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# Service-Disabled Veteran Small Business Owners' Success Strategies

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Calvin Lewis Russell

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2016

Abstract

Service-Disabled Veteran Small Business Owners' Success Strategies

by

Calvin Lewis Russell

MS, National Defense University, 1996

MBA, Troy University, 1987

BS, Jacksonville State University, 1977

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

July 2016

## Abstract

The federal government has been inconsistent in meeting the mandated contracting set-aside goals of 3% to aid service-disabled veteran small business owners. Guided by the general systems theory, the purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore what strategies an owner and 2 senior managers of a small service-disabled veteran-owned business in the Washington, DC metropolitan used to obtain federal contracts. The owner and senior members represented those responsible for strategic vision, development of business opportunities, and the company acquisition process. Data were collected from semistructured face-to-face interviews and corporate documents. Member checking and transcript review were completed to strengthen trustworthiness of interpretations of the participants' responses. Based on the methodological triangulation of the data sources collected, 6 themes emerged from the data analysis as key strategies to obtain federal contracts: business practices, business development of opportunities to attain growth, marketing to obtain opportunities to bid, networking to gain industry knowledge on trends and markets, understanding federal government contracts which emphasized the federal acquisition system access and availability of procurement information, and contract bidding which emphasized the importance of solution development. The findings from the study may contribute to social change by providing insights and strategies for service-disabled veteran small business owners in sustaining profitability through obtaining government contracts. The data from this study may contribute to the prosperity of the veteran small business owners, their employees, their families, and local communities.

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## Dedication

I am dedicating this study to my late mother, Ola M. Russell, my wife Rosetta and my children Chaddrick, Creighton, Tiffani, Taiylor, and Christian. Thank you for your patience, inspiration and understanding. Your motivational speeches inspired me to continue when events seemed insurmountable at the time. I love you!

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The United States has a history of increasing the size of the forces for armed conflicts and then reducing the size upon the reduction of hostilities (Kerrick, Cumberland, Church-Nally, & Kemelgor, 2014). With force reduction, active duty personnel often will return to the civilian sector (Keane et al., 2013). Military veterans explore all avenues of employment, and are 45% more likely to become entrepreneurs than their civilian peers (Hope, Oh, & Mackin, 2011). These veterans may join 2.4 million other veteran business owners and become part of small business owners who represent 99.7 % of all employers in the United States (Hope et al., 2011). Veteran business owners generate 1.2 trillion dollars annually, and small business ownership is an excellent means for service-disabled veterans to reenter society (Huang-Horowitz, 2014). Veterans with service-connected disabilities represent 8.3% of veteran business owners. Coordination with federal, state, and local government resources, universities, and other stakeholders is key to a service-disabled veteran starting a business and obtaining contracts from the U.S. government (Keane et al., 2013). The purpose of this qualitative explorative single case study was to determine what strategies service-disabled veteran small business owners need to develop to obtain federal contracts.

### **Background of the Problem**

The United States has a long history of taking care of disabled veterans, dating back to 1636 when the Pilgrims at Plymouth Colony passed the first pension law to provide financial assistance to wounded soldiers (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs [VA], 2015). Later, the U.S. government provided programs such as the G.I. Bill to assist veterans' reintegration into civilian life (Hurst, 2013). To promote entrepreneurship and

enhance competition for contract awards to service-disabled veteran small business owners, congress enacted two laws (U.S. Small Business Administration [SBA], 2015b). Legislators set a goal that 3% of all federal contracts would be awarded per year to service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses, and they provided a provision for federal contracting officers to limit competition to only those business owners (Best, 2013).

Obtaining a federal contract for goods or services and taking advantage of government programs and legislated goals has not been easy for service-disabled veteran business owners (McGann, 2014). Service-disabled veterans must establish a business, then obtain verification to be granted the status of service-disabled veteran small business owner by the Federal Government (McGann, 2014). The owner must next learn how to participate in the federal acquisition process, and then must secure stakeholders and develop procedures to bid successfully on contracts (Blass & Ketchen, 2014). Contracting officers can unilaterally restrict procurements to service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses as mandated by law if appropriate for that procurement (Federal Acquisition Regulation [FAR], 2015).

### **Problem Statement**

The U.S. Government created the Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business Program to help service-disabled veterans compete against conventional companies for contracts in the federal marketplace (Best, 2013). Service-disabled veteran small business owners have only met the government-mandated 3% set aside twice in the past 9 years (Bressler, Bressler, & Bressler, 2013; SBA, 2015c). The general business problem was the inability of service-disabled veteran small business owners to compete

effectively and remain profitable. The specific business problem was that service-disabled veteran small business owners lack strategies to obtain federal contracts.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative explorative single case study was to explore strategies service-disabled veteran small business owners need to develop to obtain federal contracts. I conducted semistructured face-to-face interviews with one small business owner and two management members in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. I also collected and reviewed data from the company databases. The target audience for this study is the federal agencies' small business advocates and the service-disabled veteran small business owners. The target audience represents those who could affect how the U.S. government awards contracts, and those who are awarded the contracts. The study may contribute to social change by increasing service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses, thereby reducing the veterans' unemployment rate. The results of this study may affect the business environment by contributing to new strategies for business owners and change the manner procurement officials select bidders for contract awards. An additional business impact may be financial savings to the Federal Government.

### **Nature of the Study**

Researchers use the qualitative method to observe and gather data from participants in their environment over a period and focus on the events (Al-Mubarak, Muhammad, Busler, & Stockton, 2014). A researcher can use inductive reasoning with this method (Carrera-Fernandez, Guardia-Olmos, & Pero-Cebollero, 2013). Data gathered and analyzed using qualitative methods enable the researcher to learn about the participants' lived experiences in their environment under a theoretical, conceptual

framework (Koch, Niesz, & McCarthy, 2014). As an integral part of the qualitative method, the researcher's assessment brings sense to the data collection and analysis (Fletcher, De Massis, & Nordqvist, 2016). A critical component in qualitative research is observing individuals in their environment and allowing participants to provide their personal feelings (Ganong & Coleman, 2014). The quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because the approach tends to be inflexible and does not relay the significance of the participant in the analysis (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Likewise, the mixed methods approach, a combination of the qualitative and quantitative methods, was not appropriate for this study because this was an exploratory study and the mixing of data would not have supported the research design or research question (Harrison, 2012; Tsai, 2016).

The single case study design offered me an approach to explore the strategic planning processes owners must use to respond to federal procurements, and provided opportunities to gather suitable data at the participants' location which allowed for a thorough investigation (Tsang, 2014). Further, the case study was an appropriate design for an examination of the participants in their environment using their day-to-day procedures (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014; Stake, 1995). There are three types of case studies: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive (Yin, 2014). The descriptive method was not appropriate because the study did not entail documenting the environment or the participants' conditions, and the explanatory method was not appropriate because I did not seek to examination competing accounts of the same events (Spector, 2013).

### **Research Question**

The research question was: What strategies do service-disabled veteran small business owners need to obtain federal contracts? The following four interview questions supported the research question (see Appendix A).

### **Interview Questions**

Q1: What barriers or constraints exist for service-disabled veteran small business owners seeking federal procurements?

Q2: How are service-disabled veteran small business owners trained in the U.S. government procurement process?

Q3: How do you develop business opportunities?

Q4: What are the obstacles you encountered when trying to participate in U.S. government procurements?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Ludwig von Bertalanffy's general systems theory (GST) provided a theoretical basis for this study. Ludwig von Bertalanffy (Bertalanffy, 1968; Drack & Schwarz, 2010) first introduced the GST in 1949. The tenets of the GST are an open and closed system (Bertalanffy, 1968; Drack, 2009). The open system represents an interchange of information with an active association among components in an environment to yield outputs and attain a *steady state* (Bertalanffy, 1968; Drack, 2009). A closed system has very little interaction with other components in an environment (Bertalanffy, 1968; Drack, 2009). The theory provides an explanation about the possible relationships between the U.S. government procurement personnel and service-disabled veteran small business owners. Key constructs underlying this theory are (a) interaction within



organizations and the environment, (b) increased probability of survivability and prosperity, (c) collaboration among the members with continual input and output, and (d) relationships (Ducq, Chen, & Doumeingts, 2012; Seising, 2010).

The openness of the U.S. government persons operating the procurement systems processes will help guide the research. The U.S. government controls all the data and can make it available to small business owners so they can be competitive in the marketplace (Mukhopadhyay, 2011). The communication between entities means there is continual output by the U.S. government contracting personnel and valid input from the veteran-owned businesses. A business owner operating in a closed-system environment will only view the organization's capabilities from an internal view instead of taking a holistic approach that includes the external environment (Bertalanffy, 1968).

### **Operational Definitions**

Many terms in this study are related to U.S. government procurements and federal agencies. Each of the following terms refers to the unique U.S. federal acquisition process and those who manage or seek to attain a U.S. government contract.

*Contracting officer (KO)*: A person who has the authority to bind the U.S. government through contractual instruments (Federal Acquisition Regulation [FAR], 2015).

*Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR)*: A regulation that provides the guidelines for those who procure goods and services for the U.S. Federal Government (FAR, 2015).

*Federal agency*: A federal agency is an organization designed for a special purpose by the President or through legislative action (FAR, 2015).

*Service-disabled veteran*: A veteran with a disability connected to service while in the military (FAR, 2015).

*Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB)*: A business that is not less than 51% owned by a service-disabled veteran (FAR, 2015).

*System for Award Management (SAM)*: This database is a repository of those who have been awarded a federal contract or those seeking to do business with the U.S. government (FAR, 2015).

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

The single case study explorative design was the basis for the assumptions, limitations, scope, and delimitations for this study. Recognizing these assumptions, limitations, and delimitations provided me the basis for identifying characteristics that specifically relate to the study. The following assumptions, limitations, and delimitations framed my assertions in this study.

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are undeveloped truths that are essential to the conduct of the study (Simon & Goes, 2013). Two basic assumptions guided the research. First, I assumed that service-disabled veteran small business owners want to succeed as entrepreneurs. There are many U.S. government and private programs to aid veterans to succeed as businesspersons. Some benefit the business owner some do not. Business owners attend industry days and conventions to position themselves to attain federal contracts. Second, I assumed that federal agencies' procurement officials have the desire to award contracts to these disadvantaged business owners. Legislators established a goal of 3%, but the federal agencies have met this goal only three times in 9 years. Contracting officers have

a hard time finding qualified businesses that can perform the contract requirements.

Those two assumptions led to the following additional assumptions: the businesspersons can articulate their qualifications, the businesspersons understand the procurement acquisition process, and the businesspersons know how to build opportunities and relationships.

### **Limitations**

The limitations are the likely vulnerabilities in the study (Denscombe, 2013). The focus of the study was limited to service-disabled veteran small business owners; this was a single case study and limited to my experience. The single case study results may or may not represent similar service-disabled veteran small business owners. Further research can determine if the results may apply elsewhere.

### **Delimitations**

The delimitations are the parameters of the research study (Denscombe, 2013). The emphasis of this study was on federal agencies' failure to consistently meet their service-disabled veteran-owned small business contracting goals. The research study included those veteran-owned small businesses that meet the requirements of the FAR (2015), the U.S. Small Business Administration, and the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. Omitted from this study were businesses not qualified as a service-disabled veteran-owned small business. All federal agencies were a source of information and data collection for this study.

### **Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative explorative single case study was to determine what strategies service-disabled veteran small business owners need to develop to obtain

federal contracts. Interviews I conducted with a business owner and two senior management members in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area provided information about the strategies a service-disabled veteran business owner uses during the procurement processes and the barriers he or she confronts. The results of this study should help service-disabled veterans who want to start a business understand the strategies they must undertake to be a successful entrepreneur. The target audience of service-disabled veteran entrepreneurs, federal agencies' procurement officials, and small business advocates can use the results to help achieve their business goals and provide better opportunities for service-disabled veteran-owned small companies. This study may also help service-disabled veteran small business owners determine where they lack in submitting bids for U.S. government contracts.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Federal agencies depend on contractors for products and essential services (Smith & Fernandez, 2010), but service-disabled business owners have not been receiving their mandated share of federal procurements (SBA, 2015c). This study might help improve the strategies service-disabled veteran small business owners need to develop to obtain U.S. government contracts. If more service-disabled veteran small business owners participated in the bidding process, then the federal agencies may be more likely to achieve their goals. Last, based on the study results, the U.S. Government may change the manner contracting officers forecast opportunities to service-disabled veteran small business owners.

## **Implications for Social Change**

The study's social implication may be an increase in veteran-owned businesses and the concurrent possible reduction of the veterans' unemployment rate.

Unemployment for veterans who have served in the military since September 2001 is higher than nonveterans (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). This trend may continue because of stigma and prejudices attached to veterans as unhappy, unpleasant, and having a mental disorder (Stone & Stone, 2014). Organizations such as Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities help educate and train veterans pursuing successful business ownership (Mills & Johns, 2012). There continues to be a disconnection between what veterans know and what they can deliver based on their attainment rate of contracts from federal procurement programs (Blass & Ketchen, 2014). Veterans own over two million businesses, and over 8% of veteran business owners have a disability (Mills & Johns, 2012). Using the results of this study may give veterans confidence to start or grow their business and reenter society at a higher level than when they joined the military.

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

In this qualitative explorative single case study, my intent was to determine what strategies service-disabled veteran small business owners need to develop in order to obtain federal contracts. I collected data from a business owner and two senior management members. The target audience includes federal agencies, small business advocates, and service-disabled veteran business owners. The results of this study may influence the business environment by contributing to new strategies for business owners, and changing the manner procurement officials select bidders for contract awards. The

development of a strategy may help service-disabled veteran business owners compete effectively and remain profitable. This single explorative case study design and qualitative research methods provided me the tools needed to explore the strategic planning processes owners use to respond to federal procurements (Tsang, 2014).

My purpose for reviewing professional and academic literature was to summarize, compare, and contrast various sources that relate to my research and topic. In the process of the literature review, I focused on answering the central research question: What strategies do service-disabled veteran small business owners need to obtain federal contracts? In what follows, I discuss the application of the GST to my study and small business ownership in general. I also discuss the U.S. Department of Defense, contractual interests, and veteran programs intended to help service-disabled veterans become successful business owners. I also review literature on the topics of entrepreneur financing, small business innovation, marketing, and strategic planning which are challenges for new business owners who may want to attain federal contracts.

I reviewed contemporary peer-reviewed scholarly articles concerning GST and the limitations, weaknesses, and the potential for future research in each category. I also reviewed statistical reports and scholarly books. The Walden Library databases served as my primary resource for obtaining the sources. I used several databases to locate peer-reviewed articles published after 2012 including Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM Complete, Emerald Management, SAGE Premier, ProQuest Central Academic Search Complete, Science Digest, U.S. government databases, Dissertations and Theses at Walden University, and Google Scholar. Keywords in the search criteria included *contracting officer*, *Federal Acquisition Regulation*, *federal agency*, *service-*

*disabled veteran, service-disabled veteran-owned small business, System for Award Management, and GST.*

The majority of the articles I included in the review were from peer-reviewed journals published since 2012. The study contains 270 sources, of which 90% are contemporary peer-review sources published in the last 5 year. Additional sources of information emerged during the data collection phase of the study.

### **General Systems Theory**

I used Ludwig von Bertalanffy's (1968) GST to develop the conceptual framework for this study. Bertalanffy's (1968) cultivated the general systems approach in the field of biology from which he adapted some of the basic organismic ideas such as organization and integration that may work together to conduct many processes (Bertalanffy, 1968). GST is an open and closed system (Drack, 2009). The open system represents an interaction between organizations and the environment and has a greater probability of survivability and prosperity for all when the system reaches equifinal (Bertalanffy, 1968). There is collaboration among the members with continual input and output. A closed system does not have communication or relationships, and in the end ceases to exist (Bertalanffy, 1968). I used the systems theory because my study focused on the openness of the U.S. government procurement systems processes. The U.S. government controls all the information regarding procurement and can make it available to small businesses so they can be competitive in the marketplace. The communication between entities includes continual output by the U.S. government contracting personnel and valid information provided to the U.S. government by the small businesses.

E-government is more than the organizations and technology (Roman, 2013). E-government is about the people, and influence they use in daily through interactions (Roman, 2013). In e-government, the system, beliefs, and technology are somewhat bound together (Roman, 2013). The system theory is about understanding an organizational and the associated activities help show how change unfolds (Drack, 2009).

Organizations change, resulting in shifts in the company, and how employees react to an organization's structure impacts and effects leadership and decision-making (Bertalanffy, 1968). A complex system evolves when governed by rules and standards (Ducq et al., 2012). The systems theory offers a framework for understanding the continuous evolution of enterprises and systems' interoperability (Bertalanffy, 1968). Systems must be flexible to interact between enterprises and at the organizational level (Bertalanffy, 1968). The organizational level is the primary level for interoperability and management can attain interoperability (Bertalanffy, 1968). The basic tenet of GST is that system exists with many interconnected parts (Zenko, Rosi, Mulej, Mlakar, & Mulej, 2013).

The grey systems theory focuses on the study of problems where the information is in some measure known and in some measure unknown (Liu, Forrest, & Yang, 2012). Grey systems exist everywhere because of the uncertainty or partiality of information (Liu et al., 2012). Grey systems include systems with incomplete information and inaccuracies in data, using different approaches and techniques (Liu et al., 2012). In summary, the grey systems theory could help to deal with difficult situations particularly when the information is incomplete and the data collected is incorrect (Liu et al., 2012).



## **Small Business**

Small business is a significant sector of the economy, which influences overall economic growth and growth and stability of the middle class (Salyakhov, Zagidullina, Fakhrutdinova, & Aleshina, 2015). A small business may be a partnership, sole proprietorship, corporation, or other legal entities (SBA, 2015a). Small business owners start businesses for many different reasons, and with various aspirations and abilities (Blackburn, Hart, & Wainwright, 2013). To conduct business with federal agencies, a small business owner must register the company with the U.S. government in the SAM (SBA, 2015a). A small business owner must follow the industry standards for size, revenue, and the number of employees as established by the SBA because the U.S. government procuring offices use the standards and codes to qualify the business for a contract (SBA, 2015a). A business owner must obtain a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and an employer identification number (EIN) which is the federal tax identification number for a corporate entity, to register in the Dynamic Small Business Search (DSBS) database (SBA, 2015a). The DSBS is an on-line tool developed by the SBA that is used by contracting officers to identify potential small business contractors for upcoming contracting opportunities.

Business owners should also familiarize themselves with the Federal Business Opportunities (FedBizOps) to search for contracting opportunities. FedBizOps is an online service operated by the Federal Government, which announces all contracting opportunities over \$25,000 (Shehane, 2013). To gain an understanding of where the Federal Government award contracts, the owners should visit the USASpending website

([usaspending.gov](http://usaspending.gov)). This searchable website is free to the public. Small businesses owners can also use DSBS to identify other small businesses for teaming and joint venturing.

The U.S. Federal Government awards over \$500 billion dollars in contracts annually, and has a goal to award at least 23% of all procurement dollars to small businesses (SBA, 2015a). Small business executives need to understand the political landscape as well as the procurement processes, and a small business owner doing business with the Federal Government needs to understand policies and the implications (Dennis, 2011a; Dennis, 2011b).

Small business owners need to understand the influence human and social capital have on their businesses' success (Khanna, Jones, & Boive, 2014). The human capital of the firm comes from the skills and experience gained from the education and training received by the employees (Khanna et al., 2014). Social capital helps to reduce concerns about each other, benefits all parties, enables trust, and makes possible social norms (Kim & Kang, 2013). Human and social capital provide a small business flexibility and help with the entrepreneur's success (Khanna et al., 2014; Salyakhov et al., 2015).

Being a small business owner is a stressful endeavor, and the business owner must be able to endure or successfully cope with stress (Baron, Franklin, & Hmieleski, 2013). The business owners who do not fare well in stress situations tend to be unsuccessful business owners (Baron et al., 2013). Researchers have found that entrepreneurs who venture into new businesses tend to handle stress better than those who do not seem to have the capacity (Baron et al., 2013).

## **U.S. Department of Defense**

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) procures billions of dollars of goods and services for the U.S. government (Rosen, 2013). The Federal Government contracts over 22% of all procurement dollars with small businesses, and the DOD accounts for most of the dollars spent on small businesses (SBA, 2016). In this study, I used the DOD mostly as a representative of all federal agencies for the sake of simplicity. If business owners want to do business with federal agencies like the DOD, then they need to understand the acquisition system (Rosen, 2013).

The procurement process continues in peace and wartime in an iterative manner (Worger, Jalao, Wirthlin, Colombi, & Wu, 2014). The processes are both event and scheduled driven (Worger et al., 2014). These methods help to manage billions of dollars for producing and sustaining a combat capability through the development and procurement of systems through the acquisition and contracting programs (Worger et al., 2014). The overall system is inherently complex and requires constant adjustments achieved through policy or regulation changes (Worger et al., 2014). The procurement of military systems is a multifaceted process, the success of which is dependent upon the integration of processes, people, and skills (Vasilache, 2014). This integration is inherently difficult because it involves combining disparate parts into something cohesive (Vasilache, 2014). The U.S. Federal Government, however, aims to maintain a sufficient industrial base by being innovative and using the acquisition process (Vasilache, 2014).

The conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somali caused defense-spending increases which have benefitted small businesses (Doussard, 2014). The drawdown of forces and military operations will result in decreased contractor requirements both in the United

States and outside of the continental United States (Doussard, 2014). Being near a military base is not required for securing defense contracts, although during the latter part of the 1980s, military spending helped the growth of cities such as Huntsville, Alabama, and Colorado Springs, Colorado (Doussard, 2014). Some major programs require a contractor to have an office close to the U.S. government location (Doussard, 2014). Small business owners located near military bases may be able to obtain local procurement contracts for base operations such as roads, landscaping, food service, utilities, and for a major mission support services (Doussard, 2014). The procurement requirements play an essential role in directing defense contracts into the local economy or alluring contractors into the area (Doussard, 2014).

### **Small Business Education and Training**

Education and training have a positive effect on the growth and sustainability of small businesses (Mas-Tur, Pinazo, Tur-Porcar, & Sanchez-Masferrer, 2015). Programs such as the GI Bill, Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans and service corps of retired executives (SCORE) assist a new business owner with being successful by providing the required skills (Kerrick et al., 2014). Lastly, essential to an owner's success is motivation and passion (Kerrick et al., 2014).

**The GI Bill.** In 1944, because of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, known as the GI Bill, World War II servicepersons' military obligation of serving honorably in any military branch of service for 90 days raised their economic status tremendously (Keene, 2015). The material benefits offered by the GI Bill created the largest welfare service in the history of the country and helped shape the post-war era (Keene, 2015). Veterans took advantage of the entitlements to enhance their economic standing, providing the basis for

a postwar economic boom created a broad middle class and an equal distribution of wealth (Keene, 2015).

Many U.S. veterans used the GI Bill education benefits and then return to society contributing in the greatest capacity (Keene, 2015). After World War II, many veterans who were college level athletes attended the school of their choice (Mills & Salaga, 2015). The GI Bill gave them the ability to attend a school of choice and participate in collegiate athletic activities basically for free (Jolly, 2013). Veterans of the Korean, Vietnam, Gulf Wars, and the Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits program use the later versions of the GI Bill (Jolly, 2013). The Post-9/11 GI Bill offers over two million Americans' who served in Iraq or Afghanistan education assistance for enrolling in institutions of higher learning (Mills, Paladino, & Klentzin, 2015). Not all veterans enjoyed the benefits of the GI Bill in the early years (Jolly, 2013). That is no longer true in 2015, the GI Bill continues to help to bring many veterans into wealth and fortunes not experienced by many previous veterans (Lotchin, Newton, Pate, & Pifer, 2014).

The current economic climate presents challenges to those who face separation and service-connected disabilities from service to our nation (Bell, Boland, Dudgeon, & Johnson, 2013). Veterans with service-connected disabilities have a higher unemployment rate than those veterans without a reported disability (Horton et al., 2013). Veterans attain injuries resulting in permanent disabilities are at greater risk of experiencing challenges in readjustment to civilian and campus life after active duty (Bell et al., 2013).

Due to the DOD drawdown, there are more military veterans than ever before seeking entrepreneurship opportunities (Kerrick et al., 2014). This is because

unemployment among veterans continues to increase for those who left the service after 1990 (Mills & Johns, 2012). In comparison, non-veterans have a lower unemployment rate, and those who are service-disabled the rate is even higher (Mills & Johns, 2012). The analysis is this trend is continuing (Mills & Johns, 2012). We should expect veterans to consider becoming an entrepreneur (Kerrick et al., 2014). Veterans such as Sam Walton and Malcolm Forbes are excellent examples of entrepreneurs to follow (Kerrick et al., 2014). Entrepreneurship education for veterans is relatively new when compared to the GI Bill, which started in 1944 (Kerrick et al., 2014).

**Entrepreneurship boot camp for veterans.** A relatively new program is the Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities started at the Syracuse University in 2007 (Kerrick et al., 2014). The entrepreneurship boot camp program helps veterans with disabilities start their own business (Blass & Ketchen, 2014; Mills & Johns, 2012). The program is free, and the participants learn how to start a business successfully (Blass & Ketchen, 2014). Over 700 veterans completed the program from various universities across the country (Kerrick et al., 2014). Librarians across America program also assist veterans in the entrepreneurship boot Camp become more knowledgeable business owners (Mills & Johns, 2012). In cities across America, the SBA as well as the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs offer entrepreneurship training and education for veterans (Kerrick et al., 2014).

**SCORE.** Service corps of retired executives (SCORE) is another organization in the US dedicated to providing mentorship to entrepreneurs of small businesses who are starting or growing a business (Botham, 2012). The SCORE Association, supported by SBA is a non-profit charitable organization consisting of members who mentor business

owners for free (Botham, 2012). The SBA administers the Small Business Administration Distribution Centers (SBDC) Program to provide assistance to those who own a business and those considering becoming entrepreneurs (Kunz & Dow, 2015). The SBDCs provide a mired of services from training, counseling and other business marketing and management assistance (Geho & McDowell, 2015; Kunz & Dow, 2015). Lastly, the U.S. funds SBDCs to provide advisory services to small business owners, also for free (Botham, 2012).

**Motivation and passion.** Starting and successfully running a business requires motivation and passion (Mills & Johns, 2012). Veterans own over two million businesses, and over 8% of veteran-owned businesses have a disability (Mills & Johns, 2012). Veteran households, in general, have lower income than their civilian counterparts do; but those who own small businesses have a higher income than non-veteran householders do (Mills & Johns, 2012). Those veterans who own businesses gained their skills from the military (Hope et al., 2011). More than 20% of veterans are planning to start a business (Hope, et. al., 2011). The veterans leaving the service need entrepreneurship training to stay motivated to overcome the hurdles to sustain and grow a company (Miles, 2013). The U.S. government bureaucracy may cause many not to become service-disabled veteran-owned small business owners (Roman, 2014). The U.S. government procurement processes benefit a future business owner because of the process stability and the purposeful nature of the contracting mission (Roman, 2014). This is an application of an open system (Bertalanffy, 1968). Business owners that learn processes can take advantage of federal procurement system (Mills & Johns, 2012).

### **Contractual Interests Contracting Officials**

U.S. government contracting officials acquire products, products support and services for federal activities (Mukhopadhyay, 2011). U.S. governments spend about 10 to 15% of the GDP for procurements (Mukhopadhyay, 2011). The DOD spent about 50 billion dollars on contracting for goods and services in 2012 (Doussard, 2012). The DOD budget expenditure represents more than 44% of the world's military budgets (Warf, 2013). U.S. government purchasing requires the federal agencies purchasing department to achieve goals (Resh & Marvel, 2013). Undeniably, military spending has substantial impacts on the economy because the DOD purchases around 80% of all U.S. government goods and services (Warf, 2013). Budget reductions may lead to extensive cuts in the military budget starting in 2013 (Drucker, 2015). Despite downsizing the size of the force structure and installations, defense spending continues to increase (Warf, 2013).

Contracting officers are the U.S. government official who can bind or obligate funds for the government using a contract (Federal Acquisition Regulation [FAR], 2015). The contracting officer, along with the agency head, makes the procurement policy and goals for the organization (Federal Acquisition Regulation [FAR], 2015). Federal contracting officials have to satisfy several objectives in the conduct of awarding federal contracts (Warren, 2014). Contracting officers must construct contractual instruments within the procurement acquisition timeline and budget (Warren, 2014).

A contract is a legal and binding vehicle used by federal agencies to acquire goods and services from the commercial marketplace (Federal Acquisition Regulation [FAR], 2015). The U.S. government administers the contracts vehicles in accordance with the Federal Acquisition Regulation, which sets firm terms and conditions (Federal



Acquisition Regulation [FAR], 2015). The service-disabled veteran-owned small business program is listed in FAR, part 19 (Federal Acquisition Regulation [FAR], 2015). These contracts usually require frequent reporting and a high level of responsibility. A failure to perform and achieve the promised results or product on time and on budget could result in criminal and/or civil actions and/or financial consequence.

The Federal Government contracting officers continue to purchase goods and services with a decreased workforce (Resh & Marvel, 2013). Unfortunately, this may lead to solicitations and contracts issued with faults that require adjustments (Warren, 2014). These changes cost the U.S. government time and money (Resh & Marvel, 2013). Contracting officers make mistakes and use less U.S. government friendly type of contracts to compensate for the errors (Resh & Marvel, 2013). Again, lack of contract managers compounds the problem (Resh & Marvel, 2013). The U.S. government contracting expertise has been eroding with contract complexity increasing while institutional knowledge due to retirements was decreasing (Johnston, & Girth, 2012). A result has been outsourcing of once considered U.S. government only functions such as managing other contractors (Johnston, & Girth, 2012).

In general, business owners believe the U.S. government purchasers want competition so they can improve efficiency and effectiveness in the U.S. government contracting process (Johnston, & Girth, 2012). The solicitation competition is often noncompetitive (Johnston, & Girth, 2012). Some large businesses allow small businesses to prime U.S. government contracts for them to gain the revenue (Johnston, & Girth, 2012). The small business receives the revenue; however, most of the profit goes to the large business (Johnston, & Girth, 2012). This ploy undermines the small disadvantaged

business policy objective (Johnston, & Girth, 2012). To counter this practice the Federal Government enacted the Small Business Act of 2010 and implemented in the Federal Acquisition Regulation (Federal Acquisition Regulation [FAR], 2015) which directs the prime contractor to meet required small business subcontracting goals (Kidalov, 2013). The goals are not binding, but the prime contractor does have to present a subcontracting plan with goals in the solicitation and contract to the contracting officer for approval (Kidalov, 2013). Small business owners' lack of compliance typically does not net any harm to the prime contractor (Kidalov, 2013). Many of the federal agencies establish mentor protégé programs to help with their subcontracting goals and contributes to building the size of a small business (Kidalov, 2013). Agencies such as the DOD and U.S. Department of Energy receive incentives for subcontracting with small businesses (Kidalov, 2013).

Contingency contracting requires a business owner to use sensemaking to recognize and respond to new and varied challenges as dictated by the contractual agreement (Moynihan, 2012). Contracting officers develop a relationship with local vendors with explicit preferences towards small emerging businesses, during contingency operations such as Hurricane Katrina (Moynihan, 2012). Locality is a driving factor in the awarding of contracts, with a preference for local and in-state vendors (Williams, 2014).

The U.S. Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Program is a contract set-aside program for only small businesses (Link & Scott, 2012). The SBA provides these technology-oriented contracts to promote innovation for developmental requirements in the technological environment (Lanahan & Feldman, 2015). The SBIR program consists

of three phases and each participating federal agency allocates part of the research and development projects to SBIR (Qian & Haynes, 2014). Some firms profited from the program initially, by increasing employees; however, after analyzing the data, Link and Scott (2012) found the agencies did not retain most of the contractors after the project completion. SBIR projects awarded to small businesses do not have a direct relationship with the number employees in the company (Link & Scott, 2012). Most firms do gain from cross-training personnel to perform other projects thereby advancing employee skills and retaining those employees (Link & Scott, 2012). An essential point for business owners is only to increase personnel when the agency retained the rights to the data (Link & Scott, 2012). The SBIR program provides opportunities for small business owners.

The U.S. government procurement process and programs are about fairness, efficiency, and effectiveness of goods and services acquired by the Federal Government at the right price (Mukhopadhyay, 2011). Small business owners and contractors have to trust each other and the source selection process (Maser & Thompson, 2013). Most contracting organizations conduct market surveys, request white papers, and conduct industry days to determine which owners have the business acumen to prosecute a contract successfully (Siegel & Wessner, 2010). The federal procurement program is extremely complicated, and those who prosper, spend an enormous amount of time learning the system (Resh & Marvel, 2013).

### **Veteran Programs**

Obtaining a federal contract for products or services to take advantage of U.S. government programs and legislated goals have not been easy for a service-disabled veteran business owner (McGann, 2014). To enhance competition and contract awards to

service-connected disabled veteran owners the Congress enacted two laws, The Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act of 1999, and the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 (SBA, 2015b). The results of those laws were the creation of the Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) program to help service-disabled veterans compete against conventional businesses for contracts in the federal marketplace (Best, 2013). The laws set a 3% goal of all federal procurements and provided a provision for federal contracting officers to limit competition to only service-disabled veteran small business owners (SBA, 2015b). The federal agencies made the government-wide 3% prime goal for service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses in 2012, 2013 and 2014, but has never achieved the 3% subcontracting goal (SBA, 2015c). The business owner must understand the 3% goal is not a requirement for the agencies to achieve.

Contracting officers can unilaterally restrict procurements to service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses as mandated by law if appropriate for that procurement (Federal Acquisition Regulation [FAR], 2015). Veteran-owned businesses range from very large to one or two person companies must obtain verification to become a service-disabled veteran-owned small business owner (McGann, 2014). The Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU), Center for Verification and Evaluation (CVE) is the only organization authorized to validate and verify a business for participation in the SDVOSB program (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), 2015). The service-connected disabled veteran must own no less than 51% of the business, must be the senior person in the organization and must make all operational and management decisions (SBA, 2015b). The owner must

then learn how to participate in the federal acquisition process, secure stakeholders, and then develop procedures to bid successfully on contracts (Blass & Ketchen, 2014). The business relationship between the U.S. government and a contractor exists with a contractual instrument and is where the formal commitment begins (Camen & Gottfridsson, 2012).

Service-disabled veteran-owned small business owners must understand the environment and be prepared to bid on U.S. government opportunities (Kotler & Keller, 2012). To develop a winning strategy business owners must understand the standards and requirements to bid on U.S. government contracts (Gill & Biger, 2012). Then the owner must understand and take advantage of the available education, training, and financing to be successful (Gill & Biger, 2012). The business owner must understand how to market to the U.S. government, provide innovative ideas, and develop a strategy to win U.S. government contracts (Kotler & Keller, 2012). These are some of the barriers for disadvantaged-owned businesses obtaining contracts from the U.S. government (Gill & Biger, 2012). The business owners must maintain an open system with the federal agencies to succeed by communicating with procurement officials and competing for contracts (Valentinov & Chatalova, 2014)

### **Entrepreneur Financing**

New business activity decreased after 2009 and is still recovering; moreover, the creation of new businesses is what the economy needs to boost economic growth and job activity (Kauffman, 2013). Entrepreneurs who believe their business idea will net a successful venture are willing to seek funding (Rasmussen & Sorheim, 2012). Obtaining and managing finance is important to small business owners and weighs heavily

on whether the company owner is successful (Kauffman, 2013). The small business owner needs financial training and education to help them be a successful entrepreneur who can innovate, create new products, and new jobs, thereby, helping the economy (Terjesen, Patel, Fiet, & DSouza, 2013).

Service-disabled veteran-owned small business owners with an idea could start a company and raise funds (Rasmussen & Sorheim, 2012). The business owners have three choices to raise funds, and they are debt, equity, and borrowing (Barringer & Ireland, 2010). Debt usually is a promise to make payments based on a schedule; the payments are taxable, and there is a penalty for not making timely payments and may result in loss of all or part of the business (Barringer & Ireland, 2010). Equity investing is raising funds from investors or using the business owner funds to start a business (Barringer & Ireland, 2010). Equity investors can receive significant portions of the profit; the equity investors do not require repayment if the company fails (Barringer & Ireland, 2010). Borrowing money has an advantage in that the loaner will not receive any profits (Barringer & Ireland, 2010). Borrowed money is an expense, and requires repayment with interest (Barringer & Ireland, 2010).

There are advantages and disadvantages of raising equity capital versus obtaining a bank loan to fund a business (Barringer & Ireland, 2010). The advantages are if the business is doing well there may be more funding in the future, and the equity capital investors will bring experience and interest in the business venture success (Barringer & Ireland, 2010). The disadvantages are raising capital is not easy, and it will take away time and effort needed to run a successful business (Barringer & Ireland, 2010). The business owner may lose some of their power as an owner to the equity investor, and the

equity investor will require a business to grow faster (Barringer & Ireland, 2010).

Business owners should seek to have an excellent relationship with a banker, by regularly meeting with them to discuss current and future needs (Barringer & Ireland, 2010).

Entrepreneurs who seek different financial resources during the start-up period are more likely to establish a viable firm with growth potential (Jayawarna, Jones, & Marlow, 2015). New business owners could use bootstrapping as a means of reducing the dependency on outside assistance for a startup firm (Nakhli & Belkacem, 2013). The business owners could economize on costs by developing payment plans in advance with the customer to manage cash flow and create just in time supply chain to cut down on inventory (Nakhli & Belkacem, 2013). There are unique challenges to bootstrapping and payoffs (Jayawarna et al., 2015). The unique challenges are the business plan may need adjustments and the sources of funds may have to increase to greater than anticipated (Nakhli & Belkacem, 2013). Operating in a strapped financial environment and being too cautious may hinder new business development (Grichnik, Brinckmann, Singh, & Manigart, 2013), bootstrapping can offer greater flexibility in relations with diverse financial sources (Jayawarna et al., 2015).

Entrepreneurs seeking funds to operate in the technology sector provide a boost to the economy and efficiencies in the marketplace (Terjesen et al., 2013). Venture capitalists play significant roles in financing start-ups (Conti, Thursby, & Rothaermel, 2013). Venture capitalist investments have a positive effect on sales growth of businesses, job creation, and economic growth (Terjesen et al., 2013). Venture Capitalist transfer funds from investors to entrepreneurs because venture capitalists do not use their resources but raise funds from other funding sources (Kollmann, Kuckertz, &

Middelberg, 2014). Venture Capitalist seeks businesses that show large short-term revenue streams with long-range potential for greater returns (Kollmann et al., 2014). The business owner needs to achieve a competitive advantage in the marketplace or show more funding would advance the business past the competitors (Kollmann et al., 2014). The venture capitalist would have to believe that the business owner has the right managers in place to advance the organization (Kollmann et al., 2014). How and when the business owner makes, the financing decision may determine how the business grows (Schweinbacher, 2013). An issue for investors is the evaluation of investments from a service-disabled veteran-owned business owner's perspective (Drover, Wood, & Fassin, 2014). Venture capitalists do not have the insight into how the entrepreneur evaluates them (Drover et al., 2014). Addressing this issue will allow better communication between the investor and investee and provide better understandings as to why entrepreneurs agree to or refuse funding proposals (Rasmussen & Sorheim, 2012).

Successful business owners understand finance as well as develop business and strategic partnerships (Jayawarna et al., 2015). A potential financial source is the small business innovation research (SBIR) program sponsored by the Small Business Administration to obtain funds for innovation (Cumming & Li, 2013). These business owners develop a good relationship with the customer so the company owner can obtain a favorable payment schedule, such as decrease time for payment and in return the business owner can offer discounts for those who support creative financing (Cumming & Li, 2013).

The U.S. government using public policy can set the conditions to help increase investments through external funding for entrepreneurs (Cumming & Li, 2013). Policies



on public expenditure programs facilitated more entrepreneurs who started a successful business in Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program (Cumming & Li, 2013). Education and labor frictions are barriers to an entrepreneur financial success (Cumming & Li, 2013). Lastly, many governments seek methods to increase the survival of businesses especially new firms (Baron et al., 2013). To increase the survivability of new businesses some communities have created business incubators (Baron et al., 2013). A business incubator increases the business chance of survival and adds value due to growth probability (Baron et al., 2013).

Service-disabled veteran-owned small business owners might also consider the whole business (WB) securitization strategy for obtaining corporate funding (Haaranen & Nisar, 2011). The whole business is a fundraising strategy that permits company leaders to use the company assets to realize the organization full potential in collaboration with their stakeholders (Haaranen & Nisar, 2011). Using a WB strategy, the business acquires funds by issuing bonds backed by the company assets (Haaranen & Nisar, 2011). The key to the WB strategy is the investors can influence the business direction by requiring a business plan and implementation of this plan according to the investor's desires (Haaranen & Nisar, 2011). A franchise is an example of a whole business securitization strategy (Haaranen & Nisar, 2011). The WB securitization strategy provides an avenue for service-disabled veteran-owned small business owners to obtain funding for their business (Haaranen & Nisar, 2011).

**Crowdfunding.** Crowdfunding is a viable financial tool for entrepreneurs (Mollick, 2013; Voelker & McGlashan, 2015). There are various reasons for a company to fail such as a poor business plan, too much competition, but most businesses fail

because of inadequate financing (Haaranen, & Nisar, 2011). Businesses such as Kickstarter have been in business with many crowdfunding ventures creating a viable option for entrepreneurs to use to obtain funds for a new venture (Mollick, 2013). Crowdfunding is part of crowdsourcing that means the need for the crowd to respond to the ideas and concepts (Bouncken, Komorek, & Kraus, 2015). Crowdfunding is a method for entrepreneurs to raise money from contributions, and the contributions come from at least two people over the internet to fund a project or business (Mollick, 2013; Vogel, 2012).

Crowdfunding is a relatively new method for businesspersons to obtain capital (Ibrahim & Verliyantina, 2012). Crowdfunding is micro-finance, and a form of crowdsourcing used to raise funds facilitated by the internet (Mollick, 2013).

Crowdfunding can fall in four sometimes-overlapping categories (Mollick, 2013). The four types are humanitarian projects, as a loan with expectations of return on investment, reward-based funding and as an investor receiving equity for the monetary investment (Mollick, 2013). The fundraiser network, project quality, and geography relate to the success of crowdfunding efforts (Mollick, 2013). An entrepreneur can raise funding for a business by crowdfunding and crowdfunding for enterprises comes from contributions from individuals, not venture capitalists (Carni, 2015). Entrepreneurs need to set the conditions for success when it comes to crowdfunding (Carni, 2014; Vogel, 2012).

Legislators in 2008 in an attempt to stimulate the economy and help start-up companies facilitated the use of crowdfunding by creating an exemption in Title III of the JOBS Act (Cavaliere, Mulvaney, Swerdlow, & Baldo, 2014). According to the provisions of the act, a new startup business owner can market up to million dollars in guarantees every twelve

months, through a crowdfunding broker, without the standard registration requirements (Cavaliere et al., 2014). Opponents of the exemption have cited the possibility of fraud (Carni, 2014). The Act prohibits fraud, omitting pertinent data and making false statements in a relationship with the buying or selling of guarantees (Carni, 2014). Unfortunately, crowdfunding over the Internet has been involved in fraud, although the act provides protection, small investors may not be able to recoup their investment (Carni, 2014). The risk is part of any new venture and using crowdfunding is no different (Stemler, 2013). The success of crowdfunding depends on the marketing and the benefits gained by previous users (Carni, 2014). Innovators, new small business owners such as service-disabled business owners can benefit from using crowdfunding (Stemler, 2013). The JOBS Act provides an opportunity for equity crowdfunding in the United States (Carni, 2014). Crowdfunding may have a positive impact on the field of entrepreneur finance (Gleasure, 2015). There is less time needed to secure financing because these small business owners can sell their idea in a forum where investors desire to be in the marketplace (Gleasure, 2015). Crowdfunding is an alternative financial source for the small business owner to increase the growth rate (Papazov, 2014).

### **Small Business Innovation**

Innovation is one of the key factors to a successful business and contributes to the economy and wealth making in a state and country (Mas-Tur et al., 2015). Business leaders must understand when and how to use innovation in a competitive environment to gain an advantage with the customer (Nagano, Stefanovitz, & Vick, 2014). Leaders of governments can establish an encouraging innovation environment by setting policies, and standards, provide opportunities and be flexible with tax requirements for

entrepreneurs (Patanakul & Pinto, 2014). Government innovation management can affect technological change in all phases of the innovation process (Dorgelo & Galloway, 2014). Countries like the U.S. develop innovation strategies to help achieve and sustain the economy and be competitive in the global marketplace (Dorgelo & Galloway, 2014). A Strategy for American Innovation 2015, is an update to previous strategies detailing how Americans could work together to improve future economic growth. In the document, President Obama established initiatives to focus on economic growth, transformative innovations, and modernizing government (Dorgelo & Galloway, 2014). The engine for this growth has been corporate leaders and their companies (Dorgelo & Galloway, 2014). The foresight to develop a strategy creates an environment for technology advancement is the sign of innovation management (Cajaiba-Santana, 2013).

In many aspects of business, technology pervades and contributes to maintaining a stable operation (Aithal, 2015; Bertalanffy, 1968). The change in research on innovation happened in the 1950s and since then businesses carefully plan the launch of new products and have evolved from understanding an individual to understanding the relationship between individuals (Aithal, 2015). Technology has helped evolve our society, and small business owners must understand the challenges and develop the strategies to meet challenges (Autio, Kenney, Mustar, Siegel, & Wright, 2014).

A business owner must understand the government customer matters and the customer are key to any new technology success (Osenieks & Babauska, 2014). This focus creates an environment for developing employees, corporate wealth, and the competitive advantage (Osenieks & Babauska, 2014). Service-disabled veteran-owned small business owners should understand how to make use of open innovation where the

knowledge is flowing inward and outward of a business for the purpose to accelerate innovations in the company's business environment and use the internal knowledge to expand into other markets (Inauen & Schenker-Wicki, 2012). A business needs a plan and vision to incorporate technology and must understand the benefits of the implementation (Hittmar, Varmus, & Lendel, 2014). Service-disabled veteran-owned small business owners might need to understand the marketplace to be relevant and competitive in 2015 (Hittmar et al., 2014). Business owners that understand the marketplace know when to review the company strategy and develop the a model to fit the environment take advantage of new opportunities or respond to innovations (Hittmar et al., 2014). The business owner may deliver innovative solutions by aligning the business to customer value based on customer requirements (Hittmar et al., 2014).

Technology will help an entity become more efficient if properly utilized but new technology is no technology if the customer or an organization cannot understand how to use the new product or service (De Araujo Burcharth, 2014). The implementation must be part of any business plan at all levels for technology to work because technology innovation requires a cultural change (Aithal, 2015). Leaders must understand how their organization accepts changes and interpret new knowledge because this is a continuous process (De Araujo Burcharth, 2014). Organizational learning enhances technological innovation and innovation shifts the emphasis from organizational constructs and practices to the processes to a learning organization with knowledge creation (De Araujo Burcharth, 2014). A small business entrepreneur can cause changes in the marketplace by being innovative and taking risks in areas that lead to more opportunities and a better economy (Elenurm, 2012).

**Reverse innovation strategy.** Innovations are fundamental to maintaining and improving society's way of life and are crucial to the global economy and economic wellbeing (Qiu & Fan, 2013). Some small service-disabled veteran-owned small business owners might be able to assist multinational companies to use emerging markets to originate innovations in the local markets of the developing economies (Qiu & Fan, 2013). These innovations if successful generate demand in First World countries, hence, reverse innovation and global corporations can make money from the emerging markets (Qiu & Fan, 2013). The developing countries collectively have a voice because economic growth has been shifting from developed countries to developing countries Qiu & Fan, 2013). Emerging countries provide better business opportunities than developed countries (Govindarajan & Trimble, 2012). Enhancing a global corporation reverse innovation strategy, means the company must understand the culture, language infrastructure and employ the best talent available in that country (Govindarajan & Trimble, 2012).

Accessing, improving and developing the country's human resources provide a competitive advantage to a business (Sood & Szyf, 2011). Businesses must be amenable to developing or changing a sustainment strategic management plan to support the local economy (Stead & Stead, 2013). The reverse innovation program must sustain the local ecosystems and advance the societies and economies (Kashyap, 2012). Reverse innovations provide an opportunity for developing countries and the host country (Govindarajan & Trimble, 2012). Nevertheless, the local leaders must address the financial aspect of the domestic systems (Sood & Szyf, 2011). The local economy will benefit from reverse innovations (Sood & Szyf, 2011).

The leaders must prepare for transactions outside their borders that they will have no control (Sood & Szyf, 2011). Once identified local policy makers will have to adjust to the new wealth and changes in their environment, economic and financial systems (Sood & Szyf, 2011). Developing countries collectively have buying power rivaling developed countries (Govindarajan & Trimble, 2012). Innovations influenced the past advancement of the First World economies and with a connected global economy, emerging markets are part of future advancements (Govindarajan & Trimble, 2012).

### **Small Business Marketing**

The role of marketing is to achieve competitiveness for the organization and its products or services through marketing by creating and cultivating relationships with other organizations and people who can effect the success of the organization (Wirtz, Tuzovic, & Kuppelwieser, 2014). Having a relationship with federal agencies, conducting effective intelligence, and marketing help the business owner find new government business (Wirtz et al., 2014). Marketers and leaders cannot create this success without cultivating relationships (Kotler & Keller, 2012). The marketing systems do not operate in a closed environment and are an active part of the organization's internal and external systems (Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2015).

Transactional marketing and relationship marketing have different goals (Rocha, Stedefeldt Jansen, Lofti, & Ribeiro Fraga, 2013). A business leader using transactional marketing expects a quick sale but in relationship marketing, a business leader seeks long-term relationships (Rocha et al., 2013). Business leaders need to develop the right marketing strategy for their business (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Thus, marketers encounter challenges to improve sales quality, meeting customer demands and developing the sales

team (Kotler & Keller, 2012). The traditional marketing methods will not die, however, a firm cannot remain competitive if the salesperson, and the leaders do not understand and manage information systems (Kotler & Keller, 2012). The traditional method may work for long-term agreements, but salespersons must eventually develop a customer relationship (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

The Internet has become essential to society and has had an enormous influence on small business owners' success (Leeflang, Verhoef, Dahlstrom, & Freundt, 2014). To be successful, small business owners need to hire marketing consultants external to their company such as those who can provide internet solutions, because most firms do not have the need or funds to hire a full-time person (Leeflang et al., 2014). Business owners will gain and maintain a competitive advantage, by staying abreast of and using technology (Agnihotri, Kothandaraman, Kashyap, & Singh, 2012).

An owner who uses transactional marketing focuses on traditional marketing mix and the 4Ps: product, price, promotion, and place (Donnelly, Simmons, Armstrong, & Fearne, 2013). A transactional marketing strategy does have a long-term focus on the customer (Donnelly et al., 2013). Relationship marketing focus is on building a relationship between the marketer the customer (Donnelly et al., 2013). Social media can drive change in both marketing strategies and help the service-disabled veteran-owned small business owners understand what people want to purchase (Agnihotri et al., 2012). Last, the role of social media can help create value for the marketers of both strategies even with a different manner each approach marketing (Agnihotri et al., 2012).

**Marketing and technology.** Technology has and will continue to enhance and improve marketing (Rocha et al., 2013). Corporations are looking for better performance



from the marketers; technology is a driving force, and companies must change to meet the market requirements (Rocha et al., 2013). Corporation's internal organizations must change to meet the growing need to satisfy the customer (Rocha et al., 2013). Marketers must be able to show the financial benefit when presenting the concept of using social media to leaders (Rocha et al., 2013).

**The role of information technology in marketing.** By 2017, 2.55 billion people around the world are using social media (Davis et al., 2014). Social media are having a significant influence on businesses and may continue in the future (Wiersema, 2013). The business owners need to understand the role social media plays in the success or failure of the branding in social communities (Davis et al., 2014). Small business owners' marketers need to create metrics to help manage the returns on social media (Rocha et al., 2013). Social media is a growing part of communication platforms impact on new technologies and salespersons (Kang, Oh, & Sivados, 2013).

The social media industry owners have yet to develop a standard as a communication tool; it may in the future (Schultz, Schwepker, & Good, 2012). Older salespersons use social media less than their younger counterparts, and may have to develop their social media skills to remain competitive in the workforce (Schultz et al., 2012). Business leaders use social media to reach different sectors of society and provide a competitive advantage to those who learn how to reach those consumers (Kang et al., 2013). Customers expect two-way conversations and social media provide a venue for this collaboration online (Davis et al., 2014).

Business owners could use more marketing automation and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their marketing production (Gross, Holtzbatt, Javalgi,

Poor, & Solymossy, 2013). Technology has and will continue to enhance and improve the field of marketing (Wiersema, 2013). Salespeople and leaders must adapt to new technology by reshaping the organization, add training, and use social media to create more opportunities (Agnihotri et al., 2012). Marketers will also have to learn how to conduct content marketing because it requires different techniques and selling tactics (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Traditional marketing may not be dead, but its usefulness is decreasing (Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

**The impact of information technology.** Information technology (IT) improves the marketing efficiency (Leeflang et al., 2014). Salespersons need technology for making a budget, making sales presentations, and analyzing marketing statistics (Leeflang et al., 2014). Through technology, salespersons can communicate and collaborate faster with customers, develop marketing innovation through on-line and electronic services thereby promoting better business relationships (Wiersema, F. 2013). IT can change the competitive environment (Wiersema, F. 2013). IT helps to make firms more efficient because of the speed firms can exchange information and in the long-run firms are more effective (Pardo, Ivens, & Wilson, 2013). To remain competitive firms must adapt to the market environment.

Social media plays an important role in relationship marketing (Agnihotri, et al., 2012). An important and growing role is the salespersons can reach into the different sectors of society by using social media and connecting directly with the consumers and their networks (Khang, Eyun-Jung, & Lan Ye, 2012). Social media could help a business to gain and sustain a competitive advantage; however, an age gap exists between those

who do and do not use social media (Schultz et al., 2012). Older salespersons tend not to use social media (Schultz et al., 2012).

Information technology may continue to have a positive impact on the marketing field (Zineldin & Philipson, 2007). No company uses a total traditional marketing method (Zineldin & Philipson, 2007). Those former traditional types of marketers use a combined type of approach, and this helps the business firms effectively use information technology and take advantage of the relational aspect (Zineldin & Philipson, 2007). Marketers who use relationship marketing want to develop business relationships for the long term not just to appeal to new customers (Zineldin & Philipson, 2007). Losing the customer base can decrease sales and increase the cost to gain other consumers but by using information technology, the business owner can keep existing customers, and be competitive through relationship marketing (Jahromi, Stakhovych, & Ewing, 2014).

Successful service-disabled veteran-owned small business owners might have to reorganize their internal organizations to remain competitive in the marketplace (Pardo et al., 2013). This is not an easy task because the desire to satisfy the ever-changing customer and the information technology advancements (Pardo et al., 2013). Business leaders can adapt the marketing strategy to the changing requirements such as social media and customer relations management directorates (Pardo et al., 2013). The key to any realignment is for the reorganization to evolve into a competitive organization, one that supports each business unit (Pardo et al., 2013). Information technology matters to leaders because IT directly affects the methods marketers use to increase performance, profits, and customer relationships (Pardo et al., 2013).

Small business owners who use information technology gain a venue to communicate better with the customer and may use social media to develop relationships for marketing products and services (Agnihotri et al., 2012). An important and growing role for salespersons is to reach different sectors of society (Khang et al., 2012). The businessperson uses social media to connect directly with the consumers and their networks (Khang et al., 2012). Content marketing is a method of developing relationships with customers without trying to sell them a product (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). The goal is to make the government customer smarter while hoping the customer will buy the product in the future. To be successful business owners will have to understand the digital world, publishing, and their marketplace to be successful (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Marketers will have to learn how to conduct content marketing because IT requires different techniques and selling tactics (Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

**Networking.** The businesses and military organizations in the future might be that which each enjoys seamless systems connectivity and interoperable systems. Successful organizations must be able to adapt to changing situations or face failure (Aaboen, Dubois, & Lind, 2013). Veterans starting a business must network, communicate and collaborate about their business organization to business associates, family, friends, and the customer (Kerrick et al., 2014). The business owner can use networking to gain knowledge about new sources of information and assists the business owner to increase exposure to those who are not totally related the military marketplace (Kerrick et al., 2014).

### **Small Business Strategic Planning Process**

A strategic plan is a guide created to show how the small business managers will reach the company goals (Saunders, 2015). Equally, the strategic plan lets everyone know how and why the company uses resources to obtain the goal (Saunders, 2015).

Conventional components of a strategic plan should include a vision, purpose, behaviors, and goals (Armajani, 2012). Using those elements, the leadership, and planners can develop a functioning organization with all business units and senior management working toward a common objective (Armajani, 2012). Unfortunately, organizations consist of personnel who do not have the same goals (Elbanna, 2016). The leaders compete for insufficient resources using tactics that create friction among them, while not focusing on what it takes the company operationally to outperform the competition (Calvo-Mora, Suarez, & Roldan, 2015). Through the right personnel, the organization can use sensemaking to change the perception of the organization (Tomkins & Eatough, 2014). Perceptions sometimes become reality and focal to the sensemaking process is how perceptions could project how an organization will act in the future (Weick, 2012). Sensemaking is an ordinary activity used to produce, valid organizational practices (Weick, 2012).

Strategic intent thinking is a clear and concise expression of the direction and future focus of an organization (Chen, Liu, Ni, & Wu, 2015). The strategic intent thinking gives the employees a sense the organization's leaders will direct attention to new competitive territories to be competitive in the future (Mariadoss, Johnson, & Martin, 2014). Usually, the intent involves intermediate objectives and allows the leaders, and personnel to focus without distractions (Mariadoss et al., 2014). Both strategic

planning and strategic intent thinking are necessary to be a competitive business in the end (Richard, 2015). Developing a strategic plan is valuable for an organization as well as, a focused plan with objectives. Strategic leaders must manage the day-to-day activities while executing the strategic intent (Richard, 2015).

A strategic choice is an approach to a business or institution to obtain and maintain a competitive advantage (Stacey, 2011). The senior leader or a team formulates the strategy (Stacey, 2011). They follow a decision-making process that has goals, alternatives, and control measures to direct the company on a path for a long time (Stacey, 2011). The business will continually face the challenge of exercising choice among courses of actions (Stacey, 2011). The decision is to select from among the courses the approach that will best meet the business objective. The leaders must design a structure that will secure and maintain a competitive advantage (Stacey, 2011).

Strategic thinking is about the ability to see the present and visualize the future state (Mariadoss et al., 2014). The leaders make decisions that lead to desired outcomes and encompasses a vision that is goal driven; makes sense for all to follow (Mariadoss et al., 2014). Strategic thinking focal point is on long-term decisions; intuition, creativity, plans, trends, and that affects the past and future of the business (Silva & Mousavidin, 2015). Strategic thinkers anticipate potential risks and opportunities with priorities in mind (Silva & Mousavidin, 2015). The small business owner operates in a multifaceted environment that requires strategic thinking, planning and while making the right choices (Silva & Mousavidin, 2015). Working in multidimensional environments and using general systems thinking, the business owner can gain an understanding of the active nature of the business climate (Haro & Bitektine, 2015). The small business owner's

vision reflects the understanding of external environmental and market conditions (Haro & Bitektine, 2015). Most small business lack strategic thinking because of funds and time available and desire to grow (Anderson & Ullah, 2014). Profitability and competitiveness in the marketplace do relate directly to the strategic planning process and the small business owner ability to adapt to the environment (Dibrell, Craig, & Neubaum, 2014; Mariadoss et al., 2014; Silver, Lundahl, & Berggren, 2014).

Organization leaders have to change to maintain a competitive advantage or to survive to create a new business focus (Gawer & Phillips, 2013). Some large corporations have taken advantage of Six Sigma and Lean Six Sigma as a means of improving processes and cost reduction; however, small and medium-sized (SMEs) companies have not for various reasons taken advantage of or realized the benefits of the practice (McAdam, Anthony, Kumar, & Hazlett, 2014). Most SMEs do have the money or trained personnel to conduct a study or implement the methods (McAdam et al., 2014). Six Sigma implementations involve improving business processes by reducing unnecessary activities or events and the leaders in the firms that recognized the benefits and limitations of the process in early stages understand the benefits (McAdam et al., 2014). Leaders, who lead by example, and take on changes such as Six Sigma and Lean Six Sigma, are accountable and responsible for their actions to the stakeholders in the organization (Othman & Rahman, 2014). Chester Barnard believed the individual was the base for any organization and with the addition of more people; the individual functioned as an organization (Godfrey & Mahoney, 2014). Barnard concluded the organizations create and produce output, but only the management can lead or act (Godfrey & Mahoney, 2014). The role of the executive is to preserve the system and ensure

coordination and cooperation between entities (Godfrey & Mahoney, 2014). The organization may use the interaction to innovate and grow. In the end, leaders must generate value to sustain customer's loyalty and business (Mencarelli & Riviere, 2014).

In applying the GST (Bertalanffy, 1968), service-disabled veteran-owned business owners need to understand that businesses and military organizations in the future may be designed so that each enjoys seamless systems network connectivity and interoperable systems (Aaboen et al., 2013). Business owners must be in an open system and viable to survive (Drack, 2009). As service-disabled veterans' return to the civilian sector seeking to be entrepreneurs (Kerrick et al., 2014), these veterans will need to be trained and educated (Gill & Biger, 2012). Having an understanding of the role of the federal agencies' procurement personnel and processes will assist a future business owner to gain a higher percentage of U.S. government contracts (Dennis, 2011a; Dennis, 2011b). These business owners must understand how to obtain finance. Building a strategy and systematically thinking may lead to success (Mariadoss et al., 2014). It is up to the owner and the senior managers to plan the organization mission with the future in mind (Godfrey & Mahoney, 2014). The federal agencies achieved the 23% goal for small businesses and the 3% goal for service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses in 2013 and 2014 (SBA, 2015c). There continues to be a concern of about the ability of service-disabled veteran-owned small business owners obtaining contracts (Mills & Johns, 2012).

### **Transition**

Discussed in Section 1 are the background to the problem, problem statement, and purpose statement, along with the nature of the study used to justify the qualitative method and exploratory single case study design. In Section 1, I also included the



background of the problem, research question, and interview questions. Next, in Section 1 were the conceptual framework, operation definitions, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. I concluded with a discussion Section 1 with the significance of the study and a review of the professional and academic literature. The literature review focus was on previous research relating to sections and subsections GST, small business, DOD, small business education and training, contracting interests, financing, innovation, marketing, and strategic processes.

I discussed in Section 2 the purpose statement of my research study, the role of the researcher, the selected participants, and a detailed the research methodology and design. Next, I described the population and sampling method; ethical research; data collection instruments, and technique, and data organization technique; and data analysis techniques. I concluded the discussion in Section 2 with how I ensured reliability and validity in my study.

In Section 3, I presented the findings, applications to professional practice and implications for social change. Then I discussed the recommendations for action, further research, and my reflections. Lastly, I concluded Section 3 with a summary and study conclusion.

## Section 2: The Project

In this section I describe the purpose of this project, my role as researcher, and the participants. Next I offer an in-depth discussion of the research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research procedures, data collection instruments and technique, data organization technique, and data analysis. I conclude this section with a discussion of how I ensured the reliability and validity of the project.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative explorative single case study was to explore strategies service-disabled veteran small business owners need to develop to obtain federal contracts. I conducted semistructured face-to-face interviews with one small business owner and two management members in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. I also collected and reviewed data from the company databases. The target audience includes the federal agencies's small business advocates and service-disabled veteran small business owners. This audience represents those who could affect how the U.S. government awards contracts, and those who may benefit from the contracts. The study may contribute to social change by increasing service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses, thereby reducing the veterans' unemployment rate. The results of this study may affect the business environment by contributing to new strategies for business owners, and changing the manner procurement officials select bidders for contract awards. An additional business impact may be financial savings to the Federal Government.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher, I was the data collection instrument. I developed research questions that aided in conducting semistructured interviews. I used was semistructured face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions as the protocol for interviewing one small business owner and two senior management members in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. I used a single case study design to gather data from the business owner and two management leaders to answer the overarching research question. I used the research and interview questions to gain an understanding of the participants, and gather, organize, and analyze the data to understand their experiences. In doing so, I worked to stay mindful of the participant's feelings during the research process (Collins & Cooper, 2014).

I designed the initial questions to build rapport and inspire the interviewee to speak liberally about the questions (Comi, Bischof, and Eppler, 2014). I mitigated bias by controlling my emotions and those of the participants during the data collecting process, and by taking notes, recording the interviews, and reviewing the transcribed data collected with the participants. I was aware of my worldview and personal lens and thus focused on learning and collecting data from my study that impartially and accurately reflected the participants' point of view. I also acknowledge that the participants did not have worldviews significantly different from my own. I spent 28 years in the military and retired as a service-connected disabled veteran.

During my tenure in the military, I received training to be a U.S. government contracting officer with the ability to bind the U.S. government. Early in my military career, I had two assignments as a U.S. government contracting officer. Later in my

career, I was in charge of those making requirements for contracting officers. After retirement from the military in 2004, I worked for large businesses that teamed with service-disabled veteran-owned businesses. I currently own a small business, but the business is not a verified service-disabled small business. My peers consider me an expert in contracting and business development operations.

The 1979 Belmont Report offered guideline for ethical principles and mitigating any ethical problems that could come about during research with human participants. The Belmont Report was a response to unethical practices in studies of vulnerable populations such as the Tuskegee syphilis study (Greaney et al., 2012). The central point of and reason for the Belmont Report were that research participants were not given the truth about the experiments (Greaney et al., 2012). As the researcher, I treated each participant in an ethical manner. I gave the participants time to digest the requirements and the opportunity to stop at any time. This ensured my adherence to the ethical standards and that all participants were aware of the topic and research question, and were amenable to contributing to the study. One of my primary ethical responsibilities as the researcher was to ensure the confidentiality of all participants (Greaney et al., 2012).

### **Participants**

This was a qualitative explorative single case study designed to explore what strategies service-disabled veteran small business owners need to obtain federal contracts. The participants consisted of a service-disabled veteran small business owner and two senior management members from the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. I used purposeful sampling because this type of sampling supported a qualitative single case study and allowed me to obtain rigor and have a valid data collection (Rowley, 2012). I

used my personal and professional email network and the Internet to gain access to the participants. I contacted those small business owners whom I met during my tenure in the Army, those I met during my tenure as a defense contractor, and those I found by searching the SBA DSBS database for service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses in the local area. I sent an email invitation to each prospective participant.

The quality of the data received by a qualitative researcher depends on the relationship the researcher developed with the participants (Kral, 2014). Researchers need to determine before data collection what type of relationship they want to have with the participant, and then establish and maintain that relationship (Kral, 2014). The goal is to acquire knowledge by developing a relationship through participatory research and collaboration with the participants (Kral, 2014). I maintained ethical data collection standards set by the Walden University Institution Review Board (IRB), and obtained IRB approval number 11-25-15-0400187 for my research.

The use of the service-disabled veteran-owned small business owner and two senior management participants allowed me to obtain valid and trustworthy results. The target audience is the federal agencies' small business advocates, and the service-disabled veteran small business owners. The target audience represents those stakeholders who can affect how the U.S. government awards contracts and the owners. My plan is to present a one-page summary or verbal presentation to the stakeholders, audience dependent. I protected the participants' identities and their organizations as discussed by Biddle et al. (2012). I obtained each participant's written consent prior to conducting the interviews, and I will maintain the consent forms in a securely locked file cabinet drawer for 5 years.

## **Research Method and Design**

The research method and design provided allowed me to bridge the research question and literature review with data gathering and analysis (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2012). In this section, I discuss why I chose the qualitative explorative single case study to determine what strategies service-disabled veteran small business owners needed to develop to obtain federal contracts.

In keeping with the method and design, I used open-ended, semistructured, face-to-face interviews to obtain the data needed to understand the viewpoints and opinions of the participants (Yin, 2014). I chose an owner and two senior members of the management team to interview because of their knowledge of the firm and likelihood of being able to provide data relevant to the interview questions. I asked each participant to sign a consent form to participate in the study, and then I interviewed each participant. I digitally audio-recorded each interview and transcribed the interviews, redacting all identifying information. I compared the transcripts to the audio recording for accuracy, and used qualitative analysis software QSR NVivo Version 11 to support with documentation and organization of codes, themes, and subthemes. I determined that I had reached data saturation when I ascertained that there were on new codes and themes in the transcripts (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013).

### **Research Method**

I chose the qualitative research method because I could collect data from participants in their natural setting (Dileep and Govindarajo, 2014); The qualitative method helped me to understand the ideas and views of the participants, hence, allowing for an in-depth data collection (Zuofa & Ochieng, 2014). It also permitted a research

strategy that facilitate collection of rich and thick data (Zuofa & Ochieng, 2014).

Qualitative research provided a venue to answer the who, what, and why questions that I developed for this research study (Harrison, 2012).

Collecting data from the participants in their environment through the interviews and observations was a key motivation for my choice of the qualitative method (Harrison & Reilly, 2011). Data collection was my primary concern, and I sought to collect enough appropriate data to reach the point of saturation (Yu, Abdullah, & Saat, 2014). Data saturation was a high priority, and when I found no new ideas or views, I completed data collection and began analysis (Taplin & McConigley, 2014).

I did not employ the quantitative research method because I was not seeking answers to questions more suitable for understanding questions of who, how, and where. Quantitative research data are typically objective, systematic, and numerical (Parylo, 2012), and quantitative research is characteristically descriptive and relationally-based (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). My goal with this qualitative study was to understand the perceptions and meanings attached to the experiences of individuals (Bourrelier et al., 2016). The purpose of this study was to use qualitative data that typically consists of material that is difficult to quantify such as interview transcripts (Griensven, Moore, & Hall, 2014).

Conducting qualitative research seemed particularly relevant to the management issues in this study, for which recourse to mixed methods seems justifiable (Guercini, 2014). This is because the mixed methods combine the qualitative and quantitative approaches (Sinley & Albrecht, 2016). A mixed method approach may have been applicable depending on the desired outcome of a study (Chiang-Hanisko, Piyakong, &

Liehr, 2015). However, I developed a research question for a qualitative study and would have struggled to integrate mixed method study findings into this study. The purpose of the study was to explore the problem in its entirety with respect to a small number of subjects in the participants' natural setting.

### **Research Design**

I used the single case study design to provide me with the tools needed to explore a strategic planning process owners might use to respond to federal procurements as described by Tsang (2014). A single case study enables the researcher to focus on the forces at work in the participants' location (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). Examining and observing participants in their environment using their normal procedures is a feature of the single case study design (Hyett et al., 2014; Stake, 1995). I used the single case study design and a conceptual framework to guide the data collection and data analysis process. The best approach to answering a researcher's *how or what* research questions was to use a single case study design (Amerson, 2011, Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). These types of studies can survive the test of any practical research over time (Amerson, 2011; Yin, 2014).

I employed the single case study for my research design. I considered other research methods including phenomenological, narrative research, ethnography, and grounded theory designs. A phenomenological design focus is on connecting what the participants say to their lived experience, and the experience was the focus of the study (Gill, 2014). Similarly, the narrative approach focus is on the lived experience with the primary focus on an individual or group's story based on a period (Gill, 2014).

Ethnography approach examines how individuals organize and account for their everyday



activity in a cultural setting (Gill, 2014; Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). The researcher focus is on developing a theory base on the data collected in the grounded theory approach (Cassidy, Turnbull, & Gumley, 2014). The designs, as mentioned above, do not provide the best opportunity to answer the research question under investigation. The best qualitative research design for answering *what* type questions is the case study approach (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).

### **Population and Sampling**

The target population for this exploratory case study was service-disabled veteran-owned small business owners verified by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. The business owners met the VA standards to become service-disabled veteran-owned business. That means a company met the definition in FAR, Subpart 19 Federal Acquisition Regulation (Federal Acquisition Regulation [FAR], 2015). To recruit participants, I obtained all the qualified service-disabled veteran-owned small business businesses listed on the SBA Dynamic Small Business Search (DSBS) website in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. Then I selected one qualified business owner that was willing to share information about the company processes, successes, and failures and allowed me to interview two senior members of the organization.

I excluded large businesses because the purpose of this study was to determine what strategies service-disabled veteran small business owners need to develop to obtain federal contracts. Using large businesses in the study would not achieve the desired results to the research question. I conducted a purposive sample because this type of sampling is for comparing the participants and the various experiences in the different locations (Binz-Scharf, Lazer, & Mergel, 2011). Purposeful sampling also supported the

method and design criteria established for the research (Noohi, Peyrovi, Goghary, & Kazemi, 2016). Many factors determine the sample size such as the objective and purpose of the study, the design, the methods, and the number of interviewees (Noohi et al., 2016). I obtained permission to interview the senior management members prior to the start of the interviews (see Appendix D). After written consent, I conducted semistructured face-to-face interviews, within the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. I choose a setting that had the least distraction to participants and myself. I explained the purpose of the interview and addressed the interview format and confidentiality issues. I also explained to the interviewees' that I would ask open-ended questions, record the interview, and resolve any additional questions or issues.

I used an adaptive approach to gathering data, which proved to be beneficial because it led to unexpected opportunities. I used the content analysis approach to analyze and code data to discover emerging themes from the interview transcripts (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). There was no blueprint for me to follow in conducting the qualitative research; however, my plan was to be flexible. I saturated the data when data collection became *counter-productive* to continue because no new information came from the collection process (Noohi et al., 2016)

### **Ethical Research**

I protected the rights of all who participate in this study according to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I obtained consent to participate in the research before conducting research as noted by Enama et al. (2012). I maintained the highest ethical research standards during the interviews. I used ethical research procedures to maintain the participants' privacy during data collection as discussed by Gaeni, Farahani,

Seyedfatemi, and Mohammadi (2014). To ensure obscurity and privacy, I did not include participants' names or organization in the study. I replaced participants' names with a sequential identification code and the company's name with *The Company*. I conducted the interviews at a location and time convenient to the participants as discussed by Ohura, Takada, and Nakayama (2014). I audio recorded each interview, and for this reason, I obtained each participant's approval. Only the researcher and interviewee were present during the interview process. I conducted the 3 interviews separately to ensure the privacy of responses. I assured the interviewee and that the company name and location would remain unidentified and any exposure to either association would not be credited within the study (Karabacak, Yildirim, & Baykal, 2016). I secured all written data in a locked file cabinet drawer and will shred the data after 5 years to protect participant confidentiality. The electronic data is on a secure personal, password-protected portable external drive in a locked file cabinet drawer. The data will be kept for 5 years, and I will delete the data after 5 years.

I obtained permission to interview the senior management members from the owner prior to the start of the interviews (see Appendix D). I gave all participants a consent form (see Appendix B) before participating in the study. I wrote the consent form so that all participants were able to understand its contents (see Appendix B). I gave the participants enough time to look over the document and ask for clarifications before signing the document and giving consent. On the consent form was the purpose of the research, the reason I asked for participant's participation, that the participation is voluntary, the estimated required time and that the participant could decline or stop participation at any time. The consent form included a written assurance that declining or

stopping the interview would not damage any relationship. Participants could have withdrawn from the study by email or phone call at any time without penalty (Hassanian, Ahanchian, Ahmadi, Gholizadeh, & Karimi-Moonaghi, 2014). None of the participants discontinued or withdrew from the interview. I did not anticipate or experience any conflicts of interest. Lastly, participants did not receive any compensation or monetary benefits; they have access to the results, and I will email the results and findings to participants.

The consent form included any reasonable risks to the participants, and there was no discomfort in comparison to the anticipated benefits. I took those measures mentioned to provide reasonable protection from loss of privacy, distress, psychological harm, economic loss, damage to professional reputation, and physical harm. I also obtained and personally reviewed the Walden University IRB approved consent form with the participants, and all participants gave written informed consent. The Walden IRB approval number is 11-25-15-0400187. The consent form is stored in a locked file cabinet drawer to protect the rights of the participants and is destroyed after 5 years. Anyone who reviews the contents of the study will sign a confidentiality agreement.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Methodological triangulation was appropriate to use in this study to mitigate bias and increase the trustworthiness and legitimacy of the study (Hargittai, 2015). The methodological triangulation of data collection methods were qualitative interviews, and corporate documents, including internal reports, company history, and other publish material as suggested by Dinesen, Seeman, and Gustafsson (2011) and Draper and Swift (2011). As the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument as described by

Denzin and Lincoln (2011). Interviews as a method of data collection provided me with one of the best techniques to collect data (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). I developed four research questions that aided in the conduction of the semistructured face-to-face interviews (see Appendix A). By using the research question to gain an understanding of the participants and to understand their experience, I collected data using semistructured interviews and company documentation to answer the research question as pointed out by Draper and Swift (2011).

Purposeful sampling is an instrument used in data collection to select the participants who qualify for a study; the semistructured interviews involve prepared questioning (Qu & Dumay, 2011). By conducting purposeful sampling, I was able to identify and select the companies and individuals who could best help the researcher answer the research question (Palinkas et al., 2013). To enhance the reliability, validity, and credibility of the data collection process, I integrated member checking. Member checking allowed me to ensure that I had captured the meaning of participant's answers and approve my interpretations as noted by Houghton et al. (2012) and Gaeni et al. (2014). I saturated the data, as discussed by Groenwald (2004), when no new ideas or codes emerged through the data analysis.

Before starting the data collection process, I obtained approval from the Walden University Research Institutional Review Board before I began my research. I used semistructured interviews, corporate documents including internal reports, company history, and other published material, as suggested by Leoni (2014) to explore the research question What strategies do service-disabled veteran small business owners need

to obtain federal contracts. I asked and received permission to collect data using a digital audio recordings device.

As the interviewer, I quickly gained acceptance and trust through the initial questioning and sensing section. The challenge was to maintain a researchers' relationship with the participants to mitigate personal bias (Lopez-Dicastillo & Belintxon, 2014). Balancing the relationship with the participants' allowed me to gain and maintain trust without the perception of bias in a trustworthy study as discussed by Lopez-Dicastillo and Belintxon (2014). My personal role in this study was that of the data collector. I understood that as the researcher and interviewer that I was essential to the research as posited by Pretto (2011). As the researcher, I determined during the interview process that I needed the answer to additional questions; hence, a need to listen, adapt, and develop questions throughout the interview process to obtain answers to satisfy the research question as acknowledged by Qu and Dumay (2011). I clarified the questions when the questions were unclear to the participant to further develop and expand the responses. Interviews took approximately 30-60 minutes.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Initiation of the data collection process began after I received the IRB approval. Then the search to find through the SBA, qualified service-disabled veteran small business owners in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area began. I used my personal and professional email network, and the Internet to gain access to the participants. I sent an email invitation to each prospective participant (see Appendix C). The data collection method was methodological triangulation, which included semistructured face-to-face interviews with audio recordings using the Zoom H4N digital recorder and an Apple

iPhone as a backup. I also read and collected company documents including the capability statement and acquisition process. Each interviewee received a consent form before initiation of any interviews. In order to receive IRB approval, I obtained permission to interview the senior management members prior to the start of the interviews (see Appendix D). I walked through the consent form letter with each participant and provided each participant a copy of the research questions (see Appendix A). An interview is one of the best techniques for collecting data and qualitative researchers widely use interviews as their data collection method (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). I conducted face-to-face, individual, in-depth semistructured interviews. I encouraged the interviewees to follow up on their responses to further develop their perspective on the question. The responses contributed immensely to the coding and emerging themes.

I used methodological triangulation to facilitate the validation of data through cross verification from more than one data sources to mitigate bias as stated by Archbold, Dahle, and Jordan (2014). In using this method, I gained an understanding of what participants felt or believed during the interviews as discussed by Draper and Swift (2011). The disadvantage of using methodological triangulation was after the interview sessions I had to spend additional time with the senior managers to collect and review *The Company's* documents made available for data collection.

Reading and rereading the collected interview data several times throughout the data collection process, allowed me to make sense of the data and ensure I captured the true experience as discussed by Bailey, Pemberton, and Frankfurter,(2013). Transcribing the data verbatim and entering the validate data into the Qualitative Analysis Software

NVivo 11 as tool aided in the analysis process. I also integrated member checking to share with the participants my interpretation of the data and make notes of any input as described as suggested by Houghton et al. (2012). This allowed the participants to validate their input to the study as noted by Bailey et al. (2013). I targeted the entire iterative process of data collection, analysis and refinement towards saturating the data. I also used the data to determine the contributions to the body of knowledge regarding the conceptual framework for this study.

### **Data Organization Technique**

The key to choosing the right technique for data collection is to understand the information required based on the research question (Draper & Swift, 2011). I began the process to answer the research question: What strategies do service-disabled veteran small business owners need to obtain federal contracts, after I received Walden IRB approval to start my research. I used the four interview questions developed from previous experience and the literature review to gain an understanding from the veteran-owned business participants about the research problem.

Data collection takes time to obtain the rich data necessary yields to answer the research question (Foster, Hayes, & Alter, 2013). I collected data from participants using semistructured face-to-face interviews, and review of corporate documents including the capability statement regarding the acquisition process. I also reviewed the business plan (Leoni, 2014). To manage the data generated during the collection process, I used a computer program as described by Brennan and Cotgrave (2014). The NVivo 11 Software assisted in analyzing and interpreting the interview data from the transcripts (Gluesing, 2013). I secured all written data in a locked file cabinet drawer. I will shred



the data to protect the participants after 5 years. I placed the electronic data will on a secure personal, password-protected portable external drive in a locked file cabinet drawer. The data will be kept for a period of 5 years, and I will delete the data after 5 years.

### **Data Analysis**

I used the qualitative analysis software QSR NVivo Version 11 to assist with documentation and organization of themes and subthemes. Data analysis is a vital step in the research process, and data analysis has to be thorough, and guided by answering the research question (Foster et al., 2013). The interview protocol was semistructured face-to-face interview, and open-ended questions about one small business owner and two senior management members within the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The semistructured face-to-face interviews and review of corporate documents provided the basis for the use of methodological triangulation to mitigate bias and increase the trustworthiness, and legitimacy of the study to help corroborate findings (Archbold et al., 2014). To ensure rigor, I obtained authorization from all participants and conducted the detailed planning to enhance execution as noted by Cilliers and Harry (2012).

Methodological triangulation gives the researcher more alternatives to collect data such as interviews, and corporate documents, including internal reports, company history, and other published material (Archbold et al., 2014; Leoni, 2014). I used semistructured face-to-face interviews and collected corporate documents to review. I also managed the transcribed transcripts with QSR NVivo version 11, using a content analysis approach to qualitative data analysis. During the process, I reread the transcripts several times. Based on the collected data, I developed the initial list of codes from reviewing articles in

journals, other studies, and my literature review. Then the analysis began by interpreting the transcribed interview data and developing nodes based on the transcripts using the NVivo 11 software because the NVivo 11 Qualitative Analysis Software provided the right management framework needed for the approach as noted by Brennan and Cotgrave (2014) and Cassidy et al. (2014).

Answers to the central research question come from the nodes, which then become codes (Brennan & Cotgrave, 2014; Cassidy et al., 2014). An outcome of the coding is the development of subthemes from recurring statements (Cassidy et al., 2014; Thomas, 2006). Identifying similar words and phrases that the interviewees used to describe how service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses fair in achieving U.S. government contracts helped in identification of the subthemes. As the research progressed, those subthemes in conjunction with participant's perceptions helped to provide answers to my study's research problem as pointed out by Thomas (2006). I ran the process again to verify the resulting subthemes and themes. Relating the data back to the conceptual framework and the existing body of knowledge demonstrated that the study results were valid.

### **Reliability and Validity**

In this study, to ensure the reliability and validity of the research I used various approaches. Using the methods, data methodological triangulation, member checking, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and data saturation ensures the reliability and validity of the research results. The goal was to attain an analytical overview to compare the theoretical results while ensuring a reliable and valid study (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014).

## **Reliability**

I conducted a reliable research during this study by ensuring dependability. The interview protocol was semistructured interviews and open-ended questions to one small business owner and two senior management members within the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. I used a research question and interview questions to gain an understanding of the participants, and gathered, organized and analyzed the data to understand their experience. The intent of this study was not to include larger businesses but service-disabled veteran small business owners to develop a strategy to obtain federal contracts. I achieved dependability by carefully documenting the data collection and analysis process and recording all changes as described by Elo et al. (2014). I conducted member checking to underscore the trustworthiness of the study as discussed by Koskenniemi, Leino-Kilpi, and Suhonen (2012). Member checking is the process of writing a summary of participants' responses, and then asking the participants to review to ensure one has captured the meaning of their responses (Doubet & Ostrosky, 2015).

I used NVivo 11 Qualitative Analysis Software to create tables and codes to manage and document the analysis. The combined methods of using tables and codes help to recognize data saturation (Ando, Cousins, & Young, 2014). I initially developed a list of codes based on the *Literature Review*, reviewing articles from journals and other studies as posited by Miri, Abu Mansor, Alkali, and Chikaji (2014). I developed additional codes from analyzing and interpreting the transcripts interview data as noted by Miri et al. (2014). From the codes, I was able to develop themes from the recurring statements by identifying similar words and phrases the interviewees' used to describe the strategy used by them to obtain U.S. government contracts. As the research

progressed, those themes in conjunction with participants' perceptions helped to explore solutions to the study's research problem as pointed out by Thomas (2006).

I achieved reliability by using methodological triangulation, examining transcripts, analyzing data, and member checking. I used methodological triangulation to examine evidence from different sources to corroborate the same fact or finding as discussed by Archbold et al. (2014). Using methodological triangulation assists one to overcome bias by examining the data from multiple sources to increase the confidence in the research and acceptability of the findings as noted by Archbold et al. (2014). I examined all transcripts, notes, and corporate documents including internal reports, company history, and other published material as suggested by Leoni (2014). I also created a coding method with the intent of developing some initial themes as discussed by Jaakkola and Alexander (2014).

Next, I developed concepts and categories by grouping the ensuing codes as posited by De Guzman et al. (2013). Then I analyzed the data to determine if there was any distinct commonality inductively and use NVivo 11 Software as a tool to aid the tracking of the develop themes as noted by Jaakkola and Alexander (2014). Lastly, I conducted the member checking process by actively providing feedback to the three participants face-to-face to determine if the initial assessment reflected their perspective. This is an essential element in improving the trustworthiness of the research (Tzafir, 2015).

### **Validity**

Qualitative research involves establishing a believable perspective of the participant in the research while ensuring the study achieves the intended purpose and

represents the participants' experience (Elo et al., 2014; Tzafirir, 2015). To gain credibility, I triangulated the data to confirm ideas and statements from different sources of data as determined by Jones and Williams (2012). The credibility needed to validate the data that answers the research question derives from using methodological triangulation (Elo et al., 2014). My intent was to use methodological triangulation in this study to collect corporate data and by conducting semistructured interviews with a business owner and two senior management members. I continued to analyze the data until additional data collection did not yield new information as pointed out by Ando et al. (2014). This occurs when new ideas become absent in the data collected (Taplin & McConigley, 2014).

I ensured confirmability and transferability. To ensure confirmability throughout the data collection process, I read and reread the interview data to make sense of the data and ensure I captured the true experience as discussed by Bailey et al. (2013). In the role of the researcher, I conducted all interviews and conducted a data audit to ensure the data collection and analysis process supports answering the research question as noted by Al Sayed Mohamad and Mohamad (2014) and Koskenniemi et al., (2012). Other researchers could use the coding and theme developed in the data collection and analysis (Moore, 2015). Transferability is conducting a quality research so those reading the study can view the document in a different environment (Elo et al., 2014). A quality data collection and data analysis will increase transferability (Moore, 2015). Transferability is up to the reader to decide (Elo et al., 2014). To that end, I used the member checking by validating the responses with the participants, face-to-face, as posited by Rafique and Hunt (2015) and noted the changes not altering the original data as pointed out by Petty et al. (2012).

### **Transition and Summary**

Discussed in Section 1 are the background to the problem, problem statement, and purpose statement, along with the nature of the study used to justify the qualitative method and exploratory single case study design. Section 1 also included the background of the problem, research question, and interview questions. Next, in Section 1 discussed were the conceptual framework, operation definitions, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. I concluded with a discussion Section 1 with the significance of the study and a review of the professional and academic literature. The literature review focus was on previous literature relating to sections and subsections GST, small business, GI Bill, DOD, small business education and training, contracting interests financing innovation marketing and strategic processes.

Section 2 included the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participant selection, and the research method and design. Next, I described the population and sampling method, ethical research, data collection instruments, technique, and data organization technique, and data analysis techniques. Lastly, I concluded the discussion in this section with how I ensured reliability and validity in my study.

In Section 3, I began with an introduction that will include the purpose statement and the research question. Next, the presentation of the findings, applications to professional practice and implications for social change is discussed. Then I discussed the recommendations for action, further research, and my reflections. I concluded Section 3 with a summary and study conclusion.

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

In this section, I start with an introduction that includes the purpose statement and the research question. Next, I present the findings, applications to professional practice, and implications for social change. Then I discuss the recommendations for action, further research, and my reflections. I concluded Section 3 with a summary and study conclusion.

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative, explorative single case study was to determine what strategies service-disabled veteran small business owners need to develop to obtain federal contracts. Obtaining federal contracts presents a challenge for the owner and senior managers of a service-disabled veteran-owned small business (Cox & Moore, 2013). The qualitative method and case study design was appropriate for this study because, as Kebede and Kebede (2016) note, this method and design allow the researcher to focus on participants' perceptions and experiences. My goal in the study was to answer the research question: What strategies do service-disabled veteran small business owners need to obtain federal contracts? The U.S. government set a goal of 3% for federal agencies to award contracts to service-disabled veteran owners; however, the government has not consistently met this goal (Cox & Moore, 2013). The U.S. government does have processes to award federal contracts to owners, and owners may have strategies to obtain the contracts, but the current system and strategies have not reached the 3% goal.

I conducted semistructured interviews with the owner and two senior management members from a verified service-disabled veteran-owned business in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The owner and senior members represent those responsible for

strategic vision, development of business opportunities, and the company acquisition process. Based on the qualitative method and exploratory single case study design, I used four open-ended, semistructured, interview questions (see Appendix A) to collect the data required and to understand the viewpoints and opinions of the participants (Yin, 2014). The study design and conceptual framework guided the data collection and data analysis process, and I used them to answer the *how* and *why* questions (McLaren, Appleyard, & Mitchell, 2016). I asked the interviewees *how* and *what* type research questions that many researchers have posited as being the best approach when using a single case study design (Amerson, 2011; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). These types of studies can survive the test of any practical research over time (Amerson, 2011; Yin, 2014).

The business problem that I explored in this study was service-disabled veteran small business owners' lack of strategies to obtain federal contracts. I conducted the interviews in an area agreed upon by the participants, and asked questions during the one on one interview that allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences of competing for federal contracts and the strategies used to obtain them. I entered the transcribed interview data from the three interviewees along with company documents into NVivo 11 qualitative analysis software for coding. I analyzed the data and identified six emergent themes to describe how the owner and senior managers develop strategies to obtain contracts. The six themes that emerged from the methodological triangulation of the data were (a) business practice, (b) business development, (c) marketing, (d) networking, (e) U.S. government contracts, and (f) contract bidding. My analysis of the participant responses indicated alignment with the literature review and conceptual framework.



### **Presentation of the Findings**

The overarching research question that guided this study was: What strategies do service-disabled veteran small business owners need to obtain federal contracts? I conducted the research using a qualitative method and case study approach. The case study exploratory research design allowed me to identify, examine, and interpret the data to understand the participants' viewpoint and experiences as posited by McDonald, Jayasuriya, and Harris (2012). The case study design allowed for rapport between the participants and myself while maintaining the established interview protocol to prevent potential bias and enhance legitimacy as noted by Hyett et al. (2014). The participants scheduled the interviews at a place and time convenient for them to attend and not be distracted.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, I replaced the participants' names with the pseudonyms P1, P2, and P3, and replaced the company's name with the pseudonym The Company. I also changed names, words or phrases that could connect participants and The Company to the study. The data collection from the interviews and corporate documents validated my use of methodical triangulation and enhanced the rigor of the research results. However, as Heale and Forbes (2013) contend, subsequent research often benefits from a larger sample size. As suggested by Babenko-Mould, Ferguson, and Atthill (2016), I incorporated methodological triangulation to enhance the validity and rigor by triangulating the interview results and company document analysis in the study. Moreover, I conducted member checking to ensure I captured the meaning of what was said by the participants. No new codes or themes emerged after the member checking process.

I developed initial codes from the transcribed interviews and company documents using NVivo 11 software. The six relevant themes presented in Table 1 emerged from the content analysis process including (a) business practices, (b) business development, (c) marketing, (d) networking, (e) understanding U.S. government contracts, and (f) contract bidding. I compared the literature review and the conceptual framework of the study to the themes to evaluate the reliability of the study results. My analysis and interpretation of the findings answered the research question and aligned with the conceptual framework for this study, which was the GST. The findings confirmed results from the literature review and extended the body of knowledge under review.

Table 1

*Nodes Related to Themes*

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Sources</i>	<i>References</i>
Business practices	5	62
Business development	4	36
Marketing	4	23
Networking	4	29
Government contracts	4	33
Bidding on contracts	4	26

The literature review, a qualitative synthesis, provided a basis for my analysis of the transcribed interviews and company documents, which resulted in initial codes and the resultant themes from the coding. I then compared the results of the data analysis and the themes to the conceptual framework to insure the validity and reliability of the study results. The GST centers critical attention on the entity and the total system, not the complex parts (Levenson, 2016; Zhang & Wang, 2016). In this study, I used the GST to understand the U.S. government procurement process as a system that can only operate

properly if the federal agencies' procurement activities and the contractors have a relationship and continually interact with each other. In other words, *the sum is greater than the parts* (Levenson, 2016). The data results justified my use of the GST as the conceptual framework for this study regarding the service-disabled veterans' quest to obtaining federal contracts. The results of the data analysis and the interpretation of the findings helped me answer the central research question.

### **Demographic Characteristics of the Participants**

During the process of the interview, each participant established their demographics that were relevant to the study. P1 and P2 established The Company and were the owner and co-owner. P3 joined The Company later as an account manager after working for another company for seven years. Each participant was a retired military service veteran, and all stated that their military experience played a significant role in their success in their current roles in the company. P1 and P2 obtained knowledge while in the military about U.S. government contracting by working with performance work statements, and P3 was a contracting officer representative. None of the participants had prior business ownership experience.

### **Emergent Theme One: Business Practices**

The first theme to emerge from the data collection was business practices with three sub-themes: value, communication, and education (see Table 2). Literature was generally supportive, but in some cases conflicted with the data collected regarding the emergent theme. The subthemes emerged from the findings as essential strategies for company leaders to obtain federal contracts. In my literature review, I found evidence to support the study findings regarding the emergent theme and subthemes. Organizations create a

business practice strategy to provide a company personality and brand (Huang-Horowitz, 2014). The personality of the company influences who an organization employs, their relationships with customers, their current teammates, and the perception of the competitors who may become teammates in the future (Huang-Horowitz, 2014). Moreover, the high frequency of occurrence in P1, P2, and P3's responses indicated the magnitude of these relationships in business practices, and marked them as essential to obtaining federal contracts. Table 2 indicates the main emergent theme of business practices and the sub-themes of value, communication, and education as viewed by senior managers to direct the future of the organization.

Table 2

*Nodes Related to Theme 1: Business Practices*

<i>Themes/Nodes</i>	<i>Sources</i>	<i>References</i>
Business Practices	5	62
Value	5	22
Communication	4	22
Education	3	18

The participants provided an in-depth view of how The Company started, and of how they used a strategy to obtain federal contracts. According to P1, P2, and The Company's capability statement, The Company began operations after the war on terrorism commenced as a verified service-disabled veteran-owned small business (SDVOSB) as defined by the U.S. government. According to Mihai (2015), the principal manager's leadership skills contribute to the success of a company; for this study that would be owner-leaders of The Company. P1 and P2 stated that their motivations for starting The Company were their prior military service experience, perceived contracting opportunities, and a desire to be business owners.

According to literature, entrepreneurs who seek financial assistance in the early phase of the business will be more successful in sustaining their firms (Jayawarna et al., 2015). However, the participants reported less need for financial assistance than indicated in the literature. The financing for this startup business came from their personal finances and a \$50,000-dollar line of credit from a credit union. Their early successes in obtaining subcontracts allowed the owners to survive without the need to use the line of credit which remains active.

Current literature and corporate documentation show that a business must be a verified service-disabled veteran-owned business to receive a federal contract in the SDVOSB (FAR, 2016). Adapting the organization to interact at a different level in the federal acquisition system aligns with the GST and the current literature because interaction within organizations and the environment is a tenet of the GST and is relative to the conceptual framework (Drack & Pouvreaux, 2015). The findings indicated the importance of business strategies of value, communication, and education, which resonated through all the themes of this study. In relation to the current literature and the conceptual framework, businesses operate in an environment where the internal and external business practices have to function in an open system with an active association among the components in the system to survive, which is in alignment with the GST (Carayannis, Grigoroudis, Sindakis, & Walter, 2014).

**Value.** The emergence of value as a subtheme aligns with the data collection and literature review. Findings in scholarly articles indicate the values of a company are revealed and demonstrated by what the small business owner communicates to employees specifically by actions, which may inspire employees to strive to provide a

quality product to the customer (Keranen & Jalkala, 2014). Both P1 and P2 placed adhering to their values above all other strategies they used (P1, P2 personal communication, 01-21-16). Their strategy is to provide outstanding value to their customers in the execution of a contract (capability statement; P1, P2, and P3 personal communication, 01-21-16; confirmed through member checking on 02-04-16). A key component of the value-added proposition to the U.S. government can be the expertise of the staff of former military personnel (capability statement, 01-21-16; P1, P2 personal communication, 01-21-16).

Participants P1 and P2 started *The Company* based on their moral values and commitment to the strategy of being honest with the U.S. government about their capability and ability to provide contractual support as required (P1, P2 personal communication, 01-21-16; company handbook, 01-21-16). One must not deviate from the values because, at some point, it puts a strain on the organization and ruins the company brand name (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16; confirmed through member checking on 02-04-16). Moreover, managers have to be selective with the teammates required to fulfill contractual obligations (Mathias et al., 2015). P2 noted we will not work with certain companies and would rather be unsuccessful owners than ruin the company's reputation (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16).

Current literature and participant responses confirmed findings in the literature that entrepreneurial experiences have an influence on decision making (Mathias, Williams, & Smith, 2015). Findings also indicated that company documents and participants' answers confirmed through member checking showed that senior managers' values played an important role in their approach to conducting business (P1, P2 personal

communication, 01-21-16; company handbook, 01-21-16; confirmed through member checking on 02-04-16). Implementing an inclusive value driven organization demonstrates how the company's leaders assist the organization in their interaction with the procurement system and alignment with the conceptual framework (Alter, 2013).

The subtheme *value* related to the conceptual framework of GST as demonstrated by the owners sharing their values with employees as well as information shared among other components in the federal acquisition system as discussed by Ducq et al. (2012). The sharing of information as based on current literature enables business owners to develop new opportunities and obtain federal contracts. The theory provides an explanation about the possible relationships between the U.S. government procurement personnel and service-disabled veteran-owned small business owners as noted by Ducq et al. (2012). Ducq et al. (2012) explained that systems theory is a group of parts that have a relationship and contribute to a goal. In applying the GST, the senior managers' values contribute to sustaining an SDVOSB, as an element of the system, aligns with the theory and the conceptual framework, which aligns with what von Bertalanffy (1968) said.

**Communication.** The emergence of communication as a subtheme from the interviews with the participants aligns with current literature while working hard to communicate with the customer, and the employees are a key strategy for a company (Okreglicka, 2015). In the beginning, the owners developed a formal business plan to provide a company vision and direction (P1, P2, personal communication, 01-21-16; company handbook, 01-21-16). The owners understood a growing company needed more employees and hired two key employees, the chief financial officer (CFO) and an account manager when the company was financially able to support the hiring's (P1, P2, personal

communication, 01-21-16). Sensemaking occurs when managers recognize the need for a strategic change in the organization structure and thinking to become more competitive in the marketplace (Balogun, Jacobs, Jarzabkowski, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014).

By hiring needed senior personnel, the entrepreneur became more trustful and is more likely to be a successful entrepreneur according to Caliendo, Fossen, & Kritikos (2012). Also, the leaders have an open communication with all employees and keep employees informed on all aspects of *The Company* business which includes the financials (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16; company handbook, 01-21-16). The practice of employees' sharing knowledge also helps in the fraud prevention and aids in a company's fraud risk management (Hess & Cottrell Jr, 2016). P2 noted, we want to spread the knowledge because we are only a small business with limited resources (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16).

Literature supports the significance of management setting the values of open communication (Garon, 2012). The findings of this study are consistent with other research regarding communication as a strategy. The open communication strategy may lead to more opportunities to obtain federal contracts. Current literature supports open communication with the employees by sharing the strategy helps the organization be more effective and may provide additional strengths to the owner's ability to obtain contracts as stated by Garon (2012). The inter-organizational, interpersonal relationship allows for the sharing of knowledge between large and small, experienced and less experienced entities (Binz-Scharf et al., 2011). The communication between entities means that there is continual output in the system by the U.S. government contracting personnel and valid information inputted from the veteran-owned businesses. A business



owner operating in an open-system environment will view organizational capabilities from a holistic view within which to operate in a larger system; this indicates alignment with the conceptual framework and the GST as discussed by Alter (2013) and Drack and Pouvreaux (2015).

**Education.** The emergence of education as a subtheme aligns with the data collection and literature review. Entrepreneur education can help a startup business owner setup the business entity, develop management approaches, obtain financing and learn about the marketplace the business will be competing (Ramayah, Ahmad, & Fei, 2012). The owners did not receive any formal education on contracting and training before starting the business, although they did contact the local small business administration office which provided them some information on a business strategy (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16; confirmed through member checking on 02-04-16). The SBA has improved policies aimed at providing small business owners with access to knowledge and financial assistance (SBA, 2016). P1 and P2 learned by doing, and although the SBA offers education and training to business owners, the offering has been no value to the company then and now (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16; confirmed through member checking on 02-04-16).

Companies who place a priority on learning the federal acquisition system and understanding the FAR increased their ability to win contracts (Cox & Moore, 2013). P1 and P2 did not have experience in the federal procurement process and did not understand the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) and the clauses (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16; confirmed through member checking on 02-04-16). To learn about the FAR, Participant P2 purchased and read the FAR (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16).

Participant P2 reported he hired a nationally owned business development company to teach the employees how to develop a strategy to compete in the federal contract environment, and how to develop cost elements for bidding (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16). The business development classes provide the education needed to understand the federal acquisition process (P2, communication, 01-21-16). As a business developer and the account manager, the professional training and education have helped immensely (P3, personal communication; 01-21-16 confirmed through member checking on 02-04-16).

The literature review confirmed the combination of values, communication, and education as business practices strategies (Stride & Higgs, 2013; Tennant, 2015). Findings indicated that company documents and participants' answers demonstrated that essential business practice strategies play a vital supportive role in influencing what the business owner consider before developing opportunities to pursue. Implementing an inclusive value driven organization demonstrates a model GST open system capable interaction in a larger system (Alter, 2013). Aligned with the GST and the conceptual framework, SDVOSB owners may interact in the system with other organizations and the environment to ensure the business practices increase the probability of survivability and prosperity by obtaining federal contracts as posited by Alter (2013). Systems have an ability to evolve, and education helps the organization grow within the borders of the system (Ducq et al., 2012).

### **Emergent Theme Two: Business Development**

The interviews revealed different methods for the company to develop opportunities to obtain contracts. Business development included undertaking endeavors

to make the procuring activity aware of a business capability, which may be better than current choices in the marketplace (Georghiou, Elder, Uyarra, & Yeow, 2014). Business development also includes the development of opportunities for both short range and long range from targeted U.S. government requirements, positions *The Company* in the environment to be competitive and allows for revenue generation (acquisition process statement, 01-21-16). New revenue generation may occur when organizational managers develop and seek opportunities in new markets for which the organization has a comparative niche (De Villiars-Scheepers, 2012). As Table 3 indicates, the frequency of occurrence of the core theme revealed the business development as an effective strategy for obtaining federal contracts. Previous research supported these findings.

Table 3

*Nodes Related to Theme 2 – Business Development*

<i>Theme/Node</i>	<i>Sources</i>	<i>References</i>
Business Development	4	23

During the first years of the business, P1 conducted the business development (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16). The managers used Federal Business Opportunities (FedBiz Ops) database because the U.S. government advertises all procurement opportunities over \$25,000 on this internet site (FedBizOps.gov), and word of mouth to find opportunities (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16). P1 and P2 noted we would look for subcontracting opportunities with companies with a capabilities gap and needed our expertise. The strategy was to become a subcontractor to build the company's past performance (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16).

The owners hired participant P3 because of the need to have someone in the company who understood the business development process, develop relationships with the contracting personnel, and understood how to gain knowledge about the U.S. government requirements (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16). The senior managers also hired P3 because he had previous experience in developing and winning opportunities in the federal acquisition process (P1, P2, personal communication, 01-21-16). The business developer is responsible for knowing and understanding the customer, what the customer cares about, what their issues are, how best to engage them and to ensure good business relationships with the decisions makers (acquisition process statement, 01-21-16).

The findings indicated the owners used business development sources that provide them with long range, and short range U.S. government opportunities. The strategic intent was to prosecute opportunities that are 3-18 months before award, however, P1 and P2 may determine for various reasons to pursue shorter range targets (P3, personal communication, 01-21-16). To further develop targets P3 used the small business liaison office to obtain information about future requirements and potential teaming partners (P3, personal communication, 01-21-16). The small business liaison office is a good source for information on potential opportunities and teammates (P3, personal communication, 01-21-16). The strategy to prosecute opportunities at 18 months before award does not take advantage of the actions and decisions made by federal agencies current procurement process for service-disabled veteran-owned business program as evident by the U.S. government inability to achieve mandated goals.

Theme two findings answered the overarching research question and current literature by aligning the business focus to the customer requirements to obtain federal contracts as noted by Hittmar et al. (2014). The findings also indicated the managers took action to increase the relationship with their current U.S. government customers and, at the same time, develop new relations with the potential customer using the company's past performance and expertise as a platform. The participants' responses confirmed findings in the literature that developing a relationship with a potential customer may expand their perception of any proposed solution as discussed by Georghiou et al. (2014). Focusing on U.S. government customer requirements allows an owner to interact as a subsystem of the federal acquisition system, which aligns with the GST open system and interchange of information with an active association among components in an environment to yield outputs to obtain contracts as posited by Valentinov and Chatalova (2014). As shown from the data analysis, these findings lend support to the argument that business development is essential to the company's ability to obtain federal contracts (Hittmar et al., 2014).

### **Emergent Theme Three: Marketing**

Findings from the data collection and the literature review indicate marketing as strategy is vital to the organizational obtaining federal contracts. Marketing is the process of creating value for a customer by developing a product or service and communicating value to the client through various media channels (Gupta et al., 2015). Marketing also includes the deriving value from the customer for the organization through metrics and analytics (Gupta et al., 2015). P1 noted we create a market development plan to guide the

selection, penetration or expansion of an identified market (P1, personal communication, 01-21-16; acquisition process statement, 01-21-16).

Table 4 shows the core theme emerged from the data analysis regarding marketing, importance to obtaining federal contracts. Through company documents and participants' responses, the findings of the study showed the senior managers practices needed for successful marketing efforts. These findings align with previous research.

Table 4

*Nodes Related to Theme 3 – Marketing*

<i>Theme/Node</i>	<i>Sources</i>	<i>References</i>
Marketing	4	23

The senior managers in developing new business collaborate with contracting officers about sending out market surveys to determine if a procurement can be set aside for a disabled veteran-owned company (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16). The managers created the capability statement to brand *The Company* and to let customers and potential teammates know what they do in the marketplace (P3, personal communication, 01-21-16; capability statement, 01-21-16). Senior managers attend U.S. government-industry days to meet with potential customers and conduct follow-up meetings with the Agency's procurement personnel to let them know *The Company's* capabilities (P1, P3, personal communication, 01-21-16). Marketing is key; it is very key, and the capability statement helped to market our brand (P3, personal communication, 01-21-16; acquisition process statement, 01-21-16). We have to market as well as brand ourselves (P3, personal communication, 01-21-16).

My analysis of current literature supports a business using a marketing strategy consisting of developing relationships with customers to make them more intelligent about the company's capabilities while anticipating the customer will buy their product or service in the future (Hadjikhani & Leplaca, 2013). To be competitive, the managers must identify an opportunity to develop a relationship with the customer, so the customer clearly understands the capability of the organization (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16; acquisition process statement, 01-21-16). These relationships need to position *The Company* as both a trusted resource and a solution provider for the buyer (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16; acquisition process statement, 01-21-16). The findings indicate that to be known as a solution provider, it is critical for *The Company* to develop a clear understanding of the markets and customer issues, work to understand its needs, and offer solutions to the customer (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16; acquisition process statement, 01-21-16). The main goal is to position the company to win contracts, with a secondary mission to grow and diversify the business capabilities (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16; acquisition process statement, 01-21-16).

Current literature and the data analysis support the findings that marketing relationships are part of the greater system and in alignment with the conceptual framework (Hadjikhani & Leplaca, 2013). The marketer must be a leader in the organization who provides senior leaders with innovative ideas to help shape the organization's future (Baker, 2013). Marketers interchange of information with federal agencies to yield opportunities that may result in obtaining contracts aligns with the conceptual framework because interaction among components of a system is a key construct of the conceptual framework (Hadjikhani & Leplaca, 2013). Marketers seek to

provide a solution to satisfy customer needs, customer requirements and improve the company's financial status to be able to maximize customer satisfaction to obtain contracts (Lim, 2015). Owners have to communicate the company's value as part of a greater system, reorganize their internal organizations to remain competitive, and adapt the organization to the changing requirements to be able to exist in an open system by obtaining contracts; this is a basic tenet of GST which is the conceptual framework for this study (Lim, 2015).

#### **Emergent Theme Four: Networking**

The fourth emergent strategy was networking. Participants concurred with Okreglicka (2015) who asserted networking allows a small business owner to develop new strategies based on the knowledge gained from other owners, which may lead to management providing updated or different capabilities than competitors to the customer. P2 noted that networking is connecting with the owners and business development personnel of other companies, and, more so, includes networking with people with the same standards or values (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16). Business owners often pay more attention to partners or the relations with the partner rather than the contractual arrangement, which may not benefit business opportunity but may benefit a long term relationship (Suddaby, Burton, & Si, 2015). SDVOSB owners network for self-interest and building networks by creating connections positions the company for success in obtaining contracts (Trefalt, 2014).

Table 5 shows the core theme emerged from the data analysis regarding the most effective strategies to obtain federal contracts. As Table 5 indicates, the frequency of



occurrence of the core theme revealed networking as an effective strategy for obtaining federal contracts. Previous research supports these findings.

Table 5

*Nodes Related to Theme 4 – Networking*

<i>Theme/Node</i>	<i>Sources</i>	<i>References</i>
Networking	4	29

P1 noted he believed networking was significant because it is whom you know when bidding on the U.S. government requirements and, the more people you know in the industry, the more knowledge one obtains (P1, personal communication, 01-21-16). Every person in *The Company* does networking because each employee represents *The Company* (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16; acquisition process statement, 01-21-16). Networking includes telephone calls, email, and meeting in person like a social call; buying them a beer if it is a good old boy system (P1, personal communication, 01-21-16).

Networking allows the company to obtain information from those in the industry and the U.S. government procurement personnel who attend industry days and conferences about future requirements and customer's likes and dislikes (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16). P3 reported he is on committees of several organizations, and he uses those connections to network the company's capability (P3, personal communication, 01-21-16). P3 may have an excellent point, according to Mitchell, Schlegemilch, and Mone (2014), networking allows the company to gain access new knowledge such as industry trends and markets. P3 stated that we network at every

opportunity to interact with the customer and those in the marketplace (P3, communication, 01-21-16).

Member checking with each participant confirmed the findings; networking was key to the organization's strategy and success (P1, P2, P3, personal communications, 02-04-16; confirmed through member checking, 02-04-16). The key to networking is to recognize that a competitor today maybe a teammate tomorrow (P1, P2, P3, personal communications, 02-04-16; confirmed through member checking, 02-04-16). In fact, teaming on a contract does not avoid or negate competition between two companies on future opportunities (Ford & Mouzas, 2013). The three participants for this study were persistent in their perception of the need to network.

Current literature and the body of knowledge about the importance of networking supports the findings of this study that networking helps an organization to be more effective (Binz-Scharf et al., 2011). In applying GST, SDVOSB owners may seek other owners for assistance to build active networks by creating networking connections to grow their business as discussed by Trefalt (2014). Aligning the conceptual framework and the GST indicate networking provides an environment for the owner to gain an understanding of the current industry trends on how to obtain federal contracts (Wang, Han, & Yang, 2015). With feedback from industry, the owner can adapt the organization and evolve to be a greater part of the subsystem within the whole system and, thereby, increase the probability of survivability and success of the organization which is a tenet of the GST and conceptual framework (Ducq et al., 2012).

### **Emergent Theme Five: Understanding U.S. Government Contracting**

The findings indicated understanding U.S. government contracting is paramount to obtaining government contracts (see Table 6). The findings also supported literature that the federal acquisition process requires the U.S. government to decide what to procure in writing, what entity can legitimately provide the required items and or services, and who can be accountable to the U.S. government by a contract vehicle which states the required performance and specifications (Hawkins & Muir, 2014). To that end, responsive and responsible contractors can help U.S. government agencies achieve their various missions and goals (Hawkins & Muir, 2014).

Table 6 shows the core theme emerged from the data analysis regarding the most effective strategies to obtain federal contracts. As Table 6 indicates, the frequency of occurrence of the core theme revealed that understanding U.S. government contracting as an effective strategy for obtaining federal contracts. Previous research supports these findings.

Table 6

#### *Nodes Related to Theme 5 – Understanding U.S. Government Contracting*

<i>Theme/Node</i>	<i>Sources</i>	<i>References</i>
Understanding U.S. Government	4	33

Ensuring all contractors have equal access to procurement information is a unique U.S. government regulatory obligation (Hawkins & Muir, 2014). Fundamental to the acquisition process is information availability (Hawkins & Muir, 2014). The FAR supports agencies providing and exchanging information early in the acquisition process

to prospective bidders about future acquisitions as long as the integrity of the process remains intact (Federal Acquisition Regulation [FAR], 2016). Moreover, owners should advise a targeted agency's procurement personnel and small business liaison office that they are a service-disabled veteran-owned small business in order to receive market surveys and sources sought for potential set-asides procurements (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16). *The Company's* acquisition strategy is to respond promptly to U.S. government requirements where they have a niche as well as whether it is within their North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16). Recent findings and previous research are consistent when comparing access to public procurement information for business owners. (Hawkins & Muir, 2014).

The FAR Subpart 19 provides the authority for contracting officer to set-aside procurements under the SDVOSB program (Federal Acquisition Regulation [FAR], 2016). A Contracting Officer can also set-aside an acquisition on a sole-source basis to an SDVOSB if the owner can satisfy the verification requirements (Federal Acquisition Regulation [FAR], 2016). *The Company* is a verified SDVOSB (P1, P2 and P3 personal communication, 01-21-16).

The contracting officer may set aside procurements for an SDVOSB based on at least two responsible bidders for acquisition above \$150,000 threshold (Fernandez, Malatesta, & Smith, 2012). There are no fixed set-asides for service-disabled or veterans (P1, personal communication, 01-21-16). Historically, federal agencies have only minimally met the legislative prime contracting goals and almost entirely ignored the subcontracting goals both of 3% (SBA, 2015c). Clearly, the implementation of the law

has met resistance (Cullen, 2012). *The Company* in this study has received only 5 SDVOSB set-aside contracts; two of those were re-competed contracts (P1, P2, and P3 personal communication, 01-21-16).

A problem for *The Company* is the U.S. government's timeline for some acquisitions (P3, communication, 01-21-16). In many cases, the participants stated that the U.S. government does not let *The Company* know the acquisition strategy and provides false timelines (P3, personal communication, 01-21-16). P3 noted we pursued an opportunity with the U.S. government and there was little to no communication from contracting personnel; we wasted time and money because the requirement was later cancelled (P3, personal communication, 01-21-16). The perception of the senior managers is that the federal agencies do forecast requirements but not timely and few are service-disabled veteran-owned business requirements within FedBizOpps (P1, P2, and P3, personal communication, 01-21-16).

Participant P3 noted that bidding on short noticed requirements is a recipe for failure and a huge problem (P3, personal communication, 01-21-16). The lack of timely information may be best handled by a larger company, because a smaller business may not have the personnel or funding to allocate to the short noticed potential requirements (P3, personal communication, 01-21-16). The design of the SDVOSB program was to ensure small firms did not always have to compete with larger businesses for federal procurements (Gibson, McDowell, Harris, & Voelker, 2012).

As indicated by the analysis of data and current literature, these findings provide support for the line of reasoning that the FAR and the contracting officer are important to the acquisition system and play a crucial role in the company's ability to obtain contracts

as noted by Warren (2014). Moreover, the relationship of core themes (see Table 1) indicate that, among these necessary strategies, senior managers should consider prioritizing the need for training and education of the federal acquisition system and the FAR higher when developing strategies to obtain contracts.

Theme five findings aligned with the GST conceptual framework by indicating how different components of a system communicate based on a division of responsibilities and functions (Brnjac, 2014). Studies on the GST indicated most pay attention to the parts rather than the whole (Mehrjerdi, 2013). The parts of the system included in this study are the senior managers, owners of an organization, and contracting officers; all collaborate by contributing to the understanding and operation of the whole system. This study demonstrated the importance of information management as well as linking manifestations of knowledge to compliance. In answering the central research question, current literature and findings indicated that senior company managers need to understand the federal procurement system to bid and win contracts because government procurements by default play a role in shaping the procurement environment as noted by Caldwell and Howard (2014).

### **Emergent Theme Six: Bidding on Contracts**

The sixth theme to emerge from the data collection was bidding on federal contracts (see Table 7). According to Snider, Kidalov, and Renon, (2013) an organization conducting business with the Federal Government considers obtaining contracts as an essential strategy, which aligns with current literature. *The Company* business focus is the federal government; therefore, the business acquisition personnel must understand and attain proficiency in preparing solutions in response to U.S. government solicitations

(acquisition process statement, 01-21-16). A business owner must understand the acquisition system process when making a major decision to submit a bid to the U.S. government (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16). *The Company's* bidding process involves many phases, from the effort to find and identify the opportunities to deciding to submit and offer through the award of the contract (acquisition process statement, 01-21-16).

Table 7 shows the core theme emerged from the data analysis regarding the most effective strategies to obtain federal contracts. As Table 7 indicates, the frequency of occurrence of the core theme revealed bidding on U.S. government contracts as an effective strategy for obtaining federal contracts. Previous research supports these findings.

Table 7

*Nodes Related to Theme 6 – Bidding on Contracts*

<i>Theme/Node</i>	<i>Sources</i>	<i>References</i>
Bidding on U.S. Government Contracts	4	26

The owner's initial business success came from subcontracting with other small firms, and their technical knowledge was key to their early successes (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16). New entrepreneurs with no past performance as a prime contractor may use subcontracting opportunities to gain experience (Hawkins & Muir, 2014). P2 noted his experience indicates a company needs past performance to bid on U.S. government contracts, and the optimum past performance was at least three years (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16). The only past performance P1 and P2 had as a

startup company was military service capabilities (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16). The managers noted the experience gained from subcontracting allowed them to prime contracts (P1, P2 personal communication, 01-21-16).

An owner along with the senior managers must consider the resources, costs, schedule and risks involved with each bid. A company must attain and sustain proficiency in preparing, reviewing, approving, publishing and submitting high quality, technically compliant, cost competitive bids to compete successfully for U.S. government contracts (P3, personal communication, 01-21-16). Solution development is important to the company because the bid represents the company in the source selection process for an award decision (capability statement, 01-21-16). P2 noted he could write an excellent solution to answer requirements of the solicitation, but the reality is the U.S. government pre-selects the winning contractor before the bid (P2, personal communication, 01-21-16). After winning a contract, we must accomplish assigned tasks and produce deliverables in a manner that assures customer satisfaction and efficient business operations (P3, personal communication, 01-21-16; confirmed through member checking on 02-04-16). The U.S. government requires activity and the contractor to collaborate to ensure a proper initiation of the contract requirements (Hawkins & Muir, 2014).

Previous research is consistent that senior managers need to understand the federal procurement system to bid and win contracts (Resh & Marvel, 2013). The development and submission of a bid indicate the GST open system approach through owner interaction with the U.S. government and subsequent written response to solve a requirement to obtain a contract. The continual collaboration among business owners and the federal agencies as a system to respond to the output of requirements to public



business owners regarding the input of bids and solutions to federal procurement activities, aligned to GST and conceptual framework in this study (Brnjas, 2014). Through previous research, participant responses, and review of company documents, the findings of the study showed the strategies business owners needed to bid on federal contracts bid on opportunities to obtain federal contracts and function as a component of the federal acquisition system.

### **Summary**

The overarching purpose for this study was to explore what strategies service-disabled veterans need to obtain federal contracts. The research findings were consistent with an exploratory design and in consonance with the purpose and related to the GST. Themes and subthemes emerged allowed for analysis and an understanding of the strategies used by a business owner and two senior managers to obtain federal contracts. Business owners who want to succeed, at obtaining contracts must spend time learning the Federal acquisition system (Resh & Marvel, 2013). The U.S. government mandated procurement policies to stimulate and equalize opportunities for service-disabled veteran-owned businesses (Gibson et al., 2012). Implementation has not been in favor of the SDVOSB owner and current company strategy risk obtaining more federal contracts.

Understanding the federal agencies can create different opportunities independent of an owner's ability to recognize and exploit them allows an owner to develop a better decision-making process to pursue opportunities. The conceptual framework for this study was the GST. By understanding how the government creates requirements, the owner can use the systems approach with the strategies identified to develop in this study opportunities to obtain federal contracts.

The findings indicated six key themes from the data analysis (a) business practices; (b) business development of opportunities to attain growth; (c) marketing to opportunities to bid; (d) networking to gain industry knowledge on trends and markets; (e) understanding U.S. government contracts which emphasized the federal acquisition system access and availability of procurement information; and (f) contract bidding which stressed the importance of solution development, an owner may need to obtain federal contracts. The owner may use the six strategies to interact at different levels with the various elements of the system to achieve success at obtaining federal contracts. The collaboration and continual input and output, with the larger system and other member elements, align with GST and the conceptual framework in this study as discussed by Brnjas (2014). Through previous research, participant responses, and review of company documents the findings of the study showed the strategies business owners needed to bid on federal contracts

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The U.S. government enacted the SDVOSB program to ensure deserving service-connected disabled veterans who start a small business receive a percentage of federal procurements (Best, 2013). Service-disabled veteran-owned small business owners' success is a topic of discussion and has the concern of the President (Mills & Johns, 2012). The results of the study provide essential knowledge for business owners developing strategies to obtain federal procurements using the SDVOSB program. Moreover, the ability to obtain federal contracts has been an issue for SDVOSB owners since the program's beginnings (Cullen, 2012). The findings from this study are relative to the GST and indicated business owners require strategies to obtain federal contracts.

The owners do possess the ability to adapt to obtain contracts and the ability over time to develop a strategy to focus and direct the organization (McDowell, Harris, & Geho, 2015).

To build and implement a strategy takes years of hard work by management (Batra, 2016). Principal manager leadership skills can attribute to the business success (Mihai, 2015). The business owners can implement and manage the organization's personality, and brand starting with the initiation of the firm; it may endure throughout the life of the firm if done correctly (Huang-Horowitz, 2014). Additionally, creating and implementing a culture allows managers and employees to conduct themselves by the stated acceptable behavior based on the principles rather than a philosophy (Stride & Higgs, 2013; Tennant, 2015).

The managers depicted a key strategy for a business practice was to communicate with the customer and the employees. Implementing a strategy of communicating with the employees prevents stress, confusion, unwarranted concern for the future and misplaced anger (Mazzei, Flynn, & Haynie, 2016). Entrepreneurs who implement programs that indicate trust are more likely to be successful entrepreneurs (Caliendo et al., 2012). An owner who implements strategies to learn the federal procurement system and understand the FAR will increase the win percentage of obtaining federal contracts (Cox & Moore, 2013). The implementation of the internal strategy allows an organization to become successful in a GST open system.

SDVOSB owners seeking effective strategies to develop a business by targeting new opportunities and marketing the organization could use the strategies identified in the second and third themes. The Federal Government requirements are constantly

changing and to adapt to this environment senior managers' implementing a viable business development program can use government databases such as FedBiz Ops to find opportunities (Shehane, 2013). Managers use marketing to communicate a company's a value proposition to the customer and to develop a relationship with the requiring activity to win contracts. (Gupta et al., 2015) To achieve more revenue generation, the managers may use the organization's past performance and expertise to search for opportunities in new markets (De Villiars-Scheepers, 2012). Besides the FedBiz Ops the company uses the SBA small business liaison office, DSBS, and relationships developed with federal agencies contracting officials and partners to develop opportunities. This is consistent with previous literature.

The managers depicted networking as another strategy to obtain federal contracts. Business owners collaborate with multiple business leaders. Implementing networking strategy allows an owner to develop a relationship with competitors to gain industry knowledge about market trends to update a company's capabilities (Mitchell et al., 2015); Okreglicka, 2015). Networking will help managers find the partners for opportunities (Ford & Mouzas, 2013).

The U.S. government contracts are vital to a service-disabled veteran-owned small business owner. Veterans who service-connected disabled who want to start a business must prosecute the paperwork to become a verified SDVOSB owner (Federal Acquisition Regulation [FAR], 2016). Owners can implement a strategy to develop a relationship with the procuring personnel to include small business liaison officer to obtain market surveys and set-aside opportunities. SDVOSB owners implementing a

strategy to obtain set-aside contracts must understand the set-aside program is a goal, not a requirement (Federal Acquisition Regulation [FAR], 2016).

Managers can implement a strategy to bid and win U.S. government contracts. To bid and win government contracts managers should implement a strategy to produce high-quality, competitive solutions using the organization's past performance and expertise as a basis for the bids to submit. Implementing a bidding strategy includes the transitioning from a bidder to a performer for the customer to ensure a proper execution of the contract requirements (Hawkins & Muir, 2014). Regardless of the actions taken by a business owner, the federal procurement process implementation of the set-aside program remains at the will of the procuring personnel and requires a business owner to implement active strategies to obtain federal contracts (Fernandez et al., 2012). The study findings and recommendations may add to the current body of knowledge of business assisting SDVOSBs in developing effective strategies to assist small businesses in obtaining federal contracts.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The U.S. government has a responsibility to assist veterans to reenter society at a higher level, and entrepreneurship may enable them in this endeavor (Best, 2013). Disability is more and more becoming part of the lives of active duty personnel and later veterans; from 9/11, one of every four veterans have a service-connected disability (Blass & Ketchen, 2014). Disabilities may be associated with the ability to obtain employment, earnings, and participation in programs to assist the service-connected disabled veteran (Stone & Stone, 2014). Some veterans may want to become business owners, unfortunately, small business owners do not have adequate access to service-disabled

veteran set-aside procurements and have not received their fair share of federal contracts (Cullen, 2012).

The purpose of this qualitative explorative single case study was to explore strategies service-disabled veteran small business owners need to develop to obtain federal contracts. The mission of the federal acquisition process is to provide the right goods and services at the right time for the customer. The U.S. government can conduct fair and reasonable procurements to carry out the mission for the federal requiring activity while achieving their social, economic set-aside goals (Fernandez et al., 2012). The social aims of the SDVOSB program serve society, the U.S. Government, and the business owner. By awarding federal procurements through the set-aside program gives those business owners the opportunity for growth, attain profitability, and increase employment (Cullen, 2012).

The findings bring attention to and stress the socio-economic nature of the service-disabled veteran program and the interface between a strategy and the environment, values, and perceptions of participants led to an inconsiderable amount contracts awarded to the organization. Researchers could use the findings from this study to aid in a company's business strategy of forecasting opportunities to increase profitability and growth.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore strategies service-disabled veteran small business owners need to develop to obtain federal contracts. Current business owners should obtain education about the federal acquisition process including developing a federal agency opportunity strategy. Despite noble

intentions, the set-aside program needs to be implemented in a more efficient manner by most federal agencies (Cullen, 2012). Future and current business owners should pay attention to those federal agencies that support the service-disabled veteran-owned small business program. Small business owners should focus on the strategy used by their targeted agencies or contracting command. Knowing where the disabled veteran business friendly agencies may result in a higher win percentage. Underperforming agencies need to develop and implement a strategy to improve their award record to those who deserve better. The U.S. government needs to improve the SDVOSB set-aside program (Cullen, 2012). The legislatures should make awarding set aside contracts to SDVOSB owners a requirement rather than a goal.

Large businesses have a role to play in procuring goods and services for the U.S. government; equally, the large businesses have a role in the achievement of subcontracting goals for socio-economic disadvantage business owners. The target of 3% may not represent a fair proportion of U.S. government contracts; however, achieving the goal will allow the SDVOSB owners to obtain more federal contracts and may become more profitable. The final important consideration is for federal agencies to penalize large businesses who fail to meet the goals of the contract-subcontracting plan. The study may influence social change by uncovering strategies to obtain federal contracts and aid more military service-disabled veteran business owners to become more profitable. My plan is to present a one-page summary and a verbal presentation to SDVOSB conferences and seminars and disseminate the study findings to military and scholarly journals.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The requirement exists for continued research on the strategies owners need to

develop to obtain federal contracts. Gaps exist in why senior managers cannot obtain federal contracts and why federal agencies have not fully implemented the SDVOSB program. Gaps exist in the knowledge of the program by the owners and implementation of the program by federal agencies procuring officials (Cox & Moore, 2013). The increase in service-connected veterans requires federal agencies to facilitate access and create an environment for SDVOSB owners to compete in the procurement process (Jahnke, Haddock, Carlos Poston, & Jitnarin, 2014). Given the escalating economic and social rationale for reallocation of public procurement dollars to disadvantage, companies serve to benefit society with job creation and more opportunities for employment (Cullen, 2012).

Researchers should continue to conduct further studies on implementation of the SDVOSB program and the barriers faced by the business owner (Blount & Hill, 2015). The focus of the study was limited to service-disabled veteran small business owners. I recommend further research to examine the relationship between the federal agencies procurement activities and other social-economic disadvantage business owners from a business owner perspective. An examination to gain a deeper understanding of the set-aside program from the firm owner's perception may generate a new round of questions that could improve business practices. Similar research may be more beneficial to policy makers creating a greater awareness of the perspectives of SDVOSB owner's experiences.

The study identified a business with a strategy and a high level of commitment to values. Future studies should investigate what specific expertise SDVOSB owners need to achieve success. In this manner, the attributes may include, business practice, business



orientation, niche, knowledge of the FAR, and strategic intent. Last, I recommend further study into why large prime contractors cannot meet the subcontracting goals for social-economic disadvantage business owners.

### **Reflections**

This doctoral study helped to develop a focus on becoming more scholarly as a professional. The research process allowed me to gain an understanding to substantiate the theory rather than to express an opinion. The study was based on a research question using a qualitative method and case study design to study the problem. The opinion towards service-disabled veteran-owned businesses obtaining federal contracts changed during the literature review and solidified during data collection and analysis. In-depth research transformed my perspective on the topic as well as a distinct approach forward for future studies.

I discovered the small business did have a strategy to obtain SDVOSB contracts; however, the strategy was not allowing them to take advantage of the U.S. government procurement process. It would have been too easy to place the blame on the business owner if the statistics did not support the U.S. government implementation issues with the set-aside program; however, the managers still need to adjust the strategy to obtain contracts. Using the GST as the conceptual framework allowed me to view the U.S. government's acquisition process and the SDVOSB program as a system rather than as part, which added to my changed worldview. The manager's honest recall and perceptions about situations made the interview process enjoyable. It was refreshing to learn how important the values, communication, and education was to the managers.

### Summary and Study Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative, explorative single case study was to explore strategies service-disabled veteran small business owners need to develop to obtain federal contracts and to answer the research question: What strategies do service-disabled veteran small business owners need to obtain federal contracts? The specific business problem was service-disabled veteran small business owners lack strategies to obtain federal contracts. One small service-disabled veteran-owned small business owner, and two senior members who manage the strategies and business processes participated in semistructured face-to-face interviews one on one interviews. I also collected and reviewed data from *The Company* databases.

Six themes emerged from the data analysis including business practice, business development, marketing, networking, understanding U.S. government contracting and bidding on contracts. The findings indicated that leaders need to develop current strategies that include marketing and developing opportunities outside the current customer base. The findings also reported that federal agencies need to develop and execute a long-range procurement strategy for service-disabled veteran-owned small business owners so they can reach their mandated contract goals. This may allow a company's managers to develop an effective strategy to obtain more service-disabled veteran-owned business opportunities and address ineffective strategies that lead to the perceived barriers to obtaining federal contracts.

In conclusion, to this exploratory case study to determine what strategies necessary to obtain federal contracts. There have been many studies and actions taken to increase opportunities for SDVOSB owners; the study confirmed there is no one solution

as to why service-disabled veteran-owned business owners are not obtaining federal contracts. The goals of mandated procurement policies are to stimulate and equalize opportunities for service-disabled veteran-owned businesses (Gibson et al., 2012). The strategies that emerged in this study may help business owners obtain federal contracts. An important aspect of the manager strategies is the need to understand the federal acquisition system. This study was based on the GST.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Study: Service-Disabled Veteran Small Business Owners Success Strategies

### Introduction

Thank you for allowing this Service-Disabled Veteran Small Business Owners interview today. The results of this study may impact the business environment by contributing to new strategies for business owners, and change the way procurement officials select bidders for contract awards. An additional business impact may be financial savings to the Federal Government. The results of this study should help service-connected veterans who want to start a business understand the strategies that they must undertake to be a successful, profitable entrepreneur. This study may also help service-disabled veteran small business owners determine where they lack in submitting bids for government contracts.

### Introductions

State the Main Research Question: What strategies do service-disabled veteran small business owners need to obtain federal contracts?

Informed Consent (provided a copy of consent form, and discuss each point with the interviewee)

### Interview Rules:

You may postpone any question to answer later.

Your frank answers are important.

Your answers to questions are important and respected.

I will keep everything said today confidential.

May I have your permission to record this session at this time?

Any questions? Start the recording!

Interview Questions:

Q1: What barriers or constraints exist for service-disabled veteran small business owners seeking federal procurements?

Q2: How are service-disabled veteran small business owners trained in the government procurement process?

Q3: How do you develop business opportunities?

Q4: What are the obstacles you encountered when trying to participate in government procurements?

Interview Wrap-Up

Remember that the study's social implication may be an increase in service-disabled veteran-owned businesses thereby possibly reducing the veterans' unemployment rate and improving the quality of life for many.

Your identity and responses will remain confidential.

Please contact Walden University using the contacts on the consent form for any questions or concerns.

Thank you for this interview opportunity.

## Appendix B: Consent Form

## CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of small business owner's involvement in obtaining federal procurements. The researcher is inviting service-disabled veteran-owned small business owners in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area to be in the study. The information gathered through interviews with a business owner, and two senior management members will assist in obtaining information about the strategies that a service-disabled veteran business owner use during the procurement processes and the barriers overcome. You were chosen for the study because you are (a) A business owner or (b) selected by the owner as senior management member of the same firm. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Calvin L. Russell, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to determine what strategies service-disabled veteran small business owners need to develop to obtain federal contracts

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you then asked to:

- Read and sign an informed consent form thereby providing your permission to use your information in the study.
  - Allow two of your senior managers to participate in this study by forwarding a letter of cooperation to them.
  - Consent to an audio recording of the interview with owner and senior managers.
  - Provide responses to four semistructured open-ended interview questions.
  - Understand the interview may take up to one hour.
  - Provide answers to follow-up questions if further explanation is required.
  - Confirm your answers with follow-up interviews that may take less than an hour.
  - Provide company documentation which may include corporate documents internal reports, company history, and other published material and policies that support formal strategies to gain government contracts.
  - Final check the interview transcripts for accuracy and provide feedback if necessary.
- Here are some sample questions:
- Why did you start a business?
  - What types of financial assistance did you pursue and to establish and sustain this business?
  - What types of governmental assistance programs did you use initially and now to maintain this business?
  - What type of education and training did you receive before starting your business?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study and you are assured that if you decline or discontinue participation it will not negatively impact your relationship with the researcher. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. There will be no direct benefit to you other than you may benefit from gaining a better understanding about the possible strategies available to obtain federal procurements. The researcher will benefit from the study by collecting data to complete the study and obtain the doctoral degree.

**Payment:**

There will be no payment or compensation for participating in this research.

**Privacy:**

There will be no payment or compensation for participating in this research. Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Written data will be kept secure in a locked file cabinet drawer and electronic data will be kept on a secure personal, password-protected portable external drive in a locked file cabinet drawer. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via [calvin.russell@waldenu.edu](mailto:calvin.russell@waldenu.edu). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is **612-312-1210**. Walden University's approval number for this study is **11-25-15-0400187** and it expires on **November 24, 2016**.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

**Statement of Consent:**


I have read the above information, and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below or replying to this email with the words, "I consent," I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

**Printed Name of Participant**

**Date of consent**

**Participant's signature**

**Researcher's Signature**



## Appendix C: Recruitment Email

<Date>

<Address Block>

Dear Sir/Madam,

As part of my doctoral study research at Walden University, I would like to invite you and two of your senior management to participate in a research study I am conducting to explore strategies service-disabled veteran small business owners need to develop to obtain federal contracts. I contacted you to participate because you are a small business owner in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. Participation in the research study is voluntary, and will be confidential. Please read the enclosed consent form carefully and ask any questions that you may have before acting on the invitation to participate.

To achieve the objectives of the research study, your participation depends on satisfying being the owner of a service-disabled veteran-owned small business. If you satisfy this criterion agreed to participate in the study, please notify me via the contact information. I will contact you again to deliver consent forms, a letter of cooperation for your employees, and to set up the personal interview.

I anticipate that the total time required for each interview will span no more than one hour. The interviews will be audio recorded and participants will have the opportunity to review the transcribed interview for accuracy prior to inclusion in the study. I sincerely appreciate your valuable time and thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at [calvin.russell@waldenu.edu](mailto:calvin.russell@waldenu.edu).

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Calvin Russell

## Appendix D: Letter of Cooperation

[REDACTED]

Dear Calvin Russell,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Service-Disabled Veteran Small Business Owners Success Strategies with the [REDACTED]. As part of this study, I authorize you to gather information through semistructured face-to-face interviews with audio recordings with two senior management members, and collect company documentation, which may include corporate documents, internal reports, company history, and other published material, and policies that support formal strategies to gain government contracts. I understand each participant will be able to final check interview transcripts for accuracy and provide feedback if necessary. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include two senior management members. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

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

I understand that 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,

[REDACTED]

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the email, or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staffs verify any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).