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# Strategies to Increase Profitability and Longevity of Small Trucking Businesses

Derrick Olando Brown  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Derrick O. Brown

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

Abstract

Strategies to Increase Profitability and Longevity of Small Trucking Businesses

by

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MBA, Northcentral University, 2014

BS, Virginia State University, 1991

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2019

## Abstract

Typically, small businesses have encountered issues with sustaining their enterprise for longer than 5 years after inception, which can adversely affect the prosperity of the communities in which the businesses operate. The purpose of this multiple case study was to identify and explore strategies some owners of small business trucking companies used to achieve profitability and longevity for longer than 5 years. The population of the study consisted of owners of 4 small business trucking companies located in Northern Virginia, who demonstrated profitability and longevity for longer than 5 years of operation. The conceptual framework for this study was systems theory. The data for the study came from semistructured interviews, and review of companies' documents. The data analysis process consisted of organizing the data, interpreting the data, and identifying the themes. After verifying the themes through methodological triangulation, 3 themes emerged: relationship building, passion and commitment, and access to capital. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations from this study could effect social change by providing profits to the small business trucking owners for sustaining and aiding employees, families, and their communities' economies.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to my family, especially my sister, LaFon Brown Tuck. I want to dedicate this study to my deceased parents (Carroll P. Brown, Sr. and Gertrude J. Brown) who taught me the meaning of accomplishment and achievement. Their love and support still resides in my heart deeply. I want to dedicate this study to small business owners and entrepreneurs who decided to make the commitment to pursue their goals and dreams. With love, support, and direction from those who care, anything is achievable.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small business is an influential and effective way to innovate, create wealth, and growth economically in the United States of America (Alsaaty, 2013). Small business trucking companies are among the fastest growing businesses in the United States (U.S. Small Business Administration [SBA], 2014). Research is necessary to explore how small business trucking owners sustain their businesses to achieve longevity and profitability (Gai & Minniti, 2015). I explored the lived experiences and strategies of small business trucking companies in Northern Virginia that achieved profitability and sustainability.

### **Background of the Problem**

Small businesses have transformed from traditional “mom and pop” businesses to diverse industries, such as technology, business services, finance, and manufacturing, causing an increase growth rate in entrepreneurship startups (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2015; SBA, 2014). The failure rate of small businesses equates to 44% within 2 years of starting the operation, whereas 50% survived beyond 5 years of operation (SBA, 2016; Solomon, Bryant, May, & Perry, 2013). The failure rate for small business trucking companies is 66% within 2 years of starting the operation. Forty-five percent of small business trucking companies experience profitability and longevity beyond the first 5 years of operation (SBA, 2016). The U.S. economy depends partly on the successful operation of small business trucking companies, which generated employment of 3.5 million people in 2014 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2015; SBA, 2016).

Small business failure is an area of interest to academicians, business managers, and policy makers seeking to understand the sustainability of small businesses (Khudri & Sultana, 2015). The increase in entrepreneurship startups is associated with an expanding quantity of research for small business trucking companies (Link & Scott, 2012). Cultivating and developing sustainable strategies requires the implementation of prudent decision-making measures to realize the organization's mission and goals (Link & Scott, 2012). Further research focusing on the operation of small business trucking companies is necessary to retrieve strategies generating increased profitability and longevity to propel the firm beyond the first 5 years of operation.

### **Problem Statement**

Each year, more than half of 700,000 new U.S. small business startups fail within the first 5 years of operation (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). Only 45% of small business trucking companies experience profitability beyond the first 5 years (SBA, 2014). The general business problem is some small business trucking companies do not engage and employ information to remain sustainable beyond 5 years. The specific business problem is some owners of small business trucking companies lack strategies to achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify and explore strategies some owners of small business trucking companies use to achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years. The target population was owners of four small business trucking companies who demonstrated profitability and longevity beyond 5 years of

operation, located in Northern Virginia. The implications for positive social change include the potential for advancing employee and family conditions, continuing employment, additional tax revenues and job opportunities.

### **Nature of the Study**

The research method for this study was qualitative. Using a qualitative research study entails exploring issues to understand phenomena through analyzing unstructured data to answer open-ended questions consisting of *how* and *what* (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013). Researchers using the quantitative method examine relationships and differences among the research variables of the study (Lewis-beck & Bélanger, 2015), which was not suitable for my study on strategies for achieving profitability and longevity. Mixed method researchers utilize both quantitative and qualitative methods; which, the numerical data portion for the quantitative method will not benefit this research (Yin, 2014; Zohrabi, 2013). Qualitative research is the appropriate choice since the participants will provide lived experiences on achieving profitability and longevity beyond 5 years.

A qualitative multiple case study was the appropriate design for this study. Other design approaches to a qualitative study include: (a) ethnography, (b) phenomenology, and (c) narrative. The ethnographic design was not suitable because the ethnographic researchers analyze cultural groups systematically from the subject researched or single source of data. Phenomenological research was not appropriate because using phenomenology entails identifying and exploring the meaning of individual experiences or worldviews to identify and develop common themes. The narrative design was not suitable as narrative researchers seek to develop descriptions from the participants

centered on historical and personal stories or cultural experiences. Researchers employ narrative designs to highlight life stories and individuals' personal experiences (Petty et al., 2012). Using the case study method over other designs enabled methodological resilience by utilizing multiple types of data to retrieve answers to *how* and *what* questions.

### **Research Question**

The overarching research question for the study was: What strategies do some owners of small business trucking companies use to achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years?

### **Interview Questions**

The interview questions were:

1. What strategies do you use to increase profitability and longevity?
2. What strategy did you find worked best to maximize profitability and longevity?
3. What were the key challenges you encountered to implementing your strategies for increasing profitability and longevity?
4. How did you address the key challenges to implementing your strategies for increasing profitability and longevity?
5. What key financial processes did you employ or develop to support the implementation of your strategies for increasing profitability and longevity for your business?
6. What else would you like to add concerning the profitability and longevity of your business?

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was systems theory. Ludwig von Bertalanffy introduced and coined the term systems theory in 1937 and characterized the theory as a system consisting of elements or common components (Pouvreau, 2013). Lazlo (2012) described and portrayed the application of systems theory to systems analysis. Pouvreau (2013) added that systems thinkers combine surroundings to raise new characteristics to focus on processes, relationships, and interconnections. Corning (2014) emphasized systems theory as the external environment of an organization, system, or group, concentrating on complex interactions of a holistic approach. The focus of systems theory is on the arrangement of parts and their linkage to the business entity (Corning, 2014; Pouvreau, 2013). Findings from this study may benefit small business trucking owners to establish a profitable and sustainable business.

Pouvreau (2013) posited systems theory as completeness of objects and events aligned in a certain way to depict reality. Nan, Zmud, and Yetgin (2014) indicated that systems theory encompasses comprehending problems and solutions to problems based on identifying and understanding key processes and interrelationships. The conceptual framework provides a potential lens for understanding and comprehension of the findings from my study. Using a qualitative method for exploring relationships facilitates exploring retrieve patterns and themes for understanding strategies (Neumann, 2013; Riss, 2014). Using systems theory could facilitate understanding the findings from my study because business owners systematically merge various strategies, components, and procedures including overcoming unpredictable challenges.



## **Operational Definitions**

*Entrepreneurship*: Creating and commencing new businesses, which encompass risks, opportunities, and innovating ideas to reality (Parilla, 2013).

*Operational processes*: Organizational activities or techniques coordinated to achieve a product or desired output (Gomez, Orcos & Palomas, 2014).

*Small-business trucking companies*: Owner-operators (usually owned privately), of freight, flatbed, tanker, or dry-goods trucks who transport goods and products throughout the city, state, or country to fulfill contracts (Costello, 2013; SBA, 2016b).

*Strategic business management*: The process of providing vision and direction of business resources and capabilities to obtain goals and initiatives (Mainardes, Ferreira, & Raposo, 2014).

*Sustainability*: The ability to maintain a certain level or point to establish and promote growth to preserve the business successfully (Montiel & Delgado-Ceballos, 2014).

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

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions consist of a collection of biased notions that one must challenge to protect the integrity of the research (Kirkwood & Price, 2013; Scherdin & Zander, 2014). Researchers possess potential bias and a collection of beliefs based on experiences (Kirkwood & Price, 2013; Wortham, 2015). To prevent falsehood or misrepresentation, researchers must describe and identify assumptions (Kirkwood & Price, 2013; Wortham, 2015). The first assumption for this study was that the participants' experiences and

perceptions would offer information on small business trucking strategies to achieve longevity and profitability. The second assumption was that participants in the study would answer honestly and truthfully. The third assumption was that small business trucking companies who planned and managed their business successfully achieve longevity and sustainability.

### **Limitations**

Yin (2014) identified limitations as circumstances or factors beyond the researcher's control. In a qualitative study, participant interviews can present potential bias and the inability to recall accurately from events happening in the past. Participants could encounter an unwillingness to disclose failure or success information, as the disclosure may not represent their understanding of operating a business. Another limitation is this study does not include all types of small businesses from other regions of the country. Henry (2013) indicated potential limitations of a study may not transfer geographically. The findings from my study may not apply to all small business trucking companies in different regions of the country.

### **Delimitations**

Researchers set boundaries or restrictions, known as delimitations, before the beginning of the study to limit the scope of the study (Barney & Maughan, 2015; Fan, 2013). One delimitation of the research includes the physical location, which entails only small business trucking companies located in the Northern, Virginia area. The small business trucking companies participating in the study must show profitability and longevity beyond the first 5 years of operation.

## **Significance of the Study**

### **Contribution to Business**

Small businesses makeup over 99.7% of United States' employer firms and contribute tremendously to the U.S. economy by increasing private-sector payroll, employment, and output (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2015; SBA, 2014). Trucking companies add to the growth of the economy because receiving increased contracting opportunities to move products and goods could increase profitability and longevity (Mitchelmore & Roweley, 2013; Yang & Regan, 2013). Businesses showing profit beyond 5 years reveal sustainability, longevity, and growth strategies (Mitchelmore & Roweley, 2013; Phillips & Knowles, 2012). Identifying strategies for growth and sustainability may assist in the advancement of other small businesses (Bateh, Heaton, Arbogast, & Broadbent, 2013). Reviewing and employing the findings from this study could contribute value to small business trucking companies' management by providing a strategic understanding of how to achieve profitability and longevity beyond the first 5 years of operation.

### **Contribution to Positive Social Change**

The potential contribution to positive social change includes the capability to improve human or communal conditions. One of the largest failing segments of business enterprise in the United States is the small business trucking company (SBA, 2014). Placing emphasis on strategies small business-trucking companies use to achieve sustainability beyond the first 5 years could contribute to local economies through increased profits for spending, taxes, and job opportunities. The conclusions from this

study have implications for positive social change by enabling self-worth and dignity to owners, contributing to the prosperity of individuals, employees, families, and communities.

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

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how some owners of small business trucking companies use strategies to achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years of beginning operations. The review of the professional and academic literature presents a foundation for clarifying the overarching research question on what strategies small business-trucking companies use to achieve profitability and longevity beyond the first 5 years. I used my exploration of peer-reviewed and scholarly journals, primary literature, dissertations, and articles to identify potential answers to the research question.

The literature review is an imperative part of the research study (Beattie, Kim, Hagen, Egan, Ellinger, & Hamlin, 2014). My literature review encompasses an analysis and synthesis to justify the need for the study and assist in answering my research question. The related literature subjects I used include profitability, longevity, leadership, and sustainability. The keywords that I used to retrieve the resources for this research study were *small business*, *business strategy*, *strategic planning*, *entrepreneurship*, *sustainability*, and *finance*. The primary sources in this literature review included ProQuest Central, Business Source Complete, Walden Library Dissertations, Walden Library Books, and Google Advanced Scholar Search. A key requirement for this research study was to use a minimum 85% of peer-reviewed references articles published

within 5 years of graduation. I used 119 references in the literature review. Of the 127 publications used and referenced in the literature review, 86% are 5 years old or less and 94% are peer reviewed. I used 230 references for the complete doctoral study. Of the 230 references used, 212 or 91.3% are within the 5 year range and 96% are peer reviewed.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was systems theory. Small business trucking companies have a link or connection with the local economy. Laszlo (2012) stated systems thinkers concentrate on processes, relationships, and interconnection instead of structures, components, and separations. The connection or relationship of small business trucking to the local economy consists of job creation, which generates revenue for federal, state, and local entities. Laszlo linked the general systems philosophy to single circle knowledge for reaching a ceiling and then ending the process. Laszlo added to connect the general systems theory philosophy to double-loop knowledge, transpiring when necessary modifications for reaching a ceiling and then ending the process while probing principles in how companies operate and drive decisions. Argyris (2002) contended that businesses must identify the presence of an issue (single-loop) and then pinpoint the internal efficiencies, flaws, and adjustments needed to rectify the problem (double-loop). Tosey, Visser, and Saunders (2012) broadened Argyris's idea of the double-loop learning and understanding approach through their emphasis on the triple-loop learning doctrine. The triple-loop learning principle supplemented the double-loop learning through reforming engrained organizations and policies (Tosey et al., 2012). Ameli and Kayes (2011) expanded on the triple-loop learning doctrine by

analyzing and describing the single, double, and triple loops. Single-loop learning entails the how learning works, double-loop learning encompasses what is learned, and the triple-loop learning incorporates why learning must occur for a systems change (Ameli & Kayes, 2011). Each loop deals with one of the questions about the *how*, *what*, and *why*.

The focus of systems theory incorporates the relationships among parts, providing a clearer display of the business phenomenon. Business owners could navigate and manage work from the system's essential function to reach the desired goal (Adams, Hester, Bradley, Meyers, & Keating, 2014). Adams et al. (2014) highlighted that systems thinking varies from conventional forms of reasoning, which entails a linear approach along with placing problems into components while examining individual parts. Pouvreau (2013) emphasized systems thinking as a necessary tool to have management envision how different sectors of the system interact and influence other areas of the system. The consolidation of systems thinking and systems theory could offer informative and descriptive information to pinpoint possible issues or differences inside the organization.

Determining the need for a systems change entails understanding and comprehending systems theory design for the small business enterprise (Dawidowicz, 2012). Corning (2014) proclaimed that parts of a system could respond in a distinctive way when observed independently. Business systems involve a series of actions to reach a goal through inputs and processes to retrieve information in developing a total product (Corning, 2014; Pouvreau, 2013). Understanding different loop concepts, as they relate to business systems, can help address the profitability and longevity of small business

trucking company's sustainability. Processes within small businesses must have well-balanced functions to prosper and succeed (Rahatullah & Raeside, 2015). Identifying and exploring small operational processes could advance businesses through the *what*, *how*, and *why* questions of the triple-loop process, which could allow growth of employment, revenues, and the economy (Tosey, Visser, & Saunders, 2012).

Thinking systematically by small business owners allows for completeness in operations (Rahatullah & Raeside, 2015). Potential small business owners who desire to start a viable small business trucking company should contemplate several system-oriented strategies to achieve profitability and longevity (Tosey et al., 2012).

### **Small Business Enterprises (SBEs)**

According to the SBA (2014), the average number of employees determines an SBE. The average number of employees defines an SBE over a 12-month period or the average annual receipts of the past 3 years (SBA, 2014). The SBA (2014) defines a small business enterprise, as a concern organized for profit, independently owned and operated, has a place in, as well as operate in the United States, and not dominant in its arena on a national basis. The small business labor force encompassed 56.8 million employees in the United States in 2014 (SBA, 2014; Office of Advocacy, 2014). According to Anastasia (2015), small businesses are small if the enterprise contains less than 250 employees. Small firms can have different definitions in the United States, depending on the number of employees or average receipts (SBA, Office of Advocacy, 2013) and can vary from one country to another when considering the number of employees or asset value

(Yazdanfar, 2013). No matter how one defines an SBE, small business can add to the growth of communities and the local economy (Gale & Brown, 2013).

Small businesses are major contributors to local economies by adding strength to communities (Svensson & Wagner, 2015). Prezioso and Coronato (2013); Svensson and Wagner (2015) acknowledge the importance of small businesses and their influence on the local and global economy. The United States is first when comparing long-run growth rates of major developed economies and the driving reason is the small business enterprise (Amash, 2012). Small businesses contribute significantly to creating jobs by establishing components to increase stability and cohesion, as well as economic development (Karanja et al., 2013). Small business enterprises play an essential role in job creation such as manufacturing, trucking, finance, and services (Karanja et al., 2013). Amash (2012) stated small business enterprises are vital catalysts to build economic wealth locally and nationally. Blackburn, Hart, and Wainwright (2013) added that SBEs provide a significant boost toward the economic development of growing industrialized countries. Blackburn et al. (2013) stated that job creation by SBEs is instrumental in the growth of economies. SBEs add to economic growth and provide major contributions to the economy.

Some small businesses flourish while other size firms do not fare well. Small business enterprise owners start businesses for reasons such as being in charge themselves, new product creation, or providing additional income (Gupta & Muita, 2013). Lee-Ross (2015) uncovered that the reason new business owners start businesses is to receive greater flexibility, income, and or to provide an avenue for product



introduction or services. Owners start businesses to create an innovative product or service or to offset unemployment (DeKrey & Portugal, 2014). Economic growth is a priceless asset added by the small business enterprise that transcends throughout the United States and global markets (Svensson & Wagner, 2015).

Entrepreneurially-minded individuals should take the time to ponder the many ideas that exist for the start-up of a small business enterprise (Hulbert, Gilmore, & Carson, 2013). People who share and embrace an entrepreneurial mindset identify opportunities missed by large firms (Hulbert et al., 2013). A pondering of ideas before commencing a small business enterprise could help increase the success rate of the venture. Since an interrelationship between small firms and communities exists, success depends on the welfare and prosperity of persons in the firm, as well as the community (SBA, 2013). Small businesses also tend to employ persons represented inadequately from the local communities where the business functions (Hulbert et al., 2013).

Small businesses are imperative for job growth and job creation in local communities (Kozan & Akdeniz, 2014) and small business failures can hurt communities and local economies (Bates & Robb, 2014). Therefore, failure of a small business is a significant interest area to academicians, business managers, and policy makers seeking to understand the sustainability of small businesses (Khudri & Sultana, 2015). Business failure in the United States received increased attention and is important in the progression of developed and undeveloped nations (Jena & Sahoo, 2014). Business performance connects to strategy preparation and characteristics, such as leadership, financial literacy, and trust (Blackburn et al., 2013; Cook & Wolverton, 2015). One

possible cause of business failure is the lack of managerial skills possessed by the owner or managers (Jena & Sahoo, 2014). Business failure will always exist, but with proper strategic planning, and implementation processes, longevity, and sustainability, profitability of firms may increase.

The survival of firms is difficult, and the reasons for failure differ for each business owner. Hyytinen, Pajarinen, and Rouvinen (2015) argued that the survival of small businesses depends heavily on the ability to innovate. Jena and Sahoo (2014) proclaimed the reason for small businesses not surviving is the inability to manage properly. Managers presented with issues or problems tend to rush for answers instead of probing for causes and derivative solutions to address the challenges properly (Blackburn et al., 2013; Jena & Sahoo, 2014). Zafar and Khan (2014) added that small businesses could fail if the firm lacks proper education and management training. The inadequacy of management training and teaching could negatively affect the longevity, sustainability, and profitability of businesses. Atamian and VanZante (2011) suggested that the education of small business owners must continue develop skills pertinent to increasing the owners' success. Owners can acquire skills and knowledge to increase sustainability from available sources, such as Small Business Development Centers, SBA, seminars, certification programs, and degree programs.

Economies of scale allow larger businesses to stay competitive with pricing (Bratland, 2012). Larger companies possess greater finance and flexibility to sustain order cancellations and downturns in the economy in comparison to smaller companies (Bello & Ivanov, 2014). Larger businesses implement economies of scale, which reduce

prices to customers, which can increase small business failures (Thomason, Simendinger, & Kiernan, 2013). Small business owners' responses to changes in economic activity could influence the survival of their companies (Mahjoor, 2016). Albuquerque, Filho, Nagano, Junior, and Philippsen (2016) posited that multiple issues could affect the survival of enterprises, such as industry-related, local, regional, and national conditions. Many reasons exist as to why businesses fail; some business failures are imminent and inescapable (Mahjoor, 2016).

Implementing and using available resources while maintaining focus on business strategies can help business owners achieve longevity and profitability (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). The success of businesses, as explained by Lechner and Gudmundsson (2014), depends on the commitment of the small business owner to achieve excellence. Sayed and Reiche (2013) stated that business owners need road maps to keep and record excellence to help achieve success by seeing their business, as a way of life. When business owners envision their business as a way of life, a thinking system occurs, which propels business survival and sustainability. Farrington (2012) proclaimed that some personality types cause small business owners not to experience fulfillment with being self-employed. If self-employment does not fit the personality type of the firm owner, less commitment and job satisfaction results, which frequently contributes to failure. Farrington added that three personality traits most appropriate for self-employment are: (a) agreeability, (b) conscientiousness, and (c) openness to experience. Developing these traits, focusing on survival issues, and factors to develop strategies can contribute to the success of small business owners.

**Small business enterprises in the state of Virginia.** Small businesses contribute to Virginia's economy (Office of Advocacy, 2013). Small business owners in Virginia employed 46.9% or 1.5 million small business employees of the state's private workforce in 2013 (Office of Advocacy, 2016). The number of employees equates to 97.7% of Virginia's 681,517 small businesses (Office of Advocacy, 2016). Small businesses in Virginia, in 2013, created 26,105 new jobs, where the least gains came from firms employing one to four employees, which employed 2,009 new jobs (Office of Advocacy, 2016). In 2015, the private sector employment increased from 1.2% in 2014 to 1.9% (Office of Advocacy, 2016). At the end of 2015, the unemployment rate was 4.2%, which decreased from the end of 2014 of 4.8%, well below the national unemployment rate of 5% (Office of Advocacy, 2016).

The state of Virginia dedicated an agency to enhancing the procurement opportunities to participate in state-funded projects, which would increase business, the local economy, and employment. The agency devoted to the program is the Virginia Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity (Virginia Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity [DSBSD], 2016).. The Executive Order 33 signed by Governor Kaine in 2006, established a goal for the Commonwealth of Virginia to acquire 40% of its purchases from small businesses (DSBSD, 2016). The state launched the Departments of Business Assistance, Minority Business Enterprise, Planning and Budget, Transportation, and universities to increase opportunities to direct projects as prime contractors on state projects (DSBSD, 2016). The Executive Order 33 established a Small Business Development Program to increase and enhance the development of small

businesses in the Commonwealth of Virginia (DSBSD, 2016). In July 2014, Governor McAuliffe enhanced executive order 33 with executive order 20, which required the Commonwealth of Virginia to acquire 42% of its purchases from small businesses (DSBSD, 2016). The Commonwealth of Virginia plays a vital role in assisting small businesses to achieve sustainability, which could help them stay successful and strengthen local economies further.

### **Sizes and Types of Small Businesses**

Small businesses have different definitions, depending on the number of employees (Albuquerque et al., 2016). According to (SBA, 2014), businesses with five hundred employees or less are considered small. Albuquerque et al. (2016) described small-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as small if the company employs less than 250 employees. Micro-businesses employ less than 20 employees. In 2010, the United States possessed a small business labor force of 55 million employees (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2013). Bauer (2011) stated that 20 million micro-businesses operate in the U.S., which equates to 16.6% of private employment that does not including farm businesses. In many countries, micro businesses make-up almost 98% of the small business firms and encompasses more than 50% of small businesses in the United States (Monahan, Shah, & Mattare, 2011). Small businesses have different meanings and definitions, which vary from country to country, according to the total count of employees, as well as the financial worth (Grable & Carr, 2014; SBA, 2014). SMEs, small businesses, and micro-businesses help provide a more balanced and stable economic activity for sustainable social communities (Bates & Robb, 2014).

Technology and electronic improvements provide greater opportunities for sustainability to entrepreneurs and microbusinesses (Cragg, Mills, & Suraweera, 2013). Parilla (2013) explained that owners of microbusinesses do not promote their products or services, as opposed to entrepreneurs who advertise their goods or services. The reason for the disparity in microbusinesses advertising and promoting less is due to tight budgets, as well as choices on where to spend monies (Gundala & Khawaja, 2014; Parilla, 2013). Some microbusiness owners and entrepreneurs conveyed the lack of time, unpredictability, and emotional support, as the most important issues for persons self-employed (DeKrey & Portugal, 2014). Microbusiness owners and entrepreneurs may need support from family, friends, coaches, and accountants to achieve the longevity and sustainability of their businesses (Abdalkrim, 2013).

Microbusinesses, small businesses, and SBEs are vital to the economy (Alstete, 2014). Small businesses, to include microbusinesses, increase and maintain environmental, social, culture, and economic sustainability, which fuel the development of communities (Gundala & Khawaja, 2014; Zafar, & Khan, 2014). Monahan et al. (2011) proclaimed the essential portion of economic renewal and rejuvenation rests on microenterprises. According to Monahan et al. (2011), small businesses with 20 or fewer employees created more jobs than larger manufacturing companies, regardless of the firm's performance. SMEs are firms consisting of less than 500 employees, according to the classification systems of the United States and European standards (Kreiser, Marino, Kuratko, & Weaver, 2013). SME's provide an essential purpose in job creation, service delivery, as well as manufacturing jobs, which is crucial to economic expansion and

wealth creation (Kreiser et al., 2013). Small to medium enterprises create economic development in developing countries and industrialized nations (Gundala & Khawaja, 2014; Kreiser et al., 2013).

### **Operational Processes**

Failure to plan and implement operational processes could lead to lower success, productivity, and longevity for small businesses (Bello & Ivanov, 2014). Ivanov (2011); Grable and Carr (2014) stated that lack of strategic and operational planning attributes to nearly 95% of small business failure. Ennis and Tucci (2011) presented an understanding of how deficient internal auditing systems employed by entrepreneurs could cause small business failure. Small businesses focusing auditing efforts on efficiency, effectiveness, and the economy can strengthen the small business owner (Ennis & Tucci, 2011).

Possessing a strategic or business plan, or a plan of succession could assist in the survival of businesses (Mahjoor, 2016). A proprietor's lack of implementing processes, as well as planning, leads to small business failure (Christofi, Nunes, Chao Peng, & Lin, 2013; Cragg, Mills, & Suraweera, 2013). Business owner failure risk increases when successors of the company do not have the designed business target or model (Cragg et al., 2013; Lam, 2011). If a succession plan is lacking in the overall long-term growth strategy, the failure risk may increase Cragg, Mills, & Suraweera, 2013).

Efficient and effective small business operational processes are vital to the survival of the company (Mahjoor, 2016). Marketing is a segment lacking in many small businesses, as the owners tend to work in their business opposed to on their business (De Salas & Huxley, 2014). Small businesses lack strategies in marketing relating to the

integration of social media (Fernández-Pérez, Alonso-Galicia, del Mar Fuentes-Funtes, & Rodriguez, 2014). In several instances, small businesses have issues of competition with larger firms and organizations when considering significant media operations such as television or radio (Fernández-Pérez et al., 2014; Winterberg, 2013). Social media are a tool often overlooked by small business owners, which could increase sales, leads, profitability, and the company's brand without traditional costs to marketing (Eisenberg, Johnson, & Pieteron, 2015). Social media, if used properly by small businesses could address marketing costs because social media are rather inexpensive or free in many instances (Eisenberg, Johnson, & Pieteron, 2015; Vernuccio, 2014).

### **Economic Growth of Small Businesses**

Small businesses bring and supply the boost of economic growth, which contributes to the development of local economies (Feldman, 2014). Two-thirds of employment in the U.S. comes from job creation by small to medium enterprises (Chinomona, 2013; Gale & Brown, 2013). Amash (2012) proclaimed SMEs as the backbone in many if not all economies; so, survival is crucial. Kreiser et al. (2013) posited SMEs create more employment than large firms do and considered an important source for advancement and innovation. Amash (2012) stated that small businesses and entrepreneurs add influential drivers to increase and grow the economy; adding tremendously to the U.S. economy. Small firms are imperative to economic growth and job creation.

Small businesses have the ability to drive the economy with creativity through innovation. Cronin-Gilmore (2012) proclaimed small businesses maintain the lead in



technology and drive the economy. Lechner and Gudmundsson (2014) acknowledged the importance of small firms for the creation of employment; which means their longevity and sustainability can provide essential economic growth. Comparatively, Cader and Leatherman (2011) confirmed programs started by local governments and states increase job creation, as well as entrepreneurship and economic development for small businesses. Small businesses can counter the direction of a bad economy with innovation and creativity (Monahan et al., 2011). Small businesses should focus on close engagements of patrons to offer and create personalized goods and services (Thomason, Simendinger, & Kiernan, 2013). Small business owners must consider strategies to increase profitability, longevity, and sustainability, specifically during downturns of the economy (Chang & Wang, 2013).

Focusing on finances becomes imperative when small businesses face unsettling environments or changing economies, which could leave small businesses vulnerable (Papaoikonomou et al., 2013). Forte, Barros, and Nakamura (2013) concluded that small businesses have greater vulnerability to decreasing local economic activity. Darcy, Hill, McCabe, and McGovern (2014) argued that the main to the development of small firms is finance. Hulbert et al. (2013) highlighted the lack of access to short and long-term capital financing as the main barrier affecting small businesses and economic improvement. Cook and Wolverton (2015) argued strategy development influences the growth of small businesses, as well as establishing sustainability.

Multiple agencies have programs to help and assist small businesses, among which the U.S. Small Business Administration plays a crucial role (SBA, 2013b).

Creating viable and sustainable growth for small businesses depends on stimulus programs, which invigorate the economy (Geho & Frakes, 2013). The federal government's Small Business Administration offers various small business programs that provide: (a) short-term loans, (b) mentor-protégé programs, and (c) financing to purchase equipment (Gale & Brown, 2013). Gale and Brown added these types of programs along with public policies are imperative to support small businesses, which assist in obtaining credit to help achieve longevity and sustainability. The mentor-protégé programs help small firms partner with other successful companies and enterprises to increase the likelihood of success in the market.

Parilla (2013) argued that entrepreneurship is a vital part of the progression of the economy because of the swift advancement of information and knowledge. Dawson and Henley (2012) proclaimed entrepreneurship is a driving force of pulling and pushing for wealth creation, as well as economic development. Feldman (2014) indicated entrepreneurship assists with social development through the innovation of new or improved products and services to address a social issue. Venturing into small business ownership or entrepreneurship is a difficult and challenging undertaking, which could influence why many new businesses fail.

### **Entrepreneurship**

There are multiple explanations of entrepreneurship and what entrepreneurs do to how entrepreneurs achieve goals (Rahatullah & Raeside, 2015). Entrepreneurship means defining and developing a business venture with the capacity to organize, develop, and manage risk to achieve a profit (Jafarnejad, Abbaszadeh, Ebrahimi, & Abtahi, 2013).

Entrepreneurship coupled with risk and innovation is a vital part of improving the economy globally (Feldman, 2014). Tundui and Tundui (2012) proclaimed entrepreneurship as a certain power or strength to catalyze economic growth and progress throughout the world. In contrast, Nnamseh and Akpan (2015) declared entrepreneurship as operating a business with willingness, self-interest, and risk to achieve profit or minimize loss while managing the business venture. Bello and Ivanov (2014) expressed managers involved in an uncertain business arena tend to use increased risk-taking action. Olaison and Bent (2014) stated entrepreneurship is a risky venture often resulting in business closure or failure. Campbell and Mitchell (2012) described entrepreneurship as an opportunity to receive success in business through the realization of profit and innovation creation. Entrepreneurship provides the direction and opportunity for entrepreneurs establishing SBEs, which plays a vital role in growing and sustaining an economy (Jafarnejed et al., 2013; SBA, 2016). Entrepreneurs consist of more than the willingness to take on opportunity and risk for profit. Entrepreneurs have focal points on imminent facets of business such as developing new products, services, or industries (Bratland, 2012). Entrepreneurs consist of founders, owners, and managers of new enterprises and prominent companies with different personalities (Chang & Wang, 2013; Smith, Bell, & Watts, 2014). Entrepreneurship is an economic stimulant for expansion and growth for communities (Paunescup, 2013). These depictions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship reflect that entrepreneurs play key roles for the advancement of local economies, society, and innovation (Rahatullah & Raeside, 2015).

Entrepreneurs typically embrace risk-taking through leadership, as the foundation to create longevity (Sakiru, Othman, DaudSilong, & Busayo, 2013). Effective leadership is critical to cultivate and advance new business (Sakiru et al., 2013). Lechner and Gudmundsson (2014) stated that leaders possess a vision, which allows a long-term commitment to achieve objectives. Assuming the role of manager or owner entails leadership. Leadership consists of influence between the leader and the persons lead to attain the goals of the organization (Sarti, 2014). Alstete (2014) contended organizations must create leaders who think strategically, which supports proficiency. Cook and Wolverton (2015) indicated proficiency established by strategic thinking promotes improves business decisions. Comparatively, leaders in business must think strategically to continue pertinence in business to focus on the many changes in an organization. Because the environment is forever changing, leaders in organizations must endure and confront threats caused by the growing environment (Sakiru et al., 2013). Nurturing and investing in entrepreneurship creation helps revitalize, inject, and grow economies (Rahatullah & Raeside, 2015).

**Innovation of new ideas and methods.** Innovation makes up a significant part of entrepreneurship and risk, which is an essential piece to the role of entrepreneurs (Hyttinen, Pajarinen, & Rouvinen, 2015). Entrepreneurs who assume greater risk increase their failure rate of business (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). The risk is unavoidable for many entrepreneurs with a quest to introduce new products, services, or just taking advantage of evolving opportunities (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). Entrepreneurs attempting to delve into large loans, unexplored areas of business, and lack

of planning may not experience sustainable and profitable outcomes during downturns of the economy (Taneja, Pryor, & Hayek, 2016). Verbano and Venturini (2013) stated that in business activities, the risk exists in many and various functions. Entrepreneurs incur many risks potentially and encounter a magnitude of uncertainty.

Many justifications and reasons remain to answer why people desire entrepreneurship (Gupta & Muita, 2013). Soininen et al. (2012) posited the reasons allow people to expound on starting a business, especially during downturns in the economy when opportunities are minimal. Entrepreneurship start-ups have become necessary to address economic shortfalls that could lead to crises, financially. Entrepreneurs move toward self-employment to avoid possible layoffs and minimal availability to quality employment (Dawson & Henley, 2012; Lafontaine & Shaw, 2016). Soininen et al. declared that uncertainty in the economy determines and influences the decisions managers and owners make. Regardless of the many reasons why entrepreneurs start businesses, their existence is essential and necessary to help sustain and stimulate the economy.

Small business owners and entrepreneurs need to employ strategies to create sustainability and longevity through economic downturns (Geho & Frakes, 2013). Implementing proper strategies during economic downturns and slowdowns align small businesses to receive successful results after the economic downturn (Leavy, 2013). Henry (2013) stated the decision-making process, as an entrepreneur, requires an understanding of strategic planning to propel a successful business. Blackburn et al. (2013) proclaimed that entrepreneurs might need opportunity and circumstances rather

than depending on strategies. Entrepreneurs and small business owners who receive and experience success are direct and deliberate in their process in decision-making (Phillips & Phillips, 2012). The survival and success of small businesses rely upon the drive, perseverance, and leadership of the entrepreneur (Agrawal & Gugnani, 2014; Ul Haq, 2014).

### **Business Strategy**

Business strategy provides focus and direction for achievement over the long run of a firm. Business strategy is an intentional method for accomplishing strategic goals and actions most important for the organization's successes (Abdalkrim, 2013). De Salas and Huxley (2014) defined strategy as establishing direction and scope for the organization to follow. Small businesses response to strategies along with the influence of institutional monies determines the success of the firm (Helfat & Peteraf, 2015). Strategy for many businesses can have different meanings (Abdalkrim, 2013; De Sala & Huxley, 2014). De Salas and Huxley (2014) stated strategy has many meanings and definitions and becomes difficult to characterize from one viewpoint. Strategy provides a precise and organized approach to align the capacity of business with the mission and vision of the company (De Salas & Huxley, 2014). Gupta and Muita (2013) showed strategy as actions taken to achieve organizational goals.

Strategies provide the foundation for businesses to succeed (Blackburn et al., 2013). Alstete (2014) expressed that every business needs a strategy, inherently and specifically to create sustainability. Implementing effective strategies helps build the business structure, as well as steering better economic performance (Phillips & Phillips,

2012). Strategic performance has much to do with the achievements realized by the organization (Blackburn et al., 2013). Increasing performance by owners and managers helps cultivate business outcomes. Cultivating positive results with proper strategies helps a business improve performance (Abdalkrim, 2013). Useful strategies must possess relevant measurements to help businesses survive and thrive (Bello & Ivanov, 2014). Abdalkrim (2013) stated that engaging employees in the process of strategic planning increase the rate of success for the firm through driving improved processes and procedures. Planning the right strategy may assist small businesses to achieve profitability, longevity, and sustainability.

Strategic planning provides direction toward achieving goal and objectives of the organization, which assists with survival for the future. Abdalkrim (2013) suggested strategic planning as an action to predict the future and respond properly. Tundui and Tundui (2012) added that the strategic planning process encompasses forecasting for businesses and organizations. Strategic planning can help achieve in obtaining and receiving proper capital and financial management for small businesses.

**Strategic business management.** Strategic management could provide small business owners with the knowledge to make adjustments to redirect the goals and plans of the business (Fox, 2013). The concept of strategic management has been in place for over 50 years (Abreu, 2016). The term of strategic management has been in use since the 1950's (Abreu, 2016). Strategic management assists small business owners with the ability to build information and knowledge toward goal achievement, as well as guide ways to increase value and wealth (Rolleri, Nadim, & Lussier, 2016). Achieving goals, as

stated by Bee and Neubaum (2014) means entrepreneurs may need to create reasonable and manageable goals by limiting the number of objectives. Strategic management entails providing opportunities through developing and sustaining competitive advantages (Alstete, 2014; Rahatullah & Raeside, 2015). Leadership, stability, and organizational structure of the entrepreneurial direction creates growth (Bello & Ivanov, 2014), which influences strategic management. Leavy (2013) stressed the success of a firm is dependent highly on the internal and external factors allowing basic functioning of strategic positioning toward competition and growth. De Salas and Huxley (2014) emphasized that competence supported by strategies could assist small businesses in survival, continuity, and growth. Achieving profit among competing firms requires efficacious entrepreneurial strategy and effort with goals, purpose, and objectives (Bratland, 2012; Rolleri et al., 2016). Strategic management provides another avenue for small business owners to make decisions to achieve sustainability for their business (Abdalkrim, 2013).

Daily decisions are a regular part of any small business and provides direction for the company (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). Entrepreneurs and business owners must adjust decisions to meet opportunities influenced by modifications in the environment, which could alter organizational performance (Blackburn et al., 2013; Gupta & Muita, 2013). External stakeholder collaboration plays a major role in making adjustments to increase the position of the organization and sustain organizational performance to increase profitability (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014).



## **Capital Funding Financial Management**

A prevailing and typical component of many small businesses is the inadequate access to proper funding (Yazdanfar, 2013). Small businesses depend heavily on personal resources such as family savings (Kozan & Akdeniz, 2014). In many instances, retrieving personal resources, as the sole source of funding, keeps the business operating (Kozan & Akdeniz, 2014). Busch, Bauer, and Orlitzky (2015) stated that businesses must implement and engage the correct procedures for financial management, which helps maintain sustainability. Ivanov (2011) researched small business failure and uncovered information that inadequate capital is often the cause. Small businesses with a lack of adequate capital tend to experience difficulties growing their businesses (Cole, 2013). Sequeira, Wang, and Peyrefitte (2016) posited that many hindrances to success for new enterprises are access to capital and efficient management. Providing access to capital along with effective management could add to the longevity of the small business through increased profits (Busch, Bauer, & Orlitzky, 2015).

Effective management could help small business owners establish strong financial strategies (Kim, Egan, Kim, & Kim, 2013). Busch et al., 2015 suggested that owners of small businesses design a strong financial strategy plan when creating and building a sustainable business. Designing a strong financial strategy plan helps when seeking to fund from other sources of finance. Building a sustainable business, in many cases, requires funding, which could come from financial institutions, venture capitalist, bootstrapping, and angel investors (Busch et al., 2015; Grable & Carr, 2014). Busch et al. (2015) added that “bootstrapping” is one of the most common ways to finance and

sustain a business, which entails the use of credit cards, savings accounts and retirement accounts. Using financial institutions becomes an option when business owners exhaust available personal funds and lack other viable avenues to raise capital (Geho & Frakes, 2013).

Financial institutions consist of organizations such as credit unions, banks, or direct loan firms, specializing in lending monies to businesses and individuals. Cole (2013) argued that small business owners must develop relationships with bankers and loan officers to obtain funding in the form of loans. Cultivating a relationship with different financial institutions could give a power of influence for small business owners trying to raise money to sustain their business beyond the first five years of operation.

Small business owners with challenges in their creditworthiness create impediments to raise and receive funding, especially in the early stages of business (Foley & O'Connor, 2013). "Angel investors" are imperative to small business owners during the startup phase (Grable & Carr, 2014). One option for small business owners with challenging creditworthiness looking to obtain funding is using the angel investor (Cole, 2013). Grable and Carr (2014) recommended comprehending the importance of pinpointing financiers who can offer funds long-term who understand the business and not only the creditworthiness. Small business owners must succeed at obtaining funding from angel investors by coordinating what their businesses offer to how the angel investors form decisions to invest (Sequeira et al., 2016). If the business owner is not successful in raising capital, venture capital provides another approach to increase funding for the small business owner in the start-up phase (Cole, 2013).

Venture capital is a contentious system of business funding for business owners (Sequeira et al., 2016). Venture capital investors provide funding to entrepreneurs and business owners who have a potential for long-term growth (Kozan & Akdeniz, 2014). Venture capital is a major source of financing for owners in the start-up phase without a connection to financial markets (Kozan & Akdeniz, 2014). The downside for start-ups is the venture capitalist could have control in the decisions of the company, which may influence the direction of the small business (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). Funding from venture capitalists comes from investment banks, wealthy investors, and other institutions with group related investments or partnerships (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). Arthur and Hisrich (2011) declared that venture capital does not always take the form of money and could encompass providing management technical assistance or expertise. Applying a venture capitalist approach to raise funds or expertise, as a business owner, demands pinpointing the problem and offering solutions to increase longevity and sustainability for the business.

### **Employee Development**

Management developing employees provides structure and processes needed to implement a fluid way of creating a culture of learning, producing, and growing-on-the-job (Fox, 2013). Business owners with employee development plans and programs offer a culture of learning and growing, which adds to the success of the business (Blignaut, Aronson, & de Groot, 2014; Bryant & Allen, 2013). Business owners must take on the burden of providing training and development, as a regular function of their business to continue increased performance (Braun, Avital, & Martz, 2012). Mihret & Shumetie

Ademe (2017) noted that a culture of training and development should possess an organization to help provide aim toward bettering individuals and their performance while on-the-job. Business owners, managers, and supervisors need to develop and implement ways to allow employees to use their creative skills and abilities to offer better ways of doing business (Blignaut, Aronson, & de Groot, 2014).

If employee development is not a focal point of managers and business owners, the business could lose good employees, which could affect the survival rate of the business (Blackburn et al., 2013). Companies must invest in employee career development to increase and advance skills, which could help with the retention of employees in organizations (Beattie et al., 2014; Kim, Egan, Kim, & Kim, 2013). In a small business setting, the business owner can provide better training unique to the business (Kim et al., 2013). Business owners, in a small setting, increase the success rate of the business by allowing time to train employees to build skills in a relaxed and straightforward environment (Chinomona, 2013).

Larger organizations have an advantage to training staff on skills needed in the organization by hiring consultants and corporate trainers (Paunescup, 2013). Chinomona (2013) expressed that small business owners, with small budgets, may need to employ simple development skills, which include specific and straightforward on-the-job training. An employee development program requires time and money small business owners must invest. An employee development program may provide benefits to small business owners, as employee development programs channel higher productivity and profitability (Chinomona, 2013; Ul Haq, 2014). Business owners creating opportunities

for coaching and employee career development may assist with the retention of employees in organizations (Kim et al., 2013). The development of employees is imperative to increase skills and knowledge of employees while on-the-job (Ul Haq, 2014).

**Barriers affecting employee development.** Two leadership styles, participative and instrumental, assist in driving, inspiring, and developing employees in their positions (van Wijk, 2014). Leadership styles, as a small business owner, can influence the development of employees negatively or positively (Choudhary, Akhtar, & Zaheer, 2013). Leadership is the ability to guide and direct persons in the organization (Cook & Wolverton, 2015). According to Sarti (2014), participative leadership engages the employee by advocating the interest of group members and sharing decision-making abilities. As a small business owner looking to achieve goals, participative leadership allows involvement of each employee resulting in the organization's decision-making process (Sarti, 2014). Instrumental leadership is a result of functionality and strategy to organize and coordinate processes with other staff (Choudhary et al., 2013; Sarti, 2014). If employees experience a collective decision-making process along with guidance and certainty, the employees are inclined to strengthen skills needed to perform on-the-job (Sarti, 2014). As a small business owner looking to achieve goals, effective leadership could offer direction and certainty for employees resulting in higher employee morale (Gupta & Maita, 2013).

As a small business with employees, barriers exist and arise when developing employees (Leavy, 2013). One barrier preventing employee development for small

business owners is the lack of financial resources, as well as ample employees (Bandura & Lyons, 2015). A business owner keeping a sufficient number of employees on-the-job can help when sending several employees away for training, which could affect productivity (Twyford, Alagaraja, & Shuck, 2016). One way to overcome a barrier to employee development requires using training through computers to avoid sending employees for external training (Bandura & Lyons, 2015). Owners could add a barrier to their small business if providing training to employees on their responsibilities (Twyford et al., 2016). When a small business increases its capacity of business, the owner's availability to give personal training to newly hired employees diminishes (Bandura & Lyons, 2015; Vroom, 2013). If training differentiates across the company, the owner could face difficulty attempting to train everyone at the same time; thereby, reducing the productivity of the company until training the employees (Mihret & Shumetie Ademe, 2017) adequately.

A business owner hiring consultants to train employees could create a financial burden for a small business (Park & Vermeulen, 2016). A third barrier to employee development is the financial obligation of employing an outside consultant for training new hires (Bandura & Lyons, 2015). A financial duty to hire a training consultant could reduce productivity and hinder the sustainability of the small business (Park & Vermeulen, 2016). According to Bandura and Lyons (2015), a fourth barrier to the development of employees in a small business is the owner's absence of knowledge in the area of expertise needed by the employee. If the proprietor needs definitive training in areas such as payroll or contracting, the owner may possess the skill set to train or

develop the employee in these areas (Bandura & Lyons, 2015). To realize successful results as a small business owner when developing employees, one must understand when to train and how to train cost efficiently while maintaining the productivity of the firm (Mihret & Shumetic Ademe, 2017).

### **Geographical Location**

A small business should conduct prior research strategically before doing business to uncover if the business will succeed in the location desired (Chang & Wang, 2013).

Tasnim, Yahya, and Zainuddin (2014) found that entrepreneurial failure depended on the location or geographical area of the company. Wang (2013) noted that many types of business require distinctive locational determinants to achieve efficiency. Conducting research strategically to identify a particular area revolves around the characteristics conducive toward supporting the growth of the small business (Casey, 2014).

Entrepreneurs and small business owners must implement strategic decisions to help align themselves with the geographical location to receive opportunities for their business (Frese & Gielnik, 2014). Frese and Gielnik (2014) stated that a firm's specific geographical location has much to do with performance, growth, and sustainability. Small business owners and entrepreneurs with closeness to customers, available resources, networks, and community alliances create a quick response to the market with their services and products (Casey, 2014; Goetz & Rupasingha, 2014). Aligning business with the geographical market is imperative to help achieve profitability and longevity (Freire-Gibb & Nielsen, 2014).

The location of a business is not the only determinant of success or failure of the business (Hamilton, 2014). Berg (2014) stated that business owners should not conclude that because a business is not in a given area, there is no demand for the product in that area. Business owners who employ this line of thinking and approach have lacked in research and time required to determine if a company could produce a profit to yield longevity and sustainability (Berg, 2014). Failure for a business owner to conduct adequate research for a specific location could result in a loss of revenue or untapped opportunities for business (Hamilton, 2014). Berg (2014) suggested that business incentives given by local governments could influence owners of businesses to locate in the areas where incentive occurs. Governmental inducement could force a small business owner to open a business in a particular geographical location (Afful-Dadzie & Afful-Dadzie, 2016).

Start-up capital for entrepreneurs and business owners may differ depending on the geographical location (Berg, 2014). Capital for a start-up is less for business owners whose businesses reside in communities with a lower threshold of entry (Lofstrom & Bates, 2013; Lofstrom, Bates, & Parker, 2014). Barbers, beauticians, janitorial companies, car washes, athletic trainers, and soul food restaurants are a part of this group (Lofstrom & Bates, 2013; Lofstrom et al., 2014). Bates and Robb (2014) suggested that small businesses might limit their customer base if they do business as an ethnic niche provider solely. Business owners experience less profitability and sustainability when servicing ethnic communities, typically because of lower wages of residents in ethnic neighborhoods (Freeland & Keister, 2016). A small business owner who gives attention



to diverse communities or tax advantage areas could aid in the profitability, longevity, and sustainability, as compared to small business owners who may not choose the same options (Afful-Dadzie & Afful-Dadzie, 2016).

### **Transition**

The information in Section 1 introduced the study, the problem statement, and the scarcity of knowledge on how some small business trucking companies use strategies to achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years. Section 1 addressed essential elements of the study, which include the Problem Statement, Purpose Statement, Nature of the Study, Research Question, Conceptual Framework, Significance of the Study, and the Literature Review headings. Small business trucking companies show a high failure rate, resulting in only 45% of small business trucking companies experience profitability and longevity beyond the first 5 years of operation (SBA, 2014). According to Freire-Gibb and Nielsen (2014) research is needed to show adequate methods and strategies to achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years. The results from the study could reveal what strategies and information small business trucking companies can use to reach business sustainability (Bateh, Heaton, Arbogast, & Broadbent, 2013).

The review of the professional and academic literature provided comprehension and understanding of the essential constructs of the conceptual framework of systems theory about (a) motivations and purpose, (b) characteristics, (c) strategic decisions, and (d) resource management. In Section 2, I provide a detailed explanation of the qualitative design encompassing the populations and sampling, data collection, data analysis, and reliability and validity. The information presented in Section 3 includes the doctoral

study findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for future research, and overall conclusions.

## Section 2: The Project

My goal for this qualitative case study was to identify and explore how owners of small business trucking companies achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years. I focused my study on small business trucking companies located in Northern Virginia who exhibited profitability and longevity beyond 5 years of operation. Comprehending strategies and methods of small business trucking owners who obtain sustainability beyond 5 years might reduce high failure rates in similar small business (SBA, 2014). Section 2 in this study contains: (a) the restatement of the purpose, (b) the role of the researcher, (c) the research participant, (d) research method and design, (e) population and sampling, (f) ethical research, (g) data collection instruments, (h) data collection techniques, (i) data organization techniques, and (j) reliability and validity of the study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify and explore strategies some owners of small business trucking companies use to achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years. The target population was owners of four small business trucking companies who demonstrated profitability and longevity beyond 5 years of operation, located in Northern Virginia. The implications for positive social change include the potentials for advancing employee and family conditions, employment, taxes, and job opportunities.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in a qualitative study is to engage, observe, and explore phenomena by interviewing participants, as well as reviewing artifacts, documents, and

records (Bahn & Weatherhill, 2013). Draper (2016) indicated the researcher is the instrument for conducting qualitative research. Qualitative researchers conduct studies in different settings such as workplaces to maintain and safeguard the participants' experiences and to analyze the data (Yin, 2015). Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2013) posited that a researcher is the connection of the study by deciphering and understanding reality in various ways to describe individual viewpoints. However, direct and personal interaction with participants of the study initiates the possibility for ethical issues emerging (Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, and Casey, 2015; Metcalf & Benn, 2013).

I created a compilation of various sources of obtaining data (primary and secondary), keeping documented proof to include an interview protocol (see Appendix A), as well as a reflective journal to minimize possible bias. The use of an interview protocol provides a more structured setting to explore a research topic, which could guide focus and consistency in the interviews (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The justification for the implementation of an interview protocol was to develop and implement a consistent way to ask the semistructured interview questions to give focus on the overarching research question.

Being a principal senior business analyst for the U.S. Small Business Administration for 4 years, a business development specialist for the State of Virginia for 13 years, and as a small business owner for more than 11 years, equipped me with a personal perspective of leadership in business. I possess substantial knowledge in organizing, planning, directing, staffing, and controlling commercial enterprises, allowing interaction with clients, community members, and customers in multiple

business conditions. Having and possessing management and leadership skills enabled me to observe leadership characteristics from various aspects.

Researchers use *The Belmont Report* (1979) to provide a framework for procedures and ethical principles a researcher must adhere to concerning human research subjects. *The Belmont Report* outlines guidance for researchers and suggests researchers comply with three humane and ethical standards when administering research involving human subjects. *The Belmont Report* (1979) stressed three basic ethical principles researchers should abide by are: (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice. I will adopt and adhere to the three basic ethical practices while conducting my research at all times.

Qualitative researchers seek to reduce error and personal bias (Lewis, 2015). To reduce or mitigate potential personal bias, the researcher should refrain from making any conclusions or judgments about the phenomena of the study (Moustakas, 1994). I attempted to mitigate potential researcher bias and opinionated ideas by controlling my expressions and reactions to interview responses. A protocol for the interview (see Appendix A) was imperative to ensure I adhered to the same interview process for each participant. Establishing an interview protocol ensured I conform the same steps in the interview process (O'Brien, Harris, Beckman, Reed, & Cook, 2014).

### **Participants**

The participants for this study were owners of small business trucking companies in Northern Virginia. A purpose of exploratory research is to gather and retrieve an in-depth comprehension of the information (Neuman, 2014; Poulis, Poulis, &

Plakoyiannaki, 2013). The small business trucking companies I selected demonstrated a record of longevity, profitability, and sustainable strategies beyond 5 years of operation. To reach and identify the participants, I used databases from Northern Virginia Chamber of Commerce and Fredericksburg Regional Chamber of Commerce based in Fredericksburg, Virginia. The databases encompassed business owners' names, company addresses, telephone numbers, cities, counties, and the established year of the companies. By way of resolute and purposeful sampling, I asked the most pertinent participants who could provide information necessary to assist in acquiring interpretation and description related to the overarching research question (Sangster-Gormley, 2013; Yin, 2013).

The selected participants received an invitation to participate through direct mail or telephone. After contacting the possible participants, while describing the purpose for calling, I asked if they would willingly engage in the research study. The participants received letters by direct mail for involvement in the research study, and upon the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University approval, the participants of the study received a letter of consent disclosing the purpose of the study. Before participants took part in the study, I gave assurance to them concerning the confidential nature of the study. Participation in the study by the participants did not occur until after signing the consent form. I communicated by phone to convey the willing and voluntary nature of the study and conducted semistructured, face-to-face interviews with the participants in an ethical manner.

Yin (2014) proclaimed that case study protocol encompasses establishing a relationship between the selected participants and the researcher. Cole (2013) stated that

the working relationship between the participant and researcher must occur in the participant's natural setting. I established and created a working relationship with each participant through continued communication while on site visits. Ross (2015) posited that to achieve adequate research, the working relationship must reflect impartial, moral, and honesty between the participant and researcher. I planned to visit each location to describe the study's purpose intent and to obtain support. Bashara (2014) and Metz (2013) recommended using a strategy consisting of fairness, linked relationships directed on integrity, principle, awareness, and morality, while maintaining a connection between the researcher and participant. I tried to build a relationship of trust and openness through listening and encouraging elaboration. Barnham (2015) emphasized that listening is an important component of the ethics of care, as the interviewer's voice should not control the interview.

### **Research Method and Design**

Three methodologies exist for researchers to use to administer research: (a) qualitative, (b) quantitative, and (c) mixed method (Fassinger & Marrow, 2013; Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016; Yin, 2014). Campbell (2014) and Yazan (2015) indicated researchers should choose the research method and design that are most appropriate for a study to help achieve the goal of the study. The goal of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how some owners of small business trucking companies use strategies to achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years.

## **Research Method**

The qualitative research method was appropriate to explore the in-depth and detailed experiences of each participant of the study (Gringeri, Barusch, & Cambron, 2013). A qualitative research method is suitable for researchers designing a basic intuitive worldview to explore, understand, and explain a social phenomenon in a natural setting (Anyan, 2013; Fassinger & Morrow, 2013; Gringeri, Barusch, & Cambron, 2013). The qualitative methodology is useful for understanding phenomena in a specific setting, gaining detail information from interviews, observations, secondary data sources, and archival artifacts (Bevan, 2014; Pettigrew, 2013; Poulis et al., 2013). Using the qualitative method allows an understanding of social or human issues with a focal point on the significance of the participants' viewpoints (Aguirre & Bolton, 2014; Houghton et al., 2015; Tomkinson, 2015). To explore the phenomena of business, I determined that the qualitative method was the appropriate choice for this study.

The quantitative research method entails numerical data quantifiable and measurable through examining the relationships or differences among variables and the testing of a hypothesis to answer the research questions (Palinkas et al., 2013; Smith, 2014). According to Venkatesh, Brown, and Bala (2013), quantitative research studies attempt to prove or invalidate a theory. Quantitative researchers employ an instrument-based questionnaire. Quantitative responses undergo statistical examination for understanding and clarification (Allwood, 2012). Engaging the quantitative research method did not apply to this study, as limitations exist in the use of statistical



information, and I did not seek to examine variables relationships or differences by testing statistical hypotheses.

I did not choose the mixed-method design, as the focus of the study explores strategies to increase profitability and longevity to implement sustainability. The mixed-method approach has a relevant position in research. However, the processes involved in the mixed-method design prescribed extra costs, analyses, and time from the researcher to discern and interpret the information. Mixed-method designs are suitable when exploring lived experiences, as well as for examining the sources of variation among relevant variables (Green et al., 2014; Maxwell, 2016). The mixed-method approach was not appropriate because the quantitative portion is not helpful to understanding small business trucking owners who desire longevity strategies.

### **Research Design**

Researchers who desire to use a qualitative method can select from different designs that include: (a) case study, (b) ethnography, (c) narrative research, (d) phenomenology, and (e) grounded theory (Elo, Kaariainen, Kanste, Polkki, Utriainen, & Kyngas, 2014; Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014; Yazan, 2015). Research involving gathering interview data from participants of the study follows a qualitative research design (Elo et al., 2014; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2014). The strengths and weaknesses of the research design consist of different uses, the expected participants, nature of the study, and geographical location (Yazan, 2015).

The case study design is preferred for researchers seeking to answer research questions asking *how* and *what* (Yin, 2014). The case study design is suitable for

enabling the researcher to investigate, explore, retrieve, and interpret the experiences of the participants in their natural setting (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). A case study design can encompass single or multiple cases (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014; Lewis, 2015). The researcher using a single or multiple case study should submerge into the participants' setting while exploring phenomena in natural surroundings (Singh, 2014; Yin, 2014).

Employing the ethnographic design is relevant when the researcher pursues submersion within a group of people to identify and characterize cultures to explore behaviors, interactions, and demeanors on a daily basis while in a natural setting (Maxwell, 2013). Using the ethnographic method or design requires more time to collect data because the researcher must build a relationship to gain trust and certainty with the partakers (Lewis, 2015; Yin, 2014; Yin, 2015). I did not choose to use an ethnographic design, as data collection necessitates frequent interactions along with full notes recounting various observations for characterizing a group's culture.

Researchers using the narrative research design focus on collecting participants' stories by conducting numerous interviews throughout an extended duration of time (Walker, 2012). The researcher conducting the narrative research design must establish contextual frameworks to specify certain and chronological themes to ascertain a true comprehension of the partakers' experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I did not choose the narrative research design since story collecting based on the participants' lives did not suit the purpose for this business study.

Engaging a phenomenological research design means scrutinizing the lived experiences of the participants of the study. A phenomenological researcher attempts to create common statements or ubiquitous truthfulness shared by individuals or groups of people experiencing the research phenomenon (Yazan, 2015; Yin 2014). I chose not to use the phenomenological research design because my research encompasses small business trucking companies, which I needed to uncover many circumstances of phenomena beyond the meanings of the owners' lived experiences.

Researchers employ grounded theory to identify and explore fundamental and essential social processes to develop an expansive relevant theory with a realistic point of view (Corley, 2015; Urquhart & Fernández, 2013). Researchers regard grounded theory as flexible and adaptable across each research paradigm when constructing theory in many scopes averse to testing a theory individually (Urquhart & Fernández, 2013). Grounded theory was not appropriate for this study, as I was not attempting to construct or develop a new theory for explaining small business trucking companies' strategies' effectiveness.

The research design for this study was a multiple case study. A helpful process of the case study design means exploring and retrieving phenomena of different perspectives with various types of data. Yin (2014) posited that a multiple case study design is pertinent when appropriate data could emerge in more than one setting. I observed, interviewed, and reviewed archival company documents from four small business-trucking businesses in the Northern Virginia area, which made the multiple case study design most appropriate for this study.

Smith and Chudleigh (2015) posited that data saturation materializes when researchers are not able to uncover or find additional information from the partakers' answers to the interview questions. Data saturation develops when there is an absence of new pertinent information surfacing from interviews, company documents, or other data sources (Anyan, 2013; Bahn & Weatherhill, 2013). The number of interviews with the participants could vary, depending upon when data saturation becomes evident.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population of this study consisted of four small business trucking companies located in Northern Virginia. Participants must meet and align with the following criterion for the study developed and implemented successful strategies to achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years of operation. I explored the strategies of the participants used to sustain profitability and longevity beyond 5 years of operation. Palinkas et al. (2013) indicated purposeful sampling entails choosing the least amount of companies, producing the greatest amount of information while minimizing time and expenditure to focus on the research question.

A purposeful sampling method from the study consisted of select participants. Deliberate and purposeful sampling is appropriate when individuals, documents, or locations are selected intentionally because of potential significance on the groupings, dimensions, or properties of the phenomena under research (Aguirre & Bolton, 2014; Anyan, 2013). Purposeful sampling occurs in qualitative research to pinpoint information about the phenomenon under research (Aguirre & Bolton, 2014; Poulis et al., 2013). Because there is a population of multiple small business trucking companies who

successfully implemented sustainable practices to achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years of operation, in Northern Virginia, the appropriate method for this study is sampling. The purposeful sampling method was appropriate for this study because using purposeful sampling allows deductions, considering conditions locally or regionally when discussing case study results.

When no new data, coding, or themes result, and replication occurs from the information given, data saturation has taken place (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Houghton et al., 2013). Employing member checking on selected participants improves the validity and accuracy of the study (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013). In case studies, researchers, typically, employ member checking where the size of the sample is small to assist in data saturation (Cronin, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). Member checking encompasses administering follow-up interviews with the participants to allow review of the written information retrieved by the researcher, ensuring accuracy, clarity, and correct interpretation, as well as collecting additional information if available (Boblin et al., 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015). The objective of selecting a sample size is to determine a useful number of participants for the design of the study selected (Boblin et al., 2013). The size of the sample should ensure the number of participants is adequate to meet data saturation requirements by verifying that participants are interviewed until no new themes emerge (Lewis, 2015). Reviewing company documents, as a secondary source of data supports data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Saturation is used to ensure and assure that adequate data are retrieved to support the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Using the case study design enables researchers to make direct observations of participants and conduct face-to-face interviews in a natural setting (Lewis, 2015; Yazan, 2015). The face-to-face interview in a natural setting of the participant can help with receiving more in-depth answers to the research question (Pettigrew, 2013; Pierre & Jackson, 2014). While conducting face-to-face interviews, the researcher can observe body language and movement to promote better interaction and communication between the participant and the researcher.

### **Ethical Research**

I commenced research after receiving approval from Walden's IRB for the ethical protection of the research participants. The Walden University IRB approval number for this study is 0810-18-0539880. I selected the participants by phone or email inquiry and submitted a letter with an explanation of the voluntary and nonincentive-based participation along with the nature of the study (see Appendix A). The letter contained the consent form given to each potential participant of the study. If the potential participant decided to participate in the study, the participant circled I consent and initialed along with signing and dating the form. In the event no answer was received within 5 days from a mail inquiry, a phone call was made to the participant. Protecting the privacy and confidentiality, along with the well-being of participants, are important in any study (Yin, 2015). Morse and Coulehan (2015) noted that the protection of participants' privacy is a fundamental practice of research ethics. The consent form assisted in keeping the privacy and confidential nature of the study for the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Ethical issues could arise when conducting qualitative

interviews. As proposed by Mealer and Jones (2014), one method I used for assuring the protection of the participants' identities was to use a secure password when uploading interview transcripts and deleting the audio file after 5 years.

Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis and participants were at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time verbally, in writing, or by e-mail requesting not to continue to participate in the study. Even though the participants read and signed the consent form, describing the voluntary nature of the study, the participants received a reminder before conducting the personal interview about the voluntary nature of participation in the study. The participants understood they could withdraw at any time and any information given would remain confidential. Participants did not receive inducements or incentives while taking part in the research study. Coding consisted of the participant's name and company using alphanumeric values known by the researcher only. Using a system of coding helps preserve confidentiality and privacy while safeguarding the participants agreeing to participate in the study (Yin, 2015).

I conveyed to each participant in the study that I will provide, after a personal request, the completed findings of the study. The data and information from the study will stay secured and locked in a vault, which is accessible by the researcher only for a period of 5 years. The destruction and elimination (file deleting and paper shredding) of data and information related to the study will commence after 5 years from the CAO's approval date.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

When administering multiple case study interviews, I was the primary collection instrument for obtaining the data. A multiple case study investigation entails employing interviews to retrieve data through the exploration of the significant phenomenon using *how* and *what* questions (Allwood, 2012; Elo et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). As the collection instrument for the data, I asked open-ended questions using the semistructured interview process, allowing follow-up questions to probe participants to gain in-depth information.

Researchers have an advantage when using the qualitative method approach (Maxwell, 2013; Rittenhofer, 2015). The advantage using the qualitative method encompasses the different means available to retrieve or collect data (Yin, 2014). I employed an interview protocol, as the primary instrument for data collection, which assisted in directing the semistructured interviews. The interview questions and protocol are located in Appendix A. Researchers endorse the importance of engaging a plan for research or an interview protocol before commencing case study research (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2015). I obtained and preserved further data for the research using a contemplative journal with notes to document thoughts and observations after conducting interviews. Employing a contemplative and reflective journal helps with reviewing business records and keeping focus, as well provides a way to serve as a guide for the researcher (Pettigrew, 2013; Rittenhofer, 2015; Yin, 2015).

As an addition to obtaining data from interviews, a researcher using the qualitative method approach can obtain additional information from: (a) documents, (b) company records, (c) direct observations, and (d) physical artifacts (Yin, 2014). Physical



artifacts include directives, memos, and other records about achieving sustainability, longevity, and profitability. One example of a physical artifact is reviewing company records to support operational and strategy processes, and training records and course materials. Business records I reviewed included paper notes and computer information that demonstrated how management has assured progress toward achieving business longevity and profitability.

Upon completion of the interview, I reviewed notes recorded, from a hand-held recorder, for each interview conducted. I also reviewed recorded notes to track pertinent information to help craft writing, chronologically (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Rittenhofer, 2015; Yin, 2014). I made direct observations at the companies' locations, and of employees to ascertain additional information or to obtain significant data. Yin (2014) indicated using multiple data sources can create an inclusive and extensive package specified as a case database.

Employing member checking with participants gives the researcher the opportunity to review and ascertain interview data as being correct and accurate. Researchers suggested that when conducting interviews in qualitative research, the use of member checking assures the validity of the interview data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Maxwell, 2013; Morse, 2015). However, some researchers oppose using member checking because of the difficulty translating the interview accurately in summary form (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

I recorded each interview with a personal recorder to store the participants' answers, experiences, opinions, values, and feedback to the open-ended interview

questions (see Appendix B). While the interview was in session, I made brief comments to notate pertinent information and feedback. Employing a reflective or contemplative journal to assist in recording the interviewer's thoughts and understandings right after the interview ends allows researchers to provide clarity in the process (Cairney & St Denny, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The contemplative journal potentially protects against bias when translating, writing, and describing the interview data, which can improve accuracy, reliability, and the validity of the case study findings.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Three methods for obtaining qualitative interview data are: (a) open-ended interviews, (b) extensive interviews, and (c) informal, conversational interviews (Patton, 2014). The three methods for collecting qualitative interview data each possess strengths and weaknesses. I chose a semistructured, face-to-face interview approach with open-ended questions along with the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to encourage responses from participants and to retrieve additional information.

One strength of the semistructured interview is that personal interviews provide rich and detailed information about the phenomena (Patton, 2014). A second strength of the semistructured interview is that the researcher can revisit answers to the questions to provide clarity and accuracy to the participants' responses (Yin, 2014). A third strength to using the semistructured interview with open-ended questions is to gain perspectives and insights about strategies needed to achieve profitability and longevity (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Additional advantages of semistructured interviews include gaining insights into the experiences of small business trucking owners. A researcher may also

choose to employ the personal interview approach for data collection because interviewing facilitates exploration of the data in multiple ways (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Patton, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I would have rejected and eliminated any names of the participants or companies from the study to avoid a possibility of a potential conflict of interest. However, since I do not work in the trucking industry or serve as a consultant in the industry; therefore, no conflict of interest existed. The interview process did not create any risk to the participants of the study.

Before commencing each interview session, the participants reviewed their signed consent form, in which the purpose of the interview and the study was re-examined to ascertain if any participants had questions. I reiterated to the interviewees that their participation is voluntary and verify their understanding that they may withdraw from the study at any time. I commenced informal dialogue with the participants to make the participants feel comfortable. I answered questions asked by the participants. Researchers who use the qualitative approach suggest assisting interviewees by commencing engaging conversation or asking “ice-breaking” questions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Morse, 2015; Yin, 2014). Once the participants became comfortable, I asked semistructured, open-ended questions, applying the interview protocol (see Appendix A). As I moved closer to the end of the interview, I asked the participants to review company records and documents such as memos, planning documents, reports, and other information pertinent to strategies for achieving profitability and longevity.

The ability to reproduce or replicate a qualitative case study, results from using interview protocols by asking the same principal questions, and employing various styles

of the query to improve dependability through methodological triangulation (Houghton et al., 2015). Methodological triangulation is compiling and comparing numerous types of information and deciding if the various data types support similar findings (Yin, 2014). I sent a copy of the interview transcripts to the participants for member checking, to verify the accuracy of the findings.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Administering a multiple case study using personal interviews and document reviews demands strong management. Scrutinizing qualitative data means the researcher employs a framework adequately for the information to achieve structure and organization (Vaugh & Turner, 2016). The four principles of case study organization require developing a case study database, using multiple sources, managing a conglomerate of evidence, and implementing caution when using the data from electronic sources (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Yin, 2014).

In qualitative research, the researcher is the collection instrument for data. To assist in avoiding bias, the researcher must use a reflective journal to record the research progress (Collins & Cooper, 2014; Cope, 2015). The intent of the reflective journal is to record and document data, and information based on the researcher's comprehension of the events (Cope, 2015; Fung & Hoon, 2013). A reflective journal provides a means for the researcher to document any bias affecting the interviews, participants, or information received (Fung & Hoon, 2013; van Wijk, 2014). I used a reflective journal to assist in recording data in the research process and perceptions from my study.

I used two recording devices, one of which was for backup while conducting the semistructured interviews. According to Yin (2014), the researcher should store the information received from the case study electronically along with categorization. One way to categorize the information is to list the participants as Participant A1, A2 for one company, Participant B1, B2 for another trucking company, and following order until all of the participants are on a list alphabetically (Mealer & Jones, 2014; Wagner, 2015). As the data collection instrument, I converted paper, data, forms, and transcripts electronically into scanned files. All information retrieved will remain in my custody for 5 years on a password protected external drive to secure the rights of the human subjects in the research study. The secure external drive will reside in a lock box protected from harm and unwarranted intrusion, and I will destroy the information after 5 years from the date of CAO approval.

### **Data Analysis**

I employed methodological triangulation by bringing together numerous types of information from the different businesses interviewed. Triangulation is a way to employ multiple methods or sources of data in qualitative research to build a complete comprehension of the phenomena (Yin, 2014). Using methodological triangulation raises the credibility of the study (Metcalf & Benn, 2013). Researchers explore multiple cases to ascertain if the multiple cases within the study reflect related outcomes of a specific phenomenon (Sangster-Gormley, 2013; Yin, 2014). The data collection method for this doctoral study incorporated semistructured interviews, as well as reviewing documents to answer the research question. I employed and used the responses given in the interviews

and analyzed information in company documents to establish methodological triangulation. Following the collection of the data, I translated and examined the data using the different programs to help with organizing the data. The analysis of data encompassed employing a procedural method to scrutinize and study the data (Yin, 2014). Using Microsoft Excel helped provide a grouping for the organization of participants, questions, responses, common themes, as well as interview notes to establish coding. I used identification measures that included labeling and coding participants for interviews. Data organization is imperative in qualitative research. Data organization has a vital importance to the understanding and comprehension of qualitative research (Houghton et al., 2015).

The next step in the data analysis function required organizing the data through developing categories and coding the ideas or concepts. Yin (2014) posited that pattern matching of data is one of the most widely used methods or approaches. Patton (2014) stated that researchers of qualitative studies are adaptable when implementing the deductive approach toward determining themes and patterns for use during the complete analytical process. Data analysis in qualitative research comprises a process of systematic coding (Bahn & Weatherhill, 2013). The codes assist with appointing context to the descriptive information retrieved from the study (Cho & Lee, 2014). I studied, interpreted, and read reflective notes, interview recordings, and field notes to recognize and identify essential categories, themes, patterns, or issues throughout the study. I analyzed the themes and patterns emerging from the conducted interviews with the themes and patterns acquired from the review of the professional and academic literature.

I performed a cross case analysis to assure validity and to assist in decreasing bias by analyzing the differences and likenesses in multiple cases. I color coded, classified, and categorized pertinent and similar information emerging during the data collection process. I then created an Excel database to facilitate the data analysis process and for identifying patterns and themes. I employed a computer assisted data analysis software (CAQDAS). Using CAQDAS allows clarity and expands the data analysis likelihood in various methods (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013). I used NVivo CAQDAS software to assist in identifying themes through recognizing repetitive phrasing and concepts. The data analysis procedure included reviewed literature for new and recently published material to identify possible themes for determining what relationships or difference exist with themes from the past or then current literature.

### **Reliability and Validity**

For establishing and demonstrating the reliability and validity of a qualitative research, researchers seek to assure and demonstrate accuracy through using various types and sources of data, as documentation to lessen prejudice and researcher bias (Foley & O'Connor, 2013). Achieving and demonstrating quality in qualitative research presents challenges, which depend on the intrinsic precision of the collected data and providing a rich explanation of the research process (Dikko, 2016; Smith & Chudleigh, 2015). For qualitative designs, researchers address the analogue of the combination of reliability and validity which is “trustworthiness”. Qualitative researchers must demonstrate trustworthiness with the reader (Kruth, 2015). Trustworthiness, or rigor,

relates to the amount of certainty in the data and analysis, as well as the methods and processes used to establish or demonstrate the quality of studies' quality (Cope, 2014).

### **Reliability**

**Dependability.** Dependability, the qualitative analogue of reliability, ensues when the data collected from the participants produces similar results (Yin, 2015). Achieving dependability in a qualitative research study results from implementing multiple common processes such as member checking, transcript reviews, and methodological triangulation (Colorafi & Evans, 2016; Patton, 2014). Implementing methodological triangulation aids in assuring dependability in qualitative research (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2014; O'Brien et al., 2014; Yin, 2015). Methodological triangulation is a process qualitative researcher's use to achieve and demonstrate dependability in the study by employing two or more different data types of data. I used the qualitative data software NVivo to increase the dependability of the study to enable the classification of information by shaping and connecting analysis. I also used member checking to affirm I represented the participants' interviews accurately and give the participants the opportunity to uncover errors or inconsistency in the collected data.

### **Validity**

A core component for assessing the value of both quantitative and qualitative research is validity. Achieving validity in a qualitative study involves researchers applying four tests, for demonstrating credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability which, together comprise trustworthiness (Cope, 2014; Houghton et al., 2015).



**Credibility.** Credibility is the capability to produce the same observations of the phenomenon if the research employs the exact procedure or process (Cope, 2014).

Achieving credibility and trustworthiness with the reader encompasses demonstrating the use of member checking, which entails verifying data accuracy (Grossoehme, 2014; Kornbluh, 2015). To demonstrate the credibility of the study, I assured I consistently adhered to the previously defined processes for collecting, reviewing, summarizing, and reaching conclusions from the data. I spoke directly to the participants to review the results and themes through performing member checking (Kruth, 2015).

**Transferability.** Determining transferability of findings from research entails thoroughly communicating the processes and the results of the research to enable others to determine relevance to other situations, settings, or other contexts external to the research (Baillie, 2015). Houghton et al. (2015) proclaimed that implementing transferability demands deep depiction from qualitative researchers. Transferability, as described by Baillie (2015), facilitates other researchers' capacity to enable other researchers to understand the relevance of the study's analyses and findings to other settings.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability is the final criterion for demonstrating a qualitative study's trustworthiness (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). A qualitative researcher addresses the research question with the context and viewpoint of researcher's understanding, knowledge, and experience. The construct of confirmability means that other researchers can corroborate the study's findings, which is necessary for all research (Houghton et al., 2013). The corroboration represents other researchers' ability to

reproduce the study producing the same or similar results given the same research design, population, and research question.

**Data saturation.** To make certain data saturation occurred, I interviewed participants repeatedly until no new information was revealed, and used member checking to assure accuracy to reach data saturation to demonstrate credibility of the study's results.

### **Transition and Summary**

The information contained in Section 2 encompassed the restatement of the purpose of the study, the research method and design, the role of the researcher, and the qualifying criteria for participants. The purpose of the study was to uncover an approach for exploring small business trucking companies' strategies to achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years. As the essential and primary instrument for the research study, I explained the process for the recruitment of participants using purposeful sampling. The study's design information contains a description of how I plan to obtain data through semistructured interviews, as well as a review of company records to validate the interviews' findings. Interviews and member checking continued until the saturation of data was achieved by the researcher.

Section 3 includes an introduction, encompassing the purpose of the research study, along with the overarching research question. Section 3 includes the overview and findings of the study, demonstrating the study's relevance to business and utilization and application to professional practice. Section 3 also contains recommendations for further actions of future studies and implications for social change, as well as my conclusions.

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

In Section 3, I provide a thorough and comprehensive description of the outcomes and results of my study. I summarize essential themes and findings, identify the implications for social change, describe how applicable my research is to professional practice, and explain how the findings offer suggestions for further research and action.

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify and explore strategies some owners of small business trucking companies use to achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years. According to the U.S. Small Business Administration (2014), small businesses create more than 99% of the jobs in the United States. The jobs created by the small businesses provide major drivers of economic growth (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2014). I administered semistructured interviews consisting of four small business trucking company owners in Northern Virginia, who achieved profitability and longevity beyond 5 years. To conduct methodological triangulation, I reviewed transcribed interview data, as well as company documents that included profit and loss statements, and cash flow statements for each participating company in the study. Individual and business names were not used to provide privacy and confidentiality of the participants. After attaining data saturation, I employed Yin's (2014) procedural method of organizing the data, interpreting the data, and scrutinizing the data along with using the data analysis software, NVivo, to identify patterns and themes to answer the research question. The themes that surfaced from the research using

the data analysis software (NVivo), which I verified through methodological triangulation, were relationship building, passion and commitment, and access to capital.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The findings from the research aligned with those expected from the systems theory conceptual framework which encompasses holistic interrelationships instead of individual components and patterns (von Bertalanffy, 1972). The three emergent themes are reliant upon each other to assist in creating a profitable business for small business trucking company owners. Adams et al. (2014) posited systems theory involves the linking of parts and the connection among the elements, as a whole. I employed participant interviews, profit and loss statements, and cash flow statements to conduct the methodological triangulation for this study. I gathered and retrieved answers to the subsequent research question: What strategies do some owners of small business trucking companies use to achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years?

After reviewing the two data sources, I retrieved the greatest quantity of relevant data from the participants' interviews. I attained data saturation after the review of company documents and the interview data became repetitious and concluded that no additional information was forthcoming. I recorded and input the data from the interviews and company documents to NVivo, the qualitative data analysis software. According to Yin (2014), qualitative data analysis entails collecting explanations for a specific circumstance to include interviews, notes, and video recordings. The steps in this data analysis consisted of organizing the data, interpreting the data, and recognizing the emergent themes or patterns to develop findings, recommendations and conclusions.

Three main themes emerged: (a) relationship building, (b) passion and commitment, and (c) access to capital.

The first theme that emerged from the research was relationship building with customers and potential customers. The second theme that emerged was the importance of the passion and commitment possessed by the small business trucking owner. The third emergent theme consisted of access to capital provided to each client. The three emergent themes aligned the conceptual framework of systems theory. I concluded, that for the current study, the small business trucking owners implemented each theme simultaneously to influence and achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years of operation.

### **Emergent Theme 1: Relationship Building**

The first theme from the collection of data was the capability of the small business trucking owner to build relationships with each customer. Participant 1 stated, in response to Interview Question 1, “Relationships are important to creating longevity in this business.” Interview Question 2 revealed relationship building as a key component in increasing profitability and longevity of a small business trucking company. For example, Participant 3 stated “It is important to build relationships.” Creating a good relationship with customers is the life of a business, but one must build customer relationships internally as an essential function of managing. Table 1 displays Participant 4 response to Interview Question 3 was, “to build relationships among employees to help meet goals and objectives.” Table 1 displays that Participant 3 referred to the importance of relationship building in two of the five responses, which is 34% of the answers given by

Participant 3. Participants 1 and 2 voiced how important relationship building was in creating longevity and profitability of their small business trucking company in two of the five interview questions. The responses by Participants 1 and 2 in Table 1 accounted for 50 % of the answers given by participants.

Table 1

*Number of Times Relationship Building Stated in Participants' Interview Questions' Responses*

Question where participants stated relationship building	Number of times stated
Participant 1, Interview questions 1 & 2	2
Participant 2, Interview questions 2	1
Participant 3, Interview questions 2, 3, & 5	2
Participant 4, Interview questions 1	1

Relationship building was mentioned by all four participants, particularly by providing internal relationships to help the trucking company achieve its mission. Small business owners seek to establish trust with internal customers (employees), as a key element to attain a business that is sustainable (Shukla, & Shukla, 2014). Participant 3 stated, “You must create relationships internally to help with profitability,” in response to Interview Question 5. Further into the interview, Participant 3 specified, “I have relationships with my employees’ families.” Creating a relationship with employees helps with exchanging ideas, questions, and information to improve businesses’ profitability and longevity (Gupta, & Muita, 2013).

Relationship building aligns well with the conceptual framework for this study, as relationship building for a small business trucking owner requires reliance on internal and external customers to achieve longevity and profitability in the business. In a small business trucking company, essential relationship building is necessary to conduct business on a day-to-day basis, effectively. Relationship building was one component that participants noted that assisted with the overall success of the small business trucking companies.

**Emergent Theme and past literature.** The emergent theme of relationship building aligns with preceding researchers' findings. Past research findings were both constant and consistent with a focus on relationship building, which could influence a definite and affirmative effect on the longevity of the business (Steyn, & Niemann, 2013). The business size could help in relationship building externally and internally from the owner of the business, the employee, the vendor, and the consumer (Anderson & Ullah, 2014). Relationship building also aligns with systems theory in this study. The alignment with systems theory focuses on the delivery of outstanding client services and product services, creating consistent repeat business, which could assist in the longevity and profitability of the business. Mangal (2013) stated that systems theory benefits emerge when individual and specific parts of an organization conjoin and influence the organization, as a whole.

Participants of the study reiterated how imperative relationship building is for forming and instituting into everyday business. Relationship building can create strong contacts, which can create positive results in customer service and achievement.

Participant 4 posited relationship building as a key ingredient in the response to Interview Question 4, which was, “I had to challenge myself in creating long-term relationships I can fall back on to help with obtaining contracts.” Anderson and Ullah’s (2014) research aligned with the experience of Participant 4, as a small business trucking owner must understand when to implement internal and external business practices to create longevity for the business. An external business practice noted by Participant 3 suggested creating relationships through collaboration and partnership by the use of payroll services.

### **Emergent Theme 2: Passion and Commitment**

The second theme to emerge in strategies to increase longevity and profitability beyond 5 years was the passion and commitment the four small business trucking owners possessed for their businesses. The small business trucking owners revealed passion and commitment for excellence in (a) management and leadership skills, (b) marketing, and (c) customer service. Each participant in the study mentioned how much passion and commitment each had for their small business trucking company.

**Management and leadership skills.** Management and leadership skills were introduced by two participants, which the two believed were a direct cause of increasing longevity and profitability beyond 5 years in their businesses. Participant 4’s response to Question 6 in Table 2, “As an owner of a trucking company, it is important to lead and inspire employees through encouragement, which helps with focus and productivity.” The information retrieved from the owners or leaders of the trucking companies demonstrated how the owners enabled others to take responsibility through empowerment and enablement. Westcott (2014) suggested leaders who share information and power



encourage and strengthen others. Management skills could increase and strengthen through effective leadership practices, which could increase the longevity of the business. Anderson and Ullah (2014) expressed the importance of a manager to possess experienced and flexible leadership skills to achieve business success.

**Marketing.** Participant 2 and Participant 4 voiced marketing as a strategy used to achieve longevity and profitability of their business beyond 5 years. Table 2 shows Participant 2 response to Interview Question 5, which was, “I purchased an expensive website to help with people requesting jobs and as a way to update customers about my business.” Participant 4 used social media sites to market the trucking business, as well as run local ads on the radio from time-to-time. Participant 4 also offered a discount on services if the customer mentioned that they heard about the business on the radio or from a social media site. The use of social media sites for marketing and sales of small businesses increases exposure and is known as a common key success factor (Eisenberg, Johnson, & Pieteron, 2015).

**Customer service.** Providing excellent customer service is imperative to the survival and longevity of a small business trucking company. All four participants expressed giving excellent customer service as a critical piece to achieving longevity and profitability beyond 5 years. Systems theory and providing good customer service align, as all four participants commented on how customer service assisted in the retention of customers and for engaging of new customers. Systems theory consists of various elements of an enterprise associated collectively, which influence the organization as a whole (Mangal, 2013). Company size and make-up of an organization could present an

advantage to how customer service is delivered in a small trucking business company because of fewer levels of management. Anderson and Ullah (2014) stated business owners can leverage company size to facilitate the delivery of great customer service, as business owners can collaborate periodically with customers.

Table 2 displays the four participants' responses to Interview Questions 4 and 6, which identified delivering good customer service, as a key challenge to implementing strategies for increasing longevity and profitability, but recognized exemplary customer service aided in their capability to sustain their businesses. Participant 4 stated, "Delivering customer service is a top priority in this company." Participant 1 echoed and affirmed the same strategy for customer service with a statement, "making the customer number one is the most important part of the process. Providing good customer service in the business process aligns with the findings expected from systems theory, as customer service contributes to the long-term achievement of the small trucking business company. Kozan and Akdeniz (2014) stated customer service networking, as a small business owner, applies internally to employees as well as externally to customers to attain the overall success of the business.

Table 2

*Strategies to Increase Longevity and Profitability Beyond 5 Years*

Strategy	Number of participants mentioning strategy
Passion and commitment	4
Management and leadership	2
Marketing	2
Customer service	4

**Emergent Theme 2 and past literature.** The emergent theme consisting of passion and commitment aligns with preceding researchers' findings in past literature. Preceding research findings were consistent with the theme of passion and commitment, through which a small business owner can demonstrate optimism and passion about their business to catalyze profit (Hunter, 2011). The small business owner who exudes more commitment to their business is more likely to achieve success of their business goals (Decker, Haltiwanger, Jarmin, & Miranda, 2014). Mangal (2013) posited systems theory consists of many pieces organized in distinct positions with each other to perform as a whole. Previous research showed small business owners should continue with projections and purpose which includes passion and dedication to obtain business success (Tasnim, Yahya, & Zainuddin, 2014). Passion and commitment add to the longevity and profitability of a business which aligns with the principal constructs of systems theory, as the parts of the organization contribute to the whole (Rahatullah & Raeside, 2015).

### **Emergent Theme 3: Access to Capital**

Access to capital to start and sustain the business successfully was the third emerging theme. Mastrangelo, Eddy, and Lorenzet (2014) stated, as a small business owner, limited resources are more prevalent as compared to larger business and can affect performance adversely. Each participant mentioned issues with accessing capital prior to starting their business. Two participants borrowed money from family, whereas one of the participants used a credit card because of the inability to secure a loan. One participant was able to secure a loan from a bank to buy a truck along with his brother, as a cosigner. Bates and Robb (2013) posited that small business owners must prepare prior to starting a business to foresee money needed for the business, which will also help to determine future decisions. Capital access is imperative to the success of the small business owner's business. Obtaining capital for a small business owner is a major ingredient to set and achieve objectives along with purpose (Bates & Robb, 2013). Access to capital allows a business owner to accomplish goals. When a business owner has a limited credit card, savings, or limited access to capital, capitalization becomes limited, which hinders meeting and achieving business goals (Mastrangelo, Eddy, & Lorenzet, 2014). Access to capital is not just indispensable for small business start-up, access to capital is necessary for business growth, development, and perpetuation.

Participant 1 and Participant 2 acknowledged access to capital, as a strategy used to achieve longevity and profitability of their business beyond 5 years. Participant 1's response to Interview Question 3, was, "My challenge to implementing longevity strategies was needing capital to set-up my business with adequate tools and equipment

to perform the job.” Participant 1 used money borrowed from family members to create his small business trucking company. Participant 2 also borrowed money from members of the family to achieve his dream of owning a small business trucking company.

Participant 2 needed more money than what was received, but had to make do with what was given, as a loan from the family. Capital access to small business owners is critical to start-up any small business, as well as funding subsequent business phases for small businesses (Jafarnejad, Abbaszadeh, Ebrahimi, & Abtahi, 2013).

Participant 3 used a credit card, as the major source of funding to start his small business trucking company. Participant 3 could not secure a loan from a financial institution because of derogatory marks on his credit caused by a loss of employment. Banks and other financial institutions have gravitated toward identifying credit risk and collateral opposed to business management and technical knowhow when starting a business (Chanyatipsakul, & Wongsurawat, 2014). The financial business loan paradigm shift does restrict small business owners’ access to capital, which can change plans and directions of a firm. Some banking institutions may picture start-up businesses as very risky for their portfolio (Chinomona, 2013). Participant 3 changed the strategy for his company, which included changing plans for his family. Participant 3 stated, in response to Interview Question 4, “I asked my wife to find a job to help with getting money to keep the business afloat.” Participant 3’s strategy changed when money was needed to acquire the necessary equipment to sustain the business.

Participant 4 had a significant amount of money saved, but needed additional financial resources for starting the business. Participant 4 realized quickly that borrowing

money from a bank and holding on to his savings would help with cash reserves, as well as pushing the company forward. Credit cards were not an option because the interest rates offered were much higher than what the banks offered because of his credit score. A bank loan for Participant 4 was an option, but due to the debt-to-income ratio, a cosigner was needed to secure the loan. Participant 4 stated, in response to Interview Question 2, “The strategy that worked best for his company was securing a loan to hold on to his cash, which provided a cushion,” A bank loan was an option for Participant 4 and he wanted to make himself very appealing to the banks due to possessing adequate collateral. Although bank loans have become harder to obtain, as a small business trucking owner, Participant 4 stated, in response to Question 5, “I continue to ascertain my credit worthiness by maintaining an appropriate credit score and debt-to-income ratio.” Banks usually avoid granting loans to startups, especially when the startup company possesses inadequate collateral (Kasseeah, 2012).

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The findings of this study indicate the urgency for small business trucking owners to develop startup, growth, and sustainability strategies. Results from this study may assist small business trucking owners to adopt, adapt, or create business success strategies. Each of the four participants in this study have owned their trucking companies for a minimum of 5 years and have contributed to the local economies. Future and current small business owners can benefit from the research findings by understanding the importance of developing and implementing strategies for relationship building, passion and commitment, and access to capital.

Small business trucking owners' information may offer certain and clear implications for increased longevity and profitability of small business trucking companies in the Northern Virginia area, as well as other regions of the United States. The importance of small business trucking owners' experiences is through providing various viewpoints and added to the existing body of knowledge for starting, growing, and sustaining small businesses. New and existing business owners can assist in the advancement of business performance by implementing these research findings. The information from this study could increase small businesses' productivity and longevity, leading to the sustainability of small business trucking companies.

Relationship building requires organization of the owner to keep an open invitation for coworkers and communities to give and receive ideas to achieve mutually beneficial goals. Relationship building reaches beyond just employees and customers; relationship building encompasses the whole supply chain to include suppliers, wholesalers, and vendors (Heinze, 2013). Relationship building allows the owner to comprehend, understand, and implement better practices of business. An essential facet of relationship building is to open idea exchanges to improve business practices (Heinze, 2013).

Achieving and demonstrating passion and commitment requires setting and meeting goals based on values and principles. Passion assists with creating intense focus to enable creativity, which produces innovation (Nnamseh, & Akpan, 2015). Tasnim et al. (2014) indicated passion and commitment allow one to do more than normal, which includes working longer and going above and beyond stated goals to create profitability

and business longevity. Because passion and commitment is one key aspect for building longevity and profitability in a small business trucking company, a business owner must employ independence and joy to increase the probability of the business surviving beyond 5 years (Albuquerque, Filho, Nagano, Junior, & Philippsen, 2016).

Access to capital is imperative to assist a business with goal achievement and sustainability. Zafar and Khan (2014) posited one way to push toward achieving success, as a small business owner, is to identify multiple ways to create access to capital by becoming financially educated. Expounding knowledge on financial preparedness to gain access to capital should help business owners plan successfully for both business startup and growth.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The results of the study contributed to the existing and growing body of knowledge with regard to small business trucking companies and their survival. Small businesses in the United States create over 99% of job (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2014). As stated by Gale and Brown (2013), small businesses are major drivers for jobs, innovation, and expansion. The U.S. Small Business Administration (2014) posited that the survival rate of new small businesses is 50% beyond 5 years. For small business trucking companies, the survival rate is 45% beyond 5 years. The principal themes of this study (a) relationship building, (b) passion and commitment, and (c) access to Capital, suggest several efficient strategies used by small business trucking companies to achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years.



Typically, small business trucking companies open their businesses yearly, but fail within the first 2 years of business. The failure rate for small business trucking companies is 66% within 2 years of starting the operation (SBA, 2014). Haltiwanger, Jarmin, and Miranda (2013) stated about 47% of start-up created jobs are lost within the first 5 years. Small business trucking companies provide essential materials and supplies to other companies while adding to the strength of the United States' economy (Chinomona, 2013). The failure of small business trucking companies results in the loss of employment and money for the owner, employees, and families. Small business trucking owners who experienced success possess strategies and information, which can offer sustainability practices to other trucking owners to grow and prosper. Contributing and adding purposeful strategies to small business trucking companies can ensure their enduring capacity to survive and create a catalyst for growing local economies. The findings from this research can influence social change if the small trucking business owners carry out strategies for providing relationship building, passion and commitment, and access to capital. Small trucking business owners employing a profitable and sustainable business can add to the success of their employees, families, communities, and the local economies through increasing tax revenues. Owning and managing a sustainable business can lower the rate of unemployment by affording jobs for people in neighborhoods the business serves.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Small trucking business owners, entrepreneurs, as well as future small trucking business owners should study the results to receive benefit from the findings of this

research. The research findings showed the significance of providing relationship building, passion and commitment, and access to capital. I analyzed, scrutinized, and identified these three themes the participants mentioned as achieving longevity and profitability of small trucking business companies in Northern Virginia beyond 5 years. The identified themes could equip new and existing small trucking business companies to attain 5 years of existence with information to achieve longevity and profitability. The United States' Small Business Administration, the Small Business Administration district offices, the SCORE association, Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), and business consultants should review the results to share with existing and future small trucking business owners.

The findings from this study can offer academicians, professors, and instructors of business-critical information to share with inspiring and current business students. Sharing the results of this research in an educational atmosphere with students, can offer strategies for students to prepare themselves with knowledge and information needed to start a small trucking business company or apply to other small business startups. I propose and expect to disseminate this study's results through business organizations and academic journals. I intend on making presentations at seminars and conferences to professional in business, as a method to share the study's information.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Future researchers should target a larger population sample and broader geographic base. In this qualitative multiple case study, the population sample size of the participants was the primary limitation, as well as a second limitation, the disinclination

of participants to share information. Four participants comprised this study's population; therefore, research in the future should encompass more organizations to verify and potentially augment the results from this study.

As a second recommendation, researchers should expand the study to other or similar industries, which could provide a broader area of research. Researchers should conduct a longer study incorporating startup, growth, and sustainability cycles of business based on the three strategies identified. Small business owners in other industries could identify using the same or similar strategies identified by the small trucking business owners in this study. A third recommendation is to commence a study on each of the themes of relationship building, passion and commitment, and access to capital. Conducting such a study would enable other small business owners to identify and explore key themes and study the best means for implementing each of the strategies. A fourth recommendation is that since this study was a qualitative multiple case study, future researchers could employ the quantitative method and correlational designs for examining key variables' relationships for predicting small trucking business longevity and profitability.

### **Reflections**

My drive to achieve educationally is something that is limitless, as I desire to learn continually. My experience in the DBA Doctoral Study process was a journey for me. The journey allowed me to experience the challenges academically, spiritually (with the death of my father, brother, and mother), mentally, and physically. The journey revealed new directions and heights I did not know I could climb. I have a better

understanding and appreciation for this Doctoral process and am proud of myself for facing and overcoming barriers.

As a small business owner, I have met and addressed challenging situations in day-to-day operations. The research performed in this study gave me the opportunity to understand how small trucking business owners managed daily operations to meet goals for sustainable results. I had confidence in the responses of the participants in the study, as the participants conveyed an abundance of know-how and expertise. The three themes identified aided the participants toward achieving longevity and profitability beyond 5 years, which is valuable to other trucking owners and start-ups. The experience received from the know-how of the small trucking business owners provided priceless information for strategies to advance the knowledge to achieve longevity and profitability. Through concentrating on the central purpose of achieving sustainability through the three themes, I came to believe other small business trucking owners can achieve better socioeconomic status to their families, employees, and communities.

### **Conclusion**

Comprehending and understanding strategies for sustaining small trucking businesses can assist in the process of creating new trucking ventures and helping established trucking companies grow, plan, and develop. I completed this study to comprehend strategies used to achieve profitability and longevity. The three principal themes resulted in identifying the successful implementation of strategies to remain sustainable in the small business trucking arena: (a) relationship building, (b) passion and commitment, and (c) access to capital provided the participants with a pathway for

longevity and profitability beyond 5 years. Small trucking business owners should analyze and implement the strategies to achieve the desired results. Owners of small business trucking companies could benefit by implementing a plan of action for reviewing, adapting, and implementing these strategies with the involvement of key stakeholders for understanding opportunities for starting, growing and sustaining their businesses. Employing the strategies in every part of the business cycle can allow and enable the trucking owners to achieve results to survive and prosper.

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol

**Research Question:** What strategies do some owners of small business trucking companies use to achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years?

**Interview Purpose:** In this qualitative multiple-case study, the interview will contain 6 open-ended questions and additional follow-up questions to determine strategies small business trucking companies use to achieve profitability and longevity beyond 5 years.

### **Participant Selection Process:**

- Participants contacted either by telephone or e-mail.
- Participants receives a copy of the interview questions, interview protocol along with a consent form.

### **Interview Setting:**

- Interviews will take place in a private setting desired by the participant.
- Researcher reminds each participant of the study's purpose and remind them that participating in the interview is voluntary and the interview is confidential.
- Participants receives reminders there is no compensation and may withdraw at any time.

### **Recording the interview:**

- The researcher reminds each participants of the recording and receives confirmation
- The researcher alerts each participant that a journal is secondary way of capturing notes from the interview and to lessen bias.

**After the Interview:**

- A thank-you message is sent to each participant one day after the interview by e-mail.
- The researcher will transcribe the recorded interview of each participant and send a copy of their interview for feedback.
- Member checking will occur by contacting each participant in person or by telephone to review the recorded information for accuracy.
- A determination occurs to identify the need for follow-up questions or the need for a second interview, after the translation of data occurs
- All files are saved on an external drive and locked away in safe places for 5 years: and destroyed after the 5-year period expires. Each participant receives a copy of the published study.