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Survival Strategies for Owners of Micro and Small Enterprises in Kenya

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Samuel Too

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2019

Abstract

Survival Strategies for Owners of Micro and Small Enterprises in Kenya

by

Samuel Too

MBA, Eastern and Southern African Management Institute, 2008

BCom, University of Nairobi, 1996

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2019

Abstract

Micro and small enterprise (MSE) owners in Kenya are faced with a myriad of constraints that affect their survival for longer than the first 5 years. Owners of MSEs who are unable to identify and implement strategies may not succeed in sustaining their businesses. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies owners of MSEs in Nairobi, Kenya, used to sustain their businesses for longer than 5 years. The conceptual framework for the study was the theory of constraints. Data were collected from 4 purposefully selected MSE owners in Nairobi, Kenya, through face-to-face, semistructured interviews, and review of field notes and company documents. Using thematic data analysis, the major themes that emerged were customer service, access to capital, and nearness to market. The implications of this study for positive social change include strategies for MSE owners to generate stable income for employees, new employment opportunities for job seekers, improved standards of healthcare and education for the community, and a positive lifestyle for the residents of Kenya.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my dearest family for their support and prayers. To my wife Emily for her true love, commitment, and continuous encouragement even when I doubted my strength. My daughter Tracy Too, who continuously checked on my progress while pursuing her studies. My son Ted Too who amazed me with his use of technology and kept reminding me to keep it simple. My son Titus Too for always reminding me to focus on the ultimate prize, the graduation day so that he can travel again to America. I also thank my entire extended family members for their encouragement and motivation. I give glory, thanks, and honor to my Almighty God for his provision, care, and protection during my entire journey. I went through the mountains and valleys, and in all circumstances, my God granted me victory. May Your name be always praised in Jesus name, Amen.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Micro and small enterprises (MSEs) play a critical role in the Kenyan economy by influencing entrepreneurship, which has the potential to catalyze innovation, create employment, and expand business outlets. The MSEs sector comprises of micro and small-sized enterprises undertaking various commercial activities that spur business development in the country. MSE owners tend to start a business with limited experience and lack strategies to overcome constraints that hinder business survival within the first years of operations (Shibia & Barako, 2017). Such constraints include (a) a limited amount of start-up capital, (b) poor accessibility to the market, and (c) a lack of business experience (Odongo & Wang, 2016). Some MSE owners face other constraints, such as the lack of technology, capital, business competencies, and experience (Mairura, Ngugi, & Kanali, 2016). The findings from this doctoral study could provide MSE owners with useful insights and information on the strategies necessary to overcome constraints that inhibit business survival in the first 5 years of operations.

Background of the Problem

One-third of MSEs collapse within the first 3 years of operation, with 80% of those that survive fail to reach the fifth year (Wairimu & Mwilaria, 2017). The failure rate could be attributed to the implementation of inadequate strategies (Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017). MSE owners who develop strategies to overcome constraints increase the chances of their business surviving (Odongo & Wang, 2016). A multiple case study was used to explore those strategies that owners used to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. I conducted a multiple case study using the lens of the theory of constraints (TOC)

to understand the business survival strategies that MSE owners use to sustain business beyond 5 years. Exploring the constraints that MSEs face and identifying practical survival strategies may help MSE owners overcome challenges and sustain their business operations. The study findings are expected to contribute to the literature on survival strategies for MSE owners.

Problem Statement

Failure to manage constraints hampers the survival of MSEs (Odongo & Wang, 2016). One-third of MSEs collapse within the first 3 years of operation with 80% of the surviving MSEs failing to reach the 5-year mark (Wairimu & Mwilaria, 2017). The Kenya National Survey Report of 2016 placed the number of new MSEs owners that failed to sustain their business beyond 5 years at 2.2 million (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2016). The general business problem was that MSEs owners are unable to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The specific business problem was that some MSEs owners lack strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies some MSEs owners use to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The target population comprised four MSEs owners in Nairobi, Kenya, who successfully used strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The results of this study could contribute to positive social change by enabling MSE owners to sustain businesses that contribute to socioeconomic development, promote economic stability, and enhance the well-being of Kenyan citizens.

Nature of the Study

The qualitative method, which I used for this study, allows the exploration of a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when the boundaries among phenomena and context are not evident (Yin, 2018). The quantitative method involves testing hypotheses and analyzing independent and dependent variables' relationships or differences using statistical methods (Leung, 2015; Yazan, 2015). The quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because hypothesis testing and analysis of variables' relationships or differences was not necessary to address the research question. The mixed method combines elements of qualitative and quantitative methods to conduct an in-depth complementary study (Shannon-Baker, 2016; Yin, 2018). The mixed method was not suitable because the quantitative component could not address the research question.

I considered the following 3 research designs that researchers use for a qualitative study: (a) ethnography, (b) phenomenological, and (c) case study. I selected a multiple case study design for the study. Researchers apply the case study design to provide a holistic, in-depth analysis of a real-life, contemporary system bounded by time and place (Yin, 2018). The application of the case study design requires researchers to explore research questions through multiple sources of data (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2018). The phenomenological design is applicable when a scholar explores the lived experiences of participants (Yin, 2018). Because the emphasis of my study was not on exploring the meanings of participants' lived experiences, the phenomenological design was not appropriate. Researchers use ethnography to gain insights into how participants in diverse

cultural groups interact with their natural environment (Islam, 2015). Ethnography was not suitable for this study because my focus was not on understanding the cultural behaviors and patterns of the participants.

Research Question

What strategies do some MSEs owners use to sustain business beyond 5 years?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to sustain your business beyond 5 years?
2. How did you implement the strategies that sustained your business beyond 5 years?
3. What were the key barriers to implementing your strategies that sustained your business for over 5 years?
4. How did you address the key challenges to the implementation of your strategies for business survival?
5. How have you measured the effectiveness of your strategies to sustain business beyond 5 years?
6. What else would you like to share that you did not address about strategies to sustain your business beyond 5 years?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the theory of constraints (TOC). Goldratt (1990) proposed the TOC on the premise that managers can determine the weakest point (constraints) in their firms' processes to improve their performance. Goldratt and Cox (1984) defined constraint as anything that limits a system

(organization) from achieving higher performance against set goals. TOC has 5 components based on finding the constraints in the system: (a) identification of the system constraints, (b) determination of how to exploit the system's constraints, (c) subordinate everything else to exploit the identified constraints, (d) alleviate the system bottlenecks, and (e) if, in a previous step, a constraint has been managed and no longer a limiting factor in the system, go back to step (a). Owners of small businesses could use the TOC 5-step process to understand their constraints and implement appropriate strategies to sustain their businesses. In this study, I explored the tenets of TOC to understand strategies that owners of MSEs use to sustain their business beyond 5 years.

Operational Definitions

Firm constraint: Any limitation that inhibits a firm from achieving its objectives (Goldratt, 1990).

Jua kali: Small yard in an open-air market situated off the roadside in central urban areas (Mungai & Ogot, 2017).

Microenterprise: A firm that has engaged not more than ten employees (Anastasia, 2015).

Micro and small enterprises (MSEs): A firm, trade, service industry, or business activity whose annual sales turnover does not exceed Kenya Shillings 5 million and employs 1-50 employees (MSEA, 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are statements of facts that a researcher embraces to be true without verification (Kihn & Ihantola, 2015). In this study, I made three assumptions. The first assumption was that the participants had knowledge of strategies that are necessary to sustain their business. The second assumption was that MSE owners involve themselves in the strategic process to sustain a firm. The third assumption was that the participants would willingly provide responses to the interview questions and disclose truthful information.

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses that are beyond the researcher's control (Rimando et al., 2015). The first limitation was that the sample might have owners who relied on others for management and did not have firsthand information. The second limitation was that of obtaining cooperation from the research participants. The third assumption was that participants might withhold pertinent information about business strategies.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries that researchers impose on a study to remain within a selected scope (Qiu & Gullett, 2017). The first delimitation was the use of the MSEs as defined by the Micro and Small Enterprises Authority (MSEA) of Kenya. The population under consideration consisted of owners of MSEs that had been in operation for longer than 5 years. The second delimitation was that participants were MSE owners in the Central Business District of Nairobi, Kenya.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

The findings may be of value to businesses by a provision of new insight regarding strategies to sustain businesses for continuous operations. An increase in the survival rate of MSEs may contribute to thriving businesses by increasing competition, opening a new market, and improving the quality of products and services. MSE owners may gain new knowledge from successful owners to implement strategies that might lead to an increase in sales, profits, and market shares (Gherhes, Williams, Vorley, & Vasconcelos, 2016; McKenzie, & Woodruff, 2016). The findings of this study might contribute to effective business practice through the documentation and benchmarking of proven successful business strategies that could be useful to policymakers and business consultants for planning and decision making.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change include the potential to create a repository of strategies that struggling owners of MSEs could replicate. Replication of survival strategies could result in the creation of new employment, income stability for employees, stable economic support for the community, and a positive lifestyle for the residents of Kenya. The continuous operation of businesses beyond 5 years might contribute to socio-economic development, promote economic stability, and enhance the well-being of Kenyan citizens.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The literature review involved an in-depth inquiry into various sources, such as academic journals, technical and research reports, publications of professional organizations, seminal works, and scholarly books. The focus was on current peer-reviewed research publications on studies of new business survival, MSEs, the theory of constraints, and survival strategies to overcome business constraints.

The sources of information included scholar-practitioner journals and professional trade magazines, government databases, websites, and statistical reports on the study phenomenon. Google Scholar, Emerald Insight, Science Direct, Business Source Complete, and ProQuest were the primary databases for this study. I also searched for materials using Social Science Research Network and the website of the publisher, Elsevier. The keywords were *new business operations*, *new businesses survival*, *business strategies*, *microenterprise*, *small business success*, *small business failure*, *entrepreneurship*, *case study research methodology*, and *qualitative methodology*. The literature review yielded 82 sources with 78 (95.1%) of the references published within the past 5 years, and 76 (92.7%) were from peer-reviewed sources. The breakdown of the frequency and percentage of all sources used in this study is shown in Table 1.

This case study explored strategies that some MSEs owners used to sustain their business beyond 5 years. I conducted a literature review analysis to explore strategies owners of MSEs applied to remain in business for more than 5 years continuously. The literature review comprised of 3 significant areas, namely, TOC as the conceptual framework, a discussion on MSEs, and literature on business failures and the strategies

that owners use to sustain their operations. The study reflected the outcome of my exploration of the case study, follow up analysis of data, and my reflection on the ways MSEs owners sustain business beyond 5 years.

Table 1

Total Sources Used in the Doctoral Study

Publications	< 5 years	> 5 years	Total	% of total	% ≤ 5 years
Seminal	5	2	7	3.7%	2.7%
Government sources	4	1	5	2.6%	2.2%
Dissertations	7	0	7	3.7%	3.8%
Peer-reviewed articles	168	3	171	90.0%	91.3%
Total	184	6	190		

Owners of MSEs might venture into business for different motives. Some owners establish business firms for profit, while others tend to pursue innovation or passion (van der Zwan, Thurik, Verheul, & Hessels, 2016). Most owners of MSEs venture into a business to seize opportunities for self-actualization, financial independence, or opportunity to impact the society (Simoes, Crespo, & Moreira, 2015). The establishment and development of MSEs from startup undergoes various organizational life phases that require attention to support the survival of the firm (Rahimi & Fallah, 2015). In the early years of firm establishment, owners of MSEs face a myriad of business constraints if not checked, could lead to the collapse of the firm (Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017). In some instances, owners tend to occupy a strategic managerial role in the firm to nurture and respond to business challenges (Odongo & Wang, 2016). To avoid MSEs failures,

owners should implement astute business strategies that include the investment in managerial competencies, customer focus, and innovation (Wang, Hermens, Huang, & Chelliah, 2015). Additionally, the adoption of information technology and communication for ease of interaction with stakeholders might enhance the survival of MSEs (Matata & Namusonge, 2015).

I organized the literature review into three major areas based on the key themes from the literature in the same field and the relationship with this study. In the first section, I discussed the conceptual framework, TOC in the following order: (a) introduction of TOC, (b) evolution of TOC, (c) the application of the theory to business problems, and (d) synthesis of TOC and contrasting theories. In the second section, I defined MSEs and expanded on the impact in the Kenyan economy. I provided in the third section (a) an introduction of the motivation of owners of MSEs to start a business, (b) an analysis of owners' business failures from constraints, and (c) strategies owners adopted to sustain business beyond 5 years.

Theory of Constraints (TOC)

The TOC was the conceptual framework of this doctoral study. Goldratt and Cox (1984) promoted the TOC and argued that owners of businesses could determine the weakest point in their firms' processes to improve their performance. Akaeze and Akaeze (2017) presented that the application of TOC facilitates managers' understanding of their organizational structure and process to survive and grow in a competitive environment. Every organization has at least one constraint that is limiting it from maximizing performance and preventing the attainment of its goals (Goldratt & Cox, 1984).

TOC is an appropriate theory for improving business survival. Researchers and professionals use TOC to guide them through the decision-making process of problem structuring, problem identification, solution building, identification of barriers, and implementation of the identified solution (Panizzolo, 2016). Business owners tend to seek practical solutions to identify operational obstacles that hinder the achievement of their goals. One of the central tenets of TOC is that any system has a constraint that hinders the achievement of the system goal (Panizzolo, 2016). Goldratt and Cox (1984) presented TOC as a useful theory to improve business results by addressing the weakest constraints in an organization through analysis, evaluation, and continuous improvement.

Researchers and scholars have studied TOC. Cox, Robinson, and Maxwell (2014) expanded on Goldratt's theory and described five focusing steps for addressing system problems: (a) identify the constraint, (b) exploit the constraint for the best possible output, (c) subordinate other activities to the constraint through linkages, (d) elevate the constraint if sufficient output is not forthcoming, and (e) if anything has changed, go back to the first step to assess new constraints. According to Cox et al., the initial step involves the identification of the system's constraints that may be physical items or policy related such as the raw material, physical assets like machinery, human resources, finances, guidelines, and policies. It is essential at the first stage to identify constraints that impact the survival of the business (Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017). Upon the identification, the second step is to exploit the constraint. Goldratt (1990) defined constraint to represent the weakest link in an organization, and the owners should exploit to the maximum extent possible.

The third step of addressing system problem involves the subordination of the system's constraint (Goldratt & Cox, 1984). The other components that do not constitute the constraints of the system need adjustment to support and increase the effectiveness of the constraint. The fourth step requires the elevation of the system's constraint (Goldratt & Cox, 1984). After exploiting and subordination, a review is necessary to determine if the constraint is still a priority in the system (Goldratt & Cox, 1984). Once the constraint is determined as a priority, the owner provides additional resources to improve it (Goldratt & Cox, 1984). As the performance of the constraint improves, eventually, the system will encounter a new constraint (Goldratt & Cox, 1984). The fifth step, according to Goldratt and Cox, involves a confirmation and the evaluation to determine the adequacy of the response to the constraint. If the response is satisfactory, then the recommendation is to go back to the first step to address other constraints (Goldratt & Cox, 1984).

Business owners should understand the steps for addressing system problems. The five steps facilitate a detail and systematic review of business constraints and the establishment of adequate business strategies while aware of the challenges (Cox et al., 2014). Constraints, when seen as business obstacles, may block the attainment of the desired outcome (Ikeziri, Souza, Gupta, & de Camargo Fiorini, 2018). Owners of enterprises, therefore, may devise strategies that aid them to overcome the constraints. The results from past studies show that TOC is necessary for business managers to align operational goals with strategic business goals to sustain businesses.

Many researchers have demonstrated that business owners should understand the strategies for improving their business survival. The assertion of constraints as the foundation for the identification of internal survival strategies drew much attention from researchers interested in the reviews of the growth and survival of business organizations (Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017). Leaders may use the TOC tenets to improve business performance while reducing inefficiency by addressing the operational constraints of their firms (Goldratt & Cox, 1984). Other researchers extended the works of Goldratt and Cox by addressing how business leaders could use TOC framework to identify constraints that affect business sustenance (Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017; Oglethorpe & Heron, 2013; Simsit, Gunay, & Vayvay, 2014; Wamuyu, 2015).

Business owners encounter some constraints that could impact the chance of survival of their firms. Oglethorpe and Heron (2013) applied TOC lenses to categorize firms' constraints and offered corrective strategies to overcome the challenges. Some of the constraints include (a) competency constraints, (b) financial constraints, (c) supplier/credit constraints, (d) resources constraints, (e) market constraints, (f) government policy constraints, and (g) material constraints. Wamuyu (2015) identified information communication and technology (ICT) as a constraining factor to the owners of MSEs. Akaeze and Akaeze (2017) presented additional constraints to include government support in the provision of policy guidance and investment in infrastructure, innovation, and corruption. The identified constraints cut across different business firms and many scholars have identified them as recurring themes in the most published

literature on the survival of business firms (Oglethorpe & Heron, 2013; Simsit et al., 2014).

Evolution of TOC. Since the initial advancement by Goldratt and Cox (1984), the TOC has attracted much interest from scholars that led to several adoptions and refinement. Simsit et al. (2014) conducted a historical review of TOC and categorized the evolution literature into 5 periods, namely, the optimized product technology era, the goal era, the haystack syndrome era, it is not luck era, and the critical chain era. The next section contains a brief review of each of the 5 categories.

Optimized product technology era. The optimized product technology (OPT) era started with a simple request from a businessman for help that Goldratt (1990) responded to with proprietary software used to identify bottlenecks in a manufacturing process. Researchers opined that OPT was the foundation of TOC, but Panizzolo (2016) offered a different view and argued that though TOC and OPT are substitutable in some literature, the two terms refer to different processes. The early adopters of OPT claimed to have tripled their sales turnovers that resulted in more extensive scholarly attention and application by many business firms within the United States (Simsit et al., 2014). However, some of the firms that adopted OPT failed to record positive results (Panizzolo, 2016). Upon investigation, Goldratt (1990) diagnosed the problem as a misunderstanding of the OPT package, poor adoption, and poor application of schedules (Ikeziri et al., 2018). The customers' complaints of OPT gave rise to another business opportunity for Goldratt that resulted in the published novel titled *The Goal*.

The goal era. Goldratt and Cox (1984) published the business novel titled *The Goal* that addressed earlier shortcomings in the adoption of OPT with the use of educational guides (Simsit et al., 2014). Ikeziri et al. (2018) described *The Goal* as one of the most sold business books which offered several heuristics and techniques that formed a solid foundation for TOC. *The Goal* outlined the 5 focused steps that other scholars refer to as the process of continuous improvement. Cox et al. (2014) expanded on Goldratt's (1990) concept of a continuous improvement plan and described the 5 focusing steps to address system problems. Ikeziri et al. highlighted how scholars added two steps to the continuous improvement plan that defined the organization's goal and secondly determined the global performance measures. The seven steps formed the primary component of TOC that guides the management's thinking and change process (Ikeziri et al., 2018). Business scholars have argued that the implementation of the continuous improvement plan guides the user through the decision-making process of problem structuring, problem identification, solution building, identification of barriers, and implementation of the solution ((Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017; Cox et al., 2014; Goldratt & Cox, 1984; Panizzolo, 2016).

The haystack syndrome era. Goldratt and Cox (1984) pointed out the inconstancy between the firm's aim to make money and the wrong impression created by the application of cost accounting principles to the firm's performance measurement. Scholars assumed the application of the cost accounting principles gave the wrong impression on the monitoring and actual performance of the firm (Ikeziri et al., 2018). The search for clarity led the early adopters of TOC to advocate for the improvement of

the financial performance of firms through the emphasis of a process focused performance measurement system in cost accounting (Goldratt & Cox, 1984). In a similar response, Ikeziri et al. (2018) defined the TOC as an operations theory that highlighted the constraints within a process for improvement of the throughput. Other scholars of TOC vouch for the application of both financial and cost accounting with eyes on operating expenses and cost accounting to measure throughput and inventory that was necessary to achieve operational measures at the subsystem level (Simsit et al., 2014). The generated interests and implementation of TOC by firm owners led to a recorded improvement in production planning, throughput, and control system performance (Panizzolo, 2016).

“It is not luck” era. Goldratt (1990) advocated for a new thinking process through the definition of management policies and a concept called *drum buffer rope* system that focused on root problems and provided alternate solutions to management challenges. The drum represents the pace of the process expressed by the slowest function within the process, while the buffer was the ability to move ahead with production through the avoidance of delays in the process (Bisogno, Calabrese, Ghiron, & Pacifici, 2017). The rope provided the communication of orders and material to control movement by providing the linkage between critical points of control to ensure synchronization (Goldratt, 1990).

The critical chain era. The critical chain project management (CCPM) was introduced in the 1990s as a project management concept based on TOC logic blended with the application of the thinking process (Ikeziri et al., 2018). The thinking process

focused on the constraints that inhibited the achievement of goals by the system (Ikeziri et al., 2018). The application of the 5 steps defined in the thinking process facilitated the identification of goal inhibitors and the prescription of the corrective measures for resolution (Ikeziri et al., 2018). Simsit et al. (2014) described the different processes of the thinking process concept using the cause-effect logic as the current reality tree (CRT), future reality tree (FRT), transition tree (TT) and necessary condition logic, used in the evaporating cloud (EC) and prerequisite tree (PRT).

The CRT is a logical structure designed to demonstrate the reality of the existing system by an analysis of the cause-and-effect relationships between the undesirable effects (UDEs) and their immediate causes rather than addressing the visible symptoms (Kuruvilla, 2017). The identifiable causes should be in the span of control and sphere of influence of the business owners if it consists of at least 70% of the UDEs (Kuruvilla, 2017). Any conflicts, as noted through CRT, are analyzed diagrammatically with the aid of the EC (Cox et al., 2014; Simsit et al., 2014). The owners need to identify a straightforward constraint that needs change to have the most significant impact on their businesses.

The EC, when analyzed or presented in a diagrammatic form, facilitates new insight into the core problems facing the organizations, groups, or business owners by providing a structured framework to deal with a business problem (Kuruvilla, 2017). Researchers have used the cloud structure to establish the underlying assumptions and existing relationships (Simsit et al., 2014). The FRT is the construction of the desired outcome after a review of prevailing conditions and constraints. The mapping of EC and

FRT should clarify what actions and conditions are necessary and sufficient to bring about desirable effects or change (Kuruvilla, 2017). Researchers predicted the extent to which the present situation would produce the desired outcome with the logic structure (Ikeziri et al., 2018). The model could enable entrepreneurs to carry out useful testing of new concepts or strategies before implementation (Kuruvilla, 2017). Entrepreneurs should use the thinking process concept of EC and FRT to prevail in their constraints.

Entrepreneurs can use the transition tree (TT) to develop their business plan; describe the objectives, tasks, and activities; and provide a roadmap for achieving the desired result (Kuruvilla, 2017). The TT is the cause-and-effect logic tree designed to provide a detailed systematic plan for the implementation of the desired solution to overcome a constraint (Goldratt, 1990). The use of thinking process can facilitate the analyses of the cause and effect with a review of the underlying assumptions that enable the entrepreneurs to decide on constraints to manage or prescribe any change process (Simsit et al., 2014). The TT is a useful thinking process that entrepreneurs could use to overcome their constraints.

Goldratt (1990) applied the lens of cause and effect to prescribe the following three fundamental questions that are necessary to address change process: (i) what to change, (ii) what to change to, and (iii) how to cause change. In agreement with the change process, Ikeziri et al. (2018) viewed the construction of the FRT in the same version to a definition of “a what-if exercise,” that stipulates the actions and necessary circumstances for the desired outcome or change. PRT aids in the identification of constraints in the implementation process while TT facilitated the creation of an

implementation plan with a detailed step by step process (Cox et al., 2014). By adapting the concepts of PRT and TT, entrepreneurs could develop a plan to surmount constraints.

Application of the TOC

Goldratt (1990) positioned TOC as the ideal theory to manage constraints for firms to be successful. Scholars recognized that TOC is an ideal theory for a change process that focuses on the identification and definition of the desire for change, determination of what to change, and the process to achieve the desired results (Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017; Cox et al., 2014; Goldratt & Cox, 1984; Panizzolo, 2016). The implementation of TOC is a continuous process, and owners should continuously monitor the business environment and identify all possible operational constraints that require improvement or elimination (Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017). TOC is the most appropriate theory for exploring the strategies that entrepreneurs could use to sustain their businesses.

Many companies have used TOC in diverse areas. Some areas involving TOC application include (a) project management through the critical chain project management, (b) supply chain management by use of buffer management, (c) production through drum-buffer-rope, (d) sales through layers of resistance, (e) strategy or tactics in education sector using the thinking process tools, and (f) finance and measurements using throughput accounting (Singh & Misra, 2018). Several of the global firms that used TOC receives mixed results (Panizzolo, 2016). Researchers noted the successful implementation of TOC in the manufacturing supply chains industries, especially aerospace, apparel, automotive, electronics, furniture, semiconductor, steel, and food (Oglethorpe & Heron, 2013). TOC applies to a wide range of organizational sectors.

Some British firms utilized TOC to improve operational performance and inventory that resulted in high manufacturing performance while other firms recorded the improved quality of services (Panizzolo, 2016). In the United Kingdom, for example, a hospital applied TOC for few months and was able to significantly improve its ranking from the bottom 10 to the top 10 among 500 hospitals ranked by emergency response time (Cox et al., 2014). Also, an oral surgeon's practice used the TOC to improve from break-even to a \$3.5 million profit (Cox et al., 2014). Similarly, some Spanish plants implemented TOC production to improve their due-date performance (Panizzolo, 2016). Parker, Parsons, and Isharyanto (2015) reviewed the use of TOC in a project management perspective and opined that the low success rate of projects was due partly to the mismanagement of resources and the lack of recognition of constraints. TOC is useful in improving organizational performance.

Ikeziri et al. (2018) acknowledged the development and application of TOC to broader business practices. The areas highlighted include (a) production, by the use of simplified drum buffer rope, (b) projects through the application of critical chain project management, (c) distribution and retail through the concept of pull replenishment (d) plan execution control methods by use of buffer management, and (e) criteria for decision support measures. Kaspina (2015) reported that companies that had implemented TOC survived the global economic crisis and recorded significant growth. Examples of such companies in India were in the automotive industry, steel production, and in the manufacturing of pharmaceuticals (Kaspina, 2015). Entrepreneurs should implement TOC to grow and sustain their firms.

The implementation of TOC by Russian companies resulted in sales improvement and continuous improvement of the operations (Kaspina, 2015). Examples of Russian companies that implemented TOC specialized in the production of refrigeration equipment, timber industry, and in wholesale businesses (Kaspina, 2015). Zivaljevic (2015) described the application of TOC outside of manufacturing or production to produce a positive result in road traffic management in New Zealand. Naor and Coman (2017) advocated the use of TOC to improve customer services in offshore call centers. TOC could be implemented in both production and service organizations.

Singh and Misra (2018) highlighted the use of TOC to manage the downstream supply chain but noted some criticism from users. The criticisms were (a) TOC was complex to implement, (b) the implementation requires expert in TOC and this increases the cost to the users, (c) TOC weakness in answering questions that relate to opportunity costs and decisions on the choice of technology, (d) inability to deliver consistent results, (e) in some instances implementation did not lead to a sustainable increase in throughput, (f) lack of leadership support, and (g) lack of cultural change to support a successful implementation. Entrepreneurs should use TOC to develop strategies to overcome constraints and increase the survival of their businesses.

A review of the primary intention of the business owners to venture into business may facilitate the choice of theory and development of strategies (Hyytinen, Pajarinen, & Rouvinen, 2015). By appropriate identification and management of constraints, business leaders gain significant improvement and protect the firm from the pitfall of failure (Mairura et al., 2016). However, when ignored, constraints may lie idle, squandering vast

amounts of capacity and may inhibit business growth (Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017). The recommended solution is for business managers to implement TOC to manage constraints and increase the chances of business survival effectively (Cox et al., 2014). The focus of business managers should be on continuous systems enhancement to identify and manage factors that hinder the survival of business firms.

Akaeze & Akaeze (2017) promoted TOC as an influential holistic management theory that aims to improve organizations' processes, and micro enterprises should embrace it to survive and grow. The implementation of TOC assisted owners of small business in increasing chances of survival through the identification of constraints, prioritization of resources, and elimination of wastage (Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017). Additionally, the application of TOC can help managers to focus on process improvements and management of critical constraints (Cullen & Parker, 2015). Owners of MSEs, therefore, may implement TOC as a management theory to achieve the business objective, and hopefully sustain their firms for a perpetual future.

Contrasting Theories to TOC

The resource-based view theory (RBV), resource advantage theory (RAT), and resource dependence theory (RDT) are the contrasting theories to TOC. Despite the evidence of success and the application of the principles of TOC to business organizations, there continues to be few empirical support for the ability of TOC to improve the business performance of adopters (Singh & Misra, 2018). For instance, scholars noted that some of the firms in the United States that adopted the theory failed to record any success (Ikeziri et al., 2018). The use and value attached to TOC seem to

differ in some countries. Panizzolo (2016) noted that TOC production was valuable in French and Spanish plants but was not the case in German and Italian plants. Business performance in German and Italian cases recorded high manufacturing performance achieved from other business models rather than the application of TOC in production (Panizzolo, 2016). The implementation and success of TOC vary among countries.

Cullen and Parker (2015) recognized the role of RAT that focuses on the development of an organization's resource-base and strategic assets and the focus of RDT on the external resources and management of environmental dependencies. Johnson, Creasy, and Fan (2016) viewed TOC to be inferior and instead advocated for management by constraints theory and alternative theories for studying business constraints. The identification of critical resources by use of TOC, RBV, and RDT can enhance the success of project-based management (Cullen & Parker, 2015). By using TOC, business leaders could identify constraints and take actions to sustain their business.

Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) developed the RDT that researchers have used as a basis to study and explain how the businesses depend on the contingencies of their environment to obtain resources for continuous operations (Bendickson, Gur, & Taylor, 2018). Researchers used RDT in development of new perspectives on critical decision points in business operations management such as make-or-buy decisions, sourcing strategies decisions, supplier strategies decisions, and contracting decisions (Hitt, Xu, & Carnes, 2016). The reliance of external resources is a central tenet of both the strategic

and tactical management of an organization for adopters of RDT (Bendickson et al., 2018). MSEs owners could use RDT concepts to identify strategies to sustain their firm.

In contrast, researchers viewed the RBV as an inside-out process of strategy formulation (Swanson & Droege, 2016). RBV has 5 processes that include: (a) identify and classify the firm's resources, (b) identify the firm's capabilities, (c) appraise the rent-generating potential of resources and capabilities, (d) select a strategy that exploits the firm's resources and capabilities relative to the external environment, and (e) identify the resource gaps need to be filled (Hitt et al., 2016). In this theory, business managers' start by looking at what resources the firm possesses, they assess their potential for value generation and end up by defining a strategy that will allow them to enhance performance in a sustainable way (Swanson & Droege, 2016). Researchers use RBV for conceptual and empirical studies to explore how organizations achieve performance based on the resources available (Swanson & Droege, 2016). Entrepreneurs could use RBV theory to understand how resource availability support the growth and sustenance of their business.

Researchers of the RAT viewed the industry as secondary importance to firm profitability. The RAT concept maintains that entry barriers, industry concentration, market share power, and strategic group membership have limited relevance (Thoeni, Marshall, & Campbell, 2016). The proponents of the theory argued that continuous business innovation was based on: (a) the internal resources of the firm offering it, (b) the firm's capabilities in using those resources, (c) the competitive advantage to the firm of its resources and capabilities, (d) the attractiveness of the market in which it competes, and (e) the innovation's contribution to financial performance of the firm (Holdford,

2018). The tenets of the theory emphasized the need for managers to create and nurture the resources and core competencies of the firm, rather than merely to decide which industries to launch competition.

As applied to this study, business leaders could utilize the components from RDT, RBT, and RAT to gain strategies that will enable them to overcome internal and external business challenges. Internal constraints relate to the characteristics and attitude of small business owners and the firm in general that negatively impact business growth and survival. Some internal constraints include (a) competency constraints, (b) financial constraints, (c) supplier/credit constraints, (d) resources constraints, and (e) ICT constraints. The constant change in the external environment driven by competition, demanding consumers, and an unstable economic climate may contribute to the external challenges.

MSEs and Impact on Kenyan Economy

MSE is a small business setup or a medium established family business with one employee or several employees that play a significant role in any economy (Lussier & Sonfield, 2015). Most MSEs are a one-person business who practices flexibility, customization, unique competence, proactiveness, and risk-taking (Faherty & Stephens, 2016). Among the unique features of MSEs are the sizes of the firm, the number of personnel, and the level of independence in decision-making (Mabhungu & Van Der Poll, 2017). The characteristic of one-person business owner doubling up as a manager tend to facilitate faster decision-making void of any bureaucracies (Faherty & Stephens, 2016). MSEs owners make critical decisions in their firms.

MSEs refers to a micro and small enterprise business with annual gross sales of less than 5 million Kenya shillings and employs between 1 to 49 employees (MSEA, 2018). When separately defined further, the microenterprise employs 1-10 persons, while small enterprise employs 10 to 49 persons (MSEA, 2018). Within the Kenyan economy, MSEs account for 92% of all the micro, small, and medium enterprises in the country (KNBS, 2016). The MSEs offer employment to an estimated 14.9 million people, that accounts for 81% of employment, and contribute over 92% of the annual job creation in Kenya (KNBS, 2016; MSEA, 2018). Additionally, government records indicated that MSEs contributes about 33% to Kenya's GDP (KNBS, 2016). While MSEs make the bulk of the business firms in the Kenyan economy, the government does not have a central register of all MSEs (Wairimu & Mwilaria, 2017). The MSEA is developing policies and guidelines to establish regular registration of the MSEs (MSEA, 2018). Once developed, the database might facilitate the identification of companies and act as a basis for the government support to the sector (MSEA, 2018). The establishment of records of all MSEs would provide useful data for government, academicians, and other interested stakeholders (Wairimu & Mwilaria, 2017). The absence of complete records may inhibit a uniform definition and an accurate understanding of the structure of MSEs in Kenya.

The structure and size of the MSEs contribute to its simplicity, flexibility, and the risk appetite (Lussier & Sonfield, 2015). Some of the attractive features of MSEs include easy startup, less labor intensive than big enterprises, and their close relationship with customers (Lampadarios, 2016). The simplicity and flexibility of the MSEs enable owners of the business to operate in very different markets and embody varying levels of

skills, capital, sophistication, and growth orientation (Lussier & Sonfield, 2015). To have a detailed understanding, a review of the role of MSEs in the economy is appropriate.

Impact of MSEs on the Kenyan economy. Owners of MSEs play a critical role in most countries as an influence of several sectors that catalyze economic development (Shibia & Barako, 2017). MSEs form the bulk of business firms that drive social and economic growth in many countries (Odongo & Wang, 2016). The notable contributions of MSEs include economic development, poverty reduction, job creation, and improvement of household income (KNBS, 2016). MSEs play essential roles in driving social and economic growth in Kenya.

By creating employment opportunities, MSE owners tend to encourage the development of local industries (Lampadarios, 2016). The growth of local industries improves regional economic balance through industrialization and the creation of markets for local products (Mungai & Ogot, 2017). Additionally, MSEs drive industrialization by acting as the leading suppliers of inputs to large firms while at the same time being consumers of outputs (Lampadarios, 2016). Amire, Prosper, and Ese (2016) described the role of entrepreneurship in driving modern economies through transformative ideas and innovations. Entrepreneurs contribute to economic growth, and therefore, the growth and survival of the business are essential for any country (Bakar, Islam, & Lee, 2015). Hence, the contribution made through employment creation, innovation, and wealth creation tends to position MSEs as the backbone that stimulates economic growth (Mungai & Ogot, 2017). The growth and survival of MSEs are essential in stimulating economic growth in Kenya.

The MSEs in Kenya are either formal with established structures or in the informal sector operating along the major roadsides or open-air markets referred to as Jua Kali (Mungai & Ogot, 2017; Shibia & Barako, 2017). One of the main contributors to the growth of MSEs is the low absorption capacity of the labor market that forces most of the employable youths to venture into business as a means of survival (Wairimu & Mwilaria, 2017). The sector comprises of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) undertaking various commercial activities that include (a) woodwork, (b) metalwork, (c) leatherwork and textile, (d) handicraft, (e) service industry, (f) retail trade, (g) motor vehicle repair, and others (KNBS, 2016). The MSEs sector provides employment and creates markets for raw materials and finished products (Shibia & Barako, 2017). MSE owners create employment opportunities for Kenyan citizens.

MSMEs act as the primary source of inputs of goods and services to other sectors of the Kenyan economy (MSEA, 2018). However, some of the MSEs face some constraints, such as the lack of appropriate modern technology, capital, business competencies, and experience (Mairura et al., 2016). To address such shortcomings, governments in developing economies have established policies and provided incentives to MSEs in recognition of their role in economic growth and development (Shibia & Barako, 2017). For example, the government of Kenya recognizes the contribution of the MSEs and established several initiatives (Odongo & Wang, 2016) but has not managed to address all the challenges in the sector. MSE owners face varying challenges in Kenya.

The first notable contribution of the Kenyan Government was the developed Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1986 on economic management for renewed growth that

provided a policy framework and affirmed commitments for promotion and growth of MSEs (Shibia & Barako, 2017). Later, the government adopted Sessional Paper No. 2 of 2005 on the development of MSEs as a strategy for wealth and employment creation (MSEA, 2018). The Kenya Vision 2030, a long-term development plan launched in 2008, further ignited policy efforts to strengthen MSEs through skills development and access to financial capital (KNBS, 2016). Further, the government enacted legislation to promote the growth of MSEs through enabling business environment, access to business development services, and the establishment of an authority to formulate, review and monitor relevant policies (MSEA, 2018). The global recognition of Kenyan government efforts to promote MSEs is in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals regarding the promotion of the growth of MSEs as a strategy for inclusive growth and productive employment (Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis [KIPPRA], 2017). MSE owners should align with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

Despite the significant contribution and prospects, researchers have noted the high mortality rate of MSEs. Odongo and Wang (2016) reported that one-third of MSEs collapse within the first 3 years of operation and 80% of those that survive the inception stages, fail to celebrate the 5th anniversary. A few of the MSEs that survive beyond 5 years embrace a collection of critical success factors to stay in business (Mabhungu & Van Der Poll, 2017). Researchers should explore the positive strategies that MSEs use through the lens of TOC.

The motivation of Owners, Business Failures, and Strategies to Survive

Motivations of owners to start a business. Owner of MSEs, when described as an entrepreneur, is an individual that owns and independently manages a business (Walter & Heinrichs, 2015). The entrepreneur assumes the risk to invest in material, time, and money to acquire a business with an expectation to achieve profits or returns over a period (Gorgievski & Stephan, 2016). The individual entry into the business can be through a formal or informal process. The decision to venture into business depended on the entrepreneur's perception of risks and assumed cost-benefit analysis (Saunoris & Sajny, 2016). An informal sector is a group of production units that comprise unincorporated enterprises owned by entrepreneurs or households (KNBS, 2016). The distinction between household-based enterprises and quasi-corporations is by the legal status and if office accounts are held (MSEA, 2018). Informally self-owned enterprises usually employ family members and casual workers occasionally. A formal enterprise is incorporated and has legal status. An entrepreneur would opt for formal business if the business registration is simple, and the cost outweighs the expected future benefits (Odongo & Wang, 2016). If not, the entrepreneur tends to venture into business without formal registration and avoid government regulation (Wairimu & Mwilaria, 2017). MSE owners should understand risk perception and cost-benefit analysis before deciding to establish a business.

The key factors that promote MSE ownership are the individual's intention, opportunity, and necessity. The establishment of startup firms may depend on the entrepreneur's intention to risk appetite or rate of innovation (Hyytinen et al., 2015).

Entrepreneurship is also explorable using intention-based models where entrepreneurial behavior is predictable by the individuals' intentions (Esfandiar, Sharifi-Tehrani, Pratt, & Altinay, 2019). Simoes et al. (2015) discussed how individual-level characteristics determine entrepreneurial engagement. Similarly, van der Zwan et al. (2016) utilized the motivational factors to analyze entrepreneurship from the perspective of opportunity and necessity. The necessity for entrepreneurship arose from human attributes such as the desire for money, control, and flexibility (Simoes et al., 2015; van der Zwan et al., 2016). Some human attributes of MSE owners include the intention to innovate and desire for financial success and power.

The opportunity and necessity factors tend to influence the establishment of MSEs (Simoes et al., 2015). Opportunities or the push factors that provide positive motivation for a startup could emanate from the need for self-actualization, the desire for financial independence, and opportunities for social development while the fear of unemployment, family pressure, and personal dissatisfaction and desire for change drive the pull motivational factors (van der Zwan et al., 2016). Opportunist and necessity entrepreneurs pose different competencies and would apply different strategies to start a business. Starting a business might be a complicated process, and an entrepreneur requires the necessary drive and commitment (Esfandiar et al., 2019). Other necessary factors influencing entrepreneurship include the ability to conceive an idea, having the skills and experience, and the ability to nurture the idea and develop a business (van der Zwan et al., 2016). MSE owners should have the knowledge, ability, and experience to start and grow their business.

A review of the initial intentions of the entrepreneur can facilitate the understanding of the long-term survival of the MSEs. Scholars have used theory-based and process-oriented perspectives in an attempt to understand the precursors of entrepreneur intentions (Fuller, Liu, Bajaba, Marler, & Pratt, 2018). Esfandiar et al. (2019) underscored the impact of entrepreneur's cognitive state of intention in directing towards a business venture and theorized that the greater the intensity of intention, the higher the probability of entrepreneurial activities' intention to venture into business. In similarity with Esfandiar et al. assertions, Fuller et al. hypothesized that various self-efficacy beliefs motivate entrepreneurial self-efficacy and that individual traits can be a predictor of intentions due to the mediating effects of entrepreneurial perceptions. A detailed exploration of the entrepreneurs' intentions theories is, however, out of the scope of this study.

Owners of MSEs who manage their firms tend to focus on entrepreneurial and analytical orientation (Fuller et al., 2018). Entrepreneurs who adopt behaviors that focus on entrepreneurship, using their competitiveness, profitability, longevity, and innovation enhance the growth and survival of their firms (Coda, de Castro Krakauer, & de Franca Berne, 2017). Scholars argued that children of entrepreneurs are more likely to become self-employed as they learn from their parents. McKenzie and Woodruff (2016) underscored the positive result of the transfer of knowledge and skills from entrepreneurial parents to children on the continued survival of firms. MSE owners could learn entrepreneurial knowledge and skills to grow and sustain their business.

In most occasions, entrepreneurs double up as the day to day manager of their firms. A critical factor that could influence the growth and survival of MSEs is the different management style and competences of the owners who work as the manager of the business (Mckenzie & Woodruff, 2016). The early stage survival of startups could depend on the passion of the entrepreneur and their creativity to devise ways to acquire the resources for their business operations (Stenholm & Renko, 2016). Entrepreneurs passion refers to an individual's commitment and dedication to entrepreneurial activities (Ma, Gu, & Liu, 2017). Stenholm and Renko (2016) postulated that the survival chances of small business firms in the early years depend on the higher levels of bricolage behaviors among entrepreneurs. Scholars defined bricolage as the ability for one to be creative in using available resources to solve the problems with a passion for developing a venture as well as a passion for inventing and survival (Stenholm & Renko, 2016). Passionate and bricolage entrepreneur tends to strive to succeed and would try to find solutions for any constraints met to avoid failure.

The failure of entrepreneurs could have a more significant effect than monetary loss. The high rate of failure could pose a psychological problem to the entrepreneur considering that more than 50% of the money used to start the business come from private channels such as personal family savings (Tubey, Nandwa, Omboto, & Situma, 2015). To avoid failures, entrepreneurs should adopt sound business strategies such as marketing, recording keeping, and fiscal management (Mckenzie & Woodruff, 2016). Equally important is the competency and capacity of the business owner that influences the management style of the firm. In this study, the TOC was appropriate to analyze

relevant information on the strategies' owners of MSEs use to sustain business beyond 5 years.

Constraints facing MSEs. Goldratt and Cox (1984) defined constraints as the obstacles that block a system from achieving any desired output. Mabhungu and Van Der Poll (2017) discussed the constraints as the restrictions on the smooth operations of small businesses. The restrictions or challenges to business can be numerous. Hence, the owners of MSEs need to devise appropriate measures for identification and prioritization of constraints to ensure the continuity of their business operations.

The appropriate identification of constraints may facilitate the development of management strategies. Scholars analyzed the constraints as internal or external to the entrepreneurs. Atsan (2016) argued that the failure rate among small startup firms is mostly associated with internal constraints, while external constraints mostly affect the survival of large firms. The internal constraints include the owners' competency and the ability to apply strategic planning, innovate, and use of technology, finance, credit, resources, and material constraints. The external elements include market constraints, government policy, infrastructure, and corruption.

Internal constraints. Internal constraints relate to the characteristics and attitude of small business owners and the firm in general that negatively impact business growth and survival. Shibia and Barako (2017) noted that the poor management of internal constraints affects the survival of small business firms. In this study, I reviewed the following internal constraints: (a) competency constraints, (b) financial constraints, (c) supplier/credit constraints, (d) resources constraints, and (e) ICT constraints.

Competency constraints. Limited managerial competencies inhibit the survival of MSEs (Atsan, 2016; Oglethorpe & Heron, 2013). Owners who acquire business competencies through education and training over time result in the application of strategic thinking and innovative ideas in business practice. Strategic planning is fundamental to the success of any business. A strategic plan charts a path that leads an organization from the present to the desired unforeseen future (Kariuki, 2015). In most MSEs, the proprietor or owner develops the business and implements it with or without any formal plan. Odongo and Wang (2016) posited that most MSEs either do not have any planning document or have insufficient capacity to develop one. Similarly, Kariuki (2015) presented that small business owners do not document a clear vision of their business desires and fail to determine the appropriate credit limit for their business. A defined strategic plan enables the business to implement its policies, monitor progress, and achieve the desired outcome.

Entrepreneurs operating without strategic thinking have limited knowledge of the market and miss the opportunity to prosper. The lack of strategic planning is a significant constraint to MSEs in gaining access to desired finances for working capital (Odongo & Wang, 2016; Kariuki, 2015). The existence of a strategic plan presents the clear business direction of a firm and facilitates business owners' appeal to lenders of financial credits (Mabhungu & Van Der Poll, 2017). Odongo and Wang (2016) rendered that owners who have limited competencies do not consider the risk elements and often fail to include in their financial credit applications the mitigating risk measures. MSE owners should develop a defined strategic plan to grow and sustain their business.

There are no set educational criteria for business startups with entrepreneurs using their intuition to implement ideas while others tend to copy what is successful elsewhere (Shibia & Barako, 2017). Starting and operating a microenterprise firm can be as simple as one person performing all the processes, to a more complicated situation where several employees are engaged to perform several duties (Odongo & Wang, 2016). Thus, simple management missteps can lead to the collapse and closure of a small enterprise with no chance to learn from the mistakes (Omari & Daniel, 2015). The lack of managerial training, experience, education, and skills are some of the significant competence constraints that affect the survival of MSEs (Odongo & Wang, 2016). Though in their study, Mckenzie and Woodruff (2016) differed when they found that advance training of MSEs had little impact on sales and profits. Entrepreneurs regardless of gender, require basic managerial skills to comprehend the financial management and bookkeeping that are necessary for business operations. Therefore, the limitation of business competencies by owners of MSEs is a source of constraint for effective business operations and survival.

Entrepreneurs regardless of gender, tend to venture into business with limited business information but with the anticipation to succeed. Kremel and Yazdanfar (2015) reviewed the role of gender in microenterprises against the uptake of business education and training services by startups. Researchers have demonstrated that women owners are more active in business but have equal chances to survive as men (Kremel & Yazdanfar, 2015). When reviewing competencies, the gender of owners is not a factor for business

survival. Owners of MSEs may be constrained in the development of sound strategies due to the limitation of education and training exposures.

Finance constraint. At the infancy stage of business, the lack of finances makes the entrepreneurs more dependent on financial intermediaries without which it can be detrimental to their survival (Ylhainen, 2017). Most startups begin with little financing and lack access to additional funding, which hampers their emergence and ultimate survival. The limited capital and inability to access additional finances are a detriment to the survival of MSEs (Wairimu & Mwilaria, 2017). Omari and Daniel (2015) opined that lack of finance causes the failure of most MSEs in their first two years of operation. A World Bank survey of over 100 countries that covered ten years found that access to financial capital is a significant constraint hindering operations and growth of MSEs in developing countries when compared to developed countries (Muriithi et al., 2017). In most African countries, the financial sector provides limited financial options and limited options for financial instruments. Additionally, the small size of MSEs firms tends to connote a higher risk in the eyes of established lenders of financial services. Hence the limitation of financing options for business liquidity can be detrimental to the survival of the firm.

Lack of appropriate financial information may limit entrepreneurs from choosing the right financing options. In Kenya, for instance, small firms rarely meet the conditions set by financial institutions because of a lack of adequate information and failure to secure enough collateral for loans (Ndemi & Mungai, 2018). Owners of MSEs need to

establish mechanisms to gather information and be aware of current affairs, such as the financial markets, to effectively manage their firms.

In developing economies, the finance or equity markets are at various stages of development and MSEs have insufficient options or no option for long-term financing. The non-bank financial intermediaries, such as microcredit institutions, play a role in the short term but fall short in debt management. Omari and Daniel (2015) reported the lack of appropriate structures for dealing with MSEs financial support with the primary sources being their retained earnings or informal savings and loan associations. Such sources of finances if relied upon by owners of MSEs can be unpredictable, insecure, and limited in scope for risk sharing. The absence of adequate finances curtails the availability of working capitals that MSE owners require for continuous operations.

Credit constraint. Accessing credit could be one of the significant obstacles to the survival of MSEs. Fewer MSEs in Kenya access loans from commercial banks than from other smaller financial institutions (KNBS, 2016). Ndemi and Mungai (2018) attributed the causes of MSE owners' inability to access loans to the excessive cost of repayment, strict collateral requirements, failure to obtain guarantors, high processing fees and short repayment periods. Consequently, some entrepreneurs avoid loans because of negative perceptions about the related expenses and the cost of management (KNBS, 2016). Startup owners would prefer to avoid commercial loans but borrow from personal savings, family members, and friends (Tubey et al., 2015). The MSE owners who raise funds from family members, personal savings, and friends are more than those who borrow money from commercial, financial institutions.

The lenders of commercial loans are risk-averse and prefer to hedge against borrowers' risks by demanding collateral that the borrowers lack. Odongo and Wang (2016) presented that financial institutions perceive small business as substantial risky and unprofitable because of the perception of inadequate and insufficient capacity to manage and deliver services. Thus, borrowers who are willing to pay prevailing credit interest rates cannot access the funds at favorable rates because lenders are unwilling to lend due to risk perception and insufficient information. The limitation of credit facilities hinders MSE owners from direct access to a long-term relationship with suppliers and financiers, which is necessary to sustain the business.

Information and technological challenges. ICT plays a significant role in business processes creation. The rapid changes in ICT trends and consumers' behavior could negatively affect the survival of small enterprises (Wamuyu, 2015). ICT encompasses the information that companies create and use as well as a broad spectrum of increasingly convergent and linked technologies. Firms keep adjusting business strategies to reduce the cost of obtaining, processing, and transmitting information.

Despite the availability of ICT, scholars have noted that few MSEs embrace the technology. Omari and Daniel (2015) submitted that very few MSEs in Kenya use computer-based ICT and rely on cheap mobile phones as a business tool. Additionally, the Government Survey report showed that 78% of small business owners had a mobile phone though over 20% do not have any ICT gadget (KNBS, 2016). The failure to embrace ICT constrained the owners of small enterprises from keeping pace with technological innovation.

Among the recent innovations in ICT, are electronic commerce, mobile banking, and mobile money. The entry of mobile money technology has altered the means of financial services in many countries (Yermack, 2017). The mobility of information and communication facilitates the speed and convenience that influences trade and interaction through competitiveness in the online market (Bankole, Osei-Bryson, & Brown, 2015). Although the use of mobile payment is a growing phenomenon, some small traders and consumers are skeptical about this service due to their perception of the difficulty of use, security, and costs (Yan & Yang, 2015). Moreover, business owners need to comprehend the available drivers and existing barriers to adoption. The low rate of adoption of ICT and mobile technology might constraints the owners from freely available online information and market.

External constraints. External constraints to the survival of MSEs relate to decisions, rules, and policies that a business firm has no control over, but that when left unattended, could directly affect the operations of the business. The external constraints discussed in this section are (a) infrastructure, (b) government support (c) market/competition (c) corruption.

Infrastructural constraints. The lack of proper infrastructure inhibits the creation of a conducive environment for enterprises to thrive (Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017). The lack of accessible roads, electricity, telephones, internet connection, water, and transport to the markets negatively influences the competitiveness of the MSEs (KNBS, 2016). Licensed public entities and small private firms tend to have more access to utilities when compared to informal MSEs and Jua Kalis that owners are family members and sole

proprietors (KNBS, 2016). The absence of basic infrastructure may limit the owners of MSEs that operates in the informal sector. The government should, therefore, prioritize the provision of adequate infrastructure and an enabling environment that support the growth and survival of business enterprises (MSEA, 2018). The lack of infrastructures could affect the growth and survival of MSEs.

Market and competition. Scholars argued that in a thriving economy, new competitors emerge that cut the market share for existing entrepreneurs. MSEs face continuous stiff competition from both small and larger enterprises. In Kenya, for example, 11.4% of MSE owners shifted to new business or changed location because of stiff competition from larger firms (KNBS, 2016). Lenders of credit view owners of MSEs as riskier and either charged high interest or hesitated to lend money to MSE owners because they operate in an uncertain competitive environment (Odongo & Wang, 2016). MSEs that fail to mount enough forces to face competition do not survive.

Some MSEs fail to competitively influence the market price because of high unit costs from buying and selling in small quantities. Moreover, the MSE owners possess limited competencies in key business areas such as networking, marketing, business planning, and human resources (Gherhes et al., 2016). Owners of MSEs need to acquire the necessary competencies to develop competitive strategies that could stimulate and support business survival. Globalization and free trade policies could be detrimental to the survival of MSEs if they cannot compete with cheap importations (Kusumawardhani, Rahayu, & Maksum, 2015). MSE owners should understand the market and competition to grow and sustain their business.

Corruption. Corruption occurs when one issues a bribe to receive personal gains dishonestly or fraudulently in return. For example, small business owners may be tempted to take shortcuts to receive regulatory registrations, obtain permits, or even influence decisions in the market. The entrepreneur's desire to succeed can result in survival tactics that could be unethical but justified by the owner to overcome constraints (Boudreaux, Nikolaev, & Holcombe, 2018). When faced with an elevated level of adversity derived from personal characteristics that they cannot change, some small firms' owners, also regarded as underdogs, tend to use bribes to compete for government grants or donations support towards entrepreneurship (Baron, Tang, Tang, & Zhang, 2018). Most governments funded programs designed to encourage entrepreneurship are attractive because funds disbursed are in the form of grants with no expectation of repayment. The competition for scarcely available government funds is high in developing economies because of limited resources and a high number of MSEs who face similar constraints (Baron et al., 2018). In such circumstances, the entrepreneurs expect fairness and transparency from the government officials.

Corruption in Kenya is deemed endemic with many established government institutions unable to eradicate the vice (Muriithi et al., 2017). High-level corruption curtails the rapid growth and expansion of MSEs to match the growing market demand for goods and services (Odongo & Wang, 2016). Corruption practices, mostly perpetuated by government officials, hinder access to the necessary infrastructure, and affect the growth of small enterprises (Kanu, 2015). Government officials tend to bully owners of small establishments to submit to corrupt vices rather than the executives of a

medium and large organization (van den Berg & Noorderhaven, 2016). MSE owners are exposed to corruption vices, which hinder the establishment and growth of their firm (Datta & Sobel, 2016). Some of the effects of corruption include diverting resource from core activities, lowering economic output, and distracting entrepreneurs from productive to destructive activities (Boudreaux et al., 2018). Governments should provide the necessary support, share information, and create awareness for owners of MSEs to jointly fight the corruption vice and establish their business on a solid foundation (KNBS, 2016). By avoiding corrupt practices, most MSE owners could establish and grow their firm.

Most governments have enshrined policies and regulations to guide the support to entrepreneurship. Despite the clear policies, the decision to award government grants are dependent on irrelevant human factors such as race, ethnic origins, gender, age, family backgrounds, physical appearance and even school background (Baron et al., 2018; Simoes et al., 2015). When government official who controls the disbursement of resources disregard such human factors, they create a desperate situation for entrepreneurs who are left with no survival choices but to buy their way out (Williams & Shepherd, 2016). Miller and Le Breton-Miller (2017) describe entrepreneurs faced with such disadvantages as "underdogs." The underdog entrepreneurs run a business in an unfavorable environment that hamper their chances of survival.

Government support. Lack of government support can be detrimental to the survival of the small business. With the recognition of the role that MSEs play, the governments in most developing countries invest heavily in the sector (Kusumawardhani et al., 2015). The government is involved throughout the life of MSEs with such

processes as the issuance of business registration, licenses, and operating permits and collection of business taxes. Unfortunately, small business owners are regularly subjected to random compliance inspections that could turn into a continuous extortion bribery fraud by unscrupulous government officials and cause impediment to the growth of small businesses (van den Berg & Noorderhaven, 2016).

MSEs strategies for survival. Owners of MSEs invest in the acquisition of business competencies to have a clear vision in the form of a strategic business plan that guides the business direction and allocation of resources. When venturing into business, entrepreneurs need to think through the type of product or service that attracts customers. A customer demands a product or service that solves a problem with less money, at a convenient time, effectively or even better than others. A well-defined strategic plan should inform the financiers of the nature of the business and assure that the business is committed to making profits with the ability to repay its debts. Owners of MSEs need to acquire business competencies through education and continuous training.

Scholars have presented MSEs as small but powerful economic drivers with the ability to incubate innovations and stimulate business growth. Awa, Ojiabo, and Emecheta (2015) recognized the strength of MSEs as the center of innovation that utilizes more human intellectual capital and technology than other traditional resources. When compared with a large organization, managers of MSEs are more reactive and responsive to market dynamics through innovative ideas (Wang et al., 2015). The core competency for an MSEs survival and growth involves creating and sharing knowledge, innovating,

and learning and adapting to customer demands (Shibia & Barako, 2017). MSE owners should understand market dynamics and customer demands.

Innovation plays an essential role in the survival of small business firms. The ability of owners of MSEs to innovate continuously determines the growth, success, and firms' survival (Rahman, Yaacob, & Radzi, 2016). Ortiz-Villajos and Sotoca (2018) theorized that a higher number of registered innovation patents increases the survival chance of firms in the manufacturing business but not for those in the service industry. The service firms can enhance their survival through online marketing, computerization of the processes, and social network (Rahman et al., 2016). MSE owners should adopt new technology and innovation to grow and sustain their business.

Scholars highlighted other controlling factors that influence survival to include the firm's size, its international dimension, and the age of the business founder at the inception of the business. According to Ortiz-Villajos and Sotoca (2018), entrepreneurs who start a business at a tender age acquire experience over time and would have higher chances of survival in business than those who enter the business at a mature age. Entrepreneurs should, therefore, embrace continuous innovation for product and processes to overcome business pitfalls.

With the small size of several MSEs, the owners' leadership and management style are crucial for the growth and survival of the firms. Small business firms led by professional leadership tend to be more innovative and quickly adapt to market evolution because of their lean structure and the active involvement of their human resources (Omari & Daniel, 2015). The small size of a firm that operates with a small budget could

be a limitation to innovation. The leadership of small firms concentrates more on a day to day survival tactics than product development and innovation (Faherty & Stephens, 2016). Investment in leadership training would strengthen the owners of MSEs and provide them with the necessary competencies for the advancement of their business goals.

The understanding of the customer demands translates to business opportunities. Wamuyu (2015) tendered that customer satisfaction and entrepreneurial creativity positively influence the survival and success of MSEs. With their small size and flexibility, decision making in MSEs depends on one or two owner-manager who can be quick to adapt to market conditions and seize available opportunities (Lussier & Sonfield, 2015). The owners of MSEs need to establish a customer feedback mechanism to timely respond to and retain the customer for a more extended period.

Understanding customers and the ability to retain them requires the acquisition of business experience over time. Scholars have reviewed the acquisition of experience and business survival on a gender basis. Lock and Lawson Smith (2016) reviewed MSEs through the gender lenses and found that the constraints that female entrepreneurs face in Kenya significantly reduced over time. The reduction of constraints provides more access to women to invest in small and micro enterprises. Consequently, the involvement of women in running micro-enterprises reduced poverty and improved the economic well-being of the community (Grigsby, Jeanetta, & Jivetti, 2015). Women entrepreneurs who are risk takers are more likely to survive in business than those who venture into a business to pursue a better work-life balance (Rey-Marti, Porcar, & Mas-Tur, 2015).

However, women entrepreneurs are risk-averse and tend to borrow funds for tradition business and rarely for high risky ventures (Dutta, & Banerjee, 2018). MSE owners should acquire experience to ensure the growth and survival of their business.

Female entrepreneurs have lower chances of achieving medium-term business survival than those who assume risks. Adom, Asare-Yeboah, Quaye, and Ampomah (2017) alluded that female entrepreneur place more value on the quality of life of the family at the expense of business survival. As a result, the MSEs has a significant impact on the economic empowered of women to utilize and control resources in business and household (Mezgebo, Ymesel, & Tegegne, 2017). Regardless of gender, the entrepreneurs need to have clear motives with a strategic plan for their business startups to wade through the survival challenges (Rey-Marti et al., 2015). Owners of MSEs should develop a strategic plan to enable them to overcome survival challenges.

To overcome the financial and credit constraints, owners of MSEs tend to establish a network with microfinance institutions for better terms than established banks. Microfinance participation in lending to the MSEs can be quicker and cheaper than established credit firms, with attractive features of reducing loan application procedures and payment bureaucracy when collaborating with the entrepreneurs (Wairimu & Mwilaria, 2017). Owners of MSEs can work with microfinance institutions to establish stronger mutual partnerships and business relationships.

Embracing ICT and technology-based solutions enable MSEs to achieve transparency, efficiency, and responsiveness that can improve business profitability and survival (Matata & Namusonge, 2015). Owners of MSEs should invest in ICT solutions

that can serve the overriding business objectives. In the modern business world, a firm aims to achieve efficient use of resources such as people, money, machinery, facilities, material, and information. Suppliers, manufacturers, and customers connect through the information superhighway by a single click. Information retrieval and processing from anywhere at any time are achievable by making use of mobile technology. Smartphones and the Internet provide access to stylish knowledge at consumers' fingertips and the expectation of personalized service resulting in rapid changes in consumer demands (Oliveira, Thomas, Baptista, & Campos, 2016). Customers want instant gratification when making choices, and retailers must exceed their expectations to create loyalty. In the retail business, for example, the emphasis has been noted to change from transaction to personal interaction (Kandampully, Zhang, & Bilgihan, 2015). By interaction, retailers can create an emotional connection between customers and brands or products. The use of technology can facilitate the owners of MSEs to maintain customer records and feedback that can influence purchase decisions.

The investment in ICT technology is capital intensive and can be a challenge to owners of MSEs. The surviving owners of MSEs have relied on government support and intervention to survive through rapid technological advancement. Chua, Jean-Francois, and Roth (2015) advanced that technology competitiveness seems to better respond to government efforts when targeted to support entrepreneurs' participation in electronic procurement. For example, the government of Kenya has responded and implemented e-procurement to encourage transparency and ease of doing business with the government (MSEA, 2018). The government is in the process of automating most processes within

the supply chain management, including electronic invoicing, computerized shipping and tracking, and automated notifications (KNBS, 2016). The transparency, consistency, and communication capabilities from integrating ICT could enable organizational functions to share information effectively (Wairimu & Mwilaria, 2017). ICT, when combined with complementary coordination mechanisms, allows the firm to respond quickly to customer-based opportunities and enjoy a competitive advantage (Omari & Daniel, 2015). Adopting ICT could assist MSE owners to respond quickly to market changes and gain competitive advantages.

The growth and survival of MSEs are higher in locations with the availability of utility infrastructures and lower incidences of crime (Shibia & Barako, 2017). Owners should locate their business where the government has provided adequate infrastructure. The enabling environment would include a government provision of reliable and cheap infrastructure, such as functional road networks, cheap electricity, the supply of water and sewage system for the business firms to survive and effectively contribute to the national economy (KNBS, 2016). The provision of infrastructures would enable MSE owners to grow and sustain their business.

Having recognized the decisive role of MSEs in the country, the government of Kenya with support from international donors established the microenterprise support program trust (MESPT) in 2002 to support business growth by providing integrated business solutions for sustainable development (MSEA, 2018). The Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1986 on economic management for renewed growth provided a policy framework and affirmed government commitments to the promotion and growth of MSEs (Shibia &

Barako, 2017). The continuous development of Kenya's microeconomics requires the government to introduce more effective policies, regulate the informal sector, and further encourage entrepreneurs in the form of business training, mentoring, and financial support (Lock & Lawson Smith, 2016). The rural entrepreneur access program is one example of the government financial support that has registered a positive and significant impact on income, savings, and asset accumulation for rural women entrepreneurs in Kenya (Gobin, Santos, & Toth, 2017). Hasan and Cheung (2018) concluded that firms that invest more in the organization capital such as, business practices, processes, systems, designs, and the unique corporate culture are less likely to face unfavorable changes in the first 5 years the life cycle. Owners of MSEs should invest in organizational practices to grow and sustain their business.

Summary and Transition

Section 1 of this study provided the foundation and background of the problem of the study. MSE owners encounter constraints that affect the survival of their firms. The specific business problem was that some MSEs owners lack strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The research question pertained to exploring the strategies used by successful MSE owners to sustain business beyond 5 years. The conceptual framework was the theory of constraints with the 5 tenets for the identification and management of the constraints. The outcome of the study might contribute to the sustenance of more business firm through the replication of the strategies and might contribute to a positive social by the creation of employment opportunities and improved well-being of the citizens. A detailed presentation of the literature review supported the

background of this study. The literature review was organized into three main sections; MSEs definition and roles, the TOC, and owner business failures and strategies to sustain the business.

In Section 2, I developed the plan for exploration and study of the strategies that owners of MSEs use to sustain their business for more than 5 years. The section covers the purpose of the research, details of the role of the researcher, and a description of the participant population. Section 2 also include a discussion of the method and research design, ethical research, and data collection, including instrumentation, collection, and organization techniques. Also presented in Section 2 are the methods to analyze data collected, reliability tests, and data validity procedures.

Section 3 contains the presentation of the study findings, application to professional practice, and implications for potential social change. Furthermore, Section 3 includes recommendations for action and future research for practitioners and researchers. I close the study with reflections and a conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

The objective of this doctoral study was to explore the survival strategies that owners of MSEs use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. In this section, I discuss the purpose of the research, the role of the researcher, the participant population, the research method and design, ethical research, and data collection, including instrumentation, collection, and organization techniques. The section also contains information on data analysis, reliability tests, and data validity procedures.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies some MSE owners use to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The target population comprised four MSE owners in Nairobi, Kenya, who successfully used strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The results from this study could contribute to positive social change by enabling owners of MSEs to sustain businesses that contribute to socioeconomic development, promote economic stability, and enhance the well-being of Kenyan citizens.

Role of the Researcher

A researcher who applies the qualitative methodology may be the primary data collection instrument (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The primary role of the researcher entails the recruiting of potential participants, data collection, data organization, and analysis of the data (Hernandez-Hernandez & Sancho-Gil, 2015). Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017) highlighted the additional roles of conducting interviews, coding the data, analyzing data for themes and patterns, and drawing conclusions. As the researcher, I was the primary

data collection instrument, and my roles included the recruitment of participants, interviewing, and interpreting their responses to yield the study findings.

Percy, Kostere, and Kostere (2015) emphasized the need for a researcher to be knowledgeable of the study area to integrate her own understanding and the participants' perspective of the research phenomenon to form meaningful analyses. I am knowledgeable and have a relationship with the research topic through my family connection. I am familiar with the survival of the small business firm, and I have in the past provided advisory support to my family member who is in business in Kenya. I have witnessed many MSEs within my community fail before 5 years.

A researcher dealing with human beings should conform to the principles of the *Belmont Report*, which calls for the respect for persons, beneficence, and justice for all participants (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). The principle of respect for persons sets ethical requirements for the treatment of a person as autonomous agents and persons with diminished autonomy who require protection (Strauss & Corbin, 2015; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). Any person to be the subject of research should receive informed consent to freely decide on participation (Adashi, Walters, & Menikoff, 2018). The application of the principle of beneficence requires a researcher to treat persons ethically in order to secure their well-being. A researcher should make efforts to maximize the benefits and reduce any risks from the research investigation (Adashi et al., 2018; Strauss & Corbin, 2015). The fulfillment of the principle of justice demands fair procedures and outcomes in the selection of the

research participants (Friesen, Kearns, Redman, & Caplan, 2017; Jones & McCullough, 2015). I conformed to the principles of the *Belmont Report* in this study.

To meet the requirement of the *Belmont Report*, I showed respect to the prospective participant using informed consent that provided information for comprehension and voluntary decision. I considered all potential risks and benefits that might accrue to protect the interest of the participants. To comply with the principle of justice, I used the informed consent form to explain the sample inclusion criteria for participants to understand the selection procedure.

I avoided viewing data through a personal lens to mitigate bias. The quality of data depends on the researcher's ability to reduce bias and validate the correct interpretations of the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2018). Although personal bias can be mitigated, the total elimination of personal bias is difficult (Bengtsson, 2016; Elman, Gerring, & Mahoney, 2016; Nelson, London, & Strobel, 2015). I ensured that data collection follows a systematic process, and the interpretations of the data accurately represent the participants' views. I ensured complete disclosure of my experiences and used member checking and bracketing to expose bias that I cannot easily mitigate.

An interview protocol outlines the steps to take during the interview process to facilitates systematic research. During data collection, qualitative researchers use interview protocols as a tool to achieve cohesion and add to the reliability (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To achieve research cohesion, I developed an interview protocol (see Appendix A) that was applied uniformly to all the participants. I administered a set of

carefully prepared interview questions to the participant, conducted a follow-up member checking to ensure the accuracy of the information and collaborated data from diverse sources to address reliability.

Participants

A researcher can use purposeful sampling in the selection of the participants through selection criteria that align with the overarching research question (Morse, 2015a; Palinkas et al., 2015; Yin, 2018). I selected participants who met the following criteria: (a) a business owner of an MSEs who has operated the business beyond 5 years, (b) operates business firm within the Nairobi Central Business District, and (c) the size of the firm employs between one and nine employees and has annual income not exceeding Kenya shillings 5 million.

Qualitative researchers may gain access to participants through personal contacts with participants (Hoyland, Hollund, & Olsen, 2015; Maramwidze-Merrison, 2016). To gain access to the participants, I obtained cooperation from a government agency and obtained a contact list of micro and small enterprises located in Nairobi Business District that contain most updated business categories, names, addresses, cities, and phone numbers. I purposely chose MSEs that have been in existence for more than 5 years and operated from the central business district of Nairobi. Upon receiving permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I sent an email to participants to introduce myself, the study, and requested their participation.

Halcomb and Peters (2016) stated that researchers must establish trust with participants, which is vital for the success of the study. A researcher needs to build trust,

be transparent, and cultivate a working relationship with the participants (Harvey, 2015; Jagosh et al., 2015). Qualitative researchers should engage in active, supportive listening to develop rapport and encourage in-depth discussion with participants (Bodie, Vickery, Cannava, & Jones, 2015; Tam et al., 2015). I engaged the participants in active and supportive listening and used open-ended questions to develop rapport and encourage in-depth discussion throughout the interview process. As a starting point, I sent an introductory letter to the MSE owners explaining the purpose of the study, criteria for selecting participants, and the benefits of the study to establish a working relationship (See Appendix B). The introductory letter explained the purpose and significance of the study and solicited the participants' cooperation during the interview. During the interviews, I had a face-to-face meeting with the participant to build rapport and facilitated open communication that enabled the participant to communicate freely without any duress.

A researcher should develop some selection criteria that establish an alignment of participants' characteristics with the overarching research question (Morse, 2015b; Palinkas et al., 2015; Yin, 2018). Participants selection criteria should be aligned with the research question to facilitate the collection of quality data that are necessary for the completeness of the study (Bengtsson, 2016; Hadi & Closs, 2016). I aligned the population with the research question through my selection of owners of MSEs, whom I assumed to be knowledgeable of the phenomenon.

Research Method and Design

The 3 common research methods that researchers use to conduct research are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (McCusker, & Gunaydin, 2015). A researcher's choice of research method and design depends on the purpose of the study, the research question, and the time available for the study. The purpose of this study was to explore the survival strategies owners of MSEs use to grow and sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Qualitative researchers explore and understand individuals' perception of the social or human problem (Corti & Fielding, 2016). Researchers use case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of a specific issue or problem over a specified period (Morgan, Pullon, Macdonald, McKinlay, & Gray, 2017). The multiple case qualitative study was the most appropriate research method and design for this study.

Research Method

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods are the 3 common types of research methods (McCusker, & Gunaydin, 2015). A qualitative researcher applies a subjective analysis of the meaning of experiences and words rather than an objective measurement of phenomena (Florczak, 2017). The qualitative method is the exploration of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context to gain a clear and detail understanding (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Yin, 2018). A researcher uses the qualitative method to generate more profound insight into a study (Florczak, 2017; Hadi & Closs, 2016). I used the qualitative method for the study. The qualitative method was

appropriate for my intention to explore, explain, and understand what strategies are necessary to sustain micro enterprises.

A quantitative researcher measures variables to set up a hypothesis to test the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Yazan, 2015). The quantitative method tends to limit the effort for documentation of the experiences of each participant (Savela, 2018; Shannon-Baker, 2016). The quantitative method was inappropriate in the absence of the requirement to measure the variables for hypothesis testing and the establishment of the variables' relationships.

The mixed method is another available alternative research method. Scholars who apply mixed method combine elements of qualitative and quantitative methods into a single study (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Shannon-Baker, 2016). The use of variables for measurement and hypothesis testing in the study rendered mixed method inappropriate for my study.

Research Design

The common types of qualitative designs are case studies, phenomenological, and ethnographic (Bengtsson, 2016; Cairney & St Denny, 2015; Lewis, 2015). Researchers apply the case study design to provide a holistic, in-depth analysis of a real-life, contemporary system bounded by time and place (Yin, 2018). The application of the case study design requires researchers to explore questions through multiple sources of data (Bengtsson, 2016; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2018). Scholars use the case study design to generate rich data through a combination of different data collection methods such as interviews, questionnaires, observation, and archives (Yin, 2018). I selected the multiple

case study design for this research to explore in depth the participants' strategies that sustain business operations for more than 5 years.

I considered the other research designs, such as phenomenological and ethnography, but found them unsuitable for my study. Researchers may use a phenomenological research design to focus on the lived experiences of participants (Yin, 2018). The emphasis of this study was to explore business strategies business owners used to sustain their business, and not on the participants lived experiences. Therefore, the phenomenological design was not appropriate. Researchers using ethnography immerse themselves in the lives, culture, or situation they are studying (Islam, 2015). The need to understand the cultural behaviors and patterns of the participants is outside the scope of this study, which made ethnography design unsuitable.

During the study, I achieved data saturation through follow-up interviews with the participants and continued to collect data until the point where the participants repeat the same information with subsequent interviews. Data saturation occurs when no new information results from additional data (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Yin, 2018). Once a researcher achieves data saturation, it is unnecessary to conduct further interviews (Carcone, Tokarz, & Ruocco, 2015). Researchers use member checking for data validation by involving the participants in checking misrepresentation, correcting errors, and assessing the accuracy of the data (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016; Harvey, 2015). My selection of owners of MSEs with 5 years of continuous business experience facilitated appropriate responses to the research question.

Population and Sampling

The population for the study consisted of four MSE owners in Kenya who have successfully used strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years. A sample population of at least 3 participants might provide quality data required to achieve data saturation (Fugard & Potts, 2015; Yin, 2018). A sample selection of four participants was adequate to provide information to achieve data saturation.

Researchers use purposive sampling to select participants for the study. Under the purposive non-random sampling technique, a researcher uses own judgment to identify the participants from members of the population that meet the objective of the study (Fugard & Potts, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015; Yin, 2018). My target was participants who were knowledgeable and can provide diverse perspectives on the strategies used to sustain their business beyond 5 years. I used purposive sampling technique to choose the study participants.

A researcher may use a sample set of the total population to establish the number of participants for a study (Bengtsson, 2016; Morse, 2015b). Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested a careful selection of the sample that provides the best opportunity to reach data saturation. The sample size may be large enough to gather the information that answers the research question but can be small enough to reach data saturation (Morse, 2015b; Patton, 2015; Williams & Bornmann, 2016). Two to 3 cases are accepted as the minimum sample size in a multiple case study (Andersson & Evers, 2015; Yin, 2018). Dankwa (2018), Potts (2018), Wani (2018), and Warren (2016) in similar case studies sampled a maximum of four owners and achieved data saturation. A selection of a sample

size of four participants for semistructured interviews and follow-up member checks provided the best opportunity to answer the research question.

I conducted face-to-face interviews with each participant using the interview protocol (see Appendix A). Administering semistructured interviews where the researcher asks the same questions to each participant is an additional method to obtain data saturation (Harvey, 2015; Morse, 2015b; Yin, 2018). To solicit answers to the research question, I subjected all the participants to the same interview questions (See Appendix C). The environment for conducting interviews should not be loud, public, unsafe, nor inconveniencing to the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I requested the participants to choose a private and convenient place for the interviews.

Researchers record the interview to ensure accurate interpretation of information. The use of a recording device during the interviews enables the researcher to give full attention to the participant and facilitate the collection of raw data required for verbatim transcription (Sutton & Austin, 2015). During the interview, I sought the participants' consent to use a handheld audio recorder and computer-aided software (Dragon) to audio record the interviews. As a backup, I took handwritten notes during the interview meetings to facilitate accurate transcription.

Researchers achieve data saturation through member checking with the participants. Data saturation is essential to the success of qualitative studies, but is subject to the quality of interviews, the number of interviews per participant, sampling procedures, and researcher's experience (Morse, 2015b). Achieving data saturation during data collection and analysis is possible when additional information becomes

redundant (Hagaman & Wutich, 2017). I stopped interviewing participants when additional interviews produced the same information over time to achieve data saturation. Researchers use member checking to validate data and avoid misrepresentation of the participants' views (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking is a process researcher use to confirm the meaning extracted from the participants by having them review the analysis of their responses and scheduling another time to do follow-up interviews. I used member checking to confirm the accuracy of the information extracted from participants.

Ethical Research

In line with scholarly requirements, research that involves human elements requires ethical consideration (Ferreira, Buttell, & Ferreira, 2015; Tomkinson, 2015). The 3 ethical requirements of research involving human subjects are the principles of respect of persons, beneficence, and justice (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). I conducted this study upon receipt of approval from IRB at Walden University, and compliance with the requirements of the *Belmont Report* provided an ethical foundation for this study. The IRB approval number for this study was 04-25-19-0555801.

To be ethical, a researcher should obtain the informed consent of the participant before the commencement of a study. A researcher must seek participant consent and provide full disclosure and awareness before the collection of data (Ferreira et al., 2015; Lie & Witteveen, 2017). Upon receipt of the approval for data collection from IRB, I sent an e-mail invitation to the potential participant to explain the purpose of the study. The e-mail contained the informed consent form for interested participants to review and reply

to the e-mail with the words "I consent." The content of the informed consent form included the background of the study and information to the participant on the intention to audio record the interviews. I used the informed consent form to notify the participants of the intention to collect company documentation and record observations during the study. I received email responses with the words "I consent" from interested participants.

Researchers should respect participants' privacy and the right to withdraw from a study and not place them at any risk during the study (Hammersley, 2015). The informed consent form should contain a statement that participation in the study is voluntary, and respondents may withdraw during the interview process at will (Tam et al., 2015). The participants were free to withdraw from the study before or during the interview, choose not to respond to any question without offering any explanation, and only need to inform me of their intention to withdraw.

A researcher may decide whether participants may receive compensation in a study (Collins et al., 2017; Wiener, Viola, Wilfond, Wendler, & Grady, 2015; Yin, 2018). In this study, participants did not receive any compensation. The study was voluntary, and participants did not receive any incentives for participating in the study but will be given a summary of the study findings with a note of appreciation for their participation.

The selected research participants should participate willingly and free from any duress. During the study, participants may encounter harm, anxiety, and apprehension (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The National Institute of Health (NIH) called for the protection of human subjects. Guidelines for business research follows the NIH requirements. A researcher should focus on ethical principles throughout the process of

the study and must demonstrate such principles through respecting the autonomy of the participants, observing the privacy of participants, minimizing harm, and acting calmly (Hammersley, 2015). The critical issues NIH highlighted that I observed in this study include avoiding physical and emotional harm, protecting research participants identify and confidentiality by using code names and promoting research that serves a public good.

I protected the confidentiality of the participants by use of unique identifiers such as participant P1, P2, P3, and P4 and removed from the published document any information that could identify the participant. To protect the identity of participants, a researcher should redact any information that could give hints about or expose the participant (Ferreira et al., 2015). I plan to keep all electronic data on a password-protected electronic storage drive and place in a locked cabinet with restricted access to myself. I will store the files for a minimum of 5 years and, after that, destroy all the copies by use of a paper shredder and deletion of electronic copies.

Data Collection Instruments

I served as the primary data collection instrument and interviewed participants by asking open-ended questions to solicit answers to the research question. Conducting a successful interview will depend on how well the researcher has prepared through careful planning, development of interview technique, and choosing the appropriate method (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Cridland, Jones, Caputi, & Magee, 2015). A researcher can choose from several interview methods. The face-to-face interview method is one option commonly applied by researchers of small and medium enterprises (Maramwidze-

Merrison, 2016; O'Connor, 2015). In this study, I conducted face-to-face, semistructured interviews by following a prepared interview protocol (see Appendix A).

The semistructured interviews involve the use of a set of interview questions administered consistently and systematically punctuated with inquiries designed to elicit more detailed responses (Cridland et al., 2015). The use of open-ended questions allows the participant the opportunity to provide an in-depth account of their experience of the phenomenon (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Yin, 2018). My interview process consisted of six questions (see Appendix C) and follow-up questions that solicited the data necessary to fulfill the purpose of the study.

Researchers make efforts to mitigate personal bias when collecting the data. The quality of the data depends on the researcher's ability to reduce bias and validate the interpretation through member checking (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Morse, 2015a; Yin, 2018). Addressing validity and reliability in case studies will require the use of different techniques at various phases of the research process (Morse, 2015a; Yin, 2018). The use of the triangulation method through the application of interviews, observations, and review of documents might facilitate the reliability of the data. Member checking validates participant responses and provides some assurance on the credibility of information (Birt et al., 2016; Hadi & Closs, 2016; Thomas, 2017). On completion of the transcription of the interview, I shared my interpretation of the information with the participant to check and validate.

Qualitative researchers develop a case study protocol to aid in enhancing the dependability of the research (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Yin, 2018). I prepared a case

study database to guide in exploring the strategies owners of MSEs use to ensure the survival of their enterprise. The database included interview notes, copies of audio transcripts in MS word document, and copies of the initial and subsequent draft study findings.

Data Collection Technique

Researchers use study protocol to collect primary data for their study. Researchers of multiple case studies may conduct interviews and review the company document to collect data (Percy et al., 2015). The use of semistructured interviews enables the participants to respond to open-ended questions (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The success of the semistructured interviews in obtaining quality and depth of information requires adequate preparation of the interview guide, adequate participant recruitment, and the obtaining of informed and voluntary consent (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Cridland et al., 2015). I used an interview protocol to collect primary data for my study

Upon receipt of Walden IRB approval, I formalized the arrangement for the face-to-face interviews with the participants. Before the interview date, I called the interested participant to confirm the time and convenient location of the interview. On the agreed date, I arrived at the venue 30 minutes before the scheduled time to ensure the room was ready and tested my recording device. I estimated the interview session with each participant to last for 30-60 minutes. I conducted the interview process following the step by step procedures laid down in my interview protocol (see Appendix A).

The interview process involved 12 steps. First, I introduced myself and the research topic to the participant and appreciated their free willingness to participate.

Next, I presented the consent form, went over the contents, and answered questions and concerns of the participant. Then, I gave the participant a copy of the consent form for review and record keeping. After that, I requested for the participant's permission to turn on the recording device. Following the procedures, I introduced the participant with the coded identification, noted the date and time, and reminded the participant of the purpose of the research study. Then, I commenced the interview process by asking the first question and followed up with additional questions where necessary. After asking the last interview question, I discussed member checking, requested for, and obtained the company the documents. Finally, I thanked the participant for the cooperation and reiterated the contact numbers to reach for follow-up questions and concerns.

Researchers tend to apply a triangulation method to collect data. The triangulation method involves using at least two of the possible six sources that include a review of documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts to obtain a holistic view of phenomena (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Yin, 2018). Methodological triangulation of various sources of data helps to assure the validity of the findings (Florczak, 2017). To supplement the data from the interviews, I obtained secondary data through a review of copies of company documentation such as annual financial reports, company diaries, and success stories of the MSEs that featured in the local magazine clippings. In cases where the owners are unwilling to share the company documents, I requested for supplementary information about the MSEs from MSEA. I secured copies of the company documentation and interview transcripts in a locked private cabinet in my study room and used for this study. All electronic information

emanating from this study were secured in password protected files. After 5 years, I will shred all paper documents and delete all electronic files relating to this study.

The advantage of conducting interviews is the ability to collect information that relates to individuals' experiences, opinions, or perspectives (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Semistructured interviews enable the researcher to concentrate on the research boundary and help clarify perceived inferences through face-to-face interaction with the participants (Cridland et al., 2015; Yin, 2018). Face-to-face interviews can also facilitate the building of rapport and generate more information than an online based interview, although the quality of data collected using both methods might be the same (Shapka, Domene, Khan, & Yang, 2016). The combination of face-to-face semistructured interviews and short handwritten notes from the interviews can provide an accurate review of participant's data (Hadi & Closs, 2016; McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Yin, 2018). I used face-to-face semistructured interview and note taking to collect information from participants.

Researchers have noted some disadvantages of conducting interviews. The disadvantage of conducting interviews may include the perception of bias, the cost the researcher incurs traveling for a face-to-face interview, and time taken to arrange with the participants for the best convenient time and place to conduct the interviews (Cridland et al., 2015; Turner, 2016). Additionally, the flexibility of semistructured interviews may create a perception of bias that could inhibit the participants from freely expressing themselves to skew their response to what they think the interviewer needs to hear

(McIntosh & Morse, 2015). I used a semistructured interview to understand the participant's responses and clarify vital information to the study findings.

Researchers use member checking to ensure data accuracy. Member checking provides an opportunity for the participants to validate the accuracy of the interpretation of the data collected during the interview (Birt et al., 2016; Harvey, 2015; Thomas, 2017). Marshall and Rossman (2016) highlighted the opportunity that member checking provides the participants to review and verify the researcher's interpretation of their responses to the interview questions. I transcribed the recorded interview and shared the transcript with the participants to verify, confirmed, and corrected the accuracy of my interpretation of the interview transcripts.

Data Organization Techniques

In qualitative methods, data collection and organization comprises the careful review of the data for content, establishing codes for the data, and sorting the codes into common themes (Saldana, 2015). During the study, data organization and storage are critical elements for consideration. Storage of data electronically makes it easy to access and to be manipulated (Patil, Lu, Saunders, Potoglou, & Robinson, 2016). I organized the data according to themes from the participant responses to the research questions and stored them electronically.

Electronic filing and data storage save time and is gaining popularity with user-friendly features such as ease of file organization and retrieval (Hashem et al., 2015). Before the commencement of the interviews, I sought the participants' permission to use a handheld audio recorder and computer-aided software (Dragon) to audio record the

interviews. As a backup, I took brief handwritten notes during the interview meetings to aid in the transcription. I used a research log to record date, time, location, and participant's code name for the interview. Once recorded, I converted the digital voice recordings to password-protected computer files, established a folder for each participant's audio file and transcript, labeled the folders with the coded participant's name and location, and reviewed the transcripts of each file.

Researchers should maintain the confidentiality of the participant throughout the study. Maintaining the confidentiality of the participant is possible without the disclosure of individual names (Maramwidze-Merrison, 2016; Ferreira et al., 2015; Morse & Coulehan, 2015). In this study, I protected the identity of the participants with alphanumeric characters such as P1, P2, P3, and P4 in place of the participant names. I maintained the confidentiality of the participant throughout the study. I have secured all information, including consent forms, in a password protected files and kept them in a safe. After 5 years, I will permanently destroy the paper files using a paper shredder and erase all electronic files.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in a case study consists of a critical examination of the research data, categorizing the data, and tabulating to analyze real-world experiences (Bengtsson, 2016; Silverman, 2017; Yin, 2018). Data analysis for this study consisted of an audit trail of all recordings, notes, transcripts of the interviews, and member checking. Scholars of the qualitative case study may develop more in-depth findings from research evidence through the application of a methodological triangulation approach (Fusch & Ness, 2015;

Yazan, 2015). Methodological triangulation is the use of multiple data sources to confirm research findings (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I applied the methodological triangulation approach through the analysis of data from transcripts of interviews, review of interview notes, and examination of information from the company documents.

A timely data analysis ensures the validity and accuracy of the writing, account, and transcription (Silverman, 2017). To perform the data analysis, I used a thematic analysis approach to identify themes from repeated words, phrases, signs, or symbols. Percy et al. (2015) and Saldana (2015) suggested the use of thematic analysis for data analysis to sequence in the following steps as (a) read and examine each participant's transcript, (b) identify and highlight from the transcript the relevant sections to the research question, (c) synthesize phrases and words to form a similar concept from each transcript, (d) take a review of the codes and the identifiable common concepts across the transcripts, (e) develop a matrix of the major concepts, (f) compare and contrast the major concepts from each transcripts, (g) analyze and interpret the common concepts to form themes and subthemes, and (h) categorize the identifiable themes that provide answer to the research question.

Qualitative scholars may use Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to record, organize, code, and recognize common themes (Bree & Gallagher, 2016; Ose, 2016; Saldana, 2015). I utilized Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to store, organize, and analyze the data for exploring the information that answers the research question.

Watkins (2017), Silverman (2017), and Yin (2018) suggested the use of an inductive process as one of the methods to analyze and code data. Inductive reasoning is the method of establishing conclusions from collected data by weaving together additional information into theories (Bengtsson, 2016). To perform data coding, I followed 5 steps. First, I read the transcript and documents and created a moment to reflect on the information. Next, I used color codes to highlight the relevant phrases or catchwords, categorized the highlighted data into codes, and read the transcripts and repeat the coding for the second and third time to identify any emerging codes. After the third iteration, I constructed a table in MS word to compile, summarize, and organize the themes for each participant to identify commonalities from all the participants' responses. Then, I identified the major common themes, recorded them in the excel file for further analysis, and merged the common themes that provide answers to the research question. Finally, I compared the major themes from the transcripts, notes, and company document with the literature findings.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Researches should ensure the reliability of their study. In a qualitative study, reliability connotes the dependability of the research process that includes a method, design, and concept that the researcher applied in the study (Morse, 2015a; Dikko, 2016). The use of multiple sources of data augments the reliability of a case study (Bengtsson, 2016; Hadi & Closs, 2016; Harvey, 2015). To address the dependability in this study, I used methodological triangulation to compare multiple forms of data collection sources,

such as analysis of company records, comparisons of interview observations with field notes, and face-to-face semistructured interviews with the participants.

Researchers should establish a process for addressing the dependability of their study. Birt et al. (2016) and Harvey (2015) proposed a follow-up member checking of data interpretation to allow the participants the opportunity to review the interviewers' interpretation of the information with the implication to confirm the dependability of a study. A researcher needs to ensure the dependability of a study such that other researchers can subject a similar phenomenon to the same design, procedure, and protocol to arrive at a similar conclusion (Bengtsson, 2016; Hadi & Closs, 2016). I used the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to ensure that the interview process was uniform and consistent with each participant. I conducted a member checking of interview transcripts with each participant to ensure accuracy of information. By using the interview protocol and member checking, I enhanced reliability and addressed the dependability of the study results.

Validity

The subject of validity is relevant to the qualitative researcher to evaluate the rigor, soundness, and transferability of the research process (Cypress, 2017). The validity of qualitative research is a demonstration of the degree of confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability of the research findings (Leung, 2015). To enhance the validity of the study findings, I used the interview protocol, recorded, and accurately transcribed the interview data, documented the data analysis techniques, and disclosed the procedures used in the case study.

Credibility. A researcher can determine the credibility of the data through the analysis of the participant's responses by conducting member checking. Bengtsson (2016) defined credibility as the process where a chain of logic exists between the decision made and how the study is done. I addressed credibility using several strategies such as methodological triangulation, member checking, and regular participation and feedback from participants throughout the research process. I demonstrated methodological triangulation from the semistructured interviews, interview notes, and the collection of company documents. Researchers use member checking to ascertain the accuracy and credibility of the data (Birt et al., 2016; Thomas, 2017). I conducted member checking after transcribing and analyzing the participants' responses to verify that the analysis represents the actual intention of the participants.

Transferability. A qualitative researcher can enhance transferability through the provision of the rich descriptions of the research procedure put in place (Hagaman & Wutich, 2017; Morse, 2015a; Yin, 2018). Transferability in qualitative study denotes the ability, assurance, and confidence of a researcher to apply the findings or results in other future research setting or context without losing the meaning (Leung, 2015; Hadi & Closs, 2016). Transferability of qualitative studies involves applicability of the findings and not the generalization of the findings to the general population (Bengtsson, 2016). The reader is responsible for the transferability of research findings (Parker & Northcott, 2016). The findings from the study might not be the general representation of the business strategies that owners of MSEs use to ensure the survival of their enterprises beyond 5 years. However, the findings from this study might include recommendations

that could be relevant to readers to judge the applicability of the research procedure and method to their studies. To aid the reader and future research assess transferability of the study, I provided detail literature on research ethics, data collection, sampling technique, and the process of data analysis.

Confirmability. Confirmability refers to the degree to which other researchers could corroborate the results of a study (Bengtsson, 2016). The purpose of validity in the case study is to achieve acceptance and applicability, unlike statistical generalization in quantitative research studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2018). Achieving confirmability requires the researcher to describe the basis for the conclusion and interpretations void of personal bias and to demonstrate a direct linkage to the data (Bengtsson, 2016). I provided an audit trail, which highlighted every step of data analysis to provide a rationale for the decisions made. My audit trials helped to establish that the research study's findings accurately portray participants' responses.

Data Saturation. Data saturation allows the evaluation of validity where repeated themes will demonstrate the high validity of the study by presenting the consistency of responses within a multiple-case study design (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Authenticity is the reporting of the participant's experiences in a fashion that retains the original context of the data and presents differing perspectives so that the reader can reach an impartial decision (Bengtsson, 2016; Yin, 2018). In this study, I achieved data saturation through repeated interviews and follow-up questions with the participants and review of documentation.

Summary and Transition

Section 2 included a restatement of purpose statement and description of my role as a researcher, participant selections process, population and sampling, the research method and design, and ethical research. Also included in Section 2 is a discussion on data collection, including instruments, data collection technique, and data organization techniques. I concluded the section with a narration of the methods for analyzing collected data and for testing the reliability and validity of the data in response to the research question stated in section 1 of the study.

In Section 3 of this study, I discuss the research findings after conducting the study, as outlined in Section 2, having obtained permission for the research work. My intention for the last section is to present the study findings and discuss the applications to professional practice. Other topics addressed in this section include the implications for social change, recommendations for actions and future research, reflections, and summary and conclusions regarding the study

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Positive Social Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies some MSE owners used to sustain their business beyond 5 years. Four MSE owners who successfully used strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years participated in this study. Their responses to open-ended interview questions formed the basis of the research findings. The data collection process included validating and triangulating information gathered via transcript reviews, the use of archival business documents, and field notes. Data reached saturation when no additional information emerged from the interviews and document review. The research findings have the potential to create value for owners of businesses by providing strategies to sustain businesses; their implication for social change was that they could improve the livelihood of local residents. The study findings suggested that MSE owners use a combination of survival strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years: use (a) customer service, (b) access to capital, (c) talent, passion, and integrity, and (d) nearness to market.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was: What strategies do some MSE owners use to sustain business beyond 5 years? Researchers have demonstrated that implementing adequate strategies could help owners of MSEs to overcome challenges that hinder business survival beyond 5 years of operations (Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017; Shibia & Barako, 2017). According to Odongo and Wang (2016), the failure of MSE

owners to manage constraints hamper the survival of firms. Owners of MSEs face unique challenges of limited start-up capital, poor accessibility to the market, lack of competencies, experience, and lack of technology (Mairura et al., 2016; Odongo & Wang, 2016). The four themes identified in this study were (a) customer service, (b) access to capital, (c) talent, passion, and integrity, and (d) nearness to market. These themes were corroborated with company documents that contained detailed handwritten diaries of customer records.

Theme 1: Customer Service

The first theme to emerge was customer service, which involved the need to satisfy customers with excellent quality of service by meeting or exceeding their expectations. All participants affirmed using customer service as a strategy to grow and sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. P2 said, "High quality of my service has kept the customers coming and I put my best for customers to place repeat orders." Participant P4 added, "I respect deadlines." P1 explained, "This is a competitive business. I decided to offer quality and better service to maintain my customers and attract more; you have to meet the deadline set by the clients." Participant P2 stated, "As you know, customers want personalized service that I have to deliver." Participant P3 added, "You must be ready to deliver to the customer in real time." Furthermore, P1 recognized the importance of meeting deadlines and asserted, "I can outsource to other designers or hire additional hands to meet up with the timelines." The sales records and customer feedback records that participants P1, P2, and P3 provided validated their statements.

Wamuyu (2015) tendered that customer satisfaction and entrepreneurial creativity positively influence the survival and success of MSEs. Customer satisfaction is a strategy that small business owners use to sustain their business (Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017). Some essential characteristics of excellent customer service include accepting customer feedback, not delaying service, and using a reliable delivery process (Dechant, Spann, & Becker, 2018). All participants agreed that providing customers with good service quality was helpful in the survival of their business. P1 explained, "Whenever I was absent for personal reasons such as sickness, it affected my customers who were used to my personalized services." P2 stated, "One customer pass information about my quality design and they keep coming." Participant P1 acknowledged the need to develop a good relationship with the customers and remarked, "I could make direct calls with the customers to apologize for delays."

Albrecht, Walsh, and Beatty (2017) demonstrated that customer service is a crucial success factor for business survival. Small business owners could sustain their businesses by fulfilling customer needs (Zancul et al., 2016). Participant P1, attested, "The quality of my work has given me the confidence that I am doing well. Customers' feedback for my work has been perfect, and my customers are satisfied and happy with my quality." P4 advised, "Keep a neat job and ensure timely delivery of your commitment to the clients." P1 recognized the negative effect of disappointing customers and explained, "I hire temporary assistants or sub-contract the work to trusted designers to complete the work on my behalf." Participant P2 added, "When the demand is high, I have to put in much extra time and urge my tailors to work extra hours."

The theme of customer service as a business constraint aligned with the concept of continuous improvement advocated by scholars of TOC. A central tenet of TOC is that any system has a constraint that hinders the achievement of the system goal (Panizzolo, 2016). Participants shared how they met customer's expectation by working long hours, opening on public holidays, making direct calls to customers, and actioning on the customer feedback.

Participant P2 had to work long hours to satisfy the customers. Participant P1 had to sub-contract work to other designers to meet customer deadlines. Participants P3 and P4 had to deliver finished clothes on real time as agreed with the customers. Zivaljevic (2015) and Naor and Coman (2017) highlighted the application of TOC to achieve a positive result in customer services. According to Kaspina (2015), organizations that had implemented TOC tend to survive the global economic crisis and record significant growth. In this study, all the participants used customer service to retain their existing customers and expand their businesses after identifying it as a constraint.

The theme of customer service aligned with the findings of Bauer, Vargas, Sellitto, Souza, and Vaccaro (2019) who applied TOC to highlight the need to focus on customer care and the quality of service. As applied in this study, owners of MSEs should implement customer service as part of survival strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. All research participants confirmed using customer service as one of their strategies to grow and sustain their businesses.

The participants' responses aligned with Koyagialo's (2016), Wamuyu's (2015), and Zancul et al.'s (2016) statements that small business owners use service quality as a

strategy to sustain their businesses. The study findings indicated that owners of MSEs used customer service as a survival strategy for sustaining their business beyond 5 years.

Theme 2: Access to Capital

Access to capital emerged as a theme in the study. All the participants recognized the importance of access to capital for the survival of their businesses. P3 recognized the need to have cash flow by stating, "So, I have always tried to have money with me so that I can meet the orders." P2 attested, "The biggest challenge is financing" while P1 affirmed, "I can summarize all my challenges as lack of enough funding" and explained, "Funds is my main issue to sustaining my business." Participant P4 concluded, "Lack of capital is the main challenge."

The failure of most MSEs in their first 2 years of operation is attributable to the lack of finances (Omari & Daniel, 2015). According to Farida, Siregar, Nuryartono, and Intan (2015), most small business owners prefer to acquire a loan from money lenders because of the ease of requirement, exercise trust as the collateral and ignore the higher costs of interest. P2 explained, "It helps a lot to have flexible lending companies from the mobile phones leading apps like Tala, Mshwari. You borrow from your phone, then put into the business, and help to run the business." Participant P4 added, "To address the challenge of capital, I resorted to borrowing from microfinance and also the mobile phone applications." P1 rationalized, "On financial challenges, I depend on short-term borrowing. I borrow from mobile loan apps, which help my business sort out short-term financial needs." Participant P3 noted that lack of funds is hindering the business growth.

Access to financial capital is a significant constraint hindering operations and growth of MSEs in developing countries (Muriithi et al., 2017). The limited capital and inability to access additional finances is a significant detriment to the survival of MSEs (Wairimu & Mwilaria, 2017). Business owners' source about 50% of their start-up capital by channels such as personal or family savings (Tubey et al., 2015). The ability of business owners to obtain financing is crucial for business survival (Baptista & Leitao, 2016). By gaining access to a healthy credit market, entrepreneurs could obtain the needed finance to seize opportunities and invest in the growth of the business (Aggarwal & Elembilassery, 2018).

Entrepreneurs should have easy access to the credit market to obtain the cash flow required for financing business operations, growth, and expansion (Iqbal, Ahsan, & Zhang, 2016). The lack of finances at the infancy stage of a business makes the entrepreneurs depend on financial intermediaries for their survival (Ylhainen, 2017). The avoidance of commercial loans by some entrepreneurs is attributable to the negative perceptions of the interest charged by financial lenders (KNBS, 2016). Small firms rarely meet the conditions set by financial institutions because of a lack of adequate information and failure to secure enough collateral for loans (Ndemi & Mungai, 2018). P1 stated, "I started with little money and used the profit as my starting capital that I rolled over." Participant P4 added, "I sourced my initial capital from family and friends." While P3 explained, "I take short term borrowings from my friends and family members. From my sales net profit, I also try to keep some savings to care of the business."

Participants offered that the maintenance of separate records for business and personal finances was essential for accessing additional capital. Entrepreneurs should adapt to recording keeping and fiscal management to avoid misuse of the capital (Mckenzie & Woodruff, 2016). 3 participants recognized the importance of separating personal and business finances. P2 explained, "I keep a separate business record, put down all the expense, set up a business account where I save all business money to be separate from personal." P2 said, "I manage to keep the business afloat by separating funds from a personal account." Participant 3 remarked, "For you to be relevant and sustain your business, you must have money." P3 further stated, "I do keep records, I take stock of products I import or dealing with in my shop. I record all my expenses to measure my profit." Participant P4 added, "I keep little records of my business income and expense." The participants provided copies of the cash books, sales records, and customer diaries that collaborated their statements.

The theme of access to capital aligns with TOC constraint of finance. Oglethorpe and Heron (2013) identified firms' constraints and offered corrective strategies to overcome the challenges. One of the constraints was a financial constraint. The participants identified a lack of capital, limited collateral to access capital, and poor financial records management as detrimental to the survival of MSEs. The participants came up with corrective strategies to financial constraints. P2 stated to access capital from flexible mobile phones companies in Kenya. P1 stated, "I depend on short-term borrowing." The participants explored the constraint of capital by looking at ways to overcome it.

The participants' responses align with Mckenzie and Woodruff's (2016) and Muriithi et al. (2017) assertions that lack of financial capital is a constraint to MSE owners. This study findings indicated that owners of MSEs used access to capital as a strategy to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. As applied to this study, 100% of the participants affirmed using access to capital as a strategy for achieving the survival of their businesses beyond 5 years.

Theme 3: Talent, Passion, and Integrity

3 of the participants identified talent, passion, and integrity as a contributor to the survival of MSEs. The owners' pursuit of their talent with passion and honesty contributed to the customers' patronage of their businesses. P2 said, "I was pursuing my passion and can say I am enjoying what I am doing. I wanted to be a designer and make money." Participant P4 remarked, "I am passionate to my customers. While P1 stated, "I keep the promise I made to my customers." and P4 added, "I am faithful to my customers because it is important to keep your promise to the client." Wamuyu (2015) posited that entrepreneurial creativity positively influences the survival and success of MSEs. The human attributes that necessitate entrepreneurship include the desire for financial independence, the need for self-actualization, and opportunities for social development (Simoes et al., 2015).

Researchers have demonstrated that some business owners establish firms for profit, while others tend to pursue innovation or passion (van der Zwan et al., 2016). Stenholm and Renko (2016) postulated that the survival chances of small business firms in the early years depend on the higher levels of bricolage behaviors among

entrepreneurs. Passionate and bricolage entrepreneur tend to strive to succeed and would try to find solutions for any constraints met to avoid failure. P1 affirmed, "In this industry, talent matters a lot, and if customers identify and like your talent, they will keep coming." Continuing P1 said, "I make a follow up with my customers to receive their feedback on my work." P4 advised, "I would encourage other business people to have passion for the job and be faithful to customers." At the early stage, the survival of start-ups depends on the passion of the entrepreneur and their creativity to develop ways to overcome obstacles and meet the customer requirements (Stenholm & Renko, 2016).

3 participants stated that they benefited from customer referrals to sustain their business. P1 attested, "I benefited from referral and repeat customers" and P2 added, "I put my best for customers to place repeat orders." P4 asserted, "I have benefited from referrals where customers introduce new customers through word of mouth." Continuing P4 explained, "When I make a good design, and my client wears it, interested people will inquire, and eventually, I receive referrals." P4 affirmed, "I am just maintaining the flow and keep depending on customer referrals." P2 said, "Most of the clients get to know my business from word of mouth of those who appreciate my talent. I have many repeat customers." P1 stated, "I do not even advertise my work in the television or radio, but I continue receiving clients through referral."

Koyagialo (2016) demonstrated that passion is a strategy that successful small business owners use to survive beyond 5 years. Entrepreneurs require the necessary drive and commitment to start and sustain a business (Esfandiar et al., 2019). A review of customers records, diaries kept by the participants, and testimonial confirmed the

evidence presented. Participants P1 and P2 presented testimonials from customers that praised the creativity and talent exhibited by the completed works of the participants. P2 displayed several pictures of high profile clients wearing the firm's designs.

The theme talent, passion, and integrity relate to TOC framework of identification of internal constraint to be exploited for the best output. Talent, passion, and integrity are internal characteristics where an owner can have an impact on the survival of the business. MSE owners could pursue their talent with the passion and demonstrate integrity to earn the trust of customers. Odongo and Wang (2016) rendered that business owners with integrity are risk-averse and tend to follow their passion. Van der Zwan et al. (2016) submitted that the pursuit of passion by owners sustains the life of the business. Nurturing of business start-up through the life cycle requires owners' attention to details and integrity to manage constraints (Rahimi & Fallah, 2015). A passionate entrepreneur tends to identify constraints and seeks to find solutions to avoid failure.

The absence of integrity from owners of MSEs could inhibit the growth and survival of the business (Atsan, 2016). Mckenzie and Woodruff (2016) opined that entrepreneurial parents transfer knowledge and skills to children to ensure the continued survival of firms. P2 explained, "I believe I am talented. I never actually studied design and tailoring; my mother used to do similar business." P4 remarked, "my wife is passionate and work with me as my assistant, and we share the tasks."

The participants' responses are consistent with the findings of Koyagialo (2016), Stenholm and Renko (2016), and van der Zwan et al. (2016) who mentioned the role that talent, passion, and integrity play in the survival of small businesses. As indicated in this

study, 75% of the participants confirmed that having talent, passion, and integrity helped them to grow and sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

Theme 4: Nearness to Market

The fourth theme that emerged was the nearness to market. 3 participants indicated they used nearness to market as a strategy for ensuring the growth and sustenance of their businesses. P2 explained that fulfilling orders from Nairobi improved the business and stated, "I decided to relocate to Nairobi to be closer to my customer." P1 narrated how network failure was frustrating telephone orders with customers. Participant P2 attested, "I then decided to get an office in the middle of the town, which made a significant change because customers can stop by the shop at their convenient time."

The theme of the study is in line with the existing literature. Wach, Stephan, and Gorgievski (2015) stated that an essential determinant for the success and survival of small businesses is the geographical location. According to Ross, Adams, and Crossan (2015), the choice of location in traditional business aligned with the niche or targeted market. The growth and survival of MSEs are higher in locations with the availability of utility infrastructures and lower incidences of crime (Shibia & Barako, 2017). Mustafa, Martin, and Hughes (2016) posited that owners of small businesses operate in a rapidly dynamic and active market. Globalization and free trade policies could be detrimental to the survival of MSEs if they cannot compete with cheaper priced imports (Kusumawardhani et al., 2015). 3 participants admitted that they adjusted their business location to gain market share and meet customers' expectations.

Jaouen and Lasch (2015) opined that the location of a brick-and-mortar business could determine the demand, existence, and the future of the firm. The participants acknowledged that change in the marketplace provoked business adjustment for their growth and survival. P2 explained that traveling to Nairobi to deliver items to customers harmed profits. To address the high transportation cost, P2 remarked, "I made a decision to relocate the business office to Nairobi city" and attested, "Since I relocated, I can say business is not bad, and I have started registering growth."

The use of technology to position the product facilitated the nearness to the market. P3 said, "I figured out that I could not only depend on customers who patronize my shop. I had to go out there on the online platform using social media such as Facebook and Instagram." P3 took pictures of items and uploaded on the online platform, which attracted customers who came to the shop to pick the items or ask for delivery. P1 explained the benefit of the diversified market and stated, "When you have your product at your shop and post them online, you increase your chances of getting orders."

The nearness to the market can be enhanced through the use of technology for positioning the product. Grida and Zeid (2019) recommended a technological model to identify the system bottleneck resource, then to exploit and to subordinate the system around the resources. Technology and media provide an avenue for expanding small businesses' customer base to position product closer to the customer (Molinillo, Gomez-Ortiz, Perez-Aranda, & Navarro-Garcia, 2017). Service firms can enhance their survival through online marketing, computerization of the processes, and social network (Rahman et al., 2016).

The nearness to the market aligns with TOC framework of assessing the constraints to the firm. Akaeze and Akaeze (2017) and Oglethorpe and Heron (2013) applied TOC framework and offered corrective action to manage external constraints for the survival of MSEs. Shibia and Barako (2017) attributed the nearness to the market as a contribution to the survival of firms. P2 said, "I chose to locate my business at the city center for my customers to walk in easily." P3 remarked, "since I moved the firm to the busy street, my sales have gone up." KNBS (2016) reported that MSE owners shift to new business locations to overcome stiff competition and to survive. The proximity to the market positions the business closer to the customers.

The existing and new literature collaborated the nearness to the market as a strategy for business survival. The response from the participants was consistent with the findings of Jaouen and Lasch (2015), Molinillo et al. (2017), and Wach et al. (2015) who noted the positioning of the firm in the market. Participants described the gains recorded by moving offices to the city center. The participants identified accessibility to the market as a constraint and decided to eliminate the constraint by relocating nearer to their customers. 3 MSE owners attested that moving nearer to market was a useful strategy for sustaining their businesses beyond 5 years.

Themes tied to the conceptual framework. The themes were related to the TOC framework. Under each theme presentation, evidence was presented from data that was supported by the literature review and also related to TOC framework as the lens guiding the study. Owners of MSE could improve operational performance, the competitive performance, and quality of services by implementing TOC (Panizzolo, 2016). Goldratt

and Cox (1984) asserted that every organization has at least one constraint that is limiting it from maximizing performance and preventing the attainment of its goals. An essential aspect of the first stage of TOC is to identify the most critical constraint that impacts the survival of the business (Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017). The participants of this study suggested strategies that MSE owners might use to manage constraints and sustain business beyond 5 years.

The identified constraints should be maximized to enable the owners of businesses to achieve desired goals (Panizzolo, 2016). Business owners should not see constraints as obstacles to eliminate but instead view them as opportunities to be exploited (Ikeziri et al., 2018). According to Kaspina (2015), organizations that had implemented TOC tend to survive. Zivaljevic (2015) concluded that the use of TOC facilitates the owners to manage constraints and improve processes that sustain the business. Naor and Coman (2017) advocated the use of TOC to improve customer services. As applied in this study, owners of MSEs attested to the implementation of several survival strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

Akaeze and Akaeze (2017) and Wamuyu (2015) applied the tenets of TOC to understand strategies business owners use to identify constraints that hinder the survival of their business. TOC is the most appropriate theory for a change process based on the identification and definition of the desire for change, determination of what to change, and the process to achieve the desired results (Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017; Panizzolo, 2016). As confirmed by the findings, TOC is a useful framework that business owners could use to align operational goals with strategic business goals. All participants used a

combination of strategies involving customer service, access to capital, passion, and integrity, and nearness to market to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. TOC framework served as a lens for supporting the study.

Themes tied to new literature. The four themes from this study relate to new literature on small business survival strategies. The themes of financial capital and nearness to the market relate to the findings of Akinso (2018) study on small business survival strategies. Nearness to the market allows the owners of the firm to respond quickly to customer-based opportunities and enjoy a competitive advantage. Akinso (2018) suggested the positioning of the market and access to flexible capital as possible strategies for the survival of small businesses.

Owners of MSEs addressed capital constraints through borrowing from diverse sources while choosing the ideal business location appropriately. The high cost of borrowing from financial institutions disadvantages the MSE owners (Ndemi & Mungai, 2018). Aware of the constraint of access to capital faced by MSE Owners, the government of Kenya in May 2019 launched a pilot phase of mobile loan product to support all MSEs in the country (Central Bank of Kenya, 2019).

The theme of customer services relates to the findings of Stovall (2018) who highlighted survival strategies to include personal preparation, customer services, and sustaining strategies. Owners of MSEs tend to provide personalized services that are valuable to the customers. Dechant et al. (2018) rendered that an established customer service enables the owners to timely receive customer feedback and promptly process customer orders.

Wani (2018) emphasized the role of entrepreneur characteristics as a survival strategy for owners of small businesses. Entrepreneur characteristics relate to the theme of talent, passion, and integrity of this study. According to Stenholm and Renko (2016), the character of the entrepreneur may influence the survival of start-ups. Wani (2018) highlighted other survival strategies to include education and management skills, financial planning, marketing strategies, and competitive advantages.

Applications to Professional Practice

The identification of the survival strategies that MSE owners use to sustain their business beyond 5 years is fundamental to the survival of the firm. Odongo and Wang (2016) identified some of the challenges that owners of MSEs face to include a limited amount of start-up capital, reduced accessibility of the market, and lack of business experience. The level of competency and lack of technology could affect MSE owners' ability to grow and sustain their businesses (Mairura et al., 2016). The findings from this study could contribute to collaboration, information sharing, and teamwork among MSE owners seeking for survival strategies to grow and sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Owners of small businesses may use the TOC 5-step process to understand their business constraints and implement appropriate strategies to improve business performance, thereby grow and sustain their businesses.

The high failure rate of MSEs is a global business concern. Wairimu and Mwilaria (2017) demonstrated that one-third of MSEs collapse within the first 3 years of operation, with 80% of those that survive failed to reach the fifth year. In Kenya, about 2.2 million new MSE owners fail to sustain their business beyond 5 years (KNBS, 2016).

According to Andrews (2015), small businesses should embark on sustenance pathways to survive in the current fast-paced business environment. Based on the study findings, the most significant contribution to professional practice may be the identification of potential survival strategies that owners of MSEs could use to grow and sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. New and emerging entrepreneurs may use the data from this study to overcome constraints that inhibit business survival beyond 5 years.

Within the Kenyan economy, MSEs account for 92% of businesses, 81% of employment, and contribute about 33% to the country's GDP (KNBS, 2016). The research participants solicited the support of government regarding access to capital and training to enhance their business survival. The findings from this study may contribute to professional practice through the documentation and benchmarking of suggested successful survival strategies that may assist policymakers and business consultants in planning and decision making. These study findings may contribute to the literature on survival strategies of MSEs and provide owners of MSEs with new insight regarding strategies to sustain businesses for continuous operations. MSE owners and scholars could learn from the study findings regarding strategies and best practices for sustaining small businesses beyond 5 years.

MSE owners may gain new knowledge from successful owners to implement strategies that might lead to an increase in sales, profits, and market shares (Gherhes et al., 2016; McKenzie, & Woodruff, 2016). A researcher has acknowledged the benefits for small businesses to adopt strategies to sustain their businesses (Bandyopadhyay, 2017). An increase in the survival rate of MSEs may contribute to thriving businesses through

increased competition, open a new market, and improve the quality of product and services. Some research participants acknowledged that nearness to market was fundamental to the growth and survival of their businesses. The study findings may assist upcoming MSE owners to bridge the knowledge gap on available survival strategies to overcome constraints that inhibit the growth and survival of their businesses beyond 5 years. Potential owners of MSEs may use the findings of this study in aligning their constraints with survival strategies to grow and sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

The participants' responses aligned with Odongo and Wang (2016) and Mairura et al. (2016) on the challenges that MSE owners face that inhibit their business survival beyond 5 years. Some of the challenges that owners of MSEs face include a limited amount of start-up capital, poor accessibility of the market, lack of business experience, low competency level, and lack of technology (Mairura et al., 2016; Odongo & Wang, 2016). All the participants affirmed that they overcame most of the constraints to grow and sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The study findings may help potential MSE owners become conversant with the survival strategies that may help them to grow and sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

Implications for Social Change

MSEs play important roles in driving social and economic growth in Kenya. In Kenya, some notable contributions of MSEs include economic development, poverty reduction, job creation, and improvement of household income (KNBS, 2016). The socio-economic costs of business failure include emotional trauma and stigma to the owner, loss of job and benefits, and indebtedness (Bruhn, 2015). As illustrated in this

study findings, the identification and implementation of survival strategies may assist owners of MSEs to sustain their businesses and continue to provide job opportunities to the local residents.

MSE owners create employment opportunities which tend to encourage the development of local industries (Lampadarios, 2016). MSE owners provide employment opportunities and create markets for raw materials and finished products (Shibia & Barako, 2017). By developing strategies to overcome constraints, owners of MSEs might increase the chances of their business survival (Odongo & Wang, 2016). The implications for positive social change may include the potential to create a repository of strategies that struggling owners of MSEs could replicate. With improved knowledge, MSE owners might have better chances of overcoming constraints that could hinder the growth and survival of their businesses beyond 5 years. The continuous operations of businesses beyond 5 years might contribute to socio-economic development, promote economic stability, and enhance the health of Kenyan citizens.

Owners of MSEs face the obstacles relating to lack of technology and business competencies, which may hinder business survival during the early years of operation (Mairura et al., 2016). Because entrepreneurs contribute to economic growth, the growth and survival of their businesses are essential for any country (Bakar et al., 2015). Sustainable businesses ensure benefits to both the owners and employees, job security, long-term job creation, and contribute to community wealth (Gopinath & Mitra, 2017). A replication of survival strategies could result in the creation of new employment, income stability for employees, stable economic support for the community, and a positive

lifestyle for the residents of Kenya. New employment creation could offer more job opportunities for residents and contribute to the economic growth in the community. The owners of MSEs pay taxes which the local community leaders could use to provide social services such as libraries, schools, and health centers to the community.

By exploring the activities of MSEs, government, academicians, and other interested stakeholders might obtain useful data (Wairimu & Mwilaria, 2017) to support planning and decision making for improved business performance. The MSEs constitute the majority of business firms that drive social and economic growth in many countries (Odongo & Wang, 2016). The failure of a business is a shortfall for both the community and the local government (Errasti, Bretos, & Nunez, 2017). The findings from this study could provide owners of MSEs with useful insights and information on the strategies necessary to overcome constraints that inhibit business survival beyond 5 years. The general public might learn from the survival strategies that owners of MSEs use to grow and sustain their businesses.

Recommendations for Action

Identification and implementation of survival strategies are crucial to the growth and sustenance of MSEs. Small business owners should adopt effective strategies to sustain their businesses (Gauthier, 2017; Hyer & Lussier, 2016). According to Omari and Daniel (2015), most MSE owners fail to survive their first two years of operation due to lack of finance. The lack of managerial training, experience, education, and skills could affect the survival of MSEs (Odongo & Wang, 2016). Owners of small business could improve performance by investing in human capital to offer quality service to customers

(Koyagialo, 2016). Because entrepreneurs lack the finances necessary to sustain their business, they depend on financial intermediaries for their firm survival (Ylhainen, 2017). I recommend that owners of MSEs should identify and implement survival strategies to enhance the performance, growth, and sustenance of their businesses beyond 5 years.

Some MSE owners lack the survival strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years. Hyer and Lussier (2016) posited that lack of strategy and poor implementation of business strategy could result in poor business performance and failure to survive beyond the first 5 years. Omari and Daniel (2015) opined that lack of finance causes the failure of most MSEs in their first two years of operation. The study findings indicated that MSE owners use a combination of survival strategies to grow and sustain their enterprises. I recommend that MSE owners should have adequate knowledge, ability, training, and experience to explore appropriate survival strategies to sustain their businesses.

To sustain their businesses, owners of MSEs should implement survival strategies to improve business performance. The development of policies and guidelines are helpful in the establishment of regular registration of MSEs (MSEA, 2018). The role of entrepreneurship is to drive modern economies through transformative ideas and innovations (Amire et al., 2016). According to Wairimu and Mwilaria (2017), establishing records of all MSEs would provide useful data for government, academicians, and other interested stakeholders. I recommend that policymakers and business consultants should implement strategic frameworks that support the survival of MSEs.

The study findings indicated that owners of MSEs with excellent customer service and good access to capital have a greater chance of survival beyond the first 5 years of operation. I recommend that MSE owners should implement good customer service and have adequate access to capital to improve the chances of their business survival. I plan to disseminate the results of this study to various stakeholders through knowledge sharing in my social media and workplace; presentations at training, seminars, and conferences; and publications in academic and business journals on strategies for survival of business firms and entrepreneurship.

Recommendations for Further Research

The aim of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the survival strategies successful owners of MSEs in Nairobi, Kenya use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Researchers advised small business owners to adopt effective strategies to sustain their businesses (Gauthier, 2017; Hyer & Lussier, 2016). Owners of MSEs who fail to manage their business constraints may not ensure the survival of their businesses (Odongo & Wang, 2016). The study findings provided rich information for future researchers to further explore the strategies owners of MSEs use to grow and sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The study was limited to the sample of four owners of MSEs in Kenya. Researchers who use larger or smaller sample size may generate different themes. Future studies may involve a larger sample size.

This study was limited to cross-sectional, qualitative, multiple case study involving owners of MSEs in the Central Business District of Nairobi, Kenya. I recommend that future researchers should use longitudinal, quantitative, or mixed

methods on diverse participants from various industrial sectors in different geographical locations. Because the goal of the study was not to compare strategies across demographic patterns, the study was limited to a demographic pattern. Further researchers should explore the strategies of native born, immigrants, men, women, generation X, and Y, minorities, or millennial owners of MSEs use to sustain businesses beyond 5 years. Finally, the study is limited to my accurate interpretation of the participants' responses to the interview questions.

The findings of this doctoral study could be improved by other researchers addressing the research limitations by widening the research scope. I recommend further studies to involve a larger sample size that include more MSE owners and employees and the allotment of more time and funds. Finally, I recommend a broader scope of research experts from many disciplines to capture details that might miss in this doctoral research.

Reflections

By conducting this doctoral research, I analyzed the survival strategies owners of MSEs use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. From the research, I learned that participants use a combination of survival strategies to sustain their businesses. Significant learning is the knowledge that owners of MSEs use customer service; access to capital; talent, passion, and integrity; and nearness to market to sustain their business. Reflecting on my experiences within the doctoral study process, I found that I gained a better understanding and knowledge of the research process, which improved my skill in conducting academic research work. From the study findings, I obtained an in-depth understanding of the research problem from four owners of MSEs which changed my

personal biases and preconceived ideas and values on the survival strategies owners of MSEs use to sustain their businesses. I had previously viewed MSE as a simple organization that is easy to run because of the small size.

I contacted the participants to seek their consent to participate in this doctoral study. Reflecting on my use of emails, phone calls, and text messages to convince owners of MSEs to share their experiences with me, I realized that the emails, phone calls, and text messages were not adequate in influencing the participants to participate in the study. After my many attempts to secure interviews with some participants who did not respond to my emails, I learned the importance of networking and following the referrals. I later learned that not all MSE owners had active email accounts.

By using the qualitative research method, I conducted semistructured interviews and interacted with the participants, which improved my networking, interpersonal, listening, and communication skills. I used the purposive sampling technique to select four owners of MSEs who have successfully used survival strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The purposive sampling technique enabled me to select four owners of MSEs who had relevant skills, experience, and knowledge to answer the research question. Interviewing at participants' conducive location and time enabled the respondents to freely express themselves, which allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the research problem.

Conclusion

MSE owners face constraints of sustaining their businesses beyond 5 years. The aim of this qualitative, multiple case study was to use TOC as a lens to explore the

strategies used by MSE owners in Nairobi, Kenya, to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of operation. I used six open-ended questions through semistructured interviews of four MSE owners to collect data that answered the research question. Four themes emerged from the thematic analysis of data indicating that MSE owners in Kenya used survival strategies for sustaining their businesses. The themes were (a) customer service, (b) access to capital, (c) talent, passion, and integrity, and (d) nearness to market.

Contemporary and potential MSE owners may gain useful insights and information on the strategies necessary to overcome constraints that inhibit business survival beyond 5 years. The general public might learn from the survival strategies that MSE owners use to grow and sustain their businesses. A replication of survival strategies provided in this study might result in stable income for employees, new employment opportunity, stable economic support for the community, and a positive lifestyle for the residents of Kenya. The MSE owners pay taxes which the local community leaders could use to provide social services such as libraries, schools, and health centers to the community. Using the TOC as a lens for this study involved MSE owners who shared survival strategies that may fill a gap in the literature. The study findings support the conclusions of previous scholars on the benefits and importance of implementing survival strategies to sustain small businesses beyond the first 5 years. The findings may have potential to create value for businesses through implementing strategies that may result in increased survival of MSEs that contribute to the prosperity of their employees, their families, livelihood of the community, and the national economy.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date of Interview: _____ Code Assigned: _____

1. Introduce self to participant(s).
 2. Introduce the research topic.
 3. Thank the participant for taking the time to respond to the invitation to participate in the study.
 4. Present the consent form, go over contents, and answer questions and concerns of the participant.
 5. Give the participant a copy of the consent form for review and record retention.
 6. Request for participant's permission to turn on the recording device.
 7. Follow the procedure to introduce participant(s) with pseudonym/coded identification; note the date and time.
 8. Remind the participant of the purpose of the study is to explore strategies that owners of micro and small enterprises used to succeed in business beyond 5 years.
 9. Begin the interview with question #1.
 10. Introduce follow-up question(s) where applicable
 11. End interview sequence; discuss the follow-up member checking process with each participant and request for company documents.
 12. Thank the participant(s) for their part in the study. Reiterate contact numbers to call for possible follow up questions and concerns from participants.
- End protocol.

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate in the Study

Date

Company Name

Company Address

Dear Sir/Madam,

As part of my doctoral research proposal at Walden University, I would like to invite you to participate in a research study. I am conducting a study to explore the strategies that owners of micro and small enterprises use to sustain business beyond 5 years. I contacted you to participate because you own a micro and small enterprise (MSE) in the central business district (CBD) of Nairobi. Participation in the research study is voluntary and will be confidential. Please read the enclosed consent form carefully and feel free to ask any questions that you may have before acting on the invitation to participate.

Your participation depends on satisfying the following criteria in addition to being the owner of a micro and small enterprise. The basis for the selection includes the ownership of MSE that is located in CBD, Nairobi, and have been operating the business for more than 5 years. Besides, your firm meets the government of Kenya definition, where a micro and small enterprise is defined as a firm that employs between 1-9 employees and has annual sales turnover not exceeding Kenya shillings 5 million.

If you are willing to participate, indicate by a response to my email, and I will contact you again to set up the personal interview. I anticipate that the total time required for the interview will span no more than one hour. The interviews will be audio recorded,

and as a participant, you will have the opportunity to review the interpreted transcribed report for accuracy before inclusion in the study.

Sincerely,

Samuel K. Too

I will / will not participate in the project.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Date of Interview: _____ Code Assigned: _____

1. What strategies did you use to sustain your business beyond 5 years?
2. How did you implement the strategies that sustain your business beyond 5 years?
3. What were the key barriers to implementing your strategies that sustain your business for over 5 years?
4. How did you address the key challenges to implementing your strategies for business survival?
5. How have you measured the effectiveness of your strategies to sustain business beyond 5 years?
6. What else would you like to share that you did not address about strategies to sustain your business beyond 5 years?