


2019

Strategies for Small Business Sustainability

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Victor Adoukonou

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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2019

Abstract

Strategies for Small Business Sustainability

by

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

March 2019

Abstract

Small businesses represent more than 99% of all employers in the United States, but more than 50% of small businesses have failed before 5 years. Climate change, digitization, and social media contribute to a paradigm shift in consumers' habits, as more consumers have become environmentally and social justice conscious. Business leaders who are unable to follow the consumers' trends and changes of habit may not succeed in sustaining their businesses. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies owners of small businesses in the District of Columbia use to sustain their businesses for longer than 5 years while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations. The conceptual framework was the sustainability development theory. Data were collected from 5 small retailers through face-to-face, semistructured interviews, observations, field notes, and reviews of documents related to business sustainability. Data analysis was based on the thematic analysis model, which involved a process of organizing, coding, arranging data into common themes relevant to the research question and interpreting of the information. Member checking was used to enhance the credibility and validity of the data. Emerging themes included business establishment planning, sustainability planning, and sustainability factors use. The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by providing information to entrepreneurs about successful strategies for small business sustainability, which can lead to business owners, employees, and communities living and working in a human-oriented, prosperous, and healthy environment.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my mother, Comfort Kossiwa Alagbe, and late father, Ognandon Adoukonou, for being my heroes and my inspirers who taught me to dream big and the sky is not the limit but another step. I also dedicate this study to my family, especially my children. To my children, I urge you to put God first in everything, surround yourselves with positivity, love knowledge, and strive for excellence. Trust in God but believe in yourself. Dream big, chase your dream with hard work and know that you are limitless. May the Lord guide you, bless you, make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you always.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small businesses create wealth, economic growth, and development in the world (Blankson, Cowan, & Darley, 2017). Small business owners contribute to the economy by increasing countries' gross domestic product and living conditions (Ye & Leipnik, 2013). Small businesses have comprised 99% of all employers and accounted for 64% of net new private sector jobs in the United States (Diler, 2017). In the District of Columbia, small businesses make up 98.2% of all companies and employ 48.5% of the workforce (Small Business Administration [SBA], Office of Advocacy, 2017). However, more than 50% of small businesses have failed within 5 years of startup (SBA, Office of Advocacy, 2016).

Some of the issues facing small business leaders include lack of sale, investment, financial assistance, talent, visibility, and information to make strategic decisions (Warner & Zheng, 2013). Other issues include lack of leadership, innovation, and relevant growth strategic plan (Parsa, Van der Rest, Smith, Parsa, & Bujisic, 2015). Some of the challenges small businesses face in general include excessive operational cost, turnover, and bureaucracy (Parsa et al., 2015; Warner & Zheng, 2013). Scholars and business leaders have been trying many strategies to increase small firms' survival, profit, and long-term growth. In this study, I focused on the importance and extent of sustainability as a strategy to ensure small business profit and growth over the times (Sandvik, Duhan, & Sandvik, 2014). The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore strategies small retailers' owners use to sustain businesses beyond 5 years in the District of Columbia while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations.

Background of the Problem

Several researchers have pointed out the advantages of sustainability for businesses, governments, nonprofit organizations, and the community (Dyllick & Muff, 2016; Hörisch, Freedman, & Schaltegger, 2014). Small business leaders struggle to make profit and compete over a period (Wang, Hawkins, & Berman, 2014). Sustainability may be the pathway to small businesses profitability and long-term growth (Dyllick & Muff, 2016). Sustainability is an effective strategy to increase business sales, investment and financial assistance, talent, workforce diversity and productivity, company visibility, and goodwill (Dyllick & Muff, 2016). Sustainability also provides tools for businesses to take advantage of digitization and reduce operation costs and employee turnover.

Additionally, sustainability is a driver of innovation, ethics, employee motivation, and high long-term profitability (Dyllick & Muff, 2016; Wilshusen & MacDonald, 2017). As a result, sustainability can lead to a competitive advantage.

Sustainability is a broad concept that researchers and policymakers apply in many industries including business, community development, public services, and nonprofit organizations (Gázquez-Abad, Huertas-García, Vázquez-Gómez, & Romeo, 2015). Understanding strategies business owners use to sustain their companies beyond 5 years from startup while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations may be useful to determine the economic, social, and ecologic benefits of sustainability for small businesses. Newer and existing business owners may use findings from this study to benchmark the best strategies to build a business model to ensure profitability, growth, and competitive edge (Boyd, 2015).

Problem Statement

Small businesses comprised 99% of all employers in the United States and accounted for 64% of net new jobs from 1993 to 2011 (SBA, Office of Advocacy, 2017). However, more than 50% of small businesses have failed within 5 years of startup (SBA, Office of Advocacy, 2016). The general business problem was that some business owners embark on the small business journey without adequate strategies for sustainability. The specific business problem was some small business owners lack strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore strategies small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations. The targeted population consisted five retail business owners who have launched and sustained a business longer than 5 years in the District of Columbia. The implication for positive social change includes the potential to provide information about the economic, cultural, social, and structural issues that prevent the small business owners from succeeding in business in the long term. Strategies that the business owners used to sustain the company may help potential entrepreneurs to thrive in business. The increase in the success rate of small businesses could be significant for local economies because small businesses owners contribute to economic growth and can provide more employment opportunities and innovation in communities.

Nature of the Study

The three primary research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Jiang, Gu, & Wu, 2017). I selected the qualitative method to conduct this research. The qualitative method is appropriate when the researcher's goal is to explore in-depth social phenomena and to gain knowledge about individuals' experiences (Fu, 2019).

Researchers use the quantitative method to examine relationships between or among statistical variables to evaluate and estimate values based on data collected from samples (Abdelkader & Mansouri, 2019). The quantitative method is appropriate when the focus is on observable and objective data and facts that can be quantified to examine variables' relationships or causality (Gunasekara & Zheng, 2019). The quantitative approach was not appropriate for this study because the study did not involve collecting and analyzing statistical data and the intention was not to draw conclusions based on a hypothesis.

Furthermore, with the quantitative method, researchers may not be able to provide an in-depth understanding of lived experiences and the complexity of the phenomenon of decision-making in business. Mixed method researchers combine both the qualitative and quantitative elements. The quantitative aspect of a mixed method approach made the mixed method inappropriate to this study (Borrelli, Chao, & Su, 2019). Because my goal was to explore in-depth the strategies used by small business owners to sustain business beyond 5 years, the qualitative method was appropriate for this study.

For this study, I used the multiple-case study design. Before I chose the case study, I explored the ethnography, the phenomenology, and the narrative designs (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Ethnographic researchers seek to describe and interpret the shared

patterns of the culture of groups, neighborhoods, or organizations through the long-term involvement of setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I did not consider the ethnography design because the intent of this study was not to commit to conduct long-term research onsite for an extended period. Phenomenologists seek to understand the essence of the experience and a lived phenomenon (Jackson, Vaughan, & Brown, 2018).

Phenomenology was not the preferred choice for this study because the goal was not to understand the essence participants are experiencing a phenomenon (Chan & Walker, 2015). Narrative researchers focus on probing the way people chronicle their lives and try to understand the diversity and the various levels included in the stories (Baú, 2016). The narrative design was inappropriate for this research because the purpose was not to study the life one or two individuals by gathering data through the collection of their stories (Yin, 2017). A case study designs requires developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple case to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena (Yin, 2017). The case study design was more suitable to answer questions about *how*, *what*, and *why* to understand strategies small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations.

Research Question

What strategies do small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years from startup while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to start your business?

2. What strategies have you used to sustain your business beyond 5 years from startup while fulfilling your firm's social responsibility obligations?
3. Based on your experiences, what have been the key determinants contributing to the sustainability of your business?
4. What strategies have you used to enhance stakeholders' values in your organization?
5. What are the benefits of the sustainability strategy for your business?
6. What challenges did you overcome to sustain your business beyond 5 years while fulfilling their firm's social responsibility obligations?
7. How, if at all, have you modified the initial strategies you had in place to sustain your business beyond 5 years while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations?
8. What other elements, comments, or information would you like to add to strategies you have used to sustain your business?

Conceptual Framework

Ward and Dubos in 1972 developed the modern sustainability development theory that was the conceptual framework for this study. Ward and Dubos (1972) posited that uncontrolled population growth and the impact of human activities on the natural system could lead to a calamity, calling for innovation and a fundamental shift in ways humans interact with the environment. The works of Ward and Dubos underpinned the declaration of the United Nations conference on the human environment, held in Stockholm in 1972 as the first in a series of international conferences on the threatening

ecological crisis (Du Pisani, 2006). In the 1980s, scholars contributed to popularizing the new paradigm of sustainable development theory to balance the need for economic growth with environmental protection and social equity (Worster, 1995).

In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as Brundtland Commission, published the current sustainability theory model. The World Commission on Environment and Development used four elements to develop the corporate sustainability concept: (a) sustainable development, (b) corporate social responsibility, (c) stakeholder theory, and (d) corporate accountability theory (Wilson, 2003). With the understanding of sustainability concepts, small business owners can achieve a durable competitive advantage by saving money through innovative strategies to produce low-cost and ecologic friendly goods and services. Furthermore, business leaders can increase their revenue by embellishing the image of their businesses to attract more customers, investors, diverse and motivated talent, and business partners.

Operational Definitions

Business capital: Business capital involves the resources available for entrepreneurs to use to create a business and to generate income (Sundararajan & Sundararajan, 2015). The capital includes human capital, social capital, cultural capital, and the economic capital.

Business intelligence: Business intelligence is a set of technologies small businesses' leaders use to collect, store, disseminate, and produce internal and external information to make strategic decisions to get the competitive advantage on the market (Horakova & Skalska, 2013).

Business strategies: Business strategies are a set of vision, mission, values, practices, approaches and technologies that confer a firm a competitive advantage on a market (Pattinson, 2016).

Business sustainability: Business sustainability refers to business practice that creates competitive advantages through higher customer value by balancing stakeholders' interest, environmental protection goals, and community well-being (Wilshusen & MacDonald, 2017).

Entrepreneur: An entrepreneur is someone who discovers unsatisfied needs in the community and creates an organization to realize them to make a profit or for a philanthropic goal (Pontikes & Barnett, 2017).

Small business: A small business is a business organized for profit, independently owned and operated primarily within the United States. An enterprise that has 500 or fewer employees and annual sales up to \$38.5 million that contributes to the U.S. economy through payment of taxes and job creation (Buculescu, 2013). The business may be a sole proprietorship, partnership, corporation or any other legal form. (SBA, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts that the researcher presumes to be true (Grant, 2014), and may be derived from the researcher's experiences and cultural identity. Researchers use assumptions to develop theories, research methods, and design and to influence the findings (Wolgemuth, Hicks, & Agosto, 2017). I considered three assumptions in this

study. The first assumption was that a qualitative approach with a multiple case study design would be appropriate for answering the research question in this study. The second assumption was that the participants would provide honest responses to questions. I assumed that small business owners would give accurate explanations of strategies they have used to sustain business beyond 5 years while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations. The third assumption was that all the interviewees would be able to respond to questions in a clear and understandable English to avoid irregularities in the data collection.

Limitations

Limitations are potential factors beyond the researcher's control and consists of weaknesses of the study (Marhsall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers assess the business sustainability from financial, social, and environmental data. One of the limitations is that some participants could have been unfamiliar with in-depth questions and been reluctant to provide accurate information, which could limit the accuracy of findings. Another limitation was that the study was about collecting data within 5 years at least, and the participants may not have had reliable data storage to remember events precisely and accurately. This may have limited the authenticity and the objectivity of the responses. Third, there were only five interviewees in this study at the rate of one participant per District of Columbia principal geographical subdivisions: northwest, southwest, northeast, southeast, and downtown. My expectation was that the opinion of participants would reflect the views of all small business owners in the whole capital city. However,

realities may have differed from one geographic subdivision to another, which can limit generalization of the findings and the transferability of this study.

Delimitations

A delimitation is a technique that researchers use to limit the scope and shape the boundaries of a study (Sung, Kim, & Chang, 2015). The study was about small business owners in the District of Columbia. The study excludes big businesses and small businesses outside Washington, DC. The participants were retail business owners who legally own businesses in the District of Columbia within 5 years and longer. Younger and nonregistered companies were not considered. Finally, the targeted companies were the small business owners operating in the retailing business. Except for the location, the participants' gender, age, race, immigration status, and any other characteristic was not considered.

Significance of the Study

Value to Business

This study has a potential value to businesses because the findings may be useful to determine the economic, environmental and social benefits of sustainability for small businesses (Boyd, 2015). Furthermore, the discoveries could enhance the understanding of small business owners on how to sustain their businesses in the long term. The success stories of small business owners who engaged their companies on the sustainability pathway may inspire other entrepreneurs to follow (Kerr & Kerr, 2016). Finally, with this study, I analyzed strategies small business owners could use to build a robust and durable business model.

Contribution to Business Practice

The results of this study can contribute to business practice in three ways. First, small business owners may acquire strategies that lead to an increased business performance in the long term (Taneja, Pryor, & Hayek, 2016). Second, with the findings, business owners may understand that sustainability is a potential pathway to innovation and creativity, goodwill, talent recruitment and retention, access to capital, profitability, and competitive advantage (Saunila et al., 2014; Senge, 2010). Finally, small business owners may learn how to align firms' profitability goals with the protection of the environment, the defense of workforce and the stakeholders' interests, and to comply with regulations to avoid costly litigation and penalties (Shibia & Barako, 2017).

Implications for Social Change

The community can benefit from the results of this study in several ways. First, if sustainability is a pathway to a more significant competitive advantage, small business owners may be more willing to participate in green programs in the community and invest more in the well-being of the workforce. The increase of small firms in the community leads to job creation, poverty reduction, and the achievement of a higher standard of living (Shibia & Barako, 2017). Employees' families and communities benefit when individuals prosper in a healthy environment, work in a fair workplace, and have increased opportunities for employment.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of conducting this multiple case study was to explore the strategies small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years while fulfilling their

social responsibility obligations. The central question of this study was: What strategies do small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years from startup while at the same time fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations? This study is important because sustainability can be a pathway to small businesses performance (Vij & Bedi, 2016). Sustainable companies could drive decent and fair employment, innovation and economic freedom, long-term profitability and revenue for local governments, and better living conditions for communities (Hahn, Figge, Aragón-Correa, & Sharma, 2017). In this section, I provide an exhaustive review of prior research to contribute to better understanding the scope of sustainability.

I analyzed contemporary peer-reviewed research related to entrepreneurship, small business, strategic management, strategic planning, business intelligence, innovation, sustainable development, corporate social responsibility, corporate accountability, stakeholder theory, consumer shift paradigm, and long-term business profitability. I searched a variety of multidisciplinary social and human sciences, economics, and management and business databases. The compilation of data emanated primarily from ProQuest Central, ABI/INFORM Complete, Emerald Insight, and SAGE Journals. I also searched Google Scholar, Walden Library Dissertations/Books, government sites, and other relevant sources.

I used the following keywords: *sustainability, climate change, profitability, innovation, small business performance, corporate social responsibility, ethics, business intelligent, digitization, stakeholders, leadership sustainability, business success, entrepreneurship, and capital*. I organized the literature review into sections including

corporate sustainability, environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, social sustainability theory, and entrepreneurship and small business theory. I ensured at least 85% of the total sources are peer-reviewed with a publication date 5-years or less from 2019, the anticipated completion year. This doctoral study consists of 488 references of which 467 or 96% are peer-reviewed articles. Among the peer-reviewed articles, 448 or 96% were published between 2014 and 2019.

Corporate Sustainability

Sustainability is a complex concept (Aragon-Correa, Marcus, Rivera, & Kenworthy, 2017), and researchers need to be specific when using the concept of sustainability to avoid ambiguity (Pantelica, Sakalb, & Zehetner, 2016). Regardless of its use and areas of application, sustainability refers to something long term (Aragon-Correa et al., 2017). Broadly, corporate sustainability is the ability of an organization to maintain practices over the time (Catlin, Luchs, & Phipps, 2017). Corporate sustainability is also the balance between the economic, social, and environmental goals of an organization (Hansen & Schaltegger, 2016). Corporate sustainability involves profitability, long-term growth, innovation and creativity, and competitive advantage over the rivals. Every sustainable corporate strategy should involve the equilibrium between the three interrelated elements of economy, social, and environment (Krauss, 2017).

Development sustainability implies satisfying the needs of current generation without compromising the chance of the future generation to satisfy their needs (Chakravorty & Hales, 2017). The sustainability of a firm is the ability of the company to meet the needs and requirements of current stakeholders while developing continuous

investment and managerial strategies to ensure future profitability, social well-being, and environmental protection (Pantelica et al., 2016). A company is sustainable when leaders can develop strategies to increase market share, talent, stakeholders' benefits, and lower operational cost and workforce turnover (Banker et al., 2014). Additionally, a firm is sustainable if it continues to exist regardless of market threats and internal change (Banker et al., 2014).

To be sustainable, business owners can apply the differentiation strategy and a cost leadership approach (Banker et al., 2014). The differentiation strategy approach consists of benchmarking competitors to propose innovative products or services that will attract and maintain customers, investors, and other useful shareholders to commit (Carayannis, Sindakis, & Walter, 2015). Satisfying the needs of shareholders is insufficient to make an organization sustainable (Hörisch, Freeman, & Schaltegger, 2014). Firms need to go beyond developing innovative products or services that interest investors to take into consideration all the stakeholders, individuals or groups of individuals who can affect or be affected by the organizational activities, services, or products (Ayuso, Rodriguez, Garcia-Castro, & Arino, 2014). In the following section, I will clarify the relationship between sustainability and the concept of stakeholders. I will also explore the concept of sustainability in its three aspects: environmental, economic and financial, and social.

Stakeholder theory. Freeman (1984) developed the stakeholder theory, which is a new paradigm consisting of redefining the purpose, the structure, and the management of firms to better serve the interconnectedness of actors' interests in society (Schilling,

2000). Stakeholders can be people and organizations who have a direct affiliation with a firm and who can influence or be influenced by its operations (Fernandez-Feijoo, Romero, & Ruiz, 2014). Stakeholders also involve indirect people or groups of individuals that can be affected by the attainment of the firm's objectives (Schilling, 2000). Primary stakeholders are the employees, customers, creditors, suppliers, and local community leaders (Schilling, 2010). Stakeholders also include institutions such as local, national and global governments, network groups, nongovernmental organizations, unions groups, media, activists, consumers, and even competitors (Bottenberg, Tuschke, & Flickinger, 2017).

Sustainable organization leaders should be aware of the competition and the behaviors of direct and indirect competitors (Biggemann, Williams, & Kro, 2014). Direct competitors usually operate in the same business environment, abide by the same regulations, and sometimes use the services of same suppliers and creditors, share the market, and remain under the equal pressure from consumers and activists' groups (Herremans, Nazari, & Mahmoudian, 2016). Operating in the same business arena increases the risk of imitation (Ayuso et al., 2014). Sustainable leaders should differentiate their products or services to get a competitive edge (Chen & Uzelac, 2015). The first step to put in place a successful differentiation strategy is to apply the benchmarking approach (Liu & Fang, 2016). Benchmarking is a strategic management decision-making tool (Oberoi, 2014). Benchmarking is a measurement tool that business leaders use to evaluate firms' progress toward meeting the assigned goals and objectives. Managers also use the benchmarking to determine the best strategies to yield results and

to obtain a competitive advantage (Liu et al., 2015). Benchmarking is essential to understand why some approaches work and others do not work or why some firms do well and others do poorly (Tasci, 2017).

Business owners can also apply a benchmarking strategy to assess internal and external performance (Jimenez-Angueira & Stuart, 2015). Managers use internal evaluation to compare the results of different periods of activities to measure the attainment of goals and objectives (Tee, 2015). Internal benchmarking provides data for business decision-makers to use strategies to motivate employees, recruit and keep talent, invest, serve customers, and review operational routine (Riverbark, Roenigk, & Fasiello, 2017). The external benchmark is crucial for businesses to deal with competition (Chen & Uzelac, 2015). Externally, benchmarking is helpful to gather useful information about the performance of competitors to develop similar or best practices to resist or to surpass rivals (Veen-Berkx, de Korne, Olivier, Bal, & Kazemier, 2016). Monitoring competitors can help managers discover a new niche to satisfy the underserved customers, be better prepared to compete against established competitors, or transform current competitors into partners (Singh, 2016). There are many ways to gather data about competitors (Wu et al., 2015). Some of the tools to monitor competitors consisting of doing a Google search or visiting their websites, speaking to their current and former customers, attending industry's trade shows and conferences, searching their social media networks, and hiring competitors' former employees and consultants (Wu et al., 2015). Managers can also track the industry analysts' reports, watch the profile of employees competitors hire, conduct surveys, or spend the time to know competitors' suppliers (Singh, 2016).

In addition to differentiation, some researchers have claimed that the best way for a sustainable business to protect itself from the competition is through a servitization strategy (Sharma & Singh, 2017). Known as product-service-system, servitization is the combination of products and services to meet the need of customers and other stakeholders (Foss & Saebi, 2017). Products and process-based manufacturing are easy to imitate or to replicate (Bohnsack & Pinkse, 2017). With servitization, business leaders make it difficult for competitors to duplicate. Servitization is an integrated system that goes beyond just manufacturing or distributing products to embrace product-process-service altogether (Sharma & Singh, 2017). The strategy adds more values to stakeholders and gives entrepreneurs a sustainable competitive edge (Sharma & Singh, 2017). Tangible experimentation of servitization exists in the retailing industry; many retailers have added extra service to their routine sale operation (Sharma, 2017). Product-service-system in retailing consists of allowing banks, coffee stores, pharmacies, restaurants, cybercafé, car repairs, pets care, healthcare, tax services, maintenance, assembling, transportation, and equipment leasing services, and in some cases training activities inside the retailing stores (Rashmi & Dangi, 2016).

One of the challenges of business owners is that stakeholders sometimes have different expectations and interests (Vasileiadou & Tuinstra, 2013). A business environment can be referred to as an ecosystem to name all the direct and indirect actors that play roles in the firms' business environment (Adner, 2016). Business owners should be able to understand the systemic interaction of the stakeholders to develop successful and sustainable management strategies (Adner, 2016). A sustainable-oriented business

owner should establish and implement strategies that take into consideration stakeholders' interests (Bottenberg et al., 2017). Oberoi (2014) proposed three steps to put in place a sustainable strategic plan; business owners should be able to identify interests and expectations of stakeholders, create mutual and multilateral sustainability interests based on individual interests and expectations, and set up a monitoring strategy to perceive changes in the business environment to develop appropriate responses.

Environmental Sustainability

Environment is the surrounding that provides elements and conditions for living organisms to dwell and interact (Uitto, 2016). Environment involves biotic and abiotic components (Buri, 2017), and the environment and the ecosystem are related intrinsically because the ecosystem is a community of biotic and abiotic (Aldana-Dominguez et al., 2017). Abiotic involves inorganic components like water, calcium, and organic elements such as proteins, carbohydrates, and lipids (Buri, 2017). The ecosystem also includes climatic factors like humidity, wind, soils, temperature, and lights (Buri, 2017). Biotic comprises producers like autotrophic members capable of synthesizing food for nonliving inorganic substances, consumers like heterotrophic beings that provide to living organisms, and decomposers made of microorganisms responsible of decomposing dead bodies of producers and consumers (Buri, 2017). The ecosystem is the interaction between the environmental components (Jordan & Russel, 2014) and is responsible for the equilibrium and stability of the elements and the environment (Aldana-Dominguez et al., 2017). Krellenberg and Welz (2016) named the living and nonliving components of the ecosystem respectively biocenosis and biotope.

Environment is essential in every aspect of life (Abushammala et al. 2016), as it can be considered the provider of human existence (Boehmer-Christiansen, 2017). Environment is the supplier of food and water, protection against weather and sunlight, and the advancement of civilization (Bura, 2017). The environment offers resources to build infrastructures such as sewage, power systems, facilities, computers, and its accessories, roads, railways, and vehicles (Buell, 2017). The prosperity, military and nuclear power of a country depend upon environmental resources (Boehmer-Christiansen, 2017). Researchers have used environmental components such as plants, soil minerals, natural gases, chemicals, and nutrients to make inventions in science and technology to improve human existence on earth (Bonnet, 2016). The ability of the human being to take advantage of ecological components can explain the difference between developed and underdeveloped, powerful and weak, advanced and unadvanced, prosperous and developing countries (Buell, 2017). Additionally, the environment contributes to natural beauty (Combe, 2016) and provides recreational areas, sport and tourism, and green beauty (Ahonen & Lacey, 2017), which helps physical and mental health (Brown, 2017).

The analysis of food chain also demonstrates the importance of environment (Joassart-Marcelli, Rossiter, & Bosco, 2017). Plants use the sunlight, water, elements of soil and air to grow and produce roots, leaves, flowers, and fruits (Joassart-Marcelli et al., 2017). Animals and other plants depend on nutrients to survive, reproduce, and thrive (Bura, 2017). Microorganisms existence depends on animals and plants. Without the

environment, there will not be food chain or retailing businesses that distribute products or derivate products from the environment.

Humankind better perceives the benefits of the environment during ecologic crises (Goldsmith & Cohn, 2017; Perugini et al., 2017). Some examples of ecologic crises include lack of minerals such as copper, silicon, gold, cobalt, and petroleum to produce computers and cellphones or minerals to build vehicles and roads. The lack of water or soil and climate elements to grow food and deficiency of plants to produce medication, books, furniture, or to build houses and facilities (Rosen, 2016). Other examples of environmental crisis involve insufficient of natural gas, wind or fossil, and oil to power vehicles, or provide energy (Rosen, 2016). The human population on earth continues to grow leading to excessive natural resources consuming and other negative impacts on the ecosystem (Rodgers, 2017).

Many scientists are concerned about the consequences of human activities on the lives on the Earth (Xiao et al., 2017). Some scholars and leaders have been arguing to protect the environment from the impact of human activities (Xiao et al. 2017). For example, Perugini et al. (2017) argued that the protection of the environment is important to make life better while making sure the actions of current generation does not affect the ability of future generations to live in a healthy and providing environment. Some scientists and community leaders have called for regulations to ensure adequate protection of the environment from consequences of human activities (Ross, 2017). For example, environmentalists raise attention about the negative impact of humans on the ecosystem such as decreasing of useful natural minerals and the population of some

species, pollution, and climate change (Obradovic-Wochnik & Dodds, 2015). Some media, policymakers, and business leaders have also argued to reduce the negative human impact on the biotic and abiotic systems (Perugini et al. 2017). For example, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), conducted and published several studies about the effects of human activities on the global change (NASA, 2017).

In 2014, more than 1,300 independent scientists from all over the world acknowledged, during the fifth assessment annual report of the United Nations, that there is 95% probability that human activities are responsible for climate change (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2014). The scientists at the 2014 IPCC concurred with NASA experts about facts that corroborate the climate change claims. The scientists gathered at the IPCC referred to the decrease of land and arctic ice, claiming that ice warming contributes to the rise of global sea levels (IPCC, 2014), which may be responsible for disasters such as hurricanes, storms, and cyclones (NASA, 2017). The anthropogenic greenhouse gas that human activities produce also increases the atmospheric accumulation of toxic gases such as carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, and methane. Furthermore, the greenhouse gas stored on the ocean and land affects the productivity of soils, destructs plants, and ocean organisms (IPCC, 2014). The IPCC (2014) confirmed that the reduced fertility of soils, desertification, extreme weather, and natural disasters are also responsible for ecologic refugees. Moreover, scientists at the IPCC forum (2014) suggested that the rise of acidity in the oceans affects marine organisms' survival and reproduction. Arnell, Halliday, Battarbee, Skeffington, and Wade (2015) found that the acidity is also responsible for seafood contamination, coastal

destruction. NASA experts (2017) attributed the rise of the worldwide temperature with the record-breaking hottest in 2016 to the climate change and its collateral factors such as the rise of the acidity in the oceans and the temperature in the world.

The environmental skeptics have different thoughts (Lomborg, 2001). Some deny the risks of depletion of natural resources (Wong, Jiang, Klint, Dominey-Howes, & DeLacy, 2014). Other recognize the climate change but refuse the human responsibility arguments. Environmental skeptics believe that natural resources are inexhaustible and ecological change is in the ordinary course of the universe (Metzger, Soneryd, & Linke, 2017). Some anti-environmentalists added that human beings could develop innovative technologies and find alternative ways to live better in case current resources get finished or to be protected against climate change (Wong et al. 2014).

Furthermore, some conservative and climate change deniers argued that regulations are capricious (Metzger et al., 2017). Merriman (2017) maintained that anti-environmentalists and anti-regulation policies want the market to be the principal agent of reasonable regulations. Another group of ecologist's deniers argued that the earth is not as fragile as environmentalists portrayed it (Wood, 2017). Lomborg (2001) affirmed that the earth maintained itself long before humans arrived, and the universe will continue to exist regardless of humans' activities.

A group of anti-environmentalists based their denial on the economic and ethical aspects. Abushammala et al. (2016) posited that humans need to take advantage of the gift of nature to live better on earth. The environment provides resources for human beings to use for survival and enjoyment. Hübschle (2017) argued that the full use of

environmental resources might contribute to job creation and lower cost of living. Anti-ecologists accused environmentalists of developing fake news to limit human rights on the earth. According to Lomborg (2001), scientists based their findings on junk philosophy to restrict human freedom. The thinking of the protection of natural resources for the next generations is the anti-human agenda's plot against humanity (Ngoc, 2017). Lomborg (2001), the self-proclaimed skeptical environmentalist, argued that scientists and pro-environmentalists exaggerated the environmental issues. Lomborg (2001) maintained that the population growth and human activities are not a problem because the globe has plenty of fresh water, minerals, and air to satisfy the need for spices on earth. In the same line of thought, Hübschle (2017) reported that according to the anti-environmentalists, the economic growth is the answer to poverty. With economic growth, people will be able to earn a higher income to pay for a cleaner environment. In the view of environmental skeptics, the optimal use of natural resources is the path to alleviate poverty and provide funds to develop technologies needed to improve agricultural practices and mineral exploitation and to invest in quality health (Wong et al., 2014).

The findings of scientists and experts and the daily experiences of cases about climate change raised the awareness of consumers and increased public concerns about the consequences of the environmental degradation (Pfeiffer & Hepburn, 2016). According to Schor (2015), many Americans regard the issues of climate change seriously. People are concerned about industrial water, air pollution, destruction of ozone and rainforests, industrial accidents, oil spills, hazardous waste, and the greenhouse gas. The daily experiences of millions of people affected by environmental dysfunctions and

the pressure of scientists are some of the reasons the United Nations called for reforms in 2000 (Godbole, 2017). Despite denials, political rhetoric to satisfy corporate interests, and ecological pessimists' actions to derail regulations, the United Nations led a path to a new paradigm, the environmental sustainability (Mochizuki & Bryan, 2015). According to U.S. National Geographic' Greendex (2014), a global teamwork research consulting group (GlobeScan), consumers' behaviors towards climate change have been evolved. The U.S. National Geographic' Greendex (2014) reported that in 2014, 61% of consumers globally are concerned about environmental problems, 51% believed that climate change would affect their lives negatively, and 65% overall believe that human activities cause climate change. U.S. National Geographic' Greendex (2014) added that the sustainable behavior of consumers increased, the environmentally friendly behavior improved, more and more consumers are interested in local and organic foods, and consumers are anxious about the climate change. Hahn et al. (2017) revealed that there is an increasing pressure on corporate to change ways of conducting business to align activities with environmental sustainability approaches.

Furthermore, the international organizations, local, national and federal governments, and many scientists and business leaders initiated many meetings, symposiums, and talks to come up with initiatives to promote environmental sustainability. In 2000, 189 world leaders met at the Millennium Summit to commit to working together to end poverty by 2015 (Anderson, 2015). World leaders came up with eight main goals known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Among the MDGs figured the environmental sustainability. According to MacNaughton and Frey

(2016), the ecological sustainability involved the integration of the sustainable development values into countries policies and programs to reverse the loss of the environmental resources and the reduction of biodiversity loss of the ecological resources. Other environmental sustainability requirements included the cut by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation and the improvement of the lives of at least 100 million slums by 2020 (MacNaughton & Frey, 2016).

There are dozens of international and hundreds of local and national environmental sustainability summits since the MDGs (Chigara, 2017). The typical outcomes of past environmental sustainability consist of engaging business community and policymakers to develop strategies and policies to tackle climate change (Van-Rensburg, & Head, 2017). One of the significant progresses made is the acknowledgment of many business leaders that environmental sustainability could lead to profitability. Furthermore, thanks to financial incentive programs some governments and nonprofit organizations offer, many business leaders took important initiatives to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions (Korkut, Yaman, Küçükağa, Jaunich, & Demir, 2017). Some of the actions consist of promoting energy efficiency measures by developing and using biodegradable products and renewable energy from solar, wind, and biomasses (Parris & McInnis-Browers, 2017). Many leaders worked with their shareholders to address the impact of their firms on the environment (Cugurullo, 2017). According to Bocconi and Saebi (2017) including environmental measures into the business model is a dominant pathway for economic growth.

Economic Sustainability

Making a profit and sustaining growth over the long-term is the most challenging fact business leaders face (Gupta, 2017). Two main ways for businesses to make a profit are by revenue and saving (Davila, Foster, He, & Shimizu, 2015). Dyllick and Muff (2016) explained that the increase in revenue and the decrease in expenditures could be the best strategy for small businesses to make a profit and grow over time. The income depends mainly on sale while saving relies on spending and consumption (Hoffer & Pincin, 2016). Economic sustainability consists of using the assets of a company efficiently and balancing the triple bottom line of environment, social and financial obligations to create profitability and ensure growth indefinitely (Oberoi, 2014).

Engaging small firms in sustainability pathway has costs and opportunities (Hammer & Gary, 2017). Montiel and Delgado-Ceballos (2014) argued that business leaders encounter a lot of challenges in going green. One of the problems is what Wade (2016) named financial burden of sustainability. The financial difficulties of sustainability involve the costs to transform the old operational system into an eco-efficiency system (Wang, Hawkins, & Berman, 2014). Some of the expenses include expenses of the new products process, inventory system, workplace layout, packaging and retailing redesigning to meet the environmental standards (Visconti, Minowa, & Maclaran, 2014). Rivera-Torres, Garcés-Ayerbe, Scarpellini, and Valero-Gil (2015) added the cost of environmental compliance and regulations, energy-efficient lighting, and production system. Finally, one could include the cost of cooling and heating systems, and recycling of materials such as transformers, electric conductors, plastic, and

papers (Visconti et al., 2014). According to Peiró-Signes, Segarra-Oña, Verma, Mondéjar-Jiménez, and Vargas-Vargas (2014), retailing owners also face the sustainability and environmental compliance system certification financial burden. Purani, Sahadev, and Kumar (2014) declared that business leaders use verifiable labels to prove that their products are better for the environment and stakeholders' health and therefore better than competitors' products. Retailers use certifications labels as part of the company's marketing strategy to communicate to stakeholders and primarily to prove to current and prospect customers that their products are healthier, safer, greener, and complied with regulations (Peiró-Signes et al., 2014). Jepsen and Grob (2015) affirmed that sustainability means altogether renewable energy, being a loved member of the community, saving resources, eco-friendly facilities, fair trade, less greenhouse gas emission, and fair employment system.

Furthermore, Ross (2017) stated that environmental sustainability involves recycling and waste management activities, reuse, and renewable programs. Hopkinson and Gwilliam (2015) indicated that sustainability is at the crossroad of many disciplines and business management programs. As a result, there are many different certification programs to implement to show managers' eco-friendly compliance. Geeraert (2016) opined that the cost of the implementation of certifications is high making it difficult for small retailing firms or their suppliers to acquire entirely. Alves-Pinto, Newton, and Pinto (2015) stated that sustainability certifications are not equal to environmental compliance system but both matter for eco-friendly stakeholders. Zobel (2015) affirmed that the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), a globally agreed standard set out

ISO 14000 to help leaders improve their organizations' environmental performance to use resources efficiently and to reduce waste and workplace accident. However, despite implementing the environmental management system (EMS) could add values to small companies, the process comes with financial constraints (Geeraert, 2016). Roome and Louche (2016) mentioned that costs such as training, documentation, coaching, internal and external auditing, certification, and continual improvement programs to meet new environmental standards could have an adverse financial impact on the small business balance sheet.

Dyllick and Muff (2016) admitted that sustainability is a cost-driven program, but the advantages of adopting the sustainability business approaches are higher. Sardana (2014) and Sirakaya-Turk, Baloglu, and Mercado (2014) posited that sustainability is a way for multiform savings. For example, insurers in their roles of risk carriers, risk managers and investors put in place many incentive programs to encourage companies to embrace sustainability pathway (Baral & Pokhare, 2017). Maynard (2008) and Weiss (2013) said that more and more insurers offer discounts to energy-efficient facilities, indemnifications to companies that use renewable materials. Insurers also provide premium credits to retailers who install mitigation device or choose storm-resistant construction or another incentive to firms with electric or hybrid vehicles fleet (Hoeppe, 2016). Moreover, Destler (2016) as well as Sjöstedt and Kleinschmit (2016) cited grants programs, subventions, and incentives some nonprofits or local governments provide to encourage managers to go green. Susskind (2014) reported that sustainability leaders save on energy, water, and raw materials consumption, and avoid or decrease the probability

of legal issues like lawsuits. Alves-Pinto et al. (2015) admitted the existence of a plethora of sustainability and EMS certifications. However, small business owners do not need to have all the certifications (Alves-Pinto et al., 2015). Retailing business owners, for example, need to be able to identify a few certifications that could meet stakeholders' approbation (Schaltegger et al., 2016). Managers need to analyze if the cost and opportunity of certifications align with the firm's strategic plan and the specific requirements in their communities (Delmas & Gergaud, 2014).

Sharma and Agrawal (2017) argued that sustainability could be an opportunity to expand into a new business niche. Sustainability is an innovative program that business owners should promote (Dyllick & Muff, 2016). Schaltegger et al. (2016) advised small firm leaders to actualize their business model to come up with innovative products, process, services or operational systems to create a long-term profit and growth. Sustainability requires new talent, process, and ways of conducting business to meet clients, shareholders and other stakeholders' requirements (Feiock, Portney, Bae, & Berry, 2014). In the current turbulent business environment, innovation and creativity in the green sector could be a proven pathway to competitive advantage (Hart, Sharma, & Halme, 2016).

Wade (2016) argued that more and more consumers become sustainable-conscious. Sharma (2017) encouraged business owners to use the firm's sustainability orientation to build powerful brand equity and emotional connections with customers. Some leaders include the sustainable policies in their code of ethics to demarcate from rivals (Schreck & Raithel, 2018). Kang and Choi (2016) maintained that business brand

is very crucial to link customers to the products and services and capital providers to support business expansion. Bhattacharya and Kaursar (2016) asserted that the brand is the identity of a company, a reliable instrument to connect with targeted consumers emotionally. The sustainability certification labels, the certifier's brand name, the packaging materials, the logos and the firm's motto, the color artwork, and the products designing carry message that could ground current customers and attract and keep prospects (Evans, Welch, & Swaffield, 2017). Sustainability became a tool to expand business opportunities, increase market share and revenue continuously (Sharma, 2017; Schaltegger et al., 2016). Making a profit and sustain a business over the time requires effective strategic planning and committed leadership with an ambitious vision (Abels, 2014).

Strategic planning. The origin of strategy lies in the book "The Art of War" of the Chinese general, Sun Tzu, written some 2,500 years ago (Chong, 2014; Pardhasaradhi, 2017). The strategy was the plan of actions put in place by top military leaders before battle as opposed to tactics that referred to maneuvers on the battlefield (Chong, 2014). Modern strategy derived from the Greek word *strategia* that means the office or command of a general (Chong, 2014; Stuart, 2009). In business, Seidl (2017) defined strategy as a firm's pattern of policies and programs designed to achieve long-term goals. Vesa and Vaara (2014) referred strategy to a set of systemic choices leaders make based on internal organizational systems and core values and external expectations to achieve targeted outcomes. Scholars link strategy to the science of uncertainty, general policy or an organization government (Kornberger, 2017). Other synonyms pertained to

strategy include the use of power, a roadmap to competitive advantage, systemic practice, vision, creative thinking, and dynamic organizational approach (Sibony, Lovallo, & Powell, 2017). Strategic planning consists of process, and step-by-step techniques leaders use to determine the primary objectives of an organization and allocate resources to achieve goals (Kornberger, 2017). Sustainable strategic planning is a cycle process that consists of defining the firm's mission and assessing the firm's competitive position (Kornberger, 2017). The strategy plan comprises of setting objectives and resources, identifying the competitive differentiation patterns, turning strategy into specific actions, evaluating results and redefining the plan for improvement (Kornberger, 2017; Sibony et al., 2017). To achieve economic sustainability, retailers must commit to including environmental and social aspects into the firm's strategic plan (Rashmi & Dangi, 2016). Kumar, Rahman, and Kazmi (2016) recommended retailers to consider the ecology protection and social well-being as important as satisfying the interests of the shareholders. Allen (2017) mentioned some characteristics of strategic leadership that can lead to higher and long-term performance: vision, articulation of the business model, commitment, willingness to delegate and empower, emotionally intelligent, and being well informed. Pattinson (2016) argued that there is no strategy without business intelligence.

Business intelligence. Business intelligence is a series of technologies using to collect, store, secure, and analyze firms' internal and external data to respond to market trends (Zandi, 2014). Retail business managers need to have in place monitoring strategies to understand technology and policies trends, consumer paradigm shift,

competitors' maneuvers, investors' criteria, and changes affecting the retailing industry (Lopatta, Buchholz, & Kaspereit, 2016; Turow, McGuigan, & Maris, 2015). Leaders use business intelligence to provide methodologies and tools to adapt to change. Serra and Sardar (2017) opined that information is essential for firms' socioeconomic performance. Small business owners must have current and updated database information to make strategic and tactical decisions (Adams & Ricci, 2017). Setting up an effective and secured database is an essential step for small firms to explore e-trade. Kalyanam and Tsay (2013) purported that more and more small businesses operate virtually or hybrid. E-Commerce requires the use of firmware, hardware, software, and human support to make online experiences possible and effective (Nickson, Price, Baxter-Reid, & Hurrell, 2017).

Furthermore, small business managers need to understand the opportunity of going digital and how to make the best use of digitization (Boswijk, 2017). Akalamkam and Mitra (2017) emphasized the importance of building and making accessible business information virtually. Akalamkam and Mitra (2017) reported that many consumers google or visit companies' websites before buying their products or services. Cabrera and Williams (2014) went further to indicate that some investors and consumers try to know companies' code of ethics and environmental values before doing business with them (Mahajan & Mahajan, 2017). Huseynov, Huseynov, and Ozkan (2014) posited that business intelligence is a pathway to a durable competitive advantage in today's turbulent economic environment. Lim, Moon, Kim, and Lee (2017) broke down the benefits of

data and information system for small firms. According to Zandi (2014), thanks to business intelligence, managers could have current information about new regulations.

Moreover, managers may use business intelligence to benchmark competitors, be aware of the requirements of new investors, and perceive customers' needs and shifts in advance (Chawinga & Chipeta, 2017). A well-structured business intelligence pattern may be crucial for managers to perceive new opportunities as well as threats and challenges (Pinto & Fox, 2016). Lim et al. (2015) advised retailers to build an effective and computerized system to have accurate, historical and current data about sales, investments, and talent recruiting and training. Such a database must also contain consumers' complaints and lawsuits, strategic plan, and catastrophic scenarios to make a better decision as needed (Huseynov et al., 2014).

Banks (2015) recognized the importance of business intelligence but warned managers about the risk of cyber criminality. Maxigas (2017) declared that going digital could be fatal for small companies in the absence of a robust plan to secure the system from the risk of hackers or online criminals. Hackers often steal sensitive private information including financial reports, strategic plans, customers' private information like social security and credit cards from the database (Maxigas, 2017). The exposition and misuse of stakeholders' information may compromise and damage the brand, image and the ability of the affected firm to stay in business (Kubitschko, 2015). Lin (2017) concluded by advising small business owners who aim to be sustainable to consider cybersecurity seriously to protect and secure the privacy of customers, investors and the rest of the stakeholders.

Amoore (2018) stated that cloud business intelligence is an efficient tool to minimize insecurity and costs of implementation of intelligence system in small companies. Cloud business intelligence is a web browser and mobile application to make business data more available and accessible on a virtual network (Zhou & Wang, 2014). Fu and Chang (2016) argued that cloud-based tools such as customer relationship management (CRM), Dropbox, Help Desk Software could help small business be more competitive in the current turbulent market. Among advantages of cloud computing, Gangwar, Date, and Ramaswamy (2015) mentioned saving on staffing and IT equipment, an increase of flexibility and collaboration among the workforce, unlimited data storage, and minimization of firms' impact on the environment.

Social Sustainability

Social sustainability is at the crossroad of many theories including the equity and human rights theory, capital stock theory, institutional theory and governance, business and corporate studies, behavioral and social sciences, and transition theory (Colantonio, 2009; Takhar, 2015). Social sustainability is an approach that involves social equity, social justice, social responsibility, labor rights, health equity, community resilience, and development (Long, 2016; Takhar, 2015). Sabella and Eid (2016) related social sustainability to social capital, human capital and human well-being. Social sustainability is the effort to protect, promote and preserve transparency, fairness, equality, welfare, health and safety values for current and future generations (Schaefer, Corner, & Kearins, 2015). Smith (2013) defined a socially sustainable firm as a company in which people want to work now and in the future. Sharma and Khanna (2014) named leaders who

engage firms into the sustainability pathway responsible leaders or conscious capitalists. Scholars and policymakers used terms such as social sustainability, corporate social responsibility, and corporate citizenship to designate efforts of business leaders to include environmental aspects in the firms' strategies plan (Sabella & Eid, 2016; Schaefer, Corner, & Kearins, 2015). Siltaoja, Malin, and Pyykkönen (2015) affirmed that social sustainable business leaders or green business entrepreneurs produce, distribute or use goods and services or disposal waste with relatively minimal environment damages and consider stakeholders benefits beyond the requirements of law and regulations. Green business leaders act voluntarily to improve the quality of life of the community, shareholders, consumers, and employees (King & Gish, 2015).

Smith (2013) acknowledged many drivers of corporate social programs or corporate social responsibility (CSR). Drivers are globalization and market forces, ethics training, government laws and regulations, crises and consequences, education and social awareness (Schaltegger et al., 2016). Majumdar and Saini (2016) affirmed that CSR leaders obey the laws, set aside funds for community projects, invest in quality control and customer satisfaction, create jobs, pay taxes and disclose the environmental protection code. Social sustainability within the company encompasses areas such as fair labor practices, health, safety and well-being, gender diversity, equity, work-life balance, decent employment treatment (Mun & Jung, 2017). West, Hillenbrand, and Money (2015) referred to social sustainability as a set of strategies, policies, and practices business owners use to value and treat employees as important as shareholders. Dyllick and Muff (2015) maintained that sustainability for employees includes living and fair

wage, decent employment, advancement opportunities, and equal pay for equal work between men and women. West et al. (2015) included in decent employment, opportunities for a productive work that delivers a fair income, security in the workplace, social protection, social integration, and freedom for people to express their concerns. Sharma and Khanna (2014) argued that sustainable firm leaders prohibit discrimination, child labor, and forced works. Mun and Jung (2017) added that sustainable business managers value individuals with disabilities and promote diversity. Dyllick and Muff (2015) and Majumdar and Saini (2016) postulated that sustainable managers invest in the education and vocational training to support employees to stay in work and advance and motivate employees with a variety of benefits. Furthermore, sustainable managers embody ethics principles of transparency, justice, and fairness, autonomy, beneficence, and guarantee freedom of association and rights of collective bargaining (Spence, 2016).

Outside of the company, social sustainability includes philanthropic programs, community engagement, and volunteering activities contributing to community well-being (Spence, 2016). Sustainable managers integrate the community well-being in the firm's strategies, policies, and operations to design, produce and distribute harmless products or products with less negative impact on the community (Arundel & Ronald, 2017). Sustainable leaders participate in community programs such as offering scholarships and encourage academic excellence programs, building schools, wellness, and healthcare centers, sponsoring nonprofits organizations that promote reforestation and the environmental protection (Boetto & Bell, 2015; Long, 2016). Sustainable business leaders are aware of the impact of their firms' activities on the ecology and the

community (Oughton, 2016). Oughton (2016) posited that the role of managers is not only to acknowledge, but also to seek ways to avoid or to minimize the effects of business activities on people and animals. Kapoor and Dhamija (2017) mentioned that social sustainability has advantages and disadvantages.

Some entrepreneurs think adopting social sustainability program may increase firms operating costs and therefore reduce profitability (Wang et al., 2014). Furthermore, because of the lack of legal definition and guidelines, many other entrepreneurs found that the scope of social sustainability is too broad, and the boundary is very subjective (Lombardi, Porter, Barber, & Rogers, 2011). Sirakaya-Turk, Baloglu, and Mercado (2014) concluded that some managers think that choosing to fulfill all the ethical responsibility areas could be very costly to small firms. Another challenge small business face to embrace sustainability is the possibility of the negative perception of some shareholders (Hawker & Edmonds, 2014; Singal, 2014). Paetzold and Busch (2014) asserted that not every shareholder is social sustainability conscious. As a result, some shareholders may not approve social sustainability expenses. Long (2014) also affirmed that another group of anti-social sustainability argues that some ethical recommendation could affect the companies' brand equity negatively. Contu (2014) indicated that encouraging whistleblowing, for example, could lead to costly legal actions against the company. Ching et al. (2017) mentioned that recycling activities, investing in new environmental-friendly technologies, conducting social audits to evaluate company's activities related to social issues, or investment in corporate philanthropy could be a shortfall leading to financial deficiency.

Furthermore, the ethical responsibility is a concept depending on the cultural background and values of stakeholders (Brissett, 2017). However, stakeholders' values and background may vary from one community to another constraining companies' leaders to have several standards per location (Schaltegger et al., 2016). The lack of a global sustainability standard measures may be costly to small businesses aiming to adopt the geographic diversification strategy (Brissett, 2017).

Baral and Pokhare (2017) posited that social sustainability is the pathway to short-term corporate profit and long-term growth. Pati (2015) maintained that more and more stakeholders consider corporate position about environment protection and the community a compelling priority. Andrews (2015) argued that CSR has a lot of benefits for small businesses. CSR may be a good strategy for business leaders to establish a good relationship with employees, consumers, local governments, community members, and investors (Gollnhofer & Schouten, 2017). Woo and Jin (2016) assumed that a good relationship with stakeholders improves companies' goodwill and brand equity. Usually, responsible leaders use the firms' good reputation as a marketing communication tool to prove that beyond profit they are keen to employees, consumers, and partners well-being and community development (Dyllick & Muff, 2015). Such a strategy could motivate customers to think that spending money on responsible companies is worth because the benefit may profit them and the community (Andrews, 2015). Unlikely the anti-social sustainable business owners, the CSR leaders may have unlimited customers base because the program could interest environmental-conscious and anti-ecologic consumers (Kim, Kim, & Qian, 2018). Customers believe that green business leaders produce,

distribute, and use environmentally friendly goods and services (Perrault & Clark, 2016). Dyllick and Muff (2015) asserted that such beliefs could be a source a durable emotional bound between green firms and consumers. The green corporate strategy could be a tool to increase sales (Perrault & Clark, 2016). Moreover, Samarakoon and Arachchige (2016) affirmed that with CSR, managers send a robust message that the products meet customers' needs and requirements, are safe, good at affordable prices, and deliverable on time.

Secondly, Tanwar and Prasad (2016) argued that CSR is also a program to attract talent and to motivate employees. Tanwar and Prasad (2016) posited that job seekers could choose to work for leaders who value them, invest in them and pay fair wages with incentive compensations than for leaders who use them just as production capital. Griffin, Bryant, and Koerber (2015) posited that through CSR, business leaders create a safer, fairer, more diverse, productive, and a motivating work environment necessary for employees' morale. High morale among employees is good for team-building and an atmosphere that encourages innovation and creativity (Brammer, He, & Mellahi, 2015). Chawinga and Chipeta (2016) acknowledged that small businesses face a fierceness competition and the fast-paced change. Innovation is crucial for business survival and long-term competitive advantage (Gronum, Steen, & Verreynne, 2016). Tanwar and Prasad (2016) argued that employees' morale and motivation are essential for the innovation process. Wyatt et al. (2015) maintained that the workplace atmosphere is a factor to consider in building innovative teams. Garg (2017) recommended managers to create a work environment where employees are outward looking to discover and bring in

best practices, feel valued and appreciated, and are not afraid to try or suggest new things. Vuori and Huy (2016) concluded that business owners who build a stable, motivated and skillful team have more chance to get the competitive edge.

Hahn, Reimsbach, and Schiemann (2015) explained that CSR requires information disclosure and transparency, rational use of capital, and managerial efficiency. Grushina (2017) argued that CSR is a powerful weapon against fraud and corruption. Goel and Misra (2017) asserted that regardless of their environmental beliefs, shareholders have more confidence on sustainable companies as these firms are more likely to yield more return on the investment (ROI) and make profit indefinitely. Sharma and Khanna (2014) affirmed that with social sustainability, managers have more leverage to access additional capital to finance the firms' growth. Social sustainability is a robust tool to have a long-term competitive edge over rivals (Ching, Gerab, & Toste, 2017).

Entrepreneurship and Small Business Theory

Entrepreneurial journey is a complicated adventure (Varaiya, 2017). Dutta (2016) affirmed that most of the time, entrepreneurs create new ventures or participate in the expansion of existing firms. Every entrepreneur may not be necessarily a business owner, or a manager and every business owner or manager may not certainly have all the traits of an entrepreneur (Farmer, Yao, & Kung-Mcintyre, 2017; Mustafa, Martin, & Hughes, 2016). Entrepreneurs embody specific characteristics including risk-taking, innovation, and ability to find resources to create or sometimes to run new organizations or new activities in existing ventures to fulfill needs in the community (Farmer et al., 2016). Managers may be different from each other and may exhibit different behaviors (Mustafa

et al., 2016). Some business owners may have created or inherited or bought the business they run (Jaskiewicz, Heinrichs, Rau, & Reay, 2017). In this section, I explored the concept of entrepreneurship, small business, capital, and innovation.

Entrepreneurship theory. The economist Richard Cantillon coined the term entrepreneurship since 1700 to designate the activity of someone who bears the risk, plans, supervises, organizes, and owns factors of production (Kalimasi & Herman, 2016). The economists, sociologists, and psychologists such as Jean Baptist Say (May, 2010), Joseph Schumpeter, Max Weber, and Peter Drucker contributed to framing the entrepreneurial theory (Spencer, Kirchoff, & White, 2008). Economists opined that people embark in the entrepreneurship journey to pursue economic gain (Tlaiss, 2015). Sociologists argued that entrepreneurs engage in economic activities to express their values of change and autonomy (Borozan & Pfeifer, 2014). Psychologist asserted that individuals engage in entrepreneurship activities to fulfill the need of achievement and power (May, 2010; Spencer et al., 2008). Schumpeter opined that entrepreneurs are the catalyst of innovation and creativity in the market (Hechavarría & Welter, 2015).

Contemporary scholars considered as an entrepreneur, a person or a group of people who discover new ideas, new needs or new methods and take the risk to look for necessary resources to create an entity to satisfy those need to improve lives (Pontikes & Barnett, 2017). In this definition, Pontikes and Barnett (2017) exposed the evolution of the concept and the different branches of the application of the entrepreneurship and the characteristics of the entrepreneurs. Some of the critical features of the entrepreneurs include the risk-taking, innovation and creativity, change, gap-filling, organization

creator, fundraising, and wealth creation (Varaiya, 2017). Linda and McInnis-Bowers (2017) referred entrepreneurs to visionaries with energetic will and mind to overcome uncertainties. Entrepreneurs are also strategists and individuals capable of withstanding social opposition to find talent and resources to bring change in the community (Salignac, Galea, & Powell, 2017). Schindehutte and Morris (2017) affirmed that entrepreneurship is a complex combination of economic, psychological, and sociological factors. Dutta (2016) opined that three elements are essential to increase the entrepreneurship activity in a community: The entrepreneurial education, the capital, and a dedicated political system (Wang & Morrell, 2015). According to Krishna (2016), the economic growth gap between industrialized and developing nations resides in the level of business climate and the entrepreneurial support. Austin, Stevenson, and Wei-Skillern (2017) identified several forms of entrepreneurship program in the modern time. Some of the types and domains of application of entrepreneurship include economic entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, and intrapreneurship (Franco & Pinto, 2015). Scholars divide the field of entrepreneurship into various homogeneous social groups. There are women entrepreneurship (Raghuvanshi, Agrawal, & Ghosh, 2017), youth entrepreneurship, rural and urban entrepreneurship, immigrant entrepreneurship, and religious entrepreneurship (Choi, 2010).

Dutta (2016) reported that entrepreneurship does not grow in the “desert”. Policymakers must commit to developing the countries’ economic and social growth based on entrepreneurship principles (Mitra, 2017). Mattingly (2015) emphasized necessary conditions to make a nation or a community entrepreneurial friendly. Some of

the requirements include an entrepreneurial educational system, private sector-friendly financial market, free market with limited-regulations, and incentive programs such as successful entrepreneur awards and junior achievement programs (Damasio & Bicacro, 2017; Nielsen, 2016). Shepherd and Haynie (2017) opined that the entrepreneurial or anti-entrepreneurial behaviors of citizens depend on the content of the educational system, because risk-taking, confidence, innovative knowledge, leadership are products of the educational system. Davey, Hannon, and Penaluna (2016) indicated that an entrepreneurial education system does not rely on the academic programs only but also on a pattern of vocational training that shapes human beliefs and actions. Education and training go with incentive programs such as the creation of incubators, coaching, and spin-offs (Stadler & Smith, 2017).

Entrepreneurs contribute to the spread of innovation and creativity, important factors to increase the economic opportunities (Schaltegger, Lüdeke-Freund, & Hansen, 2016). Entrepreneurs are a unique capital, and essential elements needed to bring other capital to contribute to the economic growth and social wellbeing (Iacobucci & Rosa, 2017). Mulligan (2016) posited that entrepreneurship is the foundation of the prosperity of industrialized nations. Mulligan (2016) acknowledged that entrepreneurs create wealth and the added-values needed to transform and improve living conditions in the society. Entrepreneurs drive innovation and creativity (Dutta, 2016). Hagemann (2015) noted that Schumpeter's economic development theory included three interrelated elements: Entrepreneur, innovation, and finance. Entrepreneurs are actors of creative destruction and agents capable of finding financial and nonfinancial resources to creating ventures to

bring change in the community (Holgersen & Warlenius, 2016). According to Schumpeter, the economic development endeavors (entrepreneurship) involve the blend of the economic agent (entrepreneur), the production means (company), and innovation (strategy) (Lai & Lorne, 2014). Lai and Lorne (2014) reported that innovation is everything about new resources, methods or ideas to improve existing practices in an organization or a society. Fini, Grimaldi, Marzocchi, and Sobrero (2017) concluded that entrepreneurs are people who create firms or companies.

Small business theory. Scholars have struggled to find a universal theoretical definition of a small business (Coetzer, Kock, & Wallo, 2017). Some researchers have used the qualitative criteria and others the quantitative criteria to apprehend small businesses (Mallett & Wapshott, 2017). Under the qualitative perspectives, a small business is an enterprise independently owned and managed by the same individual(s) (Volery & Mazzarol, 2015). The quantitative approach theorists used the number of employees, the market share or sale turnover to differentiate small businesses from large corporations (Ye & Leipnik, 2013). To avoid ambiguities, many scholars, business leaders, and legislators rely on the U.S. Small Business Administration periodic definition (Dilger, 2017). The U.S. Small Business Administration defines a small business as an entity created for profit independently owned and operated primarily within the United States and contributes to the economy through taxes payment or use of the American labor, products, materials and is not dominant in its field on a national basis (Digler, 2017). Coetzer et al. (2017) noted that in the U.S., a small business could be a sole proprietorship, partnership, corporation, or any other legal form. In 2017, the small

business administration has 16 receipts and nine based industry size standards to qualify companies as small businesses (Dilger, 2017). The nine-based industry employee's size standards are 100, 150, 200, 250, 500, 750, 1,000, 1,250, and 1,500 (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2016). Regarding the receipts-based industry size, administrative and support service have an upper limit of \$20.5 million while finance and insurance industries have up to \$38.5 million in the average sale (Ye & Leipnik, 2013). The U.S. Small Business Administration presumes up to \$32.5 million receipts and no more than 500 employees-based size standards for a store and electronic retailers (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2016). The United States Federal Register (U.S. Federal Register, 2017) allocates up to \$32.5 million to supermarkets and grocery stores, \$27.5 million to the pharmacy and drug stores, and between \$11 and \$38.5 million to clothing and clothing accessories stores.

Small businesses play a crucial economic role worldwide (Cumming, Guariglia, Hou, Lee, & Newman, 2014). In the United States, small firms comprise more than 99% of all employers and accounted for 64% of net new private sector jobs (Dilger, 2017). The small businesses are the drivers of economic growth and development (Blankson, Cowan, & Darley, 2017). According to Ye and Leipnik (2013), small business owners contribute to the economy by increasing countries' gross domestic product. Sustainable small businesses leaders contribute to the increase in the value of goods and services, the national revenue via taxes payment, job creation, and the improvement of individuals well-being in general (Singh, 2016). Local and national governments use corporate and individuals' taxes to build and improve social and economic welfare and infrastructures

(Culpepper & Reinke, 2014). Williams (2017) purported that economic production and taxes collection are the determinants of rich or poor communities. A wealthy local government may improve investments in developing social programs such as adequate schools, healthcare, recreational centers, and appropriate welfare for elderly and disables (Gerrard, 2017). In the United States for example, local and federal governments collect taxes and other revenues to finance the development system in general (McFarland & McConnell, 2013). Individuals with decent employment and their families could have an easy access to better education, health protection, security, a better investment for retirement and child and disable care, and capital to invest in new ventures (Zhang, Warner, & Homsy, 2017). Small companies are critical to bringing innovation in every economic sector.

However, more than 50% of small businesses failed within 5 years of startup (U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, 2016). Some of the issues small business leaders face include the lack of sale and excessive operating cost, bureaucracy, and lack of investment (Warner & Zheng, 2013). Other issues involve the lack of leadership, lack of critical information to make strategic decisions, lack of innovation and creativity, and lack of captivating marketing plans (Parsa et al., 2015). Scholars proposed many solutions to increase small business survival and sustainability (Sandvik, Duhan, & Sandvik, 2014). This study focused on the entrepreneurial finance, innovation, and embracing of sustainability trends as essential strategies to small business profit and growth over the times (Parsa et al., 2015).

Entrepreneurial capital theory. Desan (2013) reviewed the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Karl Marx about the different facets of capital. Desan (2013) and Dean (2016) considered four capitals available for small businesses: Human capital, social capital, cultural capital, and financial capital. Sundararajan and Sundararajan (2015) recognized capital as assets available for entrepreneurs to use to create businesses to generate income. According to Fleming (2017), the human capital involves knowledge and skills pertinent to the execution of labor. The social capital includes business owners' relationships, networks, access to contacts, trusts, and ties with different individuals and groups (Muniady, Mamun, Mohamad, Permarupan, & Zaino, 2017). The cultural capital is made of business values, habits, behaviors, practices, beliefs, and languages advantages or disadvantages (Inoue & Yamaguchi, 2017). The financial capital encompasses personal and family saving, investment portfolios, physical assets, grants, equities, debt financing, and credit cards (Dean, 2016). Mocombe (2017) posited that according to Pierre Bourdieu, financial, social, cultural, and human capital are all investment resource to create wealth.

Funding sources are vital to launch and grow businesses (Elston, Chen, & Weidinger, 2016). The lack of funding is one of the leading issues small business owners face (Elston et al., 2016). There are many options for raising funds to start or to manage a business (Michiels & Molly, 2017). Possibilities include personal financing with sweat equity, friends, family, and bootstrapping (Rutherford, Pollack, Mazzei, & Sanchez-Ruiz, 2017). Other sources are equity financing, debt financing, government and nonprofit grants, capital ventures, angel investors, incubators, mutual guarantee societies, tax

incentive programs, microfinance, hedge funds, vendor financing, leasing, retirement funding, spin-off, and crowdfunding (Ahlers, Cumming, Günther, & Schweizer, 2015). Michiels and Molly (2017) posited that the best way to choose the most efficient financing options for a business is first to analyze the advantage and the opportunity cost of each funding source in rapport with the company's business model.

Furthermore, Bates and Robb (2014) affirmed that small business leaders should be able to find the most appropriate sources of financing that provides the most competitive edge to the company. Michiels and Molly (2017) stated that self-financing, family, and friends are the first options small business owners should consider. The self-financing includes the entrepreneurs' saving, revenue from potential awards, grants, and sweat equity (Ahlers et al., 2015). Ahlers et al. (2015) asserted that sweat equity represents the value of time and efforts the founder spends to launch the business. Funding from friends and the family could be as a loan or investment, or in term of gift, or any help that comes from the entrepreneur's close networks (Faulkner, 2017). Loan from family and friends can be a more flexible option to compare to banks' loans. The repayment is flexible and does not usually require hurdles and strictly legal scrutiny (Faulkner, 2017.) But the amount may be insufficient to finance important investments (Bruhn, 2015). Faulkner (2017) affirmed that the bootstrapping is an effective option entrepreneurs can use to create wealth. Entrepreneurs could use parents or friends' facilities, buy or lease equipment, obtain advance payment from customers, share facilities spaces with other employers, hire interns, and lower self-expenses or salary (Barringer & Ireland, 2011). Bootstrapping goes beyond the deployment of personal

savings and may include drawing from one's resources in a private insurance scheme, sale of personal chattels to fund the business idea (Bruhn, 2015). Jonsson and Lindbergh (2013) declared that the concept of bootstrapping is a creative way to start a business with one's resources and the reliance on the cash generated within the firm. The strategy aims at a quick turnover of inventory and overall, reduce to the barest minimum capital that a business requires at any given time (Khwaja, 2016).

With the growth of the company, leaders may consider debt financing through a traditional bank loan or equity financing (McCarthy, Oliver, & Verreynne, 2017). Entrepreneurs could choose the equity financing to share the ownership of the firm with shareholders. Shareholders may bring funds in term of stock (Le & Nguyen, 2017). Stakeholders may participate in equity financing as Angel investors, public offering, venture capitals and private placement (Drover et al., 2017). Equity funders provide leverage to the managers to focus on fulfilling the company's core goal and to keeps the administration away from hassles of raising funds continuously (McCarthy et al., 2017). The other advantage is that there are no obligations to pay back or to pay the dividend (Drover et al., 2017).

Zwilling (2013) posited that there are new financing opportunities and avenues available to potential entrepreneurs or managers. Some of the innovative financing sources available to entrepreneurs include the crowdfunding, vendor financing, and microloans (Rijanto, 2018; Sievers, 2015). The crowdfunding is a term business community uses to describe the fundraising via the Internet where groups of people pool money to support a specific project or cause (Sievers, 2015). Crowdfunding is different

from the equity crowdfunding which is a form of financing in which entrepreneurs make an open call to sell a specified amount of equity or bond-like shares in a company on the Internet, hoping to attract a large group of investors (Sievers, 2015). Vendor financing is a system that entrepreneurs use to purchase products and equipment with deferral payment (Jyoti & Arora, 2013). The microloan is the loan of the small amount that some institutions provide to potential entrepreneurs excluded from the conventional bank system (Lee & Olav, 2016). Gómez, Hernández, and Solano (2016) argued that Mutual Guarantee Society could increase the availability of finance and reduce the debt costs for the entrepreneurs. Le and Nguyen (2017) posited that business owners could use the Mutual Guarantee Society to facilitate bank financing access to boost startups and sustain the growth of the existing firms.

Moreover, Lim (2015) revealed the importance of the Activist Hedge Funds in restructuring companies in financial distress. The Activist Hedge Funds is newly emerging actors distinct from traditional stakeholders of distressed firms (Fichter, 2014). Finally, entrepreneurs could get the competitive advantage by exploring the financial support from incubators (Morgan, 2014) or through the retirement rollover funds (Tacchino, 2015).

Innovation theory. Schumpeter is one of the influential thinkers about the content and the importance of innovation in business (Miller, 2015). Schumpeter acknowledged that innovation is crucial and necessary in a free market for small business survival and longevity (Arnason, 2015). Damanpour (2014) and Spies (2014) affirmed that innovation involves any new ideas and practices that come with an added-value to

the organization. The innovation could be introducing new products and services to meet consumers' needs, opening new markets or carrying out new structures (Binder, Mair, Stummer, & Kessler, 2016; Mol & Birkinshaw, 2014). Hjalager (2014) indicated that innovation could come from inside of the organization, outside or from benchmarking partners. Saunila, Ukko, and Rantanen (2014) showed the relationship between sustainability and innovation and the importance of innovation for long-term profitability of businesses. Gronum et al. (2016) and Saunila et al. (2014) considered innovation as a vibrant aptitude that allows an organization to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address changes in a fast-paced business environment. Lofsten (2016) stated that innovation is the company's ability to have a competitive edge by applying efficiently collective knowledge, resources, skills, and the organization system to create added-value to the stakeholders. The Harvard Business Review Press (2003) postulated that the innovation process starts with two creative steps: Ideation and opportunity recognition. Shin, Kim, Choi, and Lee (2016) revealed the importance of the innovative team in the idea generation, selection and implementation. Manso (2017) recommended that business leaders put in place programs that reward individuals who generate ideas with good pay and nonfinancial desired benefits. Laviolette, Redien-Collot, and Teglborg (2016) proposed that managers include in the rewards career ladders, monetary compensation, autonomy to pursue their curiosity, and paid vacation and travel to attend technical conferences.

The fierceness of competition and the rapid technological change are severe threats to the survival and performance of small businesses (Levina, 2017). Pegoraro

(2014) recommended that small business leaders embrace disruptive innovation. The disruptive innovation occurs when new technologies, new products or services, or new practices interrupt or cause disorder and replace the old ones (Lofsten, 2016). Nagy, Schuessler, and Dubinsky (2016) found that disruptive technology involves new technologies that can create new markets or radically change the status quo in existing markets. Bohnsack and Pinkse (2017) concurred with Levina (2017) that disruptive innovation is the driver of a radical change of the companies' business model compared to the previous model. According to Hazlett et al. (2016), the disruptive innovation became necessary when an established technology matures, and the new technology can meet users' needs better than the established technologies, or when there is a change in business environment. Hahn, Jensen, and Tanev (2014) noticed that disruptive innovation can apply to any field and especially within small businesses. Helkkula, Kowalkowski, and Tronvoll (2017) agreed that the degree of disruptiveness of the value propositions of start-ups should be visible to make consensus about the change that differs from the past practices or services or products. Bohnsack and Pinkse (2017) added that the degree of the disruptiveness is the added-value perceived by customers, market channels, investors, competitors, media, and other stakeholders.

Wang and Chen (2015) focused their study on the role of the strategic innovation capability for the survival and success of small businesses. Wang and Chen (2015) found that small businesses owners operate in a very fast-paced environment with recurrent change in customers' demand and preferences, technology, and competition patterns. Levina (2017) maintained that business leaders need to break the old rules and culture to

accept to restructure the existing business models. Hahn et al. (2014) demonstrated that strategic innovation capability increases customers' satisfaction, productivity, overall revenue, and the strategic position of small businesses. Batra, Sharma, and Dixit (2017) also considered strategic innovation as a determinant of organizational survival and sustainability. Karimi and Walter (2016) provided a theoretical viewpoint on how prominent corporations impact disruptive business model innovation adoption and the way it affects their performance. Batra et al. (2017) asserted that autonomy, risk-taking and the ability of leaders to be proactive have a positive association with the introduction of disruptive business model innovation. Lopatta et al. (2016) posited that to be sustainable, small business owners should fulfill their social and corporate responsibility.

Levina (2017) studied the different dilemmas small business leaders may encounter to sustain their businesses on the market. Lampikoski, Westerlund, Rajala, and Möller (2014) acknowledged that disruptive innovation could be challenging. Efforts to adopt new disruptive technology or new products or services can be financially costly and time-consuming (Levina, 2017). Christensen (2011) argued that investing in new technology does not guarantee success. Business leaders should be strategic to identify precursor signals of change on the market to adapt products and services that better meet consumers' demand (Lampikoski et al., 2014). The financial limitation could be a potential challenge. Funding challenges include the cost of research and development and the cost of hiring talent and training the workforce (Patriotta & Hirsch, 2016). Patriotta and Hirsch (2016) considered the cost of trials and potential failure, and the financial burden to find and explore new niche market to promote the new system (Patriotta &

Hirsch, 2016). Christensen (2011) advised leaders to develop strategies to appraise their firms' capabilities and disabilities to change. Banker, Mashruwala, and Tripathy (2015) linked the disruptive innovation, strategic positioning, and the performance sustainability of companies. According to Banker et al. (2015), sustainability involves long-term profitability, competitive advantage, overhead control, increase of the market share, lower operational cost, added value, and the ability to adapt to change. Banker et al. (2015) explained that a firm is sustainable if it can continue to exist regardless of market threats. Hansen and Schaltegger (2016) speculated that sustainability includes the best strategies for small business owners. Sustainability is a winning strategy for small business leaders to retain existing customers, provide users support and consumers service; build up the customer base, and increase brand awareness and customer loyalty (Bandyopadhyay, 2017). Tolstoy (2014) asserted that the strategic differentiation approach consists of benchmarking competitors to propose innovative products or services that will attract and maintain customers, investors, talent, and other useful stakeholders.

Transition

In Section 1, I presented the background of the problem about new small business sustainability paradigm. Other components of this section include the problem and purpose statements, the nature of the study, the research and the interview questions. Furthermore, Section 1 contains the conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, the significance of the study, and review of the professional and academic literature.

In Section 2, I restated the purpose of the study, provided information about the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, data collection and organization techniques, data analysis, reliability and validity of the findings. In Section 3 I provided the presentation of the study outcomes and their application to professional practice and implication for social change. I completed Section 3 with recommendations for actions and further studies, reflections, and conclusion of the study.

Section 2: The Project

The goal of this study was to explore strategies that small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations. In this section, I discuss the purpose, the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, and population and sampling. The section also contains information about ethical research practice, data collection, instrument, data collection and organization techniques, data analysis, and description of the reliability and validity of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore strategies small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations. The targeted population consisted five retail business owners who have launched and sustained a business longer than 5 years in the District of Columbia. The implication for positive social change includes the potential to provide information about the economic, cultural, social, and structural issues that prevent the small business owners from succeeding in business in the long term. Strategies that the business owners used to sustain the company may help potential entrepreneurs to thrive in business. The increase in the success rate of small businesses could be significant for local economies because small businesses owners contribute to economic growth and can provide more employment opportunities and innovation in communities.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher plays a prominent role in a qualitative study (Saxena, 2017). In this research, my role consisted of choosing a suitable methodology, designing the study, selecting participants, collecting, organizing, analyzing and interpreting data, and writing the results of the investigation. Additionally, during data analysis in a qualitative study, the researcher identifies and codes themes and find the meanings that could emerge from the dialog with participants (Yin, 2017).

Part of my role as the researcher involved my interest in the study topic. I have an interest in strategic management and sustainable development topics from my experience as a small business consultant working with small firms' leaders and my curiosity about consumers' behavior trends toward climate change. Research has indicated the paradigm shift in consumer's buying criteria from increased awareness of the impact of human activities on climate change (Deer & Zaretsky, 2017). Thus, I conducted this research to analyze strategies small business owners use to adapt services and products to the consumer' shift to sustain businesses in the long term. The findings can help increase small businesses' profitability and growth over time.

Another role I served was as an interviewer of the participants. During the interaction with the participants, the researcher listens, gets involved, and shows interest in participants' opinions (Kumar & Cavallaro, 2017). Throughout data collection, I also acted ethically according to the Belmont Report (National Institute of Health, 2014). The Belmont Report embodies three fundamental ethical principles that include (a) the principles of respect of persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice. I complied with the three

principles during my interaction with the participants. I asked questions and collected data in a way to avoid influence on the interviewees' opinions.

Researchers use semistructured interviews to be able to ask in-depth questions (McTat & Leffler, 2017). With the semistructured protocol, the interviewer is free to ask a series of questions in different ways according to the response of the participants (Yin, 2017). In this study, I used semistructured interviews to ask in-depth questions to collect facts and explore the answers of the participants. It is also important to have an interview protocol, which contributes to establishing a uniformed way to gather comparable data from participants (Devotta et al., 2016). Before the beginning of the interview, I developed and shared with each respondent the interview protocol with a similar method of collecting data. During face-to-face data collection, the researcher can take notes to capture participants' conversation and record voices (Chongo, Chase, Lavoie, Harder, & Mignone, 2018). For instance, the researcher might take pictures and check the internal and external documentation (Bradbury-Jones & Broadhurst, 2015). During data collection, I tried to be neutral and watch my body language to avoid influencing the respondents. Furthermore, I used the bracketing method to mitigate my assumptions to curtail the introduction of biases during data analysis and interpretation. After collecting information, I used Nvivo software to transcribe data and to assist with the manipulation of data to facilitate the interpretation. I will store data for a minimum of 5 years after this study before destroying them.

Participants

A researcher selects participants whose characteristics align with the overarching research question before collecting data (Schrag, 2017). In this study, I chose participants based on the following eligibility criteria: (a) small business in retailing sector, (b) established in the District of Columbia, and (c) legally operating beyond 5 years. I selected the small business retailing owners who had the appropriate qualification about the research topic and purpose.

The relationship between the researcher and the participants is important for the success of a qualitative face-to-face study (Chan, Teram, & Shaw, 2017). Before gaining access to participants, it is important that researchers develop guidelines to ensure participants protection (Chan et al., 2017). Researchers should receive permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before contacting potential participants (Morris & Morris, 2016). My first approach after obtaining IRB approval (approval no. 2018.07.12 12:53:46-05'00') was to reach participants by searching the official repertoire of small business retailers from the District of Columbia Consumer and Regulatory Affairs to identify potential participants per location. Furthermore, I checked the targeted businesses' websites to get additional insights and contacts. I then made phone calls, arranged face-to-face meetings, or sent introductory e-mails inviting participants to the study. During the communications with participants, I presented the purpose of the study, the benefits of the research, and the criteria for the selection (see Appendix B). Each participant received my e-mails, home address, and phones numbers to contact me for future questions, issues, or feedback.

Informed consent is important in a study (Nakkash et al., 2017), as a consent form mentions the voluntary nature of the study and participants' rights to withdraw to protect their autonomy (Roulet et al., 2017) as well as defines any compensation and the confidentiality of participants (Jackson & Larson, 2016). I sent the informed consent form to the first five participants per location who had no objections to participate in this study. The informed consent explained the research, presented the risks and benefits of being in the study, and included the expectations and requirements of participation (Roulet, Gill, Stenger, & Gill, 2017). Participants' identity remained anonymous to ensure privacy. I stored paper format data and physical findings in a locked fireproof file cabinet in my home. Then I saved recordings and electronic documents on a personal password-protected and encrypted Cloud Drive format to keep it safe from fire, hackers, and any natural hazards. To ensure and protect the privacy of participants, I will shred any paper format data with a shredder machine and permanently delete recordings and electronic documents from Cloud Drive using Cloud Drive data-removal software 5 years after concluding the study.

Research Method and Design

Researchers use quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches to conduct research (Maxwell, 2016). Researchers choose the most appropriate research method and design according to the research question, the goals, and the purpose of the study. The purpose of this study was to explore strategies small business owners use to sustain businesses beyond 5 years, making a multiple case qualitative study the most suitable. Qualitative research is appropriate for the researcher whose objective is to

explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups give to a social or human problem (Corti & Fielding, 2016). Additionally, a case study is more flexible when a researcher wants to gain an exhaustive understanding of a specific issue or problem over a specific period (Morgan, Pullon, Macdonald, McKinlay, & Gray, 2017).

Research Method

I selected the qualitative method instead of the quantitative and the mixed method for this research. The qualitative method is more appropriate when the researcher's goal is to explore in-depth social phenomena and to gain knowledge about the meaning individuals attach to their experiences in society (Sparkes, 2014). The qualitative method is also more convenient for studying complex issues to generate broader data about the experiences, perceptions, and beliefs of the participants to deepen understanding (Letourneau, 2015). I chose the qualitative method over the quantitative and mixed methods for many reasons. First, the small business owners may have different motivations, opportunities, and challenges to create and manage businesses. Furthermore, each small business owner may have developed numerous strategies to sustain enterprises over the course. The qualitative method was the ideal to identify factors and explore in-depth all the elements small business owners used to sustain business beyond 5 years.

Researchers use the quantitative method to increase methodological rigor and establish a relationship between or among statistical variables to evaluate and estimate values based on data collected from samples (Laher, 2016). A quantitative method is appropriate when the focus is on observable and objective data and facts that researchers can quantify to demonstrate causality (Crane, Henriques, Husted, Mexico, & Matten,

2017). This study did not involve collecting and analyzing statistical data, and the intention was not to draw conclusions based on a hypothesis. Additionally, with the quantitative methods, researchers may not be able to provide an in-depth understanding of lived experiences and the complexity of the phenomenon of decision-making in business. Therefore, the quantitative approach was not appropriate to analyze and explain the situations each small business owner experienced to sustain businesses over 5 years.

The mixed method is the combination of the qualitative and the quantitative methods (Southam-Gerow & Dorsey, 2014). The mixed method is suitable when the researcher wants to explore at the same time both the quantitative factors and the qualitative aspects of a phenomenon (Sparkes, 2014). The quantitative part of the mixed method made it unfit to use for this study. Because the goal was to explore in-depth the strategies small business owners use to sustain business beyond 5 years, only the qualitative method was appropriate for this study.

Research Design

For this study, I selected a multiple case study design. Researchers use multiple cases to explore the experiences of a small group of participants for periods of time (Haines, 2017). A case study is the most appropriate model to examine the organizational realities in a real-life setting with an in-depth exploration of few cases or a single case (Schmidt, Eisenmann, Golla, Voltz, & Perrar, 2018). A case study consists of developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases to provide an exhaustive understanding of the phenomena (Yin, 2017). With the multiple case study, I explored

strategies small business owners use to sustain their companies beyond 5 years and fulfill their firms' social responsibility despite challenges.

I preferred the case study out of the three other designs that are adequate for the qualitative method: ethnography, phenomenology, narrative designs (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative designs were not appropriate for this study. For example, researchers use ethnography to describe and interpret the shared patterns of the culture of groups, neighborhoods, or organizations through the long-term involvement of the setting. Ethnography is more useful to uncover and comprehend the real meaning of life experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To conduct ethnographic studies, the researcher must live and experience the culture and the real life of the group (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I could not consider the ethnography design because the intent of this study was not to commit to conduct long-term research onsite for an extended period.

Phenomenologists seek to understand the essence of the experience and a lived phenomenon (VanManen, 2017). Researchers consider phenomenology when the intent is to obtain an in-depth understanding of the complexity of an issue through the lived experiences and perceptions of participants (Chan & Walker, 2015). Phenomenology was not chosen because the goal was not to understand the essence of the studied groups.

Researchers of use a narrative design to probe the way people chronicle their lives and try to understand the diversity and the various levels included in the stories (Jones, 2016). This design was inappropriate for this research because the purpose was not to

study the life one or two individuals by gathering data through the collection of their stories (Yin, 2017).

Saturation is a qualitative research tool to ensure sufficiency of data from the participants (Gibbins, Bhatia, Forbes, & Reid, 2014). Researchers consider data saturation where information participants provide does not add value, meaning researchers reach data saturation when there is enough information to replicate the study and where further coding become unnecessary (Robinson, 2014). Failure to reach data saturation affects the validity and quality of research. I considered reaching data saturation when the information participants provided did not bring any new material or data about strategies small business owners use to sustain businesses beyond 5 years.

Population and Sampling

A researcher selects participants whose characteristics align with the overarching research question before collecting data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Schrag, 2017). The targeted population was five small retailers who have launched and sustained a company longer than 5 years in the District of Columbia. The study involved five participants at the rate of one participant per District of Columbia main geographical subdivisions: northwest, southwest, northeast, southeast, and downtown. In this study, I selected the small business retailing owners who have the appropriate qualification about the research topic and purpose. The participants' eligibility criteria were: (a) small business in retailing sector, (b) established in the District of Columbia, and (c) legally operating beyond 5 years.

Researchers use two significant sampling forms techniques: probability and nonprobability (Lucas, 2017). Probability sampling consists of using random techniques to create a sample of participants (Lucas, 2017). Probability sampling is a statistical process to ensure that individuals in the population have an equal opportunity to be selected as a representative sample. However, nonprobability is based on the subjective judgment of the researcher and does not give all the individuals in the population the same chance of being selected, but it is convenient for the researcher to create samples based on the characteristics of participants regarding the subject of study (Rafail, 2018). I used the nonprobability sampling because of the lack of precise statistical data about the population. Furthermore, nonprobability sampling is more appropriate for qualitative research (Lucas, 2017).

Qualitative researchers use various sampling techniques to create participants samples including haphazard, accidental, or convenient, quota, snowball, and purposeful (Ishak & Bakar, 2014). A haphazard, accidental, or convenient sampling are easy to use but do not help create valid representative samples (Ishak & Bakar, 2014).) Quota sampling is the improved technique of haphazard, but it is more suitable when researchers target to interview individuals with different characteristics to ensure some differences are in the samples (Lu, Jiang, Lou, Zeng, & Liu, 2017). The snowball approach consists of starting with one or few participants and extending the number of participants based on the links to the initial cases (Dorney, 2017). Snowball sampling was not appropriate for this study, because I could have lost control of the sample size, which can lead to sampling errors.

In this study, I used a purposeful or judgmental sampling approach. Purposeful sampling is a qualitative sampling technique that researchers use to choose participants who possess the knowledge, experiences, and characteristics of the study subject (Williams & Needham, 2016). Purposeful sampling is helpful in defining criteria to select participants who meet the qualification and requirements of the research topic (Dorney, 2017). Qualitative researchers use purposeful sampling to seek a diverse range of detailed information sources and to focus more on the quality and richness of data than the number of participants (Randles, 2016). Williams and Needham (2016) posited that many factors could influence purposeful sampling size including the research purpose, study design, available financial and human resources, and characteristics of the targeted population. Unlike probability sampling techniques, the purposeful sampling provides researchers autonomy to gather information from different perspectives regarding the study topic (Barratt, Ferris, & Lenton, 2015). Purposeful sampling is appropriate for this study because it helped gain an in-depth understanding of strategies of participant used to sustain business beyond 5 years from startup.

Data saturation is the evidence of rigor in qualitative research (Constantinou, Georgiou, & Perdikogianni, 2017). Data saturation is a systematical guideline to ensure researchers have collected all data, understood the meaning participants give to their statements, coded all the information appropriately, and analyzes themes faithfully (Gibbins et al., 2014). Researchers use a rigorous data saturation process to ensure that there are no new data, no new coding, no new issues, no further meaning ignored, and there is enough information to replicate the study (Robinson, 2014). Researchers apply

data saturation model to reinforce the validity and the reliability of a study (Elo et al., 2014). Hennink, Kaiser, and Marconi (2017) affirmed that researchers should keep collecting data until there is no new information or no new theme or no new meaning. I made data saturation a high priority to not withdraw from collecting data until participants begin to repeat information or further data collection becomes redundant, or the information provided did not add value to the research topic.

The interview setting is essential in a qualitative study for participants to feel comfortable to respond to questions (Doll, 2017). In this study, I asked the participants to choose the appropriate and convenient venue to conduct the interview. I used open-ended questions and semistructured interview at participants' convenient time, date and location. During a semistructured interview, qualitative researchers use open-ended questions to interact with participants to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences (Yin, 2017). In addition to field note-taking, internal and external documents consultation, I audio-recorded some of the interviews and handwrote others at participants requests to ensure the fidelity of information and to facilitate data analysis.

Ethical Research

Ethical consideration is mandatory while conducting researches regarding living animal species, especially human beings (Pope, 2017). Huang, O'Connor, Ke, and Lee (2016) acknowledged numerous ethical breaches and dilemmas in human studies when researchers fail to follow proper guidelines. Researchers should follow some rigorous steps to ensure the protection of human dignity and rights including the respect of confidentiality and privacy, implementation of informed-consent rules, application of the

Belmont Report, and the use of resources that the IRB provides (Huang et al., 2016). Ellis-Barton (2016) and Barrios, García, and Tapia (2017) suggested that during data collection, researchers should avoid relationships that could impair professional performance or harm participants, discuss potential risks and benefits of the research with participants, and share contacts to reach out with further questions. Ethical research also involves practical security measures to proper data conservation and caution when exchanging and sharing confidential information electronically or during their use (Sugiura, Wiles, & Pope, 2016; Wittenberg & Elings, 2017).

My goal to comply with proper ethical guidelines was first to receive the approval from Walden University IRB before contacting participants and then use the informed consent as a roadmap of relationship with participants. From the researchers' viewpoint, the informed consent consists of efforts to ensure participants understand the purpose, potential benefits and risks, their right, and autonomy before agreeing to participate voluntarily (Nusbaum, Douglas, Damus, Paasche-Orlow, & Estrella-Luna, 2017). The informed consent must be written in a language that participants understand easily and provide enough information so that they can make an informed decision about whether to enroll or in a study (Newington & Metcalfe, 2014).

To respect the fundamental ethical principles and participants' autonomy in this research, I included detailed information in the written informed consent including the purpose of the study, interview questions, length of time of the interview, and procedures involved in the research. Furthermore, the informed consent included foreseeable risks and discomforts, benefits of the study to society and the participants, and the contact

information to answer potential questions. Also, the informed consent indicated the participation is voluntary, and that refusal or withdrawal will not lead to any consequences and mention data collection instruments.

The introduction of the researcher to participants is crucial with regards to the ethical considerations (Damsa & Ugelvik, 2017). During my introduction, I provided with details information about my background, discuss the informed consent content, and answer potential questions participants may have to ensure confidentiality and the protection of their rights. Each participant read, understood and signed the inform consent to acknowledge their agreement to participate in the study and approved data recording instruments (Newington & Metcalfe, 2014). To comply with confidentiality requirement, I used fictional names X1, X2, X3, X4, and X5 to designate each of the 5 participants.

Protecting data collected was my high priority. First, I stored paper format data and physical findings in a locked fireproof file cabinet in my home. Furthermore, I saved recordings and electronic documents on a personal password-protected and encrypted Cloud Drive format to keep it safe from fire, hackers, and any natural hazards. To protect the rights of participants, I will shred any paper format data with a shredder machine and permanently delete recordings and electronic documents using Cloud Drive data-removal software 5 years after concluding the study.

Data Collection Instruments

In qualitative studies, the role of the researcher is to understand and interpret themes that arise from data collection (Kozleski, 2017). In the qualitative multiple case study, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Damsa & Ugelvik, 2017).

In this study, I used various sources to collect data including interviews, observations, artifacts, and consultation of the companies' published and unpublished documents to ensure triangulation guidelines. Face-to-face meeting is crucial to engaging participants in the audio-recording process and establishing trust and professional relationship with participants (Andreae et al., 2017). I administered questions face-to-face to the targeted small business owners using open-ended semistructured questions. Semistructured interviews are significant in the qualitative study (Teixeira, Gregory, & Austin, 2017). The interview protocol (Appendix A) aligned with the research topic, areas relevant to the research study, and semistructured nature of all the questions. Sims (2016) reported that the use of multiple data sources is beneficial to enhance case study research and assist the researcher in achieving triangulation for research validity.

Holmes and Parker (2017) recommended that researchers should strengthen the reliability and validity of data collection through member checking to corroborate the credibility of the study. Member checking is appropriate in the case study for credibility, reliability, validity, and transferability of data collected and the trustworthiness of the results (Caretta, 2015; Kamball, 2017). To comply with member checking requirements, I transcribed the audio-recorded data collected and share a summary with each participant to review and to provide feedback about data accuracy to avert misrepresentation of information collected.

Data Collection Technique

In this research, I used semistructured interview format, because the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore strategies small business owners use to

sustain their businesses beyond 5 years while at the same time fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations. Data collection consisted of gathering information from the participants (Yin, 2017). After responding to the letter of invitation, I worked with participants to schedule date, time, and location of the interview with each of them. I used face-to-face verbal interview and audio recording primarily for this study. During analysis time, I made a few additional phone calls to clarify or confirm some information. There were no requests for remote interviews by telephone, Skype, Face-time, and other social media. Researchers can choose three ways to conduct interviews: structured, unstructured, and semistructured (Bond et al., 2014). Researchers use structured interviews to reach a broader sample of participants to collect quantifiable data, but the participants do not have the freedom to explore questions in detail (Doll, 2017). The unstructured interview is an open-end interview, an informal approach without a format or style questions (McTat & Leffler, 2017). Both the interviewer and the interviewees engage in a free flow conversation, but unstructured interviews are more time consuming, and there is a chance to get diverted from the topic (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

In this study, I used semistructured interviews. Researchers use semistructured interviews based on an interview guide with a written list of questions to capture the social cues from the interview (Rooy, Mufune, & Amadhila, 2015). The advantage of semistructured interviews is multiple. Semistructured interviews allow replication and in-depth questions with more detail information. Moreover, participants may feel more comfortable to answer questions with a well-designed protocol (Bond et al., 2014). Researchers use semistructured interviews to develop a rapport and to engage

participants' full attention to the study topic. Semistructured interviews provide a framework to gain an understanding of participants' attitude (McTat & Leffler, 2017). The disadvantage of the semistructured face-to-face interview includes the possibility of high cost and the time consuming to reach out to the participants for onsite interviews and the potential biases of data collection due to the influence of the researcher (McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Shirani, 2015).

Nordstrom (2015) opined that an audio-recording interview allows researchers to capture the information they might miss during note-taking. Therefore, I audio-recorded some interviews and handwrote others at the request of participants. During the interview, it is essential for the interviewer to take note of inconsistencies such as body languages, nonverbal and gestural cues, long pauses, and any indications meaningful to the study (Myers & Lampropoulou, 2016). Furthermore, during the onsite visit, the researchers could check the archives and companies' documents to get additional information related to the topics (Doll, 2017). Researchers ensure the privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of all participants and provided them the opportunity to indicate their agreements with the information collected for the validity of the analysis (Reed, Khoshnood, Blankenship, & Fisher, 2016).

Researchers used an open-end semistructured interview to be able to capture valuable data about what participants think, interpret information and decide sustainability (Vogl, 2014). The interview protocol (Appendix A) contains eight open-end questions for the data collection step. The interview was conversational to allow participants to give insightful and detailed information about their experiences. After

collecting data from the participants, Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) recommended researchers to use member checking techniques to ensure the accuracy of the interpretation of the information from the interview. In this study, I transcribed each interview and provided a copy of my analysis to each participant to review to authenticate and confirm the validity and accuracy of the answers collected.

Data Organization Technique

Data organization technique consists of labeling each participant's audio-recorded interview (Bishop & Kuula-Luumi, 2017). Data organization technique is essential to analyze, review and report interview data accurately (Watkins, 2017). Each participant file included the company's documents obtained during the study, the date, time and location of the interview, the inform consent, and the interview transcription. I used fictional names X1, X2, X3, X4, and X5 to designate each of the 5 participants. During data organization stage, the researchers review the interview notes, analyze the journal notes, enter data into qualitative analysis software, and check the data (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). In this study, I used the NVivo software. NVivo is a recommended software for qualitative data management and analysis (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016). First, I uploaded data collection on NVivo software to organize the result of the interview into different themes before analyzing the information from the content using thematic techniques.

I stored data according to Walden University IRB requirements to protect the confidentiality of the participants. After collecting data, researchers must ensure how to handle participants files to ensure confidentiality (Reed et al., 2016). To protect

participants rights and confidentiality, I stored paper format data and physical findings in a locked fireproof file cabinet in my home. Furthermore, I saved recordings and electronic documents on a personal password-protected and encrypted Cloud Drive format to keep it safe from fire, hackers, and any natural hazards. The Cloud Drive is a web-based storage space that a researcher can set up on a remote server, accessible mostly over the Internet to store, secure and make data available everywhere as needed (Sun, Zhang, Xiong, Zhu, 2014; Wittenberg & Elings, 2017). There are many Cloud Drives. However, for this study, I used Google Drive because it is convenient for me than other Cloud Drives. As recommended by Walden University's IRB, I will shred any paper format data with a shredder machine and permanently delete recordings and electronic documents using Cloud Drive data removal software 5 years after concluding the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the next step after field access, data collection, and transcription (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Data analysis is the process of classification and interpretation of the implicit or explicit information collected through the interview, observation, and the review of written and visual documents (Assarroudi, Nabavi, Armat, Ebadi, & Vaismoradi, 2018). Yin (2017) posited that data collection consists of arranging the interviewed-data into chronological order, categories, patterns, and identifying critical recurrent themes. Following the arrangement of data, it is essential to conduct the in-depth examination to find similarities, differences, common themes and the meaning of

information (Neal, Neal, VanDyke, & Kornbluh, 2014). Following the same procedures, I proceeded to data analysis after data collection.

Researchers use qualitative data analysis software to convert raw data into common themes (Davidson, Thompson, & Harris, 2017). I used the thematic analysis model in this study. Thematic analysis is a powerful qualitative research technique recommended to novice researchers who are not familiar with more complex types of qualitative studies. The thematic analysis allows flexibility in the researchers' choice of theoretical framework. Thematic analysis is appropriate for the multiple case study design because it provides a valuable, detailed, and well elaborated description of data (Assarroudi et al., 2018). Davidson et al. (2017) stated that researchers use the thematic analysis to make sense of the interview data fast by automatically coding open-ended questions and using matrices to compare the answers of different types of respondents. Using the thematic analysis, the researchers get more profound insights to understand fundamental concepts and sentiments in larger volumes of text spontaneously (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). Consequently, I used the thematic analysis in this study.

Researchers use the Nvivo software to examine qualitative data to deliver insightful findings and comprehensive recommendations (Robins & Eisen, 2017). Woods et al. (2016) posited that Nvivo is the recommended software to identify the redundancy and common patterns in data and to analyze a significant amount of data in various formats like text, images, literature, video, and social media. Robins and Eisen (2017) affirmed that Nvivo is a robust application to assist with the analysis of semistructured

interview transcripts. Nvivo can help answer complicated questions, enrich the researchers' understanding, and facilitate data management (Hashim, 2015). I used Nvivo 12, the latest version of Nvivo, for data analysis to assist in creating themes from the transcribed data and to facilitate the interpretations of data of the study.

I applied the triangulation technique to analyze data about the phenomena of strategy for small retailing business sustainability in the District of Columbia.

Triangulation consists of using different sources, investigators, theories, and methods to provide corroborating evidence about the study subject (Yin, 2017). Turner, Cardinal, and Burton (2017) opined that qualitative researchers use a triangulation approach to locate evidence from various sources to validate and support the same finding.

Triangulation is the convergence of evidence from different sources including open-ended interviews, focus interviews, direct or participant observations, and documents (Renz, Carrington, & Badger, 2018). Data triangulation is crucial to strengthen the validity and ensure the credibility of a study (Turner et al., 2017). Therefore, I used the data triangulation technique to evaluate information collected via the open-ended interviews, behavioral and nonbehavioral observations, and review of internal and external documents.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are essential in quantitative research as well as in qualitative investigation. In a qualitative study, researchers use reliability and validity to ensure the accuracy, exactness, and the trustworthiness of a study (Assarroudi et al., 2018). To make a study reliable and valid, researchers follow a rigor and specific

procedure during data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Elo et al., 2014). Elo et al. (2014) and Kern (2016) opined that reliability and validity include dependability, credibility, transferability, confirmability, and data saturation.

Reliability

Reliability consists of having the same findings when many researchers use the same method to conduct a study (Elo et al., 2014). The goal of the reliability approach is to examine trustworthiness and to avoid or limit the research outcomes biases (Assarroudi et al., 2018). Reliability refers to consistency in the study outcomes over time. To ensure reliability requirements in multiple case study, researchers use the same data collection instruments, technique, organization, and analysis process (Morse, 2015). Besides, researchers ask the same questions in the same orderly manner to each participant (Starcher, Dzubinski, & Sanchez, 2018).

Moreover, researchers document the sequence of data process and analysis and record the entire data collection and interpretation steps to make sure future researchers come up with similar results when same procedures are followed (Starcher et al., 2018). Researchers also use the member checking, methodological saturation, and triangulation by providing participants with the findings for a review to confirm data accuracy. I ensured reliability in this study by using the same data collection instruments and technique, organization, and analysis steps. Furthermore, I asked similar questions to all the participants, document the sequence of data process and analysis, and use the same saturation technique.

Dependability. Researchers ensure dependability to maintain consistency during the research process (Nowell et al., 2017). Dependability is crucial to provide trustworthiness of the findings. To ensure dependability in this research, I audio-recorded or write down the interview, transcribe information, use Nvivo software to analyze data collected. I based the data analysis on the raw data recorded, observed, and written to make sure further researchers come to similar results when using the same data analysis procedure. Another technique to ensure reliability is by triangulation (Robins & Eisen, 2017). Turner et al. (2017) stated that triangulation consists of using multiple data sources to support the interview data to ensure fidelity of the research outcomes. I provided triangulation by using member checking by allowing participants to authenticate my data analysis for the accuracy of findings.

Validity

Validity is essential to ensure the quality of qualitative research. Validity involves accuracy and the truthfulness of data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the findings of the study (Dennis, 2018). To ensure validity, researchers provide triangulation by using several sources of information to validate the interview data (Kern, 2016). Additional references to corroborate evidence of interview data include firms' official documentation, behavioral and nonbehavioral, field notes (Kern, 2016). Furthermore, researchers can use the member checking to allow participants consent of data analysis and interpretation. Another technique to ensure credibility is data saturation (Birt et al., 2016). Data saturation is when responses are consistent with almost all the participants. Morse (2015) opined that to ensure validity, researchers use techniques such as

credibility, transferability, and confirmability. In this study, I provided validity by applying triangulation, member checking, and data saturation guidelines.

Credibility. Credibility refers to the level of objectivity and impartiality of findings of research (Bradshaw, Atkinson, & Doody, 2017). Researchers use credibility to ensure that outcomes reflect participants' opinion and hold (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). Researchers use credibility to make sure the study's results are believable, reasonable, and truthful. Nowell et al. (2017) and Turner et al. (2017) confirmed that researchers use credibility to ensure the integrity and the trustworthiness of the findings of a study. In this research, I authenticated conclusions by using member checking by disseminating research results to participants for validation. Besides, I used the triangulation method to cross-check data collected from the interview with field-notes, behavioral and nonbehavioral data. Finally, I made sure I focused only on data collected from participants and devoid of personal opinions or biases.

Transferability. Transferability is the extent to which the findings of the qualitative research apply to other contexts or settings (Pozzebon, Rodriguez, & Petrini, 2014). Nowell et al. (2017) posited that transferability is the level to which the results of a qualitative investigation can be applied or transferred beyond the boundaries of the research. Researchers increase transferability by providing a systematical description of the population and the geographic boundaries of the study and the data collection process for readers to apply their situations (Morse, 2015). To comply with transferability, I made sure to provide information about the participants geographic limit and the research method and design methodically. Secondly, I gave a thorough description of data

collection instrument and procedures to enable readers with the opportunity to transfer the study results to other settings. Finally, I provided readers with enough evidence that the results of the research could apply to different contexts, situations, times, and populations.

Confirmability. Confirmability refers to how objective and accurate research findings are as opposed to the researcher's biases (Nowell et al., 2017). Confirmability is a criterion qualitative researchers use to evaluate the rigor and the quality of a study (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). Confirmability is the level of which different researchers can attest the truthfulness and the correctness of the findings of a study (Elo et al., 2014). To establish confirmability, researchers follow a strict scientific process to conduct a case study research, document all the research procedures and adopt rigorous approach to be devoid of personal biases (Trainor & Graue, 2014). I followed strict procedures to ensure the accuracy of data and use the triangulation technique to support findings from the interviews with multiple sources of data including field notes, companies' documents reviews, and observations. Moreover, I maintained a reflective diary during the study to ensure the confirmability of the research findings. Pozzebon et al. (2014) affirmed that a reflective diary consists of documenting researcher's experiences and challenges throughout the study to facilitate decision-making.

Data saturation. Data saturation is essential but challenging in the qualitative research (Morse, 2015). Researchers reach data saturation when during the analysis of the data collected the same themes are recurring, and no new ideas emerged (Constantinou et al., 2017). Hennink et al. (2017) stated that data saturation occurs when there is no new

insights or new data to replicate the study. Nelson (2017) explained that failure to reach data saturation calls to question the quality, reliability, and validity of the research. To ensure data saturation, I continued the interview until participants answers become recurrent and no new ideas or new findings are available.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I restated the study's purpose, the role of the researcher, the criteria I used to select potential participants, and the justification of the research method and design. Next, I provided detailed information regarding the population and sampling of the study and ethical research. Moreover, I included the description of the data collection instrument and technique, data organization and analysis process, the reliability and validity of the findings. In Section 3, I present the findings of the study, application to professional practices, implications for social change, recommendations for actions and further research reflections. I ended the section with a summary and a conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore strategies small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations. Five business owners in the District of Columbia participated in this study. To ensure privacy, I designated participants X1, X2, X3, X4, X5. I used a semistructured interview to collect in-depth experiences from participants. Data saturation occurred when participants' answers became repetitive, and there were no new insights or new information to add to data collected (see Nelson, 2017).

After transcribing the interviews and reviewing my observations and field notes, I uploaded data into Nvivo 12 software. The Nvivo 12 software helped me organize data, index segments to themes, link research notes to coding, and examine the relationship between themes. I used member checking to confirm the accuracy of the information participants provided. Section 3 includes the presentation of the findings, application to professional practices, implications for social change, recommendations for action, suggestions for further study, reflections, and a conclusion.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching question for this study was: What strategies do small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations? For this study, I conducted a face-to-face, semistructured interviews with open-ended questions. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Among the five participants, I recorded only one conversation. Other participants

preferred that I took notes. I corroborated the interview data with other sources such as observation and field notes to ensure data triangulation.

I used the modern sustainability development theory for this study. Small business sustainability involves the ability of business leaders to achieve profitability and long-term growth (Banker et al., 2014). Business leaders may align the economic goals with social responsibility to become competitive and profitable over time (Hansen & Schaltegger, 2016). Business owners who adopt sustainability approaches may increase their revenue by attracting more customers, investors, talent, and lower the operational costs and have better goodwill in the community (Pantelica et al., 2016).

After the analysis, five main themes emerged: (a) business establishment planning, (b) sustainability planning, (c) sustainability factors utilization, (d) access to credit, and (e) business model adaptability. The themes and the corresponding frequency from the semistructured interviews and secondary sources are in Table 1.

Table 1

Frequency of Themes

Themes	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Business establishment planning	33	24%
Sustainability planning	30	22%
Sustainability factors use	28	20%
Access to credit	25	18%
Business model adaptability	21	15%

Note. *N* represents the number of times participants mentioned subthemes that constitute the main themes ($N = 137$). The percentage is the frequency of the emerging themes, which I rounded.

Theme 1: Business Establishment Planning

The subthemes under business establishment planning theme are business location, entrepreneurial experience, financing, business plan, and spin-off strategy. The location is an essential determinant for the success and the sustainability of small companies (Wach, Stephan, & Gorgievski, 2015). In traditional businesses, the choice of location goes together with the niche or the targeted market (Ross, Adams, & Crossan, 2015). In a brick-and-mortar business, a location might determine the demand, the existence, and the future of firms (Jaouen & Lasch, 2015). Business locations represent the firm's ecosystem—physical environment where business owners cooperate with suppliers, lenders, customers, competitors, and other stakeholders—where stakeholders interact with a firm (Ross et al., 2015). A rich socioeconomic ecosystem is essential for businesses profitability and long-term growth (Jayawarna et al., 2014). A rich business ecosystem is overflow with customers with a higher purchasing power, abundant lenders, and qualified employees (Jayawarna et al., 2014). According to the findings of a survey X1 provided, the accessibility was one of the reasons customers like the store. X2 said, “If you have the know-how in the industry, location is the most important factor to consider because I do not think this business could succeed elsewhere.” X3 also stated, “My store is visible and easy to find. The store is in a very dynamic business environment making it easy to interact with other stakeholders including lenders, suppliers, and customers.” For X4, doing business in the United States and mainly in the District of Columbia is rewarding because of the possibility to sell products and service online. X5 added the most important factor to consider before going into business is

identifying a good location. X5 continued, “The proximity with other firms, lenders, and suppliers helped build a strong professional network needed to succeed in business.”

Entrepreneurial experience is essential to ensure business sustainability (Jayawarna et al., 2014). During the interviews, all the five participants acknowledged previous experience in the industry is essential to establish and manage a business successfully. X2 stated, “I was very dedicated in my previous jobs to learn business concept because my dream was to become a business owner.” X3 said, “My business is the replication of the business where I used to work for 10 years. The only difference is the location.” X4 affirmed, “I used to work in the restaurant of my father. Also, I worked for the Marriott hotel for 11 years as a cook. I was equipped to launch my restaurant.” According to X5, lack of experience may be the primary reason for business failure. X5 continued, “Nascent entrepreneurs usually are eager to create firms and make a fortune without adequate experiences in the industry.”

All the participants stressed the importance of financing in creating a new venture. This is supported by research, which has indicated that the wealthier a region, the easier to obtain finance to establish and grow a business (Ross et al., 2015). Additionally, business leaders’ ability to obtain financing is essential for business continuity and growth (Baptista & Leitao, 2016). X1 emphasized personal savings and the use of a credit card to start a business. X2 stated that when banks denied his loan request, he turned to friends and family members. However, X3 explained that personal finance might not be enough to start some companies. X4 added, “It is essential to explore many financing sources including family and friends, grants, and loans to be able

to cover business creation costs.” X5 maintained, “Besides my savings, I was able to negotiate extended vendor payment deferment and lease financing.”

A business plan is essential to clarify the business mission and values, set clear goals, define resources, understand the actors in the market, and to remain competitive over time (Cox, 2014; Kornberger, 2017). X1 and X5 explained that businesses fail because the owners lack strategic planning. According to X5, a business plan helps business leaders to focus on vision and values, analyze the market, define where to find resources and outline plans for potential catastrophic scenarios. The business plan is the roadmap to guide entrepreneurs to successful business practices (Watson, McGowan, & Smith, 2014). X2 said, “The business plan is helpful for me to share the company’s vision with potential partners including financial institutions, and potential suppliers.” X3 also claimed, “My business plan is my blueprint. It contains my vision, the state of the market and how to grow the business.” In responding to question regarding the importance of the business plan, X4 stated, “Failure to plan is a plan to fail. I review the business plan before I make a major decision.”

Besides business planning, participants used the spin-off strategy to expand their businesses. Spin-off business is a growth strategy that entrepreneurs use to diversify and grow businesses to explore new areas, opportunities, or to diversify the risk of failure (Spigel, 2017). Instead of enlarging their stores in the same location owner apply spin-off strategy to establish a similar business in other places. Participants also argued that creating new branches is an opportunity to promote dedicated employees to become a branch leader. X3 said, “With the growth of competition and regulations, and operational

costs, I decided to replicate the model to create new branches in Maryland and Virginia to seize more opportunities.” X1 and X4 affirmed that geographical diversification strategy contributed to their firms’ profitability, growth, and helped to strengthen the visibility and reputation of the parent company. Mentioning the advantage of spin-off strategy, X5 said, “I do not want to put all my eggs in one basket. Diversifying my store locations was helpful to expand my business income sources and ensure profitability and sustainability.” X2 stated, “With the rise of competition, the best way to succeed is to diversify your stores.” X3 added, “Diversifying stores provides opportunities to explore new markets and avoid threats of bigger rivals.” X4 mentioned, “I diversified my stores to minimize risks of loss. If the main store performs poorly, others might perform better reducing potential losses.” X5 stated, “Diversification helped spread risks and invested across different asset classes.” Thus, spin-off was a crucial strategy for small businesses to explore new opportunities and to ensure profitability and growth.

Theme 2: Sustainability Planning

The sustainability planning theme includes some primary subthemes: customer service, employee satisfaction, and government policies compliance, and community involvement. Additional subthemes some participants mentioned encompass the use or distribution of environmentally friendly equipment and products, business intelligence, benchmarking, and financial discipline. Corporate sustainability refers to the ability of firms to be profitable and grow over time regardless of the uncertainty of the markets (Bankers et al., 2014). To become sustainable, entrepreneurs must develop strategies to value the interests of stakeholders including customers, employees, suppliers, creditors,

and government officials (Fernandez-Feijoo et al., 2014). Other stakeholders include media, nonprofits, neighbor organizations, and any individuals or institutions with which entrepreneurs may interact (Bottenberg et al., 2017).

Customer service is crucial to ensure businesses sustainability (Albrecht, Walsh, & Beatty, 2017). For example, lousy customer service can be used to demonstrate how a customer-oriented company should operate (Albrecht et al., 2017). Characteristics of poor customer service include failing to greet customers when they walk in the door, hanging up on angry customers, running out of stock of desirable products, not accepting customer feedback, or not treating bad reviews constructively (Dechant, Spann, & Becker, 2018 4). Lousy customer service also involves ignoring a customer and delaying service, lack of a fair return policy, using unreliable delivering process, avoiding eye contact, and putting customers on a long hold or putting a call on hold without the consent of the customer (Hurrell & Scholarios, 2014). All participants stated that they pay particular attention to customers. For instance, X2 stated, “I am open to hearing from my customers to improve the products and services to make them happy, so they refer me to other customers.” X3 added, “I provide healthy food at a competitive price as compared to rivals.” X5 said, “Customers want quality and affordable price. I ensure I honor customers’ demand. I pay attention to feedback and make sure I provide quality food that meets customers’ specific requirements.” X1 and X4 concurred that putting in place a customer-oriented service contributed to building long-term customer loyalty.

Employee satisfaction is also critical to ensure business profitability and long-term competitive edge (Naqbi, Hamidi, Younis, & Rivers, 2014). According to Naqbi et

al. (2014), treating employees fairly includes providing them fair and a living wage, practical training, health insurance, sick leave, paid vacations, retirement plan, disability income, and flexibility. X5 supported this by stating, "I treat my employees with dignity. That is a family business. Employees are part of my family." Mentioning the importance of employee satisfaction, X1 affirmed, "If employees do not feel well, they may not treat customers and other partners well." X4 added if employees lack motivation or if they lack resources to perform their jobs professionally, the business may suffer. For X4, employees' treatment should go beyond salary to include benefits package and dignity. X3 stated, "Some of the approaches to motivate employees is to organize fun events to break employees/boss barriers. X2 stated, "I am in family-owned business. Employees do not feel like working for someone else. When the firm is profitable, employees receive a salary increase." According to a payroll archive X2 provided, there is 3 times an increase in salary from 2014 to 2017.

Government regulations are critical for business longevity (Hamann, Smith, Tashman, & Marshall, 2017). Regulations are crucial determinants of green business in the District of Columbia. X1 stated that the company leaders follow environmental protection policies to ensure products are healthy, the ingredients and accessories they use are biodegradable and maintain the cleanliness of the community. According to X4, respecting regulations helps them avoid citations and legal cost through compliance. X5 welcome inspectors, public officials and are willing to fix potentials issues to comply with government procedures and policies. X5 and X1 agreed that the respect of regulations contributes to saving because it helps avoid costly penalties and potential

business closure. For instance, X5 affirmed, “Regulating business practice and interaction among stakeholders is essential to avoid or minimize potential litigations.”

Participants also raised concerns about excessive regulations. Participants complained about the complexity and burden of the district and federal regulations. X1 stated, “There are excessive rules and regulations to comply leading to additional costs to small business as well as consumers.” X2 affirmed, “The government keeps adding rules that cost businesses more money, time, and paperwork.” Referring to some of the costly regulations, X3 complained about the increasing cost of suppliers due to the trade war President Trump declared to Canada, China, and Mexico since the second quarter of 2018. X4 criticized the overtime rule arguing that the regulation could eliminate the flexible schedule that employees appreciate. X5 claimed that the federal tax code requiring businesses with more than five employees to use external payroll companies leads to an unnecessary financial burden.

As another subtheme, participants acknowledged the benefit of community involvement and networking. Corporate engagements in the community and networking have a positive long-term economic return on the companies’ performance (Mayes, McDonald, & Pini, 2014). Participants understood the importance of developing a strong tie with the community. X1 noted, “My wife is very active in the Ethiopian community here. We support community projects. Such engagement provides us visibility.” X3 stated, “I work with the neighborhood associations. As a result, they help promote my business in local magazines. Local magazines helped me increase my customer base.” X5 added, “Participating in local projects is the best and lasting advertisement for small

businesses.” X2 and X4 acknowledged the advantages of being community-oriented entrepreneurs. For instance, X2 said, “Supporting community projects gave my firm more visibility. We developed new relationships, some of which became reliable partners.” X4 admitted, “Participating in community projects and events increases companies’ goodwill. Partners like to do business with community-friendly firms.” Additionally, X1 stated, “Leaders engagement in the community’s project helps build a productive relationship with suppliers, customers, and many critical partners.” X3 said that community is where customers live and work, adding, “A solid tie with the community ensures business to continue to flourish.” According to X4, customers are the lifeblood of profitability of a business. X4 added that an excellent connection to the community is essential to attract and keep customers and other partners. X5 contended that the neighbor association helped to have access to public grants to finance the business growth and for free advertisements on local magazines.

Some participants also mentioned business intelligence, benchmarking, and financial disciplines as strategies to make a small business profitable and grow over time. Business intelligence is a series of technologies business leaders use to collect and analyze external and internal information to understand market’s trends (Zandi, 2014). Business intelligence is also a tool to foresee the change in the market, perceive new potential opportunities and partners, and benchmark competitors to adapt strategies, products, or services (Lopatta et al., 2015). X1 stated, “I watch the news, subscribe to local magazines and online retailing journals to keep me informed of trends in the market.” X3 said, “Small businesses owners need to be on social media such as

Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and LinkedIn and be alert about consumers shift.” X2 and X5 acknowledged the importance of collecting and analyzing internal and external data to ensure change in consumers’ habits in the marketplace. X4 posited, “Keeping informed of internal and external news is helpful for better resources allocation and strategies to deal with uncertainties.”

X2 mentioned that benchmarking is a very crucial strategy to add values to small business performance. X5 stated, “Leaders in the industry are a good reference to measure one’s performance.” Benchmarking, is according to X1 “A good strategy to learn from peers and leaders in the retail industry to improve practices to ensure competitive advantage.” X3 posited, “I learn about practices of my competitors from customers, suppliers, and stakeholders. It is a cheap but an efficient way to remain competitive.”

X1, X3, and X5 explained the importance of financial discipline to ensure the accuracy of data and growth strategy efficiency. X1 stated, “Separating my accounts and expenses from the company’s ones is worthy of facilitating control and complying with the law.” For X3, “Small owners must automatize the financial transactions for the accuracy of data to measure progress and make strategic decisions.” X5 argued that financial discipline is essential to improve internal control to ensure business growth planning.

Theme 3: Sustainability Factors Use

The subthemes under sustainability factors utilization are operational efficiency and corporate social responsibility. Integrating sustainability factors into business models

provide tremendous values to shareholders and leads to profitability and long-term growth (Godha & Jain, 2015). Operational efficiency is the ability of a company to combine the right people, technologies, materials, and processes to optimize business performance (Godha & Jain, 2015). Krishnan and Ganesh (2014) stated that operational efficiency consists of eliminating waste, lowering costs, and maximizing the value creation to consumers and the end customers. All participants acknowledged that digitization, network, benchmark, diversification, and the integration of social responsibilities into business model contributed to their profitability and long-term growth. X2 posited that the company leaders utilize efficient energy bulbs and some equipment that help save energy cost. X3 explained that by being efficient, the company saved operational money and increased sale. The advantages of operational efficiency are strong brand reputation and improvement of public image, good rapport with local communities and stakeholders (Sardana, 2016).

X3 acknowledged that customer-oriented, environmental-oriented, and community-oriented associated with the use of technology and social media are drivers of the business profitability and growth. X3 stated, “Embracing environmental protection policies and digitization drove down operational cost and increase revenue.” X4 added, “Using Uber and Amazon delivering service increases sale daily. I save money using eco-friendly bulbs and equipment.” Operational efficiency is also about attracting and retaining talent (Sardana, 2014). In the current turbulent business environment, attracting and retaining talent is essential to ensure business sustainability (Goel & Rana, 2014). Recruiting and retaining highly productive workforce is the first step to provide

innovation and creativity, critical to profitability and long-term growth (Ghatge, Chakrabart, & Shinde, 2015). Effective talent retention strategies include efficient recruiting approaches, training and career development with a chance to grow, recognition, and rewards systems (Ohlrich, 2015).

Furthermore, Ghatge et al. (2015) mentioned that adequate compensation includes competitive wage, health and retirement benefits, paid time off, and bonuses. Alternatives to reduce the turnover include staff involvement in decision-making, feedback consideration, stressless workplace, teamwork, and work-life balance techniques such as remotely work and schedule flexibility (Ohlrich, 2015). All the participants admitted having low turnover. For instance, X1 said, “All the employees are from my community. We work as a family. I make sure they are treated well to participate in growing the business.” Moreover, X3 argued, “The average seniority of my employees is 4 years. I have employees who started with me since the first day.” X5 opined that he goes beyond salary and compensation to promote employees to manage new branches basing on seniority criteria. Proceeding in the same direction, X2 and X4 emphasized on schedule flexibility, teamwork, ongoing communication, and involvement of employees in decision-making processes.

Corporate social responsibility approaches are critical determinants to the increase in funding, brand reputation, and better relationships with local government and communities (Ohlrich, 2015). Participants agreed that fulfilling corporate social responsibility obligations contributed to building a strong brand name and increase the business goodwill. X1 does not pay advertisement except making his company’s website

and flyers look attractive. According to X1, existing customers do advertising through word of mouth contributing to saving of the advertisement money because of our social initiatives,” X2 noted that the company’s online customer reviews are good because of the fulfillment of corporate social responsibility. Such reviews increased firms’ referrals. X3 stated that it was easy for customers to recognize their company’s products among a multitude of offers in the marketplace because of the firm involvement in the social causes. According to X4, the business goodwill and reputation differentiate the company in the marketplace and provide a competitive edge. X5 has a recognizable business name and trusted reputation because of participation in corporate social responsibility. Such approach contributes to customer loyalty and brings more prospects.

Theme 4: Access to Credit

The process of creating and sustainably managing a small business has many obstacles including difficulties to access financial capital, competition, regulations, and lack of entrepreneurial knowledge and abilities (Piispanen & Paloniemi, 2015). Other challenges involve the inability to build an effective brand, recruit and retain talent, manage customer relationship, and manage change successfully (Piispanen & Paloniemi, 2015). In this study, challenges participants have faced include lack of access to financial capital, rapid economic and technological change, competition, and excessive regulations.

According to Aggarwal and Elembilassery (2018), a healthy credit market is crucial to provide entrepreneurs with needed finance to seize opportunities and invest in research and development to commercialize innovation. Easy access to credit market is

essential for entrepreneurs to ensure cash flow to finance operations, growth, and business expansion (Iqbal, Ahsan, & Zhang, 2016). None of the participants obtained bank financing to start their businesses. Every participant created the company using personal savings or family or friends' loan. X1 declared, "I tried many times to approach banks. But my effort was unsuccessful." X2 stated, "I used my savings to start the business. It is later that some friends and family gave me a loan to cover the operational cost and business expansion." X3 stated that the risk of failure is high in the beginning. Investors and grantors do not finance just ideas, but concrete products and services. X4 admitted that even though he used his savings to start and finance the business growth, he negotiated payment extension from suppliers most of whom are friends, family or compatriots. X5 said, "In the beginning, nobody wanted to take the risk with their money. But, when lenders saw the business taking-off, family and friends and banks provided loans."

Theme 5: Business Model Adaptability

Small businesses operate in a rapidly dynamic and active market (Mustafa, 2015). According to Sikdar and Payyazhi (2014), economic and technology, leadership and regulation change could derail a business from profitability and growth. Change in the marketplace provoke business adjustment for small businesses survival and growth (Sikdar & Payyazhi, 2014). The participants admitted that at some point they adjusted their original business model to embrace change. X2 and X4 mentioned that rapid technology change is among their main concerns. For instance, X2 stated, "Digitization became a must. More and more people go digital to learn about products and services

before placing orders.” X4 said, “If I do not use social media and online distribution, I would have gone out of market.” X3 affirmed that the technology and environmental protection campaigns in the District of Columbia made it imperative to business model adjustment. X3 posited, “Customers are curious to see if your products and the package are environmentally-friendly or if you use the energy-saving equipment.” X1 and X5 admitted having changed traditional bulbs and appliance to eco-friendly ones.

Participants stated that big retail chains or groups are serious threats. X1 said, “Big companies have more money to flood the market with cheaper products. That is small businesses’ daily big concern.” X2 stated, “With Uber and Amazon delivering, it may be cheaper for customers to order food or products from big chains such as Walmart or Giant.” X3 stated, “My prayer is not having a big company in my direct neighborhood. That will be fatal to my business survival in this location.” X4 and X5 concurred that big companies have more money, human capital, and networks to offer better quality and cheaper products than small businesses. As a palliative, X5 stated that for business to sustain and remain competitive, leaders need to adapt to trends, build a business model to support e-commerce integration. Consumers are actively shopping online (Tollefson, 2016). According to Molinillo, Gómez-Ortiz, Pérez-Aranda, and Navarro-García (2017), technology and media provide a powerful avenue to expand the small businesses’ customer base to ensure profitability and growth over the times. The online commerce has many benefits for consumers including timesaving, convenience, money-saving, and the possibility of browsing and comparing products and services from multiple channels in one place (Wei, Lee, & Shen, 2018). An online business provides more visibility and

leads to customer satisfaction and loyalty (Molinillo et al., 2017). X1 said, “I sell products online and in-store. Selling products online save me money and increase sales.”

Participants acknowledged that the use of the internet, social media, and technology could expose the company to many issues that could have a negative impact on operations (Lantis & Bloomberg, 2018). Some of the problems involve customer account hacking, credit card frauds, dependence on technology, and network devices breakdown (Singh & Rishi, 2015). Gutierrez, Bauer, Boehmke, Saie, and Bihl (2018) recommended small businesses involving in online business and smart devices to develop cybersecurity strategies. Some of the cybersecurity approaches include training employees in security policies and procedures, limitation of access to sensitive data, building a robust firewall for the internet connection (Park, Lim, & Kim, 2015). Other measures involve making copies of critical business data and information, control of the Wi-Fi network, the use of passwords and authentication, and the use of trusted and anti-fraud banking credit card services (Gutierrez et al., 2018). Furthermore, small business owners should try to comply with the Federal Information System Management (FISMA) and the risk management framework under the National Institute of Standardization and Technology (NIST) 800-series to ensure robust cybersecurity system (Park et al., 2015). I noticed that all the participants use an encrypted computer and each user accessed computers with a password. For instance, at X3 store, there are restricted areas where employees must use a security badge to enter. At X5 store, in addition to public access restrictions to some offices, employees must use the security codes to open the doors. X1 opined, “I ensure the computer and devices are encrypted and password protected to

avoid intrusions.” X2 and X4 stated that a third-party private security firm manages the companies’ data and information against hackers and cybercriminals.

Participants suggested a business model that allows managers to use social media, smartphones, or the internet. All the participants use the internet, computer, smartphones, and digital camera to monitor the stores. Each participant uses Google map service. I used Google map to find participants’ locations address. X2 stated, “We received orders online and deliver products on time via Amazon delivery or through our catering cars.” X1 posited, “Online business keeps my business run continuously regardless of nearby competition.” X4 noted, “We use Uber delivering to sell food online.” X3 declared, “We use Google service for more visibility, to be known and to get people to find our location easily.” X5 concurred with other participants that digitization and social media provide unlimited access to customers, suppliers, and many prospects. X5 affirmed, “Despite potential cyber risks, the online sale and social media help increase sale, decrease costs of operational, and may ensure continuous profitability.”

Findings Related to Sustainable Development Theory

Sustainable development consists of balancing the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental goals to satisfy current and future generations’ needs (Oberoi, 2014). Perugini et al. (2017) and Xiao et al. (2017) stated that several corroborating studies with proven evidence indicated that human activities are the major causes of climate change. Some scholars and research institutions recommended corporate, consumers, and policymakers to consider the environmental protection in every aspect of the decision-making (Pfeiffer & Hepburn, 2016). Applying to businesses, sustainable

development involves practices to ensure profitability and growth over time, environmental protection, and social equity (Bankers et al., 2014; Chakravorty & Hales, 2017).

Dyllick and Muff (2015) opined that socially responsible or green corporates attract and keep longer more stakeholders including customers, investors, talent, suppliers, and reduce operational cost. Sustainable business owners contribute to local development by providing decent and durable employment, investing in community projects, and distributing healthy and eco-friendly products and services (Krishnan & Ganesh, 2014). Green corporate also operate in transparency, invest in innovation and creativity, and ensure fairness (Gollnhofer & Schouten, 2017). Responsible enterprises contribute to advancement opportunities, security in the workplace, and social protection (West et al., 2015). Mun and Jung (2017) opined that balancing the economic goals with social justice, and environmental protection could be the pathway to profitability, continuous growth, and contribution to local development.

The findings of this study indicate that small business owners understood the benefits of sustainability approaches. Sustainability strategies that participants used to ensure profitability and long-term growth include an efficient business establishment planning, commitment to strong customer service, employee satisfaction, community engagement, and regulations compliance (Kim, Kim, & Qian, 2018). Furthermore, small business owners committed to using and selling environmentally friendly equipment, products and services, and investing in business intelligence, digitization, social media, benchmarking, and financial discipline (Mustafa, 2015). Small business owners also

focused on operational efficiency and corporate social responsibility. Such a strategy contributes to eliminate waste, lower costs, reduce the turnover, build a strong brand name, increase the corporate goodwill, and maximize value creation to consumers (Godha & Jain, 2015).

Moreover, the findings show that green or responsible entrepreneurs are aware of obstacles for small business owners to have access to financial capital and deal with competition, regulations, and fast-paced change in the marketplace (Piispanen & Paloniemi, 2015). Sustainable entrepreneurs put in place efficient tools to foreseeing the economic and technologic change in the business environment. Such an approach helps develop effective strategies and leadership approaches to adjust the business model to ensure profitability and growth over the time (Sikdar & Payyazhi, 2014).

Applications to Professional Practice

Researchers and practitioners have recognized the advantages for small businesses to adopt a sustainability roadmap (Bandyopadhyay, 2017). Findings revealed five major themes and several subthemes that provide a foundation for recommendations for professional practice. First, through this study, future business owners may learn that to create a sustainable company; it is essential to embody some entrepreneurial skills and characters, rely on personal finance, and find a good location. Current business owners may learn proven strategies to ensure profitability and long-term growth. Embarking on the sustainability pathway is vital for small businesses in the current fast-paced business environment (Andrews, 2015). The findings may show small business owners the strategies to engage in business sustainability journey. Finally, small business owners

may be more aware of potential challenges to expect during the process of creating, managing, and growing a business over the time.

The findings of this study confirmed some practitioners' claims that sustainability is imperative for big companies as well as smaller firms. Sustainability strategies may require some adjustment of business models (Klute-Wenig & Refflinghaus, 2015). However, sustainability approach embodies many other strategies needed to ensure a competitive edge in a very fast-paced economic environment (Wang & Chen, 2015). The findings made it clear that the sustainability strategy contributes to increasing customer base, revenue, business goodwill and brand equity, retention rate of talent, investors, and many other useful stakeholders. Furthermore, the findings might help small business owners understand that sustainability strategy is one of the best strategies to decrease the labor turnover and waste. The sustainability strategy helps lower operational costs and inefficiency and the small firms' inability to manage market vulnerabilities successfully (Krishnan & Ganesh, 2014).

Implications for Social Change

The antonym of business sustainability is a business failure (Kotarsk & Brkic, 2017). Business failure can lead to social, psychological, and financial costs for all the stakeholders (Chankar, 2015). The prices of business failure include loss of jobs and benefits, indebtedness, and emotional trauma and stigma to the owner (Bruhn, 2015). Business failure is a shortfall for both the community and the local government (Errasti, Bretos, & Nunez, 2017). However, sustainable businesses ensure long-term job creation,

job security, and benefits for both the owners and employees and contribute to community wealth (Gopinath & Mitra, 2017).

The findings of this study could contribute to small firms owners' understanding of the requirements of business sustainability. For instance, to be stable, business owners must sell healthy products at the same time suitable for consumption and the environment. Moreover, findings show that owners who adhered to sustainability pathway pursued economic goals as well as social and environmental protection goals. Consequently, sustainable entrepreneurs invest in their employees, support labor rights, and finance socioeconomic projects in the community (Dyllick & Muff, 2015). Sustainable business owners or green entrepreneurs may understand that their businesses may cause pollution and related diseases, natural catastrophes, and ecologic crisis. Such awareness may encourage entrepreneurs to put in place strategies to avoid or decrease the impact of businesses on the community and the environment. Finally, the findings may help business owners operate companies by respecting regulations, valuing stakeholders' interests, and promote a workplace that encourages diversity, equality, and fairness.

Recommendations for Action

Scholars demonstrated that corporate sustainability is the new business approach contributing to profitability, long-term growth, and the stakeholders' satisfaction (Baral & Pokhare, 2017). Increasing revenues and decreasing costs are the best strategies to ensure profit for small businesses (Davila et al., 2015). Sales, shares, loans, and grants are ways to increase a small business financial asset (Mason & Harrison, 2015). Researches revealed that human activities are responsible for climate change (Pati, 2015). Many of

stakeholders have concerns of air pollution and related diseases, industrial accidents like oil spills, hazardous waste and the greenhouse gas, the quality of products and services, and treatment of workforce (Pfeiffer & Hepburn, 2016). I recommend that small business owners, in general, update their business model to align with sustainability requirements. For instance, using energy-efficient equipment, providing eco-friendly products and services, having in place a system that values employees, and investing in the community are a royal path to ensure revenue increase and investment capital for growth.

Sustainability requires some investment and operational costs. Among the costs, Geeraert (2016) mentioned the costs of replacement of traditional energy-consuming equipment, recycling, redesign of the workplace to ensure security, and eco-friendly certifications. I recommend that small business owners analyze the cost and opportunity for green investment to avoid unnecessary financial burdens. Specifically, I suggest small entrepreneurs focus on a few critical certifications and put in place a simple and costless environmental management system.

Furthermore, sustainability requires that businesses continue to exist regardless of market threats and internal change (Baral & Pokhare, 2017). To meet the needs of current and future stakeholders, small business owners must ensure continuous investment and develop a dynamic managerial strategy (Oberoi, 2014). I recommend that business owners invest in innovation and diversify key partners to deal with unpredictable changes. Change can be a loss of crucial talent and even the owners, change of creditors, suppliers, and points of contact in local governments. Diversification strategy may help prepare replacement or have in place alternative plans in case the current system changes.

Digitization is the innovation creating an ever-changing retail experience (Gießmann, 2018). I recommend small business owners take advantage of the digital revolution and social media to increase sales, connect, and better serve stakeholders. According to Tollefson (2016), more than 50% of purchase took place online in 2016 in the United States, and social media influenced 78% of global shoppers. The use of a digital device may help put in place a costless but robust business intelligence system to collect, store, and explore internal and external data (Bolton, Chapman, & Mills, 2018). Quality data are helpful to make strategic decisions, benchmark competitors, follow economic trends in the macro environment (Pigni, Piccoli, & Watson, 2016). However, going digital expose small businesses to potential cyber criminality activities. Hackers may get access to strategic information or customers' sensitive data to compromise the company's existence (Maxigas, 2017). I recommend that small business owners seek cost-efficient programs to secure their information system. I intend to disseminate the findings to nascent and existing small business owners and other interested groups through conferences, seminars, training, and publication in academic and business journals.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore strategies small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations. The findings of this study provide abundant information for further researchers to explore strategies small business owners use to ensure profitability and long-term growth. The study was limited to five small retailers in

the District of Columbia. Future studies may involve more participants in other cities or throughout the country.

Moreover, sustainability is at the cross-road of many disciplines including economic, social, environmental, technology, and managerial studies (Evans, 2015). This study may not explore in-depth sustainability application in each discipline. Further, researchers may examine strategies small business owners use to ensure specific social, economic, technology, environmental, or managerial sustainability in their companies. Such studies may catch details that might miss in the current research.

Additionally, this research applied to small retail businesses. The realities may differ from one sector or industry to another. Further studies may explore strategies small business owners in manufacturing, transportation, mining, or agriculture use to sustain businesses over the years. Finally, the goal of this study was not to compare practices across demographic patterns. Further researchers may consider strategies immigrants, native, women, men, generations X, Y, or millennials, or minorities small business owners use to sustain businesses over 5 years.

Reflections

In this research, I analyzed approaches small retail business owners use to make a profit, ensure growth over the years while creating social and environmental protection priorities. From this research, I learned that participants have different practices to ensure profitability and long-term growth without knowing that all these managerial approaches are part of sustainability strategies.

Moreover, I realized that emails, phone calls, or ground mails might not be enough to convince small business owners to give away their precious time to share experiences with researchers. After many unsuccessful attempts to secure interviews with some participants, I learned that network is essential. Despite my efforts, many potential participants failed to honor interviews' schedules mentioning time constraints. Finally, in the District of Columbia, awards and thank you letters represent not only achievements but also a marketing communication strategy. I noticed that in every store, business owners proudly hung their eco-friendly and LGBT-friendly awards, and the thank you notes from many sports and festivals nonprofits.

None of the participants showed their financial statements but assured that they made profit and their revenue increased every year. Additionally, I noticed that banks and lenders are reluctant to lend money to startups. All participants use either personal savings or friends and family loans to start their business. The business plans and previous experiences could not convince banks and other lenders to provide loans to start businesses. Without personal resources, participants could not fulfill their entrepreneurial dream.

Conclusion

Climate change, digitization, and the pressure of consumers and the civil society organizations for more social responsibility considerations within organizations enhance the importance of the sustainability strategy. This qualitative, multiple case study aimed to explore strategies small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years from startup while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations. I used open-

ended questions and conducted a semistructured interview with five small business owners. Five main themes with several subthemes emerged from data analysis. Emerging principal themes include (a) business establishment planning, (b) sustainability planning, (c) sustainability factors use, (d) access to credit, and (e) business model adaptability.

In the current fast-paced business environment, sustainability became a royal roadmap for small businesses to ensure profitability, long-term growth, and competitive advantages. Sustainability offers entrepreneurs a holistic package of strategies, tactics, and tools to adapt their business models to market change to meet the needs of current and future customers, employees, and other stakeholders. A successful sustainability strategy leads inevitably to customer satisfaction, employee motivation, revenue increase, community well-being, and lower operational cost. Therefore, sustainability could lead to profitability, continuous growth, and competitive edge regardless of market threats (Wiesner, Chadee, & Best, 2018).

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

A. General information

Location: _____

Participant: _____

Date/Time: _____

Topic of the Study: Strategy for Small Business Sustainability.

Research Question: What strategies do small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years from startup while fulfilling your firms' social responsibility obligations?

B. Introduction

I will begin the interview process by thanking the participant, introducing myself, and reviewing the scope and expectations of the interview included in the consent form sent with the invitation letter few weeks before.

C. Inform Consent

I will review the form consent with each participant and make sure they have a copy for their records. Then, I will answer any pre-interview questions or concerns of participant(s).

D. Confidentiality

I will name participant by a pseudonym X. The five participants will be named X1, X2, X3, X4, and X5.

E. Interview

I will mark the date, the time, the location, the pseudonym of the participant, and turn on the recorder device.

F. Duration

The interview will last approximately 60 minutes to go over the eight questions including any addition follow-up question.

G. Collect Additional Data

I will collect any proprietary documents, take note of my observation and official business authorization permit from the District of Columbia.

H. Member Checking

Within two weeks after the interview, I will schedule follow-up meetings with participants to perform member checking. Through member checking, the participants of the study will have a chance to review the analysis of the data collected during the interviews, which will enhance confirmability.

I. End of the Interview

After verifying a successful audio recording, I will reiterate the contact numbers for potential follow up questions and concerns from participants. I will conclude the interview and thank the participant(s) for their time and part in the study.

Appendix B: Letter of Invitation

Dear Small Business Owners,

Date: _____

My name is Victor Adoukonou, a student at Walden University. I am conducting a study on strategies for small business sustainability to complete my degree. I need your help to understand strategies you used to sustain business beyond 5 years while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations in the District of Columbia. I am requesting an interview with you. 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 nor shared with any individuals or organizations. There is no compensation for your participation in this study. However, your participation can make a difference in fostering strategies small business owners may adopt to ensure long-term profitability, social well-being of their stakeholders, and the protection of the environment in the District of Columbia.

I enclosed the consent form and the observation protocol to provide detail ideas of expectations. If you decide to participate in this study, please contact me by phone at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED].

Thanks for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Victor Adoukonou

DBA Candidate Walden University

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to start your business?
2. What strategies have you used to sustain your business beyond 5 years from startup while fulfilling your firm's social responsibility obligations?
3. Based on your experiences, what have been the key determinants contributing to the sustainability of your business?
4. What strategies have you used to enhance stakeholders' values in your organization?
5. What are the benefits of the sustainability strategy for your business?
6. What challenges did you overcome to sustain your business beyond 5 years while fulfilling their firm's social responsibility obligations?
7. How, if at all, have you modified the initial strategies you had in place to sustain your business beyond 5 years while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations?
8. What other elements, comments, or information would you like to add to strategies you have used to sustain your business?

Appendix D: Observation Protocol

Participant N*			
Settings:			
Date:			
Time:	Start:		End:

Purpose of the study:	The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore strategies small business owners use to sustain businesses beyond 5 years in the District of Columbia while fulfilling their firms' social responsibility obligations.
Role of the researcher during the observation:	Observe verbal, nonverbal behaviors, interactions, artifacts, business physical environment, and other elements that can provide additional information to data collected during the interview and from documents reviews to ensure data triangulation and saturation.
Observation tools:	Sight, smell, touch, and hearing.

What	How	Field Notes
Physical setting	Does the physical setting encourage the face-to-face interview: Distractions, noise, interruptions, use of cellphone?	
Official license	Year of the opening of the business	
Social interaction in the firm	Interactions among employees, between employees and the manager, between workers and stakeholders such as customers, contractors, suppliers, government agents, and medias.	
Communication	Use of paper, digital, social media, website, online sale.	
The use and distribution of the environmentally friendly products	Use of the energy-efficient bulbs and appliances. Sale and use of healthy or organic food and biodegradable products like hybrid or electric fleet.	
Waste disposals and environment management	Use of separate dumpster for recyclable and nonrecyclable wastes. Cleanliness of the site surrounding. Pollution. Inventory.	
Safety of workforce	Hazardous materials, workplace layout, lightening. Display of OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration). Display and accessibility of labor rights.	
Accessibility of business	Parking: Easily accessible for disables, geographical location for customers,	
Potential Certifications, Awards, and Documents	Green certificate labels. District certificate of recognition. Magazine reports. Awards. Best business rates. Publicly available documents including the past 5 years financial statement	
During the interview	Body language: Verbal and nonverbal communication. Behaviors such as pauses, interruptions, interjections, interactions, use of cellphone or other distractive devices. Things I expected to see but I did not see.	