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# Governmental Procurement Restrictions, Deficit Reductions, and the Sustainability of Alaska Native Corporations

Paul O. Fondren  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Paul Fondren

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Walden University  
2015

Abstract

Governmental Procurement Restrictions, Deficit Reductions, and the Sustainability of

Alaska Native Corporations

by

Paul O. Fondren

MBA, DeVry University, 2010

BS, Fayetteville State University, 1996

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2015

## Abstract

Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs) came under political scrutiny in the United States in 2009 during a climate of economic recession and governmental spending reductions. Since then, ANCs have faced increased governmental regulations that immediately changed the ways that their leaders previously achieved growth and success. The purpose of this explanatory case study was to identify elements of ANC strategic plans that lead to success and growth when operationally implemented. The central research questions investigated what executable strategic plans ANC leaders need to ensure sustainable business growth and what practices have led to success and failures. Data were collected from interviews with 4 ANC executives, monthly marketing reports, division status reports, and corporate strategic plans. The analysis included examining word frequency and comparative phrases in the semistructured interviews. Interpretive-constructivist case study analysis and logical reasoning of coded data revealed 2 main themes. The first theme consisted of the essential elements of strategic plans: corporate analysis, market analysis, customer analysis, competitor analysis, and resource allocation. The second theme was the importance of strategic planning as a formalized process. Specific implications for positive social change include leaders of ANCs instituting a formalized planning process and incorporating each essential element into the strategic plan to achieve short-term success and long-term sustainability to provide for Native Alaskan Shareholders in perpetuity. Broader implications for positive social change include leaders of small or disadvantaged businesses gaining competitive advantages by incorporating the results of this study into their strategic planning practices.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this study to my sister, Donna Bennefield, who gave me reason to believe and strength to achieve my aspirations. To my children, Ashley, Chase, and Madison, you are my purpose in life and through each of you, all things are possible. To the true love of my life, Andrea, thank you for believing, waiting, and being here.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

In 2009, Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs) came under political scrutiny in the United States because of sole source or noncompetitive government procurement regulations (Buchanan, 2010). Prior to 2010, leaders of ANCs grew these corporations substantially through noncompeted contracts with unlimited size thresholds; however, by 2011, new regulations limited these awards to no more than \$20 million in total cost (Buchanan, 2010). This new limit created an immediate challenge for leaders of ANCs working to obtain and retain government contracts, forcing a paradigm shift toward long-term strategic planning. This doctoral study explored successful and unsuccessful strategic planning practices, approaches, and methods used by ANC leaders, and it was designed to enable ANC leaders to compete in the government contract industry under the newly imposed regulations.

### **Background of the Problem**

Leaders of ANCs face significant scrutiny, criticism, and regulatory change when participating in the Small Business Administration (SBA) 8(a) program (Buchanan, 2010). In 2009, Senator McCaskill (Democrat-Missouri) took an interest in ANCs, and she has continued this interest and criticisms largely unabated since that time (Buchanan, 2010). Senator McCaskill's argument centered on ANCs participation in the SBA 8(a) program, and it wrongly compared ANCs with numerous economically and socially disadvantaged shareholders to traditional single-owner, small, economically or socially disadvantaged businesses (Buchanan, 2010).

In February 2011, the SBA finalized new regulations governing the 8(a) program. These regulations erected new barriers to sole-source follow-on contracts and created a new focus on the size of 8(a) firms vis-à-vis the firm's primary North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). The Defense Authorization Act, also enacted in early 2011, mandated a formal justification and approval process for any sole-source award to 8(a) firm with a contract value more than \$20 million. By the end of 2011, these actions had resulted in a 33% total dollar reduction and 20% reduction in the number of sole-source awards for all corporations (Government Accountability Office, 2012).

The 2009 U.S. economic downturn, reduced federal budget, and new regulations placed on ANCs have made it especially important for leaders of ANC firms to design and implement strategic planning methods to attract business and remain profitable in the long term (Buchanan, 2010). Thirteen ANCs operate with various subsidiaries in the government contracting industry. The 16th Annual Government Contractor Industry Survey results showed that 50% of government contractors posted a pretax profit margin at or below 5% (Thornton, 2010). In addition, Professional Services Council benchmarks have indicated net pretax profit margins for industrial and nonresidential construction companies between 2% and 2.9% (Thornton, 2010). The historic mortality rate of large corporations, the 2009 economic downturn, increased political scrutiny, and new regulations limit the effectiveness of previous success strategies. As a result, leaders of these firms must take a strategic well-planned approach for future growth and success. Without effective strategic planning, ANCs will likely lose contracts and obtain fewer newly awarded contracts.

### **Problem Statement**

In 2011, the U.S. federal government appropriated \$537 billion for goods and services contracts (Government Accountability Office, 2012). However, during the same year, President Obama recommended deficit reductions of \$3 trillion for the next 10 years (Office of Management and Budget, 2011). This targeted reduction will likely affect the sustainability of contract companies. The general business problem addressed by this study is that some ANC leaders' strategic plans have failed to produce courses of action that generate improved performance and growth (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). The specific business problem addressed by this study is that ANC leaders often lack executable strategic plans to ensure sustainable business growth.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative explanatory case study was to explore what executable strategic plans ANC leaders need to facilitate sustainable business growth. I collected information from an ANC headquartered in Anchorage, Alaska; executive leaders from each of this company's operational divisions participated via telephonic interviews and shared their knowledge of successful executable strategic plans. I used a review of previous strategic plans drafted by these leaders, monthly marketing reports, and division status reports to conduct methodological triangulation. I explored the research of the essential elements of a strategic plan and activities that, when operationalized, produced successful results in bidding on and executing government contracts. Organization of strategic plans occurred with the essential elements as

identified by the participants, which were operational and produced new growth and improved profitability.

The population for this study consisted of executive leaders of the ANCs in the State of Alaska competing in the government contracting industry. This study promotes positive social change by identifying methods for improving the continued viability of these companies. ANC success is important because they (a) generate profits for the Alaska Native shareholders, (b) improve the economy in the State of Alaska, and (d) provide continued employment opportunities. A planned outcome of this study was collecting information that will provide leaders of ANCs with the essential components of strategic plans to achieve long-term sustainability for their companies. This long-term sustainability aligned with ANC shareholders' goal of establishing a mechanism to provide for the Alaska Native people in perpetuity.

### **Nature of the Study**

I used a qualitative, constructivist research approach for this study. Qualitative research focuses on words and meanings rather than numbers, and it is accomplished through induction (Bryman, 2012). Induction is an approach to theory and research in which the theory generates from words and meanings (Bryman, 2012). Constructionism asserts that social actors continuously mold phenomena, whereas interpretivism asserts that social actors grasp the subjective meaning of social interaction (Bryman, 2012). Using a qualitative research approach provided a means to understand how people interpreted their experiences and meanings in relation to successes and failures as constructed within their individual worlds, as suggested by Merriam (2009).



Five qualitative research designs are (a) narrative analysis, (b) phenomenology, (c) grounded theory, (d) ethnography, and (e) case study (Merriam, 2009). Narrative analysis is an approach for individuals to tell a story and may include a biographical study, autobiography, or life history. Phenomenological designs incorporate the meaning of lived experiences or phenomenon of several individuals, which made both phenomenological and narrative analysis inapplicable to this study (Merriam, 2009). The grounded theory approach is for the development, emergence, or building of theory through the study participants, which also excluded its applicability to this study, as suggested by Merriam (2009). Ethnographies originated with cultural anthropologists through participant observation and reflected a particular stance taken by the researcher toward individuals studied. However, more specific ethnographies focus on human society and culture, which excluded the use of this approach (Merriam, 2009). Case studies focus on bounded systems in which boundaries exist that may include a single person, program, group, institution, community, or business (Merriam, 2009), and also contributes to expanding knowledge related to organizational phenomena (Yin, 2009).

### **Research Question**

This study's primary research question was, "What executable strategic plans do ANC leaders need to ensure sustainable business growth?" The secondary research question used to help answer this question was, "What ANC leader practices have led to success and failures, and why?"

These central research questions were answered in part by posing questions to participants on their experiences within the past 5 years to capture their recent experience and the effect of relevant governmental regulations and economic changes.

### **Interview Questions**

I used the following primary semistructured interview questions:

1. How much total revenue does your firm earn each year?
2. Does your firm have a strategic planning template to follow that produces success and growth?
3. What are the essential elements in the strategic plan at your firm?
4. What elements of strategic plans directly result to your corporation's growth and success?
5. How do you believe these results are occurring?
6. What elements of the strategic plan directly result in your corporation's growth and success or failures?
7. What were the results from the success or failure?
8. What personnel participate in the design and draft stages of the strategic plans that have led to the growth?
9. How is the information for the strategic plan gathered and compiled?
10. How is it assured that the strategic goals are resourced and implemented?
11. What organizational leadership is responsible for review, approval, and monitoring of performance during execution?
12. What organizational leadership is responsible for the deployment of the plan?

13. How is the success or failure of the plan integrated into employee reward and recognition system?

14. What other information you would like to share regarding strategic planning?

The intent of the interview questions were designed in part to determine whether ANC leaders have established strategic planning practices designed to lead to business success and growth. Using these questions, I identified how the ANC leaders have solved or were solving the problem regarding strategic planning practices. The experiences documented in these interviews included successful and unsuccessful planning approaches and practices; during the analysis of results, these experiences were compared and contrasted with methods documented in extant literature and results documented in financial reports and monthly marketing reports. A goal of this study was to define actual elements of strategic plans that led to success and growth, including (a) competitor analysis, (b) firm analysis, (c) market analysis (d) customer analysis, and (e) strategy formulation.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was based on five forces analysis. Business strategy is divided into four broad schools of thought: classical, adaptive, shaping, and visionary (Reeves, Love, & Tillmanns, 2012). Reviews of a business firm and its industry are used to determine the proper strategic approach to the particular market, because this determination properly aligns strategy within a particular industry and the firm (Reeves et al., 2012). These broad schools of thought differ according to the malleability with the industry and the level of predictability in a firm's ability to

influence or change the industry (Reeves et al., 2012). Classical strategy describes a predictable industry that is difficult for firms to change; five forces analysis is a manifestation of the classical strategy (Reeves et al., 2012).

The underlying theory used by a firm and their associated strategy must be identified to understand successes and failures regarding a firm's strategic planning processes or efforts (Porter, 1991). A strategy theory describes the competitiveness of a particular firm through achieved success during defined environmental and market conditions (Porter, 1991). To properly define a firm's strategy model, a basic unit of analysis is required that identifies the firm's distinct product or service offerings and correlating market (Porter, 1991). Porter (1979) posited that five forces shape industry competition. Although the specifics of these five forces vary among industries, they remain consistent within a specific industry. These five forces are (a) threats of new entrants; (b) bargaining power of buyers; (c) threat of substitute products or services; (d) bargaining power of suppliers; and (e) rivalry among existing competitors (Porter, 1991). These five forces reveal the most significant aspects of competitive environments facing firms (Porter, 1991).

### **Definition of Terms**

*Action steps:* In the context of this study, steps describing *whom*, *what*, and *when* are involved in carrying out a strategic initiative and achieving assigned goals (Harvard Business School, 2005).

*Alaska Native Corporation (ANC):* Any regional, urban, or group corporation organized under the laws of the State of Alaska in accordance with the Alaska Native

Claims Settlement Act, as amended (43 U.S.C. 1601, et seq.) and which is considered a minority and economically disadvantaged concern under the criteria at 43 U.S.C. 1626(e)(1), (Regulation, 2010).

*Competitive advantage:* A function of strategy that puts the firm in a better position than rivals to create economic value for customers (Harvard Business School, 2005).

*Comparative advantage:* The ability of a firm to provide a service or product more efficiently or at a lower cost than competitors provide (Bahar, Hausmann, & Hidalgo, 2014).

*Small Business Administration (SBA) 8(a) Program:* The SBA's 8(a) program assists socially and disadvantaged business owners. Specifically, the SBA promotes the use of set-aside contracts to government organizations and assists with establishing small or disadvantaged contracting goals. The SBA has the authority under the 8(a) program to accept federal contract awards and subcontract those awards to certified 8(a) companies (SBA, 2012).

*Strategy:* A plan that differentiates the enterprise and gives it a competitive advantage over rivals (Harvard Business School, 2005).

*Strategic plan or action plan:* Documents that describe strategic objectives and the steps required to achieve them (Harvard Business School, 2005).

*Strategic intent:* Instituting a competitive culture throughout all sections of an organization by instilling in each employee a desire to achieve success, growth, and improvement (Hamel & Prahalad, 1990).

*Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis:* A system of analysis that leaders use to investigate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing a company or operating unit (Harvard Business School, 2005).

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

I identify and discuss assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study in this section. I have attached proposed mitigation steps and techniques to the appropriate areas and provided further explanation throughout the study. The known information in each of these sections facilitates the avoidance of researcher bias and achieves reliability and validity.

#### **Assumptions**

I completed this study with two assumptions. Tactics, techniques, and approaches for strategic planning are proprietary information. The first assumption was that study participants would respond truthfully and accurately during the interview. The interview questions focused on the participant company's success during the previous 2 years. The second assumption was that the business and individuals were achieving successes with the elements identified and discussed during the interview and no other means or avenues.

#### **Limitations**

Limitations included the total population of ANCs and ANCs operating in the government contract industry. Mitigation of these limitations was provided by selecting a large ANC's leaders for study. After institutional review board (IRB) approval, I performed a pilot study to ensure relevancy of questions. I was employed with the ANC;

therefore, a second limitation identified with the interview protocol was participants reluctance to respond openly (see Appendix A). I mitigated the reluctance by relationship building with the participants prior to the interview. Limitations included (a) the population consisted of ANCs; (b) sample size consisted of ANCs providing government contract services; (c) completing the study within 1 year; and (d) the interview guide, the instrument for data collection, may have resulted in participants experiencing a reluctant to respond openly.

### **Delimitations**

I limited the scope of this study to executives working for ANCs competing in the government contract industry with any commercial area of the firm excluded. Executives for the proposed study were intimately familiar with the firm's operational, strategic planning activities, which excluded support functions. Support functions included (a) legal, (b) human resources, and (c) finance and accounting.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Leaders recognize the importance of matching corporate capabilities to market and customer demands, and they understand environmental changes occur daily (Reeves et al., 2012). For this reason, leaders must include a comprehensive analysis of current and potential future environmental changes in strategic planning practices and strategy formation (Reeves et al., 2012). Even though leaders understand and acknowledge the importance of predicting environment change and instituting correlating operational practices, in practice they plan for only stable conditions (Reeves et al., 2012). I planned

to prove that leaders of ANCs do not have the essential components of strategic plans, which are executable by operational personnel to meet documented objectives of the plan and required to achieve improved performance and growth.

The required components, identified as operational and leading to success and growth, will provide a framework for executives to use in the future drafting of corporate strategic plans. Only components, which verifiably led to improved performance or success, is included in this case study as well as information contained in the literature review. According to Reeves et al. (2012), properly aligning corporate capabilities with industry, market, or customer requirements and defining current and potential future environmental conditions during strategic planning activities results in improved corporate performance. By providing leaders of ANC firms with a framework to conduct strategic planning activities and understanding of how to place them within the proper competitive structure, the ability to achieve success and growth should improve.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The goal was to identify essential elements of strategic planning that can enable ANC's leaders to increase operational success and growth. The significance of this qualitative explorative case study was to identify components of strategic plans, which are executable and lead to improved performance and growth. With the substantial reduction in federal spending and increased regulations regarding ANC sole-source procurements, competition will intensify. Leaders of these companies employ thousands of individuals (Buchanan, 2010). Sustainment is essential for the individual employees and the economy. With the proposed reduction in government spending of \$3 trillion in



10 years, companies may go out of business or at least achieve staff reduction efforts. Leaders of these companies must design, develop, and implement effective strategic planning efforts to prevent or reduce such reductions.

By identifying essential elements of strategic plans, and designing a successful approach to strategic planning, Alaska Native shareholders, leaders, and employees holding positions within these companies may experience positive effects, resulting in positive social change for these individuals and the State of Alaska. The design and structure identified through this research have the potential for use in other companies and industries rather than only government contract companies. The intent was to identify particular components of a strategic plan, which include (a) resource, (b) assigned to, and (c) implemented successfully by operational personnel. With the economic crisis, effective strategic planning can help aid in the continued viability of companies, their employees, and communities.

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

The purpose of this qualitative explanatory case study was to identify how leaders of ANCs assure their strategic plans include the necessary components that lead to success and growth. The literature review to supported the findings contained in this doctoral study consisted of the locating (a) documents, (b) data, (c) books, and (d) articles to explain the history, evolution, and the current state of strategy, strategic planning theories, practices, and approaches. The literature review has 89 references containing 82 peer-reviewed journals with 76 published within the past 5 years. These references consist of (a) peer-reviewed journal articles, (b) textbooks, and (c) governmental

documents. Terms used for searches were (a) *strategic planning*, (b) *strategy*, (c) *strategic management*, (d) *strategy theories*, (e) *business planning*, and (f) *strategic planning techniques*. Key sources of the literature review include (a) Igor Ansoff (1991), (b) Michael Porter (1979, 1991), (c) Henry Mintzberg (1990, 1991, 1994, 2005), (d) Steven French (2009), (e) Carola Wolf (2013), and (f) Steven Floyd (2013). The databases used for the literature review included (a) EBSCOhost, (b) ProQuest, (c) ScienceDirect, (d) Emerald Management Journals, (e) government websites, and (f) Google Scholar.

The literature review includes scholarly reviews and perspectives of the four broad schools of thought in strategy and strategic planning. This academic review highlights the differences among the theories and their applicability to defined industries and markets. This review also includes a comparing and contrasting of the theories, demonstrating their evolution to current market conditions, and highlighting their applicability to specified industries and markets during this evolutionary process.

The challenge reviewing the academic literature regarding strategy and strategic planning was that most sources addressed the strategy for companies producing products or specialized services. Strategy and strategic planning theories are applicable to define markets and industries, and the majority of the reference sources did not relate to actual types of services. ANCs may be identified as staffing companies largely, and these types of firms are absent from most academic literature relating to strategy and strategic planning.

On average, well-established companies only survive 46 to 65 years, with less than 0.1% surviving 40 or more (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2011). As of 2015, thirteen ANCs operate in various areas of the government contracting industry. ANCs include regional, village, urban, or group corporations as defined by the State of Alaska and originally written into law by the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, as amended (43 U.S.C. 1601, et seq.) (Regulation, 2010). The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act identified Alaska Natives as disadvantaged people through 43 U.S.C. 1626(e)(1), and allows them to operate under the regulations as outlined by the SBA 8(a) program (Regulation, 2010). Alaska Natives have a disadvantaged status as outlined in the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. A 1986 Congressional authorization provided leaders of ANCs unlimited dollar amount, sole-source procurement opportunities (Buchanan, 2010). In 2010, ANCs came under political criticism because of their growth (Buchanan, 2010). Senator McCaskill argued that sole-source contracts allowed ANCs to grow into large corporations under small businesses advantages; however, this position wrongly compares ANCs, with 500 plus shareholders, to other small business or 8(a) participants, which provide for one or two owners (Buchanan, 2010). The government contract market is a highly competitive culture. This competitiveness stems from low-cost competitive structures and the need for skilled resources and technological advances. Numerous competitors with similar capabilities and core competencies lead to a highly turbulent industry in which innovation and creativity frequently change.

To be successful, leaders must strive for improvement in their business pursuit approaches and operating methods, also known as exploring and, exploiting (O'Reilly &

Tushman, 2011). However, the emphasis also has to be placed on vision, strategic intent, values, incentives, and leadership, which preempt continuous improvement strategies (Markides, 2013). Without the initial and continuous focus on vision, strategic intent, and leadership, continuous improvement initiatives would not exist. The strategy is at the heart of success throughout the government contracting market and without it; firms' leaders face a short-lived existence. Strategy and effective strategic planning provide a common vision and values for executive management including (a) consensus, (b) identity, (c) trust, and (d) cooperation, which have proven essential to firm success (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2011). Decisions must be accurate and credible, which align with industry standards as well and the individual organization. Without an effective strategy and strategic planning practices, managers may discount future threats and focus on short-term gains at the expense of less certain long-term opportunities (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2011).

Strategic planning remains a dominant and widely used business practice (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). Efficacious strategic planning (a) improves performance, (b) aids strategy selection, (c) setting objectives, and (d) analyzing alternatives (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). However, beginning in 1990, the number of articles regarding strategic planning practices, approaches, and tool use began to decline (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). Prior to 1980, scholars focused their research on properly defining strategic planning in a doctrinaire manner and remained concerned about the reputation of the term as practiced, rather than results or outcomes of those practices (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). Between 1980 and 1990 scholars began to evolve in their research methods related to strategic planning by

attempting to identify associations or correlations between planning practices and results of those practices (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). As of 2013, no strategic planning topic has generated more debate than the relationship between organizational planning practices and the associated results (Wolf & Floyd, 2013).

The debate regarding the value of strategic planning persists throughout the strategic management literature because of the institutionalized rigid nature of the process and lack of strategy formation (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011). Actual strategy making becomes marginal through the institutionalization of strategic planning and the subsequent use of those, sometimes inflexible plans (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011). Although the organization's strategic plan captures the organization's intended strategic direction, plans portray inflexibility; however, little information exists regarding institutionalized corporate planning practices or the intent of those practices that lead to the development of strategic planning document (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011).

In 1994, Henry Mintzberg released a book, which highlighted fallacies with current practices and approaches and launched a new era by bringing new perspectives and assumptions to the field (Mintzberg, 1994; Wolf & Floyd, 2013). Cervone (2014) confirmed this stance and posited that the roots of the theory of strategic planning originated from the design theory prior to this era. Mintzberg redefined the process of strategy formation while integrating new ideas into strategic planning research (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). The redefining of strategy resulted in the evolution of strategic planning into institutionalized corporate processes where the identification of actions or resources are identified to obtain realistic and achievable results (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). Prior to this

era, strategic planning had been predominately a rational, centralized process (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). However, an opposing view observed the rational model as flawed because irrational decisions are unavoidable and sometimes appear to be central to long-term success (Cervone, 2014).

Since the 1990s, strategic planning and management thought processes have moved away from the simplistic view of top management's responsibility for strategy formulation and planning with operational personnel leading the charge with the implementation (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). In addition, scholars have begun to consider the diversity of personnel, which corporations integrate with their strategic planning processes and procedures (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). Scholars have also reversed their inquiry intentions from identifying obstacles regarding the use of middle managers and operational personnel to seeking and identifying positive results of these individuals' participation throughout the planning process (Wolf & Floyd, 2013).

From its earliest foundations, strategic planning, as associated with the field of strategic management, was fundamental to gaining competitive advantage (Xu & Yeh, 2012). Most commonly known and referred to as strategic planning, other names such as long range planning, strategic management, and corporate planning have previously been used synonymously (Aldehayyat, 2011). Strategic planning is a term used to convey the firm's explicit, systematic process and procedure for encouraging participation and gaining the commitment of corporate personnel responsible for developing and executing the plan after approval (Aldehayyat, 2011). Among the numerous definitions of strategic

planning, a common emphasis emerges based on a systematic, process oriented approach for strategizing and subsequent planning activities (Wolf & Floyd, 2013).

The economy has evolved into a highly competitive environment with global participation. Business models have shorter life spans than ever, driving strategy approaches and practices turning existing institutions into companies as innovative as start-ups (Kiechel, 2010). Leaders often leave operational personnel out of strategic planning activities, which lead to contempt between planners and operators since achieving results outlined in the plan fall on the operational personnel (Cervone, 2014). Firms founded in the United States rarely survive 40 years, and others point out that even large, well-established companies have a potential life of 6 to 15 years (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2011). This information highlights the need for improved practices; however, this practice must occur prior to operational practices, emphasizing the requirement for strategy and strategic planning.

For companies, leaders' strategies accurately describe corporate competencies, properly define the market, analyze and concentrate efforts between the market and competencies, and instills stability and uniformity (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 2005); however, strategy may also be viewed as a way of thinking, not a procedural exercise or set of frameworks (Bradley, Hirt, & Smit, 2011). In the simplest definition, the goal of strategy identifies a corporate competency that provides value to a particular set of customers and returns a profit to the firm (Leavy, 2012). Firms with a strong strategic positioning have resulted in value clear and distinctive (Leavy, 2012).

Strategy is change, which takes leaders down new paths to expand capabilities or improve current operational practices (Kiechel, 2010). Strategy is a plan that aims to give a firm a competitive advantage over rivals; however, a comprehensive strategy outlines the objectives and targeted path that operational personnel require to define their role and make their organization successful (Candy & Gordon, 2011). Leaders should develop strategies based on analysis and quantifiable metrics free of personal bias, but most believe these exercises fail to produce novel strategies and instead results in the perpetuation of the status quo (Lafley, Martin, Rivkin, & Siggelkow, 2012).

The 21st century was a time of aggressive capitalism, and although strategy may not be the only force driving this state, capitalism has certainly contributed most of the fundamental concepts and analytical techniques during this time (Kiechel, 2010). The intent behind strategic planning for most organizational leaders is to outline future business opportunities and operational activities; however, the outcome is often the development of a nice binder with a fancy label that lacks substantive content (Blatstein, 2012). Once the binder is composed, reviewed, approved, and placed on the shelf, many times actions cease. Follow-up actions to track performance against the plan does not occur nor is there a concern for the operationalization of the actions items listed in the binder. Consultants have found that in well over half of business enterprises surveyed, formal planning never evolves beyond annual budgeting (Kiechel, 2010). Highly successful leaders and entrepreneurs have often achieved global leadership notoriety by undertaking grand visions without having in place the necessary personnel and support. However, these people and their companies were able to achieve substantial success by



creating an obsession to win and the ability to sustain that obsession (Swenson, Rhoads, & Whitlark, 2012).

Strategy and strategic planning have evolved through the years like every aspect in the world and during these years various theories, approaches, tactics, and techniques have been developed, implemented, and practiced. However, four general strategic planning schools of thought are identified and include adaptive, classical, shaping, and visionary; each having a specific and defined approach associated with a corresponding situation or state (Reeves et al., 2012). Leaders conduct an analysis of the particular industry related to two critical factors, predictability and malleability, to identify the appropriate strategic style (Reeves et al., 2012). Organizational leaders must ascertain if they can confidently predict future consumer needs, operational efficiency, competition, and environment shifts and determine if their firm or competitors are able to guide those potential element changes (Reeves et al., 2012).

### **Classical School**

The classic school of strategic management includes the ideas and contributions of researchers from the middle of the 20th century, defined by the motto *capture success* (Ronda-Pupo & Guerras-Martin, 2012). During this time, the field of strategic management referred to as *business policy* concerned identifying the fit between external and organizational factors (Ronda-Pupo & Guerras-Martin, 2012). This original term still exists as *business model*, but still questions if firms can adapt to two different ways of competing in the same industry (Markides, 2013). Although the main goal of every organizations' leader is to increase firm value (Baxamusa, 2011), at this time, customer

satisfaction had not entered the strategic planning process. The premise was to find what the corporation was good at and match that capability with what consumers wanted or needed (Ronda-Pupo & Guerras-Martin, 2012) with the chief operating officer's primary objective as the maximization of the firm's fundamental market value (Baxamusa, 2011).

Developers of the classical school of thought premised that the company determined competitive outcomes with the best strategy (Tansey, Spillane, & Meng, 2014). Successful companies were making proper choices of where and how to compete while combining those decisions with activities to be implemented or dropped (Tansey et al., 2010). How an organization performs pertains to actions and management practices within the boundaries of the organization, whereas competing refers to the external drivers, primarily the interaction between the organization and its marketplace (Tansey et al., 2010). Organizational leaders have two fundamental factors, the ability to perform and the ability to compete, which when combined drive the successfulness or lack thereof in organizations (Tansey et al., 2010).

Igor Ansoff is given credit for providing four strategies for firms to increase revenues, which were market penetration, market development, product development, and diversification (Alstete, 2014). Market penetration referred to the firm's attempt to sell more of the same product to the same customer or target segment to increase revenues (Onetti, Zucchella, Jones, & McDougall-Covin, 2012). Market development referred to the strategy of selling more of the current product to a new target segment for increased revenues while product development referred to the innovative development of an entirely new product or service for the firm's current customers or target segment

(Onetti et al., 2012). Diversification involved the development of a new product for an entirely new customer segment (Onetti et al., 2012).

Although strategic planning is relatively young (Cervone, 2014), Harvard Business School developed strategic planning methodologies for private business, which defined strategy as action steps that define the company and its market (Candy & Gordon, 2011). Leaders develop strategies to document and communicate the fundamental purpose of the organization to personnel so they understand how their role intertwines with other sections of the firm to meet customer demands, provide social benefits, and improve economic performance of the firm (Candy & Gordon, 2011). Another simplified definition also combines the identification of corporate strategic goals and the assignment of assets and resources required to obtain the identified goals (Cervone, 2014). Strategies do not necessarily need to be complicated frameworks, as even simple rules of thumb may produce success as companies such as Intel and Cisco have experienced (Bingham & Eisenhardt, 2011).

Contributors to the history of the classical era include Mintzberg (1994) and Porter (1991). Mintzberg identified the origins of strategic planning to have begun around 1965 and argued the practice at that time consisted of documenting visions or ideas in existence rather than effective planning and strategizing exercises to create original concepts. Kiechell (2010) identified that plans and planning had been an integral part of the business for many years; however, the word *strategy* had only made scattered appearances in the corporate vocabulary before 1960. However, Mintzberg et al. (2005) ascertained that strategic planning was proposed to have begun in 1965 with the release

of *Business Policy: Text and Cases*, by the General Management Group at the Harvard Business School. Many ideas and issues in strategic planning or strategic management are in embryonic stages in this book (Ronda-Pupo, Guerras-Martin, 2012).

The classical school held a simple approach to strategy formation and strategic planning with the centralized question as what is the nature of this business, which pursued a purpose and policy that encompassed the definition of a company's business (Robinson, 2012). Answering this question and understanding the customer led to the fundamental objective to achieve a match between customer requirements and corporate capabilities of the firm (Robinson, 2012). The simple approach to strategy was also the target of opponents as the starting point for strategy is not necessarily the company itself or its competitors, but the entire world (Robinson, 2012). Focusing on internal capabilities of the company and its competitors is a mistake as the constantly changing environment of the world is a better determination for the identification of potentially successful paths in strategic planning (Robinson, 2012). Defining the scope or nature of a business is only a starting point for strategic planning, which may have led to the evolution of the design school (Robinson, 2012).

Another issue posed by opponents of the classical school rose out of its design in regarding implementation, which the classical school held as a separate element of the strategic planning process (Robinson, 2012). Implementation is critical to the strategic performance and illustrates the effectiveness of a firm's strategy and planning practices via potential results of firm performance (Robinson, 2012). In most other schools of

thought, there was no separation between those responsible for designing a strategy and those implementing that same strategy (Robinson, 2012).

### **Design School**

Except for the two basic concepts, identifying corporate objectives and assigning resources to achieve those objectives, little unites strategic planning schools of thought and theories regarding (Cervone, 2014). Capture success was the motto of the design school and established terms such as distinctive competence, differential competence, competitive competence, and comparative advantage that were all identified analyzing strengths and weaknesses of particular firms (Mintzberg, 1990). The design school of thought described strategic planning as a set of corporate processes and actions, which included the establishment of goals, objectives and assignment of resources to achieve those goals (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011). The essential concept of this school of thought was the design of a grand strategy (Mintzberg, 1990). One individual, the chief executive officer (CEO), created this grand strategy by making policy, and also by building policy into the organization structure and disseminating strategy through the structure (Mintzberg, 1990). This school placed the success or failure directly on the CEO's abilities, which resulted in a common error from this school of thought, assuming that one can delegate the process to others (Cervone, 2014).

The central concept of this school of thought was a congruence or match was used to describe the attempted positioning of the firm within its particular environment (Mintzberg, 1990). This congruence facilitated through assessments of internal and external states in which external appraisals reveal environmental opportunities and threats

and internal appraisals revealed the strengths and weaknesses of the firm (Mintzberg, 1990). The result of this analysis led to the expansion of the well-known strategic planning tool, the SWOT analysis (Mintzberg, 1990). The external turbulence had to be coordinated with equivalent corporate competences and behavior to achieve positive results (Moussetis, 2011). In addition, the SWOT tool is only effective when environmental shifts are in line with the particular corporation's ability to adapt, and associated with low-level turbulence (Moussetis, 2011).

A secondary emphasis placed and understanding on firm values, top management views and the firm's societal obligations, with resulting matches leading to the creation of strategies (Mintzberg, 1990). Once leaders created numerous strategies, also referred to as a creative act, they evaluated for the proper selection of the one best, followed by implementation (Mintzberg, 1990). This selection process has been interpreted ambiguously regarding the design school, because of the custom-made process design normally associated and described with the design school (Mintzberg, 1990). However, the design school model provides for the selection of multiple strategies and the final selection of one (Mintzberg, 1990).

Mintzberg (1990) posited that the design school underlies prescriptions in the evolution of the field of strategy, strategic planning, and schools of thought. Ansoff (1991) denied this position. Ansoff posited that one school was not an evolution of the design school and could not be a carbon copy at inception or during subsequent evolution. Mintzberg concluded the design school consisted of theoretical creations, formalized planning practices, and in-depth analysis to determine corporate positioning.

These are attributes of the design school but established in literature prior to this school of thought (Mintzberg, 1990). Whether this school of thought is responsible for following schools of thought evolution is debatable; however, this school is an original perspective, which viewed strategy as a fit between internal strengths and weaknesses and external threats and opportunities (Moussetis, 2011).

During the early days of strategy and strategic planning, approaches were to be kept simple and informal (Mintzberg, 1994). Bingham and Eisenhardt (2011) discovered that companies such as Intel and Cisco relied on simple rules of thumb and kept them very specific. During times of the design school of thought, companies attempted to identify markets they could control the competition as their primary competitive strategy (Hollen, Van Den Bosch, & Volberda, 2013). Since the design school, firms have expanded their operations through diversification or leveraged buy-out strategies. Even with the dynamic increase, analytical tools are still useful regarding understanding a firm's relative position, as well as their competitors (Hollen et al., 2013).

To summarize the design school approach, strategy formulation was the responsibility of the top management who determined the mission or vision statement (Espinosa & Porter, 2011) and primarily used case studies as a tool for policy and strategy development (Moussetis, 2011). The CEO drafted these documents through a deliberate process environment review and set objectives for others in operations to achieve and implement (French, 2009). The strategy formation process was to be a controlled conscious process of thought (Mintzberg, 1990). The design school model was an informal approach with the intent to remain relatively simple by identifying resources

and competences and no theory of strategy creation was forthcoming from this school (Danneels, 2011). Strategies were to be distinctive with the top one resulting formulated from an institutionalized planning process and top management's creative ideas (Mintzberg, 1990). The strategies were to be explicit, coherent, and fully formulated at the end of the process so that implementation of those strategies was executable (Mintzberg 1990).

Researchers argued during the design school of thought that strategy failed to develop from leaders' planning practices and processes, but instead emerged from unplanned elements (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). Some strategies and their success are results of emergent forces unplanned, unidentified, and unknown by corporate leaders (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). The premise of this school of thought is the denial of the emergent influence of middle and operating level managers input within top management's formal plan (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). The problem identified with the design school of thought is the basis of the rational design theory (Cervone, 2014). Corporations are too complex to operate linear or rational; other approaches such as complexity theory describe outcomes accurately (Cervone, 2014). As strategic planning evolved from this school of thought, middle managers and other members of the organization began to contribute to the process by adding categorized elements and using both internal and external resources for the development of emergent strategy (Wolf & Floyd, 2013).

### **Planning School**

The next school of thought to evolve during the classical era and one that formed during a push for corporate diversification during the 1950s was the planning school



(Moussetis, 2011). As noted by Mintzberg (1994), this school of thought developed alongside the design school of thought and had minimal differences, which most note as placing an emphasis on setting of formal objectives in place of the implicit incorporation of managerial value. Thus, the main difference between the schools of thought occurred in the premise of keeping the process simple and informal (Mintzberg, 1994). The design school kept a loose conceptual framework while the planning school attempted to expand with a highly formalized procedure decomposed into elaborate sequences of steps (Mintzberg, 1994). Others, such as Keichel (2010), distinguished the design school as able to choose a position and design the strategy from the planning school as emergent or it emerges from learned lessons from previous attempts.

During this period, external environments were changing rather slowly, which allowed time for separation of strategic planning processes into controllable, quantifiable, formal steps sometimes referred to as more formal than rational (Moussetis, 2011). The planning school focused on highly formalized, sophisticated, and deliberate plans drafted by a team of specialized planners, which moved away from previous simple, informal plans (French, 2009). This school of thought unintentionally focused on preserving the extensive institutionalized planning practices instead of achieving improved firm performance (Cervone, 2014). Numerous individuals have maintained that a formal planning system is an important contributing factor to corporate success and, in addition, link it to a well-managed company (French, 2009). Many corporations adopted strategic planning initiatives during this time and accepted the central message of formality, a formal procedure, formal training, formal analysis, and numerous metrics (French, 2009).

Mintzberg (1991) identified two fundamental differences in between the design and planning schools. The first of these is the participants in the planning process. The design school places the CEO as the architect of the strategy while the planning school incorporates a staff of planning professionals (Mintzberg, 1991). The second difference between these two schools of thought lies in their use of SWOT and the subsequent evolution of the model into a detailed formal model (Mintzberg, 1991). The design school simply conducted a SWOT analysis, while the planning school elaborated on the findings within the SWOT into a formal model, which resulted in delineated steps supported by numerous analytical techniques (Mintzberg, 1991).

Mintzberg (1994) identified three basic premises of the planning school, which are an elaborate, controlled, and a formalized process where the CEO has complete responsibility. Mintzberg considered Ansoff, a major contributor to the planning school of thought with the release of *Corporate Strategy*. The book's subtitle, *An Analytical Approach to Business Policy for Growth and Expansion*, was an indicator of the in-depth planning model included within the book. Mintzberg identified Ansoff's book as the pinnacle in the development of strategic planning theory. However, this degree of elaboration is the very issue most critics have highlighted in their review of Ansoff's book.

The formalization of the planning process during the evolution of this school of thought has also been the downfall. Strategic plans began to grow in length, and, as French (2009) identified, by weight. Even within the military, strategic plans have nightmarish detail and length with massive planning documents in excess of 1,000 pages

(Price, 2012). The problem with this extensive detail and length results in leaders inability to adjust to dynamic situations or circumstances and the inability to distinguish the planning from strategizing. Although the decline of the planning school coincided with the start of dynamic changes in the business environment mostly associated with the computing revolution, certain sectors of the business community such as the government arm still have many adherents (French, 2009). This position reinforces Reeves et al. (2012) belief that firms should begin with an assessment of the industry regarding predictability and malleability, as strategic planning practices or schools of thought do not work across industries.

Research regarding strategic planning slightly shifted during this school of thought; rather than studying the efficiency or effectiveness of the planning system within an organization, researchers began to explore methods leaders used to implement planning activities (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). Researchers began to identify how individuals participated during planning sessions to achieve integrated strategy and coordination (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). At this point, strategic planning was inflexible; however, an essential characteristic of planning is the ability for leaders or planners to adapt to varying circumstances and situations using decentralized decision-making authority (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). A planning culture emerged during this time as a critical element in developing an effective strategic planning process (Cervone, 2014). Thus, the achievement of strategic adaptation depends on actors involved in strategic planning and implementation of participation (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). Proponents of this school have acknowledged that environments with high levels of turbulence, complexity, change and

unpredictability, require a corresponding competitive culture and vigilant leadership approaches and practices (Moussettis, 2011). However, if time changes with corresponding power structures, managerial climate, competence and capacity, a formal approach is suggested (Moussettis, 2011).

Integrating middle and operational managers result in an exploitation of intimate knowledge accessible by top management (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). These middle and operations managers are in a position to provide important information regarding new and evolving markets, technologies, and competitors, and directly influence personnel's commitment to execute the strategy once implementation has begun (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). The transfer of knowledge is a balancing act by senior leaders as they can undermine their mission by failing to maintain corporate stability and confidence of the workforce (Cervone, 2014). The integration of these individuals with the strategic planning process has in no way diminished the role of top management, as top management involvement is a primary success factor (Wolf & Floyd, 2013).

Rather than analyzing predetermined strategies of senior leaders, integrating top management with middle and operations managers during strategic planning sessions enables adaptation and design to develop and foster innovative concepts, designs, and approaches (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). Wolf and Floyd posited adapting planning processes to the specific conditions facing an organization. The assumption of *one size fits* planning practice is a fallacy, which results in organizations encouraged to consider resources and potential sources of competitive advantage to achieve success (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). Strategic planning must have a dynamic perspective with emergent capabilities rather

than the traditional approaches, which followed consecutive macro steps and processes that eventually resulted in the development of corporate strategy (Wolf & Floyd, 2013).

### **The Positioning School**

Strategic planning came under heavy criticism during the 1980s, because of the rigidity of strategic plans at that time and their potential for reduced creativity by management (Nwagbara & Reid, 2013). During the timeframe of the planning school, special *planners* conducted strategic planning, which were newly created positions or outside consultants. With planners conducting a firm's strategic planning and plan development, managers were isolated from the process, negating their commitment to carry out the plans (Nwagbara & Reid, 2013). At times, under the planning school of thought, leaders made strategic planning bureaucratic, rigid activities used for financial control and failed to encourage the establishment of newly strategic directions, which resulted in their prevention of strategic thinking (Nwagbara & Reid, 2013).

The next school of thought to gain momentum was the positioning school, which developed during the planning school's ascendancy that was in many ways an extension of that school (French, 2009), which held formalized analysis of industries resulted in generic positions (Moussetis, 2011). As with the planning school, the design school was based on predictable industry analysis (Moussettis, 2011). However, because of numerous contributions and changes, the positioning school grew less bureaucracy, with more emphasis on implementation and innovation (Nwagbara & Reid, 2013).

Practitioners identified that excessive bureaucracy and structure restrained creativity (Cervone, 2014). Overcomplicated and inflexible planning structures result in numerous

problems for large corporations including leaders' inability to describe corporate strategy without perusing an often thick bound manuscript known as their strategic plan (Cervone, 2014). In addition, a reduction of staff planners with an increase in line manager participation was implemented along with the implementation of sophisticated planning techniques developed during the positioning school of thought (Nwagbara & Reid, 2013).

Writers of the positioning school posited that companies could choose between two generic strategies, differentiation or cost leadership, and any other options would leave a company stuck in the middle (French, 2009). However, during unstable economic or market conditions, differentiation is the only viable generic strategy (Moussetis, 2011). Positioning ideas include competition considerations by paying attention to customers' needs followed by management decisions based upon customers' needs to establish a particular strategic position (Lafley et al., 2012). The result of positioning strategies are company or brand positions within a particular market as perceived by consumers when compared to like competitor products or services (Harrison-Walker & Lake, 2011).

Leaders use the fundamental strategy positioning to establish their products or services and brand as a distinctive offering in the mind of their identified target market because position influence customer choices (Harrison-Walker & Lake, 2011). However, it also includes an entity's goals, specific strategies, their importance, and timing of planned decisions or corporate changes and incorporates how those decisions are intended to affect the entity's economic performance (Kochetova-Kozloski & Messier, 2011). Strategic positioning consists of the search for the creation of sustainably

competitive advantages and the consequent generation of extraordinary returns (Husted, Allen, & Kock, 2012). Mintzberg (1994) identifies Porter's book *Competitive Strategy* as the stimulus for scholars to express their dissatisfaction with the practices and results of the design and planning schools of thought and a belief in the need for substance.

Scholars of the positioning school incorporated principles from the planning and design schools and added two additional content structures, which included an emphasis on strategies themselves and substantial investigation into those strategies. (Mintzberg, 1994). Another fundamental difference outlined in the positioning school regarded the number of possible strategies in a particular market or industry. Strategies were unlimited during the planning and design schools of thought; however, scholars of the positioning school limited the number to essential strategies that were defensible against existing and future competitors (Mintzberg, 1994). Strategic positioning includes the firm's goals, specific strategies, their importance, and the timing of planned changes and includes how those decisions affect a firm's economic performance (Kochetova-Kozloski & Messier, 2011).

A benefit of using a limited number of strategies during the evolution of the positioning school was the development of analytical tools that assisted leaders pair proper corporate strategy to existing environmental and market conditions (Mintzberg, 1994). Expanding upon Porter's position, a firm obtains a competitive advantage through the connection of a particular firm and its environment, and identifies this as an outside-in approach in which the environment determines the business conditions for the firm (Ronda-Pupo & Guerras-Martin, 2012). This outside-in approach illustrates the need for

leaders to develop a strategy that exploits opportunities and mitigates or eliminates threats within the particular market environment and emphasizes the position that competitive strategy understands the industry and every market (Ronda-Pupo & Guerras-Martin, 2012). Porter (1991) identified five elements that affect firm performance in all industries and through analysis of these five forces, one can determine potential profit margins and degree of competitiveness (Ronda-Pupo & Guerras-Martin, 2012).

The five competitive forces analysis limited the number of strategies available and argued these included two generic strategies: differentiation and cost leadership (Banker, Hu, Pavlou, & Luftman, 2011). Leaders of firms with products or services that possess distinctive characteristics that are valuable to customers use a differentiator strategy and may have offerings with exceptional quality, innovative copyrighted or patented components, and brand name recognition (Banker et al., 2011). Leaders of firms using a cost leadership strategy attempt to offer products or services with the lowest cost to potential customers by employing efficient operational practices, reaching economies of scale in production activities, and realizing cost savings throughout the entire organization (Banker et al., 2011). High quality products, innovative products competitors are unable to replicate, and high levels of customer satisfaction achieve differentiation, which allows firms to command high margins through the creation of customer value, whereas cost leaders gain strategic advantages by reducing cost (Banker et al., 2011).

Strategies lead to a firm's competitive advantage, a term with concrete and specific meaning that define a firm's value proposition by realizing lower operating cost,



commanding premium prices for products and services or a combination, which arises from activities in the firm's value chain (Allio & Fahey, 2012). The value chain consists of the interrelated activities within a business that come together to produce or create a product or service, which has value and associated cost; implying that firms increase the value created by investing in value-enhancing activities and reducing cost (Abdelgawad, Zahra, Svejnova, & Sapienza, 2013). Leaders achieve competitive advantage by creating value for customers while retaining a percentage of the value as profits. (Abdelgawad et al., 2013). The source of sustainable superior performance was the result of the specific choices executives made in relation to the firm's value chain (Allio & Fahey, 2012). Choices and the grounding of those choices within the economics of the industry and firm results in a clear path to what has to be done to create and sustain a competitive advantage (Allio & Fahey, 2012).

Leaders of organizations are sometimes tempted to use multiple positioning bases, but this approach distorts the appropriate strategy resulting in confusion and lower overall performance (Harrison-Walker & Lake, 2011). Since Porter first defined these two generic strategies, the evolution of thought has transpired and placed them on opposing ends of a scale with competition proceeding amongst the entire interval (Banker et al., 2011). For instance, some leaders follow their firm's primary strategy and while also pursuing others (Banker et al., 2011). Leaders may concurrently pursue both strategies covertly while overtly pursuing the strategy associated with corporate capabilities; however, most leaders continue to focus on either differentiation or cost leadership as designed (Banker et al., 2011). Trying to identify and strategize every outcome and

customer is arduous to execute and produces confusion in the minds of potential customers (Harrison-Walker & Lake, 2011). A firm's strategy is only effective if execution of the strategy exceeds rivals or is uniquely distinct (Leavy, 2012).

### **The Entrepreneurial School**

The entrepreneurial school incorporates elements of the design school by labeling the CEO as the architect of the firm's strategy where actual strategy formulation transpires amidst mental reasoning (Mintzberg et al., 2005). Scholars of the entrepreneurial school of thought placed sole responsibility of strategy formulation and strategic planning with the CEO and moved away from the previous formal process approach to one of envisioning, visualizing, and predicting. (Moussetis, 2011). The entrepreneurial school separates itself from a design school through the promotion of predictions based on a vision of the CEO (Mintzberg et al., 2005). Scholars of the entrepreneurial school of thought expanded the CEO's competences to include possessing ability to effectively implement the strategy (Moussettis, 2011). CEOs accomplish development and implementation by possessing the essential mental attributes of intuition, judgment, wisdom, experience and insight (Mintzberg et al., 2005). The central concept of the entrepreneurial school of thought is the CEO's mental ability to create or design a corporate strategy and then inspirationally deliver the vision (Mintzberg et al., 2005).

The entrepreneurial school of thought placed strategy with an individual, the CEO. The CEOs were considered to be strategic or visionary leaders, able to inspire and motivate individuals for continued corporate success and sustainability and considered

critical during times of uncertainty or turbulence (Carver & Kipley, 2010). They have also been described not as a gambler or speculator and not necessarily one who takes the risk, but one known as a calculator (Mintzberg et al., 2005).

Under this type of leadership, significant organizational change may occur, which is often broad in scope, and the effect extends over long periods of time (Carver & Kipley, 2010). These individuals can help organizations by creating sustainability through initiating proper changes to enhance the organization's vitality (Carver & Kipley, 2010). This type of strategy succeeds in uncertain and predictable industry environments, but considered a critical element during stages of high turbulence (Moussetis, 2011). CEOs were required to develop a corporate vision and implement that vision during predictable and unpredictable market conditions; therefore, these individuals had to be flexible with changing conditions yet inspirational to maintain efficient operations (Moussetis, 2011).

The entrepreneurial school developed during turbulent market conditions when analysis of external opportunities and threats were paramount for prudent decision making (Su, Xie, Wang, & Li, 2011). Because of this environment, and to facilitate firm survival, entrepreneurial strategy evolved, which reflected a firm's risk level, ability to respond with new innovative products or services, and commitment toward the vision (Su et al., 2011). In contrast to the traditional entrepreneurial definition, in this sense, the entrepreneur was not a person with start-up capital or an invention; it was a person with a business idea that is powerful and profitable (Mintzberg et al., 2005).

The entrepreneurial school and entrepreneurial strategy were initially prevalent at firms developing innovative products or services in unpredictable industries in an attempt to gain initial market entry (Su et al., 2011). Because of these early activities and associations, entrepreneurial posture, or entrepreneurial orientation terms originated (Su et al., 2011). These terms were known to reflect the leaders' commitment toward innovation and level of risk acceptance and outlined in the firm's strategy (Su et al., 2011). However, the entrepreneurial school also included organizations with leaders employing operations or means of production in a different more advantageous manner (Mintzberg et al., 2005).

Innovation, risk acceptance, and a proactive corporate culture remain widely recognized as the essential elements of entrepreneurial strategy (Lau & Bruton, 2011). Innovativeness relates to how firms differentiate themselves from others to achieve competitive advantage, risk acceptance is management's disposition toward large and risky resource commitments, and a proactive corporate culture predicts imminent requirements and responds immediately (Lau & Bruton, 2011). Traditional entrepreneurial ventures must be compatible with the targeted industry (Gilinsky, Lopez, Santini, & Eyer, 2010), which is in line with Porter's position from the positioning school of thought.

Whether the individuals were heavy risk takers handling uncertainty or someone using innovative production methods, an entrepreneurs include company founders, owners, and leaders (Mintzberg et al., 2005). Entrepreneurship associated with the creators of their businesses grew to extend to various forms of leadership in organizations

where strategic vision is fundamental to organizational success (Mintzberg et al., 2005). Studies have indicated entrepreneurial approaches lead to improved performance, but this orientation may not be the primary antecedent for firm performance (Parkman, Holloway, & Sebastiao, 2012). Small firms operating with an entrepreneurial strategy may achieve superior performance in hostile environments (Naranjo-Valencia, Jimenez-Jimenez, & Sanz-Valle, 2011). However, the new venture entrants' strategy should match entrepreneurial abilities to the targeted market (Gilinsky et al., 2010). Depending on the environment and strategic conditions, the entrepreneurial strategy may contribute to firms' profitability and growth (Lau & Bruton, 2011).

Most of the research conducted during the entrepreneurial school is in the field of management; however, this school had very little writing and research relative to the other schools of thought (Mintzberg et al., 2005). In addition to the limited research, strategy formation of this school was conducted through the behavior of a single individual and left nothing to synthesize, analyze, or test (Mintzberg et al., 2005). Regarding practical matters and operational concerns, a heart attack could wipe out the organization's strategist; the prudent action is building a visionary or entrepreneurial-minded organization rather than relying on one leader's vision (Mintzberg et al., 2005).

### **Cognitive School**

Strategy is a concept, whereas strategy making is the attainment of the concept, developed and implemented by self-taught strategists who acquired their skills and expertise through experience (Mintzberg et al., 2005). The premise of this school lies with strategies developed in peoples' minds where ideas are analyzed and categorized

based on experience, and distinct perceptions lead to a defined strategy (Moussetis, 2011). These individuals' experiences shape their perceptions, which subsequently influence responses effecting and shaping future experience, which defines the central concept of the cognitive school of thought (Mintzberg et al., 2005). Mintzberg et al. sets the motto of this school of thought as, *I'll see it when I believe it*, because of organizations locked into a set way of operating based on their perception of the environment; unfortunately, many of these organizations failed because of their inability to anticipate change and adapt (Mintzberg et al., 2005).

Cognitive strategy associated the CEO or selected management personnel and based on *learning by doing* practice in which low-level and high-level factors became contrasted and compared (Johannessen & Olsen, 2011). Lower level skills develop an individuals ability to perceive a situation and form an appropriate response, while high level skills facilitate identification of inaccuracies relative to the response (Johannessen & Olsen, 2011). Items return to the lower level, for the state of operations and performance comparisons with the selected action strategy (Johannessen & Olsen, 2011). Again, this returns to the upper level for detection of continuous errors in relation to stipulated performance in the management area where limits are initially defined and refined with future experience (Johannessen & Olsen, 2011). Leaders anticipate and evaluate future states by evaluating experienced results, which result in continuous development of new strategies relative to newly defined situational boundaries (Johannessen & Olsen, 2011). When individuals use previous knowledge to review and

evaluate new learning or operational practices, critical thinking, the cognitive strategy is implemented (Liao, 2011).

Globalization influence leaders' development and execution of strategy (Mendenhall, Reiche, Bird, & Osland, 2012). Because of globalization, acquiring the ability to develop international relationships requires competencies never before required by management personnel (Mendenhall et al., 2012). This ability, known as cognitive complexity, is defined by the leaders' capacity to manage and resolve problems (Mendenhall et al., 2012). Cognitive complexity requires mental reasoning and allows individuals to modify previously adopted perceptions so new perspectives may develop (Mendenhall et al., 2012).

During economic growth and corporate expansion, planning experts create pictures of future successful paths using forecasting tools, strategic planning frameworks, and planning processes, which are relevant to the economic conditions (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2012). However, during turbulent economic conditions and uncertainty, the pictures created during economic growth and corporate expansion are no longer relevant (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2012). During turmoil and uncertainty, habitual strategies for fast and efficient cognitive processing, which normally work, become counter-productive; continued leadership in this type of circumstance applying previous ways of making sense, lead to numerous traps and poor organizational performance (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2012). In times of uncertainty, successful leaders must maintain more than one interpretation of the events in mind at a time while constantly

creating or recreating alternative scenarios of the situation (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2012).

Leaders must constantly analyze the changing market environments to predict global changes and develop appropriate responses that minimize risk exposure while maximizing opportunity exploitation to achieve success and lessen the environmental effect of the industrialized society (Smith, 2012). Leaders' abilities to perceive and respond to challenges are dependent upon individual's knowledge base and mental reasoning capabilities (Smith, 2012). Leaders with personal biases and flawed mental reasoning abilities may inaccurately quantify risks and fail to identify materializing opportunities (Smith, 2012). Judgment improvement strategies originated from understanding limitations with individual mental reasoning capabilities used by practitioners, change agents, policy makers and business educators (Smith, 2012).

The potential exists for numerous individuals to observe an incident and provide contradictory descriptions of the incident and appropriate courses of action based on previous experience, education, and training (Moussetis, 2011). Executives' perception of the environment and prediction of the market establishes market's appeal, while techniques and categorization of information executives use to determine the appropriate course for their firm validate ability or inability of the individual (Moussetis, 2011). Executives construct perceptions after mentally processing stimuli, based on experience, training, and education, which drive different strategies and planning activities (Moussetis, 2011).



The cognitive strategy researchers represented the company's activities in its market as complicated and required top management to think about transactions and eventualities (Espejo & Kuropatwa, 2011). This strategy, associated with large overstretched centralized resources, produce rigid campaigns resulting in diminished adjustment abilities regarding changing demands or market conditions (Espejo & Kuropatwa, 2011). The premise of this school of thought, required personnel in large organizations to disseminate information on exactly what to perform throughout operating locations, purchase supplies, oversee manufacturing and assembly, distribute products, and control and reconcile variances, which results in a highly complicated operational model (Espejo & Kuropatwa, 2011).

The corporate level dominates the organization's implementation of this type strategy and operational practices resulting in inefficient processes, procedures, and task assignments (Espejo & Kuropatwa, 2011). In a global marketplace, this type of structure and strategy restricts regions from communicating with their customers, as other businesses in the area, resulting in products that may not meet customers' standards (Espejo & Kuropatwa, 2011). Global performance requires two-way communication between specific regions and corporate; however, this type of operation restricts regional autonomy by only implementing corporate campaigns (Espejo & Kuropatwa, 2011). This strategy diminishes the local leaders' ability to identify new and evolving customer requirements and their capacity to respond with innovative solutions (Johannessen & Olsen, 2011).

Within the cognitive school of thought, the CEO's strategy formulation and subsequent strategic planning decisions became a hollow attempt toward achieving rationality (Mintzberg et al., 2005). Scholars viewed this rational attempt as sense-making, with CEO's only focusing on the conversion of their ideas into actual strategy and policy (Smith, 2012). However, during the time of this school of thought, push for environmental consciousness was also prevalent and added cognitive processes composed of a risk assessment between personal gain and potential effects on the environment (Smith, 2012).

### **Learning School**

The learning school has been attributed to a disturbing debate throughout the study of strategic planning and strategy formation, because of numerous topics including the architect of the strategy, participants of the strategy, strategy formation, and descriptive versus prescriptive actions (Mintzberg et al., 2005). The learning school turned strategic planning upside down and suggested strategy formation had been a fantasy that did not correspond to what happened within organizations (Lavarda, Giner, & Bonet, 2011). Scholars' study and research of strategic planning normally situate around two schools of thought, those of the planning school and those of the learning school (Lavarda et al., 2011).

Scholars of the planning school identified the benefits of formal planning in stable and turbulent market environments while learning school proponents' preferred rational incrementalism, specifically in turbulent and readily changing environments. (Moussetis, 2011). The learning school's premise is that the strategy emerges from previous

situations and experiences and may be the result of CEO, top management executives, middle management, operational management, or informed individuals anywhere in the organization (Mintzberg et al., 2005). With the learning school of thought, strategies emerge from strategists within the organization with formal design and execution intermingling (Moussetis, 2011).

The learning school of thought brought about organizations and individuals motivated to investigate new and innovative approaches, which facilitated a learning environment; however, a restriction with this school of thought deals with the time associated with learning (Moussetis, 2011). Learning has associated time constraints and requirements; therefore, the learning school of thought may not be suitable for environments characterized by high turbulence and the need for immediate responses (Moussetis, 2011). The learning school of thought is appropriate for environments with lower levels of turbulence in which time constraints do not hinder effective management strategy responses (Moussetis, 2011).

Scholars associate the term emergent strategy with the learning school and identify the practice instituted in organizations with traditional strategic planning, which requires immediate responses that are independent and adaptable to change (Maritz, Pretorius, & Plant, 2011). Literature regarding the deliberate planning schools associated with the rational approach to strategic planning is also known as content literature, whereas the emergent school has a process focus within the literature (Lavarda et al., 2011). Prior to this school of thought, strategic planning was a deliberate, formal, rational, comprehensive approach resulting with intended strategies planned, but not

necessarily realized and deliberate or realized strategies (Maritz et al., 2011). On the other end of the spectrum are emergent strategies, which are adaptive, evolving, incremental, trial-and-error approach resulting in emergent strategies in which the realized pattern, lacked original intentions (Maritz et al., 2011).

Another fundamental difference with this school of thought lies with the individual responsible for creating a strategy and leading planning activities. In previous schools of thought, the CEO was the architect of the strategy, integrating strategy by aligning assets and resources with the organization (Maritz et al., 2011). However, in the learning school, strategy emerged as an adaptive process in which lower-level managers often made strategically significant decisions without upper-level managements' knowledge or authorization (Maritz et al., 2011). This concept, known as a decentralized strategy formation occurs when lower-level managers implement a process that drive contributions from other areas of the organization and result in a changing strategic direction (Lavarda et al., 2011). Proponents of the learning school propose that leaders should allow the emergence of strategy from individuals intimately aware of the environment and marketplace (Lavarda et al., 2011). With emergent strategy, the specified strategy is rarely announced or documented and normally remain broad, general and nonquantified; while deliberate planning schools of the past produced announced planning results in a formal strategic plan authored by the architect or his delegates (Maritz et al., 2011).

The learning school also differentiated itself in the area of planning and implementation. Scholars of previous schools of thought proposed a deliberate separation

between the formulation of strategy and the subsequent implementation and evaluation of that strategy (Maritz et al., 2011). These previous approaches facilitated management control through careful analysis and monitoring of the strategy during implementation and performance to align processes and systems with the articulated vision (Maritz et al., 2011). Implementation of emergent strategies occur at a moment's notice, without any previously formulated strategy or process resulting in a simultaneous formulation and implementation process, rather than a pre-defined process (Maritz et al., 2011).

The emergent school leads to difficulty regarding control of strategy and decisions (Maritz et al., 2011). Operating by the emergent school methods assists responsible leaders with their role as change agents by facilitating immediate customer and environmental responses to change, while focusing on operational practices (Maritz et al., 2011). Some theorize that immediate customer and environmental responses to change lead to corporate sustainability, while others posit that deliberate strategy, which emphasizes long-term success and growth, is the appropriate option to achieve long-term sustainability (Maritz et al., 2011).

The learning school's emergent strategy provides organizations the ability to adapt when operating in a dynamic changing environment; however, the learning school also has the potential to result in adverse effects regarding corporate governance (Maritz et al., 2011). Corporate governance and control with operations practicing autonomous decision-making with no coordination of actions lead to poor control and accountability and increases the risk of unethical behavior (Maritz et al., 2011). A combination of rational and emergent strategies could reach a coherent fit; however, a clear and

documented corporate vision is a necessity for the integration of these two approaches (Lavarda et al., 2011). Communication of a clear vision by the leader of an organization with explicit missions and objectives leads to the rational emergence of initiatives with common goals (Lavarda et al., 2011). Most of the strategy reaching fruition in organizations is emergent strategy, rather than planned strategy and in the end a firm's strategy is what it does, not what it planned to do (Pugh & Bourgeois, 2011).

The current business environment changes daily through deregulation, advances in technology, and persistent global expansion (Prince, Barrett, & Oborn, 2014). Competition is intense, and customers are taking advantage of newfound bargaining power (Prince et al., 2014). Strategizing and effective strategic planning is essential for leaders of organizations to achieve growth, success, and long-term sustainability (Prince et al., 2014).

Strategic planning focuses on the long-term results and outcomes rather than products or outputs of a firm (Candy & Gordon, 2011). Strategic planning and military strategy have similar intentions, views, and tactics, which date back to the era Before Christ. Specifically, strategic planning is thought to have originated from *strategos*, a Greek military term used to describe the art of the general (Candy & Gordon, 2011). Strategoi validated their role during the Battle of Marathon (490 BC) as Greek advisors by providing strategic guidance to win the war, instead of tactical guidance regarding combatant exchanges during battles (Candy & Gordon, 2011).

## **Strategic Planning Tools**

Strategy is an ongoing evolving process of assessing the strengths of a business, diagnosing weaknesses, and envisioning possibilities to achieve success and growth (Pugh & Bourgeois, 2011). Practitioners developed numerous tools and frameworks between 1990 and 2010 from each school of thought, and each has proponents and detractors (Pugh & Bourgeois, 2011). Leaders must tailor their strategic planning processes and approaches to each organization as no single approach suitable for all firms (Wolf & Floyd, 2013). The same thought applies to the tools and frameworks developed between 1990 and 2010, which have specific uses and intended purposes (Pugh & Bourgeois, 2011).

Each tool or framework has a particular benefit or uses with analysis focused versus action focused, and each has a particular time for employment over which the tool shows primary efficacy (Pugh & Bourgeois, 2011). A common mistake by practitioners using tools and frameworks is the continued use of analysis to describe the current state or previous historic state while failing to evaluate possible future states (Pugh & Bourgeois, 2011). Describing in this manner is a mistake as the possible future state is the most important period for the constructing strategy and drafting strategic plans (Pugh & Bourgeois, 2011). However, many times when problems or opportunities arise, executives and managers look for solutions before developing a deep understanding of the situation (Robinson, 2012).

Development of an effective strategy requires a review of past, current, and potential future states while using the tools available to bridge the gap and identify the

most competitive path forward for organizational success and growth (Pugh & Bourgeois, 2011). For most post-modern organizations, the analysis must correspond with technological advances and turbulent environments, which create demanding situations (Moussetis, 2011). With the competitive environment in most industries, corporations have experienced a reduction in market share and projected revenue with several resulting from reduced governmental spending (Tassabehji & Isherwood, 2014). The shifts resulted in an appreciation of the value and use of strategic planning approaches and tools developed between 1990 and 2010 (Tassabehji & Isherwood, 2014). An area surrounding strategic planning practice is the constant evolution of trends that aim to create a universal approach for firm success; however, no such approach exists (Moussetis, 2011). To be successful and realize effective strategies, leaders of corporations must possess the ability to identify future environment, market, or customer challenges and develop appropriate responses that exploit opportunities, mitigate or eliminate threats, and integrates corporate strengths and weaknesses (Moussetis, 2011).

Strategic planning frameworks and tools establish competitive competencies between organizations competing for resources and profits (Tassabehji & Isherwood, 2014). Leaders use strategies to capture and create value for long-term corporate sustainability (Tassabehji & Isherwood, 2014). Value exists in customers' minds as a cost benefit analysis between reasonable prices and products (Tassabehji & Isherwood, 2014). Capturing value with profits result in the difference between the generated revenue of products or services and the cost incurred making or selling them (Tassabehji & Isherwood, 2014). Although numerous frameworks exist in the literature streams, two



remained highly developed and popularized, which are Porter's five forces analysis and the industrial organization view (Tassabehji & Isherwood, 2014). Whereas these two remain developed and popularized, SWOT analysis, the profit zone, blue ocean strategy, resource-based view, strategy as options, effectual reasoning, and the Boston Consulting Group and McKinsey matrices are important tools used by organizations to maintain competitiveness (Pugh & Bourgeois, 2011).

**SWOT.** SWOT, created by Kenneth Andrews, is an acronym for the strategic planning tool used to assess a firm's internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats. (Shaw, 2012) and is known as a tool that enables strategists to scan the environment to determine potential congruence (Robinson, 2012). This tool originated for companies strategically to align environmental opportunities with corporate capabilities (Shaw, 2012). The intent was to display fit between a firm's SWOT attributes after analysis in relation to potential customers, markets, or industries (Hunt & Madhavaram, 2012). The simplified intention of this tool was in matching opportunity with effort with the definition of effort similar to that of capability (Shaw, 2012). Leaders use SWOT to develop strategy and enhance the effectiveness of their decisions (Hunt & Hadhavaram, 2012).

Kenneth Andrews is given credit for the creation of SWOT; however, the specific origin of the term SWOT is unknown (Helms & Nixon, 2010). During the classical era, SWOT grew as a fundamental tool by assessing multifaceted conditions with less information while providing superior results (Helms & Nixon, 2010). A SWOT analysis is often conducted once a year but may also be conducted as needed to target a specific

business unit or item with the primary advantage of promoting proactive thinking and planning rather than reactive decision-making (Simoneaux & Stroud, 2011). Leaders frequently commence strategic planning with SWOT analysis because of the ease of construction in using this tool, brainstorming exercises from multiple viewpoints facilitates an initial session (Helms & Nixon, 2010). Leaders of companies attempt to gain a competitive advantage, the ability to beat competitors with larger market share or increased profitability (Hollen et al., 2013), by implementing SWOT analysis.

The SWOT tool is simple, straightforward and requires little preparation time, which encourages continuous use by practitioners and academics (Hunt & Madhavaram, 2012). SWOT analysis is multifaceted and facilitates leaders's review of current operational methods and corresponding effectiveness related to the environment, and an assessment for business development and growth (Hunt & Madhavaram). SWOT provides leaders with a foundation to recognize the proper organizational structure relative to the industry (Helms & Nixon, 2010). SWOT provides a clear summary statement of an organization's strategic position applied from corporate and functional levels down to the unit (Helms & Nixon, 2010); however, the analysis is contained within an organization's particular industry, not to anticipate changes external to the industry (Moussetis, 2011).

The SWOT matrix is composed of a two by two grid with internal corporate categories along the top two rows and external environmental or market categories along the bottom two rows (Helms & Nixon, 2010). Internal strengths and weaknesses are frequently a manager's starting point and may include brand recognition, organizational

configuration, operational efficiencies and effectiveness, and fiscal means (Helms & Nixon, 2010). Elements that are external to the corporation are threats and opportunities and include clients or consumers, competitors, market fluctuations, associates, technological advances, and regulation adjustments (Helms & Nixon, 2010). SWOT has been useful in corporate settings, successfully implemented in developing countries, and for individual personal assessments (Helms & Nixon, 2010). Leaders use SWOT analysis to determine the success of individuals and groups through an examination of their political correctness, as well as diversity training (Kowal, Franklin, & Paradies, 2013).

However, individuals who believe the SWOT tool should be abandoned identify numerous issues revolving around defining and prioritizing inadequacies and inherent subjective constructs to support their position (Hunt & Madhavaram, 2012). Creating sustained competitive advantage requires firms to bring unique resources and capabilities to a competitive environment, which entails more than simply evaluating environmental opportunities and threats choosing only high opportunity low threat business pursuits (Robinson, 2012). In addition to these shortcomings, SWOT has not been kept up to date regarding its relevance to new and updated theories resulting in vagueness in an oversimplified process (Hunt & Madhavaram, 2012). To support this argument, managers in development positions base their strategic decisions on strategy rooted in theory (Randolph, 2011).

Ghazinoory, Abdi, and Azadegan-Mehr (2011) identified SWOT as a popular means for defining a corporation's strategic action; however, they too listed several flaws with its use. Although SWOT facilitates internal scrutiny of the organization's

capabilities and scans the particular environment for opportunities and threats, there has not been a straightforward method developed to identify strengths and weaknesses (Ghazinoory et al., 2011). Managers tend to focus on too many strengths and weaknesses rather than the main strengths and weaknesses, and sometimes interject subjectivity and biases that do not produce a causality finding between strengths and weaknesses linked with one-time events (Ghazinoory et al., 2011). The core objective of SWOT lies with the internal analysis to leverage core corporate competences through strength analysis while maximizing value-creation potential and provides an opportunity to diagnose weaknesses for correction; however, SWOT lacks a set of application tools to support this endeavor (Ghazinoory et al., 2011). Because SWOT lacks application tools, Helms and Nixon (2010) recommended the application of SWOT analysis alongside additional tools such as Porter's five forces analysis.

**Five forces analysis.** Five forces analysis encompasses the bargaining influence of sellers, control of consumers, potential risk for alternatives, and competitiveness between firms, which attempts to capture the environment and the strategic positioning of the firm in terms sustainability (Prasad, 2011). In addition to sustainability, information obtained from analysis with this model displays profitability strains of competitor rivalry, the comparative control of consumers, and the probability of new competition emergence revealing the key understanding to leaders that market comprehension is significant (Leavy, 2012). Since Porter's release of this model, others have added a sixth force, the comparative influence of other participants, which may include local, state, and federal administrations, commerce organizations, lobbyist, labor organizations, shareholders, and

complements (Munir, Saddozai, Khattak, & Hashim, 2011). Porter's answer to defining the position and profitability within industries remains unchanged and relates to the unchanging core, or set of logical, fundamental relationships between profitability and the choices companies make as they compete (Allio & Fahey, 2012).

Leaders of firms using five forces analysis have an easy and simple approach to industry analysis and the resulting decision-making of whether to enter the industry, leave the industry, and determine firm or industry profitability position (Munir et al., 2011). However, limiting the use of this tool to these decisions alone has become a common misconception (Allio & Fahey, 2012). Effective five forces analysis provides executives the ability to intrinsically understand the competitive environment and illuminates potential paths for improved profitability (Allio & Fahey, 2012).

The intent of the five forces analysis tool is to provide a clear understanding of where the power lies for executives by exploiting strengths, improving weaknesses, and the identifying detrimental choices (Alrawashdeh, 2013). However, five forces analysis is not focused on taking action (Pugh & Bourgeois, 2011). The five forces equally conclude the competitiveness of a company in a particular market and the intensity of the five forces indicate potential profitability of the firm in the particular market (Munir et al., 2011). In addition to aiding in business decisions, grasp of the five forces analysis is a cornerstone of any business strategy course (Scurlock, Raikhelkar, & Nierman, 2011).

Implementing the five forces model allows leaders to sustain advantages by selecting industries with limited barriers to entry, vulnerable sellers, consumers, limited alternatives, and few competitors (Marcel, Barr, & Duhaime, 2011). Leaders of these

firms position themselves within those industries according to the relative advantageous approach (Marcel et al., 2011). Industry structure drives competition and profitability (Marcel et al., 2011). Understanding established industry competition, as well as customers, suppliers, potential entrants, and substitute products and their underlying causes, are essential for proper position, profitability, and establishing a framework for anticipating and influencing competition and profitability over time (Marcel et al., 2011). Executives using five forces analysis assess current market conditions while also attempting to identify potential future shifts, because change exists in every industry (Allio & Fahey, 2012).

Leaders using the five forces can capture the value they create; however, this ability is dependent upon the relative strength of the five forces that influence an industry (Morgan & Finnegan, 2014). Competition, risk of increased competition, control of consumers, and potential alternatives determine the competitive discount, while the brokering ability of sellers primarily effects product cost and value creation of the company (Morgan & Finnegan, 2014). Regarding the first four factors, as their influence intensifies, a discount ensues, which lowers the consumers' spending amount (Morgan & Finnegan, 2014).

**Industrial organization.** Industrial organization attempts to explain the strategy as an organization's ability to take advantage of opportunities in the market with their performance determined by the structure and conduct within their respective industry (Philipson & Oghazi, 2013). The industrial organization view emphasizes threats and opportunities within the industry with theory grounded corporate capabilities to sense

opportunities and threats in its external environment while positioning itself to rise above the ordinary to achieve sustained and superior performance (Wilson, 2012). By emphasizing the organization's activities and competition, this framework attempts to explain the creation and protection of competitive advantage (Tassabehji & Isherwood, 2014).

Historically, industrial organization focused on markets that departed from ideal environments with limited rivalry that resulted from firms achieving economy of scale, reductions in operating expenses, and proper strategy implementation (Einav & Levin, 2010). Industrial organization remains focused on the configuration within and among industries and performance of companies operating within those industries (Einav & Levin, 2010). The industrial organization framework is closely linked to the five forces model where leaders find and create a position within an organization's industry by exploiting opportunities and mitigating threats that develop within the particular industry (Tassabehji & Isherwood, 2014). In view of this framework, firms are perceived as a package of actions where resources of no value individually are used to create value and competitive advantage within the industry (Hollen et al., 2013).

When modeling firm behavior through empirical research, industrial organization frameworks use the economic theory for guidance (Einav & Levin, 2010). Researchers use economic theory to measure important variables and institutional specifics and focus on a single industry or market (Einav & Levin, 2010). Proponents of this framework argued that focusing on a specific industry provides an optimal setting to comprehend competitiveness; however, opponents argued this would result in confined analysis with

researchers unwilling to generalize results to other settings in which differences exist (Einav & Levin, 2010).

The competitive environment has intensified since the 1980s; however, the systematic framework of the industrial organization still proves useful in comprehending firm position within an industry (Hollen et al., 2013). This perspective is useful when analyzing competitive advantage in inter-firm cooperation because industrial organization focuses on a single firm's position against competitors (Hollen et al., 2013). The industrial organization framework is valuable in understanding positions of partners and competitors relative to the principal company (Hollen et al., 2013).

**Growth share matrix.** Bruce Henderson of the Boston Consulting Group is credited with creating the growth share matrix in 1970 (Pidun, Rubner, Krühler, Untiedt, & Nippa, 2011); however, Shaw (2012) identified Henderson's creation of this matrix in 1968 based upon his earlier work with experience curves. This framework categorizes business lines within the overall corporate business portfolio, comparing relationships between each line and overall based on competitive advantage and potential growth (Pidun et al., 2011). The four sections of the growth share matrix grid have evolved into the infamous classic stars, cash cows, dogs, and question marks (Pidun et al., 2011). This tool uses a two-dimensional classification of products according to relative market share and market growth rate to determine the strategic allocation of funds based on cash returns (Srivastava & Prakash, 2011). The matrix compared the strategic positions of companies' diversified business portfolio investments and assisted in the development of plans to reflect the need for each business unit returns (Srivastava & Prakash, 2011).



Throughout the 1970s, Henderson expanded upon the growth share matrix framework and documented his findings in the Boston Consulting Group's (BCG) newsletter, *Perspectives* (Shaw, 2012). By the early 1980s, numerous portfolio models comparing environmental opportunities to organizational strengths had emerged from corporations such as General Electric, Shell Chemical, and Arthur D. Little to name a few; however, BCG's growth share matrix dominates portfolio literature (Shaw, 2012). Since the initial development and subsequent evolution of the growth share matrix, three additional strategies emerged (Shaw, 2012). The three additional strategy mixes included maintenance-maintains efforts at the current level, harvesting-reduces mixture expenditures, and divesting in which removal of the section occurs (Shaw, 2012).

The growth share matrix assists executives define industry or market borders of the company, which ventures to pursue, how to allocate resources and capital, and establishes goals and actions business units with the interest of its shareholders (Pidun et al., 2011). This framework progressed when operating by scale and experience curve efforts guided cost constructs (Pidun et al., 2011). During this time, corporate growth forecasts determined financial requirements and volume signified the company's market share and ability to generate revenue (Pidun et al., 2011).

The growth share matrix and its intentions are referred to as corporate portfolio management (CPM) (Pidun et al., 2011). Leaders use CPM in multi-functional organizations to determine the capacity and profile of the overall company's portfolio and resource allocation, strategic initiatives, and targets for each section of the company (Pidun et al., 2011). Initially portfolio management configurations were effective because

they addressed the needs of the market established during that time (Pidun et al., 2011). As corporations grow and diversify, executive leadership becomes less involved and knowledgeable regarding the various business units. However, employing CPM concepts assists managers with gaining an understanding of specific complexities facing business units, distribute the appropriate level of attention, and improve resource assignment and sharing (Pidun et al., 2011).

**Learning curve.** A prominent tool developed in the design school thought was the experience curve or learning curve. The Boston Consulting Group takes credit for devising this method in 1966; however, literature regarding this topic began in a 1964 article in the *Harvard Business Review*, “Profit from the Learning Curve,” by Winfred Hirschmann (Kiechel, 2010). T. P. Wright first introduced the concept of the learning curve in 1936 to the aircraft industry (Jarkas & Horner, 2011). However, others date this concept occurring as early as the 1920s when leaders realized a reduction in manufacturing hours compared to a subsequent increase in productivity (Hossain, 2011). At this time, the efficiencies stemmed from task experience, resulting in increased production, followed by reductions in cost (Hossain, 2011).

Numerous definitions of this phenomenon have evolved since its inception; however, in simplest terms, the learning curve is defined as individuals or corporations become more efficient in the task after repeated performance (Jarkas & Horner 2011). A similar definition of a learning curve is individuals or organizations repeating a particular task increase their knowledge about the task, resulting in a reduction of time required to

finish the job (Linton & Walsh, 2013). The basic premise of this theory remains the same, which is the ability to learn from experience (Jarkas & Horner, 2011).

The learning curve has proven to be relevant to numerous industries; specifically industries involving mass production; however, labor-intensive industries have a more significant curve because of the human learning element versus a machine's inability to learn (Jarkas and Horner, 2011). Individual's learning and experience from past projects, known as *knowledge stock*, pose that professional firms' success depends on how good individuals manage and leverage their accumulated experience (Staats, Brunner, & Upton, 2011). Knowledge depreciation occurs when the stock of knowledge available at the beginning of the month is less at the end of the month (Linton & Walsh, 2013).

**PEST analysis.** Political, economic, social, and technological (PEST) analysis, also referred to social, technological, economic, and political (STEP) analysis, provides an analysis of the macro-environment to include the political, economic, social and technological variables within a corporation's competitive landscape (Dickson-Green, 2013). Leaders in organizations implementing PEST analysis can create a list of issues to consider in formulating their strategy (Dickson-Green, 2013). Identifying these issues leads to cost-benefit analysis in relation to their probability and effect, which results in planning time accordingly adjusted (Dickson-Green, 2013). For example, more planning time may be spent on potential issues with high probability and effect and less time on issues with smaller consequences and lower probability of occurrence (Dickson-Green, 2013). During these planning sessions, scenario planning is conducted to consider a series

of possible futures based upon the changes that could occur in the market based on the identified issues and subsequent cost-benefit analysis (Dickson-Green, 2013).

Much like previously developed strategic planning tools such as SWOT, PEST analysis is an attempt to identify and explain internal corporate factors and external industry factors to determine potential strategies for future success and growth (Mahnaz Hemmati, Mohammad, & Saderi, 2012). PEST analysis has integration capabilities with SWOT analysis by studying the external elements related to political, economic, social and technological issues, which facilitates the identification of elements to use in SWOT analysis leading to a distinct comprehension of environmental conditions surrounding the firm (Mahnaz Hemmati et al., 2012). Once substantial analysis is complete, the results integrate with meeting outcomes of senior management and planning specialists to define the optimal strategies selected, prioritization, and propose to the organizational decision makers (Mahnaz Hemmati et al., 2012).

**Delphi method.** The Delphi method or technique, developed over 50 years ago, has been used extensively throughout a variety of fields (Donohoe, 2011). The Delphi technique uses a qualitative technique that systematically merges professional knowledge and opinion and is achieved by iterative rounds of consecutive questions intermingled among organized responses and explanations (Donohoe, 2011). Delphi, initially created to extract opinions from experts, has evolved from an era of secrecy in the 1950s to an era of novelty in the 1960s, an era of popularity in the 1970s, an era of scrutiny in the late 1970s, to its present state permanence and enhancement (Donohoe, 2011). Researchers have used the Delphi technique to solve societal issues and in a wide range of disciplines

including governmental planning, environmental management, marketing, and corporate administration (Donohoe, 2011).

The Delphi method facilitates strategic planning in which an organization interviews a group of experts one-on-one or via questionnaires (Dickson-Green, 2013). Questionnaire results are compared, contrasted, and collated to initiate a new round of questions, which are again provided to the experts (Dickson-Green, 2013). The revised questions target more specificity regarding the answers provided in the initial questionnaire, which may have evolved from the original round of questions (Dickson-Green, 2013). However, the goal of using this technique for strategic planning is to gain foresight used to select the proper strategy and path to follow for corporate success (Dickson-Green, 2013). Foresight attempts to offer a detailed picture of possible future states that can assist a corporation adjust to environment fluctuations and significantly reduces the chance of being left behind in their respective market (Dickson-Green, 2013).

**Blue ocean strategy.** Blue ocean strategy, introduced by Kim and Mauborgne in 2004, is a relatively new approach to strategy and strategic planning (Borgianni, Cascini, & Rotini, 2012). The principles of the blue ocean strategy are simple; however, the operationalization and implementation is not been synchronized or properly documented for corporate use; nevertheless companies are declaring application of blue ocean strategy principles (Borgianni et al., 2012). This model is the first approach within the strategy and strategic planning fields to avoid the direct pairing of external and internal variables (Borgianni et al., 2012). The aim of strategizing and planning is to gain an advantage over other competitors, predominately accomplished using a SWOT or another similar

type framework comparing external and internal variables; however, the blue ocean strategy attempts to identify areas without competition or competitors (Borgianni et al., 2012).

Leaders using the blue ocean strategy attempt to gain success by reconstructing market boundaries, focusing on the overarching corporate goals, reaching beyond the existing demand, sequencing strategy, overcoming organizational or bureaucratic hurdles, and by building execution into strategy (Borgianni et al., 2012). The result of the blue ocean strategy approach is an attempt to locate a blue ocean, symbolic of unknown space, versus a red ocean, symbolic of blood spilled through traditional competition, which is tough and deadly (Mirrahimi, 2013). Red oceans represent industries in existence while blue oceans are nonexistent industries (Mirrahimi, 2013). With blue oceans, no advantages exist, because no competition exists and companies can create rules and determine the boundaries of a particular industry (Mirrahimi, 2013).

Leaders using the blue ocean strategy focus on value innovation with corporations while simultaneously creating value for their customers (Mirrahimi, 2013). Corporate leaders must create value for their customers, and they must also derive value from customers, which creates a win-win strategy (Yang & Yang, 2011). Leaders use blue ocean strategy to derive value from buyers resulting in loyal customers with enhanced intentions of future purchases (Yang & Yang, 2011). Leaders use the blue ocean strategy four-action framework, which is also referred to as the eliminate-reduce-raise-create grid, to obtain loyal customers (Yang & Yang, 2011). This grid employs the framework by eliminating costs, which have no value to customers, reducing over-designed attributes of

products or services, raising attributes with high customer demand or attraction, and by creating completely unique items of appeal for customers or new demand to attract noncustomers (Yang & Yang, 2011).

Blue ocean strategy is congruent with entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial individuals (Mirrahimi, 2013). Entrepreneurs are known to take the role of innovators and have characteristics including the need to win, accepts risk, strives for individuality, and creativity (Mirrahimi, 2013). Entrepreneurs follow paths and different approaches in their quest to develop an authentic idea that produces a legitimate new market (Mirrahimi, 2013). Entrepreneurs explore alternative industries, strategic groups within the industry, complementary products or services, search for new customers of an established chain, and the functional and emotional attributes of buyers (Mirrahimi, 2013). This type of approach has the potential to produce evolutionary work rather than incremental variations in the same area resulting in quantum leaps (Randall, 2015).

The blue ocean strategy attempts to lead companies to success through a groundbreaking or bypassing type approach with a original concept that fulfills a undeveloped previously nonexistent need, rather than head-on competition (Randall, 2015). Using the blue ocean approach, leaders avoid competition within existing industries and attempt to create markets, demands, or customers (Randall, 2015). The conventional approach to competition was the exact opposite of blue ocean strategy where competitors try to beat on another within an existing market or industry using traditional strategies of cost differentiation, efficiencies gained through economies of scale, or product differentiation (Randall, 2015).

Strategic planning has undergone substantial changes resulting in less bureaucracy while emphasizing on implementation and innovation by replacing staff planners with operational and line managers (Aldehayyat, 2011). These managers use more sophisticated techniques such as scenario planning considering changing markets and the competitive and technological environment (Aldehayyat, 2011). Strategic planning tool use has limited research published to date; however, researchers have attempted to find out to what extent there were an awareness and use of strategic planning tools and technique (Aldehayyat, 2011). Researchers found financial analysis to be the most commonly used tool for personally owned businesses and the use of PEST and Porter's five-force analysis received high rankings; however, these findings also varied between business locations relative to specific countries (Aldehayyat, 2011).

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 1 was the introduction that described the doctoral study (a) problem statement, (b) conceptual framework, (c) research questions, and (d) literature review. Use of a qualitative explanatory case study will facilitate the exploration of the strategic planning approaches and practices of ANCs competing in the government contract industry. Academic literature exists regarding strategic planning (a) approaches, (b) practices, (c) tools, and (d) schools of thought. Academic literature to include this doctoral study has evolved to explore the benefits of strategic planning approaches and appropriate tool use for corporate success and growth. A thorough review of case studies and interviews with selected ANC executives will provide information for analysis in an attempt to identify the most successful elements of (a) strategic planning, (b) strategic



planning approaches, or (c) strategic planning tools. My objective for Section 2 is to describe the (a) doctoral study research design, (b) instruments, (c) data analysis, (d) participants, and (e) ethical considerations.

## Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I describe the research design, instruments, and data analysis technique for analyzing the research problem of this doctoral study. In addition, this section consists of an overview and explanation of (a) selection criteria for study participants, (b) establishing interview questions, and (c) planned steps to achieve reliability and validity in the doctoral study. I provided an account of the participants' protective measures to ensure employment of ethical measures during data collection and subsequent analysis.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative explanatory case study was to explore what executable strategic plans ANC leaders need to ensure sustainable business growth. Executive leaders from each operational division within the selected ANC headquartered in Anchorage, Alaska, participated via telephonic interviews to share their knowledge of successful executable strategic plans. I reviewed previous strategic plans drafted by these leaders, monthly marketing reports, and division status reports to conduct methodological triangulation. I explored the research the essential elements of a strategic plan and activities that, when operationalized, produced successful results in bidding on and executing government contracts. Organization of strategic plans occurred with the essential elements as identified by the participants, which were operational and produced growth and company success.

The population for this study included executive leaders of the ANCs in the State of Alaska competing in the government contracting industry. Contributions to social

change from this study may include continued viability of these companies, which produce (a) profits for the Alaska Native shareholders, (b) an improved economy in the State of Alaska, and (d) continued employment opportunities. Leaders of ANCs may be better equipped with the essential components of strategic plans to achieve long-term sustainability. This long-term sustainability aligned with ANC shareholders' goal of establishing a mechanism to provide for the Alaska Native people in perpetuity.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I was the data collection instrument and an integral part of the study from the inception of the research, to development of research questions, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of the results (Trainor & Bouchard, 2012). Thirteen ANCs with several subsidiaries operate in the government contracting industry. Executives from the selected ANC participated via telephonic interviews in the doctoral study to share their experiences. My creation of questions and construction a data analysis instrument captured the participants' knowledge and use of strategic planning methods, techniques, and tools, which resulted in positive and negative results during implementation and execution of their plans. A challenge existed in properly identifying issues, both positive and negative, among the various strategic planning approaches and tool use. I built an interview framework to uphold both reliability and validity in substantiating the research conclusions. Testing of the protocol occurred during the pilot study after gaining IRB approval.

I currently work with and have developed a rapport with many ANC executives responsible for their organization's strategic planning processes and who participate in

these planning sessions as well, which could have produced personal bias. Personal bias emulates from values or beliefs and feelings held by a researcher that has the potential to affect the outcome of the study (Bryman, 2012). To mitigate influences of personal biases and misinterpretation of the data through a personal lens, participants' approval by member checking the transcribed interview ensured the accuracy and representation of the information (Bryman, 2012). Interviews were coordinated and scheduled with executives during convenient times while overcoming scheduling issues because of the significant time difference. I followed the Belmont Report Guidelines (a) beneficence, (b) justice, and (c) respect for persons at all times.

### **Participants**

Participants from the selected ANC were included to identify successful approaches for strategic planning and effective tool use. Participant selection for this study used the purposive sampling strategy (Merriam, 2009). Purposive sampling, also referred to as purposeful sampling, uses elements selected from the target population based on the fit with the study and specific inclusion or exclusion criteria (Merriam, 2009). Researchers purposely select elements that satisfy specific inclusion and exclusion criteria for participation in the study (Bryman, 2012).

To ensure the participants can assist to support the proposed research design and purpose, participants must meet selection criteria (Chenail, 2010). The target population for this study was executives of an ANC as formed under the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. I work for an ANC and have access to the participants and material required for the case study. Selected participants were in a position, which dealt with

their firm's strategic planning processes, approaches, and tool use and were intimately familiar with successful and unsuccessful outcomes of strategic planning current and past practices. Requirements for recruitment and selection of the participants were work experience and firm performance during the economic downturn and reduced federal spending. ANCs are privately owned organizations; therefore, networks from within the industry provided information relative to performance.

Thirteen regional native corporations and 198 village corporations exist and operate in the government contract industry. However, some of the leaders of these corporations do not pursue business in the government service provider industry. In addition to the limited business endeavors of ANCs, only 28 village corporations have at least \$1 million in assets and more than 500 shareholders. The eligible population for this study included the 13 regional Native corporations and 28 village corporations with leaders competing in the government contract industry. Meaningful case studies can be conducted with a sample size of one; however, an adequate sample size is one that is large enough to answer the research question (Draper & Swift, 2011). The participants' for this study had homogenous work experience, acted as key informants, and possessed the expertise to provide adequate data about previous and current strategic planning practices (Draper & Swift, 2011). Even though seven potential participants were identified to participate in the study, it was understandable that not all would elect to participate. Therefore, a minimum of four participants were required for the study to be valid (Seisay, 2013).

For the purpose of this explanatory single case study, the CEO of the selected firm approved and signed a letter of cooperation for the study prior to performing data collection and interviews. For participant selection, I contacted each corporate division executive to explain the objective of the study and obtain a signed consent form for interview participation. I reviewed reports and strategic plans from each division of the selected firm and interviewed four divisional executives to minimize chances of misrepresentation by maximizing access needed to collect the case study evidence resulting in an effective sampling size (Yin, 2009).

A major potential source of harm to participants in social, behavioral, and economic sciences is the release of potentially identifying participant data (Bryman, 2012). Each participant had the option to reject or accept the interview request. Once participants accepted the interview request, a consent form was sent for their signature. Interviewees determined the actual interview time and date to reduce the potential effect of work or family obligations and ensure maximum participation. Each participant was assigned a number for identification purposes. These numbers and the associated participants are kept in a password-protected file on a laptop with a backup saved on an external hard-drive. The hard drive is secured inside a locked safe to ensure identity anonymity for a period of 5 years. After 5 years, I will destroy the information.

### **Research Method and Design**

Qualitative researchers attempt to make sense of their underlying philosophical influences, which may be (a) constructivist, (b) positive, and (c) critical (Merriam, 2009). Constructivist, also known as interpretive research, assumes a construction of reality in

which no single observable reality exists; rather, multiple realities or interpretations of an event exist (Merriam, 2009). An individual with a positivist view assumes a reality, and the reality is (a) observable, (b) stable, and (c) measurable (Merriam, 2009). Critical perspective is concerned with (a) power, (b) those that have it, (c) how people negotiate power, and (d) what structures in society reinforce power distribution (Merriam, 2009). My philosophical perspective is constructivist, a worldview in which individuals seek understanding of the environment in which they live and work (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative studies are appropriate for exploring social and business phenomena from a constructivist philosophical perspective, which practices, events, or contexts are evolving (Yin, 2011).

I identified effective strategic planning methods and approaches using a constructivist or interpretive philosophical perspective. Information pertaining to this study and the participants is relative rather than absolute; constructing and interpreting data differentiates between more and less plausible claims (Merriam, 2009). Different cultural, organizational, and social settings affect strategic planning activities, and numerous realities existed among participants and throughout the literature review. Researchers construct or interpret the collective experience while emphasizing participants' perspectives, not the researcher's (Merriam, 2009).

Qualitative research facilitates the comprehension of a particular societal domain by exploring and understanding the interpretation of the domain by its participants; it is accomplished with an emphasis on words rather than quantifying metrics extracted from collected and analyzed data (Bryman, 2012). Quantitative research emphasizes

quantifying results and testing theories with an empirical approach, achieved through data collection and extensive analysis (Bryman, 2012). Using a qualitative method provided the ability to identify current and proven successful methods, approaches, and tool implementation relative to strategic planning, resulting in a view of the social reality as a constantly shifting emergent process as documented in the literature review (Bryman, 2012). To achieve an understanding and identification of successful practices implemented by senior executives in ANCs, I placed emphasis on exploring, and interpreting the participants' world using a qualitative case study.

Leaders of ANCs compete for the same customers, share the same corporate cultures, and have identical capabilities resulting in a bounded system; therefore, the case study approach consisted of telephonic interviews with senior managers working for the selected ANC. A case study approach facilitated the inquiry of specific questions regarding the use of strategic planning approaches and tools implemented relative to their effectiveness as well as probing questions to answers in response to the specific questions (Bryman, 2012). The case study review identified the successful and unsuccessful methods of previous strategic planning practices used by ANCs.

## **Method**

A qualitative research method facilitated (a) gathering data, (b) synthesizing information, (c) identifying themes, and (d) determining recommendations for future actions related to the problem statement. A qualitative method enabled the exploration and gaining of an in-depth understanding of current strategic planning practices and theory (Chenail, 2010). Participants attribute meaning to events and their environment



whereas analysis of natural sciences using quantitative methods cannot (Bryman, 2012). A mixed method, which combines qualitative and quantitative methods, would have diminished the ability to identify the cause-effect relationship between strategic planning approaches and tool implementation to their success or failure, obtained through the interpretation of participants (Yin, 2011). Differences exist among people; however, these differences are explainable with qualitative methods in which individuals are capable of providing reflections of their world (Bryman, 2012). A qualitative method was appropriate for this study.

Identifying successful strategic planning practices requires the analysis of intangible factors related to the industry, the participants' corporations, their education, training, and experience, as well as their beliefs and opinions. I selected a qualitative method over a quantitative or mixed method construct. Quantitative research uses scientific, experimental, numbers-based approach emanating from a positivist paradigm (Tracy, 2010). Quantitative researchers attempt to determine relationships between independent and dependent variables through measurement or experimentation of participants prior to or after administration of the variable (Bryman, 2012). The purpose of this doctoral study was to identify successful practices and tool use regarding strategic planning, in which no association of variables exists or hypothesis drawn; a case study design facilitated the best medium for participant data collection and analysis.

### **Research Design**

The design for this doctoral study was a qualitative explanatory single-case study. ANCs are representative and similar to one another. They offer the same or similar

services, compete for the same or similar customers, are based in the same geographic area, and possess the same or similar organizational structures and cultures. A single case study is appropriate for representative or typical cases, such as ANCs (Yin, 2009).

Explanatory case studies, also known as causal case studies, attempt to identify cause-effect relationships (Yin, 2011). Qualitative designs consist of (a) phenomenological studies focusing on people's conscious experience, (b) ethnographies which focus on society and culture, (c) grounded theory attempts to develop a theory, (d) narrative analysis used to tell people's stories, and (e) case study used for in-depth analysis of bounded systems (Merriam, 2009). The purpose of this doctoral study was to identify the relationship between strategic planning methods and the resulting successes or failures.

Using this design, I attempted to understand how executives in the selected ANC (a) interpret their experiences, (b) how they construct their world, and (c) what meaning they attribute to their successes and failures relating to strategic planning methods (Merriam, 2009).

To explore leaders' strategic planning practices and the resultant successes and failures requires an explanation of cause-effect relationships using how and why questions (Yin, 2009). Phenomenological studies focus on individuals' conscious experience and lack the ability to explore cause-effect relationships associated with leaders' strategic planning activities and results (Merriam, 2009). Narrative analysis is used to tell individuals' stories and would limit the capability to delve into cause-effect relationships needed to understand successes and failures of leaders' strategic planning

practices (Merriam, 2009). I reviewed multiple sources of information rather than relying solely on interviews and participant interpretation (Yin, 2009).

This design facilitated (a) gathering data, (b) interviews, and (c) data analysis. The case study method facilitated the exploration of strategic planning practices, approaches, and tool implementation employed in this ANC that have proven successful and unsuccessful to the participants in this study. The case study included semistructured interviews with executives of the ANC competing in the government contract industry. The executives held their positions during a time of reduced federal spending and increased governmental regulations against ANCs. The goal was to complete a compelling doctoral study by collecting, presenting, and analyzing the data fairly (Yin, 2009). I provided an in-depth understanding of real-life phenomena including highly pertinent contextual conditions of the economy and changes in governmental regulations affecting the participants' organizations (Yin, 2009).

Identification of successful strategic planning practices and tool use depends upon the study, observation, and analysis of real-life events, including life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, and industry maturation (Yin, 2009). Studying and analyzing these events and situations provided an understanding of the complex social phenomena involved with achieved success of participants; expanding knowledge in relation to the (a) group, (b) organizational, (c) social, and (d) political phenomena. For this study, no control of behavioral events, or contemporary events occurred, and questions pertained to how and why, relative to successful strategic planning approaches and tool use, which provided an explanatory conclusion (Yin, 2009).

The boundaries between the phenomena and context were not clearly evident and using a case study design facilitated focus on decisions made by the participants, which resulted in successful outcomes; how were those decisions made and why (Yin, 2009).

The case study research design facilitated the collection evidence and exploration of a focused research subject (Yin, 2009). Case study designs enable observation and review of particular locations, communities, or organizations, with an emphasis on intensive examination of the particular setting (Bryman, 2012). When used with qualitative methods, the case study design using interviewing techniques produce the generation of intensive, detailed examination of the particular case (Bryman, 2012). Explanatory single-case studies are appropriate when they are representative or typical case, or they are revelatory (Yin, 2009). A single-case study was justified because one ANC is representative or typical of other ANCs competing in the government contract industry, and these organizations have been inaccessible to social inquiry in the past because of their privately owned status.

### **Population and Sampling**

The single-case study of the selected ANC included additional units of analysis or embedded case studies, which represented each division within the company (Yin, 2009). Using this method ensured a complete corporate review to achieve replication (Yin, 2009). The selection criteria for the ANC leaders were companies headquartered in Alaska that earn over one million dollars per year and registered as either a regional native corporation or village corporation. After IRB approval, participants were contacted from the selected ANC to participate in the interview to assess their current strategic

planning practices related to success and failure. A review and comparison between participant planning practices and currently documented methods occurred to establish successful approaches and tools. The analysis conducted integrates the findings regarding success and failure during the execution phase of previous strategic plans.

I used a purposive sampling strategy to support this qualitative research design with semistructured interviews using open-ended questions. The purposive sampling consisted of screening and selecting participants who could provide analytical information regarding the use of successful strategic planning approaches and tools based on their experience and use. The target population for this study included executives employed by the selected ANC competing in the government contract industry. Participants included each operational division Vice President employed with an ANC, actively involved in their strategic planning processes, and had intimate knowledge of successful practices and approaches.

Participant selection supported the purposive sampling method and provided the ability to select the appropriate level of participant expertise to contribute to the doctoral study. Using each relevant personnel involved with strategic planning, the participants provided in-depth and unique expertise regarding successful and unsuccessful approaches in the area of strategic planning with their corporation (Bryman, 2012). To ensure the participants' backgrounds and experiences could assist in supporting the research design and purpose, the participants met the established selection criteria.

Once ANC selection was complete by obtaining consent from the CEO, I identified participants within the company. The sampling criteria for the selection of the

company consisted of the 13 Regional Native Corporations or 28 Village Corporations earning more than \$1 million dollars in revenue per year, which are required to file annual reports with the Alaska Division of Banking and Securities. The participants from the selected company had more than 10 years competing in the government contract industry, and was involved with their respective company's strategic planning approaches and tool implementation and had knowledge of previous successes and failures. The benchmark criteria ensured participants had the requisite experience and were versed in their particular company's successes and failures regarding the previous implementation of strategic planning.

### **Ethical Research**

I requested approval from the Walden University's IRB and received approval for the study prior to beginning data collection. Research participation was voluntary. The company CEO signed a letter of cooperation in Appendix B, and each participant signed an informed consent form, in Appendix C. The written consent form also included participant approval for audio recordings during the scheduled telephonic interviews.

Participants could withdraw or cease participation in the study at any time during the study without fear of retribution. I will not publish participants' names and associated organizations in this study; each participant was assigned number 1 through 4. No incentives were offered or provided to participate to eliminate any perception of unethical participation enticements. I am protecting participants' rights and information by storing a copy of the data in a locked safe for a period of 5 years. At the end of the 5-year period,

the participant data will be destroyed. At no time will participant data be available for public viewing or dissemination.

### **Data Collection**

Following ethical guidelines during the data collection phase, while mitigating personal biases, facilitated the establishment of reliability and validity in this study. Continuous familiarity with the hardware and software used during the data collection mitigated potential issues during the interviews. I allowed at least 6 hours for transcription for every 1 hour of recorded interview time and gained approval of the transcription from each participant.

### **Instruments**

I was the data collection instrument from the inception of the research to the dissemination of the results (Trainor & Bouchard, 2012). An interpretive-constructivist approach was used to search for regularities governing the successful use of strategic planning approaches and tool use, which determined the research method and data collection method to support the case study research application (Burawoy, 2011). Using an interpretive-constructivist stance through empiricism and logical reasoning leads to phenomenon explanation (Dwivedula & Bredillet, 2010). Semistructured telephonic interviews facilitated the transfer of information to obtain the experiences of participants in relation to their success with strategic planning approaches and tool use. The interview protocol facilitated the gathering of data to capture the participants' observations, perceptions, and experience with strategic planning successes.

The use of semistructured interviews facilitated collecting data from selected participants and built a relaxed atmosphere by beginning each interview with a social conversation and a brief overview of the participant's background in relation to education and experience. Incorporation of best practices while interviewing included (a) not dominating the conversation, (b) not guiding the interview in a specific direction, (c) ensuring impartiality, (d) adhering to the protocol, and (e) thinking during the interviews to develop follow-up questions (Yin, 2011). Using the interview protocol consisted of a list of specific topics; however, the interviewees had flexibility concerning their response (Bryman, 2012). I used probing questions as follow-up questions to the interviewee's replies and varied the order and wording of questions to remain flexible; while using emphasis adjustment in which significant issues emerged during the interviews (Bryman, 2012). A pilot study mitigated question bias (Yin, 2009). This protocol provided the ability to explore impromptu discussion points related to the participants' responses or explanations (Bryman, 2012). The protocol also provided interviewees the opportunity to discuss views important in explaining and understanding events, patterns, and forms of behavior (Bryman, 2012).

### **Data Collection Technique**

After receiving approval from the Walden University IRB, data collection and analysis from the participants began. The collection of data and subsequent cataloging and organization remained fundamental in the creation of coding, data interpretation, identification of trends, themes, and correlations as it related to successful strategic planning approaches and tool implementation. Tables, transcripts, and field notes to



collect, organize, and analyze the data and Hyper RESEARCH© software assisted during this phase. Using a defined method of data collection such as the interview maintained proper validity and reliability constructs in the final publication of the study. I used semistructured interviews to obtain the required data for the identification of successful strategic planning approaches and tool uses.

The design of the interview questions used an approach to capture the participants' experiences and past practices involved with strategic planning and subsequent successes and failures. The interviews consisted of 60-minute recorded telephonic interview sessions with senior executives employed with the selected ANC. The interview format was predetermined and documented in a protocol (see Appendix A), which prioritized questions to gather the necessary data to identify successful aspects of strategic planning (Yin, 2009). Data saturation refers to thematic exhaustion and variability of the data set that is a point in which no new data collection occurs, no new themes emerge, and the ability to achieve study replication occurs (Bryman, 2012). A reliable sense of thematic exhaustion and variability within the data ensued by interviewing four division executives (Bryman, 2012).

After IRB approval (IRB approval number 01-21-15-0285056) and prior to conducting interviews, I conducted a pilot study consisting of an in-depth interview with an operational division representative active and involved in strategic planning. The pilot study provided a rehearsal and practice platform for the actual field research interview questions and audio recording procedures used during the actual study (Yin, 2009). This technique provided an opportunity to vet the questions' appropriateness and identify

potential follow-up questions (Yin, 2009). The pilot study also provided an opportunity to extract feedback from participant relevant to the approach, logistics, and content of the interview questions (Yin, 2009).

In addition to the interview, I analyzed multiple sources of information during the case study to include (a) strategic plans, (b) management marketing reports, and (c) division status reports. The interview was an important source of information for this case study, because of the human affairs and behavioral events involved with processes, procedures, and planning practices, which encompass strategic planning activities (Yin, 2009). Interviews were targeted and focused directly on the case study topics, but also insightful by providing perceived casual inferences and explanations (Yin, 2009). The interviews provided important insights into human affairs and behavioral events by providing shortcuts to the history of situations surrounding those events, which helped to uncover and identify other relevant sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). The locations of ANC division executives varied across the United States; therefore, telephonic interviews provided the appropriate method. Notes from the interviews attempt to identify nonverbal cues such as hesitations, pitch in the voice, or sighs and I used follow-up questions to investigate further or clarify.

The established line of inquiry, where appropriate, presented questions in an unbiased manner (Yin, 2009). Level 1 questions pertain to the verbal line of inquiry, whereas Level 2 questions pertain to the mental course of events in the interviewer's mind; however, Level 1 questions do not necessarily betray the interviewers thinking (Yin, 2009). Level 1 questions fit specific interviewees and Level 2 questions regarding

the individual case and included in the protocol (Yin, 2009). Level 2 questions satisfy the needs relevant to the line of inquiry, whereas Level 1 questions occur in a friendly and nonthreatening manner for open-ended questions (Yin, 2009). Using these two levels of questioning in succession facilitated the minimization of potential confrontational or participant defensive posture during the interview. I was cognizant in the approach to open-ended questions and focused on the *how* of particular circumstances in follow-up questions and open-ended questions rather than *why*, which further reduced the potential for confrontations or defensive posturing of the participants (Yin, 2009).

Assignment of a numerical code between each interview and the corresponding set of interview notes assisted with identifying characteristics of earlier participants during the ongoing and simultaneous analysis (Merriam, 2009). In addition to the interview transcriptions, I retained personal notes in separate files, but with corresponding codes to assist with analysis and future review and performed data backups of information daily (Merriam, 2009). These corresponding codes resulted in a scheme, which assisted in organizing and labeling of information for ease of use and retrieval (Merriam, 2009). Participants verified the contents of the transcription through member checking prior to conducting the analysis.

### **Data Organization Techniques**

Using Microsoft Lync© software during the telephonic interviews recorded the entire conversation. Once the interviews concluded, a Microsoft Lync MP3 file facilitates storing of the conversation. I used the Microsoft Lync MP3 file to draft a transcription verbatim into a Microsoft Word document. Using member checking, each participant

reviewed the transcription for confirmation in relation to the accuracy of the transcribed data. Recording and transcribing the interview provides the correction of limitations of memory and intuitive glosses placed on how the interviewee responded to a particular question (Bryman, 2012).

I have stored the original (a) recordings, (b) transcribed word document, and (c) emails from participants confirming contents of the transcription as password-protected files on a laptop. A secure backup of files is stored on an external hard drive and locked in a safe. Retention of the files will exist for 5 years; however, at the 5-year mark, I will destroy the files by deleting them.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

The primary question under study was what executable strategic plans do ANC leaders headquartered in Anchorage, Alaska, competing in the government contract service industry, need to ensure sustainable business growth? The data analysis used the information obtained from strategic plans, monthly marketing reports, division status reports, and participants during semistructured interviews with the following questions: The primary semistructured interview questions proposed were:

1. How much total revenue does your firm earn each year?
2. Does your firm have a strategic planning template to follow that produces success and growth?
3. What are the essential elements in the strategic plan at your firm?
4. What elements of strategic plans directly result to your corporation's growth and success?

5. How do you believe these results are occurring?
6. What elements of the strategic plan directly result in your corporation's growth and success or failures?
7. What were the results from the success or failure?
8. What personnel participate in the design and draft stages of the strategic plans that have led to the growth?
9. How is the information for the strategic plan gathered and compiled?
10. How do the strategic goals become resourced and implemented?
11. What organizational leadership is responsible for review, approval, and monitoring of performance during execution?
12. What organizational leadership is responsible for the deployment of the plan?
13. How is the success or failure of the plan integrated into employee reward and recognition system?
14. What other information would you like to share regarding strategic planning?

These questions identified effective and ineffective methods or strategies for the ANCs to compete with other established and experienced government contract companies. I reviewed data from industry reports and existing journal articles, research and books to gain an understanding of industry best practices. During the explanatory case study, a review of (a) previous strategic plans, (b) division status reports; (c) monthly marketing reports, and interviews with executives will explore how and why successes and failures occurred. The intent of the interview questions was to identify successful and unsuccessful planning approaches and method to compare and contrast the

methods with those documented in existing literature based on results documented in financial reports and monthly marketing reports. The goal was to prove actual elements of strategic plans such as (a) competitor analysis, (b) firm analysis, (c) market analysis (d) customer analysis and (e) strategy formulation, which lead to success and growth as outlined in the conceptual framework.

The data for this study included strategic plans, monthly marketing reports, division status reports, and semistructured focused interviews. The interviews explored and attempted to identify successful strategic planning practices and tool implementation in ANCs competing in the government contract industry. Employing a case study design, facilitated an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single bounded unit, ANCs (Merriam, 2009). Data analysis initially consisted of reliance on theoretical propositions and expanded to include pattern-matching technique (Yin, 2009). The process began with an in-depth literature review, which encompassed strategic planning schools of thought and specially designed strategic planning tools. Theoretical propositions found in the literature review assisted in expanding and refining the questions asked during the case study semistructured interviews. Once the interviews and analysis of strategic plans, monthly marketing reports, and division status reports were complete, coding of data enabled the establishment of themes for analysis, and implementation of pattern matching began.

The qualitative design is emergent; the data collection and analysis was a simultaneous, recursive, and dynamic process. Once data collection was complete, analysis intensified (Merriam, 2009). Simultaneous and early analysis provided the

development of categories or themes during data collection and resulted in organization and refinement during the intensive data analysis phase (Merriam, 2009). Ongoing analysis achieved a focused, exciting, and prudent volume of material for processing (Merriam, 2009). Once the successful transcriptions were completed through the interviewee's conference with the contents or member checking, a thematic analysis began. During this phase, data examination extracted core themes distinguishable between and within the interviews (Bryman, 2012). Using the coding technique broke data into parts and assigned labels to each theme (Bryman, 2012). I identified recurrences of the sequences of coded text within and across interviews as well as links between different codes (Bryman, 2012).

Hyper RESEARCH© software assisted with coding and theme analysis among the interviews. This software assisted with categorizing and coding data obtained during each interview. Once complete with coding and categorization, emerging patterns developed (Merriam, 2009). Using multiple sources of data aided in the achievement of triangulation (Yin, 2009). Triangulation corroborated the same fact or phenomenon between the multiple sources of information rather than relying on a single source of evidence (Yin, 2009). I used methodological triangulation to analyze the strategic plans, monthly marketing reports, division status reports, and interviews to triangulate the same fact(s) or phenomenon(s) between three sources of data (Bekhet & Zauszniewski; 2012; Yin, 2009).

I used coding and pattern matching during analysis to analyze data and answers to the research questions resulting in data consolidation, reductions, and interpretations

applied to interviewee responses to interpret the data, resulting in categories, themes or findings (Merriam, 2009). Using (a) coding, (b) pattern matching, and (c) methodological triangulation techniques provided the ability to identify successful and unsuccessful strategic planning methods (Merriam, 2009). The interview questions provided a medium to obtain data relative to successful and unsuccessful practices, approaches, and tool implementation relative to strategic planning in ANCs. Interviews provided answers to the actual practices as they relate to the conceptual practices and approaches described earlier in the study in which identification of potential codes and themes emerged.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability refers to the replication or the ability for researchers to reproduce the same outcomes, given the same or similar set of circumstances, data, or participants (Merriam, 2009). Validity refers to the credibility of the findings relative to the data presented (Merriam, 2009). Achieving reliability and validity in qualitative studies dealing with social sciences are problematic, because human behavior is never static, requiring assumptions about the reality that is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing (Merriam, 2009).

#### **Reliability**

Using a qualitative case study design challenges the researcher with addressing the rigor relating to the researcher's findings (Thomas & Magilvy, 2012). This method facilitated focus in the study, which enhanced rigor through (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability (Thomas & Magilvy, 2012). Dependability estimates the extent to which the test or set of data or design measures,



reflects, or produces what is it supposed to measure, reflect or produce and cannot exist without reliability (Bryman, 2012). To ensure dependability, I provided (a) a description of the specific purpose of the study, (b) participant selection criteria, (c) description of data collection and storage, (d) description data reduction and transformation for analysis (Thomas & Magilvy, 2012). The next chapter provides a presentation of the findings with discussions and interpretations, and document techniques used to determine the credibility of the data (Thomas & Magilvy, 2012). The combination of these elements will generate debate among professional managers and executives in the government contract industry and ANCs.

Achieving reliability and validity occurs through constructs of rigorous ethical approaches and methods of qualitative design in which an understanding of strategic planning is the primary rationale for investigation. The case study findings must demonstrate replication to achieve reliability. To achieve replication, the same results under the same conditions occur (Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010). Human behavior is never static and achieving replication in social sciences is difficult. I developed and adhered to an interview protocol and conducted a pilot study to ensure validity and reliability. These techniques enable replication if the same methods, in the same context, and circumstances of participant participation remain unchanged and produce similar results (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009).

The intent is to identify successful strategic planning methods and tool implementation that offer a positive effect to the ANCs, and anyone competing in the government contract industry. Successful strategic planning approaches and tool

implementation is a viable issue, which could lead to improved practices within numerous organizations. To achieve reliability, I used credible research protocol to collect and assess the research data. This protocol was a recording device supported by Microsoft Lync software and installed on a laptop. This software facilitated a digital recording and saving of conversations in an MP3 file format for review and future use.

Suri (2011) recommended integrating trustworthiness and dependency among the data collection and analysis to achieve reliability in research conclusions and supporting data. I took steps in preparation and during the interviews to prove the recommendations from the study would be reliable. Stringent participant selection and establishing sufficient sampling criteria resulted from the first step. The second step, taken within the context of the research question, resulted in the development of interview questions based on a thorough review of the literature, theories, and schools of thought surrounding strategic planning. After confirming the interview questions and interview protocol using a pilot study, implementation of procedures occurred to acquire the interview participants' assessment of their prior experience with successful planning approaches and tool use.

### **Validity**

My goal was to conduct methodological triangulation aimed at corroborating the same fact of the phenomenon among the interviews (Bekhet & Zauszniewski; Yin, 2009). I analyzed (a) strategic plans, (b) marketing reports, (c) division status reports, and (d) information obtained during the interviews and conduct methodological triangulation between these sources to provide credibility (Bekhet & Zauszniewski; Yin, 2009). As identified by Tracy (2010), qualitative research design's validity consists of a pertinent

topic, sincerity, credibility, a significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful conclusions. Reflexivity ensured the establishment of operational measures of the concepts studied (Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011), achieved through methodological triangulation with multiple sources of data and interviews in this doctoral study.

The pattern matching technique achieved validity through cross-case analysis and methodological triangulation, which was consistent with the researcher's interpretive-constructivist perspective (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Merriam, 2009). The results of this method assisted with establishing findings consistent with reality resulting in the credibility of the study. I considered the participants' construction of reality, in how they understood the circumstances surrounding their experiences and established findings based on those circumstances relative to the participants' experiences; accepting reality is ever changing (Merriam, 2009).

Recognizing complete objectivity is impossible in social research (Bryman, 2012), biases, attitudes, and assumptions were identified and documented using self-reflection to assure confirmability and good faith actions. Personal values and theoretical inclinations did not sway the research or resultant findings to assure objectivity (Bryman, 2012). Validation was achieved using both a substantive or firm basis in reality and ethical standpoint. The extent a case study's findings generalize relative to the domain of a particular study results in transferability (Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011), which was achieved through specification of the population of interest. I provided sufficient descriptive data for transferability to other potential researchers for

application in other situations (Merriam, 2009). The goal of transferability was to provide a sufficient detailed description of the study's context to enable future potential researchers to compare the situations through analogy and extrapolation and make inferences to construe meaning (Merriam, 2009). Pattern matching is a technique comparing empirically based patterns with a predicted pattern, and when the patterns coincide, the results can strengthen the case study's internal validity (Yin, 2009). Validity was achieved using pattern matching and analytic induction in which the establishment of universal explanations of the phenomena occurred and no cases existed inconsistent with a hypothetical explanation (Bryman, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to prove an argument and provide supporting data to influence discussions regarding strategic planning approaches, practices, and tool use. The selection of participants combined with their degree of professionalism and ability to foster further debate increases the transferability of this research. Implementations of specific steps with validity criteria, which demonstrate credibility and transferability of this doctoral study, substantiate the case study and research quality. These steps provide the ability to capture and publish the interview contents for participant or interviewee review prior to publication. I provided time for the interviewee to validate the accuracy of the transcription relative to what was said and meant in the telephonic interview, known as member checking, enforcing credibility. If the participant did not agree with the transcription based on the contents provided, I made an amendment and changed the transcription for an accurate reflection of the participant's meaning. In addition, methodological triangulation between the qualitative data collected from the interviews,

management reports, marketing reports, and division operational reports substantiates the research findings.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I documented the (a) research method and design, (b) data collection technique and organization, (c) population size, and (d) reliability and validity constructs. In addition to providing a description of these sections, I provided the rationale and justification for the selection of approaches and techniques used. For example, establishing a qualitative method and case study design is appropriate because of the need to communicate findings through detailed narratives, as opposed to data analysis. These justifications and rationale establish proper guidelines to ensure reliability and validity of the doctoral study.

Section 3 includes a review and analysis of information based on data analyzed relative to emergent themes from semistructured interviews, corporate and division reports, and the potential social effect of the study. I followed the interview guide/protocol with an established set of interview questions to determine successful strategic planning approaches and tool implementation. Using consent forms and implementation of procedures to protect participants' information and identity uphold ethical compliance.

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

Section 3 includes an overview of the study, a presentation of the findings, applications to professional practices review, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and recommendations for social change. I conducted a qualitative explanatory case study to identify successful and unsuccessful strategic planning practices, approaches, and tool use. The conclusion contains a comparison of the participant interviews, strategic plans, monthly marketing reports, and divisional status reports with current and past practices to identify successful and unsuccessful strategic planning results. The recommendations for further study contains the results of themes, which emerged from the collected data regarding strategic planning within ANCs competing in the government contract service provider industry.

#### **Overview of Study**

A case study research design facilitated this doctoral study to explore current and past strategic planning practices, approaches, and tool use related to successful and unsuccessful results. ANCs traditionally grew by obtaining noncompetitive, direct source government contracts, but in 2011 with increased procurement regulations, direct source contracts were minimized. With direct source contracts, ANC leaders had conducted strategic planning initiatives as a formality and with no true implementation of competitive considerations.

I concentrated the research on evaluating previous and current successes and failures to understand how and why those successes or failures occurred. The main goal of the doctoral study was to identify essential elements of strategic plans that, when

operationalized, led to success and growth. A review of previous and current strategic plans, monthly marketing reports, and division status reports occurred during the case study. I interviewed four leaders of the ANC gain an assessment of current and past strategic planning practices, approaches, and tool use as it related to the how and why of successful and unsuccessful results.

The central question I explored in this doctoral study was to prove the executable strategic plans that ANC leaders need to ensure sustainable business growth. In addition to this central research question, I identified an ANC leader who was implementing strategic planning practices within their respective firm and explored practices that had led to success and failures, and I explored why those results occurred. The questions posed to participants were limited to their experiences within the past 5 years to capture their experience and relevant governmental regulations and economic changes. During the case study, themes emerged within and between the information reviewed and participant interviews and is included in the following sections.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The two central research questions for this doctoral study focused on determining what executable strategic plans ANC leaders need to ensure sustainable growth and what elements of those plans are essential for operational success. The emerging themes generated from the case study's comparison and participants' interviews provide the basis for a recommendation to ANCs and other corporations competing in the government contracted, service provider industry. The participant interviews and document review of

strategic plans, monthly marketing reports, and division status report provided an assessment of past and current practices as related to successes and failures.

Leaders of ANC's grew these corporations through direct source, noncompetitive procurements, which led to diverse business portfolios. As Participant 2 stated, "I think it was one of our former CEOs described it as picking up the phone and saying, 'hello.'" Direct source procurements led the ANC selected for this doctoral study to reach revenue levels that exceeded \$800 million per year, but the downside to this explosive growth was a diverse business portfolio with no differentiation strategy or predefined strategic direction for the corporation. The underlying theory of a firm and associated theory of strategy must be identified to understand successes and failures regarding a firm's strategic planning processes (Porter, 1991). Leaders of the ANC have recently developed a new strategic planning template and had to analyze properly and define the services provided and the best path for the future.

The basic unit of analysis in the theory of strategy must be a strategically distinct business or industry (Porter, 1991). Five forces shape industry competition, which are (a) threats of new entrants, (b) bargaining power of buyers, (c) threat of substitute products or services, (d) bargaining power of suppliers, and (e) rivalry among existing competitors (Porter, 1991). These five forces reveal the most significant aspects of competitive environments facing firms (Porter, 1991); therefore, before the research initiated, conceptual themes were developed to analyze data from the reports, plans, and interviews.



- Would a standardized strategic planning template improve or hinder each division's competitiveness in their respective markets?
- How receptive would Division leaders be toward changes in planning practices, approaches, and strategy formulation?
- Would a standardized strategic planning template effectively rival competitors?
- Would a standardized strategic planning template accurately categorize the bargaining power of suppliers?

The first step was to analyze previous and current strategic plans to identify the essential elements contained within each plan. Monthly marketing reports were analyzed to confirm the direction provided in the strategic plans were being pursued operationally during the execution of the strategic plan. I analyzed division status reports to identify whether or not newly awarded contracts were in line with the strategic direction provided in the plan, and the results occurred from actions outlined in the monthly marketing reports. Once the analysis of corporate reports and plans were complete, I conducted telephonic interviews with four corporate division vice presidents.

The first interview question pertained to the size of the ANC relative to current revenue per year and responses were consistent with all participant responses. No themes were expected to emerge from this question as it was not relevant to the central research questions. The second interview question dealt with the participant's organization and whether or not a strategic planning template existed, which produced success and growth.

All four participants responded that they currently have a strategic planning template that produces success and growth.

Each of the four participants initially provided information from past practices during the direct source procurement growth era where no formal strategic planning occurred. Participant 1 described the previous process as, “Simply a compilation of data to meet a requirement of the Board of Directors.” Participant 2 described the previous process as, “Shooting from the hip to try and stay in business.” Participant 3 stated, “Some of the reasons we’ve experienced a decline is because we didn’t properly plan for strategic planning.” Participant 4 stated, “It was more of a report, almost reporting out or projecting out as opposed to getting into planning.”

Table 1

*Emergent Themes From Interview Question 2, “Does Your Firm Have a Strategic Planning Template to Follow That Produces Success and Growth?”*

Themes	Participants
Environment change	1, 2, 3
Compilation of information	1, 2, 3, 4
Corporate analysis	1, 2, 3, 4
Direct source	1, 2
Formalized process	1, 2, 3, 4

Each of the four participants attributed the lack of previous strategic planning to the direct source, noncompetitive market environment and the shift toward a formal strategic

planning process and template development to the change in the industry environment. Participants 1, 2, and 3 stated that because of the change in the environment, which shifted their focus to a competitive strategy, they believe the new template will lead to success and growth.

The third interview question focused on identifying the essential elements of the strategic plan at the participants' firm. Participants identified a total of five elements with two appearing with each participant. The two elements that emerged between each participant was corporate analysis and market analysis and participant 4 identified market analysis as the most essential in the plan. Participant 4 also ranked SWOT analysis as the second most essential element of their strategic plan. No other participant ranked these elements in order of importance or effectiveness.

Table 2

*Emergent Themes From Interview Question 3, “What are the essential elements in the strategic plan at your firm?”*

Themes	Participants
Competitor analysis	1, 3, 4
Market analysis	1, 2, 3, 4
Corporate analysis	1, 2, 3, 4
Customer analysis	2, 3,
SWOT analysis	2, 3, 4

Participant 1 identified corporate analysis as being used to identify the proper fit related to the federal market and also the understanding of building a corporate investment portfolio to improve the infrastructure of the company. Participant 2 stated that corporate analysis is, “used to determine whether or not we can be competitive.” In addition to the 5 elements identified, Participant 3 included corporate goals and strategy as essential to the plan. Participant 3 stated, “in the past, senior leaders just allowed the division or division operations to come up with their own views of where they corporation should go, there was no top-down direction, it was simply bottom up.” Participant 3 stated, “now specific goals were identified and promulgated throughout the organization from senior managers.” Participant responses were consistent with emerging themes and explanations of those themes related to past and current strategic planning practices.

The intent of the fourth interview question was to narrow, define, and identify the elements of current and past strategic planning, which led to success and growth. The participants' previous strategic planning approaches, practices, and tool use had been minimal to nonexistent until 2014; therefore, participants' recent practices, approaches, and tool use provided information relevant to this question. Participants 1 and 2 attributed their growth and success to one element each while Participants 3 and 4 identified additional elements each.

Table 3

*Emergent Themes From Interview Question 4, "What elements of strategic plans directly result to your corporation's growth and success?"*

Themes	Participants
Market analysis	1, 3
Corporate analysis	2, 3
Strategic focus	3
Customer analysis	4
Competitor analysis	4

Participant 1 identified market analysis as an element that directly results in corporate success and growth; however, the market analysis defined and identified by Participant 1 establishes new markets. Participant 1 describes this area of market analysis where targets for potential corporate expansion using current corporate capabilities occurs. Participant 2 identified corporate analysis but narrows this area of corporate

analysis to resource identification where the right people are in the right positions.

Participant 3 identified market analysis, corporate analysis, and strategic focus as elements resulting in success and growth. Participant 3 describes strategic focus as the ability to define corporate capabilities properly and match those abilities to customer requirements to increase the likelihood of winning in the competitive environment.

Participant 4 identified competitor analysis and customer analysis and described the benefit of these used in tandem. Participant 4 identifies the use of customer analysis to identify incumbent contractors. Participant 4 conducts analysis of these incumbent contractors or competitors to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Once Participant 4 properly identifies customer requirements and the incumbents strengths and weaknesses relative to performance, a plan is developed to pursue the potential new customer.

I used question 5 as a follow up to question 4 in an attempt to explore operational practices and techniques, and market and environmental conditions. Five themes emerged from this question, but resource allocation remained predominate between Participants 1, 2, and 4. Two new themes emerged from this question. Participants 1 and 2 both discussed proper resource allocation in their responses, and Participant 2 identified the use of lessons learned practices.

Table 4

*Emergent Themes From Interview Question 5, “How do you believe these results are occurring?”*

Themes	Participants
Resource allocation	1, 2, 4
Monitoring and managing	1, 2
Formalized process	2
Lessons learned	2
Strategic focus	3, 4

Participant 1, 2, and 4 identified proper resource allocation and assignment as instrumental in obtaining recent success and growth. The common theme between these participants was, “having the right people in the right positions.” Participants 1 and 2 both rely on continuous monitoring and management of the plans through periodic reviews and analysis of results. Participant 2 describes the strategic planning process, monitoring and managing of the plan, and the incorporation of lessons learned as they are experienced, as an integrated formal process that provides the medium for obtaining success and growth. Participants 3 and 4 identify the newly incorporated strategic focus throughout the corporation as the means for obtaining recent success and growth.

Participant answers to question 4 provided information relative to success and growth; therefore, I focused this question on participants’ experience and knowledge of failures. Each participant identified numerous elements that led to past failures and most focused on previous planning practices or the lack of previous strategic planning

activities. A total of 9 themes emerged from this question and varied among participants. Each participant manages their particular business line and conducts strategic planning for their particular market. The differences between markets, customers, and lines of service results in different results regarding strategic planning and a standardized template approach used in the participants' company. The varying results of this question and experiences of the participants reflect the varying markets, customers, and lines of service.

Table 5

*Emergent Themes From Interview Question 6, "What elements of the strategic plan directly result in your corporation's growth and success or failures?"*

Themes	Participants
Changing environment	1, 2, 3
Market analysis	1, 3
Monitoring and managing	1, 3
Resource allocation	2
Corporate commitment	3
Formalized process	3
Corporate analysis	4
Customer analysis	4
Setting of unrealistic goals	4



New themes emerged from this question with Participant 3 and 4. Participant 3 identified the lack of corporate commitment in previous years regarding strategic planning, but also links this element to the current plan and the lack of ongoing monitoring and managing during the execution phase. Participant 4 identified setting of unrealistic goals as a new theme and linked this to revenue based analysis versus corporate and customer based analysis. Participant 4 defines revenue based analysis as the setting of revenue goals for the division without properly analyzing corporate capabilities and resources and customer requirements. Participants 1, 2, and 3 identify the lack of strategic planning during the direct award growth period of ANCs as the major failure of their corporation. Had previous leaders conducted strategic planning, the changing market environment would have been identified prior to the changes and action could have been implemented to mitigate or eliminate the losses experienced.

Interview Question 7 pertained to direct results of previous successes and failures to identify tangible items or actions. Participant responses related successes or changes in current operations or practices, which developed as a result of previous failures. Each participant identified different results from one another, but the central theme between them is a newly developed competitive culture with a strategic focus toward growth achieved by the proper allocation of like-minded competitive personnel.

Table 6

*Emergent Themes From Interview Question 7, “What were the results from the success or failure?”*

Themes	Participants
Loss of revenue	1
Risk analysis	1
Resource allocation	2
Competitive culture	3
Strategic focus	4

Participant 1 identified the loss of revenue as a direct result of previous failures and the subsequent development of risk analysis as a success that resulted from the failure. Participant 2 identified proper resource allocation as a result of previous failures; however, this resource allocation specifically pertains to personnel with competitive education and experience. Participant 3 stated, “the competitiveness has never been stressed throughout the organization because we started the business and grew the business on sole source revenue.” Participant 3 continued, “so naturally we evolved as an organization that was not naturally efficient, and so the efficiencies we’ve gained over the past 3 years have been good, but it has also really hurt us at this point as far as revenue.” Participant 3 also identified the shift in corporate culture to one of competitiveness as a success resulting from previous failures. Participant 4 identified the strategic focus as a new found success for the company that resulted from previous failures. According to

Participant 4, this strategic focus allows the corporation to identify markets properly based on corporate capabilities and resources, which results in larger contract awards.

Interview Question 8 identified corporate personnel that participated in the design and draft stages of the strategic plan. Participant answers reflected current strategic planning practices where the CEO directs participation each division executive. Previous strategic planning practices lacked a formalized process where individuals developed specific elements or sections.

Table 7

*Emergent Themes From Interview Question 8, "What personnel participate in the design and draft stages of the strategic plans that have led to the growth?"*

Themes	Participants
Division level	1, 2, 3, 4
Strategic planner	1, 2, 3,

Participants 1, 2, 3, and 4 identified Division Vice Presidents and Directors of Operations as the personnel responsible for designing and drafting their sections of the strategic plan. Participants 1, 2, and 3 identified a strategic planner being assigned to manage the process and compile data into a coherent document. Participants 1 and 3 stated the strategic planner was a person assigned this responsibility by the CEO. The strategic planner selected for recent planning activities had numerous years of experience with strategic planning at various government contract companies.

The intent of question 9 was to understand how the data and analysis were gathered and compiled into a standardized document. Each division executive was

responsible for designing and drafting the information for their respective business line. Question 9 expands on question 8 and describes personnel responsible for gathering and compiling the information from each division executive.

Table 8

*Emergent Themes From Interview Question 9, “How is the information for the strategic plan gathered and compiled?”*

Themes	Participants
Planning team	1, 2, 3, 4
Strategic planner	1, 3

Participants 1, 2, 3, and 4 identify a planning that is responsible for gathering and compiling each division executive’s information. Participants 1 and 3 identify the strategic planner as the individual responsible for overall management, review, and editing of the document. The strategic planner compiled the information from each division executive into an overall plan. The strategic planner sent the plan to the Division Vice Presidents to conduct a review of the contents. Once the Vice Presidents reviewed and confirmed the contents, the strategic planner used business development resources to edit, customize, and print the document for dissemination.

The intent of question 10 was to determine how goals identified in the strategic plan were resourced and implemented during execution of the plan. Two themes emerged from this question between the participants, which included the identification of future resource requirements and an integrated budgeting process with strategic planning. Each participant had similar descriptions regarding this question.

Table 9

*Emergent Themes From Interview Question 10, “How is it assured that the strategic goals are resourced and implemented?”*

Themes	Participants
Future resource requirements	1, 3, 4
Integrated budgeting process	2, 3

Participants 1, 3, and 4 described the identification of future resource requirements as an outcome of the strategic planning process. During market, customer, and competitor analysis, corporate resource requirements were identified and linked to the new business pursuits identified by Division Vice Presidents. Participant 2 and 3 discussed the integrated budgeting process with strategic planning and explained how budgeting of additional resources occurred for implementation during the specified year of expenditure.

I used question 11 to identify individuals or groups responsible for the review, approval and monitoring of the performance of the plan during execution. Each participant identified the same group and individuals, which was the executive team. The executive team consists of the CEO, Senior Vice Presidents, and Vice Presidents. Each of the individuals are responsible for the execution of the plan and conduct scheduled meetings to assess performance relative to the plan.

Table 10

*Emergent Themes From Interview Question 11, “What organizational leadership is responsible for review, approval, and monitoring of performance during execution?”*

Themes	Participants
Executive team	1, 2, 3, 4

I used question 12 to identify individuals or groups that were responsible for the actual deployment of the strategic plan. Each participant described the operations team, which consist of the Senior Vice Presidents, Vice Presidents, and Directors. These individuals are responsible for the deployment of the plan as directed by the CEO once the Board of Directors grants approval of the plan.

Table 11

*Emergent Themes From Interview Question 12, “What organizational leadership is responsible for the deployment of the plan?”*

Themes	Participants
Operations team	1, 2, 3, 4

Participant responses were consistent between one another with question 13, which explored how employees obtain reward for their performance in achieving success during the execution of the plan. Participants 1, 2, 3, and 4 described a reward system established to reward and recognize an individual that meet performance objectives outlined in the strategic plan. Participant 3 stated, “that’s another area where we are evolving, the past compensations wasn’t tied to achievement necessarily.” Participant 3 expanded by stating, “we’re moving to a plan to where we reward more senior managers

for their successes and then create a bonus pool for spot awards to lower levels within the organization.”

Table 12

*Emergent Themes From Interview Question 13, “How is the success or failure of the plan integrated into employee reward and recognition system?”*

Themes	Participants
Reward system	1, 2, 3, 4

For the last question, I asked the participants if they would like to share additional information regarding strategic planning. Participant 4 suggested adding a section or area to the strategic planning template for unique strategies that pertain to a particular business line or division of the company. Other than Participant 4’s recommendation during the last question, no themes emerged. During this question, I took the opportunity to express thanks to each participant. Each participant did take this opportunity to express their belief in the importance of strategic planning and Participant 3 stated, “you know the strategic plan, it really needs to be a document that becomes the bible of the organization.”

Twenty eight themes emerged from the Participants during the interviews and 8 of these themes emerged between each participant. Corporate analysis emerged among all Participants with 20 total references, the highest number of all themes, followed by market analysis with 16 references, and customer analysis with 14 references. Competitor analysis and resource allocation followed closely behind with 13 references each, and a formalized process referenced by each participant with 12 entries.

Table 13

*Emergent Themes From All Interview Questions With the Highest Number of Entries*

Themes	Number of Participant references
Corporate analysis	20
Market analysis	16
Customer analysis	14
Competitor analysis	13
Resource allocation	13
Formalized process	12

Based on the participant references of emerging themes, elements that should be included in strategic planning templates is (a) corporate analysis, (b) market analysis, (c) customer analysis, (d) competitor analysis, and (e) resource allocation. In addition to strategic plans having each of these elements, corporate strategic planning should be a formalized process. Additional themes emerged with fewer references by each Participant that identified personnel involved in the planning process, the corporate culture, and tools used during planning activities.

Participants identified the CEO as the individual responsible for establishing a competitive corporate culture, goals and strategy, identifying individuals responsible for planning activities, and ensuring time and resource availability. Participants identified operational executives as the individuals responsible for particular business line strategic planning and the personnel conducting the majority of the analysis. Participants selected



SWOT analysis as the main tool used during planning sessions. Participants attributed continuous monitoring and managing of the plan combined with an established reward system for personnel achieving planned results as a complement to effective strategic planning.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

This doctoral study has implications within the Alaska Native Corporation community and other organizations providing services to governmental agencies. Strategic planning is essential to the success of any organization and without it leaders face the same or similar circumstances as those leading ANCs during the 2009 economic downturn and reduced governmental spending. Identifying essential elements of strategic plans that led to success and growth during tumultuous times provides leaders a baseline for planning purposes and template development. Implementing strategic planning practices and processes provides the platform for leaders to identify potentially market and environmental changes that may negatively affect their firms.

Leaders of the ANCs initially grew their organizations using direct source noncompetitive procurements. During the growth period of ANCs, strategic planning was not required for growth or success, so strategic planning was a formality with no substantive meaning, collaboration, or content. As Participant 2 indicated, growth and success was obtained by simply answering the phone. However, with no substantive strategic planning instituted within ANCs, these leaders were not prepared when direct source contracts came under political scrutiny or when the federal government reduced spending.

The top three themes that emerged from this study were (a) corporate analysis, (b) market analysis, and (c) customer analysis. Conducting corporate analysis facilitates the opportunity for leaders to identify their capabilities and resources for current operations and potential future growth opportunities. This element of strategic plans provides leaders the ability to analyze further corporate capabilities relating to customers and markets. Market analysis facilitates leaders identify potential future changes in the particular environment concerning regulatory, economic, and spending changes. Customer analysis provides the medium to identify needs related to corporate capabilities. In-depth customer analysis provides the potential for leaders to identify trends in procurement strategies where predictions of future changes occur that may be detrimental to continued success and growth. Leaders conducting substantive analysis and planning identify changing conditions prior to the occurrence and develop strategies to mitigate potential negative effects or exploit the changes for positive outcomes.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Corporate success and growth can and does happen without strategic planning processes and practices as exemplified by the history of ANCs. Growth and success that occurs without strategic planning is temporary. The environment, market, and the economy is ever-changing, and conditions that lead to success and growth without proper planning and strategizing will be different in the future. Leaders fail to predict future changes and suffer the loss as a result of failed planning and strategizing. Planning and strategizing facilitate the ability for leaders to predict future environment, market, and

economy changes and establish resource, operation, and management structures to respond to those changes.

ANCs provide shareholders with dividends, job training, scholarship funds, elderly benefits, social and cultural programs and land management services. In addition to benefits, these corporations provide employment opportunities for shareholders to improve their quality of life in perpetuity. Establishing successful strategic planning practices and approaches, which lead to growth and success for these corporations, also lead to growth and success of the Alaska Natives and the State of Alaska.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The themes that emerged from the case study interviews and review of strategic plans, monthly marketing reports, and division status reports indicate a strategic planning template would increase the potential for success and growth for ANCs. Leaders of the ANC under study experienced losses during a time that strategic planning was not effectively implemented. These same leaders, conducting effective strategic planning practices for a short time, have experienced gains in market share and new market entries. Effective results-bearing strategic planning occurred by using a formal process directed from the CEO with a push toward a competitive culture.

Leaders of ANCs should outline their strategic planning templates with the elements included in this doctoral study. These elements are a starting point for ANC leaders as specialized divisions will require specific elements for their particular industry, customer, and type of services provided. Once the corporate template is designed and approved, each specific division should identify elements specific to their customer base,

industry, and service type. Each division executive should be responsible for the development of their specific and unique requirements to be incorporated into the corporate strategic plan.

The CEO should drive the strategic planning initiatives and instill a competitive culture throughout the corporation. Each division executive should be responsible for ensuring the competitive culture is passed to the lowest levels of their respective division. Division executives should lead strategic planning practices and hold their personnel accountable for achieving the goals and objectives outlined in the strategic plans. Strategic planning should be a team effort between senior and middle-level managers. Leaders should disseminate the contents of the strategic plan to each individual responsible for achieving the documented goals and objectives.

Senior executives and middle-level managers should hold regular reviews of performance related to the goals and objectives outlined in the strategic plan. Regular reviews provide the opportunity to make adjustments during the execution of the plan. These reviews of performance should be documented and used as lessons learned during future strategic planning sessions. Executives should remain flexible in their strategic planning approaches as changes in the economy, governmental spending, and newly approved regulations occur regularly and require immediate adjustments to achieve success and growth.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Recommendations for further study include a qualitative study to identify the proper resource allocation of ANCs competing in the government contract industry.

Leaders of these corporations grew their businesses using direct source noncompetitive procurement awards and corporate infrastructures and resources evolved from this strategy. Leaders of these organizations are moving toward a competitive strategy, but the infrastructures implemented do not match the path forward. Resource allocation was a top 5 theme that emerged during the interviews; therefore, a qualitative study that identifies the proper corporate infrastructure and resources for success in the new competitive environment would provide further benefits to ANC leaders.

### **Reflections**

I had no preconceived ideas, or personal bias regarding effective elements of a strategic plan that lead to success and growth. The purpose of this study was explanatory in relation to successful and unsuccessful approaches, practices, and tool use by leaders of ANCs. I remained open to the answers provided by participants and allowed themes to emerge that provided insight from their experience with previous and current strategic planning practices.

I knew and worked with each participant and explained my role as a researcher rather than colleague for the purposes of this study. I explained the purpose of the study to each participant regarding the identification of successful and unsuccessful strategic planning approaches, practices, and tool use. Each participant understood the goal was to identify elements that will improve ANCs short-term survival capabilities and long-term success and sustainability.

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

Leaders of corporations cannot wait for change or assume successes obtained with existing methods, practices, and strategies will lead to success in the future. Leaders must be vigilant and proactive with their approaches to achieving success and growth year after year. No guarantee exists that strategic planning will lead to success and growth, but without strategic planning success and growth will not be sustained. Leaders of organizations will not achieve long-term success and growth without effective implementation of strategic planning processes and procedures. With the changing economy, federal spending, and governmental regulations, leaders must inject new ideas, approaches, practices, and strategies to sustain previously experienced success and growth trends. Leaders of corporations that embrace and implement a competitive culture with an effective formal strategic planning process will continue achieving short term success and growth of sustainable success and growth into the future.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

### Introduction to participants

The purpose of the study is to explore decisions and choices executives are making in an Alaska Native Corporation competing in the government contract service provider industry. Data collected for the research may provide insight into the extent ANC executives are leveraging strategic processes, strategic thinking, and adaptive practices to optimize business results in a changing economic environment. Identifying essential elements of strategic plans, successful methods, and unsuccessful methods will potentially provide leaders with additional knowledge and tools for sustained growth.

### Objectives that will be provided to participants

1. To explore experiences in and practices with strategic planning relating to successes and failures
2. To understand how and why these successes and failures occurred
3. To share best practices obtained from experiences during an economic downturn, reduced government spending, and increased governmental regulations on direct source procurements

### Interview Questions

1. How much total revenue does your firm earn each year?
2. Does your firm have a strategic planning template to follow that produces success and growth?
3. What are the essential elements in the strategic plan at your firm?

4. What elements of strategic plans directly result to your corporation's growth and success?
5. How do you believe these results are occurring?
6. What elements of the strategic plan directly result in your corporation's growth and success or failures?
7. What were the results from the success or failure?
8. What personnel participate in the design and draft stages of the strategic plans that have led to the growth?
9. How is the information for the strategic plan gathered and compiled?
10. How is it assured that the strategic goals are resourced and implemented?
11. What organizational leadership is responsible for review, approval, and monitoring of performance during execution?
12. What organizational leadership is responsible for the deployment of the plan?
13. How is the success or failure of the plan integrated into employee reward and recognition system?
14. What other information you would like to share regarding strategic planning?

## Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

Letter of Cooperation

Company Name

Representative able to provide authorization on behalf of the company

Title

Address

Phone Number

Date: TBD

Dear Paul Fondren,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled, “Strategic Planning: Essential Elements for Operational Success” within Company Name. As part of this study, I authorize you to recruit and interview operational Division Vice Presidents, review strategic plans, monthly marketing reports, and division financial data. Individuals’ participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

Leaders in Company A understand that Company A organization’s responsibilities include: time set-aside with appropriate executive personnel for in-person or telephonic interviews and copies of strategic plans, marketing reports, and financial performance reports. Leaders in Company A reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if circumstances change.

I confirm I am authorized to approve research in this setting.



I understand the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Representative's name

Title

Address

Phone number

## Appendix C: Consent Form

Dear Potential Participant,

You are invited to take part in a research study entitled, “Strategic Planning: Essential elements for operational success.” I will seek to gain an enhanced understanding of strategic planning tools and approaches that have resulted in success and failure during the decline in government spending and increased governmental regulations against direct source procurements with Alaska Native Corporations. This form is part of a process called informed consent to help you understand the intent of the study before deciding to take part. A researcher named Paul Fondren, who is a doctoral student at Walden University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of the study is to explore decisions and choices executives are making in an Alaska Native Corporation competing in the government contract service provider industry. Data collected for the research may provide insight into the extent ANC executives are leveraging strategic processes, strategic thinking, and adaptive practices to optimize business results in a changing economic environment.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to engage in a telephonic interview with the researcher, responding to questions related to your knowledge of strategic planning practices within your company.

Sample questions include:

1. Can you please describe your business regarding of geographic coverage, competition, customer base, and service(s)?
2. Can you please describe your role with strategic planning practices?
3. What practices have led to your division's success and how?

#### Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during or after the study. You may stop participating at any time.

#### Risks and Benefits of participating in the Study:

To be in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that may be encountered in daily life, such as stress or becoming upset. Your participation in this study would not pose a risk to your safety or wellbeing. Any risk of injury or harm during the study interview is virtually nonexistent, and the duration of the interview session will be limited to less than 1 hour. The interview will be audiotaped to maintain the accuracy of data collected.

#### Payment:

Participation in this study is voluntary; there will be no form of payment for participation.

#### Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. I will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. In addition, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. The privacy of participants will be protected with sensitive data coded in place of your

identification. Study protocol, collected data, and consent forms will be stored in a locked container for 5 years from completion of the study, at which time data will be destroyed.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Alternatively, if you have questions later, you may contact me via telephone or email. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you are welcome to call Dr. (To Be Provided). He is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. His phone number is (To Be Provided). Walden University's approval number for this study is (To Be Provided).

I will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information, and I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, "I consent," I understand that I agree to the terms described.

Printed Name of Participant and Name of Firm

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature