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Success Factors for Minority Small Business Sustainability

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Abstract

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Minority small business owners significantly contribute to national and local economies. Only 50% of small firm owners sustain their businesses longer than 5 years. The purpose of the multiple case study was to explore the management strategies that minority small business owners used to sustain their businesses for longer than 5 years. The study's population consisted of 4 minority small business owners in the midwestern region of the United States to explore management strategies necessary for maintaining minority small firm operations. The conceptual framework for the study was general system theory. Data sources included semistructured interviews, social media information, company documentation, and company website information. Based on the methodological triangulation of the data sources, analytical coding, and analyzing the data using a qualitative data analysis software, 3 themes emerged: networking with other small business owners, strategic planning, and building strong customer and employee relationships. The study findings might contribute to positive social change by providing knowledge about effective management strategies to minority small firm owners, thereby creating jobs, augmenting local and national economies, and increasing profitability.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my parents, Candace Walls and Furman Barnes as well as my aunt, Gwendolyn Sullivan and a host of other family and friends who encouraged me on this journey. With their inspiration, support, and confidence in me, I was able to reach my goals.

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I am very thankful for the guidance provided by my chair, Dr. Alexandre Lazo whose patience and direction helped me realize my dreams. His keen eye and attention to detail helped me to refine my thoughts and stay focused. I would also like to thank Dr. Matthew Knight, Dr. Robert Hockin, and Jill Murray for their reassurance and valued feedback throughout the process. I would also like to thank the faculty, staff, and my fellow scholars who have been positive driving forces and a source of motivation in this venture from the beginning.

Table of Contents

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small firm owners significantly contribute to the U.S. economy through job creation. In the United States, roughly 25 million working-age adults either begin or run new firms (Crump, Singh, Wilbon, & Gibbs, 2015). In 2012, minority firm owners contributed $1.38 trillion in revenue and 7.2 million jobs to the economy (Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy, [SBA], 2016b). However, minority small business owners have lower rates of success when compared to nonminority firm owners (Bewaji, Yang, & Han, 2014). Only 50% of small firm owners sustain their businesses longer than five years (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2017a). The rate of small business owner failure supports the assumption that some people begin small businesses without adequate preparation (Williams & Williams, 2014). Sarasvathy, Menon, and Kuechle (2013) claimed that some people lack the skillset and knowledge necessary to sustain a small business longer than 5 years. Some minority small firm owners may lack the management strategies necessary to sustain and grow their businesses in the future. Gaps in current research addressing minority small enterprise owners and their management strategies indicate a need for further exploration. This study explored the management strategies that leaders of minority small businesses used to sustain their firms for longer than 5 years.

Background of the Problem

Some small firm owners begin new business ventures out of necessity and a need for advancement (Bewaji et al., 2014; Rocha, Carneiro, & Varum, 2015). Ethnic minorities begin businesses for independence, financial opportunities, and to keep their self-interests alive (Sims, Neese, Sims, & Anderson, 2015). Minorities in the United States represent an underserved population of small business owners and experience lower rates of success than nonminorities (Bewaji et al., 2014; SBA Office of Advocacy, 2014). Minority firm owners are more likely to fail than nonminority firm owners. The high failure rates of minority small business owners suggest that some minority owners do not adequately prepare before beginning their small business venture (Williams & Williams, 2014). Many minority small firm owners might lack the management strategies and skills necessary to sustain their businesses in the long-term. Future minority firm owners in the midwestern region of the United States could benefit from information about successful management strategies that lead to long-term small business sustainability. In this section of the study, I discussed the business problem, the purpose of this study, the research question, the conceptual theory driving the study, and information about the study's significance to minority small business owners in midwestern region of the United States.

Problem Statement

An estimated 392,000 small firm owners closed their doors due to failure in 2014, representing 8% of business shares in the United States (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2017a). Fifty percent of small business owners fail within the first 5 years, and only one third survive longer than 10 years (Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council, 2016). The general business problem was that some small business owners lack the knowledge necessary to sustain their firms in the long-term. The specific business problem was that some minority small business owners lack the management strategies required to remain in business for longer than 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, explorative multiple case study was to explore the management strategies that minority small business owners used to sustain their businesses for longer than 5 years. The target population for the study was minority small proprietors in the midwestern region of the United States who have been in business for 5 years or longer. Identifying critical management strategies minority small firm owners used to sustain themselves in the long-term could influence social change through job creation and economic stimulation.

Nature of the Study

The study followed a qualitative approach. Qualitative researchers learn about participant opinions by focusing on how they think (Hampshire, Iqbal, Blell, & Simpson, 2014). Bailey (2014) claimed that qualitative investigators pursue answers to questions emphasizing social experience by exploring participant experiences. Quantitative researchers observe physical phenomena by measuring said phenomena (Thamhain, 2014). Ross and Onwuegbuzie (2014) claimed that researchers test theories and hypotheses and categorize research questions through quantitative inquiry. Leko (2014) argued that quantitative researchers neglect to investigate and analyze human experiences. Researchers expand knowledge about phenomena through qualitative and quantitative inquiry when implementing a mixed-method design (Siddiqui & Fitzgerald, 2014). When considering the three research methods, I determined that the quantitative and mixed-method designs did not align with the study’s focus. The goal of the research was to explore human experiences related to management strategies that led to long-term sustainability. A qualitative inquiry was the most suitable.

Design theories in qualitative research include (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, (c) narrative research, and (d) case study research (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Phenomenological investigators explore the lived experiences of participants (Patton, 2014). Ethnographic researchers study social interactions, behaviors, and perceptions that occur in groups, organizations, and communities (Mannay & Morgan, 2015). Narrative researchers study the lived experiences and stories of participants (Chandler, Anstey, & Ross, 2015). Multiple case study researchers explore multiple case studies to collect data over time and to explore noticeable facts across different cases (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) explained that researchers benefit when using the multiple case study approach when the focus of the research explores how and why. I used the multiple case study design because it best fit the focus of the study exploring necessary management strategies for minority small business long-term sustainability.

Research Question

The central research question for the study was: What management strategies do minority small business owners use to sustain their business longer than 5 years?

Interview Questions

Researchers use qualitative semistructured interviews to observe and record a participant's unique perspective or experience as it relates to a phenomenon (Jamshed, 2014). I used open-ended questions to interview participants over 18 years of age, who own and sustained a small business in the midwestern region of the United States.

The interview questions were as follows:

1. What management strategies did you use when starting your small business?
2. How did you apply the management strategies when starting your small business?
3. What modifications did you make to your initial management strategies that helped grow your business during the first 5 years?
4. What motivated you to begin your own small business?
5. What barriers did you face when starting your own small business in the first 5 years?
6. How did you address the barriers you faced?
7. What community or social resources did you use that contribute to your success?
8. What financial resources helped you start and grow your small business?
9. What opportunities assisted you when launching your small business?
10. What information would you like to add to the interview subject?

Conceptual Framework

In 1936, biologist von Bertalanffy established the general systems theory (Pouvreau, 2014). Von Bertalanffy (1972) defined a system as the interaction of related mechanisms influencing the interaction of all parts. Key tenets of this theory are (a) objects, the variables within the system; (b) the attributes of the system and its objects; (c) the interrelationship between objects in a system; and (d) the existence of a system within an environment (von Bertalanffy, 1972). Sayin (2016) found that researchers could use general systems theory to improve processes by recognizing patterns. Turner and Endres (2017) posited that researchers use the general systems theory to explore new approaches to organizations and society.

General systems theory applied to this study. General systems theory provided the most appropriate construct to explore critical management strategies necessary for minority small firm owners to sustain their firms longer than 5 years. The construct aligned with the exploration of challenges that minority small business owners faced when beginning, managing, and sustaining a small business. The system theory framework applied to the study of minority small business owner success considering that small business owners implement different components, decisions, and strategies when beginning and sustaining a small business in the long term.

Operational Definitions

For additional clarity, I applied the subsequent terms to aid in the comprehension of the study:

Business performance: Business performance is the way business owners deal with employment changes, profits, and financial stability (Bozidar & Slobodan, 2015).

Economic development: Economic development is the development of wealth using human, financial, capital, physical, and natural resources to produce marketable goods and services (Neagu, 2016).

Human capital: Human capital is the accumulation of knowledge necessary for the execution of labor that creates economic worth (Greer, Lusch, & Hitt, 2017).

Minority small business owner: A minority small business owner is a small business owner who self-identifies as nonwhite (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2014).

Small business owners (SBOs): Small business owners are owners of small businesses (Weber, Geneste, & Connell, 2015). Definitions of small business owners vary. For study purposes, a small business owner is one who begins a privately-owned small business and has less than 50 employees.

Strategic management: Strategic management is the plan linking resources to the direction and the vision of business in each situation (Ogrean, 2016).

Strategic planning: Strategic planning is the way small firm owners balance the external environment and the internal capabilities of their business (Neis, Pereira, & Maccari, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are statements or ideas that researchers accept as true in a study without evidence (Fan, 2013). Researchers identify statements presumed true when constructing theories in a study through assumptions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers must identify and address assumptions when developing findings, concepts, and inferences beneficial for research (Grant, 2014). Three basic assumptions formed the basis of the study. The first assumption was that the qualitative approach was the most appropriate method to explore the factors and gather data related to the study. The second assumption was that participant responses were honest and accurate descriptions of their strategic experiences with small business sustainability. The final assumption was that successful minority small business owners accurately described their long-term management strategies integral to their continued success.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses that could affect the study which the researcher cannot control (Fan, 2013). Limitations restrict the findings of research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Study limitations included scheduling and meeting time constraints when collecting data from the participants. Study limitations also depended on the availability of persons willing to participate in the interview process. A study limitation was that the collected data might not adequately reflect the views or experiences of all minority small business owners. A further potential limitation of the research included inaccuracies related to participant recall of events related to management strategies employed over a 5-year period. A purposeful sample of minority small business owners who sustained their firms for longer than 5 years in the midwestern region of the United States was the focus of the study.

Delimitations

Fan (2013) defined delimitations as restrictions that researchers impose to shape the scope of a research study. One delimitation of the study was the small number of participants interviewed. Etz and Arroyo (2015) maintained that smaller participant groups are consistent with the focus of qualitative research. Marshall and Rossman (2016) noted that sample sizes could limit research studies. The sample size was an inherent delimitation of the study because it restricted the researcher’s ability to generalize study results. The sample size consisted of four minority small business owners who were essential in gaining a comprehensive analysis of collected information answering the research question. Subsequently, such strategies might only apply to minority small business owners in certain groups.

Another study delimitation was the short data collection period consistent with the smaller participant pool and the case study design guiding the study. Some researchers believe that data collection should occur over longer periods of time. The scope of the study only focused on the management strategies minority small business owners needed to sustain their firms longer than 5 years. Another delimitation of the study was the geographical location. This study did not include small business owners in other geographical locations. The focus of the study only considered minority small firm owners in the midwestern region of the United States, although the phenomena under study could affect business nationally and internationally.

Significance of the Study

Jeger, Sarlija, and Bilandzic (2016) explained that small business owners are essential to the growth and health of the U.S. economy. The SBA Office of Advocacy (2016) reported that small firm owners were responsible for 43% of private payroll, accounted for roughly 64% of private sector employment, and are a major driver of job creation and growth. Understanding the strategies necessary for small business success could enable minorities to make informed management decisions when starting a new venture. Comparing and combining the findings from this study with current data and linking the conceptual framework might offer new knowledge useful for increasing sustainability rates for minorities seeking small business ownership.

Contribution to Business Practice

I hoped to contribute to business practices by adding additional information to current knowledge regarding the management strategies essential to the sustainability of minority small business owners for longer than 5 years. Ejdys (2014) claimed that the success of a small business owner relies on their ability to react to changes and competition. Oncioiu (2014) noted that small business entrepreneurs who use comprehensive business plans accomplish business sustainability. The study could affect minority small business owners because the findings could increase their understanding of critical management strategies necessary for long-term sustainability. Minority small business owners could apply study data when developing effective management strategies that could lead to long-term sustainability in the future.

Small business owners strengthen local and national economies (Neagu, 2016). Wiesner and Millett (2012) maintained that many small and medium entrepreneurs focus on operational issues instead of management strategies. Subsequently, many minority small entrepreneurs fail to optimize the benefits resulting from the implementation of strategic management theories (Popa & Miricescu, 2015). Such trends suggest that some minority small business owners might lack the necessary management strategies required for the long-term sustainability of their businesses. Surma (2015) argued that leaders of successful organizations develop and implement distinctive strategies. In many instances, small business owners pursue differentiation strategies to differentiate their products from bigger retailers (Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014). Gross (2016) posited that strategic thinking might contribute to business sustainability. Strategic thinking is a problem-solving process that merges rational thought processes with creative and different thought processes (Gross, 2015). Alstete (2014) asserted that owners who implement strategic thinking concepts could increase their businesses performance because many small business owners do not understand the importance of strategy. Small business owners could combine strategic thinking and strategic planning to solve strategic problems in some instances.

This study might benefit minority small business owners seeking to develop management strategies and increase their chances of long-term business sustainability. Study results regarding successful management strategies could help minority small business owners make more informed decisions that sustain their business. Small firm owners could influence market competitiveness by acquiring further knowledge about successful management strategies and small business long-term sustainability. Minority small business owners moving towards long-term sustainability could implement strategic thinking to modify their behaviors.

Implications for Social Change

In 2014, there were roughly 856,682 small businesses in Michigan (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2017b). Approximately 13,206 of small firm owners opened businesses in

2013, and 79.6% survived through 2014 (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2015). In 2016, minorities owned 158,892 small firms in Michigan (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2017b). Small business owners, both nonminority and minority, are essential to local and national economies.

The study results might contribute to positive social change if its findings lead to an improved quality of life for minority small firm owners in Michigan. New knowledge related to minority small business owner sustainability could increase the prosperity of the community, which would indicate positive social change (Holloway & Schaefer, 2014). Defining the problems faced by minority small firm owners could advance the skill levels of community members (Bishop, 2015). Identifying the management strategies that ensure the sustainability of small businesses longer than 5 years could inform small business owners, improve their performance, and reduce the risk of failure. Understanding and addressing the characteristics of small business success among minority small firm proprietors could reduce poverty levels, lead to higher standards of living, and improve the financial outcomes for the community (Wang & Lysenko, 2014). Researchers studying small businesses could use study findings to examine different behaviors and analyze how the actions contribute to the success or failure of minority small business owner endeavors. Identifying success factors for small business sustainability could also benefit every segment of the country.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this literature review was to explore relevant literature regarding strategic management approaches attributed to minority small business owner sustainability beyond 5 years. Rowley (2012) posited that researchers use the literature review to facilitate the research process by reviewing current information related to a study's research question, identifying gaps in research, and providing the foundation that answers the research question. I conducted a literature review to assess available information about the management strategies minority small business owners apply to sustain their businesses longer than 5 years in the midwestern region of the United States. I also discussed the factors affecting the formation and growth of minority small businesses, how minority small business owners develop, and the challenges minority small business owners face while becoming sustainable in the literature review.

In the literature review, I referenced 358 journal articles, books, dissertations, and non-peer-reviewed government or seminal sources. Of those, 319 were peer-reviewed articles constituting 89% of the sources in this literature review; the remaining 11% of documents were from books, dissertations, and non-peer-reviewed government sources or are seminal works. The authors published 89% of the sources after 2013, while the authors of the remaining 11% published their works in 2013 or prior years. In total, I referenced 358 sources with 319 (89%) of the sources published between 2014 and 2018. Peer-reviewed sources constituted 320 (89%) of the total sources referenced. I addressed specific topics in the literature review, including (a) an overview of small businesses, (b) the history and development of small businesses, (c) the characteristics of small business owners, (e) the constraints and challenges small and minority firm owners face, and (f) the conceptual framework. In other sections I addressed (a) entrepreneurs role in economic development, (b) how internal and external influences affect small business owners, and (c) minority small business owner characteristics and disparities. I reviewed scholarly and peer-reviewed journal articles, organizational reports, and dissertations to answer the research question and explain how effectively implementing management strategies could lead to the success, viability, and sustainability of four minority small business owners in the midwestern region of the United States.

In the literature review, I referenced von Bertalanffy's (1937) general system's theory and systems thinking to explain how incorporating effective management strategies could lead to minority small business owner longevity and to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena surrounding minority small business owners. I also provided an overview of contrasting theories that further explained the appropriateness of the conceptual framework guiding the study. In the literature review, I explored effective management strategies and how the application of such strategies could contribute to the long-term sustainability of minority small firm owners. Secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and minority small business owner disparities and barriers further augmented the literature review.

Included in the literature review were several sources consisting of journal articles, dissertations, small business literature, and other reference material deriving from library resources obtained from the Walden University online library. The primary databases that I used to obtain information incorporated minority small management enterprises, small business, and other management sources. Specific databases included SAGE Publications, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, Emerald Management Journals, EBSCOhost, Management & Organization Studies, government databases, and LexisNexis Academic.

Supplementary database searches included ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertation, and Google Scholar. I used various keywords to research scholarly documents, including *small business, minority small businesses, small business owners, minority small business strategy, successful minority business strategy, competitive business environments, general systems theory, minority small business in urban areas, sustainability, management strategy, and qualitative analysis of minority small business*. Key search terms I used in this study included *qualitative research and small business, qualitative research and minority small business, small business strategy, multiple case studies*, and an amalgamation of keywords.

General Systems Theory

Von Bertalanffy developed the general systems theory in the 1930s to explore relationships between events and components (von Bertalanffy, 1972). Researchers use the general systems theory to identify interrelationships and parts of the system instead of focusing on single patterns (Caws, 2015). The general systems theory framework could assist researchers when exploring and defining a group of objects that work together to produce a result (Sayin, 2016). Von Bertalanffy (1972) posited that researchers and business leaders could adopt the systems theory to examine linkages amongst phenomena related to events within organizations. Pouvreau (2014) maintained that researchers who comprehensively explore systems observe and record exchanges amongst various elements to understand systemic interrelationships that business owners must recognize, develop, and control. Researchers could gain a clearer understanding of how systems work in successful enterprises by understanding the key tenets of the general systems theory.

Von Bertalanffy (1972) further emphasized that a core tenet of general systems theory is open and closed systems. Von Bertalanffy maintained that when systems are open, there is an exchange of energy, matter, people, and information. Business leaders could use open systems to acquire information from their operating environment. In closed systems, there are no exchanges of elements or interactions or connections between parts. Firm leaders cannot gain an understanding of how outside elements affect business success through closed systems.

Business leaders could advance their knowledge about business systems by implementing the general systems theory into business operations (von Bertalanffy, 1972). Caws (2015) indicated that business leaders could use the theory to understand system complexities and how it relates to forces in external environments. Chikere and Nwoka (2015) posited that inputs and outputs from the environment play a major role in organizations. Such inputs and outputs create the need for business leaders to develop a protocol for adjusting to environmental demands (Chikere & Nwoka, 2015). Sayin (2016) explained that business leaders could adopt general systems theory approaches to develop skills and competencies that result in improved performance through improved processes. Small business owners could incorporate different elements of the general systems theory to make decisions, develop skills, and successfully maintain profitable enterprises.

Firm owners must understand how business needs and activities work together to ensure business longevity. Small business leaders must operate within several systems, including (a) marketing, (b) technology, (c) customer satisfaction, and (d) financial dealings when seeking long-term success (Turner & Endres, 2017). By incorporating the general systems theory, new entrepreneurs could view business processes from the standpoint of a system and its parts (Abdyrov, Galiyey, Yessekeshov, Aldabergenova, & Alshynbayeva, 2016). Minority small firm owners could employ general systems theory approaches to develop management strategies and an understanding of how connections within systems lead to sustainable firms. Exploring the management strategies that minority small enterprise proprietors implement to sustain themselves for longer than 5 years could help new minority small business leaders experience long-term sustainability.

Researchers could identify business problems in firm operations by employing aspects of both general systems theory and systems thinking (von Bertalanffy, 1972). Chen (2016) added that firm leaders could use systems thinking approaches to analyze business activities. Hanson (2014) posited that firm leaders who adopt a general systems theory construct view their operations through a different lens. Hanson (2014) further explained that firm owners could find solutions to complex problems that involve multiple interrelated parts by employing tenets of the general systems theory.

Valentinov (2014) maintained that firm leaders who implement principles of the general system theory have a better understanding of business strategy. Business leaders who develop effective business strategies based on general systems theory concepts have a higher chance of achieving long-term organizational success (Flood, 2013). Marsan, Bellomo, and Gibelli (2016) maintained that business sustainability depends on a firm leader's ability to apply the theory to their organization in a manner that leads to positive results. As a result, small firm owners could use concepts from the general systems theory to implement successful management strategies that lead to sustainable businesses in the long-term.

Firm leaders who employ general systems theory have a better understanding of how external forces influence business operations (Luhmann, 2017). Chikere and Nwoka (2015) asserted that firm leaders must grow their firms and accomplish dynamic equilibrium to succeed. Long-term business success relies on a firm leader's ability to implement systems theory in complex environments (Valentinov, 2014). Business leaders realize long-term success by applying general systems theory concepts to promote effective communication (Adams, Hester, Bradley, Meyers, & Keating, 2014). Minority small firm owners who apply general systems thinking approaches could experience long-term business success through the acquisition of knowledge about external business environments and effective communication.

Jeston and Nelis (2014) concluded that inefficient business processes lead to business failure. Van der Schaft and Jeltsema (2014) found that when firm owners implement general systems theory constructs to guide their business operations, efficiency is the result. Firm owners promote long-term success by bolstering communication within their organizations through the implementation of general systems theory constructs (Lang, 2014). Gummesson (2014) indicated that firm owners who employ competent business procedures effectuate quality service in their organizations.

Understanding how general systems theory constructs support business owner sustainability through communication and effective business practices could assist minority small firm owners with having sustainable businesses.

Researchers apply the general systems theory to understand how a process interacts with and relates to the larger environment (Mania-Singer, 2017). In most instances, social structures depend on several interrelated factors. Likewise, small firm owners rely on outside factors, including human capital, networking, and technology to sustain their business which are a part of a larger system. I grounded the study by applying the general systems framework to explore the management strategies minority small business leaders implement to maintain their business longer than 5 years. The general systems theory provided a suitable framework for this qualitative multiple case study.

Systems Thinking

Researchers apply systems thinking to explore linkages and interactions between components in a system (Chen, 2016). Nguyen, Beeton, and Halog (2015) indicated that researchers address if actions impact a part of a system and if such actions trigger a reaction or new action in other parts of the system by implementing systems thinking. Rousseau (2015) found that investigators apply systems thinking to identify, explain, and predict conflicts within an organization. Researchers could evaluate how different parts of an organization relate to and impact other parts by exploring systems thinking (Kaspary, 2014). Leaders of successful organizations must use sound decision-making processes when making decisions (Sun, Hyland, & Cui, 2014). Systems thinking could be an effective approach that minority small business owners apply to their decision-making processes.

Combining aspects of both general systems theory and systems thinking could help small business owners identify specific management factors important to business sustainability. Von Bertalanffy (1972) theorized that the general systems theory relies on (a) relationships, (b) decision making, (c) patterns, (d) interactions, (e) structures, and (f) seeing wholes. For study purposes, the general systems theory and systems thinking concepts aid in the exploration of perceptions and experiences related to management strategies regarding general systems theory characteristics and its influence on minority small business sustainability.

Many organizational leaders apply systems thinking to address business processes that require the adaptation and integration of activities in changing environments (Nguyen et al., 2015). Organizational leaders could incorporate paradigms that analyze complex problems to obtain a complete picture of the dynamic relationships and complexities that affect the behavior of a system and facilitate business intelligence in an organization. Business leaders could employ systems thinking to develop business intelligence and when effectively managing complex problems (Caws, 2015). Senge, Smith, Kruschwitz, Laur, and Schley (2010) maintained that small firm owners are a part of a larger system that works together for sustainability. Only studying factors contributing to new business failure could mislead researchers because it may not provide a proper assessment of the problem.

The concept of combining aspects of systems thinking with business initiatives and workplace environments derived from the need to investigate the factors that form the foundation of learning organizations (Caldwell, 2012). Systems' thinking in this context identifies practical problem-solving strategies. Through an exploration of related factors, Langstrand (2016) found that organizational change and human agency were at the core of learning organizations. The concept of learning organizations involves the following five disciplines (a) personal mastery, (b) mental models, (c) team learning, (d) shared visions, and (e) systems thinking (Senge et al., 2010). Systems thinking derived from the disclosure of (a) system change feedback, (b) organizational learning, and (c) the need to view practices in their entirety (Caldwell, 2012). Gaps in research still exist regarding the benefits of strategic development based on the view of organizations as complete systems and its applicability to organizational sustainability.

Contrasting Theories

Researchers could explore multiple theoretical frameworks when seeking to explore a phenomenon. The general systems theory is the theoretical framework I chose for the study. Some theories contradict the chosen theory for the study. In the following discussion, I highlighted key premises of the contrasting theories and explained why they are not suitable for the study.

Contingency theory. Fiedler (1964) developed the contingency theory to emphasize leadership effectiveness based on personal and situational characteristics. A premise of Fiedler's contingency theory is that leadership style is static. Fiedler suggested that specific circumstances determine the most appropriate leadership style (Pratono, 2016). Fiedler created the least preferred coworker scale (LPC) to identify leadership style and task orientation. The literature suggested that there are varying opinions regarding the usefulness of Fiedler's contingency theory in leadership situations. Da Cruz, Nunes, and Pinheiro (2011) argued that the construct validity of the LPC is questionable. Despite the fact that some contingency theorist experienced success using Fiedler's theory, a shortcoming of the theory is that it concentrates less on the leader and more on leadership situations. The contingency theory was not a suitable framework to explore the management strategies that minority small business owners need to succeed longer than 5 years.

Grey systems theory. In 1982 Deng created the grey systems framework to measure problems involving small samples and incomplete information (Liu, Yang, Xie, & Forrest, 2016). Lee, Wu, and Tsai (2014) argued that researchers could apply the grey systems construct when adopting prediction and decision-making approaches to understand systems, conduct relational analysis, and construct a fuzzy system model with inadequate data. Memon, Lee, and Muari (2015) maintained that the theory offers a useful approach when making decisions in uncertain environments. Li and Lin (2014) posited that the grey systems theory has inherent flaws and continues to emerge in different directions. For study purposes, a system is one in which parts of systems work effectively as a whole (Caws, 2015). The grey systems theory contradicts the general systems theory because it concentrates on limited or unreliable system information.

Small Business and Small-Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

Most small and medium enterprises employ fewer than 500 employees (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2017a). In 2014, researchers at the SBA reported that small business proprietors established 63% of new jobs from 1993 to 2013 (Mishra, Mishra, & Grubb, 2015). Jeger et al. (2016) contended that small business owners have a major impact on the growth of local economies. Small firm owners were responsible for providing 61.8% of net new jobs from 1993 to 2016 (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016a). Small business classifications include micro, small, and medium firms (Ellis, 2016a). A true definition of what a small business enterprise is varies depending on the number of employees, value of assets, and country the small business originates from (Wit & Kok, 2014).

Many researchers acknowledge the importance of small business. The SBA Office of Advocacy (2017a) defined a small business as a firm with less than 500 hundred employees (Turner & Endres, 2017). Bygrave and Zacharakis (2014) reported that small business proprietors account for approximately 99% of all proprietors, 50% of the private workforce, and are responsible for over 50% of the entire private gross domestic product (GDP) in the United States. Bygrave and Zacharakis further claimed that the United States leads major developed economies in long-term growth rates due to its strong small business economy. Small firm owners are an integral part of job creation, social stability, and economic development. Small and medium firm owners largely contribute to economic growth and advancement because they easily adapt to environmental and technological changes (Pooe, Mafini, & Loury-Okoumba, 2015). Economic wealth depends on small business owners (Hong, Lee, Sun, & Harrison, 2015).

Aleksandr, Jaroslav, Ludmila, and Pavla (2016) posited that owners of (SMEs) play an important role in economic systems because they positively influence a country's GDP, employment, value, and revenue. Abay, Temanu, and Gebreegziabher (2015) stated that owners of SMEs are responsible for creating jobs. Resilient SME owners lead to resilient local and national economies.

Small business entrepreneurs drive global economies. Small and medium enterprise owners play an important role in the economic landscape of most economies in the world, especially in developing countries (Quartey, Turkson, Abor, & Iddrisu, 2017). Prakash and Patawari (2014) posited that employment rates, effective resource use, and economic growth determine a nation's prosperity and growth. Muenjohn and McMurray (2016) reported that owners of SMEs are crucial in Thai economies and most economies worldwide. Owners of small and medium enterprises represent a greater share of businesses in South Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria (Quartey et al., 2017). SME owners employ most of India's citizens and are drivers of the region's economy (Prakash & Patawari, 2014). Small and medium enterprise owners represent roughly 39% of manufacturing output and 33% of total exports in India (Gbandi & Amissah, 2014). World economies could benefit from entrepreneurship.

The number of small firm owners contributing to economic growth continues to rise. Entrepreneurs begin new businesses for several reasons. Hurst & Pugsley (2011) reported that over 50% of new owners begin their enterprises for flexibility, while 41% begin their new business to introduce a new product, and 34% seek additional or better income opportunities. Unemployment is a major driver of new business start-ups.

Poposka, Nanevski, and Mihaljlovska (2016) claimed that unemployment is a factor that causes people to start new businesses. Hulbert, Gilmore, and Carson (2015) stated that entrepreneurially minded people start small firms because they recognize opportunities larger firms overlook. Job growth is also directly related to small business start-ups in some cases. Fitzgerald and Muske (2016) maintained that there is a correlation between community well-being and successful small business owners. Small business owners tend to hire more people when unemployment rates are higher (Mallet & Wapshott, 2017). Reuben and Queen (2015) contended that small firm owners hire wage workers in underserved demographics. Yallapragada and Bhuiyan (2011) argued that some small business proprietors are likely to employ older, disabled, rural, and individuals with little education, unlike many larger firms. Small business owners play a major role in job creation.

A major aspect of understanding business owner survival is recognizing and understanding why business owners fail. The spotlight is on small business owner failure in the United States due to its status as a developed nation (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2014). Summers (2015) posited that small business proprietors in the United States experience high rates of failure. In the United States, an estimated two out of three firm exits resulted from firm owners closing their establishments (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016a). A potential cause of small firm owner failure is the lack of management skill (Joshi, Kaur, & Jain, 2016). An entrepreneur's skill level reflects their ability to make decisions that result in a firm's sustainability (Putta, 2014). Lobacz, Glodek, Stawasz, and Niedzielski (2016) contended that intangible sources, such as mistrust could lead to poor small firm owner performance and failure. It is inevitable that some small business owners will fail. Small business owners who incorporate key management strategies could improve their firm's success.

Small Business Challenges

Business owners fail. Poor managers cause business failure in some instances. Small business managers must seek solutions to the challenges they may face to remain sustainable (Summers, 2015). Understanding such challenges could help small firm owners develop successful management strategies (Omri, Frikha, & Bouraoui, 2015). When managers lack education and management experience, the likelihood of small business failure rises (Radipere & Van Scheers, 2014). In some instances, a firm’s sustainability hinges on the manager's education and experience. Dahmen and Rodriguez (2014) maintained that small firm owner success relies on education and management experience because managers handle difficulties with financing, weak demand, and finances when payments are overdue.

Another barrier to small firm owner success lies in their competition with bigger retailers. Some small business owners fail as a result of exposure to corporations that unequally compete with smaller firms (Armstrong, 2012). Owners of larger firms have more access to funding, which ensures competitive pricing. Business survival is contingent upon the business owner’s ability to respond in declining economies (Ropega, 2016). Muchiri and McMurray (2015) argued that factors, such as industry, region, and national economic conditions impact small firm owner survival.

Entrepreneurs play a major role in sustainable societies by exploiting emerging opportunities in marketplaces (Taneja, Pryor, & Hayek, 2016). Some small business owners embrace survival tactics that ensure profitability without understanding the link between sustainability and time investment. Business owners could benefit from concepts related to business survival and sustainability. Some factors that motivate small business owners are acceptable streams of income, maintenance of ownership, and job satisfaction (Chuanyin, 2014; Maria das, Caetano, Rodrigues, Barroso, & Couto, 2016). Other factors include financial necessity, a better quality of life, and independence (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016). Business success relies on a firm owner’s ability to develop and implement management strategies that contribute to business success.

Some small firm owners have a difficult time understanding how to remain competitive with similar businesses. Maintaining a competitive advantage is problematic when firm owners have access to limited finances (Thomason, Simendinger, & Kiernan, 2013). McDowell, Gibson, Aaron, Harros, and Lester (2014) asserted that small firm owners grow their businesses by being strategic. Direct competition with larger retailers diminishes the growth potential of small firm owners. Economies of scale and scope are major factors that determine whether small firm owners effectively compete with big-box retailers (Metaxas, Duquenne, & Kallioras, 2016). Small business owners with limited access to suppliers and smaller customer bases are more likely to experience disruptions in business when compared to larger organizations (Jones, Sambrook, Pittaway, Henley, & Norbury, 2014). Small firm proprietors must remain competitive to ensure their firm's survival.

Small firm leaders drive economic growth and sustainability (Afthonidis & Tsiostras, 2014). Lofstrom, Bates, and Parker (2014) argued that small business proprietors must determine and preserve the direction of their businesses. Small business owners must evaluate the risks and challenges they face. Neagu (2016) claimed that small business owners are critical to a healthy economy in the long-term. Dragnic (2014) posited that small and medium enterprise owners strengthen economies and are a major part of economic activity and recovery. Small firm owners should understand economic decline and how problem economics affect business and job growth potential when developing sustainable management strategies.

Small Business Owners

In the United States, roughly 1,500 firm owners start new businesses each hour (Bygrave & Zacharakis, 2014). Small firm owners represent 99.9% of all firms with employees, account for approximately 64% of new jobs, and constitute roughly 43% of total private payroll in the United States (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016a). Small business proprietors reinforce healthy economies and transform unhealthy economies by creating jobs and bringing innovative products and services to markets. Citizens in some countries embrace larger firms and reject small firm owner concepts (Barkhatov, Pletnev, & Campa, 2016).

Small business owners have new ideas, introduce them to markets, and are economically responsible for new business ventures. Turner (2017) described entrepreneurship and small business ownership as a form of bartering and trading. Dhliwayo (2014) characterized entrepreneurs and small business owners as self-interested individuals who take risks to drive profit or loss. Examples of notable small business start-ups that grew into major corporations and generated revenues internationally include Microsoft, Amazon, Dell, and Starbucks. Bygrave and Zacharakis (2014) claimed that at local community levels, effective small business owners help grow the economy by (a) creating jobs, (b) revitalizing communities, (c) creating civic alliances, (d) introducing new products and services, and (e) increasing local and federal tax revenues.

Entrepreneurs

The terms entrepreneur and small business owner are interchangeable in some scenarios. Some define entrepreneurs as leaders, managers, and individuals who undertake risk. Joshi et al. (2016) insisted that managers plan, organize, lead, and assist the organization in reaching established objectives. McDowell, Harris, and Geho (2015) contended that leaders usually focus on the organization's vision and long-term orientation. Effective leaders head successful organizations (Peterlin, Pearse, & Dimovski, 2015). Leaders of small businesses are managers and owners. Studies show that a characteristic of entrepreneurs is leadership. Leaders influence others to reach organizational goals. Leaders must effectively lead when developing and growing a new business (Oladele & Akeke, 2016). Bibu, Sala, and Alb (2016) claimed that leaders of successful organizations rely on strategic thinking competencies. Business owners make better business decisions when thinking strategically (Calbrese & Costa, 2015). Sahut and Peris-Ortiz (2014) postulated that anyone could be an entrepreneur. Business leaders must address rapid changes in organizational needs and structure to remain relevant.

Leaders often face challenges in many contexts, including (a) cultural workforce diversity, (b) finances, (c) strategies, and (d) innovation (Franco & Matos, 2015). Paunescup (2013) suggested that when small firm owners invest in the entrepreneurial culture of a country, it results in the creation of new businesses that help transform and revitalize national economies.

For study purposes, entrepreneurs are small business owners. Entrepreneurship means adapting an idea to a product or service in a manner that generates wealth and increases employment opportunities (Ruiz, Soriano, & Coduras, 2016). Bartz and Winkler (2016) stated that entrepreneurship is the attentiveness to and seizing of profit opportunities to take innovative actions. Entrepreneurs are an irrefutable part of global economic development. Lofstrom et al. (2014) contended that entrepreneurs are critical to a country's economic development. Entrepreneurs recognize opportunities and good ideas and develop them (Poposka et al., 2016). Dunne, Aaron, McDowell, Urban, and Geho (2016) asserted that entrepreneurs are willing to take risks that help them achieve goals. Ramoglou and Tsang (2016) argued that entrepreneurs operate out of self-interest, take risks, and make profits or sustain losses. Equally, Joshi et al. (2016) found that managers operating in uncertain environments make risky decisions. Jones et al. (2014) added that becoming an entrepreneur involves risky behaviors that cause many small businesses to close their doors after a few years. Henrekson and Sanandaji (2014) explained that entrepreneurs present lucrative and innovative opportunities that involve time through the contraction of inexperience. Entrepreneurs are the first step in small business creation (Jafarnejad, Abbaszadeh, Ebrahimi, & Abtahi, 2013).

Entrepreneurs focus on the future aspects of their businesses. Summers (2015) claimed that entrepreneurs are the owners, developers of new businesses, and managers of prominent firms. Ruiz et al. (2016) defined entrepreneurship as the driver for economic growth and vitality for society. Entrepreneurs benefit local economies. Risk is a critical component of entrepreneurship. When entrepreneurs take on more risk, business failure rates grow (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). Lechner and Gudmundsson (2014) added that risk is a necessary factor involved with emerging opportunities. Entrepreneurs are subject to potential risks that are highly uncertain.

Entrepreneurs start their businesses for various reasons. Alain, Liñán, and Moriano (2014) found that incentives, including flexibility, income, and notoriety may motive some entrepreneurs to start their firm. Ramoglou and Tang (2016) claimed that some entrepreneurs start new businesses due to the absence of other opportunities when unemployment is high. Bates and Robb (2014) maintained that challenges restricting opportunities for wage work could cause hesitant entrepreneurs to move towards entrepreneurship. Erol and Atmaca (2016) argued that when the economy is unstable, many business owners make financial decisions. Entrepreneurs' presence in the economy is integral to desired economic outcomes locally, nationally, and globally.

Small business owners face additional challenges when the economy is unstable. Organizational leaders must incorporate and balance retrenchment and repositioning strategies to survive short-term disturbances and reposition for post-recessionary functioning during recessions (Erol & Atmaca, 2016). Conversely, Muenjohn and McMurry (2016) claimed that business owners and managers without clear divisions of duties rely on luck instead of strategy. Entrepreneurs must incorporate strategic planning when making business decisions (Henry, 2013). Summers (2015) argued that the decisions small business owners make impact business success or failure. A firm’s growth and sustainability correlates with the firm owner's entrepreneurial drive, vision, management, and potential (Sajilan & Tehseen, 2015). Other business owner qualities that lead to small firm sustainability are social assessment skills, problem-solving abilities, and expertise (He, Standen, & Coetzer, 2017). Small firm owners endure challenges by developing proactive management strategies.

Firm owners use strategic management when anticipating future challenges and opportunities (Brezinova & Prusova, 2014). Applying strategic management concepts could further small business owner knowledge and lead to sustainable businesses. The primary tenet of strategic management is the creation of value and wealth as it relates to free enterprise (Parnell, 2015). Mazzarol, Clark, and Reboud (2014) posited that firm leaders must focus on growth and profit maximization to achieve entrepreneurial growth. Alstete (2014) found that small business leaders realize more opportunities when incorporating strategic management strategies. Firm owners who implement strategic management strategies can increase competitiveness, lessen costs, make better decisions, motivate employees, and increase customer satisfaction (Brezinova & Prusova, 2014). Firm owner success hinges on internal and external factors (Metaxas et al., 2016). Armstrong (2012) suggested that when entrepreneurs incorporate competency-based strategies, they support business survival and growth. An entrepreneur’s strategy relies on the establishment of profitable differences in competitive environments (Parnell, 2015).

Firm owners could realize long-term business sustainability by incorporating strategic management into small business strategy.

Business owner decisions are a part of successful small business cultures. The environment determines a firm’s sustainability. Business leaders and managers must adapt decisions to the changes and opportunities in their environment (Alstete, 2014). When making decisions, business owners and managers must account for external stakeholders. Entrepreneurs who understand external stakeholder need strengthen the strategic position of the firm and improve organizational performance (Loi, 2016). Continuous development helps business owners gauge their businesses tolerance to internal and external forces.

Entrepreneurships’ Contribution to Economic Development

Economic growth stimulates an entrepreneur’s innovative capacity (Leyden, 2016). Small firm owners create jobs and growth opportunities for disadvantaged populations (Reuben & Queen, 2015). Memili, Fang, Chrisman, and Massis (2015) defined economic growth as the increase in economic output that reflects its capacity to produce goods and services. Economic growth theorists recognize that new entrepreneurs who create small to medium-size firms are drivers of economic growth, job creators, competitive, and promoters of innovation and knowledge spillovers, which stimulate economic growth in society (Memili et al., 2015).

Rauch and Hulsink (2015) acknowledged that a link between entrepreneurship and small business exists. Motivation is an internal force that compels some individuals to become entrepreneurs because they wish to determine their destiny (McGuigan, 2016).

Other entrepreneurs are unhappy with their employment and choose to leave organizations and work for themselves (McGuigan, 2016). Entrepreneurs are risk takers who advance change by introducing new technological processes and products (SBA, 2014). Morris, Neumeyer, and Kuratko (2015) agreed that entrepreneurship involves risk-taking and practical planning regardless of culture. Umar and Wahab (2013) asserted that an entrepreneur's role is to use new knowledge, networks, and markets to make practical decisions to create and benefit from new business ventures. Entrepreneurs are influencers of innovation. Entrepreneurs advance new technology, are drivers of job growth, and are major drivers of domestic capital (Hörisch, 2015). Small business owners also help redistribute income, serve local markets, and help improve rural economies.

New firm owners represent roughly 20% of gross job creation in the United States, while younger high-growth business owners are responsible for approximately 50% of gross job creation (Decker, Haltiwanger, Jarmin, & Miranda, 2014). New firm owners account for approximately 16.6% of all gross job creation while existing firm owners creating new establishments account for another 16.6% (Summers, 2015). In the United States, small enterprise owners help increase job growth through their businesses. A small sector of owners of younger firms reinforces job creation and sustainability through fast growth (Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014). High-growth firm owners compensate for most job losses connected with a reduction in workforces or market exits (Decker et al., 2014). The implication is that entrepreneurs sustain job creation, which thereby contributes to the economy.

Owners of younger firms create jobs in the United States and contribute to the rapid pace of the reallocation of productive resources. Smaller firm owners could play a vital role when developing strategies to combat unemployment in inner cities (Zeuli & O'Shea, 2017). Decker et al. (2014) suggested that young firm owners demonstrate high post-entry dynamics, particularly low-productivity young firms depart markets, while higher-productivity younger start-ups expand rapidly. Owners of younger firms also play a significant role in innovation, which also contributes to productivity growth. Morris et al. (2015) posited that fewer new business owners are entering markets. Morris et al. also claimed that the declining role of young business owner dynamics in the economy results in declining business dynamics.

Entrepreneurs create jobs at higher rates than larger firms (Ghosal & Ye, 2015). Yallapragada and Bhuiyan (2011) found that when compared to experienced entrepreneurs, new entrepreneurs could have a slightly lower chance of failure. Both small and large firm proprietors positively contribute to manufacturing sector output (Hörisch, 2015). Entrepreneurs encourage local raw material use, require simple technology, are drivers of innovation, and make technological developments. Decker et al. (2014) found that small business owners reduce poverty, create wealth, and distribute income. Sahut and Peris-Ortiz (2014) argued that individuals looking to start small businesses should have management experience and knowledge before trying to grow an enterprise.

Successful Small Business Owner Characteristics

Small business owners strengthen the U.S. economy by creating jobs. Little information is available describing characteristics successful small business owners possess to sustain their businesses in the long-term. De Oliveira, Silva, and Araujo (2014) argued that successful entrepreneurs possess personal characteristics like a strong internal locus of control and a desire for success. Small business sustainability and growth rely on owner attributes including, (a) solid negotiation skills, (b) innovation, (c) determination, and (d) self-control (Surdez-Pérez, Aguilar-Morales, Sandoval-Caraveo, López-Parra, & Corral-Coronado, 2014). Sonfield and Lussier (2014) found that successful business owners who possess a college degree realize greater degrees of success.

Chowdhury, Schulz, Milner, and Van De Voort (2014) conducted a study exploring core employee based human capital in small firms and examined the relationship between employee experience and education, and their impact on firm productivity. Survey responses from five leading compensation consulting firms in the United States provided the basis for the study. Chowdhury et al. confirmed that higher levels of human capital contributed to small firm productivity. Chowdhury et al. also found that education impacted task-specific duties while education had no impact on firm-specific experiences. Firm owners who combine education and task-specific experience must concentrate on developing task-specific human capital to achieve better performance (Chowdhury et al., 2014). Although firm-specific human capital based on organizational wide experience improved productivity, small firm owners experienced no real benefit with highly educated staff members (Chowdhury et al., 2014). Small firm owners considering human capital must understand the relationships between firm-specific human capital, task-specific human capital, and education. There is a positive correlation between human capital and small business owner success (Greer et al., 2017). Cracium (2015) described human capital as education, experience, knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary when firm owners launch new business ventures.

Byrd (2010) noted differences in the way successful and unsuccessful small business owners lead their organizations. In the quantitative inquiry, Byrd examined differences in the leadership styles of both successful and unsuccessful small business owners. Byrd relied upon the Byrd Personal Leadership Inventory (BPLI) to measure leadership practices. The six personal leadership practices measured by the BPLI included (a) attending to judgment, (b) attending to emotion, (c) attending to physical sensation, (d) cultivating stillness, (e) engaging ambiguity, and (f) aligning with a vision. Study results indicated that successful owners in the sample regularly employed the six practices unlike the unsuccessful business owners (Byrd, 2010).

Transformational leaders focus on changes in how employees view values and goals (Choi, Lim, & Tan, 2016). Passion for small business is contagious when small business owners display such behavior to employees. A key tenet of transformational leadership is goal alignment. Leaders who align goals execute effective business practices and gain employee trust that leads to cohesion within the organization (Mom, Neerijeen, Reinmoeller, & Verwaal, 2015). Owner skill is a key factor that contributes to small business owner survival. In some cases, small business owners possess both entrepreneurial skills and management skills. Visser, Chodokufa, Amadi-Echendu, and

Phillips (2016) maintained that an entrepreneur's skill level relies on their ability to create, recognize, and exploit opportunities. Visser et al. further explained that an entrepreneur's management skills involve their management ability and how they organize people and resources. Pirnar (2015) posited that the five characteristics that successful small business leaders and entrepreneurs display are (a) motivation, (b) education, (c) ability to increase performance, (d) ability to optimize opportunities, and (e) confidence.

Sharafizad and Coetzer (2016) found that small business owners who actively participate in social networking create interpersonal connections that could lead to firm sustainability. Sigmund, Semrau, and Wegner (2015) argued that small business owners who engage in networking opportunities have higher sustainability rates, higher profits, innovate, and incorporate efficiency into business practices. O'Donnell (2014) found that networking leads to knowledge exchanges. Knowledgeable small business owners improve their firm's ability to operate in the long-term. However, many small business owners lack experience, have no history of success, and have no access to funding information, which makes networking critical (Matabooe, Venter, Mandela, & Rootman, 2016).

Sharafizad and Coetzer (2016) conducted a study on the networking interactions of women small business owners in Australia. Australia was the focus of Sharafizad and Coetzer's research due to gaps in existing literature exploring women small business owner networking interactions. Study participants included 28 female small business owners for the Australian based qualitative study. Sharafizad and Coetzer chose to study participants based on female small business ownership management. Study participants ranged in age from 31 to 50 years old consistent with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) findings that the average female business owner is between 30 and 50 years of age (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016). The industries represented in the study were (a) hospitality and tourism, (b) telecommunication, (c) information technology, (d) management consultancy, project management, (e) health services, (f) financial services, (g) graphic design, (h) educational and training-type services, (i) children's entertainment, (j) administrative services, and other types of retail. Twenty participants reported previous work experience in their industry, 16 were home-based, and more than half of the participants had at least one dependent. Most participants possessed academic qualifications, more than half met tertiary qualifications, and a quarter met postgraduate qualifications.

Sharafizad and Coetzer adopted a two-phase approach comprised of structured questionnaires and semistructured, in-depth interviews. Women small business owners operating in various industry sectors received consent forms and structured 40 question surveys (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016). Interviews followed the completion of the structured questionnaire allowing participants to elaborate on their answers to the questionnaire (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016). The structured questionnaire was also a question-generating device for the interview resulting in questions for further investigation. Study findings show similarities amongst women small firm owners when discussing their interactions with others within their networks signaling that interpersonal and informal relationships are important for successful women small business owners

(Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016). Earlier research determined that many women small firm owners acknowledge the importance of trusting the people within their network and building friendships and relationships (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016).

Study results also indicated that participants spent a significant amount of time and resources to foster and maintain relationships with their network contacts (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016). Participants noted the importance of building friendships and trust amongst the people in their networks (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016). Open communication was a critical component of trust building seeing that people build trust through interactions that occur over time (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016). Another emergent theme was that networking derives from the personal and business perspective of network participants (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016). Study findings also suggested that study participants enjoyed the company of network members for reasons other than business (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016). For instance, the formation of bonds within networks characterizing how things worked resulted from the reciprocity of resources, social exchange, and mutuality. Many network participants noted that in the beginning networks developed from the extension of resources (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016).

The need to be a part of a network led participants to build cooperative relationships and view their businesses as a mutual network of relationships instead of separate economic entities. Findings suggested that participants collectively approached their businesses and believed that building long-term relationships with stakeholders was important (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016). Trust amongst small business owners is important. The study revealed hidden risks related to participants' trust-based approaches to networking. Most study participants had no written legal contracts with employees or suppliers, or with customers in some cases (Sharafizad & Coezter, 2016). Participants were also unsure how to handle breaches of agreement or trust with key stakeholders (Shartafizad & Coezter, 2016). Such findings increase knowledge about trust-based relationships amongst small business owners, even if they negatively impact business profitability.

Kozan and Akdeniz (2014) determined that networks fostering strong associations and diversity reduced uncertainty, added to the knowledge of small business owners overall, reduced ambiguity about other markets, and added information about sources of capital available. Holck (2016) maintained that the term diversity includes various genders, ages, occupations, and industries. Small business owners benefit from networking for various reasons, including (a) opportunity development, (b) technology and organizational creation, and (c) information exchange (Holck, 2016). Tata (2015) suggested that small business proprietors who participate in networking opportunities help stimulate interest.

Family and friends are critical when small firm owners launch a small business. Many women and minority small business owners introduce new business initiatives when they encounter barriers in the traditional work environment (Godson, 2014). Small business owners often encounter opportunities through personal life experiences. Fifty percent of small business owners acknowledged that they began their firm through connections from networking contacts, innovation, slight variations, or creativity from existing business (Martinez & Aldrich, 2011). Entrepreneurs who rely solely on close ties might experience business failure although the diversity of the network might be valuable to their firm.

Omri et al. (2015) suggested that teams are critical when business owners are growing their businesses. Martinez and Aldrich (2011) conducted a study randomly sampling small business proprietors starting firms between 1998 and 2000. Study results revealed that 50% of participants had assistance when launching their businesses (Marinez & Aldrich, 2011). Study results also indicated that many small business owners who start technology-focused firms recruited former co-workers possessing the experience necessary to build their new business (Marinez & Aldrich, 2011). Business owners build relationships with suppliers, customers, and others when exchanging goods and services (Glabiszewski, 2016). For instance, in the exchange stage, relationships might develop when firm owner's network, share information, and collaborate to reduce costs (Lin & Lin, 2016). Building diverse relationships and networks are advantageous for small business owners and entrepreneurs in every stage of business. Diversity leads to added resources and tighter bonds amongst small business owners (Parida, Patel, Wincent, & Kohtamaki, 2016).

In 2014, Salvador, de Villechenon, and Rizzo interviewed 24 Brazilian small business owners using a 5-point, Likert-type scale instrument to discover how networking affected business success (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). The authors found that social networks helped small and medium-sized firm owners (a) understand how markets work, (b) experience long-term success, and (c) navigate market barriers. Each study participant owned a small or medium enterprise. Study findings suggested that networking and building relationships were a critical part of business success. Mijatovic (2014) found that networks are valuable to small business owners who conduct business in unstable environments and compete with other similar firms.

Hyder and Lussier (2016) predicted business success using Lussier's model. The authors tested 15 important factors that lead to small business sustainability in Pakistan to determine the probability of new business success and failure. Hyder and Lussier confirmed that the Lussier model predicted the success and failure of Pakistani small business owners. The Lussier model did not consider country-specific social and economic environments (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). The authors determined that if small business owners in Pakistan (a) have sufficient capital, (b) keep thorough records and maintain financial control, (c) have industry and management expertise, (d) incorporate detailed plans, (e) apply expert advice, (f) possess a higher level of education, (g) employ enough staff members, (h) have better product stage and economic timing, and (i) are proficient in marketing, the likelihood that they will experience success increases.

Categories of Small Business Owners

For study purposes, the definition of a small business owner is a person who starts a business, risks financial demise in the hope of profit, and who employ 50 or fewer employees (Turner & Endres, 2017). Similarly, researchers at the SBA Office of Advocacy (2016a) described small businesses as being independently owned and operated and for-profit although they do not have a dominant presence in the market. The literature used both terms interchangeably. Badulescu (2016) argued that small business owners fit into two categories that distinguish whether they are considered innovatorentrepreneurs and user entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are innovators if they begin a new enterprise (Badulescu, 2016). User entrepreneurs typically work in an established industry to gain knowledge, expertise, and experience on different paths to possibly correct flaws and then branch into their own business to launch a new product or service (Yun & Park, 2016). Firm owners acquiring information and expertise from existing industries create new industries that increase jobs, create new markets, and offer more diverse services. In their article, Yun and Park (2016) explained how two user entrepreneurs used prior knowledge to develop new products and technology that led to the creation of small enterprises. Prandelli, Pasquini, and Verona (2016) explained that user entrepreneurs continue to develop business ventures from existing markets or industries, creating new jobs and industries.

Global Small Business

Small firm owners affect global economic performance. SME owners are critical to a country's economic performance, GDP, job availability, affluence, poverty mitigation, and citizen welfare while offering a foundation for flexibility and innovation (Jafarnejad et al., 2013). Boamah (2016) found that the global recession of 2007 sparked a financial and economic crisis that resulted in declining GDPs in multiple regions instances. Germany's GDP dropped to 4.2% in 2008 and fell by 5.1% in 2009 (Bartz &Winkler, 2016). In contrast, Vojtovich (2011) reported that Albania's GDP grew by 6% and that SME owners contributed roughly 64% to the GDP (Ramadani, 2015). Globally, SME owners are the major drivers of economic growth because they increase key macroeconomic indicators (Zarook, Rahman, & Khanam, 2013). Boamah (2016) claimed that SME owners could improve economic conditions and lower poverty rates in Africa through their ability to create wealth. Considering that many larger firms began as small businesses, small business owner's ability to create new business and invest in their communities increases the likelihood of economic prosperity (Bartz & Winkler, 2016). Economic welfare is important on a global scale.

Globally, small business owners drive economic growth (Jasra et al., 2011). Jha and Depoo (2017) contended that small firm owners in the United States drive job development. Owners of small firms in Europe employ most of the workforce and are crucial to European competitive development (Devins & Jones, 2016). In New Zealand, SME owners account for 99% of proprietors (Rosalin, Poulston, & Goodsir, 2016). Approximately 96.2% of the citizens in India work for small and medium enterprise owners (Indris & Primiana, 2015). Gray, Duncan, Kirkwood, and Walton (2014) recognized that small business proprietors create job opportunities when implementing efficient SME development policies. Gray et al. argued that firms in the South Pacific islands grow at a slower pace. In Africa, SME owners account for more than 90% of businesses and increase the GDP by approximately 50% (Muriith, 2017).

Bishop (2015) explained that small firm owners in Canada employ five million people and account for 48% of the private sector workforce. Brazil experiences progressive small business growth. Malaquis and Hwant (2015) contended that Brazil is sixth in the number of entrepreneurs worldwide. Malaquis and Hwant further mentioned that approximately 470,000 new firm owners start businesses in Brazil, although most close due to poor management skills. In Indonesia, most small business owners open agricultural businesses (Indris & Primiana, 2015). SME owners in Hong Kong account for 98% of businesses and 48% of employment (Tam & Gray, 2016). In Libya, SME owners generate 46% of business in northwestern Libya and approximately 36% of business in the northeastern region (Zarook et al., 2013). Ibrahim, Abdullah, and Ismail (2016) found that in Malaysia, 99.2% of all business and 56.4% of employment derives from SME owners. Small and medium enterprise owners in Vietnam account for 60% of total employment (Le & Shaffer, 2017).

Worldwide, SME owners positively affect global societies. Viesi, Pozzar, Federici, Crema, and Mahbub (2017) explained that in Europe, small firm owners constitute 99% of all firms and employ 89 million people. Tan and Tan (2014) indicated that in Singapore there are roughly 148,000 small businesses. In South Africa, SME owners are essential to economic growth and job creation (Cant & Wiid, 2016). Exploring the effects of profitable small business performance and management strategy is important given the positive impact small businesses have on economic growth and recovery.

The global recession affected the economies of most countries worldwide (Erol & Atmaca, 2016). Soininen, Puumalainen, Sjogren, and Syrja (2012) explained that Finnish bankruptcies linked to SME owners rose 30% during the financial crisis of 2008. Kennickell, Kwast, and Pogach (2015) claimed that economic collapse threatens the viability of many SME owners globally. Economic crisis reminds societies of changes and uncertainties, which could affect small business owners (Kurschus, Sarapovas, &

Cvilikas, 2015). There is a period of recovery when societies experience an economic decline (Erol & Atmaca, 2016). Economic crisis affects business owners worldwide.

Economic downturns limit small business owner growth and present additional challenges. Small firm owners in Indonesia faced challenges related to the lack of capital, information, and skilled workers (Indris & Primiana, 2015). Indris and Primiana (2015) also noted that small business owners in Indonesia faced difficulties when securing credit from banks or other financial institutions due to limited resources. Likewise, Brazilian small business owners had little access to long-term finances, faced inconsistent policies and educational limitations related to defunct management skills, and had little to no training (De castro Krakauer & De Almeida, 2016). Globally, small business owners face challenges related to (a) environmental, (b) financial, (c) educational, and (d) the lack of management and strategic skills.

Business strategy is another important global factor related to small business sustainability. Business strategy is essential to the competitive advantage of SME owners on a global scale (Diehl, Toombs, & Maniam, 2013). Business owners rely on their knowledge to implement successful strategies (Alstete, 2014). Competent strategies help organizational leaders focus on meeting the needs of the business. Mokhtar (2013) discovered that successful small business owners in Malaysia and Bruneian incorporated short-term and long-term business strategies. The participants in Mokhtar's study used a growth strategy that expanded the size and scope of their firm to enhance business. It is important that small business proprietors identify potential problems and likely gains when examining and choosing appropriate business strategies. The nature of the business might call for a cautious approach and thorough examination of business needs before implementation to avoid unintended consequences.

Factors, including access to human and financial capital determine if a small business owner succeeds or fails (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). Individuals often bring specific skills through their social behaviors guided by education or experience when they join a firm (Bates & Robb, 2014). Aragón, Narvaiza, and Altuna (2016) found that a direct connection exists between sustainability and micro enterprises. Small firm owners who pursue human capital through family and friend's networks sometimes hire similar racial groups (Bates & Robb, 2014). The activities of entrepreneurs stimulate growth and help establish local economies. Minority small firm owner success is critical in urban areas because small firm owners make up a larger percentage of local businesses, meet the needs of local populations, and provide employment opportunities (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2014). Bates and Robb (2014) posited that increasing small firm owner presence in heavily populated urban areas leads to more growth and maturation (Bates & Robb, 2014).

Minority Small Business

Minorities are a major driver of economic growth in the United States. Entrepreneurs encourage the economic advancement of disadvantaged populations (Ogbolu, Singh, & Wilbon, 2015). Some minorities pursue business ownership out of the need to determine their own destiny (Ullah, Rahman, Smith, & Beloucif, 2016). Canedo et al. (2014) posited that minorities are more likely to start a small business but are less likely to realize success than their nonminority counterparts. Canedo et al. further argued that the biggest challenges minority firm owners face are limited business training, credit difficulties, and insufficient management experience. Some minority firm owners adopt the prejudices of dominant groups that cause them to steer away from business ownership (Ogbolu et al., 2015).

Researchers at the SBA Office of Advocacy (2016b) defined minority small businesses as for-profit enterprises, irrespective of size, owned, operated and controlled by minorities, and located in the United States or its territories. Minority group members include U.S. citizens belonging to Asian, African-American, Hispanic, Native-American, and other nonminority cultures (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). In the United States, the term minority small business owner refers to minority owners who own at least 51% of a firm (Sonfield, 2014). Members of the minority group must manage and be responsible for the daily operations of the businesses.

An underrepresentation exists in the current literature addressing minority small firm owners. Minority business owners are critical to the improvement of the U.S. economy. In 2012, minorities accounted for 8 million businesses, created 7.2 million employment opportunities, and added $1.4 trillion in revenue to the economy (Minority Business Development Agency, 2015). Minority firm owners are a source of business growth. During the economic recession between 2007 and 2012, minorities established over two million businesses, while roughly one million nonminority business owners closed their doors (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2014). Minorities' share of overall business ownership also rose from 22% to 29% (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2014). Minority business owners also increased sales by $335 billion while adding over 1.3 million additional jobs (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b).

Sonfield (2014) posited that minority firm owners account for 18% of all American businesses. Hispanics own 2.3 million businesses, African-Americans own 1.9 million firms, Asians own 1.6 million businesses, and 0.3 million Native-American and Pacific Islanders own firms (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). It is critical that minority firm owners understand important factors that could lead to firm ownership and business sustainability. Factors that could increase minority firm owners businesses are (a) population growth, (b) business acquisition from retiring owners, (c) higher immigration in the United States, and (d) expansion of the minority labor force.

From 2007 to 2012, minority small business ownership rose to 14.6% in the United States (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2014). Minorities still experience higher rates of failure when compared to their nonminority counterparts (Kanmogne & Eskridge, 2013). Recognizing why some minority small firm owners fail is essential to ensuring the long-term success of minority small firm proprietors. Bates and Robb (2014) piloted a study exploring why some minority small business proprietors chose to open their business in lower-profit sectors in urban minority neighborhoods and measured their sustainability against those servicing nonminority white neighborhoods. Study results suggested that business closure and low profits were strongly correlated with small firm owners opening businesses in minority areas (Bates & Robb, 2014). Minority small firm owners must understand critical factors related to minority small firm failure when implementing strategies to ensure long-term firm sustainability.

Barriers to Minority Business

Minority small firm owners encounter various challenges that could determine whether they experience long-term success. Challenges associated with small business sustainability, especially those under 5 years result in fewer business owners succeeding. Minority entrepreneurs could experience disadvantages when pursuing new business ownership (Carter, Mwaura, Ram, Trehan, & Jones, 2015). Women and ethnic minority small business owners could encounter internal and external barriers. External barriers minority small firm owners face are (a) limited business knowledge, (b) limited financial support, (c) fewer government resources, (d) inferior management abilities, and (e) taxation (Bates & Robb, 2016; Cheng, 2015; Johan & Wu, 2014; Lisowska & Stanislawski, 2015; Miles, 2014).

Minority entrepreneurs also report that access to capital is a major impediment to business growth and sustainability (Reuben & Queen, 2015). Carter et al. (2015) posited that internal influences, including discrimination, the number and quality of minority firms owners, and limited support constrain minority small firm owner success. A more thorough investigation outside racial and gender factors might be necessary to measure the precise cultural differences that determine the success or failure of minority small-owned firms (Parks, Pattie, & Wales, 2012).

Parks et al. (2012) reviewed the survey responses of 128 small business owners measuring differences other than ethnicity that could determine minority business success amongst small business entrepreneurs. Sixty-two percent of the sample derived from the service industry (Parks et al., 2012). Survey results indicated that a major factor leading to differences in the business performance of ethnic minorities was access to capital (Parks et al., 2012). Parks et al. suggested that ethnic minorities might consider security as less valuable although it is vital to small firm owner performance. Parks et al. also found that study data underrepresented minorities. Although Parks et al. reported that the ratios represented in the survey were similar to the experiences of small business owners in the United States, the lack of minorities surveyed might not offer a comprehensive view of minority values as represented in the majority sample.

Successful business ventures rely on access to capital. Minority entrepreneurs often turn to the most viable options for profit because they lack the necessary education and economic aptitude to qualify for financing (Johan & Wu, 2014). The lack of financing is a significant barrier to business for many minority firm owners. Limited empirical data is available regarding minority entrepreneurs access to financial resources (Bewaji et al., 2015). The Minority Business Development Agency (2017) estimated that minority firm owners are three times more likely to be denied loans than nonminority firm owners, pay on average 7.8% in interest on loans while their nonminority counterparts pay an average of 6.4%, are less likely to receive loans, and when approved, received lower amounts than their nonminority counterparts.

Some financial institutions are also hesitant to extend loans to small business owners who have been in business for less than 5 years. Data suggests that minority entrepreneurs, especially immigrants, have fewer relationships and networking opportunities with lending institutions, making it difficult to combat this problem (Lisowska & Stanislawski, 2015). Fewer networking opportunities with lending institutions could result in minority small firm failure. Minority small firm owners could gain access to the capital necessary for long-term firm success by building relationships and networking with lending institutions. Minority small business owners must effectively manage how they use capital to remain sustainable.

Increasing Entrepreneurship of Minority-Owned Business

It is essential that minority firm owners identify and employ strategies that lead to the success of business ventures. Achteenhagen and Price Schultz (2015) found that minority firm owners fail at higher rates than nonminority firm owners even though the number of firms owned by minorities increases each year (Achteenhagen & Price Schultz, 2015). Achtenhagen and Price Schultz (2015) also maintained that although minority firm owners were more likely to fail, they created more jobs. Kanmonge and Eskridge (2013) argued that an underrepresentation of minority entrepreneurship in literature exists when compared to other groups.

Canedo et al. (2014) found that African-Americans and Hispanics own fewer businesses than nonminority business owners even though they represent the largest minority groups. Asians and Native-Americans experience fewer disparities, unlike African-American and Hispanic small business owners (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). The growth rates of minority firm owners significantly outperformed their population growth during the same time. African-American business ownership rose over 30% although the African-American population only rose by 6% (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Canedo et al. explained that the Hispanic population increased by 17% while their business ownership increased by 46%.

Another way to measure minority and nonminority enterprise owner metrics is to use the population per business ratio. A ratio of one business per 8 adults exists when measuring nonminority business owners (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). The ratio is considerably larger when measuring larger minority groups. In recent years, the gap between minority and nonminority business owners is closer to the nonminority ratio (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Hispanics owned one business for every 13 Hispanic adults in 2007 (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Similarly, African-Americans owned one business for every 14 adults (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Hispanic and African-American owned businesses accounted for every 11 members of their cultural groups in 2012 increasing entrepreneurship in both groups by 20% (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). The entrepreneurship ratio for Asians grew from six adults for each business to seven, which is significant since Asians represent the smallest ratio amongst major racial and ethnic groups (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b).

Minority and Nonminority Firm Disparities

Minority firm owners experience disparities in certain areas of business when measured against nonminority firm owners. Disparities could affect how successful minority small firm owners are in the long-term. One such disparity is minority performance. There are many ways to measure minority performance. As mentioned earlier, the entrepreneurship ratio helps researchers measure minority performance. Revenue and employment also play a role when assessing minority performance. Bates and Robb (2016) claimed that minority business owners account for fewer revenues and employees when measured against their share of all businesses.

Hispanics represent the largest percentage of ethnic business owners in the United States and account for 8.3% of all business (Suarez, 2016). In the United States, Hispanics own over two million small firms (Canedo et al., 2014). Hispanic firm owners represent approximately 12% of all businesses but only encompass 4% of all sales and employment (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). A significant gap between business shares, sales, and employment exists in the Hispanic cultural group. Disparities exist amongst minority small firm owner's sales, employment, and share of business (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Hispanic business owners experience a 33% sales disparity ratio, which indicates that their share of sales is one-third of their share of businesses (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b).

Minority firm owner success also relies on sales and employment numbers. Majid and Bernasek (2013) asserted that sales and employment disparities persist although minority firm owners have a larger presence in markets (Mijid & Bernasek, 2013). From 2007 to 2012, minority business owners hired more workers and increased sales, but still experienced sales disparities (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). All minority groups encountered disparities in the areas of sales and employment (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Asian business owners performed better than other minority groups while experiencing inequalities (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Asian firm owners realized fewer disparities between 2007 and 2012 (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b).

Rueben and Queen (2015) explored the participation of African-American firm owners in key industries to assess implications for revenue generation and hiring potential. Study findings suggested that although more African-American small business owners contributed to the socio-economic progress of African-Americans and other disadvantaged groups, African-American firm owners experienced unequal access to capital (Rueben & Queen, 2015). Study findings also suggested that African-American small firm owners face institutional barriers at higher rates than nonminorities (Rueben & Queen, 2015). Reuben and Queen also found that wealth gaps in specific industries threaten African-American firm sustainability. Minority groups experience disparities at higher rates when compared to their nonminority counterparts. Minority firm owners who recognize why such disparities exist and take the proper measures to overcome them could develop adequate strategies for firm longevity.

Sales and Employer and Non-Employer Disparities

A stark difference between minority and nonminority firm owners is evident when assessing disparities using per-firm sales averages further highlighting key variations among minority groups. For instance, African-American firm owners average about $58,000 in sales per firm, Hispanic firm owners generate around two and a half times that amount, Asian firm owners generate six times as much, and nonminority firm owners realize over nine times that amount (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Fewer disparities exist when comparing sales amongst minority employer firm owners even though great differences are evident when evaluating all firms, specifically employer and non-employer minority-owned enterprises. Hispanic and Asian employer firm owners realize similar sales per firm accounting approximately half of nonminority firm owners level (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). African-American firm owners generate approximately 41% of the nonminority firm owners average sales (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b).

Asian firm owners are more likely to hire workforces than other minority groups. Twenty-two percent of nonminority business owners pay at least one employee (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Roughly 4% of African-American firm owners have at least one employee on the payroll making them 81% less likely than nonminority firm owners to employ others (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Similarly, Hispanic, Native-American, and Pacific Islander firm owners are 40% more likely to create jobs when compared to African-American small firm owners (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). On average, minority business leaders tend to create fewer jobs than their nonminority counterparts. Asian firm owners lag behind other minority groups in this area. Asian firm owners are more likely to hire more people than both Hispanic and African-American-owned firms together (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b).

Statistics also indicate that younger owners are more likely to own a minority business, unlike their nonminority counterparts (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). African-Americans are 25% more likely to own businesses between the ages of 18 and 34, unlike nonminority business owners (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2014). Seventy-five percent of African-American small business owners are younger than 35 (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Other minority groups experience similar trends. Firms with older owners are more likely to employ others regardless of their race or ethnicity, which could be due in some part to the firm's age (Lee, Fitzgerald, Bartkus, & Lee, 2015). Minority firm owners who recognize why such disparities exist and take the proper measures to overcome them could develop viable strategies for firm longevity. Understanding how disparities impact business sustainability could help minority small firm owners develop strategies and position themselves in markets that offer the most viable profit opportunities.

Firm Age

Business owner and firm age closely correlate. Lee et al. (2015) maintained that many minority firm owners are younger than 35 years of age and have less than 5 years in business. Conversely, over 26% of nonminority firm owners survive longer than 12 years while roughly 13% of Asian, Hispanic, and African-American firm owners survive as long (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Variations could cause revenue and employment disparities seen within specific industries. Owners of firms surviving longer than 12 years typically have higher revenues, employ workforces, and hire more employees irrespective of minority status (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Minority firm owners in business over 22 years earn about ten times more than younger firms less than 5 years old and employ roughly three times as many people as younger firms (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Fewer disparities could exist as minority firm owners achieve longevity although there is no guarantee. Higher numbers of minority entrepreneurs and higher rates of business closure could account for reported gaps.

Number of Owners/Family Ownership

Single ownership is the largest minority business owner classification. Hispanic and African-American minorities are more likely to be single business owners (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). African-American business ownership rose by 34% between

2007 and 2012 (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016c). Hispanic firm ownership and Asian firm ownership also rose during the same period. Asians are more likely to own more family businesses (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Nineteen percent of Asian firm owners involve family ownership compared to 9% of African-American firm owners and 13% of Hispanic firm owners (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Firms owned by multiple owners comprise roughly 17% of all minority businesses and significantly outperform single owned firms in the areas of sales and employment (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Multiple firm owners earn nearly five times more revenue and employ five times more workers than single firm owners irrespective of their minority status (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Such differences in revenue and employment indicate that disparities in the minority group may occur due to the industry. Further, it could explain why Asian firm owners outperform other minority firm owners based on such metrics. It is important to understand if an association between family systems and business systems exist (Lee et al., 2015).

Sources of Financing

A firm owner's success depends on their ability to raise capital when beginning or expanding a business. Startup survival often depends on a firm owners ability to secure sufficient external financing (Henderson, Herring, Horton, & Thomas, 2015). African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asians with the same firm characteristics, owner characteristics, and credit scores receive less favorable treatment and access to credit lines than nonminority's (Henderson et al., 2015). In some instances, financing resources available to nonminority and minority groups are similar (Bewaji et al., 2015).

Palia (2015) conducted a study examining if minority and Caucasian small business borrowers had similar access to loans from financial institutions. Study findings demonstrated that African-American borrowers experienced a 17% to 33% higher rejection rate when compared to Caucasian firm owners with similar risk. Study findings further indicated that the credit risk and denial rates of Hispanic borrowers were similar to Caucasian borrowers although Hispanic borrowers were less wealthy (Palia, 2015). Palia also found that Hispanic and Caucasian small business borrowers had similar access to capital, unlike African-American small business borrowers.

The SBA Office of Advocacy (2016a) reported that approximately 25% of both nonminority and minority firm owners started their enterprises without financing. Fifty-seven percent of small business owners in both groups started their enterprises using personal loans or loans from family (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016a). Turner (2016) posited that minority business owners are less likely to use business loans as start-up financing than nonminority firm owners. Eight percent of nonminority firm owners used private loans while only 5% of minority firm owners considered private loans as a source of capital (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). This trend is also evident for owners expanding their businesses.

Minority firm owners are more likely than nonminority owners to use available financing options to expand their firms (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Bewaji et al. (2015) found that minority business owners use family savings, assets, and credit cards as funding options at higher rates than other business owners. Data also confirmed that minority business owners often feel discouraged when seeking private loans (Bewaji et al., 2015). Sixteen percent of nonminority's felt discouraged when seeking loans while 30% of minorities reported feeling the same way (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Similar reasoning might explain why minority business owners rely heavily on personal finances. Notwithstanding minority grouping, business owners with access to private loans for start-up and expansion increase their sales and employment numbers. Five percent of minority firm owners reported securing private start-up loans that accounted for 17% of sales and 19% of employment (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2016b). Small firm owners who understand the management strategies necessary to remain sustainable in the long-term could further their access to business capital.

Transition

Minority small business owners sustain and improve the U.S. economy. A gap exists in the literature regarding management strategies that determine small minority business sustainability. Metaxas et al. (2016) noted that a firm owner's external and internal dynamics and environment determines their competitiveness and ability to design strategies that increase sustainability and viability in local and global markets. Al-Ansari, Bederrm, and Chen (2015) stressed that it is critical that small business owners employ defined strategies. Strategies help small business owner's assess how sustainable their businesses are in competitive environments (Chryssochoidis, Dousios, & Tzokas, 2016). Literature about entrepreneurship, effective business strategy, and how small domestic and global firm owners use sound strategies to remain sustainable is available. A correlation exists between successful small business owners, strategic planning, and management support (Taneja et al., 2016). Adding to available information about minority small firm owner's use of effective management strategies could encourage minority small business owners to plan for long-term survival, growth, and retention.

In Section 1, I provided definitions for key terms related to the small business discussion for this study. I discussed topics related to global small businesses, strategic planning, entrepreneurship, management strategy, small firm owners, and minority firm owners. In the literature review, I demonstrated the need for additional focus on minority small business owners. Through the literature review, I also confirmed that suitable management strategies are essential to the survival of small firm owners. In Section 2, I explained the role of the researcher, offered specifics about the methodologies, design, analyses, and collection techniques that I used in the study, and other strategies necessary for study completion. Section 3 detailed study findings and its value to professional practice.

Section 2: The Project

Owners of small and medium enterprises create jobs and boost the economy (Hörisch, 2015). Small business owners account for approximately 99% of all proprietors, 50% of the private workforce, and are responsible for over 50% of the entire private GDP in the United States (Bygrave & Zachaakis, 2014). Few small business owners sustain their businesses longer than 5 years. I identified proactive management strategies that could help minority small business owners sustain their businesses in the long-term. I studied the experiences of four minority small business owners who sustained their firms for longer than 5 years in my pursuit of management strategy identification. In this section, I also discussed my study's role and purpose, the research method and design, data collection, participants, analysis, and procedures for ensuring validity and reliability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, explorative multiple case study was to explore the management strategies that minority small business owners used to sustain their businesses for longer than 5 years. The target population for the study was minority small proprietors in the midwestern region of the United States who have been in business for 5 years or longer. Identifying critical management strategies minority small firm owners used to sustain themselves in the long-term could influence social change through job creation and economic stimulation.

Role of the Researcher

Malogon-Maldonado (2014) explained that the primary data collection instrument in a qualitative study is the researcher. Stratton (2015) stated that it is vital that a researcher identify bias during data collection and analysis to ensure accurate findings. The goal of the researcher is to construct a credible and compelling explanation of the phenomena under exploration (Takyi, 2015). As the researcher, I constructed a reliable and convincing explanation of the research findings. Isaacs (2014) asserted that qualitative researchers must understand and restrict bias, address the influence of personal perspective during participant interactions, and interpret meanings. I was interested in the topic because the information produced by the study could add to social change. I did not have any prior relationship to the study topic or participants outside of living in the general geographical location where study participants conducted business. Study findings might provide critical information to future minority small business owners wishing to maintain their organizations in the long-term through the encounters of minority small business owners who have been successful in business for longer than 5 years.

The researcher's role is to review and use knowledge found in the literature to develop the research method and design, select participants, gather, explore, report findings, and make conclusions based on several data sources. I conducted semistructured interviews. Castillo-Montoya (2016) suggested that researchers must prepare, plan, listen intently, ensure interview accuracy via audio recording, and take notes when conducting qualitative interviews. In addition to the interview data, interview notes, and company documentation, I reviewed participant websites and social media platforms.

Writers at the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research summarized ethical principles and procedures for the protection of human subjects in *The Belmont Report* (1979). As written in *The Belmont Report*, researchers should respect participants, limit their risk, and ensure justice by utilizing consent forms and impartially managed processes (Friesen, Kearns, Redman, & Caplan, 2017; Miracle, 2016). I adhered to and supported the principles of ethical conduct as noted in *The Belmont Report* by ensuring participants entered the research freely and by guaranteeing that the participants fully understood their role in the research.

Qualitative researchers must obtain information from participants, prepare, and adapt to unforeseen circumstances (Singh, 2015). There are three interview structures available to researchers (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The structure of the interview shapes the role of a researcher. Each participant responds to the same questions in the same order when researchers apply the structured interview method to gather data (Honan, 2014). Researchers use structured interviews to standardize data and compare data at greater degrees.

When conducting semistructured interviews, researchers rely on a predetermined number of questions and then direct the conversation based on those questions or a similar set of probing questions (Jamshed, 2014). Interviewers apply a semistructured interview approach to explore relevant information while satisfying the research objectives. The third interview structure is unstructured interviewing. When conducting unstructured interviews, the researcher asks impromptu questions and allows the interviewee to direct the interview (Honan, 2014). The semistructured interview method was the best fit for this study because it offered an in-depth approach to gaining useful information about the study topic from participants.

Bracketing is the process of minimizing personal bias and influence (Sorsa, Kiikkala, & Åstedt-Kurki, 2015). Bracketing involves disregarding personal biases, ideas, and judgments when conducting research. I took interview notes, audio recorded each interview, and developed a verbatim transcript to minimize personal bias using bracketing. Before collecting data, I provided participants with a copy of the consent form. I ensured all participants understood that they could withdraw from the interview at any time before the publication of study findings, were willing to participate, and were aware that their information would be kept confidential. If a participant wished to withdraw before study publication, I explained that the participant could contact me via email or phone and request to withdraw from the study. I would then immediately destroy all collected study data if a participant requested to withdraw from the study. Also, the study did not include information about the participant. There were no penalties for withdrawing from the study. I will keep a copy of each participant's signed acknowledgment of his or her rights in a locked and secure place that is only accessible to me for at least 5 years. After that, I will destroy all hard copies of the participants' consent forms in an approved manner.

I conducted semistructured interviews by asking each participant questions in the same order listed in the Interview Protocol (Appendix A). To reduce bias, I used an audio tool and journal to transcribe the semistructured interviews. I developed a verbatim transcript of each interview. Harvey (2015) noted that developing a verbatim transcript after each interview is instrumental when developing themes. I then coded the interview data. Themes that emerged from the data could provide insights to existing or future business owners who desire to launch and sustain a small business in the long-term. I presented the transcribed participant information in aggregate form to guarantee participant confidentiality.

Participants

Gelling (2015) described the selection of research participants as critical to data outcomes. I selected participants using the purposeful sampling method. The purposeful sampling technique facilitates researcher confidence when obtaining valuable information from knowledgeable participants' relating to a phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015). Researchers use a purposeful participant sample when gathering useful data when participants are in their natural environment and comfortable during the interview. Braithwaite and Patterson (2012) explained that researchers using a purposeful sampling technique should be aware of three types of sampling errors when conducting qualitative research despite its flexibility. The first sampling error involves distortions triggered by insufficient breadth in sampling (Brainthwaite & Patterson, 2012). The second error could result from distortions introduced by changes over time (Brainthwaite & Patterson, 2012). The third type of sampling error results from a lack of complexity in data collection at each site (Branthwaite & Patterson, 2012).

Minority small business owners were the focus of this multiple case study. The population for this study was four minority small business owners over the age of 18 in the midwestern region of the United States sustaining their businesses for a minimum of 5 years. The business owners were both male and female. I anticipated that some business owners possessed a college degree. Some participants had prior ownership experience while others did not.

My sample consisted of four minority small business owners. Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested that researchers conduct interviews until they reach data saturation. I conducted semistructured interviews until data saturation ensued. Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016), suggested that researchers member check to validate the collected data. I member checked and conducted follow-up interviews with each participant to assess the trustworthiness of the collected data. I assumed data saturation ensued when no new data emerged after two interviews with each participant. In preparation for subject selection, I completed Internet searches on local business associations to obtain the contact information of minority small firm owners in the midwestern region of the United States. I only interviewed minority small business owners who have maintained their firms for at least 5 years in the midwestern region of the United States.

I contacted participants via telephone to seek their willingness to participate in a face-to-face interview. To enhance participant comfort, entice participation, and improve the effectiveness of the semistructured interviews, I suggested conducting the interviews at the business owner's place of business after hours. If participants were unable to meet at their place of business, I recommended other options like public libraries with private meeting spaces. Peterson (2014) found that conducting and recording face-to-face interviews in a public location and providing courtesies, such as beverages to show gratitude for the participants' time ensures that participants are in an environment where they feel comfortable sharing their experiences about the study topic. A positive advantage of conducting face-to-face interviews is that I could gain in-depth insight into specific answers by treating the open-ended interview questions as a discussion.

Consent depends on the participant's willingness to participate (Sigstad, 2014). I provided a copy of the consent form to participants agreeing to interview and participate in a recorded face-to-face interview as well as follow-up interviews for member checking. I requested a brief personal meeting before signing the form rather than corresponding via email when necessary. Upon receiving the signed copy of the consent form from the participant, I scheduled an appointment for 60 minutes for the audio-recorded, semistructured face-to-face interview at a time the participant identifies as convenient. I included the open-ended interview questions in Appendix B.

Before starting the semistructured interviews, I reminded each participant of the purpose and rationale of the interview and discussed the interview protocol as outlined in Appendix A. I thanked each participant at the conclusion of the interview. I manually transcribed the semistructured interview data within a 24 to 48-hour period, and then scheduled and conducted member checking with each participant to ensure the accuracy of my interpretations of the data collected. Birt et al. (2016) reported that the value of member checking during qualitative research is that it adds rich and in-depth data and helps to achieve data saturation. I validated the interview data with each participant and then entered the data into the qualitative analysis software tool QSR NVivo 12 that assisted me in coding material that identified themes.

Research Method and Design

The focus of the qualitative multiple case study was to explore the management strategies minority small business owners residing in the midwestern region of the United States employ to sustain their business beyond 5 years. I provided and justified the method and design below.

Research Method

The research method provides the researcher with a suitable strategy that appropriately answers the research question. The three research methods include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Differences in quantitative and qualitative methods research approaches lie in the manner that they address separate forms of research questions (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). While planning this study, I considered the three approaches before selecting a qualitative method.

The quantitative research approach did not fit the research objective because it would not include an understanding of the experiences of the minority small business owners regarding management strategies that may have contributed to their success. Quantitative research is suitable when the researcher's goal is to examine the relationship amongst variables using statistical procedures (Goertzen, 2017). Leko (2014) claimed that quantitative researchers do not investigate or analyze human experiences. Qualitative researchers use qualitative research to measure differences between samples taken from diverse populations (Leko, 2014). Robinson (2014) posited that a quantitative approach is not suitable when measuring smaller participant groups. The focus of the study was to explore the experiences of four minority small business owners who sustained their firms longer than 5 years. The use of statistical methods was not suitable for the study. The participant group was small making a quantitative approach inappropriate.

Researchers use a mixed-methods approach to implement both quantitative and qualitative approaches when single methods do not offer satisfactory insights to understand a phenomenon (Fawcett, 2015). I chose not to use the quantitative or mixed-methods approaches because numerical data was not required to address the principal research question for this study. Halcomb and Hickman (2015) suggested that researchers use a mixed-methods approach to combine data collection and analyze closed-ended quantitative facts and open-ended qualitative facts. Quantitative and mixed methods analysis were not a suitable fit for the research because I neither examined relationships between quantitative variables or established if an association exists between known variables by asking closed-ended questions. Green et al. (2015) suggested that investigators should use a mixed-methods approach when converging data to enhance depth and new meaning. Instead, I focused on acquiring qualitative data from semistructured interviews conducted with successful minority small business owners, company documentation, company websites, company social media pages, and interview notes which comprised the methods used to collect data for this study.

I used a qualitative methodology to explore the research question: What management strategies do minority small business owners use to sustain their business longer than 5 years? A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because, through in-person semistructured interviews, four minority small business owners could share their perspectives on the management strategies they attributed to sustaining a business for a minimum of 5 years. Bailey (2014) found that a qualitative methodology is an appropriate approach if (a) the problem involves more than a yes or no hypothesis, (b) the sample size is smaller, and (c) themes emerge from the data. Using qualitative research is the most appropriate method to gain a comprehensive understanding of the personal experiences and perceptions of the participants (Grossoehme, 2014; Park & Park, 2016). Alase (2017) claimed that researchers conduct qualitative research because it is a flexible approach and they can obtain a complete and in-depth study of phenomena, evidence through human experiences, the ability to modify and revise research if necessary, and findings that could apply to other specific settings without generalizing the results. The qualitative method aligned with the objectives of this study.

Research Design

Choosing a research design is an important step in the development of a research study linking the conceptual framework, research question, and research method (Yin, 2012). Researchers use the research design to incorporate a plan for collecting, organizing, and analyzing data related to the research question (Turner, Cardinal, &

Burton, 2015). McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) claimed that the researcher has the option to choose different study designs when conducting a qualitative study. I carefully considered each of the main designs for this qualitative research. The main designs for qualitative research include (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, and (c) case study (Park & Park, 2016).

Researchers concentrate on the lived experiences of study participants when using a phenomenological design (van Manen, 2017). Researchers also apply the phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences and their meanings to individuals who experience the same phenomenon. Through the phenomenological design, researchers gain insight into participants' experiences, perceptions, common themes that arise, and their relative importance for describing phenomena (Ellis, 2016b). Unlike in quantitative analysis of experiences, phenomenological investigators explore how participant experience phenomena, and not from some theoretical viewpoint (Bevan, 2014). As suggested by Ellis (2016b), researchers use a phenomenological approach to explore a problem from lived experiences and perspectives since it reflects concepts, ideas, and perceptions. Phenomenological research also involves describing one's experiences and ideas (Ellis, 2016b). Phenomenological researchers seek to understand how participants interact with others and their environments (Khan, 2014). Brinkmann and Kvale (2014) claimed that researchers use a phenomenological design that incorporates interviews to explore specific meanings of lived experiences related to a phenomenon under study. I did not choose the phenomenological design approach as it did not satisfy the criteria for the research topic because of the small number of participants studied. The small participant pool did not fulfill the investigative requirements for the phenomenological design.

Researchers use the ethnographic design to explore patterns of behavior or language related to distinct cultures (Ellis, 2015). When using an ethnographic design, researchers observe participants to advance their understanding of a cultural group through the extensive observation of study participants (Sharman, 2017). Leedy and Ormond (2015) found that ethnographic researchers observe individuals in societies and cultures. The ethnographic design was inappropriate for the study because this study does not include observations of humans, societies, cultures, or ethnic groups. The focus of the research was to explore relevant management strategies that minority small business owners credit for their success when sustaining a small business for a minimum of 5 years. Though culture is a part of each workplace, the primary focus of this study did not include minority small firm owner cultures.

A case study design is an adaptable approach when analyzing societal and developmental disciplines (Göttfert, 2015). Researchers use a case study research strategy to gather information from individuals and groups to describe an understanding of an occurrence (Dasgupta, 2015). Data collection techniques used in case study research are (a) interviews, (b) archival records, (c) documentation, (d) observations, (e) participant-observation, and (f) physical artifacts (Kruth, 2016). Villarreal Larrinaga (2017) recognized that researchers use the case study approach by incorporating a single case or multiple cases confined by time and location. Case study designs require that investigators collect data from two or more sources (Gog, 2015). I used a case study design for the research. I conducted semistructured interviews to gain participant perspectives about the study topic. I also used company documentation, company websites, company social media pages, and notes from the semistructured interviews of study participants to acquire additional data.

Population and Sampling

Sampling is a process where a researcher selects a subset of a population to study (Emerson, 2015). The study's population consisted of a minimum of four minority small business owners over the age of 18 in the midwestern region of the United States who sustained their business for at least 5 years. The purposeful sample contained four minority small business owners over the age of 18 who owned and sustained a business for a minimum of 5 years. I collected all data through face-to-face semistructured interviews and recorded the interviews using a digital audio recorder. Sutton and Austin (2015) explained that a viable way to collect data is through face-to-face interviews. I ensured accuracy by using an audio recording device during the semistructured interviews. I scheduled participants for the face-to-face semistructured interviews at a time convenient for their schedules. Birt et al. (2016) explained that member checking entails conducting follow-up interviews with participants to ensure the accuracy of the collected data. I conducted member checking with each participant to ensure the accuracy of study data.

The goal of the research was to recognize meaningful management strategies that might help explain how the four selected small business owners remained sustainable for 5 years or longer. Scholars share varying viewpoints about the appropriate number of participants in qualitative studies. When conducting qualitative research, the sample size is acceptable and complete when the researcher achieves data saturation during the interviewing process (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Many factors could affect the sample size needed to obtain data saturation, including (a) the study's topic, (b) the study participants, (c) the existence of an established theory, (d) the data collection method, and (e) the method of data analysis (Tran, Porcher, Ravaud, & Falissard, 2016).

Boddy (2016) implied that a single case study or interview does not yield sufficient information because data saturation can only occur after at least two cases. Andersson and Evers (2015) found two to three participants as the lowest acceptable sample size in multiple case studies. The proposed number of participants should be sufficient to assure thorough discovery (Fahie, 2014). If data saturation occurred with fewer than four participants, I would have ceased interviews. Van Rijnsoever (2017) claimed the researcher decides which cases to include in the sample based on theory or insights gained while collecting data. I did attain data saturation with four participants, causing no need to conduct additional interviews. Van Rijnsoever (2017) claimed that the minimum size of a purposive sample needed to reach data saturation is difficult to estimate.

Data saturation occurs when no new or applicable themes or supporting information develop through the data collection process (Cleary et al., 2014). I used thematic data saturation. Morse (2015) claimed that it is important that researchers use sampling because it helps them to define the success of the venture. Quantitative researchers use power analysis to identify the desirable sample sizes; yet, no such formula is available for a qualitative study (Yin, 2014). The researcher can explore participants' experiences with and perceptions of a phenomenon when conducting a qualitative study (Brewis, 2014). I initially conducted semistructured, face-to-face interviews with each participant and then used member checking to conduct follow-up interviews with each participant to acquire in-depth information until I achieved data saturation.

The main goal of sampling in qualitative research is to ensure that the sample size is small enough to manage the data and large enough to provide a new and rich understanding of participant experience (Fugard, Fugard, & Potts, 2015). Fugard, Fugard, and Potts (2015) argued that data could become redundant when sample sizes are large. I used purposeful sampling. Researchers utilize purposeful sampling to select cases containing rich information for the most effective use of limited resources (Duan, Bhaumik, Palinkas, & Hoagwood, 2015). Benoot, Hannes, and Bilsen (2016) claimed that a purposive sample consists of a specific group of individuals who could have useful information that informs an in-depth study. Researchers apply a purposeful sampling structure to ensure the selected sample yields abundant, applicable, and valuable information to address the research question (Palinkas et al., 2015). The purposeful sample only included minority small business owners who have sustained their business for longer than 5 years in the midwestern region of the United States. The data collected from minority small business owners who successfully maintained a small business for at least 5 years could lessen uncertainty for existing small business owners and offer guidance to aspiring business owners on management strategies.

Ethical Research

Wallace and Sheldon (2015) argued that researchers must protect the confidentiality and general welfare of all participants. The rules of ethical research assert that researchers must ensure (a) the proper selection of participants, (b) the consenting process is strictly followed, (c) the collection of data in an unbiased nature, and (d) data saturation. The informed consent process requires that researchers provide participants with the following in writing (a) a full explanation of the study's purpose, (b) the ability to withdraw from the study at any time, (c) a complete assessment of the potential risk to participants, and (d) a complete explanation regarding how the researcher will keep participant identities confidential (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Khoshnava Fomani, Shoghi, & Ali Cheraghi, 2014). At the beginning of each interview, I reminded each participant that they could willingly withdraw at any time before the publication of study findings. I offered no incentives to any participant for their participation.

I obtained approval from the Walden University institutional review board (IRB) (IRB Number: 04-30-18-02228074) before collecting data. Each study participant signed a consent form before each semistructured interview. I will keep the research data in a secure, locked place that only I can access for 5 years to protect the confidentiality of the participants. The consent form contained information regarding the study's purpose, introduced the researcher, explained each participants' right to withdraw from the recorded face-to-face interview at any time, and included a plan to ensure the confidentiality and discretion of participant identity and study data.

I informed the participants there were no penalties if they chose not to participate, and there were no benefits, incentives, or rewards associated with their participation in the study. The consent form included the researcher's name, telephone number, and email contact along with the name, email contact of the researcher's supervisor from Walden University, and the participant's selection criteria. Appendix C contained information relating to interview time, which I estimated to be approximately 60 minutes per interview and an outlined the interview structure and protocol. I reminded all participants that their data would remain confidential and only aggregate data would be published or shared with others.

Data Collection Instruments

High-quality qualitative research depends on researcher skill, ability, and diligence when using interview techniques to gather data and provides innovative insights (Chetty, Partanen, & Rasmussen, 2014; Kruth, 2015). Malogon-Maldonado (2014) maintained that the researcher is the primary data collection instrument. I operated as the primary data collection instrument for this explorative qualitative multiple case study. Anderson (2017) emphasized that qualitative researchers consider the importance of the research context, standpoint, and the possible effects on the research process and outcomes. Six sources that assist researchers with gathering information are (a) documentation (b) archival records, (c) interviews, (d) direct observations, (e) participant observation (i.e., site visits), and (f) physical artifacts (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) further explained that researchers must use at least two of the six sources when gathering data. I collected data originating from semistructured interviews, company social media information, company documentation, company website information, and interview notes.

I audio recorded each personal interview with the participant's knowledge by administering open-ended interview questions for approximately 60 minutes per participant to ensure that I captured data in the most efficient manner possible. The open-ended interview questions derived from the interview guide. Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, and Kangasniemi (2016) noted that open-ended interview questions based on previous knowledge and interview protocols lead to detailed responses from participants. By increasing the reliability of interview protocols, researchers improve data quality obtained from research interviews (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I established and followed the interview protocol found in Appendix A. The open-ended interview questions are available in Appendix B. I maintained reliability by utilizing an interview protocol to ensure I stayed focused on the research question. I also collected data from company documentation, company social media information, and company website information along with conducting semistructured interviews.

After I transcribed the interview data, I conducted member checking through follow-up interviews for review to ensure validity. Member checking refers to the interviewer conducting a follow-up interview to verify the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations (Morse, 2015). Researchers give each study participant the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of their responses as transcribed through member checking (Birt el al., 2016). Harvey (2015) claimed that member checking involves taking ideas back to participants for their confirmation. After I cleansed the data, I entered the verified interview data into the data organizing software tool, NVivo12.

Data Collection Technique

The qualitative, explorative multiple case study focused on the management strategies minority small business owners in the midwestern region of the United States used to sustain their business for longer than 5 years. I served as the main data collection instrument. Malogon-Maldonado (2014) posited that qualitative researchers assume the role of the data collection instrument. Rowley (2012) claimed that a researchers skill and knowledge is critical to the quality of the reported findings. The data collection technique I used required that I conduct face-to-face semistructured interviews in a location chosen by the participant until I attained data saturation. Peterson (2014) maintained that holding face-to-face interviews helps participants feel comfortable about sharing their experience regarding the study topic in their own environment.

De Massis and Kotlar (2014) argued that researchers use interviews to target, discern, and collect rich empirical data. An advantage of conducting face-to-face interviews versus online surveys or mailed surveys is that participants can seek clarity during the interview. Face-to-face interviews are also flexible and allow study participants the flexibility to focus on meaningful issues (Cridland, Jones, Caputi, & Magee, 2015). Some disadvantages involved in conducting face-to-face interviews include increased traveling costs, possible participant discomfort, and breach of privacy with face-to-face contact (Yin, 2012). Another disadvantage of conducting face-to-face interviews is that they require time to plan, conduct, and analyze (Gelling, 2015).

The data collection process requires that the researcher use an audio recorder during semistructured face-to-face interviews (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Dowling, Lloyd, and Suchet-Pearson (2016) described the interviewing process as the collection of data from participants by asking questions and receiving verbal responses. Researchers use interviews to gain a full account of the research agenda (Dowling et al., 2016; Narang & Maxwell, 2014). Researchers can use three data collection methods when conducting qualitative interviews.

Data collection methods are (a) the standardized interview, (b) informal conversation interview, and (c) the general interview guide approach (Patton, 2002). I gathered primary data by conducting in-person semistructured interviews using open-ended interview questions that inquired about the research topic. The use of interview and probing questions provides participants with queues regarding a desirable level of depth and allows them to enhance their response with greater detail (Yin, 2014). Researchers ask probing questions during the interview process to gather additional information that offers a greater explanation of the study topic (Alshenqeeti, 2014). I focused the discussion on the open-ended interview questions and asked follow-up questions when necessary.

Scaupp and Bélanger (2014) incorporated semistructured interviews to identify the factors that led small business owners to use social media, the extent of the value of social media provides small business owners, and the ability to measure the perceived value, which supported the use of semistructured interview protocol. Scaupp and Bélanger noted that the semistructured interview technique provides structure and flexibility during the interview process. Likewise, Westrenius and Barnes (2015) used the semistructured interviewing technique to develop and explore stakeholder theory by identifying small business stakeholders and their importance to small business success. Ranney et al. (2015) found that the semistructured interview method gives researchers an ideal way to concentrate on addressing the central research question. I chose not to use a pilot study. Doody and Doody (2015) claimed that qualitative researchers have the flexibility to learn on the job, which makes conducting a pilot study unnecessary.

I also used firm documentation, company social media information, and company website information to gather additional information related to participants. Wahyuni (2012) posited that qualitative researchers could use additional data sources to strengthen and crosscheck acquired data. Exploring documentation and interview data reinforces data triangulation (Heale & Forbes, 2013). An advantage of researchers using documents to collect data is that they can expand findings. A disadvantage of using documents as a method to collect additional information is that researchers could experience difficulties acquiring complete documents (Yin, 2012).

Data Organization Technique

Researchers must ensure participant information is kept confidential (Ummel & Achille, 2016). To protect participant identity, I assigned a code to each participant after completing face-to-face semistructured interviews to organize interview notes and recorded data. Wahyuni (2012) described this process as data cleansing. I assigned each participant a code, such as P01, to identify the first participant and the first business owner completing the first face-to-face interview. Likewise, I assigned codes that identified the participants in completed interview order. Marshall and Rossman (2014) argued that researchers must categorize and label data to promote consistency. For confidentiality purposes, only I know participant identities. I stored all electronic data on a personal, password-protected, external hard drive. I locked all study data, including audio recorded interviews, transcribed interview data, interview notes, and journal findings in a locked file cabinet only accessible to me. I kept track of interview data by entering information into an excel spreadsheet. I will securely maintain all research data for at least 5 years. After 5 years, I will shred all hard copies of data, delete all electronic copies using deletion software, and erase all audio recordings.

Data Analysis

Kozleski (2017) listed seven approaches to qualitative data analysis, including (a) domain analysis, (b) content analysis, (c) constant comparative, (d) key-word-in-context, (e) taxonomic analysis, (f) word count, and (g) componential analysis. When using qualitative research practices, the researcher must set aside all prior experiences and judgments as the data analysis process involves searching for all possible meanings through reduction and analysis of specific statements into themes (Yin, 2014). Each open-ended interview question supported the research question to collect information regarding what management strategies minority small business owners employ in the midwestern region of the United States that sustain their business beyond 5 years? I transcribed all interview data within 24 to 48 hours after the completion of each interview. The researcher should transcribe interview data (a) while the interview data is fresh on their mind, (b) compare the data against transcribed material and interview notes, (c) capture the data word for word, and (d) request that the interviewee double checks the data for accuracy (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I then gave each participant the opportunity to engage in the technique known as member checking. Researchers member check to establish validity by giving each study participant the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of their responses through a follow-up interview with the researcher (Birt et al., 2016). If participants identified inaccuracies or added insight, I made the appropriate changes until each participant confirmed that the transcribed data correctly represented their perceptions and experiences.

I incorporated methodological triangulation to triangulate the interview data with company documentation, company website information, company social media pages, and interview notes to assure validity during the data analysis. Data can be triangulated using (a) data triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Researchers use methodological triangulation to interpret and understand the data. I explained my intent to use methodological triangulation in greater detail in the validity subsection. In the data analysis processed from the semistructured interviews, company documentation, Internet sources, and notes taken during the interview, I disassembled, compartmentalized, and reassembled the data to establish themes and draw inferences (Wahyuni, 2012).

I used 2018 QSR International NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software to facilitate the identification of themes based on the data. Researchers use NVivo 12 software to classify and explore raw data (QSR International, 2018). The data analysis process involves (a) the verbatim transcription of recorded interview data, (b) the creation of a code record for my personal use to identify each interviewee, (c) the development of codes for the interview data, and (d) the application of codes to produce themes (Rosenthal, 2016). Qualitative researchers identify central themes by establishing such protocols (Rosenthal, 2016). The themes classified elements that could lead to the sustainability of the minority small business owners who remain in business for longer than 5 years. The conceptual framework grounding this study was general systems theory. Once I coded the data, I established patterns and themes with NVivo 12 software and then explored if emergent themes supported the conceptual framework and existing literature.

Reliability and Validity

I employed a thorough process to assure the reliability and validity of the study. Both reliability and validity are intended to make qualitative research rigorous (Morse, 2015). In qualitative research, reliability and validity have different meanings. Researchers use qualitative research to develop semistructured interview protocols to reach commonality and to reinforce the validity, consistency, and reliability of data (Smith, 2014). Sousa (2014) argued that data collection instruments must be both valid and reliable when collecting data for scientific research. Reliability and validity are principal concerns in all measurement and are ideal when investigators collect, explore, and report research data (Morse, 2015). Morse (2015) argued that when researchers incorporate reliability and validity, they establish the truthfulness, integrity, and credibility of the study.

Noble and Smith (2015) suggested that qualitative researchers ensure study credibility by (a) accounting for personal biases that can influence findings, (b) acknowledging biases in sampling and ongoing critical reflection of methods, (c) keeping meticulous records, (d) including rich and verbatim descriptions when reporting findings, (e) demonstrating clarity in terms of thought processes during data analysis and subsequent interpretations, (f) engaging with other researchers to reduce research bias, (g) triangulating data, and (h) validating respondents. I used the interview protocol in Appendix A to ensure the study's reliability. I remained consistent while collecting information from each participant to reduce bias or errors while handling gathered data. My limited knowledge regarding opening a minority small business minimized any personal bias deriving from related experience.

Reliability

Researchers collecting study data must evaluate and make judgments about the soundness, reliability of study findings, application and relevance of the measures undertaken, and the integrity of the conclusion (Noble & Smith, 2015). Cypress (2017) posited that future researchers could reproduce the study design to address the same phenomenon using the same procedures and research protocol when the research is reliable. Leung (2015) suggested that an acceptable reliability strategy determines the consistency and stability of the research. Ridder (2017) theorized that using multiple data collection sources or evidence enhances case study reliability. Qualitative researchers document the steps and procedures used to ensure reliability (Morse, 2015). I took additional measures by documenting the steps and procedures as demonstrated in the interview protocol found in Appendix A. Harvey (2015) suggested that member checking is a viable way to enhance rigor in qualitative research boosting credibility associated with accurate descriptions or interpretation of phenomena. I conducted member checking to ensure the data was sound.

Validity

Validity in qualitative research refers to the suitability of the tools, processes, and data (Leung, 2015). Qualitative researchers conducting valid analysis incorporate credibility, confirmability, and transferability in their studies (Amankwaa, 2016). Credibility refers to the degree to which the research represents the actual meanings from the perspective of the research participant (Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams, & Blackman, 2016). Wayhuni (2012) explained that confirmability is the capacity to adapt to the changing degree of stability in the research project. Anney (2014) explained that transferability refers to the degree to which study results apply to similar contexts, situations, times, and populations.

Aravamudhan and Krishnaveni (2015) maintained that content validity involves the trustworthiness, credibility, and dependability of the data in qualitative research. Cypress (2017) noted that qualitative researchers must check and recheck data for accuracy throughout the research process to ensure validity. Birt et al. (2016) posited that researchers use member checking to add to the validity of the data through follow-up interviews confirming a complete understanding of the research through participant responses to interview questions. I audio recorded the face-to-face semistructured interviews, immediately transcribed each interview, and relied on personal notes from the conversations and interview data verified through the member checking for accuracy to ensure validity. Member checking attributes include the opportunity for researchers to correct errors and challenge perceived inaccuracies and the opportunity for participants to volunteer additional information (Birt et al., 2016).

Carter et al. (2014) maintained that triangulation introduces validity through the convergence of information from different sources. Four types of triangulation are (a) investigator triangulation (b) data triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation (Carter et al., 2014). Multiple researchers gather and analyze data when conducting investigator triangulation (Carter et al., 2014). Researchers measure time, space, or persons using several data sources and sampling methods when employing data triangulation (Burau & Andersen, 2014). Researchers apply theory triangulation to explore various theoretical frameworks and interpret a phenomenon (Burau & Andersen, 2014). Researchers apply methodological triangulation by implementing more than one technique to ensure the data is both valid and reliable (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Burau and Andersen (2014) recommended using multiple data types. I used methodological triangulation to ensure validity by gathering and linking conclusions from multiple data sources. Wahyuni (2012) found that researchers increase study validity by using more than one information source. I increased study validity by using existing records, interview notes, organizational documents, company website information, and company social media pages to compare information originating from several data sources. I used descriptive words deriving from the interview data. I informed participants that I did not own a small business or have entrepreneurial experience. Denzin and Lincoln (2010) claimed that researchers must have a complete understanding of participant responses. I informed participants that it was vital that I acquired a sound understanding of their responses to identify themes which is necessary to the identification of common themes deriving from their responses on factors that contributed to the success of their businesses.

To ensure reliable results, I (a) verified participant knowledge of factors, (b) member checked, (c) triangulated the data using multiple sources, and (d) compared the interview data to the existing literature and the study's conceptual framework. I reviewed the general systems theory and determined that because it relies on shared concepts and interactions, it was a viable way to measure success. General systems theory supported the value minority small business owners placed on growing their business and understanding the complex systems necessary to operate their businesses for efficient business operations. Ranney et al. (2015) proposed that rigor is a critical component of qualitative research because it requires researchers to apply existing theories, use current literature, and add data that strengthens qualitative research or offers new perspectives for future researchers.

Transition and Summary

In section 2, I described the study's purpose, the role of the researcher, research method, design, and rationale used in the selection of a qualitative multiple case study approach to explore factors relating to the management strategies minority small business owners use to remain sustainable in the long-term. I also described the participant group and the purposeful sampling technique in section 2. I also presented the chosen data collection process. Section 2 also included a description of ethical research. In Section 3, I triangulated data and introduced the study's findings. I also explained how the research related to professional practice, its implications for social change, provided recommendations for further study, and reflected on the study's outcomes as it relates to existing literature.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

This section of the study begins with an introduction that detailed the study's purpose and a summary of the findings. I explored and discussed the strategies four minority small business owners in the midwestern region of the United States employed to remain successful beyond 5 years. In this section, I presented the findings of the study and explained how the findings apply to professional practices. I also included information regarding social change implications, recommendations for actions and further research, reflections, and the conclusion of the study in this section.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, explorative multiple case study was to explore the management strategies that minority small business owners used to sustain their businesses for longer than 5 years. To gain an understanding of the strategies minority small firm owners use to remain sustainable longer than 5 years, I completed interviews with four minority small business owners in the midwestern region of the United States. I selected four minority small firm owners through purposeful sampling, which I determined using public data from the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, other business associations, and word of mouth. After obtaining approval from the IRB and compiling the participation list, I contacted potential participants regarding their participation in the study. Robinson (2014) found that purposeful sampling increases the validity of the study and generates rich and relevant triangulation. I did not use the real names of participants. Joslin and Muller (2016) suggested that researchers identify study participants in a manner that does not reveal their true identities. Once I experienced data saturation, I input the data into NVivo 12 by QSR qualitative analysis software to identify key management strategies to answer the research question. Based on the methodological triangulation of the interview data, organizational documents, company website information, company social media pages, and interview notes, three thematic categories emerged regarding how minority small business owners used management strategies for longer than 5 years, including (a) networking with other small business owners, (b) strategic planning, and (c) building strong customer and employee relationships.

By analyzing the interview data, I discovered that successful minority small business owner management strategies use (a) networking with other small business owners, (b) strategic planning, and (c) building strong customer and employee relationships are necessary for minority small firm owners to realize profits and sustain their businesses in the long-term. Minority small business owners could realize greater success and improved sustainability by applying the management strategies discovered through the study data.

Presentation of the Findings

This subsection contains the three thematic categories and verbatim responses of participants emerging from interviews to address the main research question inquiring about the management strategies minority small firm owners used to sustain their firms longer than 5 years.

Theme 1: Networking with other Small Business Owners

The first main theme identified from the data collection process was the need for minority small business owners to network with their peers (see Table 1). Networking is the development of long-lasting and beneficial relationships through contact with others (O'Donnell, 2014). Windzio (2015) posited that networking could take place when attending birthday celebrations or by exchanging vital business information. Small business owners who network with others could learn about new products and services that might be beneficial when growing their firms. P01, P02, P03, and P04 discussed the importance of networking. P01 confirmed that networking with other small business owners led to business growth. P02 mentioned "you can learn a lot from other business owners. They can teach you things you weren't aware of." P03 stated, "it is very important to be able to network with others in the same industry." P04 found that attending workshops helped grow network connections. Minority small business owners who engage in networking could implement new practices and develop relationships that lead to new opportunities.

Table 1

Networking with other Small Business Owners

Networking	Number of Participants	Percentage
Networking with peers	4	100%
Business associations	4	100%

Small business owners who develop relationships with other business owners could gain valuable information that helps sustain their business. Kuhn and Galloway (2015) suggested that peers can personally relate to the difficulties of establishing and maintaining a business and, in some instances could offer advice about their experiences.

All participants reported that networking helped them grow their businesses and remain in business for longer than 5 years. P04 asserted that networking was vital in business remarking, “it’s all about networking and word of mouth.” Minority small firm owners could learn about useful tools and how to apply them when managing their small firms by learning from others in similar businesses.

Networking and building peer relationships could be a feasible and more affordable option that small and micro sized business owners who are unable to employ the services of professional advisors can access (Kuhn, Galloway, & Collins-Williams, 2016). Minority business owners could greatly benefit from the information they collect from others when managing their firms. P04 mentioned that networking led to additional business and new employees which were key aspects to remaining successful in business. Many minority small business owners could remain successful in the long-term by applying principles and tips learned through networking with others. P01 conveyed, “I constantly go to training seminars and listen to other people.” Each participant identified networking as an essential component of long-term business success.

Nowiaski and Rialp (2015) maintained that small business owners might gain useful knowledge about how to increase profitability and sustainability by interacting with other small business owners at social and professional events. Each small business owner verified during interviews that community networking, involvement, and engagement were essential to their small business’s success. P01 proclaimed, “I joined a forum, and through that program, we now provide several companies with materials.” P02 mentioned that new and amazing friendships were the result of networking. P03 found that networking with similar firms helped when in a bind asserting, “you may need help from one of your constituents, and they’ll help us out and vice versa.” P04 revealed that being a member of networking platforms helped gain trust with new clients. Through networking platforms, minority small business owners and potential clients could build trust that leads to business sustainability.

Networking in the form of being a member of a business association could also assist minority small business owners with managing their businesses. Many business associations offer potential and existing small business owners useful information about financial assistance, management strategies, growing a business, and keeping a business sustainable (Marques, 2017). All participants were current or former members of business associations and agreed that being a part of a business association was valuable to the success of their businesses. P01 mentioned that being a member of a business association helped gain important clientele that has helped grow the business tremendously. P03 reported that as a founding member of two business associations, knowledge sharing helped other small business owners. P03 also stated, “it’s always good to get involved with some type of organizational structure that you can actually maintain and network your business because with other things you can’t really make money.” P02 found that being a member of business associations increased communication with other owners with similar business interests and resulted in learning, growing, and successful business. The theme regarding networking aligned with the literature and systems theory in that networking involves many aspects of the daily business operations between small business owners and the outside environment. The implications of these findings rely on the interconnectedness of business expectations and activities that lead small firm owners to business sustainability and growth.

Theme 2: Strategic Planning

The second key theme identified during data collection is strategic planning (see Table 2). Some researchers believe that planning is the foundation of management (Dearman, Lechner, & Shanklin, 2018). Strategic planning is important to small firm owners when managing a small business. Small firm owners who plan strategically clearly define their business's mission while assessing the current landscape of the business (van Scheers & Makhitha, 2016). By strategically planning, minority small business owners could have a better grasp on their business. Key components of strategic planning practices are assessing the current business situation and making positive changes when necessary to the organization's environment (Grant & Jordan, 2015). All participants agreed that strategic planning helped them remain in business longer than 5 years. P01 reported that updating and implementing new policies and procedures when necessary was important stating, "you have to put a lot of time to develop the business." P03 stated "we started operating on a principle called PDCA. PDCA stands for plan, do, check, and adjust." P04 contended that conducting research and analyzing what competitors offered helped with planning and ultimately set the business apart from other businesses. Minority small business owners who implement effective strategic planning practices could transform their firms and move them in a direction of growth and progress.

Table 2

Strategic Planning

Planning Strategies	Number of Participants	Percentage
Written plans	4	100%
Financial planning	4	100%
Social media	3	75%

Understanding how strategic planning is fundamental to small business owner growth and sustainability might help minority small firm owners achieve success. P01 claimed that planning and organization were key attributes to a successful minority small business owner stating, “100%, being organized is the biggest key to everything we do.” P02 asserted that developing a business plan helped further goal setting, marketing objectives, and when opening their business. P03 and P04 both contended that strategic planning helped them move their businesses from their homes into brick and mortar establishments. Muhammad (2015) advised that organizations run by leaders who implement strategic planning processes perform better than that do not use strategic planning processes. All of the participants introduced strategic planning processes to set goals and move their firms in a positive direction.

Dearman et al. (2018) claimed that owners and managers of new ventures must decide whether preparing a formal business plan is feasible for their business. The type of venture and owner characteristics could determine the propensity of an entrepreneur’s decision to prepare a formal business plan (Dearman et al., 2018). P02 planned and organized their business using a detailed business plan that explained every aspect of the business. P02 shared that it is important to constantly revamp certain practices especially when business is up and down. Essential strategic management practices involve performance assessment and revised practices based on the environment and making changes when necessary (Guerras-Martina, Madhokb, & Montoro-Sánchezc, 2014).

Many successful business owners manage their firms by implementing appropriate planning and organizing techniques. Not all minority small business owners use formal business plans. P01, P03, and P04 disclosed that they did not have formalized business plans when beginning their firms but did implement written planning strategies that helped them maintain and grow their firms. P01 described how the development of a safety protocol kept employees safe. P03 spoke about a technique coined “PCDA, plan, do, check, and adjust” that helped with planning and organizing the business. P04 contended that even though a formal business plan was not in place initially, note taking helped with the development of business objectives. Minority small firm owners who employ strategic planning practices help sustain their firms.

Strategic planning is also important when managing the finances of a small firm. Suitable funding and the implementation of financial management procedures can support small business owner sustainability (Kozan & Akdeniz, 2014). P01, P02, P03, and P04 agreed that financial planning was important. Each of the four participants discussed how family and friends supported their business financially. P04 received donations from parents. P03 mentioned that when in a financial bind an aunt and brother helped. P02 maintained that personal finances and family and friends were a major part of financial strategies at times. P01 mentioned that when starting, business credit was not available, so other avenues for financing helped grow the business. Chavunduka, Chimunhu, and Sifile (2015) found that there was a positive correlation between strategic planning and organizational performance measures regarding net income and return on investment and market share, among others.

Minority small business owners should implement effective financial strategies to keep their businesses sustainable in the long-term. The role of finance in strategic planning and the decision-making process is crucial (Calopa, 2017). The participants understood the importance of a healthy financial profile and often made changes to their initial management strategies when managing their finances throughout the life of their businesses. P02 stopped certain practices at times while growing their business to ensure financial stability and revealed that at one point relocating the business was necessary to cut costs. P03 stated, “when you want to grow you always need money, and in order to get to where we are right now, we applied a strategy called delayed gratification.” P04 contended that during certain times of the year they employ five full-time employees and five part-time employees. Minority small firm owners who implement financial planning practices to forecast future performance and measure the financial fitness of their businesses could experience long-term success.

It is essential that minority small business owners who plan strategically recognize areas in their business that require outside help. Keating, Geiger, and McLoughlin (2013) argued that small business owners must identify the areas they lack business competence and be willing to seek outside assistance to complete tasks for said areas. P01 and P03 echoed this sentiment by confirming that part of their financial planning strategy was to hire an accountant to manage their business finances. P01 stated, “if there is a problem you want to have the ability to go to that individual to find out what it is that occurred and how can we fix this.” P02 used financial software to manage the firm's finances. P04 confirmed that hiring a best friend helped with business. P01, P02, P03, and P04 asserted that understanding and addressing their limitations allowed them to have a better grasp on their business and helped them develop strategies to overcome limitations.

A part of some small business owners’ financial strategy is to lease or purchase a brick and mortar establishment. Minority small business owners who are accessible to consumers in a physical location help customers gain confidence in the quality of the products or services they offer. P01, P02, P03, and P04 each acknowledged that they invested in brick and mortar establishments to grow their businesses and to provide easy access to customers. P04 stated, “for sure you can reach more of the masses in brick-and-mortar.” P03 shared that having a brick and mortar establishment allowed customers to see what they did, make appointments, and provide good customer service. Each of the participants believed that owning brick and mortar establishments helped them establish positive relationships with customers that led to business growth and financial sustainability.

Social media is another important strategic planning tool that minority small enterprise owners could use to positively benefit their firms because it offers a way for them to communicate with, listen to and learn from their customers in a less conventional way (Momany & Alshboul, 2016). Most of the participants discussed using social media as a part of their strategic planning. Jones, Borgman, and Ulusoy (2015) confirmed that small firm owners benefit from the opportunities presented through social media that might otherwise be unavailable through limited access to traditional resources to market their products and financial constraints. Business owners versed in how the Internet and social media impact business are more successful (Jones et al., 2015). Social media is a cost-effective strategy that small business owners can implement to develop, advertise, and sustain their businesses (Jones et al., 2015). P02, P03, and P04 each recognized that a major change to their initial planning strategy was incorporating social media. Small business owners could benefit from using social media by gaining new customers with minimal effort since it is more productive than many conventional means of communicating (Momany & Alshboul, 2016). P02 claimed that the popularity of social media led to a change in their firm's planning strategy for marketing because it was an inexpensive way to market the business. P03 added, "now that we have the Internet, 45 maybe 50 % of business now comes from the Internet." P04 shared that their business strategy now includes social media for advertising and marketing. P02, P03, and P04 found that social media was an effective marketing tool when growing and maintaining their firms.

Small firm owners could increase business opportunities and communication with their customer base via social media (Balan & Rege, 2017). P02 claimed that, "with Facebook, you not only reach your customer base, but you reach their friends and their friend's friends." Many social media users communicate using social networking platforms (Cardon & Marshall, 2015). Balan and Rege (2017) found that many business owners recognize the opportunities gained by advertising and managing social customer relationships through social media. P04 revealed that at first social media was not a part of their firms planning strategy but soon realized it was necessary to grow their business claiming, “we were losing business I think to social media, especially since its free advertisement.” Firm owners could use social media platforms to connect to larger audiences. Hetz, Dawson, and Cullen (2015) asserted that social media encourages social capital and relationships amongst people. It is vital that small firm owners understand the significance of using social media and how it leads to business success (Balan & Rege, 2017). Small business owners could better understand customer needs by marketing using social media platforms. Small firm owners could also maximize the number of people reached by having a social presence (Balan & Rege, 2017). P04 mentioned that social media was essential for a business to thrive and grow. Each participant noted that social media helped them connect with customers and build their business with minimal financial impact.

The theme regarding strategic planning aligned with the literature and general systems theory in that strategic planning involves the interaction of many aspects of the daily business operations. Von Bertalanffy (1972) defined a system as a complex interaction of elements. One aspect of small business owners managing a business is strategic planning. Some minority small business owners use strategic planning to make changes as necessary to sustain their businesses. When applied to business scenarios, firm owners could use the general system theory to plan and change business goals and practices when necessary to further the success of their businesses.

Theme 3: Building Strong Customer and Employee Relationships

The third key theme identified during data collection was the need for minority small business owners to build strong relationships with employees and customers (see Table 3). Small business growth and success are dependent on new customers (Cook & Wolverton, 2015). Business owners should align products with strategy and customer expectations (Miles, 2013). Customers are becoming increasingly more involved in ensuring their needs and standards of service are met (Lipiäinen, 2015). Minority small firm owners who provide good customer service keep customers supporting their businesses and could lead to increased profits. Understanding how to build a customer base is critical for small business owner success (Galvão, de Carvalho, de Oliveira, & de Medeiros, 2018). Small business owners who create external relationships positively impact the sustainability of their firm (Anderson & Ullah, 2014; Keating et al., 2013).

Table 3

Building Strong Customer and Employee Relationships

Building Relationships	Number of Participants	Percentage of Responses
Customer Relationships	4	100%
Employee Relationships	4	100%

Armstrong (2012) claimed that small business owners offer good service to retain loyal customers and to enhance word-of-mouth advertising. It is essential that minority small business owners provide good customer service when their goal is to sustain a successful business in the long-term. Participants P02, P03, and P04 own brick and mortar establishments where customers go to the business to procure products and services. The three participants mentioned that having brick and mortar establishments allowed them to better interact with their customers. P03's establishment included a lobby with tables and chairs aimed at making customers feel at home when visiting his establishment. P03's business also featured amenities that included a wall mounted television, rental computers, snacks, and beverages to enhance customer experiences. In a social media review, one customer wrote, "a very clean professional ran operation, super cool owner." Another customer wrote, "it was a great environment and had excellent service." P04 incorporated a seating area and vending machines into their establishment to create a comfortable environment for customers when visiting the business and to keep them coming back. In a social media review, one customer wrote, "I love this place, family oriented. I never had a problem in 20 years." All participants indicated that good customer service was the key to owning a successful business.

Small firm owners who recognize and cater to unfulfilled customer needs can generate additional business and build stronger customer relationships (Armstrong, 2012). P01 stated, "I go out and talk to business owners in terms of what their needs are and try to sell our business to their business to allow us to be able to have a relationship." Successful minority small firm owners must provide responsive and responsible customer service that is timely, professional, and courteous to all customers. P04 stated, "customer service is key to developing a relationship with your clients because if you don't have that then why should they come to you?" Each of the participants recognized that happy customers kept their firms open and thriving.

Small business owners who focus on good customer service and quality management, could improve their firm's performance (Basu & Bhola, 2016). All participants agreed that good communication was important when building positive employee and customer relationships. In a review on a social media platform, one of P02's customers stated, "love it, what a wonderful shopping experience." In another review, another customer declared, "on my first time to the shop I found exactly what I needed with the help of the friendly staff." Another customer exclaimed, "love their selection, quality, and above all their customer service." P02 also mentioned that customers often say, "I just love you guys, you have the nicest staff, you guys are so nice." Small firm owners should maintain good customer service and communication skills and consider customer input in every aspect of their business (Galvao et al., 2018). P01 mentioned that building positive relationships with customers helped settle payment issues amicably. P04 asserted, "we value ourselves on customer service and treat everyone the same." P03 reported that without a steady customer base, their business would fail. All participants understood the importance of good customer service and implemented practices that kept customers supporting their businesses.

Building and supporting positive customer relationships could pose challenges for business owners but doing so has considerable advantages. The study participants presented a strong argument for developing and sustaining good customer relationships. Business owners could sustain good customer relationships if they incorporate good customer service into every aspect of the business. The business owner must always focus on ensuring the business attracts customers. Simply stated, customers are essential to the growth and success of small business owners. Cook and Wolverton (2015) found that a strategic performance indicator for small firm owners is an understanding of the importance of good customer service. The goal of each small business owner should be to provide good customer service.

Employee relationships were also important to minority small business owner success. All participants in the study acknowledged that positive employee relationships were vital to remaining in business for longer than 5 years. P03 indicated that keeping employees happy and investing in the business helped keep their business successful. Barnes, Collier, and Robinson (2014) found that employee behavior was a key indicator of customer satisfaction. All participants agreed that focusing on employee relationships was important because it led to increased profits and sustainable firms. Small business owners who frequently communicate with their employees build solid relationships and promote positive work environments (Ntalianis, Dyer & Vandenberghe, 2015). P02 stated, "it is just a win-win and when you know your staff works in a place that they enjoy working. It makes for a happy employee, and they are usually happier at their job, and it comes through." Each participant discussed that focusing on employee relationships helped their firms grow and remain successful.

Ntalianis et al. (2015) found that employees working for business owners that encourage relational contracts are likely to feel fulfilled. P04 mentioned that good communication helped employees realize they were a vital aspect of the business.

Business owners who communicate effectively display reliability and dependability (Ntalianis et al., 2015). P04 stated that “when starting my firm, I did not include my employees when making major decisions. However, after being in business for over 30 years, I learned that it is important to take employee and customer feedback into perspective when implementing practices to sustain and grow the business.” P03’s strategy to encourage employee relations was to manage employees by being present at the business while managing the day-to-day business operations alongside employees. P01 also used this management strategy to gain and build trust with employees. Gaining employee trust encourages positive employee performance that leads to lasting business success.

The findings aligned with Axelrod (2015) who found that successful managers (a) recognize employee talents, (b) help develop employees’ self-awareness, (c) promote breakthrough of blind spots, and (d) build trusting relationships with each employee, which could result in employee commitment, company loyalty, and customer satisfaction. Chang, O’Neil, and Travaglione’s (2016) concluded that employee trust in managers is an essential aspect influencing business performance and through social interaction, trust evolves. P02’s customer reviews, length in business, and interview data helped to determine the level of customer satisfaction received as a result of fostering good employee and customer relationships. P01 encouraged positive employee relationships by being present at the business while following the same rules and regulations they were expected to follow. P04 nurtured employee relationships by offering incentives, buying lunch, and taking employees on trips. Minority small firm owners could gain employee trust and loyalty by nurturing employee relationships.

Minority small business owners building strong customer and employee relationships relates to the general systems theory because relationships are an important aspect of growing and maintaining a successful small business. Small business owners cannot maintain or grow their businesses without buy-in from employees and customers. The general systems theory relies on multiple aspects of a system working together. Business owners who build positive relationships through trust and effective communication help ensure that all aspects of the business work together to make a firm sustainable.

Applications to Professional Practice

I revealed three major themes shared by four minority small business owners in the midwestern region of the United States who sustained their firms for longer than 5 years. New or existing minority small firm owners could maintain their businesses and develop new strategies that lead to long-term sustainability by employing the findings from this study. Potential researchers could use study findings to form the basis of future recommendations for strategic management actions as well as further potential studies. Potential minority business owners could develop probable resolutions that address management needs by implementing the strategies identified through study findings.

Minority small firm owners could apply management strategies that assist them with remaining sustainable, thereby adding revenues to local economies through the findings of this study. Future minority small firm owners and current business leaders could benefit from the information contained in this discussion by applying such ideas to professional practice. Minority small firm owners might find the themes identified in the study helpful when establishing a small business in the midwestern region of the United States.

Implications for Social Change

Fifty percent of small firm owners experience failure within their first 5 years of operation (Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council, 2016). The strategies reported in the current research study as shared by the interviewed minority small business owners could invoke positive social change. New and current minority small business owners could have direction regarding successful ways to manage and maintain a small business by implementing strategies discovered through the study. An implication for positive social change that could occur as a result of this study is a reduction of small business failures which could result in retaining skilled employees. By providing potential minority small business owners with successful management strategies, they could gain a deeper understanding of the importance of management strategies when maintaining a successful business in the long-term.

Positive social change deriving from the study could lead to added financial security for minority small firm owners and employees, additional employment opportunities for local community members, and additional revenues in the local economy. Minority small firm owner success is more likely to occur when minority small firm owners receive proper guidance about managing and maintaining a small business.

Minority small firm owners could use study findings to employ the appropriate management strategies necessary to succeed in business for longer than 5 years.

Recommendations for Action

Some minority small business owners experience issues with sustaining their firms for longer than 5 years. Minority small business owners should take actions that help them develop successful management strategies, which could increase the resiliency of their firms. Minority small firm owners seeking to gain insight into the direction of a small business should use effective management strategies. Minority small firm owners could use study findings to gain additional knowledge regarding how they could advance their firms and increase the likelihood that they realize long-term success. Local government agency personnel pursuing an understanding of how to guide the success of minority small business owners in a manner that boosts tax receipts could use study findings to their benefit. Minority small firm owners who currently experience setbacks, seek to reinvigorate their current businesses, and seek to excel in business could benefit from the shared experiences of the four interviewed minority small firm owners.

Minority small firm owners should examine the benefits of management strategies across time. Entrepreneurs should continuously examine management strategies that lead to long-term sustainability. Minority small firm owners who recognize challenges and implement successful management strategies could avoid the failure of their firm. Recommended actions for minority small firm owners are (a) to understand the value of networking with their peers, (b) to strategically plan all aspects of their business and make to changes to those plans when necessary, and (c) to realize the importance of building positive customer and employee relationships. I recommend that minority small business owners consider the study results and understand that they could increase their chances of success because the findings offer additional insight, resources, and guidance to overcome some uncertainties involved with opening and a successfully managing and sustaining a small business. Minority small business owners could stay ahead of their competitors by networking, strategically planning, providing good customer, and by satisfying employees.

I will share the results of the study with local business associations and the Michigan Chamber of Commerce. Sharing the results with these agencies could present a potential opportunity for the distribution of study results at conferences and training events. Minority small business owners could also benefit from study information while networking to further business opportunities. The dissemination of study results could also occur through peer-reviewed publishing. The four study participants might gain useful knowledge from the study results. I will provide the four participants with a summary of the published results for their records.

Recommendations for Further Research

Recommendations for further research consists of potential researchers expanding the focus of the research to include minority small firm owners who operate with more than 50 employees, operate in varying industries, and operate in different geographical locations. The sample size limited the study and restricted the transferability of the findings. The information provided by study participants might not be applicable characteristics of all successful minority small business owners. Future researchers could increase transferability by expanding the focus of the research.

Another limitation of the study involved the responses of minority small firm owners. Minority medium and large firm owners might share comparable responses or behaviors to the minority small firm owner participants in the study. Only four participants participated in the study. Future researchers could explore the management strategies of minority small firm owners who increase their profits and examine the relevance of gender, firm size, and age variances amongst minority small firm owner using mixed-methods and quantitative designs. Future researchers could identify additional areas to research by focusing on the specific themes identified through the study including, (a) networking with other small business owners, (b) strategic planning, and (c) building strong customer and employee relationships. Another recommendation is for future researchers to focus on the management strategies of successful minority firm owners and minority small firm owners who were unable to sustain their business for 5 years. Conducting additional research in such areas could afford business owners and government leaders with the opportunity to continue support, augment resources, and bolster local economies and communities.

Reflections

The doctoral study process taught me that I could accomplish the goals I set for myself and surmount any mountains placed before me. During the process to complete my doctoral study, I learned a wealth of information regarding the management strategies of minority small business owners sustaining their firms longer than years in the midwestern region of the United States. The process was long, complex, and arduous at times. Realizing the potential impact of study results and how they could benefit minority small business owners and local communities, my efforts paid off. I was easily able to find study participants. Through the information provided by study participants, I was able to add to current literature regarding successful management strategies leading to minority small firm sustainability. As the researcher of the study, I fully invested myself in the research process to ensure that I completed the study in the most effective manner possible.

I approached the research process using an impartial approach and exclusively relied on the data to address the responses to the research question. The study participants were more than willing to share their lived experiences related to the management strategies they employed to sustain their firms in the long-term. I remained neutral throughout the data collection process while ensuring that the study participants were comfortable at all times. I used bracketing to reduce biases about the study's findings when analyzing the data to identify emergent themes. Sorsa et al. (2015) found that bracketing reduces researcher bias. Bracketing helps researchers mitigate assumptions about the focus of the research through subjective engagement with the study data (Peters & Halcomb, 2015). I used bracketing to lessen personal perceptions about the research data.

Conclusion

The purpose of the qualitative, explorative multiple case study was to explore the management strategies that minority small business owners used to sustain their businesses for longer than 5 years. Minority small firm owners contribute greatly to the United States economy. Successful minority small firm owners contribute to the economy through job creation, which leads to growing economies (Bewaji et al., 2015). Despite having a positive impact on local, national, and global economies, minority small firm owners continue to face challenges related to sustainability (Bengtsson & Hsu, 2015). A greater comprehension of the management strategies minority small firm owners employ to remain sustainable longer than 5 years is necessary if minority small firm leaders, potential minority small business owners, and public service organizations intend to improve the business potential of this group. I collected data from semistructured interviews, company documents, data from company social media pages, and company website data. Joslin and Muller (2016) suggested that methodological triangulation helps researchers identify key themes. I used methodological triangulation to aid in the identification of themes deriving from multiple data sources. Birt et al. (2016) found that data saturation ensues when no additional information emerges. I reached data saturation when no themes emerged after the initial interviews and member checking.

Existing and future minority small firm owners could apply the major themes discovered in the study to manage and realize success in their businesses. Minority small firm owners must employ proper management strategies to maintain a successful business. An in-depth review of study participants' responses and the cross-examination of the multiple data sources yielded additional sources of information regarding the management strategies minority small business owners employed to remain sustainable in business. Through the outcomes deriving from the study, minority small business owners and potential researchers could benefit from the recommendations for action and future research. Minority and nonminority small firm owners could realize positive social change by applying study findings to their daily business operations.

I identified three major themes during data analysis. Building upon the general systems theory, the research participants revealed that minority small business owners placed significant value on certain management strategies that supported sustainability. Existing, new, and future minority small firm owners could benefit from understanding and addressing the successful management strategies reported by the minority small firm owners who participated in the study.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Location: ______________________

Participant: _____________________

Date/Time: _____________________

A. Introduce:

   a. Thank you for allowing this small business owner interview today

   b. Introduce self to participant(s).

   c. Main Research question: What management strategies do minority small business owners use to sustain their business longer than 5 years?

B. Present consent form, go over contents, and answer questions and concerns of participants.

C. Participant signs consent form

D. Give participant copy of consent form.

E. Turn on recording device.

F. Follow procedure to introduce participants with pseudonym/coded identification and note the date and time.

G. Span approximately 60 minutes for responses to the 10 interview questions, including any additional, follow-up questions.

H. Begin interview with question #1; follow through to the final question.

I. Follow up with additional questions.

J. End interview sequence; discuss member checking with participants.

K. Thank the participants for their part in the study. Reiterate contact numbers for follow up questions and concerns from participants.

L. End protocol.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What management strategies did you use when starting your small business?
2. How did you apply the management strategies when starting your small business?
3. What modifications did you make to your initial management strategies that helped grow your business during the first 5 years?
4. What motivated you to begin your own small business?
5. What barriers did you face when starting your own small business in the first 5 years?
6. How did you address the barriers you faced?
7. What community or social resources did you use that contribute to your success?
8. What financial resources helped you start and grow your small business?
9. What opportunities assisted you when launching your small business?
10. What information would you like to add to the interview subject?

Appendix C: Letter of Invitation

Date: ______________

Dear Minority Small Business Owners,

My name is Tawny Barnes, a student at Walden University. I am conducting a study on minority small business owners to complete my doctorate. I need your help to identify the management strategies used to succeed in business in [redacted].

I am requesting to conduct an interview. The interview will take about one hour. With your permission and consent, I will ask you questions and record your answers. Your personal information will remain confidential, and will not be published or shared with any individuals or organizations. The plan is to share the results of this study with you, business agencies, and organizations, including [redacted], for-profit and non-profit agencies, and the local Chamber of Commerce.

Participants will not receive compensation for study participation. Your participation can make a difference in fostering business success and employment for minority small business owners in [redacted].

If you decide to participate in this study, contact me by phone at [redacted] or by e-mail at [redacted].

Thanks for your time and consideration,
Sincerely,
Tawny Barnes, MBA
DBA Candidate Walden University