2018

Strategies to Sustain Small Retail Business More Than 5 Years

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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MBA, Cardinal Stritch University, 2009

BSM, Cardinal Stritch University, 2007

Doctoral Study Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Small business failures have a negative effect on the profitability of entrepreneurs. Many small businesses fail within the first 5 years after establishment. Profitable small businesses contribute to the stability of the local economy; however, when failure occurs the economy suffers. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies used by small retail business entrepreneurs to maintain profitability more than 5 years after business establishment. Using Cantillon's theory of entrepreneurship, with a focus on Miller's entrepreneurial orientation for the conceptual framework, this study included a purposeful sample of 3 small retail business entrepreneurs located in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin area. Data from semistructured interviews, organizational documents, and a review of the company's website were collected. Data analysis consisted of using coding techniques, constant comparison, and keyword phrases. Member checking solidified the credibility of the interpretations of the participant responses. Three themes emerged from the data analysis: customer service strategies, human capital strategies, and financial capital access strategies. Findings from this study may contribute to social change by outlining strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs use to maintain profitability and employ individuals. Data from this study may contribute to the growth of small retail business entrepreneurs, the local community, and the employees of the businesses. New knowledge from this study could benefit current and prospective small business owners by sharing information specific to the need to plan for accessing financial capital, practicing good customer service, and making a commitment to attract, hire, and retain, competent employees.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my dear mother Euvetta Bady (Miss Betty). Mother, may you always live forever in my heart. While sitting on your bed in the darkest of days, we had a heart-to-heart talk. Among other things, you told me first that I would one day be Dr. Jennifer Potts, even when I did not believe in myself, you told me that I could reach this milestone with perseverance. I often close my eyes and remember how you lit up the room with your smile; I remember your laugh and how with you around I knew everything would be alright. Nothing could have ever prepared me for you to be gone. I want you to know that I carry your spirit with me with each step I take in this world. No words can express the loss that I feel just knowing that you are not here with me. Your only wish for me was that as the generations grow, we never forget you, I did not understand it then, but I do now. I promise you, as long as we have breath, we won't stop talking about you, passing down your name, photos, love, patience, and wisdom, on that you can depend. My dear mother, may God keep you and allow you to rest in peace, please, believe me, I will always love you. JenJen

Acknowledgments

To my husband, R.P., I could not have made it to this point in my life without you. We have taken this journey together and you have held me down in ways I am unable to express. Our life together has been filled with everything I knew it would be when we first met. There is something about you that is a part of my spirit, and with you, I feel whole, I am forever in love with you, thank you. To Brooke and Nola, you both have made me the mother I am as I have watched you both grow in the light. May God shine his light on you throughout this lifetime and beyond.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Denise Land for walking with me through this journey; even though the road was long, you mentored me through. Thank you Dr. Kevin Davies, for taking the time to guide me with education, learning, and knowledge. I acknowledge Dr. Julia East as the URR for this study. To Avis Gordon, I want to thank you for being in my life and walking this walk with me in the midwest. Barbara Stovall, we started this journey together and have built a friendship that goes unsaid. Most of all, I would like to thank Elaine, Arlene, Lisa, and Samantha, my sisters. We have each other; we lean on each other, and life would not be the same without each of you. We have made it this far together; let us continue to support and lift each other up as no one can take our sisterhood away from us. We are forever family.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Before expanding a small business, the most common first step for entrepreneurs is to develop and maintain a customer base (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [USBLS], 2015). Researchers at the U.S. Small Business Administration (USSBA, 2014) defines a small business as an independent business having fewer than 500 employees. There is a documented need for qualitative research in entrepreneurship that allows for an in-depth study of the phenomenon (Hlady-Rispal & Jouison-Laffitte, 2014). Entrepreneurs undertake risk with the uncertainty of operating a business. Entrepreneurship, as poised by Miller (1983), encompasses risk-taking, innovation, and proactivity. In this study, I explored the strategies used for sustaining a small business past the critical 5-year milestone.

Background of the Problem

Small business success is a critical factor for entrepreneurial profitability at the establishment level. The success or failure of small retail businesses entrepreneurs may depend on the strategies used to sustain their business. Some small retail business entrepreneurs lack strategies to achieve profitability within 5 years after the establishment of their business. The availability of financial resources and technical assistance is necessary for entrepreneurs to realize profitability (Panda & Dash, 2014).

During the start-up phase, entrepreneurs formulate a strategic direction for the creation of new business (Miller, 1983). New business startups contribute to entrepreneurial success (Kegel, 2016). Haltiwanger, Jarmin, and Miranda (2013) found that small business startups contribute to the profitability of the business owner.

Successful business owners are necessary for the sustainability and growth of small business enterprises (Rauf, 2014). Despite business resource availability, small business failure can occur when entrepreneurs seek opportunities to attain profitability (Cui, Sun, Xiao, & Zhao, 2016). Business owners that fail within 5 years of business establishment suffer financial losses (Adebisi & Gbegi, 2013). Moreover, the implementation of inconsistent economic strategies is an indicator of a lack of profitability and ultimate small business failure (Adebisi & Gbegi, 2013). On the other hand, business owners who implement measurable financial strategies can achieve profitability and success (Singh, Kumar, & Colombage, 2017). It is vital for a small business to succeed because should a failure occur, there is a negative effect on the future employment of the owner (Adebisi & Gbegi, 2013). The results of this study may guide and advise small retail business entrepreneurs when creating profitability strategies.

Problem Statement

Small business failures negatively affect the future profitability of entrepreneurs (Ucbasaran, Shepherd, Lockett, & Lyon, 2013). In the United States, 50% of small businesses survive 5 years or more (USSBA, 2014). The general business problem was that some entrepreneurs who begin small business enterprises fail. The specific business problem was that some small retail business entrepreneurs lack strategies to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some small retail business entrepreneurs use to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. The target population I selected for this study consisted of three small retail business entrepreneurs in Milwaukee, Wisconsin who had implemented strategies resulting in profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. More than 50%, or approximately 1.2 million, of the workforce of Wisconsin, are employed in small businesses (USSBA, 2016). The results of this study could contribute to positive social change by identifying strategies some small retail business entrepreneurs use to maintain profitability. The findings could help reduce small business failure rates and increase employment. If small business entrepreneurs succeed rather than fail, positive social change may occur, which could lead to a better quality of life, while contributing to community stability.

Nature of the Study

Qualitative research is an interpretive platform to study the social phenomenon in the natural world (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers can conduct an inquiry using qualitative methodology by seeking to understand the complexities of the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I selected the qualitative research method for this study because there was a need to explore the strategies used by entrepreneurial owners of small retail business stores to maintain profitability and sustain their business more than the first 5 years after business establishment. Researchers use the quantitative research method to collect information from a predefined dataset (Starr, 2014); they apply the quantitative method to perform an examination, test theories, and validate measurements (Groeneveld, Tummers, Bronkhorst, Ashikali, & van Thiel, 2015). I did not select the quantitative research design because I engaged the study participants by asking questions to garner information from their responses. Mixed method research combines qualitative and quantitative methods with the intent of gathering information from each (Starr, 2014). Because the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods can be time-consuming, I determined that the mixed methods approach was not optimal for this study.

When using a case study design, the researcher executes a robust inquiry into a concrete and complex phenomenon within its real-world context (Turner & Danks, 2014; Yin, 2014). The case study researcher endeavors to include the creation of a detailed description of the case through familiarity with each observation experienced (Cronin, 2014). Because I wanted to delve into the reasons some small retail business owners experience longevity, I selected a multiple case study design to explore the strategies used by three small retail business entrepreneurs to sustain their business by maintaining profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment.

Other designs related to the qualitative research method that I considered but disregarded included ethnography and phenomenology. Ethnographers typically focus on the culture of groups, communities, or organizations through a lengthy immersion in the setting by using multiple data collection methods (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Yin (2014) suggested ethnographers spend an extended amount of time in the field capturing observational and interview evidence. Because the goal of this study was to explore strategies used by small business entrepreneurs in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, I disregarded ethnography as a design. I did not select the phenomenological approach because Moustakas (1994) suggested that researchers use phenomenology to understand perceptions and lived experiences of participants. I explored strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs used to maintain profitability, so phenomenology was not a suitable design for this study.

Research Question

The research question for this multiple case study was: What strategies do small retail business entrepreneurs use to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment?

Interview Questions

For this qualitative multiple case study, I used semistructured interviews with open-ended questions to collect information from small business entrepreneurs in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The interview questions were:

1. What strategies did you implement to maintain business profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment?
2. What barriers did you experience to implementing the strategies?
3. How did you address the barriers to implementing the strategies?
4. How did you measure the effectiveness of the strategies?
5. What financial resources did you use to sustain your business for more than 5 years after business establishment?
6. What additional information would you like to share regarding your strategies to maintain business profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment?

Conceptual Framework

The theory of entrepreneurship was the primary conceptual framework for this study. Richard Cantillon (2001) created the theory of entrepreneurship and produced the first analysis of commerce through, *The Essay on the Nature of Commerce in General*, published in 1755. Cantillon asserted that an entrepreneur is an individual who takes on risk with an uncertain income, profit, and price level. Retailers sell merchandise to the public (USBLS, 2015). Cantillon noted that shopkeepers and retailers buy and sell products at an unfixed price to make a profit, thus, take a risk. The dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation, as suggested by Aliyu, Rogo, and Mahmood (2015), include risk and uncertainty, which play an essential role in enhancing small business profitability and sustainability. Through this study, I used the lens of entrepreneurial orientation to provide a contextual foundation to understand reasons small retail business entrepreneurs have and continue to achieve profitability.

Scholars have agreed that the tenants of entrepreneurial orientation rely on innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness as the basis for entrepreneurial decisions and endeavors (Covin & Miller, 2014; Miller, 1983). Miller (1983) determined that an entrepreneurial owner engages in products and market innovation and assumes risks. Kollmann and Stöckmann (2014) indicated that since the 1980s, scholars had studied the entrepreneurial orientation of a firm and its relationship to performance. Exploring strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs use with relation to the entrepreneurial orientation dimensions may contribute to small business profitability (Gathungu, Aiko, & Machuki, 2014; Tajeddini, Elg, & Trueman, 2013).

Operational Definitions

Entrepreneur: An individual who organizes and assumes the risk for business (Santandreu-Mascarell, Garzon, & Knorr, 2013).

Small business: A firm with fewer than 500 employees (USSBA, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Researchers and participants have expectations at the outset of the study. Assumptions are unproven beliefs of study metrics that are not tangible when the researcher initially identifies the study goals (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Unverifiable facts that the researcher believes true are assumptions (Jansson, 2013). I held three core assumptions, related to this study. My first assumption was that the study results may offer value to small retail business entrepreneurs through the identification of strategies to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment, leading to fewer retail business failures. Another assumption was that interviewing a small sample of small retail business entrepreneurs was an appropriate strategy. Rowley (2012) surmised that when conducting interviews, participants know to offer useful insight into the research topic. My last assumption was that participants would provide accurate, truthful, and reliable feedback related to their small business practices.

Limitations

Established limitations are potential weaknesses of the study that the researcher has no bearing over (Svensson & Doumas, 2013). Researchers have described limitations of the study as a reflection of the parameters (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The first limitation of this study was that the information collected may not have reflected the experiences of all small business entrepreneurs. Second, the participants may have lacked the ability to recollect events with precision. Another limitation was the data collection method of face-to-face interviews may have limited the optimal dates and times for the participants to schedule their interviews; thus, I planned a robust schedule with various available times. The last limitation was the possibility that the participants would be unwilling to share experiences related to their small retail business truthfully.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries and conditions imposed by a researcher to clarify the scope of the study (Yin, 2014). A delimitation in case study research is the small number of cases about the extensive range of exploration exerted by the researcher (Svensson & Doumas, 2013). The location-restricted sample I selected for this multiple case study was a delimitation because it limited this study to only small retail businesses operating in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The boundaries of this study were limited to: (a) the sample size of three small retail business entrepreneurs who operate retail stores that have maintained profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment; (b) the limited study location of Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and (c) the time allowed to conduct the study because of my time constraints. Given the parameters, the results of the study may not have proven to be as transferable because the study was bound to three small retail business entrepreneurs who had maintained profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment.

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study can be of value to the practice of business because small retail business entrepreneurs are critical to the growth of the U.S. economy, which drives small business ownership (Dahmen & Rodriguez, 2014). Estimated annual U.S. retail sales have historically increased from $4,102,187 in 2011 to $4,636,345 in 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), showing small retail business profitability is attainable. The findings of this study may provide new insights and business strategies for prospective small retail business entrepreneurs. Exploring strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs use to maintain a profit and achieve sustainability may serve as a means for sharing and eliciting a positive social change for future small retail business entrepreneurs. The positive social change could occur when prospective small retail business entrepreneurs succeed as a result of gaining and applying knowledge from this study before opening their business.

Contribution to Business Practice

Conclusions from this qualitative multiple case study could help increase the success of small business ownership. Findings from this study could help small retail business entrepreneurs identify strategies to increase profitability in their business for more than 5 years after business establishment. The identification of strategies could increase entrepreneur profitability. Profitable small businesses may result in added value for the owner (Al-Dhaafri & Al-Swidi, 2014). The findings from this study could also lead to additional knowledge for small retail business entrepreneurs to assist in making informed decisions about increasing profitability. By exploring strategies that affect the successful small retail business entrepreneur, the results of the study could possibly apply in other business sectors.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change include the potential for more significant financial impact of small business profitability on surrounding communities. Dahmen and Rodriguez (2014) suggested that the U.S. economy drives small business ownership. Sahut and Peris-Ortiz (2014) indicated that there is a relationship between small business owners, entrepreneurs, and innovators; thus, there is an opportunity for the identification of strategies that could serve as a tool for sustainability. The results from the data I gathered in this study may contribute to increased insights regarding how productive small business entrepreneurs can succeed for more than 5 years after business establishment. Ultimately, the community may benefit from profitable small retail businesses with increased financial contributions to the economic base through a reduction in unemployment rates to catalyze social change.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The researcher uses the literature review—a critical component of a research study—to describe and support relevant topic literature (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Further, the process of selecting literature is representative of current knowledge regarding the chosen phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The U.S. economy is a driver of small businesses owners as suggested by Dahmen and Rodriguez (2014). Within this literature review, I will explore strategies related to the profitability of small retail businesses. Using a key search term emphasis for the literature review, I considered small business sustainability and profitability for financial performance. Researchers agreed the definition of sustainability and performance is lacking in the existing research (Schaltegger, Hansen, & Ludeke-Freund, 2015). The literature review will also include a synthesis of literature relating to the theory of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial orientation to identify ways to maintain small business profitability.

I organized the literature review relevant to themes related to the conceptual framework of the theory of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial orientation. The literature for this study included the entrepreneurial orientation concepts, the five dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation, and information related to small businesses. The databases used in the literature search included Google Scholar; ScienceDirect; ProQuest Central; Management & Organization Studies; academic databases; and governmental websites, including the USSBA and U.S. Census Bureau; doctoral studies at Walden University; and SAGE Premier. I gathered scholarly literature using keywords surrounding the successful strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs use to maintain profit for more than 5 years. Key search words included *entrepreneur, entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneur theory, small business, risk, challenges of entrepreneurs, business financing, small business failure, small business success, qualitative research,* and *retail industry.* The literature and articles I found consisted of various sources, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books, seminal sources, government sources, and other scholarly sources regarding the phenomenon of entrepreneurial orientation and the theory of entrepreneurship.

There are 217 references in the entire doctoral study. Included in the references are 205 peer-reviewed sources that represent 94% of the total references. Of these, 195 were published less than 5 years ago, representing 89%. The literature review subsection contains 98 references. Included in the literature review references are 95 peer-reviewed sources that represent 96% of the total sources. Of these, 86 were published less than 5 years ago, representing 87% of the subsection sources.

Conceptual Framework: Entrepreneurship Theory

The conceptual framework I selected for the study was the theory of entrepreneurship. Considered the founder of the theory of entrepreneurship after composing the book, *Essai sur la Nature du Commerce en General* in 1755, Cantillon (2001) separated the *Essai* into three parts: wealth, exchange, and international trade. Cantillon was the first economist to define the entrepreneur as an agent who buys products at uncertain prices; makes new combinations of products; and sells at a higher price, thus taking a risk (Carlsson et al., 2013). Further, Cantillon divided producers in the economy between hired people and entrepreneurs as an economic function within the market. Cantillon surmised that entrepreneurs are risk-prone and drivers of economic growth, profit, and sustainability. Cantillon realized an initial platform for entrepreneurship by acknowledging the undertaking of a higher level of business responsibility.

Entrepreneurs and small business owners seek economic growth and have a foundational role in the economy (Brown & Thornton, 2013). Cantillon (2001) described examples of the economic phenomenon in the *Essai* to include the concept of supply and demand. Market location is also essential for the entrepreneur because there is an interrelation between the flow of money and the physical placement of the labor market (Brown & Thornton, 2013). Entrepreneurial choices affect the ability to earn and spend money, which is a circular flow (Cantillon, 2001). In a circular flow model, wherever customers spend money, regardless of the physical location, entrepreneurs realize a financial benefit (Cantillon as cited in Brown & Thornton, 2013). Cantillon set the stage for entrepreneurs as owners of small businesses within an economic framework (Nunes, 2016). Entrepreneurial actions influence the economy by the infusion of jobs, products, goods, and services, regardless of whether positive or negative.

Additionally, Schumpeter (1934) acknowledged the role of the entrepreneur in the seminal work *The Theory of Economic Development*. Schumpeter believed entrepreneurship involved innovators carrying out new combinations and tearing down previous mixes, leading to the constant change becoming imminent (Canter & Dopfer, 2015). Also, Schumpeter noted that the idea of development is a process driven by entrepreneurial innovation. Schumpeter opposed the entrepreneur being the employer and owner of capital and believed that an entrepreneur was an innovator. Schumpeter surmised that an entrepreneur relied on profitability, new ideas, and a new combination of existing goods and services including at least one of five following concepts (a) new product launch by adding to a known product, (b) new market, (c) first time new markets, (d) new supplies and markets, and (e) creating a new structure. Schumpeter asserted that there are difficulties with entrepreneurship, and that only innovators can survive these differences. Entrepreneurs are central for new product creation and create without the guarantee of survival (Canter & Dopfer, 2015).

Not all scholars agreed that entrepreneurs are solely innovators. Schumpeter (1934) relied on innovation as a driver of growth in the global economy, policy change, new ideas, and creativity. In contrast, Winter (2016) claimed that Schumpeterian entrepreneurship is inconceivable and suggested that Schumpeter stood against policy and governmental structure. Winter stated that entrepreneurs are drivers of economic development who bring forth change in the financial structure by adding new products. In addition, Winter opined against Schumpeter's innovator viewpoint. In short, Winter concluded that the evolution of entrepreneurship theory does not adequately reflect the necessity to migrate the phenomenon of entrepreneurship in alignment with current needs such as mainstream reality-based economic disciplines. Entrepreneurship theory and entrepreneurial orientation is a scholarly theme within the context of historical underpinnings and is a topic worthy of academic research for small business profitability.

Beginning a new venture. Entrepreneurs start businesses for a variety of reasons. Ismail, Husin, Rahim, Kamal, and Mat (2016) suggested that passion and motivation contribute to entrepreneurial success. An individual decides to start a small business because of desire, a skill set, and the desire to become the boss (Hefer, Cant, & Wiid, 2015). Moreover, Estay, Durrieu, and Akhter (2013) noted that motivation is a central driver in the decision to begin entrepreneurship, further indicating that psychological dispositions vary depending on the mindset of the entrepreneur. Estay et al. (2013) concluded that entrepreneurs continually reinvent themselves, whereby exercising creativity and flexibility. Tasnim, Yahya, and Zainuddin (2014) determined that the entrepreneurial mindset is one of desire, passion, and motivation; however, for optimal performance, commitment is necessary. Entrepreneurial success is reliant on the motivation of the individual that seeks new markets, creates a venue, and is not afraid to take a risk for business success (Estay et al., 2013).

New ventures position entrepreneurs for profitability and success. Spawning from a lack of clarity in the constructs from entrepreneurial scholars, Fisher, Maritz, and Lobo (2014) determined that entrepreneurial actions vary depending on the position of the venture. Fisher et al. (2014) concluded that the success of entrepreneurial practices is a multidimensional construct derived from both financial and nonfinancial indicators reliant on the perception of the individual. Entrepreneurial success starts with thoughts different from other managers and is central to policy creation (Fisher et al., 2014). Design, research, and development, as well as governance, are approaches to entrepreneurial policy innovation as suggested by Acs, Astebro, Audretsch, and Robinson (2016). In agreement, Winter (2016) noted that successful entrepreneurs face issues and rely on innovation related to policy provisions within their field. Entrepreneurial success is reliant on competent choices before, during, and after business creation (Winter, 2016).

Self-efficacy. Entrepreneurs position themselves to make decisions for themselves. When determining entrepreneurial outcomes, self-efficacy is a factor (Ahlin, Drnovsek, & Hisrich, 2014). Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is the belief and strength of the individual's capacity to handle being an entrepreneur (Hassan, 2016). Also, Wennberg, Pathak, and Autio (2013) noted that entrepreneurial entry and self-efficacy often go together.

Creativity. The role of creativity is key to entrepreneurship as a business venture. For example, Ahlin et al. (2014) declared that entrepreneurial creativity is essential in the innovation process and ultimate success or failure of the undertaking. In agreement, Tu and Yang (2013) suggested that a positive effect occurs when entrepreneurs use creativity at both the initiation and implementation stages of their business. Creativity can stall if the fear of entrepreneurial risk and failure is prominent from business inception (Hassan, 2016). Embracing entrepreneurial creativity in the business planning process can lead to a successful venture.

The success of small businesses is imperative for economic viability. Kegel (2016) noted that entrepreneurial motivation is the drive to start a business and make it successful. Fisher et al. (2014) developed a measurement scale to evaluate entrepreneur perception of success by delving deep into the reasons why individuals start businesses. Taking a chance and weighing out options is a way that entrepreneurs can move toward profitability.

Driving economic development. Entrepreneurs make economically-driven decisions, take risks, and manage organizations. Entrepreneurship consists of activities of an individual or a group to create a structured economic business (Kegel, 2016). Entrepreneurship is an economic function that individuals use to create new opportunities for market penetration (Carlsson et al., 2013). Entrepreneurs are influential decision makers who add value to a business economy by way of input and outputs and drive economic development. Amire, Prosper, and Ese (2016) posited that entrepreneurship is a driver of the economy in modern society with value in the role of creation, building, and transforming ideas into innovation. Entrepreneurs contribute to economic growth, and entrepreneurial education is a vital driver of financial stability (Bakar, Islam, & Lee, 2015).

Many prospective entrepreneurs and small business owners begin the planning process and have ideas for business success (Alstete, 2014). Entrepreneurship is a choice for individuals with a passion for monetary rewards and the freedom to make decisions without the traditional employer supervision. Innovation is essential when considering entrepreneurial activities (Alstete, 2014). Many individuals from business spectrums seek entrepreneurial opportunities. Whether individuals start businesses for profit or growth, the idea of an individual charting their course is attainable through profitability via entrepreneurial intent.

Risk. Entrepreneurs naturally assume risk as part of new venture creation. Baltar and de Coulon (2014) argued that entrepreneurial attributes rely on the skill to move ideas into action through entrepreneurial projects as well as the ability to assume the risk and deal with uncertainty. In opposition, Alvarez, Barney, McBride, and Wuebker (2014) suggested entrepreneurs must realistically avail themselves of opportunities for exploration. Alvarez et al. (2014) further noted that entrepreneurial action must occur for new venture creation because opportunities will lie dormant without input and solicitation of the entrepreneur. Entrepreneurial intentions rely on cognitive aspects of the individual (Alvarez et al., 2014). Scholarly literature related to the field of entrepreneurship is increasing (Busenitz, Plummer, Klotz, Shahzad, & Rhoads, 2014). Future research regarding the individuality of the entrepreneur as well as the inception of the entrepreneurial mindset is necessary (Walter & Heinrichs, 2015).

General Systems Theory

As a conceptual lens, I considered general systems theory as a paradigm on which to ground this study and explore the strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs used to maintain a profit for more than 5 years after business establishment. Von Bertalanffy (1972) created the general systems theory in the 1930s. Von Bertalanffy speculated that a massive system is comprised not only of a few pieces, but also many tiny parts; consequentially, researchers use systems theory to understand systems. However, Adams, Hester, Bradley, Meyers, and Keating (2014) noted there is a lack of consistency in the definition of general systems theory. In this study, each of the small business entrepreneurs could operate as individual systems reliant on products, pricing, services, and business processes; therefore, the general systems theory did not align with the conceptual lens for the study. After review, I selected the theory of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial orientation as the framework to ground the study regarding the strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs use to maintain a profit for more than 5 years after business establishment.

Contingency Theory

Contingency theory was the last conceptual lens I considered to ground this multiple case study related to the strategies that three small retail business entrepreneurs used to sustain profitability within their organization. Small retail business entrepreneurs must exhibit leadership qualities to achieve and maintain profitability. Fiedler (1965) originally related contingency theory to a successful management style driven by the characteristics of the leader and the situation. Per contingency theory, the method of the leader, whether task or relationship oriented, is a key factor to business success (Fiedler, 1965). Chun-Lan (2015) conducted a study and reviewed theories and literature related to entrepreneurial orientation, the resource-based view, and communication strategies with an emphasis on contingency theory in the high-tech product arena. Chun-Lan found that having an entrepreneurial orientation contributed to new product success in the high-tech field. Although Chun-Lan presented a concept related to entrepreneurial orientation and contingency theory, the population I selected includes owners of profitable small businesses in the retail industry and not the high-tech sector. I decided against further research regarding contingency theory because small business entrepreneurs may delegate responsibility to others; whereas, there is a possibility of a lack of decision making centralized at the top of the organization.

Entrepreneurial Orientation

Entrepreneurial orientation is a pathway to entrepreneurship. Mintzberg (1973) suggested that an organizational strategy for seeking new ventures is reliant upon an entrepreneurial orientation. Mintzberg created the theory of organizational structure and relied on information from strategy-making firms to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of entrepreneurial orientation. Next, Miller (1983) identified that an entrepreneurially-oriented firm possesses core tenants of innovation, risk-taking, and proactiveness. Miller indicated that entrepreneurship is the process of organization and market renewal taken by first movers. Miller suggested that, historically, scholars have outlined leader personalities, the role of the firm, and strategy creation. Miller indicated that there are three types of entrepreneurially-oriented firms. The first type of firm is simple and small with power centralized at the top (Miller, 1983). The next is a planning firm, which is large with formal controls in place (Miller, 1983). The last type of firm, as outlined by Miller, is an organic firm with leaders adapting to the environment with expert-based power. Miller defined entrepreneurially-oriented firms as strategy makers, regardless of the type of firm. Miller noted that simple firms are reliant on the leader to implement strategies related to an entrepreneurial activity. The more internal the leader is, the firm may start entrepreneurial projects (Miller, 1983). In contrast, the more external the leader is, the less likely it is that the firm will take on entrepreneurial projects (Miller, 1983). In agreement, Wales (2016) noted that entrepreneurial orientation has morphed into one of the key constructs in entrepreneurship and management research.

Entrepreneurs are leaders in organizations. Leadership style is key for a successful entrepreneurial oriented firm (Rauf, 2014). Both strategic planning and innovation are other strategies entrepreneurially-oriented leaders use as tools for success and profitability (Rauf, 2014). Rauf concluded that a firm’s entrepreneurial orientation is reliant on strategy implementation and the ability to adjust to changing conditions. Strategy creation and the entrepreneurial orientation measure of competitiveness are indicators of optimal performance for small firms (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). Likewise, Saeed, Yousafzai, and Engelen (2014) indicated that the universal dimensions prevalent in strategy making organizations are innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk.

The dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation include risk and uncertainty, which enhances small business profitability and sustainability (Aliyu et al., 2015). There is a need for further research related to entrepreneurial strategies to achieve profitability (Muchiri & McMurray, 2015). Not all scholars agreed that there are solely three dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation.

Researchers explored the factors associated with entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) acknowledged the foundational work of Miller (1983) as the starting point for the entrepreneurial orientation construct with a narrow focus. Lumpkin and Dess suggested that the purpose of entrepreneurship is to enter new markets and offer new products and that additional entrepreneurial orientation factors (competitive aggressiveness and autonomy) are central to new firm entry. Scholars have studied the five factors of entrepreneurial orientation and have acknowledged legitimacy (Wales, Gupta, & Mousa, 2013; Zhang el al., 2014). Tasnim et al. (2014) identified a lack of a consistent definition of entrepreneurial orientation. Gathungu et al. (2014) surmised that to collectively realize the benefit of firm-level performance resulting from entrepreneurial orientation, the three common measures (risk-taking, innovation, and proactivity) should accompany two additional measures: competitive aggressiveness and autonomy. Awareness of the dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation is central to successful entrepreneurial ventures.

Entrepreneurial orientation coexists with two dominant frameworks. Within the context of entrepreneurial orientation, there are five dimensions that relate to two main constructs: unidimensional and multidimensional (Wales, 2016). Miller (1983) presented the original unidimensional model of entrepreneurial orientation: risk-taking, innovativeness, and proactiveness. Next, Miller suggested that a firm exhibiting entrepreneurial orientation needs to use all three constructs for success. Further, the multi-dimensional construct of entrepreneurial orientation presented by Lumpkin and Dess (1996) suggested that an entrepreneurially-oriented firm could exist independently from the five entrepreneurially-oriented dimensions. Companies can thrive using one or all five entrepreneurially-oriented constructs: autonomy, innovativeness, competitive aggressiveness, risk-taking, and proactiveness (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Discourse is an issue within the realm of entrepreneurship because many firms that seek a profit exhibit at least one dimension of entrepreneurial orientation.

Miller (1983) posed the original construct of entrepreneurial orientation as innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactivity. Also, Lumpkin and Dess (1996) brought forth the addition of competitive aggressiveness and autonomy. Wales (2016) suggested that the two conceptual approaches are relevant and are prevalent for scholarship within the entrepreneurial orientation framework. Further, Wales noted the need for alternative entrepreneurial orientation measurement approaches to include computer-aided research and secondary measures such as firm resource allocation. Entrepreneurial orientation should consist of innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactivity at the firm-level (Murimbika & Urban, 2014). The field of entrepreneurial orientation is a defined area for business planning purposes and small business conceptualization.

Risk-taking dimension. Entrepreneurs embrace risk recognizing the possibility of failure. The willingness to invest in an idea with an uncertain outcome is the foundation of a risk-taking firm (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). If a company is to survive, the entrepreneur takes a modest risk without innovation being the precursor for entrepreneurship (Hyytinen, Pajarinen, & Rouvinen, 2015). Exposure to risk is prevalent for firms that venture into large markets (Dai, Maksimov, Gilbert, & Fernhaber, 2014). Further, companies that engage in high risk-taking opportunities to generate sales such as international expansion can benefit from an innovation and risk mixture (Dai et al., 2014). Leaders are eager to take risks if a decision-making capacity is present and possible consequences identified at the outset (Brettel, Chomik, & Flatten, 2015). Managing risk is the role of the entrepreneur while continuously seeking a profit (Brettel et al., 2015). Anderson, Kreiser, Kuratko, Hornsby, and Eshima (2015) proposed a formative construction of conceptualizing whether entrepreneurial orientation is an attitudinal or behavioral construct for delving into managerial attitudes toward risk-taking. Also, Anderson et al. (2015) distinguished between managerial attitude toward risk and the actions taken to control risk and found that the senior most manager is the leader when determining how a firm behaves regarding risk perception. Leaders of the organizations embrace entrepreneurial orientation and risk while seeking a profit.

Business ventures that are acceptant of risk to stay safe from loss may not equivocate to profit. Even though entrepreneurship is a risky venture, when firms commit resources to projects and activities, the firms can either take a risk and reap the financial benefits, or not take the risk and miss an opportunity (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Risk management is an important consideration for an entrepreneurially-oriented firm; the organization must realize the possibility of complete failure (Mishra, Barclay, &

Lalumiere, 2014). Owners of highly entrepreneurial firms take risks to compete with other firms (Mishra et al., 2014). Firms engage in organizational risk-taking when they are at a competitive disadvantage (Mishra et al., 2014). In contrast, Cheng, Hong, and Scheinkman (2015) found that firms with a high-risk propensity have managers who work just as hard as firms with a low-risk propensity. Individuals entrenched in the firm such as entrepreneurs rely on instinct to perform and risk is not the determining factor associated with performance (Cheng et al., 2015). Entrepreneurial risk is commonplace within the business climate to compete.

Entrepreneurs realize risk as commonplace when seeking a profit. A prominent dimension within the entrepreneurial orientation framework is a risk (Cantillon, 2001). Cantillon (2001) claimed that taking a risk by working for oneself boasted a successful entrepreneur. Taking a risk is a part of a first mover strategy (Cantillon, 2001). Miller (1983) suggested that entrepreneurs associate themselves with risky ventures, proactive outreach, and being first to create a product. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) indicated that needs change throughout the business lifecycle and not all entrepreneurial orientation dimensions are equally important when facing risk. The nature of the entrepreneurial orientation with relation to risk is subject to change such as with firm age and size (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). To achieve success, an engaged entrepreneur will research business opportunities, even with the possibility of failure.

Entrepreneurs seek risk to gain profitability. To this avail, risk propensity is a determining factor to entrepreneurial financial success or failure (Cui et al., 2016). Moreover, an alert entrepreneur’s position embraces growth capabilities that others may lack (Cui et al., 2016). For example, Schumpeter (1934) suggested that entrepreneurs take risks by veering from traditional lines that an ordinary businessperson finds comfort. In agreement, Cui et al. (2016) stated that entrepreneurial risk propensity is a key factor for the positive enlightenment of other entrepreneurial orientation dimensions: autonomy, proactiveness, and innovation. To make a profit, entrepreneurs embrace risk with the realization of possible failure.

Profitable companies analyze risk as a part of seeking financially stable ventures. Risk-oriented firms embrace opportunities for growth while seeking profits and market share (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Implementing strategies to control for risk through differentiation is a way that companies reduce costs factoring in a lower investment initially (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). In agreement, Anderson et al. (2015) suggested that entrepreneurs accept or deny risk by top-level managers and attitude toward risk is a facet of entrepreneurial behavior. Risk and proactiveness are key entrepreneurially-oriented dimensions for companies seeking profits.

Entrepreneurs experiment with new ideas and products during the business startup phase. Entrepreneurs start risky ventures as a form of experimentation in uncertain markets (Kerr, Nanda, & Rhodes-Kropf, 2014). For example, there are two types of experimentation prevalent for entrepreneurs; the economic experimentation that allows new ideas, products, and technologies to displace existing products; and the process of bringing a new product or idea to market (Kerr et al., 2014). In conclusion, Kerr et al. (2014) noted that there are many options for new business ventures. Thus, entrepreneurs must make careful decisions when using scarce resources as risk is prevalent. Accepting the possibility of success or failure during startup is a reasoned risk acknowledged within the course of entrepreneurship.

Proactiveness dimension. The entrepreneurial-orientation dimension of proactiveness is the basis for opportunities firms takes to introduce new products before the competition to make a profit. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) suggested that within entrepreneurial orientation, a proactive firm has an advantage as a first mover. Firm owners seek to bring new products to market and actively engage market opportunities to set futuristic trends (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Intentional change is inherent in firms that operate in a proactive mode as they are progressively forward and positioned for growth (Miller & Friesen, 1978). In agreement, Rahman, Civelek, and Kozubíková (2016) suggested that proactive firms continuously seek new opportunities to make a profit during new market entry. Owners of proactive companies exercise the ability to make quick decisions that lead to profitability and competitive financial advantage (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). In agreement, firms that have higher sales, company growth, and profits exhibit proactive tendencies (Munoz, Welsh, Chan, & Raven, 2015). New product development and proactivity measures can lead to an increase in sales and profitability (Welsh, Munoz, Deng, & Raven, 2013). For firms to gain a competitive advantage, the usage of new technologies and differential products is necessary (Srivastava, Franklin, & Martinette, 2013). Not only is a firm’s proactive business acumen a factor for success; but also, a firm’s proactive attitude also leads to successful ventures (Munoz et al., 2015). A firm’s profitability increases with proactive measures for growth.

Proactive firms hire competitive thinkers that pay close attention to market activities. Proactiveness guides a company's entrepreneurial orientation by embracing a perspective that is forwardly progressive (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Further, passiveness is the exact opposite of proactivity as there is a lack of ability to seek out new markets and react with a plan (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Also, Miller (1983) surmised that an entrepreneurially-oriented firm is the first to identify and act on new products and services in front of competitors. To this end, Miller suggested that a company first to innovate using processes geared towards proactive tendencies, regardless of the economic climate, could survive. Proactive firms have an increased profitability because the competition of the market relies on management decisions (Rahman et al., 2016). Proactive firms are alert and capable of facing new situations despite the prevalent risk (Hughes & Morgan, 2007). Entrepreneurially-oriented firms are reliant on managers with the ability to act on market demand with the goal of making a profit.

Proactiveness is the use of a forwardly progressive platform for companies. Environmental scanning is a method used for the identification of opportunities and threats to make concrete decisions (Welter, Mayer, & Quick, 2013). Business owners are proactive in the quest to find new opportunities for business sustainability (Welter et al., 2013). Entrepreneurs of proactive companies experience a first mover advantage for business relations (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). In agreement, an entrepreneur of a proactive company is the first to innovate when a market demand arises (Miller, 1983). The entrepreneur of a proactive company can perform in the current situation; however, the final goal is for ultimate survival (Hughes & Morgan, 2007). Strategically anticipating new business demands relies on entrepreneurial proactivity and awareness.

Innovation dimension. Business innovation is important for long-term firm survival and sustainability. Hyytinen et al. (2015) theorized business innovation and firm survival rates result in a positive association for entrepreneurial ventures. In agreement, Kraus (2013) concluded that innovation is a key driver for small business firm survival. Kraus suggested firms that are willing to take a risk and focus on innovation boast higher performance rates. Innovation at the firm-level is key for entrepreneurial orientation and performance. Linking entrepreneurial orientation and learning is important for small businesses performance and competitiveness (Bengesi & Roux, 2014; Brettel & Rottenberger, 2013). Further, Brettel and Rottenberger (2013) concluded that entrepreneurial orientation and continuous learning are factors for performance and innovation. If entrepreneurially-oriented firms invest in new products and services through innovative measures, the possibility of profitability is likely to increase.

Strategic management practices that lead to innovation are vital for business success. Murimbika and Urban (2014) found that innovation is a decisive factor for new product development and business success. Internal business processes and strategic planning lead to innovation, new business lines, and financial gain (Murimbika & Urban, 2014). Further, Murimbika and Urban concluded that a firm’s innovativeness is a strategic tool used to avert mundane operations. Innovative firms drive the owners to work values (Soinen, Puumalainen, Sjogren, Syrja, & Durst, 2013). Innovation is key when seeking new business creation for new services and products as suggested by

Soinen et al. (2013). Bello and Ivanov (2014) determined that constant upgrade is a factor for new businesses survival and innovative initiatives. Entrepreneurial startups are key drivers for growth through innovative measures.

Entrepreneurs' plans for success start with innovative ideas. Parhankangas and Ehrlich (2014) conducted a study and found that, historically, investors have shied away from overly innovative products at inception. Also, some investors acknowledge the assumption that entrepreneurs first to market may lead to initial failure (Parhankangas & Ehrlich, 2014). Innovation and success are reliant on planning.

Small business owners seek innovative measures for continuity. Santandreu-Mascarell et al. (2013) found that innovation is the foundation for small business success. Santandreu-Mascarell et al. noted that entrepreneurial characteristics that lead to success are goal setting, systematic planning, monitoring, efficiency, quality, and persistence. Further, Santandreu-Mascarell et al. found that entrepreneurs who apply strategies for innovation and adapt to changing business needs are prime for success.

Competitive aggressiveness dimension. Firm owners are responsible for business decisions related to products, location, employees, as well as new market entry. Rodriguez-Gutierrez, Moreno, and Tejada (2015) suggested that growth depends on location and firm characteristics with an emphasis on competitiveness. Incentives are positive motivators for firm performance and growth leading to competitive advantage (Rodriguez-Gutierrez et al., 2015). Entrepreneurs seek firm competitiveness and growth for business stability. Lechner and Gudmundsson (2014) found that within competitive businesses, the strategy is high and leads to optimal firm performance. Small firms place strategic efforts on entrepreneurial orientation factors to include autonomy, proactiveness, innovativeness, and risk-taking for optimal competition (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). The owners of firms that compete within their market are knowledgeable of the business, position, challenges, and growth opportunities.

The owners of small firms pay close attention to competitor's business actions when entering markets positioned for profitability. Leaders perform research to exploit new markets competitively as suggested by Abebe and Angriawan (2014). Small firm managers are closer to daily operations than large firm managers; thus, positioned to compete in the marketplace (Abebe & Angriawan, 2014). Finally, Abebe and Angriawan noted that companies with a strong market and entrepreneurial orientation position themselves strategically for growth. Competitive aggressiveness is the measure of how firms deal with competitors and goods already in the market (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Entrepreneurial orientation and competitive strategy are areas firms implement for high performance (Linton & Kask, 2017). Starting with the work of Porter's 1980 generic model of competitive strategies, management research has tied competition with firms that are entrepreneurially oriented as suggested by Linton and Kask (2017). Moreover, successful firms engage in competitive strategies, using the entrepreneurial orientation subdimensions of risk, proactiveness, and innovation as a foundation for optimal performance (Linton & Kask, 2017). Competition is a factor in the quest for entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance.

Lechner and Gudmundsson (2014) used Porter's 1980 typology of competitive advantage, differentiation, and cost leadership to outline ways firms satisfy customer demand and make a profit. Lechner and Gudmundsson found that different aspects of entrepreneurial orientation dimensions related to the competitive strategies of firms could bear negative consequences. Negative connotations arise from risk-taking and competitive aggressiveness about cost and differentiation strategies used by firms (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). A small firm develops an entrepreneurial orientation in alignment with the individualized competitive strategy based on the needs of the firm (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). Firm leaders must exercise caution and approach when seeking to implement strategies in a competitive environment.

Autonomy dimension. Some entrepreneurs exhibit a sense of autonomy when starting a new business alone. New venture creation is an opportunity to seek help, including governmental agency support (Longui & Nystrom, 2014). Also, political structures create some entrepreneurial policy to assist in the early startup and prestart up phases (Longui & Nystrom, 2014). Individuals seek assistance when starting an entrepreneurial venture in areas of finance, taxes, laws, business planning, as well as insurance needs (Longui & Nystrom, 2014). Entrepreneurs who explore resources before startup have business planning tools to make knowledgeable decisions.

Autonomy is necessary for firms to realize business strength. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) suggested that autonomy is a way to bolster new business practices and opportunities separate from current business practices. Further, Lumpkin and Dess surmised that autonomous firms act alone and are not contingent on other entrepreneurial orientation dimensions. Independent firms quickly adapt to a changing environment while continuing business operations (Rahman et al., 2016). Entrepreneurial orientation and performance link to timely action and management activities (Munoz et al., 2015). Autonomous actions lead to new opportunities.

The autonomy to act alone is important for entrepreneurially-oriented firms. Firm-level actions using autonomous intent is contingent on firm size (Rahman et al., 2016). Rahman et al. (2016) further found that there is a significant difference in the autonomous actions of a micro, small, and medium-sized firm. Rahman et al. suggested that employees at micro firms are less autonomous than employees at a medium-sized firm. Firms at a micro level have a lower independence of entrepreneurial orientation (Rahman et al., 2016). The independent action of a single individual versus a team is the basis of autonomy (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Further, Lumpkin and Dess (1996) found that entrepreneurship is a stable field because autonomous people put forth new ideas into action in markets. Similarly, Miller (1983) found that firms with a high entrepreneurial orientation have autonomous leaders willing to act. Entrepreneurs act in an autonomous capacity to advance their business and achieve profitability.

Small Business Success

Small businesses are emerging as entrepreneurs decide to invest money in their ventures. Researchers define a small business as a firm with less than 500 employees, regardless of full or part-time status (USSBA, 2014). Small business owners are vital to the U.S. economy for the creation of jobs and economic growth (Haltiwanger et al., 2013). Small businesses success and failure reflect an entrepreneur’s success and failure (Sarasvathy, Menon, & Kuechle, 2013). As recognized by Sarasvathy et al. (2013) small business owners with the tenacity to accept failure and start a subsequent business can thrive. Realizing the variables for success is crucial during the business startup phase (Halabi & Lussier, 2014). Small business entrepreneurs seek new opportunities for growth within the economy.

Entrepreneurs’ small business skills often are reliant on successful ventures. Panda and Dash (2014) conducted a study of constraints faced by entrepreneurs in developing countries regarding business success factors and found that entrepreneurs have a decreased probability of failure with an increased skill set. Further, policies guiding financial constraints, infrastructure, and business environment have a negative consequence to new business success (Panda & Dash, 2014). Within their study, Panda and Dash found that entrepreneurial success from inception relies on the availability of financial resources. Financial constraints can have a negative effect on the entrepreneur’s small business path to profitability.

Knowledge is necessary for successful small businesses in developing countries. Chowdhury, Islam, and Alam (2013) noted that firms with educated and skilled workers have the propensity to succeed. Chowdhury et al. pointed out that the success of small businesses aligns with marketing factors such as research capacity, securing an optimal location, and the provision of adequate products and services. If the marketing factors are lacking, failure is likely (Chowdhury et al., 2013). Lastly, Chowdhury et al. found that access to financing, technology improvements, and political influence are variables highly associated with growth. Small business knowledge and research are key to planning for success.

Small business owners often lack the skill set to manage performance. Gupta and Gupta (2015) claimed that business owner performance is an evolutionary process from inception to the long term. The lack of adopting a performance model proves harmful to business and managerial success (Gupta & Gupta, 2015). Further, firm entrepreneurial orientation is stronger when managers embrace a long-term entrepreneurial strategic plan, and performance is optimal. On the other hand, Gupta and Gupta found that when firms do not plan strategically for the long term, success demises over time in comparison to firms that invest in the strategy.

Human capital is an important factor to maintain a profitable small business. The development of committed employees reduces turnover rates (Allen, Erickson, & Collins, 2013). Further, small retail business entrepreneurs can leverage human capital by an investment in a commitment based human resources framework for ultimate profitability (Allen et al., 2013). Small business success is contingent on the alignment of employee needs with employer needs to recognize profitability (Boxall, 2013). In addition to cultivating the employee's skill set, employers can use empowerment tools such as training, development, and upward mobility for retention (Boxall, 2013). Boxall (2013) investigated how managers can improve the relationship between the interests of the organization and the interests of the employee in a quest for retention. Through the research, Boxall assessed the quality of the employee and employer relationship by reviewing factors such as the quality of the match, the alignment of commitment, flexibility, and the extent of the employer return on the investment in the human capital.

Boxall concluded that there is a need within human resource management to garner the knowledge, skills, and energies of employees with their personal needs.

Maintaining a relationship with customers is imperative for business longevity and success. Mohammed and Mohammad (2015) presented study information related to the customer relationship management of telecom operators in Bangladesh to determine factors for business success. Business owners maintain a customer relationship through organizational performance and knowledge of the customer’s needs and wants (Mohammed & Mohammad, 2015). The results of the study identified three themes for business success, which are satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability (Mohammed & Mohammad, 2015). Customer service-oriented firms can realize success by employing tools to understand customer needs and wants by building relationships at the outset.

Small Business Failure

Small business failure is an opportunity to plan; poor strategic planning results in a high failure rate of new businesses (Alstete, 2014). Alstete (2014) suggested that a lack of proper business planning often results in small business failure. In agreement, Decker, Haltiwanger, Jarmin, and Miranda (2014) noted that even with motivation, startup firms in the U.S. fail or do not grow due to poor planning, with only a small portion flourishing. Rapid expansion without planning is a reason for new business entrant failure (Fan, Tan, & Geng, 2014). Additionally, business survival increases with measured operational growth as suggested by Fan et al. (2014). Proper planning is tool businesses could rely on for continuity.

A founding theorist within the realm of small business success and failure rates was Robert N. Lussier (1995). The work of Lussier included the creation of the Lussier prediction model used in business to predict young business failure or success (Halabi & Lussier, 2014; Lussier, 1995; Marom & Lussier, 2014). Based on managerial attributes that lead to success or failure, financial ratios are absent from the Lussier prediction model (Lussier, 1995). Managerial attributes are germane to individuals who lead organizations through business services such as policy makers, advisors, coaches, trainers, and mentors as suggested by Lussier. The Lussier prediction model applied 15 small business factors to realize the probability of success or failure within a company reliant on resource allocation (Halabi & Lussier, 2014). The Lussier model reflected on factors reliant for small business failure or success indicators to include (a) planning, (b) recordkeeping and financial performance, (c) education, (d) management experience, and (e) access to capital. The Lussier prediction model is a framework to allow organizational leaders including policymakers, advisors, and lenders to understand entrepreneurial strengths and weaknesses in the beginning stages of business inception (Halabi & Lussier, 2014). In tangent with the Lussier model, Alagirisamy (2014) used a nonfinancial neural network model and surveyed 113 small business entrepreneurs in India regarding small business attributes for success. Alagirisamy found that access to capital was the primary factor for small business success or failure, also noting that owner management experience was a factor.

Predicting business collapse is a vibrant area of research. Horta and Camanho (2013) developed a blueprint to predict failure in the construction industry. Results indicated that business failure has detrimental implications for loss of employees, creditors, community members and investors (Horta & Camanho, 2013). To predict business failure, variables such as strategically using data for operations, awareness of company size, activities, and location are necessary (Horta & Camanho, 2013). Business failure prediction by using the tools available is worthy of entrepreneurial investment.

Business failure can have a negative consequence for entrepreneurs. Research related to the exploration of firm failure is recent in the study of entrepreneurship (Jenkins, Wiklund, & Brundin, 2014). Entrepreneurs faced loss, grief, emotional distress, and financial strain due to business failure as noted by Jenkins et al. (2014). Entrepreneurial awareness of stressors related to both individual and firm failure is key for personal wellness (Jenkins et al., 2014). Firm failure is an opportunity for entrepreneurial growth.

Small business leaders often lacked the skill set to implement measures to avert failure. Khelil (2015) claimed that previous scholars had devoted less time researching the phenomenon of entrepreneurial failure. Despite the lack of resources available, some entrepreneurs refused to give up when faced with underperformance, and others persevere in a substandard environment (Khelil, 2015). Disappointment is an emotional cost for small business failure (Jenkins et al., 2014). Khelil suggested that the causes of entrepreneurial failure are situational and diverse with each business venture.

Entrepreneurs exit firms for a variety of reasons. Historically, failure aligns with entrepreneurial and firm exit (Jenkins & McKelvie, 2016). Despite historical categorization, Wennberg and DeTienne (2014) identified the lack of an individual analysis when entrepreneurs exit. Not every entrepreneurial exit is negative, as reasons are vast including retirement, relocation, financial loss, lackluster performance, and insolvency (Wennberg & DeTienne, 2014). When determining firm failure and entrepreneurial exit, firms that are independent often posed confusion as owners usually have dual roles in both the firm and personal level endeavors (Ucbasaran et al., 2013). Further, Ucbasaran et al. (2013) found that small business failure poses a detrimental hardship to economic viability. Embracing the reason for entrepreneurial departure is a necessity before categorizing failure with exit.

Small Business Profitability

Small businesses organizational structure relies on planning to achieve profitability. Khandwalla (1973) explored the organizational structures of 79 manufacturing firms and determined factors associated with effective organizational design. Khandwalla concluded that underlying factors of leadership’s use of management tools and delegation are central for profitability. In a study conducted by Parhankangas and Ehrlich (2014) relating to businesses seeking financial resources, results found that creating a viable business planning tool and presenting concrete positive information for profitability is a basis for investor acceptance. On the other hand, Parhankangas and Ehrlich found potential investors fear firms that exemplify profits and label as a risk to deny funding. A measured approach to strategic planning is optimal for generating a profit.

Potential small business owners and entrepreneurs lack funding resources and access to capital markets. Brau, Cardell, and Woodworth (2015) noted entrepreneurs require financial worthiness to obtain mainline bank funding; thus, rely on accumulated savings and borrowed funds from family and friends. Microfinance lending companies offer higher interest rates, albeit these firms are lucrative to small business owners seeking funds (Brau et al., 2015). About obtaining riskier funding options, Roberts (2013) concluded that higher interest rates do not infer a high rate of repayment failure from microfinance lending agencies. Microfinance lending agencies tend to experience a higher profit margin, however, had higher operating costs (Roberts, 2013). In concert, creative options for lending such as hybrid loans for entrepreneurs who exhibit a positive repayment history is a way to increase business profitability (Brau et al., 2015).

Researchers align financial performance and entrepreneurial success. Lumpkin, Moss, Gras, Kato, and Amezcua (2013) found that using the composite measures of entrepreneurial orientation to include; risk, innovativeness, autonomy, proactiveness, and competitive aggressiveness lead to positive financial performance. Social motivation and relationship building is an opportunity to reap economic benefits for entrepreneurs (Lumpkin et al., 2013). Further, entrepreneurs who are socially active can interact with multiple stakeholders to drive business profitability (Lumpkin et al., 2013; McKeever, Jack, & Anderson, 2015). Entrepreneurs seek opportunities for profit by social awareness and relationship building skills.

Business strategy is a factor when owners seek profitability, performance, and growth (Blackburn, Hart, & Wainwright, 2013). Blackburn et al. (2013) indicated that understanding business owners’ insight for growth is key when seeking profitability. Blackburn et al. surmised that hands-on businesses owners position themselves for accelerated growth; whereas a lack of oversight may lead to stagnation. Blackburn et al. considered the age of the business owner as a factor leading to optimal collaboration and ultimate growth. Finally, Blackburn et al. found that the business owners' educational attainment is a factor when growing and managing the business; thus, not relevant to daily operations.

Various definitions of business profitability apply to small business. For this study, I considered a small retail business entrepreneur profitable when the leader sustained the business operations for more than 5 years after business establishment. The summation from the review of the literature is that entrepreneurs must act competitively and take advantage of opportunities when presented. With the literature presented in a thematic framework, the entrepreneur's success was reliant on the five dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation, which are innovation, proactiveness, risk, competitive aggressiveness, and autonomy. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) established a version of the entrepreneurial orientation as the processes and decision-making strategies of entrepreneurs that lead to the new entry. Further organizational factors such as size, structure, strategy, firm resources, culture, and manager's characteristics measure the entrepreneurial orientation of a firm (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). The entrepreneurial orientation structure with relation to firm profitability was a manner to utilize resources strategically.

Business failure is not always the end of an entrepreneurs' portfolio. Once a business failure occurred, there is a likelihood of subsequent business endeavor (Yamakawa, Peng, & Deeds, 2013). Yamakawa et al. (2013) explored ways that entrepreneurs not only rebound from failure, but also they learn from failure. Yamakawa et al. noted that failure motivates entrepreneurs to seek new venture creation. Further, Yamakawa et al. found that entrepreneurs renew themselves after a business failure. Finally, the quest for business success is a worthwhile endeavor for entrepreneurs.

Transition

Section 1 contained a discussion of the problem statement, purpose statement, and the nature of the study. Also, I encompassed the path taken for selection of the use of a qualitative method and a multiple case study design. Next, I presented a discussion of the significance of the study, followed by a review of the professional and academic literature to conclude the section. In Section 1, I introduced the basis of the research and the background of the topic selected. The literature review included issues specific to small retail business entrepreneurs’ sustainability such as the theory of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial orientation, risk, proactiveness, innovativeness, autonomy, and competitive aggressiveness. The literature review also included a review of business success factors as well as business failure and profitability factors.

The theory of entrepreneurship with a focus on entrepreneurial orientation provided a framework for the understanding of factors related to small retail business profitability. Cantillon (2001) first created the theory of entrepreneurship in relation to someone who took a higher risk, worked for themselves, and sought a monetary profit. The application of entrepreneurial orientation was the lens used to ground the study. Miller (1983) originated the theory of entrepreneurial orientation. Miller regarded an entrepreneur as someone who took a risk to make a profit, acted proactively, sought business opportunities, and innovated by engaging in new products and services. Next, Lumpkin and Dess (1996) expounded on the theory of entrepreneurial orientation by indicating that for entrepreneurs to fully succeed as a new entrant, there is an ebb of competitive aggressiveness and autonomy necessary. Further, Lumpkin and Dess proffered that a new entrant requirement lacks all five dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation; however, to compete most dimensions will prevail.

In Section 2, I present detailed information about my role in the study, the methodology, the design, the participants, the population, the sampling method, the ethical research considerations, data collection instruments, the data collection technique, data organization technique, data analysis, reliability, and validity. Within these elements, I outline the data collection procedures. I also present a detailed discussion of the adherence to ethical research guidelines, the methods to achieve study credibility, the methods to assure transferability of study findings, the acknowledgment of confirmability, and the recognition of saturation.

In Section 3, I include a review and summary of the purpose of the study and research question. I discuss the results of the study. I present the findings and applications to professional practice. From there, I conclude with a discussion regarding the implications of social change, reflections, and my study recommendations.

Section 2: The Project

Small businesses are the foundation of the U.S. economy and have provided 14.3 million of the 22.9 million new jobs created between 1993 and 2013 (USSBA, 2014). Strategies to attain profitability are crucial for small business entrepreneurs' success for more than 5 years after business establishment. Small businesses are critical drivers of jobs at the local level (Shukla & Shukla, 2014). This section will contain detailed information regarding the qualitative research method and design, the population selected, the method for collecting and analyzing data, the role of the researcher, and the participants. I also discuss the process chosen to follow ethical standards

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to determine what strategies small retail business entrepreneurs used to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. The target population I selected for this study consisted of three entrepreneurs from Milwaukee, Wisconsin with small retail businesses who implemented strategies resulting in profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. Over 50% or approximately 1.2 million of the state's workforce are employed in small businesses (USSBA, 2016). The results of this study could contribute to positive social change through the identification of strategies small retail business entrepreneurs used to maintain profitability and my findings could help reduce small business failure rates and increase employment. If small business entrepreneurs succeed instead of fail, positive social change may occur, which could lead to a better quality of life while contributing to community stability.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher in this qualitative case study relied on the presumption that I was the instrument collecting data from the respondents. The purpose of the research was to conduct a qualitative case study by interviewing the owners of three small retail businesses who operated for more than 5 years after business establishment. The role of the researcher involves an intricate understanding of the subject (Collins & Cooper, 2014). Qualitative researchers rely on interviews to confirm and fortify their study as reliable (Foley & O'Connor, 2013). The role of the researcher is to garner answers to questions by building trust, maintaining optimal relations, and respecting ethical issues (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To assure ethical adherence, I participated in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) ethics training course "Protecting Human Research Participants." Qualitative researchers adhere to strict guidelines when ethically conducting research.

My relationship with the research topic derived from my experience as a small business owner. As an executive director of a business improvement district, responsible for the success of more than 100 small businesses, I garnered my perspective relating to the research topic from personal experiences operating small businesses, developing business plans, requesting loan and grant funding, securing funding, and interacting with regulatory and licensing divisions. I achieved business success and endured failure. Although I direct a business improvement district, I did not consider any of the businesses that I interact with or have oversight of for participation in this study.

Research designs should include a reflection on the researcher’s identity, perspectives, assumptions, and sensitivities (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). According to Doody and Noonan (2013), the engagement between researchers and participants allows a platform to mention past life events. Furthermore, it is acceptable for qualitative researchers to use their personal experiences and relationship with the research topic to create interview questions (Doody & Noonan, 2013). At the time of this study, I owned a nail salon business. I entered the nail salon industry in 2006 and began to operate a successful business until 2013 when I ceased operations due to a flood. I revitalized my nail salon business in 2016.

Qualitative researchers must verify that personal bias does not impede the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Akhavan, Ramezan, and Moghaddam (2013) noted that researchers gain knowledge and have an ethical responsibility to follow ethical guidelines. According to Yin (2014), researcher bias may hurt the results of a case study. Gathering data during research is an essential organizational technique. Field notes are reflections of what worked and did not work, and they add value to the data gathering process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Collins and Cooper (2014) refined the role of the researcher and determined a developed researcher must apply self-awareness. During the entire research process, I kept a journal to help reduce any perceived, potential, personal, or professional bias and ethical concerns that could have discredited the interview process. I also used bracketing to mitigate bias in this study. Bracketing is a way to suspend judgment and exercise awareness of the possibility of conflicting emotions (Berger, 2013; Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). Furthermore, bracketing is a process that researchers employ to harness personal feelings and bias (Collins & Cooper, 2014). To control bias, I also maintained the highest level of professionalism during the entire research study.

Conducting an ethical research study is important to protect participants' dignity and to safeguard from wrong. To minimize risk during the interaction with human subjects, I adhered to the ethical guidance and three principles set out in *The Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979) that were (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice. In my research, I used caution and the concept of (a) informed consent, (b) the assessment of risks and benefits, and (c) fair recruitment and selection of subjects. I adhered to all guidance outlined in *The Belmont Report* to ensure the protection and privacy of the research subjects.

I also used an interview protocol to identify my own and the participant's activities and assure the credibility of the semistructured interviews (see Appendix). Qualitative researchers seek to understand patterns, similarities, and differences in the world of the participants through the interview process (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). An interview protocol is imperative for quality and accuracy of interview data (Foley & O'Connor, 2013; Yin, 2014). Interviews have benefits including the ability for the researcher to ask additional questions for clarification (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Doody and Noonan (2013) suggested that an interview protocol is advantageous for data collection. All participants received the interview protocol (see Appendix) regarding my role as researcher and applicability of the study. Before initiating the conversation, I described both my role as the researcher and participant's role as participant well as the expectations of each role before, during, and after the interview process.

Using an interview protocol is a way to gather data from participants for the research study (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). My rationale for using an interview protocol was to gather detailed information from participants and develop new themes and insights into the research study. Bourke (2014) suggested that during the research process, it is relative for researchers to place checkpoints along the way to assure bias is not present. I reviewed the open-ended interview questions for accuracy and gave the participants a copy with the option to opt out of the research process at any time. Yin (2014) suggested that the researcher should anticipate an answer from interviewees with a plan to use evidence such as names, documents, or observations. Interviews should remain open-ended in a conversational tone following the established protocol (Yin, 2014). The use of a structured interview protocol allowed a focused process, in an organized manner, leading to an interview process with a shorter duration.

Participants

The foundation of selecting participants is an important part of a qualitative research study. When choosing research participants, the researcher must use a screening procedure to select the most qualified participants (Yin, 2014). Further, optimal qualitative case research participants have past knowledge of the phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Selecting participants using a specific process related to optimal attributes is important to clarify at the outset of the study (O. C. Robinson, 2014). Elo et al. (2014) suggested that attracting the best study informants by identifying appropriate criteria is essential in participant selection. The main eligibility requirement for participants was that every small retail business entrepreneur selected had used strategies to maintain a profit for more than 5 years after business establishment.The criteria to participate in the study included: (a) the participants owned a small business; (b) the participants had implemented strategies to maintain a profit for more than 5 years after their business establishment; (c) the participants could articulate the strategies they had used to maintain profitability; (d) the business was located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and (e) each participant was at least 18 years of age. For data saturation, the inclusion of at least three participants for case study research is optimal (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013).

Researchers use a purposeful sampling technique to select participants based on their knowledge and background related to the research topic (Oppong, 2013). O. C. Robinson (2014) indicated that some researchers initially plan to use purposive sampling techniques. I purposefully selected three small retail businesses in Milwaukee, Wisconsin for study participation. I identified the three small retail businesses by accessing publicly available contact information, using websites (*Milwaukee Business Journal*, City of Milwaukee Office of Small Business Development, and Milwaukee Yellow Pages) as well as contact lists from the City of Milwaukee Business Improvement Districts. At the time of the study, I was the director of a business improvement district, and none of the businesses in my area received consideration as potential participants.

Conducting research is an iterative process requiring accessibility of the researcher and participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I initially placed phone calls to elicit interest in the study, gain access, and build a working relationship with potential participants. When contacting the businesses, I introduced myself and provided a description of the study to familiarize prospective participants with my background and assure role adherence. After gaining acceptance, I e-mailed a letter of introduction for participant review describing the intent of the research study and accompanied by the consent form. According to Klabunde, Willis, and Casalino (2013), using different methods of contact achieves a higher response rate than using the Internet alone. Jagosh et al. (2015) conducted a study and outlined information that determined that a strong partnership is necessary to build and maintain trust when doing research. For example, Doody and Noonan (2013) suggested establishing rapport is essential for the ease of the participant to answer questions truthfully. Building trust is important, as is maintaining awareness of self during the research process (Anyan, 2013; Berger, 2013). The first three participants who responded with an acknowledgment of study participation that fit the eligibility requirements gained inclusion. I availed myself to the participants before, during, and after the interview process to build a strong working relationship with them.

Research Method and Design

Research methods and designs are the guides the researcher uses from the outset to the finalization of the research study (Yin, 2014). The design selected by the researcher in a case study connects the questions, data collection, and analysis of the overall research results (Yin, 2014). After an inquiry into research approach and design possibilities, I selected a qualitative multiple case study design to address the research question.

Research Method

The three main types of methods used for research are the qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). A qualitative approach allowed me to explore the strategies small retail business entrepreneurs used to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. Qualitative research is an interpretive platform through which to explore the social phenomenon in the natural world (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Yin (2014) indicated that qualitative research entails question starting with *what or how* to explore a phenomenon. Researchers conduct an inquiry using qualitative methodology when seeking to understand the complexities of a phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Exploring the reality of an individual's perception is also a basis for qualitative research (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Qualitative researchers do not use statistical measures or quantification (Baškarada, 2014). A qualitative study was more appropriate for this study than a quantitative or mixed method because my goal was to explore the meaning of experiences of small retail business entrepreneurs to gain an understanding of the phenomenon. Moreover, a qualitative study was appropriate because I explored the strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs used to maintain profitability and not to quantify numbers.

Researchers embrace a quantitative method to perform an examination, test theories, and validate measurements (Groeneveld et al., 2015). A quantitative research method is appropriate when the need to measure known variables exists (Starr, 2014). Quantitative research methods are optimal to test hypothesis (Palinkas et al., 2015). Whereas, a quantitative method involves data analysis and measurement validation

(Groeneveld et al., 2015), a qualitative method often includes multiple types of data, such as interview transcripts, diaries, recordings, and observations (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). The focus of this study was to identify strategies small retail business entrepreneurs used to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after establishment, which are behaviors associated with qualitative studies involving questions of understanding the phenomenon; consequentially, a quantitative method was not appropriate.

Mixed method research is the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including comparing variables with the intent of gathering information for evaluation of each (Starr, 2014; Yin, 2014). Comparing variables was not necessary within this study because I explored the strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs used to achieve profitability, so a mixed methods approach was not appropriate. To gain in-depth perception for this study, I used a qualitative method approach rather than evaluations of the lived experiences of small retail business entrepreneurs that maintained profitability.

Research Design

Qualitative research includes various types of designs. Once a researcher determines the research method, depending on the goal, the selection of a research design occurs (Yin, 2014). Among other designs, qualitative research includes case studies, phenomenology, and ethnography (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). In the following paragraph, I outline the reason why selecting a case study approach was optimal for this study.

The use of a case study design enables a researcher to comprise a robust inquiry into a concrete and complex phenomenon within its real-world context (Yin, 2014). The goal of case study research encompasses the creation of a detailed description of the case through familiarity with each observation experienced (Cronin, 2014). Yin (2014) noted using a multiple case study design affords the researcher the opportunity to describe two or more cases in detail, instead of a limited single case study design. Baškarada (2014) indicated that a case study design is optimal for researchers seeking to collect various data for methodological triangulation. Furthermore, Baškarada noted the necessity for the research design and question to align. The research question for this study was as follows: What strategies do small retail business entrepreneurs use to maintain a profit for more than 5 years after business establishment? Thus, to best answer the question, I selected a multiple case study design to understand the phenomenon from more than a single case. Dasgupta (2015) proffered that case study researchers do not measure the phenomenon, they seek to understand it. Strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs use was central to this study, and the use of a multiple case study design was the best method to ascertain quality information.

Another research design I considered was ethnography. Ethnographers typically focus on the culture of groups, communities, or organizations through a lengthy immersion in the setting by using multiple data collection methods (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Ethnographers immerse themselves in the daily lives of research participants for a lengthy period (Phakathi, 2013; Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) suggested ethnographers spend an extended amount of time in the field capturing observational and interview evidence. Since the goal of this study was to explore strategies used by small business entrepreneurs, and not immersion into an organization or culture for a lengthy amount of time, I disregarded ethnography as a design.

The last research design I considered but disregarded was the phenomenological approach. Researchers used the phenomenological approach to capture the way individuals think (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). O'Reilly and Parker (2013) suggested a phenomenological approach lends credence to a deep understanding of a phenomenon with a large participant base. However, data saturation is difficult to achieve. When using a phenomenological approach, the researcher's goal is to understand the perceptions and lived experiences of participants (Moustakas, 1994). Because I explored strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs used to maintain profitability, phenomenology was not optimal for this study.

Data saturation occurs when no new data is brought forth within a study (Yin, 2014). The selection of a research design as well as the strategy for acknowledging data saturation is necessary for a valid study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Transparency of the process used to generate data saturation is essential in qualitative research (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Researchers achieve data saturation when the same patterns repeat, and no more information is gathered (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For this study, I assured data saturation by obtaining data from interviews, company documents, and archival records from small retail business entrepreneurs to explore strategies used to achieve profitability until no new data and no further themes occur.

Population and Sampling

I used purposive sampling as the sampling method for this multiple case study. The purposeful sampling technique allows researchers to deliberately choose participants who have knowledge surrounding the selected phenomenon (Oppong, 2013; O. C. Robinson, 2014). Marshall and Rossman (2016) indicated that purposive sampling spawns from concepts embedded in qualitative designs. O. C. Robinson (2014) suggested that when researchers use purposive sampling, they define inclusion criteria at the onset and draw sample boundaries. Gandy (2015) conducted a descriptive multiunit case study and used a purposive sampling technique to explore strategies four small business entrepreneurs used to achieve profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. Palinkas et al. (2015) suggested that researchers use purposive sampling for the identification and selection of individuals with robust knowledge of the phenomenon. Researchers must exercise caution when identifying a targeted approach to garner a sample group of participants (Palinkas et al., 2015). I used caution with the selection of participants who knew of the phenomenon during each step of the process and ensured a credible study.

The selection criteria for participants was vital for this qualitative research. The target population for research participant selection was the owners of three small retail businesses, who implemented strategies to maintain profitability within their business for more than 5 years after business establishment in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Elo et al. (2014) suggested that researchers carefully consider criteria to gain the best informants for study participation. Cleary, Horsfall, and Hayter (2014) opined that participant selection occurs due to a robust understanding, background alignment, and experience with the conceptual framework. The choice is a critical component when conducting a research project as the participants should add insight to the study (Yin, 2014). I sampled one owner from each of the three small retail businesses. I purposefully selected the owners that have implemented strategies to maintain profitability more than 5 years in Milwaukee, Wisconsin until the achievement of data saturation; thus, purposive sampling was appropriate.

In this study, data saturation occurred when information became repetitive. Fusch and Ness (2015) indicated that the understanding of when data saturation occurs is key within a study. Data saturation is prevalent when no new data or themes are brought forth (Gentles et al., 2015; Yin, 2014). Data saturation is not reliant on how many participants the researcher can obtain, but the quality of information brought forth from gained knowledge (Morse, Lowery, & Steury, 2014; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Thematic selection and sample size are indicators of when saturation occurs, as collecting more data bring forth additional themes (Fugard & Potts, 2015). In this study, I reached data saturation by interviewing and analyzing the data from three small retail businesses that achieved and maintained profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment with the expectation that data saturation would occur by the third interview. In the absence of data saturation after the third interview, the process of participant recruitment and interviewing would have continued until saturation occurred.

I used interviews as a vehicle to obtain data from participants in a normalized setting. Interviews allow researchers to form and adhere to a conversational tone through guided questions (Yin, 2014). My rationale for the selection of the setting derived from the need to maintain a neutral atmosphere that afforded ease of entrance and normalcy for the participants. I used an interview setting free from distraction, which allowed the participants to relax and exhibit openness and engagement during the interview process. I conducted interviews in the participants' business within a business district at the request of the participants. I allocated a period of up to 60 minutes for each in-person interview with the participants at a convenient time selected by the business owner. I offered to meet at a public library or business office of their choosing. However, all participants chose to meet at their business location. Doody and Noonan (2013) noted that the interview setting is important for maintaining normalcy. The openness of the researcher during the interview process establishes clear guidelines at the outset (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). The ideal goal of the researcher was to develop a relationship with the participant and elicit information using the interview process (Anyan, 2013). Gandy (2015) used interviews to explore strategies small business owners in Colorado implemented to achieve profitability within the first 5 years of startup.

Ethical Research

In this study, informed consent was imperative to assure ethical treatment of all participants. I completed Institutional Review Board (IRB) training (certificate number 07-24-17-0252431) from the NIH regarding proper research procedures for the ethical protection of participants. Researchers seek the highest ethical standards when conducting a study (Yin, 2014). Usually, research ethics protocols are guided by four dimensions as suggested by Barker (2013), which are (a) privacy and confidentiality, (b) informed consent, (c) protection of vulnerable groups, and (d) avoiding harm. One way to control for ethical issues that may arise through the use and implementation of the informed consent process (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). Informed consent is important to assure research participants understood and could make decisions about data sharing and study participation of their free will as suggested by Jao et al. (2015). The fair and ethical treatment of all research participants was key within this research study as outlined by *The Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). In conformance with the ethical guidance and principles of *The Belmont Report*, I showed respect for persons, beneficence, and justice when interacting with the research participants throughout the study. The IRB has oversight to review each proposal to affirm that the research is within ethical guidelines as noted by Marshall and Rossman (2016).

Before conducting interviews, I obtained a signed consent form each of the participants. The informed consent process is necessary to protect the identity of participants, ensure understanding of their fundamental rights, the basis of the research, are aware of any risks and benefits of participation, and maintain involvement by their own free will (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Researchers agreed that participants do not always understand the research guidelines; thus, using an informed consent process provides a vehicle to outline the protections afforded at the outset of the study (Kass, Taylor, Ali, Hallez, & Chaisson, 2015). Informed consent allows research participants to prepare for the interviews, time allocation, and data collection (Doody & Noonan, 2013). To respect confidentiality, I did not disclose the names of the study participants. A key decision that a researcher must decide in an interview study is whether to offer an incentive for participation (O. C. Robinson, 2014). I did not provide incentives or rewards as part of this study, and I informed the participants of this decision in the informed consent form.

Participants could withdraw at any time before, during, or after the interview. As an ethical consideration, Forsgren, Skott, Hartelius, and Saldert (2016) informed participants that withdrawal of their consent within their study would be honored at any time prompting immediate data destruction. All participants received information related to the manner that they could withdraw from the interview at any given time; participants could relay withdrawal in-person, through an e-mail notice, or a telephone call. Codes are used in social science research as a way to guard participant identities (Lahman et al., 2015). I ensured confidentiality of participant and business names using a code for identification purposes. I used a code for each business. The business codes were P1, P2, and P3 as there was one individual interviewed per organization. I only used the allocated codes within the study, and I protected the codes as part of the high ethical standards I set. The decision to safeguard research data is an important oversight responsibility (Jao et al., 2015). To maintain participants' privacy and protection of rights, after receipt of the signed consent form and collection of data, I scanned all documents on a USB device and filed in a locked cabinet, which will hold them for 5 years. I will destroy the USB device once the term is complete as part of optimal security measures.

Data Collection Instruments

In this case study, I acted as the primary data collection instrument. Qualitative researchers can serve as the data collection instrument (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, &

Murphy, 2013; Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). During the data collection process, case study researchers have many sources of evidence, depending on the research scenario to include the use of documents, records, and interviews (Yin, 2014). I used semistructured interviews as a data collection source as well as organizational documentation provided by the owners of three small retail business entrepreneurs that had been in business for more than 5 years after business establishment.

Researchers conduct qualitative case studies and use interviews as a mechanism to collect data relating to a phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Semistructured interviewing is a focused process that results in the obtainment of in-depth data using predefined approved questions (Yin, 2014). I chose to use semistructured interviews to collect data for exploration from three small retail businesses that maintained profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. I created a formalized interview protocol to solidify the scope of the interview, including the date, location, time, purpose, as well as the interview questions for participants (see Appendix). Journaling is a method to capture notes as well as to triangulate data collected (Houghton et al., 2013). I used a journal to take notes during the interviews as well as to use as a method to triangulate the data collected.

The review of company records is a technique used to glean historical data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I collected data from company documents such as the company website, marketing advertisements, company doctrine for professional engagement, and news articles. One advantage of using company documents is that the company presents primary information and sources. Qualitative researchers collected data from company documents (Yin, 2014). Another advantage to using company documents in case study research is that triangulation is likely as suggested by Hyett, Kenny, and Dickson-Swift (2014). A documentary analysis is an approved approach within qualitative research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Further, Rubin and Rubin (2012) noted that reviewing company documents is optimal in addition to interviews. Marshall and Rossman (2016) indicated that researchers supplement interviews with an analysis of company documents. Yin (2014) suggested using company records allows the researcher to study a vast amount of credible documentation. A disadvantage of using company documents is that the information could be stale and historical; thus, not in alignment with current company activities. Another disadvantage of using company records is the possibility of outdated data. Lastly, I used probing questions during the interviews for follow-up and to assure the accuracy of all information.

Open-ended interview questions allow respondents the flexibility to delve deeper into answers (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Onwuegbuzie and Byers (2014) indicated the interview conception is revealing. Researchers use qualitative interview questions as a data strategy to gather information (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). I used open-ended interview questions to collect information from small retail business entrepreneurs as part of this case study. Another data collection tool used to collect information for retrieval from the participants was an audiotape recording device (Olympus DM-720). Researchers record interviews to capture accurate information. Gamo-Sanchez and Cegarra-Navarro (2015) used a recording device to capture data from semistructured interviews and ultimately transcribed the data. I obtained prior participant consent to use a recording device to establish trust in the interview process. I also used an iPhone and a Samsung V10 smartphone with recording capacity as other data collection tools for backup.

Scholars rely on semistructured interviews to validate prior case studies. Major (2016) used semistructured interviews for a case study regarding strategies used by small business owners to avert voluntary employee turnover. Johnson-Hilliard (2015) conducted a case study and used semistructured interviews to determine strategies small retail salon owners used to stay in business more than 5 years. Koyagialo (2016) conducted a case study and used semistructured interviews to review strategies small business owners used to achieve profitability for more than 5 years. Credible case studies among scholars used the semistructured interview method. Thus, I decided to use semistructured interviews.

To establish reliability and validity of the study, I conducted member checking with participants. Member checking is a process whereby the researcher validates and clarifies information collected from the initial interaction with the participants for acknowledgment or addition to the information captured (Drabble, Trocki, Salcedo, Walker, & Korcha, 2016). Houghton et al. (2013) indicated that member checking assures the accuracy of data before analysis. Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2013) suggested that after interviews, qualitative researchers take the initial analysis back to the participants for validation. After interviews, I scanned and e-mailed the data gathered from my initial review back to the participants to validate my interpretations of their responses for accuracy in the member checking process. I made calls to some of the participants and held conversations to determine the validity of the analysis. Verification of study information occurred and there was no new data derived from the member checking process. After final data verification, I thematically coded the data for input into the NVivo11 software. Reliable coding techniques are essential to ensure accurate data analysis (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013). Coding is a process qualitative researcher used to sort and sift through the data to obtain credible results (Chowdhury, 2015).

Methodological triangulation occurred from the information by the review of notes from a journal, taped interview recordings, and data analysis. Methodological triangulation is a way for researchers to validate data collected from multiple sources within the same phenomenon (Hussein, 2009; Rossetto, 2014). Researchers use triangulation to verify data gathered from interviews, artifacts, company documents, and case information derived from more than a single source within the study (Yin, 2014). Researchers continually plan for data collection as a method to assure a valid study and implemented strategies such as preparing the set of questions and maintaining a focused approach (Chan et al., 2013).

Data Collection Technique

Data collection occurred from face-to-face semistructured interviews and a review of company documents related to the business that further enhanced the interview data. Yin (2014) suggested that collecting documents is advantageous and lends to specificity by having the ability to recall names and detailed events. Qualitative researchers prioritize the depth and quality of data during the data collection process (Anyan, 2013).

Case study research is flexible, as researchers use multiple methods to collect data in the same study (Turner & Danks, 2014). Face-to-face semistructured interviews are a method to build rapport with participants with hopes to elicit a productive dialogue that will benefit the next phase of the research (Elsawah, Guillaume, Filatova, Rook, & Jakeman, 2015). I placed a phone call to each participant to assure the appropriateness of the time and date. I scheduled participant interviews for a convenient place at an optimal time for the participants. I confirmed the time the day before the interview. I allowed a time of 60 minutes for each interview.

There are both advantages and disadvantages derived from the decision to use face-to-face semistructured interviews. The advantages of semistructured interviews, as outlined by Marshall and Rossman (2016), include: (a) the interviews are personable; (b) the data is retrieved quickly; (c) immediate follow-up and clarification is garnered; and (d) there is an ability to interview individuals with challenges, to include hearing. On the other hand, the semistructured interview process has disadvantages such as (a) the need to build trust without ample time, (b) interviewees may be uncomfortable, (c) a possible lack of dialect, and (d) the interviewee may lack truthfulness (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Hubrich and Witter (2014) found that a high accuracy rate is a benefit from in-person interactions. Lastly, a disadvantage to using the semistructured interview process is the interview may choose to stray away from the approved questions (Elsawah et al., 2015; Yin, 2014).

A pilot study was not part of this multiple case study. A pilot case study is a preliminary process used to assure the larger case study is feasible about the questions, setting, scenario, and overall flow (Yin, 2014). A definite advantage of conducting a pilot study relies on the researcher's knowledge to lay out plans on a smaller scale of the more extensive case study for a trial run to validate the data analysis and collection (Doody & Doody, 2015). I interviewed three small retail business entrepreneurs regarding strategies used to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. Gustafson, Davis, Hornsby, and Bess (2015) conducted a pilot study to determine factors that influenced the use of hearing aids in the classroom of 38 participants. The large number of participants allowed for the use of a pilot study (Gustafson et al., 2015). Although the case study research allows for a pilot study, the scale of the intended participants within this study was smaller; thus, a pilot study was not feasible.

I performed a document review of information gathered from the participants. A document review is a mechanism to validate unobtrusive documentation from the company (Yin, 2014). An advantage of a document review is that the information is specific to the company and not retrieved from a secondary source (Yin, 2014). Another advantage is that company documents have a rich archival history (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A subsequent advantage was the financial effectiveness of obtaining documents directly from the company instead of paying for postage. A disadvantage of using company documents is that scripted and biased information could arise (Yin, 2014). Research participants may withhold access to company documents in a disadvantageous manner (Yin, 2014). Also, a disadvantage of a company document review is the time to find archival information could be extensive (Yin, 2014). Another disadvantage is that the company might have biased opinions of the material presented (Yin, 2014). Lastly, a document review may have contained unreliable data contingent on the purpose of creation; thus, researchers must use caution (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers bypass weakness by the implementation of high measures (Connelly, 2013). In conclusion, I used a document review as a method used to gather data relating to company activities; thus, the benefit outweighed the risk within this study.

Member checking was part of the data collection process within this multiple case study. I used member checking for data interpretation to validate the summarized participant information collected during the research process to solidify an agreement with the participant. Member checking is the coordination and solidification of information derived from participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For instance, in a qualitative study to determine differences in western and African-centered healing processes, Ojelade, McCray, Meyers, and Ashby (2014) used member checking as a step to enhance methodological rigor as part of their operation. After the interviews, I reengaged each participant as outlined in the interview protocol (see Appendix). Caretta (2016) used member checking several times throughout the research project related to cross-cultural and cross-language and created a pamphlet to enhance participant input and validation. I summarized key points from the initial interviews and sent the information to the participants via e-mail. From there, I placed phone calls to the participants and conducted member checking by having a conversation regarding the interview and document summary. There was no new or missing information. Member checking is a way to assure data captured is reflective of the participant’s accurate statements and ultimate viewpoint (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016).

Data Organization Technique

Data organization is an important step when conducting a research study. Case study researchers have several sources available for organizing data including a case study database (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2014). Using multiple data collection sources adds credence to a research study (Houghton et al., 2013). For this study, the data organization technique was the transcription of the word for word responses collected from the semistructured interview questions using Microsoft Word. I transcribed the data for this study from the recorded semistructured interview questions. After I transcribed the interviews, I entered the data into NVivo11 as the data storage portal to code and organize the data by themes and patterns. Researchers conceptualize their data organization technique including naming convention, documentation, storage platform, access, and management (Marshall, O'Bryan, Na, & Vernon, 2013). I transcribed and coded the data using codes to replace the identity of participants. I used the codes P1, P2, and P3 since I interviewed one owner from each small business. Lahman et al. (2015) indicated that using a code is an additional safeguard to protect participant identity and privacy.

Reflective journals are a way to capture data during the research process (Everett, 2013). I used a reflective journal during the research process as a method to organize data and capture written information. In research, critical thinking skills and the ability of reflection are necessary, and researchers use a reflective journal to capture data (Padden-Denmead, Scaffidi, Kerley, & Farside, 2016). Lamb (2013) suggested that recording insights during the research process in a journal allow validation of the research data collected. Ultimately, the data collected allowed the researcher the opportunity to reflect on the experience of the project (Lamb, 2013). In my reflective journal, I captured data as well as information about myself during the research process. A research journal reflected information garnered relating to not only the data but also the researcher's self, such as being a human instrument and the acknowledgment of the researchers own background and experiences (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). Everett (2013) concluded that using a reflective journal was an effective strategy to capture critical data and gained knowledge for future recall.

I will store all data, interview notes, journals, and information collected from participants for 5 years in a secure locked safe accessible only by me. After the 5-year term has expired, I will gather all material for disposal and shred as a matter of security. Jao et al. (2015) affirmed that shredding data is an optimal way to assure confidence in the research process. Yin (2014) indicated that maintaining a chain of evidence is a manner to increase reliability in a case study. The inclusion of instructions for disposal of information collected throughout the case study process is in alignment with a robust chain of evidence as suggested by Yin. To maintain the highest ethical standards, Gandy (2015) showed reliability and plans to shred all raw and electronic data collected during the case study research after the 5-year term has expired.

Data Analysis

Many methods exist to analyze data within a research study. Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas (2013) suggested data analysis is a method to present study findings. Researchers conduct data analysis to identify relationships within the demographic stated at the problem statement level (Turner & Danks, 2014). Elo et al. (2014) suggested that researchers use a meticulous process to ensure data credibility including data analysis. Within this study, I used NVivo11 as the software package to assist me with the data analysis to answer the research question what strategies do small retail business entrepreneurs use to maintain a profit for more than 5 years after business establishment.

Triangulation is a strategic plan to help the researcher affirm data interpretations are valid (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Triangulation involved the use of multiple methods to gain an understanding of the phenomenon (Denzin, 2012). Triangulation is a mechanism to establish validity within research by capturing viewpoints from various sources of evidence (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Denzin and Lincoln (2017) outlined four types of triangulation, which are (a) data triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation. Yin (2014) noted methodological triangulation allows researchers to use multiple data collection methods within case study research to verify credibility. From the four types of triangulation outlined by Denzin and Lincoln, methodological triangulation is the best fit for the research study to capture and analyze multiple sources of data. I used methodological triangulation as part of the process to analyze the data comprised from the transcripts of the interview questions and the review of company documents. The foundation of the data collection stemmed from the semistructured interviews with small retail business entrepreneurs to determine strategies used to maintain profitability.

To analyze the data, I used the method that Rowley (2012) outlined for data analysis, including: (a) organizing the dataset; (b) getting acquainted with the data; (c) classifying, coding, and interpreting the data; and (d) presenting findings. After I completed the interview process, I transcribed the raw data from the semistructured interviews and company documents for input into the case study database using a Microsoft Word document. Transcribing data from interviews provides a platform to initiate the coding process (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins (2012) identified 17 qualitative data analysis techniques and presented a framework to help researchers garner rigor when reviewing the literature to include theme analysis and constant comparison.

To organize the data, I reviewed the transcripts of the semistructured interviews and company documents. Then, I uploaded the data to NVivo11 for coding and the identification of themes and patterns for analysis. With NVivo11, I identified the emergent themes for alignment with recent studies regarding the theory of entrepreneurship, moreover, entrepreneurial orientation to include risk, proactiveness, competitive aggressiveness, autonomy, and innovativeness. Qualitative researchers analyzed written documents and sort information into themes to report frequencies (Borrego, Foster, & Froyd, 2014). Yin (2014) suggested researchers used coding for the discovery of themes derived from transcripts and data sources. Baškarada (2014) indicated that researchers bring forth patterns and themes when coding data. I searched for the overarching themes among the data analysis from the NVivo11 software. I used the information for the write up of the findings in comparison to the conceptual framework of the theory of entrepreneurship to explain the strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs used to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. Borrego et al. (2014) indicated the conceptual framework, literature, method, and results are succinct within a study.

Triangulation involves researchers actively engaged with participants to reexamine received responses through the member checking process (Caretta, 2016). An advantage to conducting a thorough analysis is that the researcher gains clarity with the process. One disadvantage of a meticulous analysis process was that I spent extra time checking and rechecking data at each interval. Marshall and Rossman (2016) indicated that member checking is a way that some researcher validate captured data is correct. Houghton et al. (2013) acknowledged that member checking allows participants to respond to their words with affirmation or identify changes necessary. Elo et al. (2014) cautioned that researchers carefully think through the member checking process to assure participants fully understand their actions and the research process. I explained the process for member checking to each participant in a manner contextually suitable for their level of understanding. Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested that if the member checking process brings forth new data, additional coding should occur.

Qualitative researchers used software packages for data analysis as well as to capture, store, and analyze datasets, which are advantageous for time management. Qualitative data analysis software packages offer tools for rich data analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). One disadvantage of using a software package is the cost associated with the purchase. NVivo11 is a software package some qualitative researchers used to specify case details and create specific nodes (Byrne, 2013; Castleberry, 2014). I selected NVivo11 as the data analysis software to categorize, code, and organize data derived during the research process. Madara and Cherotich (2016) used NVivo software to code and analyze data related to gender challenges within secondary education. To code results from six studies about entrepreneurial legitimacy, O'Neil and Ucbasaran (2016) used NVivo11 software with success.

After receiving the data results from NVivo11, I reviewed and thematically separated the data. From there, I coded, grouped, and identified the data by the most prevalent themes. Researchers use coding to identify themes from the transcripts to ensure reliability, validity, and creditability (Yin, 2014). I compared the data results with current literature to determine if entrepreneurial orientation themes assist small retail business entrepreneurs with maintaining profitability for more than 5 years after establishment. After organizing and coding the data, I completed the last step in the data analysis process and wrote up the findings for presentation.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability is key within a research study to establish trust. Researchers must prepare for a quality project to assure trustworthiness at the outset (Loh, 2013; Yarborough, 2014). Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, and Pearson (2014) indicated that the concept of reliability is a mechanism to affirm a fit between the researcher's interpretation and information gathered from the original data source. Elo et al. (2014)

indicated that securing trust within the qualitative content is reliant on preparation, organization, and results.

Semistructured interviews are a mechanism to enhance the consistency, reliability, and validity within data sets (Foley & O'Connor, 2013). The interview protocol created for this study is a manner to enhance study reliability (see Appendix). Yin (2014) suggested that reliability within a case study is the ability of replication and the consistency of the procedures used within the research process. Further, the use of multiple sources of data lends credence to the reliability within a case study (Yin, 2014). Porte (2013) found that replication is necessary to determine whether two different works are comparable. A summation of the decisions made along with justification and rationale is a way to enhance dependability as suggested by Houghton et al. (2013). I established dependability through the usage of detailed processes and documentation throughout the study. Dependability enhanced by member checking and transcription review strengthen a study (Yin, 2014). I improved dependability within this study by performing member checking of the data gathered within this study. I provided the participants with a summary of their answers after the interviews. Each participant affirmed interview summary accuracy. Research dependability influences a well thought out and credible research process at the outset (Munn et al., 2014).

Validity

Validity in a research study is a method that researchers use to establish trust. I used member checking to assure the validity of the data. Houghton et al. (2013) indicated that member checking is key in obtaining data saturation when conducting qualitative research. Marshall and Rossman (2016) proffered that member checking is a contributor to the validity of the data by the confirmation of participant responses. Member checking is a strategy for assuring qualitative data is efficient (Anney, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined several approaches to rigor, including (a) confirmability, (b) dependability, (c) credibility, and (d) transferability. I adhered to a rigorous process from the outset and through study completion. Data saturation is a way to establish validity when data analysis has occurred, bringing forth no new themes (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Researchers strive to achieve data saturation for a quality study, and failure is a threat to the validity of the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I achieved data saturation when the themes became repetitive within the study.

I used credibility to verify valid study results. Credibility is the optimal goal when conducting qualitative research (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Member checking is a pathway to establishing credibility (Houghton et al., 2013). With member checking, when participants engage in the process, they are afforded the ability to acknowledge or make changes to their responses and credibility is likely (Houghton et al., 2013). To ensure credibility in this study, I used member checking by revisiting the participants and asking for affirmation or revision from the interview responses. Credibility is a method for validation of the researcher’s interpretation of the data captured from the study participant’s recollection (Munn et al., 2014).

Within this study, I used the standard interview protocol for collecting data to establish credibility. Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013) asserted that researchers who follow systematic protocols without a variance are a way to establish credibility and qualitative rigor of study data. Methodological triangulation of the member checking process, as well as the interview protocol, is in place to enhance the credibility of the study results. Triangulation is a mechanism to establish validity within research by capturing viewpoints from multiple sources of evidence (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Denzin and Lincoln (2017) outlined four types of triangulation (a) data triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation. From the four types of triangulation, methodological triangulation fit perfect for this research study for the collection of multiple sources of data. Yin (2014) established that a way to establish validation is through methodological triangulation and the use of an interview protocol and secondary documents.

Transferability referred to whether the study findings are transferable to other contexts and research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The ability to transfer research outcomes, meanings and content to other settings is a verification of transferability (Elo et al., 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). For establishing transferability, a documented synopsis of participant responses, along with a description of the methods used is optimal for future researchers (MacPhail, Khoza, Abler, & Ranganathan, 2016). Cope (2014) indicated transferability occurs if others not involved in the study can identify details in contrast to their experiences. Transferability of the study findings is a task for future researchers (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For this case study, I left the transferability of findings to future researchers interested in strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs use to maintain some profit for more than 5 years.

Researchers achieve confirmability when the next researcher validates study findings. Cope (2014) indicated that researcher bias in a study is a trigger for lack of confirmability. I avoided personal bias by bracketing my preconceived notions and using a journal to capture my thoughts. I collected quality data without any personal bias to enhance confirmability in this study. Cope surmised that a way to assure confirmability is with the addition of robust quotes from the participants. In addition to capturing accurate data, I used probing during the interview process by asking follow-up questions as well as comments during the interviews. Levashina, Hartwell, Morgeson, and Campion (2014) suggested that probing using follow-up questions intends to seek additional or clarifying information from the participant; thus, ultimate validity. Houghton et al. (2013) suggested that researcher’s express confirmability by documenting all decisions made throughout the entire research process. I documented decisions made throughout this research by using a reflective journal, notes, e-mail for outreach to the participants, and ultimately the data analysis.

Saturation is necessary to ensure a well thought out and valid study. Marshall and Rossman (2016) indicated that saturation occurs when no additional categories and patterns arise from the data. Gandy (2015) conducted case study research and achieved saturation when no new themes and coding appeared. Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested that data saturation occurs when the ability to replicate the study by a different researcher with no new themes occurs. Marshall, Cardon et al. (2013) affirmed that sample size is important and justification of sample size is critical for research credibility. Fugard and Potts (2015) noted determining sample size is relevant when planning research. I ensured data saturation using a formalized process to collect data starting with the collection of data and the review of information derived from the three small retail business entrepreneurs that participated in the semistructured interview process. Further, data saturation occurred with the detail and depth of the data collected.

To assure saturation, I reviewed the data gathered during the semistructured face-to-face interviews in detail. I used methodological triangulation to ensure saturation. Data saturation improves the creditability of the study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Additionally, to achieve data saturation, I used member checking and gave close attention to the data collected from participants to ensure data saturation occurred. To assure that no new themes arose, I performed a careful review of the data gathered during the member checking process. Finally, I achieved saturation by analyzing the data collected using NVivo11 with an outline of the themes identified. Saturation is reliant on the thematic separation and analysis of the data collected. Next, once no new codes or themes arose, I presented information derived from the engagement of three small retail business entrepreneurs regarding strategies used to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I provided the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study, which was to explore the strategies small retail business entrepreneurs in Milwaukee, Wisconsin used to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. The findings from this study could have implications for a positive social change of providing information to small retail business entrepreneurs to use in their daily activities and help small retail business entrepreneurs survive more than 5 years. For this study, I focused on the small retail business entrepreneur's use of the tenants of entrepreneurship, moreover, entrepreneurial orientation to achieve small business profitability. This study included a qualitative case study methodology. I used the purposeful sampling method to select the population for this study—three small business entrepreneurs in Milwaukee, Wisconsin that operated a business for at least 5 years.

No data collection took place until I obtained approval from the Walden University IRB, which allowed for the collection of field data. I conducted in-person interviews with three small retail business entrepreneurs. Upon completion, I recorded and transcribed the in-person interviews. From there, I analyzed the data using NVivo11 software to categorize and assist me with the identification of themes from the data collected.

In Section 3, I present information from the collection of data using semistructured in-person interviews from the participants' responses to the six open-ended questions and the review of company documents related to the business. I outline the semistructured interview questions to derive data from the small retail businesses entrepreneurs. In conclusion, in Section 3, I present the findings from the research study, reflections, and recommendations for future implications for small retail business entrepreneur profitability, which will ultimately benefit the community through positive social change.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

I conducted this qualitative multiple case study to explore the strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs used to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. Small businesses are the main source of job creation in the United States (USSBA, 2014). However, small businesses often experience failure (Decker et al., 2014). This section will include a detailed description of the findings of the study.

To gain a clear understanding of the phenomenon, I conducted semistructured face-to-face interviews with three small retail business entrepreneurs in Milwaukee, Wisconsin who met the study criteria. I derived data for this study from the face-to-face interviews and a review of organizational documents to reach methodological triangulation. After reviewing and transcribing the data from each of the interviews, I entered the data into the NVivo11 software, which helped to develop and categorize major themes. My analysis of data using NVivo11 software revealed three major themes regarding the strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs use to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. The first theme I identified from the data analysis was customer service strategies. The second theme I identified from the data analysis was human capital strategies, and the third theme I identified from the data analysis was access to the financial capital. Through the identification of each theme, key strategies emerged from the data derived from the participant interviews and document review related to the relevant organizations.

Presentation of the Findings

The central research question that guided this study was: What strategies do small retail business entrepreneurs use to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment? The following three themes emerged from the three participant interviews and the review of the organizational documentation: (a) customer service strategies, (b) human capital strategies, and (c) access to financial capital. In this subsection, I will discuss and compare each main theme and the corresponding subtheme to the literature reviewed in this study.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies used by small retail business entrepreneurs to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. The research in the literature review aligned with the conceptual framework of the theory of entrepreneurship, and the tenants of entrepreneurial orientation. The tenants of entrepreneurial orientation include risk, innovation, and proactiveness (Miller, 1983; Muchiri & McMurray, 2015).

I labeled the participants as P1, P2, and P3 in this study. P1 was a small business owner with over 31 years of experience in the retail sign printing business. P2 was a small business owner with over 16 years in the current retail food business and over 30 years' experience in business overall. P2 also previously owned several unsuccessful small businesses; however, after taking a risk to open the current small business success is occurring. As recognized by Sarasvathy et al. (2013), small business owners with the tenacity to accept failure and start a following business can thrive. Lastly, P3 was a small business owner and had over 20 years of experience in the retail, quick print design business.

Theme 1: Customer Service Strategies

The first emergent theme was good customer service. Each of the participants noted that providing good customer service was a strategy they used to maintain profitability past 5 years of establishment. The theme of customer service strategies aligns with the tenants of entrepreneurial orientation because each participant mentioned how customer service effectuated their ability to generate and maintain new customers by taking a risk, being innovative, and acting proactively. A tenant of entrepreneurial orientation is reliance on proactiveness (Miller, 1983). A small retail business owner can proactively interact with customers with each sale and build customer service (Anderson & Ullah, 2014). A larger business may have many employees and systems to generate sales, so personal interaction is less, whereas a small business may not (Anderson & Ullah, 2014). Small businesses sustain customer loyalty and return business by providing good customer service (Zaefarian, Thiesbrummel, Henneberg, & Naude, 2017).

Most participants also included the theme of customer service in printed marketing material and company documents. P1 stated, “If you do not have good customer service, people won’t come back; therefore, we have had this simple formula for 31 years.” P1 added, “The key to success, according to customers and employees, is a dedication to customer service.” Further, P1 noted, “Most of the success is due to repeat business and referrals.” P1 stated that after over 31 years of operation, the business is cognizant of the value of customer service to the public and the effect satisfied customers have in relation to business profitability. Organizational documentation related to customer service provided by P1 noted, “Repeat business and word of mouth are the cornerstones to our success.” Members of the public have a direct effect on business operations, and managers must stay abreast of trends (Lewis, O’Donovan, & Willett, 2017).

Another strategy all three participants used to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after establishment was building customer relationships through understanding the customers’ needs and expectations. There is a need for business owners to engage customers by excellent customer service tactics, the provision of a good product, as well as fostering good relationships (Mohammed & Mohammad, 2015; Voorhees et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2017). P2 indicated the priority of the business is optimal customer service and credited good customer service to an increase in the business profitability. P2 builds customer relationships by being physically at the business daily and interacting with each customer, often sitting at the table with them and engaging in conversation. Organizational documentation provided by P1 indicated, “The business has stayed successful through the years in large part of the owner’s friendly nature and strong customer service skills.” P3 created 14 points of culture, a marketing plan as a strategy to meet customer needs and expectations. The 14 points of culture outlined expectations related to the way that employees should treat customers and build relationships. P3 further stated, “Within a service business, you need to take good care of the customers.” As a strategy, P3 reinforced the provision of good customer service and building customer relationships through the usage and commitment to the company’s marketing plan to maintain profitability. Business owners who put customers first through optimal experiences and excellent customer service achieve more success than the business owners who do not (Alagirisamy, 2014). In alignment with the theory of entrepreneurship, business owners build relationships with customers to maintain profitability.

Customer satisfaction is a key definer of optimal customer service (Paltayian, Gotzamani, Georgiou, & Andronikidis, 2017). As a strategy to maintain profitability, the three participants discussed the ways that their businesses constantly seek customer satisfaction. P1 indicated, “If you do not have a good product, customers will not come back.” P1 uses the strategy of keeping current customers satisfied by engaging with them through personal interactions such as meeting within the business and making phone calls to find out how the products are working as well as to elicit feedback. Further, organizational documents provided by P1 indicated, “The business philosophy is to provide customers with products and services that exceed their expectations by taking the time to listen to their needs.” Proactiveness refers to business owners who are willing to boldly seek new products or services ahead of the competition (Dai et al., 2014). Each participant noted using strategies to proactively gain new customer relationships, satisfy existing customers, as well as gain acceptance from the community to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment.

P2 used the strategy of recruiting customers from the local area for repeat business to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. P2’s staff caters to the tastes of the customers within the local community as part of the strategy to maintain profitability. P2’s restaurant menu includes offerings of local food delicacies, such as chicken and waffles, that cater to the soul food consumers as a differential product strategy, garnering a competitive advantage. P2 illustrated that the business has lasted for over 16 years due to a lack of other similar restaurant businesses in the area. Srivastava et al. (2013) noted that firms could achieve a competitive advantage by using differential product strategies. P2 owns a local restaurant in the Milwaukee central city and assures that the menu prices are amicable to the incomes of the local community members to maintain business profitability. P2 guaranteed that consistently, local food favorites are available and listed on the menu daily to gain repeat business as part of the strategy to elicit repeat customers for business profitability. Similarly, P3 noted that a satisfied customer is likely to return for additional business needs and may refer the business to others within the local area. Organizational documentation provided by P3 indicated, “A service business is really a person business, and you need to take good care of your customers.” Further, P3 noted, “The quick print industry is competitive as may firms offer similar services, but this business separates itself from the competition.” Lastly, in organizational documentation, P3 noted, “We serve each customer with compassion and concern, by growing at the speed of technology, and by working together as a team to achieve the common goal of a satisfied customer.”

Another customer service strategy that P3 used to maintain business profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment was customer education. P3’s staff engages customers at the initial sales consultation with educational information related to the latest information through varying means such as products listed in physical brochures, hands-on marketing material, as well as information outlining the latest trends in the country for creating a finished product. The hands-on customer service strategy leads to increased sales and ultimate profitability. P3 noted, “We educate our customers and help them provide us with the information necessary to create a product that wows them.” In addition, P3 offers detailed product demonstrations and training classes regarding marketing such as how effective strategies to seal the deal using business cards as well as pens with the business logo and mints with the business logo affixed as a tool.

The theme of customer service strategies aligns with the three foundational dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation by showing how important customer service is to the overall profitability of a small business. The three foundational dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation are (a) risk-taking, (b) innovation, and (c) proactiveness (Miller, 1983). The three participants noted using these dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment through maintaining a high level of customer service within their business. Small businesses can achieve firm-level profitability using the foundational tenants of entrepreneurial orientation to include risk, innovation, and proactiveness (Gathungu et al., 2014; Parhankangas & Ehrlich, 2014). Developing and maintaining good customer service and building customer relationships is imperative for small business owners’ success and ultimate profitability.

The participants in this study outlined strategies used to maintain profitability for more than 5 years associated with the benefits of maintaining good customer service, fostering customer relationships and customer satisfaction, recruiting customers from the local community, and educating customers. Customers are the foundation for a small retail business. Zaefarian et al. (2017) noted that small business owners could strategically attract and maintain customers using trust for optimal business performance and profitability. Four subthemes emerged under the theme of customer service (a) risk-taking, (b) innovation, (c) community engagement, and (d) business expansion.

Risk-taking. Another strategy discussed by the participants for maintaining profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment was risk-taking. Risk-taking is an entrepreneurial capability when seeking growth (Brettel et al., 2015; Cui et al., 2016). As a strategy, entrepreneurs tolerate a moderate risk to obtain profitability (Anderson et al., 2015; Cui et al., 2016). P3 took a risk to hire a salesperson to bring in funds to reinvest in the business. The salesperson took measures such as advertising the business offerings in the local social media sites, as well as contacting current customers to highlight the full line of products and services offered by the organization. P3's risk included hiring for a new position with no proven experience that the strategy would work. P3 noted, "I feel it is important to invest back into the business and I want to have a staff that when people walk through the door, they can be taken care of and we can process jobs efficiently." The strategy that P3 deployed worked and the salesperson generated income to reinvest in the business and maintain profitability. Further, in organizational documentation provided, P1 described growth through risk-taking as follows:

> Part of the growth came from the company's investment in a new digital printer. The $16,000 printer allows the company to do a lot of printing in-house that it previously was outsourcing, giving it more control over the products and allowing it to complete jobs faster.

Managers positioned at the senior level make strategic decisions regarding whether to take on risk (Anderson et al., 2015). P1 took a risk to maintain profitability by investing personal funds to rebrand the business. To stay competitive in the retail industry, P3 makes ongoing purchases of cutting-edge large scale technologically advanced state of the art print equipment to bring attention to the products offered. P3 noted, "Taking a risk and being proactive is what led me to this journey." Entrepreneurs willing to take a risk often think outside of the box to create new ideas that are different (S. Robinson, 2014). Aliyu et al. (2015) surmised that entrepreneurs face risk in the quest for profitability. In agreement, Kerr et al. (2014) added that entrepreneurs enter into uncertain markets facing risk when unveiling a new product, idea, or technology. As an ongoing strategy, P1 continuously adapts to new technology and purchases equipment strategically as necessary to stay ahead of the market trends and to ultimately maintain profitability. This strategy has catapulted P1's business to leadership within the local retail printing market. Schumpeter (1934) foundationally recognized entrepreneurial new ventures as risky and believed that entrepreneurial firms must innovate to be the first to market. Following the literature, Schumpeter believed that anyone seeking a profit must innovate, further surmising that the application of a new method and opening a new market is the basis for economic change and ultimate profitability.

Innovation. Business innovation is the process businesses use to achieve and maintain success (Murimbika & Urban, 2014). Within the realm of entrepreneurial orientation, innovation is the firm's usage of proactive measures to implement new products and services (Radipere, 2014). The three participants discussed the importance of innovation as a strategy to achieve business profitability. To gain a competitive advantage, businesses consistently purchase and use unique technology to create innovative products (Srivastava et al., 2013). P1 used technology and creative talent through hiring high-quality employees as a strategy to continually offer innovative products to maintain business profitability for more than 5 years after establishment. Researchers suggested that entrepreneurs who constantly seek upgrade have innovative intent, thus are more likely to succeed (Bello & Ivanov, 2014; Santandreu-Mascarell et al., 2013).

P1 currently owns innovative machinery programmed to print a rainbow of colors as a strategy of product differentiation. P1 maintains business profitability after more than 31 years within the print industry by engaging in technology and innovative concepts, purchasing high-quality machinery, producing sought-after work products, thus changing with the times. Organizational documentation provided by P1 indicated, "The business is constantly changing, and you want to look for equipment and personnel that will suit the business goals. It does not make sense to invest in equipment that will be obsolete in a year or two." Dai et al. (2014) surmised that entrepreneurs maintain a risk and innovative mixture for success. P1 uses investment strategies to purchase new equipment that will continually produce revenue and ultimate profit. P1 has a large, diverse, product line, customer base, and is highly sought after for products, thus regarded as a trendsetter. P3 discussed the assurance that the company was the right size with relation to the amount of equipment and staff necessary to operate. Instead of acquiring additional equipment, P3 uses current equipment to the maximum capacity. P3 strategically dissects the needs of each order and uses systems solutions to maneuver through multifaceted orders. P3 determines the cost for each order and uses the innovative combination of hired staff and subcontractors for larger orders instead of purchasing unnecessary equipment for large order processing. Schumpeter (1934) noted that the application of new methods and combinations is a precursor for entrepreneurial innovation. Innovation is a key factor to entrepreneurial success (Alstete, 2014).

Community engagement. As a strategy to operate past 5 years of business establishment, each participant involves themselves in the local community. Ruskin, Seymour, and Webster (2016) indicated that when establishing a venture, social entrepreneurs identify opportunities and leverage resources. Participants discussed their engagement with the local community as a strategy to maintain business profitability and name recognition. P2 realized that location affects the success of the business and the development of a community-focused business can lead to business profitability. P2 has innovatively maintained the business for more than 16 years in an underserved area of the city, where there are few businesses, leading to a sustained business model of engaging the local community. Researchers suggest that entrepreneurs can enter into new markets and produce in an uncertain location and economy (Carlsson et al., 2013; Rahman et al., 2016). P2 continuously engages within the community to drive new business and maintain current business. P2 uses a community-focused marketing strategy to maintain business profitability by sponsoring local youth sports teams. With this outreach strategy, P2 maintains business profitability with the result of bringing in new customers by name recognition on the team's apparel as well as marketing material. This community engagement strategy allows new customers to patronize the business and refer new customers. As a strategy for engaging the community, P1 works with local veterans' groups to sponsor posters and outreach material for annual events. P3 is involved with the local chamber of commerce, and has achieved a proclamation from the Wisconsin Governor's office for community service. In addition, organizational documentation provided by P3 indicated, "We have been able to make a positive name for ourselves in the community by providing stellar serviced and meeting and exceeding customers' expectations. We have been able to cultivate a lot of good relationships." Entrepreneurs enter into nonfinancial ventures to gain social capacity (Ruskin et al., 2016).

Each small business owner used the strategy of maintaining a community-focus as described in company documentation. Entrepreneurial firm's leaders proactively engage in social ventures to give back to underserved local communities that lack financial means (Ruskin et al., 2016). The organizational documents provided by P3 reinforce the importance of having a visible community presence as a strategy to foster customer relations, thus ultimate good will and profitability:

> The company is always willing to give back to the community and not just through the business. The business owner will sit on a board or chair an event if it

> helps the central city community. The company is very service oriented, and it is important for the business owner to give back.

Social entrepreneurs bring small-scale change to the local community through targeted outreach (Ruskin et al., 2016). P2 uses a social entrepreneurship strategy through continuous community engagement as a method of marketing and outreach, thus bringing in additional customers to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. P2’s company uses outreach strategies by hosting local entrepreneurial art fairs, leasing incubator space to beginning businesses, allowing local food vendors to bottle fresh vegetables in season for sale, and opening the space for a variety of local community members and events. P2 noted, “We put on a lot of special events; for instance, we offer local entrepreneurs opportunities such as allowing artists to bring in their work to sell.” Researchers stated that entrepreneurs who use proactive strategies position themselves for growth and ultimate profitability (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014; Razalan, Bickle, Park, & Brosdahl, 2017; Welter et al., 2013).

Notably, P1 identified proactivity as a strategy used to maintain profitability by giving back to the local community by supporting local charities. Although the constant sponsorships do not realize financial revenue, the brand recognition and identification of the business brings in new customers and ultimate business profitability. Customer relationships are imperative to business success and performance (Zaefarian et al., 2017). P1 noted, “We support local charities, such as initiatives for homeless veterans; it is the right thing to do.” Each participant illustrated proactive strategies with a community-focus to maintain business profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment.

Business expansion. Business expansion was a strategy most participants used to maintain profitability after 5 years of establishment. After more than 15 years in business, P3 expanded the physical location of the business by leasing a connecting space to create an atmosphere that is useful, relaxing, and organized in a manner that customers can feel at ease making decisions to identify and purchase products and services leading to business profitability. P3 noted, “I do not want to be a typical business, I want to exceed customer expectations when they come into a beautiful place, this is one reason we expanded.” In addition, documentation from P3 indicated, “I obtained a small business loan after the business started for ventures such as machinery and finishing items.” Similarly, P2 innovatively created and developed a dedicated space on the ground floor of the business location as a community resource for gatherings, which equivocates to new business and purchases, and ultimate business profitability. Some of the results of the expansion have led to the space used by elected officials, and high-level organizational leaders hold press conferences at the business due to the vastness of the flooring. The strategy of business expansion offered immediate results and opportunities to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. The information contained in a website article relating to P1 mentioned:

> The decision to expand the business to include a wider variety of products and services has allowed us to keep up with customer’s needs. We continue to look

> for ways to provide our customers with the best products at the most affordable prices.

Each participant provided strategies that aligned with the theme of entrepreneurial orientation using innovative ideas to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. From strategically using finances, catering to customer needs and wants, to making a name for the business by engaging with the community, each participant created and used innovative strategies that helped their business maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. Researchers have identified a match between successful entrepreneurs who use innovative strategies and profitability (Murimbika & Urban, 2014; Parhankangas & Ehrlich, 2014; Santandreu-Mascarell et al., 2013).

Theme 2: Human Capital Strategies

The second emergent theme was human capital strategies. Baptista, Karaoz, and Mendonca (2014) indicated that human capital is the combination of both tangible and intangible aspects that business owners use to cultivate startup survival, and moreover, to maintain the business after the beginning years. Further, Baptista et al. (2014) surmised that the background of the business owners could determine new firm survival past the formative years. Each of the study participants relayed information describing strategies used to maintain a profitable business operation using human capital strategies. Some participants described human capital strategies such as cultivating employees, accepting employee input, as well as giving employees the opportunity to use their skills to benefit the business.

P1 employs a small staff and uses the strategy of assuring staff competencies through training and development to maintain profitability. P1 is reliant on the skills of the staff to cultivate new orders and maintain customer accounts. P1 suggested, “The employees treat every customer that walks in here very nicely. It is important because you want to feel good when you walk out of the door you want to have a nice experience.” Additionally, organizational documentation provided by P1 indicated, “The owner founded the company with the help of his father, wife, and other family members. The company’s head of production has worked for the company for over 10 years.” Boxall (2013) noted the need for business owners to align the needs of the organization with the needs of the employee to create a good fit and avoid skill underutilization. Further, the utilization of the entire skillset of the employee will ultimately benefit the organization by generating a return on investment and profitability (Boxall, 2013; Voorhees et al., 2017). Notably, P3 stated, “I want to have a staff that can take care of people when they walk in the door with quality products and service.” Further, P3 discussed, “I look for staff that is compassionate and patient; these are qualities that are important.”

As a human capital strategy to maintain profitability within the small business, P3 is personally involved in all facets of the human resources functions within the business to include hiring, training, and developing employee skill sets. Quality employees are important to P3’s business; thus, the hands-on involvement in human resources functions within the business is ongoing, and with the lack of employee turnover, P3 has used this strategy to avert costs of replacing staff, resulting in profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. In addition, organizational documentation provided by P3 related to human capital indicated:

> I want someone working for me that will help their teammates and show gratitude. Those points help keep us going throughout our work day and help us not only treat each other better, but then also treat our customers better.

Continuous organizational learning within the small business context can lead to an increase in innovation (Brettel & Rottenberger, 2013). P3 is reliant on competent employees that are knowledgeable in the quick print field, and maintains a well-trained staff. P3 discussed the investment in the creation of a company training program as a mechanism for employee development with results of a well-trained staff, which led to ultimate profitability past the 5-year mark. Similarly, P2 noted that the company employs ex-offenders and provides culinary arts training on site. This is a strategy that P2 used for the past 16 years with positive results through a dedicated employee base which in turn provides a sustainable model for business growth and profitability. P2 considered selling the business at one time, however, noted:

> I hired some guys that had just gotten out of jail and knew how to cook from the institution, and I quickly realized that they worked just as hard as I did, and it put me in a different light for selling the business.

Employee development and training can increase the productivity of the employees in the business (Nelissen, Forrier, & Verbruggen, 2017).

A strategy that all three participants used to maintain profitability was fostering positive employee relationships. For instance, P1 illustrated austerity measures implemented by the company to keep the employees on the payroll through difficult financial times. This measure assured the employees that they are a priority for the company as the owner committed additional time and took on more roles within the company during this tough timeframe. For instance, P1 experienced a lag in business during street construction, and due to the business commitment to the employees, the company avoided layoffs. P1 instituted cuts in other areas of the company, thus averting layoffs. P1 credited the lack of turnover due to the family-oriented business model, resulting in consistent productivity and increased business profits. Documentation from the website of P1's business included:

> The company's exceptional customer service has gotten the company through some rough times, including the recession. When the economy crashed in late 2008 and 2009, some of the clients went out of business. Others cut back on orders by creating flyers and business cards on their computers. Further, the company had to work harder to find business. They ran more specials and in-house promotions, in part to remind customers it was still there. It cut hours among its four staff, but did not lay off anyone.

Allen et al. (2013) suggested that quality human resources are important because employees embark on broader roles. In addition, P3 interacts with the employees daily, even working in the kitchen. P3 indicated that optimal engagement with employees through individual human resources interactions is important for small business longevity and ultimate profitability. In P3s organization, documentation including website articles included information relating to teamwork. For example:

> I am a team player and team leader. I do whatever it takes to stay together and achieve team goals. I focus on cooperation and always come to a resolution, not a compromise. I am flexible in my work and able to change if what I am doing is not working. I ask for help when I need it, and I am compassionate to others who ask me.

Small business owners that engage employees within a familial context have fewer exit rates (Allen et al., 2013; Nelissen et al., 2017). In a commitment based human resource model, owners realize profitability and growth factors for employee retention and development (Allen et al., 2013).

Theme 3: Access to Financial Capital

The third emergent theme focused on the need for small business owners to have access to financial capital during all stages of the businesses lifecycle. Like Lussier (1995), Alagirisamy (2014) noted that access to financial capital is a priority for entrepreneurial business success. Further, Alagirisamy indicated that adequate financial capital and the ability to obtain financial support is a key factor in business profitability. Many predictors are prevalent to determine business success or failure, including the owner's ability to obtain funding (Fisher et al., 2014). In P2's organization, documentation accessed through the website included articles regarding the need to access capital. For example, "The owner and investors have been challenged to access funds because of the economic downturn." P2 noted, "Just like we have had problems accessing capital; every other startup is probably in the same situation."

Another strategy that all three participants used to maintain profitability for more than 5 years was the ability to use personal savings to operate the business. P2 and P3 discussed the need for access to the financial capital, however, relied on accumulated personal savings and retirement funds to maintain the business for more than 5 years after establishment. P3 noted, “I got a loan after being in business for many years for investment in the printers.” In a quest to obtain finances to continue business operations, P2 suggested, “I applied for a loan consistently every year, and we were turned down from the bank that we had been banking with ever since we opened our doors.” Further, P2 noted, “Once we realized we were not going to get funded, we made a concrete effort to just pay our basic bills because there was no money in the budget.” The literature within this study aligns with the theme of access to the financial capital (Alagirisamy, 2014; Brau et al., 2015). Miller (1983) noted that entrepreneurs take a risk with a new business including the attainment of financial capital. P1 did not obtain a bank loan, however, did initially borrowed money from family, and self-funded the business afterward. P1 noted, “I have a simple bank account, and the individuals at the bank do not know me well. After paying funds back to my family, I never went into the bank for a loan.” In support of the connection of the entrepreneurs needs to access capital markets for funding, Brau et al. (2015) noted a lack of bank funding is prevalent for entrepreneurs. P3 discussed that after being in business for over 5 years obtaining a loan, by stating, “I applied for and received a small business loan to move to the current location. I have since switched the loan over to another financial institution.” Conversely, P2 added, “Business profitability is not quantified by banks but keeping the doors open.”

Consistent with reliance on Lussier (1995), there are nonfinancial factors associated with business profitability to include the business owners' ability to access capital funding. Rahman et al. (2016) surmised that proactive firms have an increased opportunity for profitability. Entrepreneurs prepare for a time of distress, thus should prepare for the obtainment of additional financial capital (Alagirisamy, 2014). Cantillon (2001) surmised that entrepreneurs would face uncertainty within the framework of business operations. All three participants stressed the need for ongoing access to financial capital to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment.

Applications to Professional Practice

Strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs use to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after establishment have direct applications to professional practice. For small business success, alignment must occur between profitability and organizational performance (Aliyu et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2017) since successful entrepreneurs infuse the local economy (Amire et al., 2016; Brown & Thornton, 2013; Dahmen & Rodriguez, 2014). The theory of entrepreneurship, moreover, entrepreneurial orientation was the lens that guided this study. The tenants of entrepreneurial orientation are present within profitable small businesses (Gathungu et al., 2014; Rahman et al., 2016), to include risk, innovation, and proactiveness. Small business owners rely on succinct strategies for maintaining profitability, and ultimate longevity of their venture through resource awareness and technical assistance (Haltiwanger et al., 2013; Panda & Dash, 2014; Singh et al., 2017). The themes I identified from this study align with the concepts in the literature review such as risk-taking, innovation, and small business profitability, thus supported the research.

The first theme identified in this study was that of implementing customer service strategies for customer satisfaction, repeat business, and ultimate profitability. Satisfied customers are messengers of the business name as well as a driver of repeat business transactions (Alagirisamy, 2014; McCrory, Pilcher, & McMillan, 2017; Mohammed & Mohammad, 2015). The second theme, human capital strategies, is a method used to allow business owners to (a) hire and retain competent employees, (b) seek their ideas, and (c) empower them with the training necessary to perform their duties within the organization in a quest for profitability. Researchers have suggested that employee relationships are a vital factor when seeking small business profitability (Allen et al., 2013; Boxall, 2013; Rodriguez-Gutierrez et al., 2015). When small business owners solicit input from their employees, empowerment occurs and, ultimately, profitability through employee retention, development, and business longevity. The third theme identified in this study was access to the financial capital. Small business owners need financial capital throughout the life of the business. Small business owners use personal savings, borrowed funds, and retirement funds to maintain profitability throughout the business lifecycle. Access to capital is imperative for growth, stability, and seeking profitability (Baltar & de Coulon, 2014; Brau et al., 2015; Longui & Nystrom, 2014; Murimbika & Urban, 2014). Through the application of these strategies, small business owners and entrepreneurs can maintain profitability, sustainment, and business longevity.

Small businesses failure usually occurs during the startup phase (Hyytinen et al., 2015). Each of the small retail business owners in this study illustrated strategies used to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment such as providing good customer service, maintaining employee relationships, as well as the ability to have access to financial capital always during the business lifecycle. Thus, recommendations from this study could help other business owners maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment. Notably, many researchers have indicated that small business failure falters business endeavors (Fan et al., 2014; Jenkins et al., 2014; Khelil, 2015). On the other hand, some researchers view small business success with hope and promise (Fisher et al., 2014; Gamo-Sanchez & Cegarra-Navarro, 2015; Halabi & Lussier, 2014; Rauf, 2014; Tasnim et al., 2014; Zaefarian et al., 2017). Current and prospective small business owners who seek strategies to improve business practices to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment may consider the themes outlined in this study as a guide through the implementation of measures related to customer service, human capital, and access to financial capital.

Implications for Social Change

Even though the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs use to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment, this research has implications for social change. The implications garnered from this doctoral study include the potential of small retail business entrepreneurs to create jobs within the community. Researchers have suggested small businesses usually generate income from the local community (Ruskin et al., 2016).

Thus, the impact of social endeavors is broad (Razalan et al., 2017). The knowledge brought forth through this doctoral study could afford small business owners the opportunity to reduce the rate of joblessness in the local economy due to hiring local community members and increasing business longevity. For instance, each participant hired staff from the local community. P1 employs community members and is committed to retaining each employee, even through difficult times. Also, P2 not only hires individuals from the local community, but also the business has a solidified training program to help community members obtain skills within the foodservice industry. Lastly, P3 is involved with many community organizations and receives awards from elected officials for the many years of service and outreach efforts within the local area. Employing and developing local community members within small retail businesses would lend credence to social change (Nelissen et al., 2017). Furthermore, stable employees contribute to the local economy (Bakar et al., 2015). Notably, P2 is a funded job site for ex-offenders, thus offering stability within employment to a population that is difficult to serve. Solid work leads to employee self-efficacy, thus reflecting a positive social change (Douglas-Lenders, Holland, & Allen, 2017). By creating opportunities for stable employment, small retail business entrepreneurs can realize profitability with the added benefit of a competent workforce within the community.

Profitable businesses could reduce the crime rate in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, as when individuals gain financial security, the quality of life improves. Small business entrepreneurs use innovative strategies to increase employment opportunities, drive economic development, and contribute to social change (Ahlin et al., 2014; Sahut &

Peris-Ortiz, 2014). The social change reflects the meshing of all classes of individuals for acceptance and increased opportunities for employment. Thus, an additional benefit derived from this study could be the reduction in governmental assistance for basic life needs.

In this study, I explored strategies that small retail business entrepreneurs use to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment through optimal customer service techniques, human capital strategies, and access to the financial capital. As suggested by the participants, business flourishes with competent employees. Hiring qualified employees from the local community increase productivity and lead to optimal customer service, high-quality products, and profitability, because of increased organizational performance. Small retail business entrepreneurs who invest in the local community may influence social change by the implementation of strategies to recruit, train, and maintain community members by offering living wages through employment opportunities.

Recommendations for Action

Through this study, I explored small retail business entrepreneurs’ strategies used for sustaining of business for more than 5 years after establishment. The theory of entrepreneurship, moreover the tenants of entrepreneurial orientation guided this study. The tenants of entrepreneurial orientation are guides that small business owners can use to achieve economic growth through profit-driven measures within their business (Kegel, 2016; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Miller, 1983). Three recommended strategy categories emerged from the results of this study for action for small business owners to maintain profitability and sustain their business past the first 5 years of operation, to include (a) customer service strategies, (b) human capital strategies, and (c) access to financial capital. Small business owners could find this information from this study useful in developing strategies to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment.

The first recommendation is for small business owners to provide good customer service. Small businesses have a direct connection with the customers, and the identification of customer service and satisfaction tactics is key to seeking profitability. Mohammed and Mohammad (2015) noted that customer knowledge, interpersonal characteristics, and friendly front-line employees are key indicators of a successful business. Retail business owners and entrepreneurs who exhibit a customer service orientated approach may lead to a competitive advantage (Tajeddini et al., 2013; Zaefarian et al., 2017). Customer service and customer satisfaction are important indicators of business profitability for more than 5 years after establishment for all the participants. Each participant understood the value of customer service for maintaining profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment, to include return customer business, marketing through word of mouth referrals, and providing a top-quality product accepted by customers. For instance, P2 is involved in the daily activities of the business, even greeting customers when they enter the business as a way of engagement. Further, P2 will sit with customers throughout the day to interact with them and find out about their wants and needs. Next, P3 makes follow up calls to the grieving families that have used their services for print material. P3 provides optimal customer service and realizes the print material from the company is meaningful and is memorabilia for future generations. P3 further discussed the referrals generated from one customer interaction are vast. For instance, individuals that visit the business for a simple brochure may have other needs in the future and encourages referrals as a form of developing a relationship that will last for years.

The findings from the study indicated that the customer relationships and personal service is a benefit of developing relationships with customers, and ultimate business profitability. For instance, P3 noted that the employees connect with customers after the first interaction. P3 illustrated the way that a customer could initially purchase business cards, then after engaging with a staff member who outlines the full range of products, the customer may need a wedding invitation, or the family may experience a loss and the business obtains a referral for additional services. P2 personally interacts with customers daily as they visit the establishment, constantly engaging them to give feedback on their experience, menu selection, and possibly other items that they would like to see. Since P1’s business is over 31 years old, the relationship building model works as P1 realizes that when the market changes the customers want the newest look. P1’s staff contact customers as a wellness check to inform them that the business is carrying the new and latest product offerings. The strategy of maintaining profitability by building relationships through personal interactions with customers works for each of the participants in this study.

A second recommendation is that small businesses invest in employee training programs and industry-specific development opportunities. Profitable businesses invest in their employees by offering training and development opportunities, whether professional or personal (Allen et al., 2013). Retention occurs when employees garner current knowledge and skills through development opportunities (Nelissen et al., 2017). Small business owners could offer incentives for employee’s continuing education such as sponsoring the fee for classes to enhance industry-specific knowledge. Since P1 and P3 own businesses that are ever changing with new trends and technology, employees could benefit from subject matter training to stay competitive. P1 discussed the way that that internet marketing is moving at lightning speed as well as the need to recognize industry advancements. The businesses owners could host training opportunities within the physical establishment location so that each employee can gain insight on new trends within the retail industry.

The third and final recommendation for action is for small business owners to recognize that starting and maintaining a profitable business relies on financial capital. Regardless whether small business owners need access to a credit line, a loan product, or working capital, the ability to obtain funds is imperative for business sustainment. For instance, all three participants relied on personal or family funds to maintain their business. P3 received a loan after many years in business but struggled to maintain profitability during the formative years. P2 has never secured a business loan, even though the business applied annually. P2 discussed the lack of availability of tangible funds. P2 further noted banks and financial institutions have high standards for approving loans. However, the funds are out of reach for many small business entrepreneurs.

Despite articulating the need for the financial capital at startup, each of the participants eluded to their need for funding at later junctures in their business as well.

If financial institutions invest in financial literacy tools specifically designed for credit compromised small businesses, the small business owners could work toward building their credit worthiness and credit scores. A better credit score and the understanding of the credit process could lead to additional small business owner's approval for loans to start, maintain, and grow the business; thus, averting the need to rely on personal and retirements funds. Brau et al. (2015) surmised that at the start-up phase, entrepreneurs lack bank-funding opportunities to their detriment. Microfinance institutions could host seminars and outreach activities to uncover the challenges faced by small businesses as well as offering tangible loan products with flexible terms. Profitable small businesses need access to working capital to make business decisions (Singh et al., 2017).

I will disseminate the executive summary of the results of this study to the city of Milwaukee Department of City Development business improvement districts. Additionally, since the city of Milwaukee Department of City Development's mission is to offer façade grants to local businesses within a business district. I also hope for allocation of resources for the utilization of small business within the local business districts to gain financial literacy and façade grant funds to stabilize their businesses. Additional funding could increase occupancy because more small businesses could locate within a commercial corridor, thus increasing revenue for the city. The increased funding could help pay for unexpected costs of maintaining a business in an urban area. I also plan to: (a) seek opportunities for journal publications related to this study; (b) pursue future scholarship both locally and nationally; and (c) present the results at the local small business workshops, business conferences, as well as speaking opportunities within my role as an executive director of a commercial corridor. Community leaders, current and prospective small business owners, elected officials, and governmental institutions need to pay attention to this study and use the themes as a guide for engaging small business owners searching for strategies to maintain profitability.

Recommendations for Further Research

Recommendations for further research include focusing on different geographical locations of the small businesses. Because the three small retail business entrepreneurs who participated in the study derived from the north side of Milwaukee, future researchers may consider studying profitable small business owners from various location demographics in the Milwaukee area for comparisons, to include (a) the north side, (b) the south side, (c) the east side, and (d) the west side. Because all small businesses in Milwaukee need licenses to operate for occupancy and must pass structural codes before opening, future researchers should consider interviewing governmental units tasked with supplying licensing and foundational permits. This perspective could enhance study findings as some of the participants infused many funds into assuring their location was up to code and struggled with basic needs for business operations, including obtaining the appropriate licenses to operate. Also, governmental agencies could offer valuable tools for business planning to each small business applying for a permit or license before startup.

A limitation of the current study was that the results of the study may not reflect the experiences of all small business owners. A recommendation for further research is to conduct a more extensive study with specific questions posed to potential, current, and successful small business owners in different sectors detailing their experiences with customer service, employee engagement, and access to funding. Governmental organizations, financial institutions, and small business resource centers may use the study for determining how to provide services to the small business and entrepreneurial community. The retail sector is highly regulated. Mainly, retail businesses interface with the department of revenue and taxing authorities, as well as a plethora of licensing agencies for governing documents and oversight. Thus, the study could add value to governmental agencies that interact with the small business community.

Overall, the study findings and themes align with the conceptual framework of the theory of entrepreneurship, moreover the tenants of entrepreneurial orientation. Each of the study participants exhibited the tenants that Miller (1983) outlined in the original entrepreneurial orientation framework of risk, innovativeness, and proactivity. Zaefarian et al. (2017) indicated that establishing business relationships, both internal and external to the company is a prime driver of business performance. Customer service through highly developed employees is a building block for longevity, performance, and business profitability (Douglas-Lenders et al., 2017; Nelissen et al., 2017). Expanding the lens of the value of the customer service strategies used within a small business is imperative through highly skilled and developed employees from inception (Voorhees et al., 2017). The primary key to a successful business is to institute graspable processes through business planning, staff competencies, business climate awareness, and financial tools to achieve sustainability and ultimate profitability.

Reflections

My doctoral study experience at Walden University provided me an opportunity to strive for knowledge that will benefit my community. Despite challenges I faced with funding my education, I persevered. I took it upon myself to attend extra classes to equip myself with the tools I needed to write, understand the text, and articulate findings. Because I am a member of a business district, I initially had a preconceived notion of the type of struggles faced by small business owners. However, through bracketing, I learned how to set my personal bias aside. I embraced my research and interactions with participants with a fresh slate. As I found scholarly literature, my view broadened. Through the works of seminal authors to current scholars, I have learned that research is iterative and vast doors will open with knowledge.

I started the program many years ago and have been with Walden through several changes. With each milestone, I had to regroup and acclimate myself to new territory. I spent many years serving in the U.S. Army and applied in my studies the mental stamina and strength I garnered from military drill, ceremony, and structure.

The data collection and analysis process proved exciting and engaged at the same time. The interactions with the diverse participants inspired me to realize there are many organizational leaders in Milwaukee who want the city to succeed. As I move forward in my journey, I feel equipped to tell their stories of having an idea, the exploration of possibilities, being stagnated, having success, experiencing failure, and giving all to keep the doors open. The study enhanced my understanding of the challenges small business owners face and the lengths they will go to for continuity. Progressing in my career, I will take the lessons learned at Walden University with me by being flexible, adapting to change, and moreover persevering through the stress and setbacks that I have endured within this program.

Conclusion

The ability of the small retail business entrepreneur to maintain profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment could rely on providing good customer service, treating employees well through the usage of human capital strategies, and the ability to access to funds to maintain the business. Through the data collection and analysis, a total of three themes emerged, which was (a) customer service strategies, (b) human capital strategies, and (c) access to financial capital. My data sources included (a) semistructured interview data, (b) journal notes, (c) information from the participant's website, (d) archival data from newspaper articles, and (e) organizational documents provided by the small retail business entrepreneurs. The findings relate to the theory of entrepreneurship as introduced by Miller (1983), moreover entrepreneurial orientation strategies used by the participants to include taking a risk, being proactive, as well as using innovative measures to maintain profitability.

Data from this study validated the need for small business owners to meet customer needs and expectations by providing good customer service and quality products. Participants revealed that valuing employees' skills and developing relationships that will foster personal and professional growth contributed to small business profitability. While the well thought out customer service strategies that fostered opportunities to retain customers and drive business is at the forefront of reasons for their profitability, it is possible that small retail business owners could focus on innovative strategies such as company specific business planning tools to not only maintain current customers, but also to recruit and retain customers at all stages of the business lifecycle.

Each of the participants identified the need to obtain the financial capital to start and maintain their business. Whether understanding how to obtain funds for starting the business or deriving strategies to keep the doors open, each participant indicated that funding is imperative for business success and profitability. None of the business owners within this study received a bank loan to start their business. Instead, they took a risk and used their savings or borrowed money from family members; thus, access to financial capital was an overarching theme. Because maintaining a small business is costly, small retail business entrepreneurs should proactively plan for financial expenditures at the outset with the expectation to access the funds after business inception. With that said, small business owners must realize that having access to financial capital is imperative throughout the lifecycle of the business and should create plans to access funds on a continual basis. Thus, realizing that the assumption of capital equipment and supplies are costly, this strategy may also provide business owners the opportunity for expansion and growth if necessary. Although maintaining a small business for more than 5 years after establishment relies on the ability of the business owner to secure funds, engage employees, and satisfy customers; the adherence to these targeted strategies may decrease the number of small business failures, lessen the unemployment rate, improve community relations, and lead to ultimate profitability while contributing to positive social change.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol and Questions

1. Introductions, provide a brief overview of the study, and develop rapport.
2. Acknowledge participant received the informed consent form.
3. Give the interview participant a copy of the signed consent form.
4. Discuss measures taken for privacy and confidentiality of data.
5. Turn on the voice recording device.
6. Turn on the backup voice recording device.
7. Introduce the participant with identification code, date, and time.
8. Present interview questions in detail, starting with Question 1; follow through until the final question has been answered.
9. Ask follow-up and probing questions for more in detailed inquiry.
10. Conclude the interview process and discuss the follow-up member checking interview process that will last up to 30 minutes. I will inform the interview participants that during the follow-up member checking interview:
    a. I will interpret and synthesize the interview transcripts by using a paragraph style format for each question.
    b. I will provide a printed copy of the synthesis to the interview participant.
    c. I will ask probing questions related to other information in conformance to the IRB approval.
    d. I will ask the interview participant if the synthesis is reflective of their answer or if I missed anything.

e. I will ask the interview participant if they would like to add additional information.

f. I will continue the member checking process until there is no new data brought forth.

11. Schedule the follow-up member checking interview.
12. Thank the participant for their time, consideration, and participation in the study.
13. Turn off the voice recording device.
14. Turn off the back up voice recording device.
15. Affirm contact information for follow-up questions from the participant.

Questions

The following are the interview questions.

1. What strategies did you implement to maintain business profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment?
2. What barriers did you experience to implementing the strategies?
3. How did you address the barriers to implementing the strategies?
4. How did you measure the effectiveness of the strategies?
5. What financial resources did you use to sustain your business for more than 5 years after business establishment?
6. What additional information would you like to share regarding your strategies to maintain business profitability for more than 5 years after business establishment?