges could be outside or within the organization.
5. How did you address each of the barriers or challenges?
6. What else you would like to share regarding strategies of the success of your restaurant?

## Appendix D: Letter of Introduction

Upon obtaining the names and contact information of small business owners who have launched and sustained a small business for at least 5 years, I will email a letter of invitation to potential participants.

Dear Participant,

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

If you agree to participate in this study, I ask you to allow me to interview you for no longer than one. I will hold the interview in a private conference room at your office or any location of your choice. Your participation in this doctoral study is strictly voluntary. My purpose in this study is to identify strategies of small business owners who have launched and sustained a business operation for at least 5 years in the northeastern region of the United States. I have attached the consent form that outlines the procedures that I will follow for this study as well as the interview questions for your review.

I will keep any information that you share confidential and the data from all the interviews will be presented in aggregate format. I plan to conduct my interviews from 12:00 PM to 3.00 PM, and if you would provide me an acceptable time and phone number to call you, I would be grateful.

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

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ovefelomaloye (Efe) Onyenego