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The First 4 Years: A Small Business Sustainability Study

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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MBA, Indiana University, 1977

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Small businesses create most of the new jobs in the world, yet more than half fail before the 5th year. Small businesses contribute to the economy by originating new products and services, yet they often lack the strategies to overcome the challenges of the beginning years. When businesses fail, the community wanes from unemployment, poverty, crime, and other social dilemmas. The purpose of this single case study was to explore small business strategies for sustainability beyond Year 4, specifically in a single independent operating Ohio restaurant owner with less than 500 employees. The conceptual framework was Schumpeter's theory of the entrepreneur's role as leader of economic growth. A semistructured interview generated the data and a review of various business documents including tax returns, the business plan, an operations manual, company marketing material, and social media from the first 4 years in operation facilitated triangulation. Member checking afforded the correct meaning of various concepts and statements. This study contained 4 themes that foster business sustainability and may help nascent entrepreneurs navigate the challenges of the first 4 years: knowledge and experience, work ethic and commitment, social capital, and opportunity recognition through creative discovery. When entrepreneurs incorporate these themes into their business model, resiliency strategies materialize to expand and create jobs, launch new products or services, pay taxes, and stabilize tenuous neighborhoods. This study may also convince community stakeholders to design and reinforce training, networking, and financial opportunities to bolster entrepreneurial venture success.

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Dedication

I dedicate this academic milestone to my late parents, Alonzo and Verna Cooper. Although neither completed their education, they were both lifelong learners and made the necessary sacrifices so I could enjoy a life of prosperity and achievement.

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Achieving a doctoral degree is evidence of personal commitment, perseverance, and stamina that requires unwavering emotional and physical support. Above all, I am grateful to God for allowing me to complete this goal. I thank my children, Mica and Malik, and my grandson, Malachi, for surrounding me with love and support. I thank my brother and sister, Conrad and Carolyn, who stood beside me like pillars, through every storm and rainbow. Finally, I also thank all of my sister-friends who provide a constant safety net for me and make my journey on earth a joy.

My chair, dear Dr. Patricia Fusch, provided the encouragement, patience, and direction I needed to persevere as I impatiently witnessed the months transform into years for this project. I also appreciate my committee members, Dr. Janet Booker and Dr. Carol-Anne Faint, who challenged me to seek excellence in formatting and content, as expected from a Walden scholar. Lastly, I must thank Dr. Freda Turner and Dr. Fred Walker for direction and encouragement along the way.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Global small business contributions include job creation, community stability, and innovation discovery (Solomon, Bryant, May, & Perry, 2013). Small businesses employed over 60 million individuals in 2010 in the United States, but many of these firms have since ceased operation; only 50% survived for 5 years (Bressler, Bressler, & Bressler, 2013; Small Business Administration [SBA], 2015). Although small businesses are the creators of most new jobs, many are unprepared for long-term sustainability (Ji & Hanna, 2012). Restaurants are the second largest private employer in the US with approximately 14 million workers, but smaller enterprises experience a premature closure with additional industry-related risk (Frazer, 2012).

Background of the Problem

Small businesses, or firms with less than 500 workers, create community stability and most of the new jobs in the United States (Clayton, Sadeghi, Spletzer, & Talan, 2013; SBA, 2014). Small businesses are a key contributor to the economic growth of most countries, but the survival rate of these enterprises is problematic (Miles, 2014a). Most of these firms fail before Year 5, regardless of industry or economic climate (Ji & Hanna, 2012). Government entrepreneurial support is available for management and technical assistance (SBA, 2015), and community colleges and universities can provide entrepreneurial training (Princeton Review, 2016). The failure rate has remained constant since 1990 and across industry sectors (SBA, 2014).

The failure trend among small business owners (SBOs) stems from many factors including (a) resource insufficiencies, (b) inadequate management training, (c) family challenges, (d) incommodious regulations, (e) economic conditions, and (f) disruptive technology (Elmuti, Khoury, & Omran, 2012; Ferguson, Green, Vaswani, & Wu, 2013; Miles, 2014b; Nnamseh & Akpan, 2015). This study contains information on survival strategies from the owner of a small restaurant in Ohio who survived the first 4 years in business.

Problem Statement

Small businesses have a difficult time managing the risk of the start-up years. Historically, 66% fail before Year 5 (Ji & Hanna, 2012). Nascent SBOs recognize this challenge, with 60% of those surveyed citing business sustainability and growth as their top concerns (Geho & Frakes, 2013). Small businesses create 86% of the new jobs in the United States (Clayton et al., 2013), with 99.7% of employers retaining fewer than 500 employees (SBA, 2014). Profitable, small businesses are essential to the economic stability of the nation (Anastasia, 2015; Haltiwanger, Jarmin, & Miranda, 2013; Karadag, 2015; Shukla & Shukla, 2014). The general business problem was many small businesses fail during the first 4 years, despite the critical role they play in the American economy. The specific business problem was some small business owners lack the strategies to succeed in business beyond the first 4 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore what strategies small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 4 years. One independent Ohio restaurant owner, over 21 years old, participated in a face-to-face, recorded interview to share his individual perspectives and lived experiences during the first 4 years of operation. I methodologically triangulated the data by reviewing the internal operating statements of the participant firm and existing research on small business sustainability. The results of my study can help other SBOs develop survival strategies from learning the operational practices of those entrepreneurs who have reached the fifth year. If small businesses have enhanced sustainability, employment trends and economic stability also improve, thereby contributing to social change within the surrounding community.

Nature of the Study

This study was qualitative, given the research goal was to explore the factors contributing to small businesses' failure before the fifth year. Qualitative researchers search for answers to *what to do* about a circumstance from an academic standpoint, and *what does all this information mean,* from a business perspective (Bailey, 2014). Bailey (2014) indicated qualitative research contains questions that start with *what* or *how* to open investigation of a particular phenomenon. In spite of numerous scholarly qualitative studies, some researchers doubt the validity of qualitative research, citing subjective inquiry and the sample sizes needed to reach the desired saturation as weaknesses

(Dworkin, 2012; Griffith & Montrosse-Moorhead, 2014; Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Quantitative studies reflect the relationship between variables numerically and do not include the reasons for a circumstance (Barnham, 2015; Harman, Lee, & Mitchell, 2011). In a quantitative study of new business failure in three countries, outcomes were inconsistent and produced no new insights (Lussier & Halabi, 2010). Mixed method researchers blend the quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive review of the circumstance (Zhang & Watanabe-Galloway, 2014). Dumbili (2014) indicated the combination of quantitative and qualitative research offers a more complete discussion of a research topic. My study does not include a quantitative inquiry.

The case study design was the appropriate method for gathering data on small business sustainability beyond the first 4 years. My goal was to compile information on real life circumstances from the participants through the variety of data collection techniques as discussed by Hadidi, Lindquist, Treat-Jacobson, Swanson (2013), and Hlady-Rispal and Jouison-Laffitte (2014). Case studies are not dependent on controlled environments, as in an experiment; the researcher seeks a current understanding of the members' experience in a particular circumstance in their own words (Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012).

Research Question

The overarching research question for this study was what strategies do small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 4 years? The following were the interview questions:

1. Why did you become a business owner?
2. What is your business model (BM) or how do you make a profit?
3. How do you make decisions?
4. What training or preparation did you pursue to operate this firm?
5. How did your restaurant change from Year 1 to Year 4?
6. What challenges, if any, did you face while developing this business?
7. How did you manage these challenges?
8. What community resources have you used to help with your restaurant?
9. What assistance did you need to strengthen your company that was not available?
10. What other comments can you offer to others on starting a restaurant?

Conceptual Framework

For this study, the fundamental research concepts are the role and economic impact of entrepreneurship in society, and the reasons for nascent entrepreneurial failure. Regarding entrepreneurship, Schumpeter, a 20th century liberal-minded scholar, trained as an economist, was highly regarded for his work internationally (Becker, Knudsen, & Swedberg, 2012). Schumpeter (1942) wrote sociology, history, and politics were interrelated. Schumpeter (1942) was the first economist to label the entrepreneur as the leader of the economy; he proffered the entrepreneur was the creator of true growth, and *creative destruction* opened new opportunities for entrepreneurs to seize and exploit for profit. Schumpeter (1942) used the term *creative destruction* to describe the process entrepreneurs employed to eliminate inadequate products or processes to launch new and improved models. Smith (1776) also valued the entrepreneurial contribution to society; he argued the entrepreneur played a critical role in the larger society, and BMs must incorporate the role and impact of surrounding stakeholders.

Schumpeter (1942) indicated a person may begin as an entrepreneur, but once he or she transitions to management, a new entrepreneur will enter the marketplace to improve the product or replace the predecessor. Schumpeter (1942) also noted traditional businesses routinely invest in equipment and processes and must make them useful and productive, but entrepreneurs explore new ideas and concepts. Customary entrepreneurial activities included (a) the creation of new products or new product traits, (b) the formulation of new production processes, (c) the introduction of new industrial production methods, (d) the entry to new markets, and (e) the discovery of new supply sources (Schumpeter, 1942).

Entrepreneurial behavior leads to changes in the economy; if entrepreneurial events are blocked or reduced, economic improvement is stalled (Schumpeter, 1942). As economic agents, entrepreneurs make decisions to capitalize on marketplace opportunities, by creation or exploitation (Endres & Woods, 2010). Entrepreneurial acts require the coupling of resources with opportunities, yet a select few entrepreneurs will have the capacity to succeed (Schumpeter, 1934). The classic entrepreneur is attracted to innovation and creativity, with secondary regard to the benefits of a comfortable lifestyle (Endres & Woods, 2010). As a depiction of the entrepreneurial mind, the following traits illustrate entrepreneurial mission and motivation: (a) the desire to own a business, (b) the longing to be in control and free of restrictions, (c) the pleasure of winning a competition, and (d) an attraction to creativity and accomplishment (Schumpeter, 1934).

Operational Definitions

Listed below are terms germane to small business sustainability and elucidate the context of this exploratory qualitative study. The definitions are from peer-reviewed sources or credible small business publications.

Business failure: A business failure is a firm unable to pay its debts and facing imminent insolvency or bankruptcy (Boettcher, Cavanagh, & Xu, 2014).

Business model: The business model is a holistic concept that demonstrates how the business may strategically reach profitability by providing value to products or services for the target customer (Nisa & Ravichandran, 2013).

Business plan: A business plan is a document that explains the business operation, mission, and goals. The plan predicts the activities and events of the business for 3-5 years (SBA, 2014).

Business success: A business is successful when the net profit for the past 3 years is at least as great as the average profit for its competitors in the same industry or market (Boettcher et al., 2014).

Business survival: Business survival is the activity when a business currently or previously struggles to operate profitably, but continues to exist and has reached a sustainable financial condition (Tundui & Tundui, 2012).

Entrepreneurship: Entrepreneurship is the process of creating a new business, acknowledging the inherent risk, pursuing opportunities, and nurturing an idea from incorporating the assumption of risk, seeking opportunities, and developing an idea from launch to reality (Zahra & Wright, 2011).

Small Business Administration: A federal agency created to aid, and counsel small businesses through financing, procurement, and training resources (SBA, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The next section includes the parameters of this study: the assumptions, the limitations, and the delimitations. The terms defined below created the research boundaries for this study of small business sustainability during the first 4 years. The assumptions, limitations, and delimitations led to opportunities for future research.

Assumptions

Assumptions are unproven and uncontrollable beliefs that frame the research design and are essential for the inquiry direction, depth, and conclusion (Simon & Goes, 2011). My study incorporated four assumptions. The first assumption was the qualitative research model was appropriate to explore the reasons the first 4 years of operation are so challenging for small businesses. The second assumption was the case study design was the best method to capture lived experiences of the restaurant owners. The third assumption was that I would identify one willing Ohio restaurant owner for participation in this study. Finally, the fourth assumption was the participant was honest and forthright during the interviews regarding their first 4 years of business ownership.

Limitations

Limitations identify potential drawbacks in the research (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010). I proposed four limitations for this study, which pertained to the participant responses. The first limitation was participant education; the interpretation of the questions and the response depended upon the sophistication of the prior entrepreneurial training experience. An individual with a limited understanding of small business management may not fully comprehend the questions and respond with answers that are not pertinent to the research. The second limitation was how the industry correlates to the small business universe; the food service industry was unique and has challenges not apparent in other business arenas. The third limitation was cultural; ethnic, or gender influences also modify the context of the responses. The fourth limitation was a single case study did not capture all results possible from studies with more participants or a different industry.

Delimitations

Delimitations are parameters that add focus to a study (Mitchell & Jolley (2010). With my study, there were four restrictions. The first factor was a deliberate concentration on the restaurant industry. The second delimitation was the business age; the restaurant was at least 4 years old. The third restriction was geographic location, given the study only included data from an Ohio restaurant owner. Finally, the fourth restriction was the restaurant cannot be a franchised operation, but must be a closely held corporation, partnership, or sole-proprietor. The outcome of my research does not necessarily align with those from studies without these conditions.

Significance of the Study

Small businesses create 80% of the new jobs in the United States (Link & Scott, 2012) with 99.7% of employers having less than 500 employees (SBA, 2013). When small businesses dissolve for any reason, jobs are lost, and the community loses another tax-paying institution (SBA, 2012). Although researchers confirmed small businesses tend to collapse before the fifth year (Ji & Hanna, 2012), limited data exists on the contributing lived events and conditions that lead to closure. If more information were available on the personal and business challenges during the first 4 years, more enterprises would survive and flourish.

Implications for Social Change

New information on business survival helps to improve conditions in the operating environment for small business owners and lead to social and economic change. Legislators determined certain regulations are inhibiting business sustainability and recommend modifications. Community resource organizations developed new training programs for local microentrepreneurs. Government agencies created lending programs with enhanced underwriting criteria to address current financial challenges for microbusinesses. Private businesses, such as insurance companies and banks, introduce new policies to attract and retain small business clients formerly ignored. The overarching result of a stronger small business climate is stable employment, contributing entrepreneurs, and resilient communities.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The intent of this qualitative study was to explore the conditions leading to small business failure before the fifth year of operation. These conditions, presenting survival challenges for nascent entrepreneurs, materialized through a case study of one small restaurant that has operated longer than 4 years. Previous studies on small business survival, and the internal operating statements for the member firm, provided additional data for methodological triangulation. The research results imparted insight on small businesses sustainability, and the continuation of economic contributions for the community.

For this study, the concepts reviewed were (a) nascent entrepreneurship, (b) the elements of entrepreneurial activity, (c) the factors contributing to the success, (d) factors leading to the failure of small businesses, (e) the business model and innovation, and (f) restaurant industry characteristics. Information gathered emanated from the Walden Library business databases, Google Scholar, print articles, small business organizations publications, and government websites. Below are key terms used in the search parameters: *entrepreneur, entrepreneurial, nascent entrepreneur, risk, small business, restaurant, food service, survival, start-up, sustainability, small business growth, small business finance, small business performance, business model, innovation, restaurant,* *food service, Small Business Administration (SBA), SME, smaller enterprise*, and *small business failure.* The majority of the articles (87%) were from peer-reviewed journals published since 2012. The literature review contains 273 contemporary sources; of those sources, 253 published in the last 5 years, and 252 sources are peer reviewed.

Nascent Entrepreneurship

A nascent entrepreneur is the central character in new venture creation by executing deliberate actions to develop and launch a business idea (Mueller, Volery, & von Siemens, 2012). During the start-up phase, entrepreneurs brainstorm financing possibilities, develop a business plan, establish a legal entity, and identify a business location (Mueller et al., 2012). Nascent SBOs spend long hours in the beginning of the enterprise; a 2012 study included data confirming 12 hour work days with most tasks, especially those regarding marketing and sales (Mueller et al., 2012). Entrepreneurs spent 36% of their time on information exchange and 28% on strategizing (Mueller et al., 2012)

Individuals pursue entrepreneurship for a variety of reasons (Zanakis, Renko, & Bullough, 2012). Unemployed or underemployed workers begin a microenterprise to gain income for daily survival (Zanakis et al., 2012). When an individual initiates a business enterprise for survival, he or she becomes a *necessity entrepreneur*, often due to inadequate education or insufficient financial resources (Poschke, 2013). Impoverished individuals reduce the impact of poverty through self-employment and educational enrichment, particularly with the support of technology and the internet (Rahman, Amran, Ahmad, & Taghizadeh, 2013). For creative individuals, entrepreneurship offers the possibility of financial success from an innovative idea (Schumpeter, 1934; Zanakis et al., 2012). In either case, the desired results are self-sufficiency and independence in exchange for the risk of entrepreneurship (Schumpeter, 1934; Zanakis et al., 2012). Nascent entrepreneurs decide if the possibility of success outweighs the risk of failure, with respect to the availability of resources and the accessibility to opportunities (Baptista, Karaöz, & Mendonca, 2014; Schumpeter, 1934).

Business success relies upon the experience of the founder, but some nascent entrepreneurs launch a business prematurely for personal survival (Baptista et al., 2014). When income ends due to job elimination or other external factors, entrepreneurial ventures provide a path to self-sufficiency, compared to those who seize opportunities while still working (Baptista et al., 2014). Previously acquired human capital resources no longer apply to the start-up venture, and the SBO must secure new resources for entrepreneurial support (Baptista et al., 2014). The necessity-driven entrepreneur benefits from prior entrepreneurial experience, whereas the opportunity-driven entrepreneur retains access to most previous human resources and associated benefits (Baptista et al., 2014). Start-up ventures from necessity-driven entrepreneurs do not add much to job growth due to the risk of the human capital deficit (Baptista et al., 2014).

Sloka, Kantane, Avotins, and Jermolajeva (2014) compared nascent entrepreneurs in the US, Latvia, Mexico, and Canada to determine the primary motives for launching a business. The comprehensive study also included data regarding the factors influencing business success (Sloka et al., 2014). The leading reasons for launching a business for all nations were independence, followed by personal satisfaction, business development, and income, in order of importance (Schumpeter, 1934; Sloka et al., 2014). The study revealed nascent entrepreneurs believe that proper training, previous business experience, and market conditions are key factors for entrepreneurial success and risk mitigation; those in the 50-59 age group indicated that proper training is more crucial to sustainability than in the 20-29 categories (Sloka et al., 2014). Social skills are also critical to nascent entrepreneurial success (Lamine, Mian, & Fayolle, 2014). When launching a new enterprise, an individual experiences loneliness and isolation; without a personal support system to manage stress, surrender becomes a viable option (Lamine et al., 2014).

Risk acceptance dwells in the personalities of those desiring to start entrepreneurial ventures (Gartner & Liao, 2012). Psychological factors compel an individual to launch a business; the motivation to launch the business is greater when self-confidence and self-reliance exist within the entrepreneurial personality (Hopp & Stephen, 2012; Schumpeter, 1934). Community and familial connections or informal institutions contribute to nascent entrepreneurial success; financial resources and social networks are available to those who fit the community success profile (Hopp & Stephen, 2012). These dynamics benefit the individual after he or she has made the decision to launch an enterprise (Hopp & Stephen, 2012; Salvato, Sharma, & Wright, 2015). Mentoring, or the regular association with an experienced entrepreneur, helps a nascent SBO with opportunity recognition (Laukhuf & Malone, 2015; St-Jean, 2012). When a novice entrepreneur studies the actions and decisions of an experienced business owner, entrepreneurial learning results through dialogue and imitation (Laukhuf & Malone, 2015; St-Jean, 2012).

Some nascent SBOs commence operation with a false set of assumptions (Alstete, 2014). An 11- year study of 380 entrepreneurial and small business ownership students revealed over half chose to pursue a traditional market business strategy, used by many competitors in their industry, making duplication a simple maneuver (Alstete, 2014). Another study of 234 entrepreneurs over 20 years included data within the Entrepreneurial Intelligence Model (Envick, 2014). The depiction contained three over-arching qualities (passion, vision, and courage) and eight essential psychological states found in successful entrepreneurs (Envick, 2014; Schumpeter, 1934). Entrepreneurial intelligence is the ability to deploy passion, vision, and courage to reach entrepreneurial success (Envick, 2014; Schumpeter, 1934). The eight psychological states are (a) ambition, (b) work ethic, (c) continuous learning, (d) innovation, (e) human capital, (f) informed risk-taking, (g) integrity, and (h) resilience (Envick, 2014). When individuals embrace the above concepts, they are poised to become successful entrepreneurs (Envick, 2014; Schumpeter, 1934).

Individuals desiring to become entrepreneurs often have inflated egos and are overconfident of their abilities and power; these narcissistic traits contribute to poor decisions as the leader in an entrepreneurial venture (Navis & Volkan Ozbek, 2016). Some nascent entrepreneurs believe they need no advice and can reach goals without the necessary human and financial resources (Navis & Volkan Ozbek, 2016). Career goals materialize into reality when there is an elevated self-esteem and the perception of a favorable environment for success (Bullough, Renko, & Myatt, 2014). When risk appears, resiliency or the willingness to persevere reduces fear and mitigates the tendency to retreat (Bullough et al., 2014). Entrepreneurial self-efficacy and resilience works together to produce business success and organization leadership within SBOs (Bullough et al., 2014; Holland & Shepherd, 2013).

Nascent entrepreneurs also hasten venture creation when there is a formidable desire to become wealthy or famous (Renko, Kroeck, & Bullough 2012). The expectancy theory (Renko et al., 2012) contains justification of why nascent entrepreneurs become obsessive with start-up requirements as crucial actions to reap personal goals. Financial gain remained strong with nascent entrepreneurs regardless of motivational level, perhaps indicating a survival instinct (Renko et al., 2012). Aldrich and Yang (2014) proffered the entrepreneurial propensity begins in childhood and continues through the point when the individual decides to start a business. Interaction with family, friends, schoolmates, coworkers, neighbors, and other peers often influence the decision to move toward an entrepreneurial occupation (Aldrich & Yang).

Riggs and O’Dwyer (2012) wrote that aspiring entrepreneurs also begin the journey of business ownership by emulating the behaviors of others. Nascent entrepreneurs often learn the culture of business ownership by networking with mentors and learning the practices of customers, suppliers, and competitors (Riggs & O’Dwyer, 2012). By studying and accepting the cultural norms and priorities of others entrepreneurs, individuals seeking entrepreneurship gain personal and group legitimacy through association and simulation (Williams Middleton, 2013). The positioning theory (Downing, 2005) is the basis for this behavior; actors imitate and repeat the actions of stakeholders they hold in high esteem as role models. Imitation alone cannot provide enterprise sustainability; entrepreneurs must continue to develop and advance existing practices to foster innovation, stabilize the organization, and withstand market risk (Aldrich & Yang, 2014). Schumpeter (1934) also noted the entrepreneurial attraction to creativity and accomplishment.

The SBO goals and the firm's goals are connected in the owner-operator setting (Newby, Watson, & Woodliff, 2012). A focus group of 29 SBOs revealed information to support an entrepreneur's feelings about his personal life also impact his or her opinion of firm success (Newby et al., 2012). For example, if sales are down, an entrepreneur justifies the decline to his extended vacation that year or an unexpected illness (Newby et al., 2012). In other words, owner-operator performance metrics should include intrinsic and extrinsic factors to accurately demonstrate achievement (Newby et al., 2012; Schumpeter, 1934). Entrepreneurs gain a higher probability of achievement with multiple competencies, including the ability to ascertain opportunities and develop strategies for market entry (Vilas Boas, Vasconcellos Dias, & Amtmann, 2014). Social interaction is equally important; the ability to create brand equity, firm credibility, and secure long-term customers fosters entrepreneurial longevity (Vilas Boas et al., 2014).

Emerging entrepreneurial launches receive celebrations in many countries due to the expectation of economic growth (Brixy, Sternberg, & Stüber, 2013). Government assistance programs fund entrepreneurial training and financial assistance to reduce the possibility of failure (Brixy et al., 2013). Some startup enterprises do not take advantage of these resources; 50% of German entrepreneurs did not seek professional assistance (Brixy et al., 2013). Three explanations explain this behavior: some entrepreneurs have already acquired business management skills, another group is confident they do not need assistance, and others do not know about entrepreneurial resources (Brixy et al., 2013). Researchers in rural Pennsylvania confirmed many entrepreneurs are unaware of government resources with over 65% unfamiliar with SCORE, a free, government counseling agency, and 67% ignorant of the Small Business Development Centers (Osborne, Wisnieski, Soni, Bharadwaj, & Palmer, 2013). Some SBOs fear government involvement because of regulatory restrictions (Osborne, et al., 2013).

Brixby et al. (2013) wrote entrepreneurs with prior industry experience appreciated government assistance, but those with college or trade school education shunned additional training. Cognitive bias is a factor in selecting entrepreneurial training; some nascent operators are either overconfident of their abilities, believe he or she has exceptional skills, or certain that he or she is in total control (Brixby et al., 2013). The desire for personal freedom is also a major influence for entrepreneurs in the early 20th century (Schumpeter, 1934). Nascent entrepreneurs are experts at a skill or trade, but unfamiliar with effective, appropriate marketing strategies for their businesses (Hisrich, Peter, & Shepard, 2008). Further, when the SBOs seek advice from others, attend a workshop, or study a textbook, they are unsure which strategy to select and implement for their enterprise (St-Jean, 2012).

A Finnish study contained evidence a conventional university education is not essential to gain entrepreneurial skills (Hietanen & Järvi, 2015). Entrepreneurial learning, including opportunity recognition, opportunity creation, decision making, and reflection, materializes in vocational settings as well as in college classrooms (Hietanen & Järvi, 2015; Princeton Review, 2016). In the vocational setting, a greater emphasis depends upon business management role-play, whereas in the university setting, procedures and outcomes were prescriptive from the instructor (Hietanen & Järvi, 2015; Princeton Review, 2016). The researchers recommended entrepreneurial learning, whether vocational or conventional, be continuous through the business development process (Hietanen & Järvi, 2015). When cash reserves are limited, training becomes a less critical expense (Alasadi & Al Sabbagh, 2015). Crisis mediation training prepares employees for rapid reaction to serious problems, but when absent from the firm protocol, the calamity escalates (Spillan, 2015).

Entrepreneurial training, regardless of source, includes the creation of a business plan (Fernández-Guerrero, Revuelto-Taboada, & Simón-Moya, 2012). Business plans are documents that represent the relevant facts about the business including mission, business model, marketing strategy, and financing (Bewayo, 2015; Fernández-Guerrero et al., 2012). The business plan is realistic, reliable, and outlines short and long-term goals, but is not a guaranty for success (Fernández-Guerrero et al., 2012). A study of 150 SBOs in Macedonia revealed that participants did not view the business plan as a risk mitigator and only related it to the pursuit of financing (Petkovski & Angelova, 2014).

Business incubators, as a small business sustainability strategy, hasten entrepreneurial learning, provide human capital, and offer an affordable business location (Anderson & Al-Mubaraki, 2012; Cooper, Hamel, & Connaughton, 2012). Affordable business space and onsite guidance make incubators a formidable armament against small business death (Moraru & Rusei, 2012). Nascent entrepreneurs share building space, resources, information, and peer support, similar to an incubator for infants (Cooper et al., 2012). A manager or sponsor is sometimes onsite or virtual to assist with technical or management challenges (Cooper et al., 2012).

Although networking opportunities exist by virtue of the shared space, SBO communication falters due to time limitations, lack of familiarity of other tenants, and distrust of data security (Cooper et al., 2012). The internal conflict arises when independence opposes connectedness (Cooper et al., 2012). Incubators are resources to foster SME sustainability, but a study of a university-sponsored incubator resulted in the need for incubator managers to foster networking opportunities to reduce tenant insecurities (Cooper et al., 2012). On a national level, the National Business Incubation Association (NBIA) is the trade association behind incubation, with a mission of supporting the business creation process as a clearinghouse for information, professional development, and technical support (NBIA, 2015).

Start-up businesses have few choices for financing, whether internal or external (Atherton, 2012). Bootstrapping, or funding from nontraditional sources such as credit cards, personal loans, or bartering, provide piecemeal capital to launch the business and sustain it on a daily basis (Brau, Cardell, & Woodworth, 2015). When the firm founders place their personal resources at risk as equity capital, external financing sources such as banks, venture capitalists, or investors, are more willing to participate due to a perceived strong commitment and shared risk position (Atherton, 2012). Some banks gamble on nascent entrepreneurs only when the financing includes a guaranty by a government entity, such as the SBA (Atherton, 2012).

Khan, Tang, and Joshi (2014) studied disengagement of nascent entrepreneurs during the start-up process with data from The Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamic II. A sample of 943 nascent entrepreneurs provided the data for this study of the abandonment of all actions to sustain a start-up venture (Dworkin, 2012; Khan et al., 2014). The researchers found the SBOs level of commitment to the start-up venture related to persistence, and a competitive climate had little to do with disengagement (Khan et al., 2014). Schumpeter (1934) also noted the attraction to competition in his research of the entrepreneurial mission.

The Elements of Entrepreneurial Activity

Entrepreneurial activity is the launch, organization, and utilization of resources to start an economic enterprise, with the founder accepting the risk of reward and the possibility of failure (Njoroge & Gathunga, 2013). Entrepreneurs desire to own and control an enterprise, free of restrictions (Schumpeter, 1934). As the enterprise expands, the entrepreneur begins to focus on financing and managing growth through strategic decisions to reach sustainability (Mueller et al., 2012). Communication with employees and external stakeholders are constant activities for growth entrepreneurs through face-to-face and telephone methods (Meuller et al, 2012). Managing and monitoring operations are the two primary functions after the start-up procedures are complete, and the owner assumes a leadership role (Mueller et al., 2012).

Entrepreneurs are emotional beings; they are self-directed and enjoy an independent lifestyle, especially as a career (Burch, Batchelor, & Humphrey, 2013; Schumpeter, 1934). Emotional labor leaves the worker feeling mentally exhausted after work (Burch et al., 2013). For example, an entrepreneur generates anger while disciplining a subordinate for a serious infraction, or joy when giving a pep talk at an employee meeting (Burch et al., 2013). Daily activities are often unpredictable and entrepreneurs must adjust to the circumstance, often in the presence of subordinates (Burchet al., 2013). Employees are also emotional and express feelings on work events in their own style (Burch et al., 2013). An entrepreneur feels a minor need to structure his or her emotions at work, but a family business owner operates with some restrictions, due to his or her position as a role model to relatives within the firm (Burch et al., 2013). Emotions, both positive and negative are used to effectively manage employees, provided the entrepreneur is respectful and honest (Burch et al., 2013). Some entrepreneurs possess fervent desires for recognition and power, which creates internal conflict for employees and external conflict for stakeholders (Miller, 2015). Successful entrepreneurs place their satisfaction first; they are often demanding, authoritarian, and neglectful parents (Miller, 2015).

Customers and employees are stakeholders in the success of a firm, along with suppliers and fellow business owners (Fornoni, Arribas, & Vila, 2012). When an entrepreneur has access to action-oriented social capital, the results can lead to improved financing arrangements, greater market opportunities, production improvements, and wider information access (Fornoni et al., 2012). Another key subset of entrepreneurial social capital is the owner's family (Werbel & Danes, 2010). Family members, especially the owner's spouse, often contribute significant support to the business, as well as sacrificing time, money and energy for the firm's stability (Werbel & Danes, 2010).

In family-owned firms, the possibility of internal conflict increases because of the work/life overlap (Werbel & Danes, 2010). At work and at home, family members have roles and responsibilities that are different in each respective setting (Werbel & Danes, 2010). When the roles change in one or both settings, without the mutual consent of the individuals affected, confusion and rebellion are possible, creating additional instability within the organization (Werbel & Danes, 2010). Eddleston and Powell (2012) wrote conventional married couples still operate within gender-classified roles within the business structure. Women often perform and enjoy supportive roles, although they also expressed dissatisfaction with the limited amount of support from their spouses at home (Eddleston & Powell, 2012).

Both family and non-family small businesses engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, such as environmental preservation, financial support for the arts, or a playground for a community school (Peake, Davis, & Cox, 2015). The motivations for engagement, known as enlightened self-interest, are varied including (a) to earn community respect in advance of a calamity, (b) display the firm's values, or (c) garner market acceptance (Peake et al., 2015). In a study of CSR motivation among SBOs, most respondents cited profitability as a major CSR goal (Peake et al., 2015). Memili, Fang, Chrisman, and De Massis (2015) wrote a balance of both family-owned and non-family owned businesses render economic growth, generational wealth creation, diversity of industry, and balanced economic risk. Goals and strategies differ, but both ownership models make significant contributions to the economy through employment, community support, and innovation creation (Memili et al., 2015). The SBO is a vital contributor to the 21st century economy due to their role as participants in larger supply chains, and their ability to connect with the target customer through enhanced customer service (Krajnakova, Navikaite, & Navickas, 2015).

Small business place building aligns with CSR (Thomas, Gould, Gaede, & Jurin, 2011). Place building is the adoption of culture, habits, and values from an organization's existence as a going concern (Thomas et al., 2011). Place building is both a business strategy and a set of protocols that define the *place* a business holds in the community (Thomas et al., 2011). The four models of place building are: (a) transformational or those that improve the environment, (b) contributive or those that support a larger cause or organization, (c) contingent or those that are disassociated from others and abide by a strict set of policies, and (d) exploitive or those that place the interests of others behind its own (Thomas et al., 2011). Place building develops over time and supports entrepreneurial growth and sustainability (Thomas et al., 2011). The firm's place building status emanates through its CSR, facilitating growth and community support (Sheehy, 2015).

In addition to invaluable social capital, entrepreneurs have better chances of success if they are proficient at many skills; if they can lead the business, manage employees, and monitor the financial results, then sustainability is possible (Stuetzer, Obschonka, & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2013). The balanced skillset theory is a belief that if entrepreneurs have multiple talents, the likelihood of surviving the economic and competitive swings in the market place will increase (Stuetzer et al., 2013). Perfecting a balanced skillset is the outcome of a personal educational investment by and for the owner (Stuetzer et al., 2013). Oberschachtsiek (2012) supported this position after reviewing the results of a comparison of success traits for entrepreneurs and employees.

A balanced skillset offers entrepreneurs enhanced sustainability from academic and experiential learning activities (Oberschachtsiek, 2012). Leadership activities include making the day-to-day decisions for the enterprise (Putta, 2014). Putta (2014) wrote business training, whether short-term or collegiate, enhances the probability of management success. Entrepreneurs make more-informed operational decisions with management training, and innovation and creativity emerge from a seasoned leader who looks toward sustainability as the goal (Putta, 2014). Creativity is the generation of new and different ideas; innovation is finding practical uses for those ideas (Jacka, 2014). Entrepreneurs seldom make decisions based upon one perspective (Podoynitsyna, Van der Bij, & Song, 2012). Entrepreneurs grapple with mixed emotions during decision making on risk and strategy (Podoynitsyna et al., 2012). Mixed emotions often accompany ambiguous situations; when there is the probability of conflicting attitudes, risk is significant (Podoynitsyna et al., 2012). With additional entrepreneurial experience, SBOs express greater optimism with risky circumstances, but must continue to analyze risk based upon information and not sentiment (Podoynitsyna et al., 2012).

Entrepreneurial risk often leads to an entrepreneurial crisis (Skeel, 2014). The swift identification and remedy to a crisis is a crucial skill for nascent entrepreneurs (Cvilikas, Kurschus, & Šarapovas, 2015). The SBO must make decisions to protect the interests of the firm's stakeholders including employees, investors, creditors, suppliers, and the residents surrounding the business property (Cvilikas et al., 2015; Pellikka & Malinen, 2014). Crises may originate externally or internally; an external crisis could be a fire to a building, whereas an internal crisis could be the death of the owner (Cvilikas et al., 2015; Pellikka & Malinen, 2014).

Crises also lead to positive outcomes for the business, such as debt restructure, improved systems, elimination of unnecessary overhead, and organizational knowledge (Cvilikas et al., 2015). A variety of financial ratios help to analyze company stability, but the crisis cause cannot usually be determined without a review of the quantitative issues and the qualitative factors concurrently (Cvilikas et al., 2015; Pellikka & Malinen, 2014). Spillan (2015) recommended SBOs develop a list of possible crises that would threaten the company, and design crisis response plans around these events. For example, hurricanes threaten businesses near the ocean; a crisis plan must be in place for this kind of event (Spillan, 2015). A comprehensive crisis plan includes (a) creating a crisis management team, (b) recognizing the symptoms of a crisis, (c) developing an effective communication strategy, (d) training staff to be vigilant and committed to a resolution, and (e) remaining flexible to changing conditions (Spillan, 2015).

An SME's information technology (IT) strategy must support the business stability strategy, and align with firm goals and strategies (Pollard & Morales, 2015). SBOs often lack the knowledge, time, and funding to invest in IT, reducing efficiency and effectiveness in business processes (Pollard & Morales, 2015). When business strategy is separate from the IT strategy, performance suffers; an integrated model is more appropriate for SMEs, given the limitation of time, resource, and talent (Pollard & Morales, 2015).

Opportunity recognition (OR) is a key talent within an entrepreneur's skillset (Shrader & Hills, 2015). Kirzner (1973) argued the discovery of new business prospects is the core of entrepreneurship; entrepreneurial alertness is necessary to stimulate OR, and may lead to the start of a new venture (Baltar & de Coulon, 2014; Schumpeter, 1942; Shrader & Hills, 2015). A study of 53 successful entrepreneurs in Chicago demonstrated that most believed that they possessed a special alertness of OR, and many new opportunities arose from problem solving brainstorming (Shrader & Hills, 2015). Organizational recognition also develops through interaction with customers and suppliers, technology modifications (Shrader & Hills, 2015). Entrepreneurs spread resources among several operations, and unforeseen events have a ripple effect on the entire operation (Iacobucci, Guzzini, & Rosa, 2015). When each business is a separate legal entity, the entrepreneur can modify ownership without disrupting the other enterprises (Iacobucci et al., 2015). When several businesses connect through the same ownership, confidentiality is a concern; but when key employees are also owners, the value of increases from the incentive of wealth creation and income (Iacobucci et al., 2015). The founding owner ultimately makes most decisions, with some guidance by minority shareholders (Iacobucci et al., 2015).

Competition is a common element in the mind of an entrepreneur (André, 2013; Schumpeter, 1934). To address the marketing and managerial challenges in a day, entrepreneurs must sometimes work 60-80 hours per week to be comfortable with their market position, while planning the next strategic maneuver (André, 2013; Schumpeter, 1934). Two different competitive attitudes may appear in entrepreneurs: one that is developmental and requires the constant desire to reach personal goals and the other, hyper-competitiveness that connotes a win-at-all-costs mentality and often implies exploitation or unethical behavior (André, 2013; Schumpeter, 1934).

A global study of the economic impact of entrepreneurship provided insight into the relationship between entrepreneurial production and financial results during the years

1972-2007 (Koellinger & Roy Thurik, 2012). Entrepreneurs do not contribute to the economy with the same intensity; start-ups offer marginal impact to employment, in comparison to high growth ventures that scale quickly through technological advances and geographic expansion (Koellinger & Roy Thurik, 2012). Investors and bankers reject many funding requests from nascent SBOs due to the high failure rate (Koellinger & Roy Thurik, 2012). Entrepreneurial activity can result in more hiring (Koellinger & Roy Thurik, 2012).

Business Model and Innovation

The business model (BM) is a holistic concept that demonstrates how the business strategically reaches profitability by providing value to products or services for the target customer (Nisa & Ravichandran, 2013). The BM reflects the value proposition, which is a collection of the features and benefits aimed at the target customer (Nisa & Ravichandran, 2013). The BM also includes the processes, systems, and marketing activities that support the value proposition (Nisa & Ravichandran, 2013). The SBO must create and abide by a BM, which guides entrepreneurial decisions (Aho, 2013). The BM should include enterprise activities that are measurable and objective, contingent upon the value proposition, customer groups, value chain, competencies, networks, relationships, and value formula (Lingren, 2012). The BM is the structure, principles, logic, and path to profitability from value added to a product or service (Aho, 2013; Lindgren, 2012). The BM contains the following elements to cultivate sustainability: (a) incentives for growth and performance; (b) leadership empowered to devise and implement long- term goals; and (c) capital to finance the previous conditions (Aho, 2013).

The BM consists of efficiency, perceived value, network value, or network efficiency (Chatterjee, 2013). Efficiency models necessitate individuals or other resources to produce commodities, as demonstrated in the airlines industry (Chatterjee, 2013). Perceived value models operate on the assumption that consumers *want* items, whether necessary for survival (medicine) or luxury (jewelry), and command a premium price (Chatterjee, 2013). Network value models reflect the loyalty of a core group of users, i.e. Netflix customers; the users become ambassadors for the brand and help to market the product (Chatterjee, 2013). The network efficiency model has two variations, but both rely upon transactional income between buyers and sellers (Chatterjee, 2013). Self-employed individuals operate from a unique BM that combines creativity with sales (Inversini, Manzoni, & Salvemini, 2014). The *solo* BM captures the activities of creative individuals, such as hairdressers, artists, and chefs (Inversinni et al., 2014; Schumpeter, 1934). This category of entrepreneurship comprises 80% of new business starts (Freeman & Siegfried, 2015).

Frequently SMEs collaborate with larger firms to create networks for innovation sharing and mutual supply chain benefits (Kamalian, Rashki, Hemmat, & Davoud Jolfaie, 2015). Due to the agility and flexibility of smaller firms, large corporations eagerly embrace new relationships that hinge upon innovation, communication, and cooperation for supply chain members (Kamalian et al., 2015). With SME contributions, production costs diminish, manufacturing processes quicken, and communication networks improve (Kamalian et al., 2015). These collaborative liaisons transform into one of four models: (a) strategic alliance when development times are long and complex, (b) short term associations for limited time projects, (c) international links to capture unique opportunities, and (d) collaborations to solve mutual problems (Kamalian et al., 2015). Some SBOs gain protection from collaboration with supply chain partners during risky economic conditions; a business model that maximizes social capital from suppliers augments training, marketing, financial limitations and ameliorates the chances of survival (Prasad, Tata, & Guo, 2012).

The BM is constantly evolving due to changing customer preferences and new technology applications (Pynnönen, Hallikas, & Ritala, 2012). *Customer-driven* BMs integrate customers into research and development during the innovation process (Pynnönen et al., 2012). With input from the customer, firms alter the market conditions toward the ideal value proposition (Pynnönen et al., 2012). To capture the customer's preferences, an SBO should meet with leadership; the discussion must begin with a clear understanding of the current business model, service, and industry conditions (Pynnönenet al., 2012). From the discussion, a business model must incorporate customer preferences in each decision point (Pynnönen et al., 2012). The panel of experts reach consensus on a plan to integrate features into the BM, based upon new customer preferences in the value proposition (Pynnönen et al., 2012). The procedure of updating and redesigning the business model is a continuous action as technology, consumer choices, and industry factors evolve (Pynnönen et al., 2012).

As businesses change, so must the business models; these changes can be gradual as in adding new services, or radical as in outsourcing tasks to others to reduce expenses (de Reuver, Bouwman, & Haaker, 2013). With uncertainty surrounding every decision, entrepreneurs need a plan to transition to a new model, especially if enhanced technology is required (de Reuver et al., 2013). A business model roadmap is a series of intermediate steps to move from the existing model to the desired model (de Reuver et al., 2013). The four steps to business model roadmapping are (a) identify the desired changes, (b) analyze the desired changes on the current operation, (c) translate the required changes into action steps, and (d) visually diagram the steps, respecting interdependencies and possible conflicts (de Reuver et al., 2013). Entrepreneurs must remember to retain flexibility for creativity, space for the old model, and allow ample time for implementation and adjustments (de Reuver et al., 2013; Schumpeter, 1942).

Reminiscent of Schumpeter's creative destruction concept, Clayton introduced disruptive models in 1997 (Bertels, Koen, & Elsum, 2015; Clayton, 1997; Robles, 2015; Schumpeter, 1942). Technological advances and changing consumer preferences hasten entrepreneurs to interrupt current buying patterns with models that move against the norm (Clayton, 1997; Schumpeter, 1942). Disruptive models appeal to a unique and sometimes inactive target customers that large corporations may ignore (Clayton, 1997; Schumpeter, 1942). Social entrepreneurial companies, or firms that follow a mission of social improvement for a profit, are market disruptors and appeal to a select group of consumers that support a mutual cause (Bendell & Thomas, 2013, Schumpeter, 1942). A current example of market disruption is Cirque du Soleil; this *Blue Ocean* concept includes elements of a traditional circus and theater, and attracted new customers interested in both drama and variety show acts (Circus du Soleil, 2015; Kim & Mauborgne, 2005; Schumpeter, 1942). A *Blue Ocean* BM includes benefits and features of a previously unrecognized target market, while traditional competitors grapple for shrinking market shares (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005; Schumpeter, 1942).

The BM sometimes includes the commercialization process, defined as a technological advancement integrated into the BM that delivers a value-added feature for the target customer (Aho, 2013). When the BM includes commercialization, the owner(s) and managers of the firm should agree on the principles, process, and goals, to make and advance critical decisions (Pellikka & Malinen, 2014). Entrepreneurs mismanage the commercialization integrations while operating the other aspects of the business; the standard method of doing business conflicts or consumes resources due to familiarity or simplicity (Pellikka & Malinen, 2014). Additionally, entrepreneurs become frustrated and impatient with the commercialization process due to its reliance on collaboration within the firm, and the fierce competition within the marketplace from other companies (Pellikka & Malinen, 2014). Schumpeter (1934) noted entrepreneurial participation in competition, but noted the strong desire to win. The SBO has limited time, money, and people to spread across several ventures; the commercialization process exhausts resources quickly during the research and development phase (Pellikka & Malinen, 2014). Further, the success of the commercialization process can surpass the knowledge of the entrepreneur, and expensive external assistance is required (Pellikka & Malinen, 2014).

Universities possess resources to help SME's with innovation, given their valuable role in economic development and employment in most communities (Powell, 2012). Knowledge sharing between SMEs and university researchers combine the best of theoretical and practical technology enhancements for a variety of products and services (Powell, 2012). Additionally, new partnerships, based upon mutual respect, materialize through the technology collaboration (Powell, 2012). A joint venture of UK universities and SMEs became a sustainable success due to the collaborative problem-solving-solution model that reaped benefits for stakeholders, especially the SMEs (Powell, 2012). Academic institutions provide supportive services to entrepreneurs, with a mission of improving their professional brand and enhancing the surrounding community with new jobs and services (Jonsson, Baraldi, & Larsson, 2015).

Commercialization contains the creative element of innovation, or the technology of upgrading processes or products that maximize the probability of improving the performance and profitability of the firm (Zabala-Iturriagagoitia, 2012). Innovation is critical for SME market leadership but can be ephemeral when the next competitor enters the market (Lindgren, 2012; Schumpeter, 1942; Wang, Hermens, Huang, & Chelliah, 2015). Innovation management (IM) involves the administration of the hard and soft aspects of commercialization; hard aspects are technology and R&D, and soft aspects are learning and skill development (Zabala-Iturriagagoitia, 2012). Stakeholder opinions, industry regulations, and other external factors are included in IM development (Zabala-Iturriagagoitia, 2012). To manage innovation, the strategic direction of the firm must align with the internal operation (Zabala-Iturriagagoitia, 2012). Strategy and innovation depend on the changing conditions of the internal and external environments, and the SBO must carefully analyze the process to attain compatibility (Zabala-Iturriagagoitia, 2012).

Innovation requires knowledge from existing sources or new ones (Saá-Pérez, Díaz-Díaz, & Ballesteros-Rodríguez, 2012). An investment in training can not only educate key employees, but also motivate them to aim for innovation within the firm (Saá-Pérez et al., 2012). For SMEs, training for innovation is either too expensive or not critical to the current business model (Saá-Pérez et al., 2012). Additionally, SME employees criticize training logistics because they are often unable to leave their position for a day or a week to attend classes (Saá-Pérez et al., 2012). A study regarding the value of innovation training occurred in the Canary Islands with 189 SME participants (Saá-Pérez et al., 2012). The results demonstrated firms used internal knowledge for product or service innovation; the industry with the largest commitment to innovation training is transportation (Saá-Pérez et al., 2012). The hospitality and construction industry planned the least level of training, and older (more than 11 years) SBOs planned more training than firms with less than 11 years in business (Saá-Pérez et al., 2012). Innovation training includes an emphasis on the diversity of people, diversity of ideas, and diversity of skills (Jacka, 2014). Successful innovation training results in employees that appreciate change to improve the existing product or service (Jacka, 2014).

Technology Outlook (TO) is a tool that can be employed to help SBOs manage innovation; formal and informal data resources are managed and filtered based upon the company's strategic direction and technological position within the market (Zabala-Iturriagagoitia, 2012). After examining the data, the SBO decides which technologies are appropriate to pursue and whether the financial resources are available to fund the venture (Zabala-Iturriagagoitia, 2012). The SBO decides how to integrate the innovation into current operations and creates an action plan for stakeholders (Zabala-Iturriagagoitia, 2012). Although tools facilitate innovation management, experiments may fail and employers must reward their subordinates for taking risks, regardless of the outcome (Jacka, 2014).

Entrepreneurial Success Factors

Successful entrepreneurs develop an affective commitment to the enterprise that demonstrates allegiance regardless of the circumstances (Tasnim, Yahya, & Zainuddin, 2014). Affective commitment originates from the entrepreneur's passion, values, and personality, and may fuel an intense desire to succeed (Schumpeter, 1934; Tasnim et al., 2014). Success for SMEs may be defined with two parameters, financial vs non-financial and short-term vs long-term (Phillip, 2011). Phillip (2011) proffered six factors emerged related to small business success from a survey of 89 business owners: (a) entrepreneurial characteristics, (b) management and ability, (c) manner of performing business operations, (d) resources and finance, (e) strategy, and (f) external environment.

Small business crises often include a threat to the firm, a surprise encounter, and a short decision timeframe (Vargo & Seville, 2011). Astute small business owners prepare for information system crises such as data breaches or system crashes (Pett & Wolff, 2012). Management's commitment to data security and appropriate computer system applications add value to the stability of the firm's infrastructure, and ultimately contribute to profitability (Pett & Wolff, 2012). When the leader can retrieve, analyze, and act upon critical operational data, sustainability is enhanced (Pett & Wolff, 2012). Organizational learning (OL) theorists described the growth from operational improvements and SME innovation as a product of trial and error experiences (Wang et al., 2015). When SMEs develop sustainability, management retrieves an operational playbook that includes pertinent activities to prepare for business fluctuations and crises (Vargo & Seville, 2011).

Entrepreneurs must participate in the launch, development, and maintenance of the information system (IS) within the enterprise to ensure that the IS supports the strategic direction and goals of the firm (Lin & Vassar, 2015). The IS system houses data needed for critical decision making for most aspects of the firm, and if the SBO is knowledgeable about the IS, the necessary information is included in the data collected (Lin & Vassar, 2015). The return on the investment into the IS materializes if the necessary information to guide the firm is available, accurate, and automated (Lin &

Vassar, 2015). When an IS system contains the capability of managing voluminous data, one can simplify the data from exporting (Rajendran, 2015). When SME's encounter export barriers including tracking shipments and expediting payment, one develops an IS system designed for these purposes which facilitates order completion (Rajendran, 2015).

Two approaches are available for IS management: bottom up and top down (Lin & Vassar, 2015). The top down approach is superior because of its integrated approach to obtain, secure, and develop issue-directed data to support the enterprise (Lin & Vassar, 2015). Four steps comprise the top down approach to IS integration: (a) identify and prioritize the firm's strategies and business model, (b) evaluate the current IS system and its functionality, (c) forecast the firm's future strategic position, and (d) identify the information requirements to support the firm's future goals and commit the resources necessary to make the enhancements (Lin & Vassar, 2015). Both approaches included web-based applications to generate and maintain accurate, timely information (Rajendran, 2015).

The web is a significant resource for SME sustainability through innovative, business applications, such as e-business (Mohamad & Ismail, 2013). E-business is an effective method for improving the efficiency and productivity of firm operations, in addition to enhancing communication among stakeholders through faster, more accurate data exchange (Mohamad & Ismail, 2013). Mohamad and Ismail (2013) studied e-business usage among SME and found most were comfortable with customer-related functions but had not pursued procurement or ordering applications. Three distinct categories of e-business usage appeared: (a) all-embracive adopters use the web in most of their business activities, (b) modest adopters use the web in selected functions such as sales, searches, and internal matters, and (c) restricted users who only search on the internet (Mohamad & Ismail, 2013). The study does provide evidence that e-business is positively associated with cumulative sustainability benefits (Mohamad & Ismail, 2013). Electronic marketing (EM), also known as e-commerce, improves the firm's relationship with customers in the business-to-business setting, and a sufficient financial allocation to this action improves marketing performance (Eid & El-Gohary, 2013). Marketing goals include increased sales, improved brand recognition, new customers, or reduced costs (Eid & El-Gohary, 2013).

Another key success factor is a proactive and informed attitude about the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), its services and the annual changes affecting SMEs (Tool, Williamson, & Whittenburg, 2015). Although many SBOs have accountants or bookkeepers, a shrewd SBO understands the implications of crucial tax laws that impact the profitability of the firm (Tool et al., 2015). One area of IRS concern is the use of independent contractors (Tool et al., 2015). Some SBOs have used independent contractors to avoid paying payroll tax and providing benefits; the IRS routinely examines the employee's role and compares it to similar roles within the firm to settle a dispute (Tool et al., 2015). When SBOs maintain detailed record keeping systems, tax filing becomes easier and less stressful (Mazzarol, Reboud, & Clark, 2015).

Service businesses originate from many industries and launch with limited resources and capital (Wilson & Hainault, 2015). The SBO bridges the gap between expected and actual service quality to attract and retain customers (Wilson & Hainault, 2015). Marketing strategies challenge some SBOs and as a result, reduce the chances of survival (Wilson & Hainault, 2015). A survey of a Midwestern campus medical clinic indicated new users rated the operation as substandard, while regular users deemed the service satisfactory (Wilson & Hainault, 2015). A marketing program designed to address the new user opinion included brochures, tours, radio commercials, and testimonial ads from regular patients helped to reduce this perception of inferior quality (Wilson & Hainault, 2015). The authors concluded marketing penetrates most services within a SME to improve and sustain a quality image with the consumer (Wilson & Hainault, 2015).

A business plan increases the possibility of SME financial success when followed consistently (Blackburn, Hart, & Wainwright, 2013). Firm age and size were more critical to sustainability than business strategy or the owner's traits, but problems occurred because of internal conflict (Blackburn et al., 2013). The inner workings of a small firm are sometimes complex and difficult to isolate from other variables, (i.e. sales, turnover, staffing, profitability, management), making analysis challenging for researchers and owners (Blackburn et al., 2013). Thorough bookkeeping provides financial information, facilitating decisions on branding, financing, and strategy (Chhabra & Pattanayak, 2014).

The SBO spends more time on short- term decisions than long term strategic planning (Ates, Garengo, Cocca, & Bititci 2013). To incorporate sustainability strategies, entrepreneurs should integrate performance management strategies in the leadership process; many owners have never finalized the firm's mission, vision, or goals (Ates et al., 2013). Change is often difficult for a small firm, but when a proactive leader implements strategies with a defined plan for the future (rather than reacting to a crisis), change is extremely beneficial (Ates et al., 2013). Strategic planning, with the aid of financial forecasting tools, helps to (a) define the goals, strategies, and resources for the business, (b) prepare solutions for possible external and internal changes, and (c) determine the impact on the firm's stakeholders (Demyen & Ciurea, 2014). Forward-looking preparation, (often a low priority for SMEs), works best in one-year increments to navigate unpredictable market fluctuations and internal events (Demyen & Ciurea, 2014). Internally focused strategic planning aligns positively with SME success, as does the owner's previous business experience (Harris, Gibson, & McDowell, 2014). Strategies designed to respect the environment not only enhance the corporate brand, but also pay dividends financially (Hemmasi, Graf, Strong, & Winchell, 2015). Expenses decrease from a strong, deliberate environmental policy, as more governments begin to institute and enforce environmental crime penalties (Hemmasi et al., 2015).

Owner expertise also effects SME success when transferred during employee training (Chinomona 2013). Expertise is the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the owner (Chinomona, 2013). Chinomona (2013) found the small business owner's expertise, when transferred to his or her staff, provided positive performance outcomes. Entrepreneurial skills emerge and mature throughout the life of the firm (Chell, 2013). Skill is different from ability; skill is a level of proficiency that reflects a mastery of a particular task, whereas, ability connotes a general competence that is neither unusual nor extraordinary (Chell, 2013). Chell (2013) pointed to market opportunity recognition as the most critical skill for entrepreneurial success.

When owners possessed marketing training, new venture launch and small business performance improved (Alasadi & Al Sabbagh, 2015). Social media is the current recipe for small business marketing success (Geho & Dangelo, 2012). Entrepreneurs who maximize the strategic use of social media and the internet reap significant returns on their time and resource investment (Geho & Dangelo, 2012). Although some owners complain that internet marketing takes too much time, social media applications and external marketing firms are available to reduce this perceived burden (Geho & Dangelo, 2012). For example, *Hootsuite* is a social media dashboard that incorporates several social media tools with one message (Geho & Dangelo, 2012). The SME can also monitor activity on Hootsuite and stay abreast of the source of the messaging as well as the frequency of usage (Geho & Dangelo, 2012). Additionally, social media strategies are also appropriate for internal communication in the SME sales and customer service departments (Schaupp & Bélanger, 2014).

Although most SMEs start with some form of marketing plan, few develop brand awareness in the short-term (Centeno, Hart, & Dinnie, 2013). Small business branding includes (a) the owner's reputation, (b) the product or service differentiation, (c) the brand as a symbol, (d) the brand as the enterprise, and (e) the brand market maturity (Centeno et al., 2013). The entrepreneur's commitment to the brand is crucial to accelerate the brand development process (Centeno et al., 2013). Brand enterprise growth also hinges upon internal team building; pride appears when the staff supports the leader and fosters open communication, shared goals, innovative thinking, and organizational strength (Centeno et al., 2013).

Entrepreneurial marketing activities vary based on the size and characteristics of the organization (Eggers, Hansen, & Davis, 2012). Two factors, entrepreneurial orientation (EO) and customer orientation (CO) modify the entrepreneurial marketing strategy (Eggers et al., 2012). EO is the level of innovativeness and risk acceptance of a SME, and CO describes the level of customer commitment to satisfaction (Eggers et al., 2012). EO positively aligns with business performance (Covin & Slevin 1991; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996), and the presence of this trait influences strategic direction (Eggers et al., 2012). Wang et al. (2015) wrote EO supports innovation advancement, in spite of limited resources, due to the inherent firm agility due to the smaller size. EO also spurs *creative destruction* by replacing dated and ineffective processes with new, more productive systems (Schumpeter, 1942; Wang et al., 2015). A competitive advantage is a direct consequence of innovation among opposing brands; this benefit relates to the core business strategy and as such, is a crucial factor of EO (Schumpeter, 1942; Wang et al., 2015).

Entrepreneurial Failure Factors

Hisrich et al. (2008) proffered business failure is the point when profitability becomes insolvency and the opportunity for external funding is nonexistent. A study of failed United Kingdom firms from 1999-2009 revealed location, industry, legal structure, and firm size were crucial factors when net income is the metric; firms located in urban districts and in the manufacturing industry reached the highest income levels, but still failed (Williams, 2014). Fernández-Guerrero et al. (2012) pointed to four reasons for nascent firm failure: (a) owners are unfamiliar with the roles and responsibilities of entrepreneurship, (b) management roles conflict with inherent creative or technical expertise, (c) social interaction with employees is unfamiliar; and (d) new relationships with external stakeholders cause uncertainty. Start-up risk and financial constraints impede nascent entrepreneurship based upon a study comparing early-stage businesses and mature firms (Nunes & Serrasqueiro, 2012). Entrepreneurs lose confidence when a business fails; limited resources and an inability to respond quickly with a solution leads to the conclusion sustainability impossible (Mandl, Berger, & Kuckertz, 2016).

Entrepreneurs refrain from discussing crisis management; to acknowledge the possibility of failure taints the motivation of the owner and the staff (Pellikka & Malinen, 2014). Financial crises lead to a loss of owner's equity, liquidation of assets, displacement of employees, and ancillary harm to the external stakeholders of the firm (Pellikka & Malinen, 2014). The SBO panics when managing extreme events, (as a flood), and haphazardly stumbles through crisis intervention, with no concrete plan or resource reserves (Sullivan-Taylor & Branicki, 2011). Some SBOs feel inadequate regarding resourcefulness, capacity, and technical ability, but are confident urgency is strength during crises (Sullivan-Taylor & Branicki, 2011). A uniform crises intervention plan will not apply to all SMEs, given their unique organizational characteristics and limitations (Sullivan-Taylor & Branicki, 2011). Advanced planning for extreme events, with respect to the firm's strengths and weaknesses, bolsters the possibility of survival (Pellikka & Malinen, 2014; Sullivan-Taylor & Branicki, 2011). Crises can foster unethical decision-making (Baron, Zhao, & Miao, 2015). When SBOs struggle with enterprise sustainability, normal decision-making falters due to moral disengagement, or the process of acting against your ethical judgment (Baron et al., 2015). Researchers found the desire for financial gain aligned positively with moral disengagement and unethical behavior, while self- realization through self-employment correlated negatively with unethical decision-making (Baron et al., 2015). Although the researchers acknowledged most entrepreneurs seek financial gain, they identified unethical decisions as the result of a strong desire to reach financial goals by compromising integrity (Baron et al., 2015).

Entrepreneurship contains significant risk, yet there is limited information on this topic, in spite of the growing numbers of nascent entrepreneurs (Miles, 2014a). Miles (2014a) wrote scholars have not attempted to define entrepreneurial risk as a variable within and without the organization; the level of risk for various enterprises is still relatively unknown. Risk cannot be labeled the cause of business failure, but the two conditions are indirectly connected (Miles, 2014a).

A study of diverse SMEs in the United States categorized risk into the following categories: (a) industry economic, (b) security, (c) market, (d) global economic, (e) internal forces, (f) business enterprise, (g) profitability, and (h) miscellaneous risks (Miles, 2014a). Internal risk, including the analytical, social, and leadership skills of the business owner, helps to determine other conceivable causes of entrepreneurial failure (Elmuti et al., 2012). When resources are limited, SMEs rely on a small customer base and expect their employees to handle many responsibilities, placing social capital at risk (Parsa, van der Rest, Smith, Parsa, & Bujisic, 2015).

Less than 1 in 25 SBOs survive long enough to employ 50 people due to the intrinsic challenges of growth (Freeman & Siegfried, 2015). Amel and Akkari (2012) wrote a firm's position in a life cycle affects the cause of failure; nascent firms close because of inadequate experience and training as well as limited resources, whereas older companies shut down due to financial mismanagement. The success or failure of SMEs depends on financial sustainability and access to capital (Mazzarol et al., 2015). Some SBOs lack financial management as numerous firms have poor record keeping systems that the owner carelessly operates (Mazzarol et al., 2015). The SBO often launches his or her businesses with insufficient legal protection that ultimately resulted in costly attorney fees (McDarby & Park, 2015). Litigation over intellectual property ownership can divide and destroy a business, if legal documentation is inaccurate or filed late (McDarby & Park, 2015).

Three sources of financing exist for SBOs: debt, equity, and retained earnings; however, the firm's inherent financial weaknesses and internal governance is often too risky for the bank's credit policies (Mazzarol et al., 2015). Failure occurs at any point in the business life cycle: birth, growth, maturity, decline, and revival, with each phase lasting approximately 6 years (von Wobeser, 2016). Miles (2014a) studied 201 SMEs from various industries to determine what types of risk were dominant causes of entrepreneurial failure. The results illustrated eight factors contribute to entrepreneurial risk: (a) industry forces, (b) security issues, (c) government policies, (d) market conditions, (e) global elements, (f) firm finances, (g) competition, and (h) business climate (Miles, 2014a). Priestly (2011) wrote SMEs, such as other organizations, grapple with environmental factors but have fewer financial and human resources than larger entities. Strategic planning of some level occurs in every organization, but quality and timeliness is lacking with SMEs (Cordeiro, 2013). Cordeiro (2013) wrote that an entrepreneur faces failure by ignoring the following: (a) defining goals, (b) understanding the environment, (c) maintaining a competitive advantage, and (d) preparing for the future's challenges.

Cader and Leatherman (2011) studied SME demise with data from the Kansas Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) files from 1990 to 2003 for 105 Kansas counties. Of the 90,134 firms observed, more than 40% of the firms did not survive after 3 years, and 42% of the firms survived after 5 years (Cader & Leatherman, 2011). Of the industries represented, technology enterprises were most likely to fail within the first 5 years, suggesting the operating environment is more volatile (Cader & Leatherman, 2011). Often, SMEs grapple with internal responsibility and external demands that prevent them from spending the necessary time and resources for employee training and strategic planning (Alasa & Al Sabbagh, 2015). As a result, the owner does not review the BM for weaknesses (Alasadi & Al Sabbagh, 2015). External training is an option, but many owners consider it another non-critical expense that reduces profit, or are unsure of the training's value (Alasadi & Al Sabbagh, 2015).

Small businesses face financial risk by operating with insufficient cash flow and limited equity reserves (Thun, Drake, & Hoenig, 2011). These weaknesses contribute to SME operational challenges when supply chain participants deviate from agreements or policies, as in selecting a competitor to do business with (Thun et al., 2011). Another risk is global competition; when suppliers and customers are in other countries, the supply chain becomes increasingly complicated due to location, culture, and costs (Thun et al., 2011). Additionally, when larger corporate customers decide to single-source parts or supplies, small firms struggle to provide the necessary items to compete for the sales opportunity (Thun et al., 2011). Phillip (2011) agreed environmental changes have a much greater impact on small firms than corporate entities, because of the inability to react quickly with limited internal resources.

Unmet financial needs impair SME performance (Blazy &Weill, 2013). Bankers are often unwilling to underwrite the perceived risk of small business loans and when available, the financing is more expensive and may require additional collateral (Blazy &Weill, 2013). Some small firms do not own assets the bank deems acceptable for collateral (Blazy & Weill, 2013). Collateral may be internal or external; internal collateral pertains to accounts receivable, inventory, or business equipment, and external collateral is real estate or other assets located outside of the firm (Blazy &Weill, 2013). Collateral reduces the bank's losses if the business fails, but appears to have little to do with inducing the borrower to repay the loan to maintain control of the asset (Blazy &Weill, 2013). Van Caneghem and van Campenhout (2012) wrote poor quality and insufficient quantity of financial statements negatively align with SME loan approvals, as do the inadequate value of internal assets. Frequently SBOs invest their personal funds into the business for working capital, creating a co-mingling relationship between personal and business funding that complicates financial analysis (van Caneghem & van Campenhout, 2012).

Restaurant Industry Characteristics

Americans spent approximately 709 billion dollars on external food purchases in 2015, and restaurants are the second largest private-sector employer in the nation with 14 million workers (National Restaurant Association, 2015). The restaurant contains a high degree of firm mortality due to several industry-related factors (Parsa et al., 2015). Restaurants require minimal resources to launch, permitting those with limited skills to enter (Parsa et al., 2015). Other factors that align with restaurant failure are size limitations, unsatisfactory location, single unit ownership, and the lack of a respected brand name (Parsa et al., 2015). Failure in the beginning years is prevalent among small restaurants; the lack of internal controls leads to reduced profitability, inefficiency, and closure (Frazer, 2012). A study employing a random sample of 270 nascent restaurant owner/managers in New York demonstrated attention to food and labor costs, (through effective internal policy implementation and review), enhances profitability, efficiency, and improved sustainability (Frazer, 2012). Internal control is management's ability to establish policies and procedures to report financial results, comply with required regulations, and efficiently manage all aspects of the internal restaurant operation (Frazer, 2012).

Economic conditions have a direct effect on restaurants (Lee & Ha, 2012). Patronage at full-service restaurants increased during periods of economic prosperity, apparently a reflection of stronger consumer disposable spending (Lee & Ha, 2012). Duarte, O'Neill, Liu, and O'Shea (2013) affirmed restaurants are essential to the travel, agriculture, and the entertainment sectors, as well as adding significant jobs to domestic and global economies. Restaurant SBOs face operational risks including economic uncertainty, labor issues, and competition that threaten sustainability (Duarte et al., 2013). As consumer preferences change with time and trend, restaurant owners need to stay abreast of market research to identify opportunities for gaining market share or reducing unnecessary expenses (Duarte et al., 2013).

Wu, Huang, and Chou (2014) found restaurant customers are more concerned about the experience than price, and will seldom return to an establishment after enduring substandard service or cleanliness. If service is slow, regardless of quality, the customer changes his or her preference (Wu et al., 2014). Current expectations must align with current restaurant outcomes to ensure a customer is satisfied and becomes a repeat patron (Wu et al., 2014). Frash (2012) proffered alcohol service enhances the customer experience and produces higher tips to servers. The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) governs tipping, which baffles some SBOs due to its complicated regulations (Eisenberg & Williams, 2015). Servers receive hourly wages less than the national standard legally, with the benefit of individual tips from customers (Eisenberg & Williams, 2015). Tipping remains controversial with restaurant employees. The *back-of-the-house* employees complain their jobs are as important as the wait staff, and should receive equal compensation (Bellini, 2016). Due to the current controversial tipping issues, some SBOs have opted out of tipping, and raised all hourly wages (Bellini, 2016).

Restaurant SBOs need to know what criteria consumers use to select restaurants, given the extremely competitive nature of the retail dining market (Harrington, Ottenbacher & Way, 2013). Restaurant categories include fast food, take out, casual dining or quick serve, and fine dining or upscale; customers select those establishments that satisfy both tangible and intangible preferences (Ha & Jang, 2012). Value is a critical determinant for repeat patronage, and customers expect to receive benefits as much, if not more, than they pay for the meal (Ha & Jang, 2012). Quick service restaurants (QSR), or limited service restaurants, are popular choices for many demographic sectors, with certain traits more important to customers than others (Harrington et al., 2013). For example, the availability of discounts to senior citizens is a leading attraction to restaurants for those individuals over 55 years of age (Harrington et al., 2013). In a quantitative study of Southwestern restaurant patrons, the following criteria were deemed to be most desired when selecting a QSR, in order of importance: (a) food safety, (b) cleanliness, (c) food quality, (d) service speed, (e) perceived value, (f) service quality, (g) friendliness of staff, (h) price, (i) menu variety, and (j) distance (Harrington et al., 2013). Regarding the practical application to restaurant sustainability, owners should consider the traits above when deciding on employee training and incentives, marketing, and resource allocation (Harrington et al., 2013).

Demographic differences do not sway restaurant patrons' opinion of the fine dining experience (Singer & Arora, 2015). The results of a study on Midwestern middle-aged patrons demonstrated both sexes scored evenly on food pleasure, arousal, and dominance, but women scored higher on the intensity of emotion (Singer & Arora, 2015). Restaurant consumers from all demographics expect individualized attention during the dining experience (Singer & Arora, 2015). Restaurant owners employ the five senses (sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell) in the ambience, to gain loyalty, regardless of gender (Singer & Arora, 2015). Patrons require a positive, emotional service experience to become a regular customer (Singer & Arora, 2015). Service failure, or the customer's belief the restaurant is substandard in food or service, inevitably leads to financial losses

(Chen, 2014). The first three kinds of service failures, (in terms of frequency), were slow service, failure to provide proper service, and failure to provide service in the order of customer arrival (Chen, 2014). The top three complaints related to intensity were poor staff hygiene, lack of professional knowledge or technique, and poor service (Chen, 2014). When dissatisfied with the restaurant experience, patrons complain to the server, demand a replacement meal, or request management intervention (Chang, Khan, & Tsai, 2012). On special occasions or with family, patrons aggressively protest when food or service is substandard (Chang et al., 2012).

The restaurant environment is one of the most influential factors of customer satisfaction, second only to food quality; theme, ambience, and décor contribute to a positive experience and reinforce the restaurant brand (Ryu, Lee, & Kim, 2012). Similarly, the most important factors to consumers at the popular buffet restaurants are food freshness, hygiene, variety and reliability, value, and staff friendliness in that order (Oyewole, 2013). Customers defined by frequent, less frequent, and more frequent are the targets for promotional benefits similar to airline customers, providing points to those who come most often (Oyewole, 2013). Restaurant loyalty develops from a continued commitment to quality and patron satisfaction (Bowden-Everson, Dagger, & Elliott, 2013). Satisfaction must be the goal to create customer loyalty; loyalty emanates from trust, customer experience, and emotional commitment (Bowden-Everson et al., 2013). When food quality is excellent, satisfied patrons pay over $25.00 more for the meal in upscale facilities and $2.47 more in QSRs (Parsa, Self, Gregory, & Dutta, 2013).

Servers play a vital role in developing patron satisfaction (Baker, Murrman, & Green, 2013). Restaurant staff must seamlessly move among social sub-cultures of patrons of varied demographics and ethnicities with agility and adaptability, especially in urban settings (Baker et al., 2013). In spite of cultural differences, the wait staff should respect and cater to individual customer needs, if possible, including timing, diet restrictions, and cooking style (Baker et al., 2013). Employee turnover is a major problem in the restaurant industry, affecting operational efficiency and profitability; restaurant owners must carefully recruit, train, and develop employees for CO as well as sustainability (Gazzoli, Hancer, & Park, 2012).

The entrepreneurial food industry differs from other economic sectors because of three unique supply chain behaviors (Liang & Dunn, 2014). Firstly, the supply chain participants align closely to each other but are very unpredictable, often due to weather conditions and the impact on agriculture (Liang & Dunn, 2014). Secondly, when there is a food pandemic, a ripple effect cripples supply chain participants (Liang & Dunn, 2014). Damage remains hidden when there is dysfunction within the supply chain (Liang & Dunn, 2014). When nascent restaurant owners grapple with financial forecasting and miscalculate labor or food, profitability wanes (Kokkinou, 2013). For example, if the restaurant owner predicts a large crowd for a holiday dinner and inclement weather arrives, losses occur due to overages in labor and food (Kokkinou, 2013). Intricate financial models are available to assist with financial projections, but the implementation cost for small operators is too expensive for small operators (Kokkinou, 2013).

Food SBOs face some risks that non-food entrepreneurs do not, although they are more similar than different (Liang & Dunn, 2014). Risks include difficulty creating and maintaining a successful BM, and economic factors such as employment, taxes, and sales (Liang & Dunn, 2014). The US government has created numerous technical and management programs to research and support food enterprises (Liang & Dunn, 2014).

A case study of a small restaurant in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina vividly describes the tremendous challenges the SBO faced after the storm (Lacho & Kiefer, 2012). The owner, a retired government worker, opened a restaurant with family support in 2007. The owner did not create a business plan and used personal cash to launch the enterprise, as the owner is unwilling to submit personal financial information or tax returns required by the bank (Lacho & Kiefer, 2012). Hurricane Katrina bypassed the location selected for the Greek restaurant, but the city of New Orleans collapsed with over 1800 dead (Lacho & Kiefer, 2012). There were government programs available for remodeling, but the SBO worked with private firms for the restaurant's construction (Lacho & Kiefer, 2012). The restaurant opened in 2008 and within months, the owner was struggling with family, financial, and management challenges (Lacho & Kiefer, 2012). Without any industry experience, or additional cash reserves, the owner realized the restaurant was at severe risk (Lacho & Kiefer, 2012). The owner reflected on several *lessons-learned* when she started this venture (a) she should have written a business plan, (b) she should have gained industry experience, (c) she should have selected a location that is busy with other restaurant traffic, and (d) she did not maximize the use of assistance with free or low-cost resources and programs (Lacho & Kiefer, 2012).

A 2013 quantitative study on restaurant sustainability revealed several factors are crucial for survival following a financial calamity (Hua, Xiao, & Yost, 2013). A restaurant's location, growth speed, owner or manager experience, and brand contribute to the success or failure of a restaurant (Hua et al., 2013). The authors also noted an inferior product, unpleasant operating environment, and uncontrollable external factors (economy, competition), also lead to failure (Hua et al., 2013). Technical support for franchised enterprises appear to buttress survival during turbulent financial periods, as does improved efficiency of internal asset usage to augment working capital (Hua et al., 2013).

Liang and Dunn (2014) studied the characteristics of food and non-food entrepreneurs between 2009 and 2011 and found more than 34% of the food entrepreneurs had started their businesses within the last 5 years, as compared to 26% of the non-food entrepreneurs. Most food SBOs employed part -time staff, whereas non-food SBOs hired primarily full-time staff (Liang & Dunn, 2014). Regarding previous experience, 9% more food entrepreneurs had management backgrounds than non-food entrepreneurs (Liang & Dunn, 2014). More than 80% of food entrepreneurs confessed starting a business is harder than they imagined and required more time than the non-food SBOs with 73% (Liang & Dunn, 2014). Food entrepreneurs operated in urban areas unlike non-food entrepreneurs who chose suburban locations (Liang & Dunn, 2014).

Restaurant owners must be vigilant about upholding safety standards within their establishments; in the United States, officials inspect food operations for safety and health violations (Jin & Lee, 2014). Food inspectors arrive unannounced and review safety, business, and hygiene conditions including cleanliness, sanitation, food temperatures, employee attire, fire hazards, and utensil maintenance (Jin & Lee, 2014). Violations of food service standards result in fines or closure (Jin & Lee, 2014). Employee safety is another concern for restaurant owners; cuts, falls, and work-related injuries reduce work efficiency, meal production and staff morale (Gentzler & Smither, 2012). Technological advances in restaurant equipment, such as automated hand tools for polishing silverware, alleviate some safety concerns (Gentzler & Smither, 2012).

Technology is a significant component of restaurant branding strategies (McDarby & Park, 2015). Innovation, or *state-of-the-art* technology enhancements, disrupt restaurant operations and provide some operators with a competitive advantage (McDarby & Park, 2015). With the advent of 3D printing, restaurants are able to use tools that create elaborate designs within cakes and customize food recipes that previously were bland and unpopular (McDarby & Park, 2015). Robots can replace human workers for many food prep tasks, but technological changes are expensive and unpopular (McDarby & Park, 2015). Technology can also improve the customer experience through electronic food ordering (Beldona, Buchanan, & Miller, 2014). The restaurant menu has been the primary method for food ordering for decades, as well as a marketing tool, but an electronic ordering system can enhance the customer experience with touch-screen ease and rapid order processing (Beldona et al., 2014). The traditional menu contained a verbal description of the food, along with photos that captured the most attractive version of a food selection (Beldona et al., 2014). An e-tablet has the same capabilities as the traditional menu but offers more menu customization, greater food description details, interactive customer communication, and entertainment through gaming applications (Beldona et al., 2014).

Although the technology trend has improved some restaurant operations, many restaurant owners are not utilizing green policies for waste management, building design, or recycling (Kasim & Ismail, 2012). Owner support, cost concerns, and employee cooperation are crucial factors for successful environmental platforms in restaurants (Kasim & Ismail, 2012). Owners who respect the value of community stakeholder support are more willing to institute new policies, as a part of their ethical and moral obligation to patrons (Kasim & Ismail, 2012). The results demonstrated most restaurant owners strive for sales and profits and forego expensive, new procedures (Kasim & Ismail, 2012). When restaurant owners employed team-building strategies, shared vision discussions, and encouraged trust within the operation, environmental policy implementation met employee approval (Tibon, 2014).

Ethical food consumption is another trend in the issues restaurant owners face (Sebastiani, Montagnini, & Dalli, 2013). Ethics enters the food discussion through fair trade regulations, safety, labor laws, environmental preservation, and animal treatment (Sebastiani et al., 2013). In a 2010 study of ethical consumption, Sebastiani et al. (2013)

revealed customers were impressed with restaurants that purchased fresh products locally and permitted customers to engage in the menu product offerings (Sebastiani et al., 2013). This qualitative study contained data suggesting when a BM contains collaboration between a restaurant and a social cause organization, mutual benefits result, including the patron (Sebastiani et al., 2013). Another ethical concern is obesity; recent legislation requires restaurant chains of 20 units or more to post the caloric content on the menu (Bolton, 2014). Whether the labeling actually encourages healthier food choices is still under debate (Bolton, 2014). Restaurants must fund the financial burden of collecting the nutritional data, reprinting menus, and training staff on nutritional content (Bolton, 2014). Currently, small restaurants post nutritional information voluntarily, but some have hired specialists to facilitate the nutritional examination and paid hefty fees (Bolton, 2014).

Fast-food restaurants depend upon technology to improve the efficiency and quality of food choices (Asdullah & Ahmad, 2015). Fast-food SBOs recognize the political, economic, and social trends of the food industry, such as new sanitation regulations, tax hikes, and food taste trends (Asdullah & Ahmad, 2015). The internal operating environment, comprised of technology, people, policies, and equipment, are the key factors for system success (Asdullah & Ahmad, 2015). Fast- food customers become dissatisfied if they perceive the wait time is excessive, and they will often complain to management or leave the restaurant (Iqbal, Whitman, & Malzahn, 2012). The busiest time for most fast- food restaurant is 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm during the week when service appears to slow down to the customer (Iqbal et al., 2012). A study of a fast- food restaurant on a college campus demonstrated the addition of one extra server to address the customer buildup offsets the labor expense in increased sales, and enhances customer satisfaction (Iqbal et al., 2012).

A common BM for restaurants is the franchise operation (Roh, Tarasi, & Popa, 2013). Franchisees assume the BM from the franchisor and pay ongoing fees in exchange for management, financial, and marketing support (Roh et al., 2013). Non-franchised restaurant owners withstand more debt, have less liquidity, and less managerial depth (Roh et al., 2013). Efficiency and profitability were also stronger with franchised restaurants, although the data from this quantitative study did not include smaller *mom and pop* establishments (Roh et al., 2013). Concept restaurants represent another trending BM (McDarby & Park, 2015). A concept restaurant BM includes a theme that captures all branding (McDarby & Park, 2015). Although concept restaurants generate a great deal of media attention, restaurant owners sometimes focus too much on the theme and less on the service and quality (McDarby & Park, 2015). The successful restaurant owner has developed a unique blend of concept ambience with quality food and service; when one becomes more critical than the other, customers notice the inconsistency and dine elsewhere (McDarby & Park, 2015). In the restaurant industry, the product and the service are difficult to separate from the restaurant brand, also known as the experience (Su, 2011).

Ethnic restaurants are similar to concept establishments because of the deep branding penetration within the ambience (Su, 2011). A key element to sustainability is the continuing attraction to the restaurant because of its ambience, which requires constant creativity in service styles and menu selections (Su, 2011). The *servicescape* or service experience is a crucial component of customer attraction; customers expect excitement from the ambience to realize a considerable return on their time and dollars expended (Su, 2011). Service innovation develops from the addition of technology to enhance food and service quality, improve the organizational structure, and uplift external restaurant features (Su, 2011).

Customers rank service as a major determinant of repeat patronage and customer satisfaction (Kanta & Srivalli, 2014). A study of Indian restaurants did not suggest a link between satisfaction and repeat patronage (Kanta & Srivalli, 2014). The study demonstrated educated customers expect higher quality service than less educated patrons, with educated reflecting junior college and beyond (Kanta & Srivalli, 2014). The study's outcome has global application to restaurant corporations that launch a site in a middle-eastern country, where cultural differences determine sustainability (Kanta & Srivalli, 2014).

Transition

Section 1 began with the introduction, problem statement, purpose statement, and information on the struggle SBOs face during the first 4 years in business. Key topics in this section were the nature of study, research questions, conceptual framework, significance of study, and literature review. Themes within the literature review were (a) nascent entrepreneurship, (b) elements of entrepreneurial activity, (c) the business model and innovation, (d) entrepreneurial success factors, (e) entrepreneurial failure factors, and (f) restaurant characteristics.

Section 2 included the purpose statement, role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization techniques, data analysis techniques, and reliability and validity. Section 3 includes the purpose statement and overarching research question. The results of the study, a detailed summary of the observed evidence, links to the conceptual framework from the research question, and study conclusions are the next components. Implications for social change and recommendations for action conclude the study.

Section 2: The Project

I selected small business sustainability as the topic for this study, with an Ohio restaurant older than 4 years as my participant. The participant had less than 500 employees and was not a franchisee. The results of this study facilitated the development of success strategies for other restaurant owners during the first 4 years when most small businesses fail. Small businesses contribute to the community by augmenting employment (Link & Scott, 2012), thereby providing stability to the economy (Haltiwanger et al., 2013).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore what strategies small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 4 years. One independent Ohio restaurant owner, over 21 years old, participated in a face-to-face recorded interview to share his individual perspectives and lived experiences during the first 4 years of operation. I methodologically triangulated the data by reviewing the internal operating statements of the participant firm and existing research on small business sustainability. The results of my study can help other SBOs develop survival strategies from learning the operational practices of those entrepreneurs who have reached the fifth year. If small businesses have enhanced sustainability, employment trends and economic stability also improve, thereby contributing to social change within the surrounding community.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection in qualitative studies (Baškarada, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The researcher must facilitate the collection of reliable and valid information from participant interviews, documents, and observations (Baškarada, 2014). As the researcher, I have worked in the Ohio small business sector for over 30 years as a small business banker, consultant, owner, writer, and instructor. I have practical experience in the small business food industry as one of the founders and owners of a food marketing company still operating after 25 years, in addition to other nonfood related small businesses. I was also the marketing manager for several restaurants located inside a major retailer earlier in my career.

Bias appears in some qualitative research because of the interaction between the facilitator and the participants on topics both parties are familiar with (Hadidi et al., 2013; Odierna, Forsyth, White, & Bero, 2013; Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). To mitigate any researcher prejudices, I have carefully patterned my interview questions from seminal case study recommendations from Yin (2014). Researchers must also respect the participants' rights, privacy, and feelings, with a focus on balancing the risk against the benefits (Mikesell, Bromley, & Khodyakov, 2013). Ethical principles and behavior, as outlined in the Belmont Report, guided my research and behavior in this study.

An interview protocol provides the researcher with a script to follow during the research investigation (Jacob & Furguson, 2012). The researcher uses a protocol form to record the critical aspects of the interview including observations and notes (Jacob &

Furguson, 2012). Yin (2014) wrote that the interview questions are the foundation of the data gathering process.

Participants

Yin (2014) wrote that participants for a case study should reflect the business environment under review. In a purposeful sample, the researcher should select a participant who will provide a deep, realistic perception and opinion of the research topic (Dworkin, 2012; Yin, 2014). Cronin-Gilmore (2012) selected a purposeful sample of small business owners for a study on their knowledge and choice of marketing strategies. Martin, McNeill, and Warren-Smith (2013) chose a purposeful sample of eight small farmers to explore business growth through ecological innovation. Yin (2014) wrote a purposeful sample must have at least one member.

My purposeful sample was one independent, operating Ohio restaurant owner with less than 500 employees. The restaurant opened more than 4 years ago, and the owner is over 21 years of age. I contacted a local small business agency and asked for recommendations of restaurant clients who were willing to participate in this study. I selected one of those recommended, and contacted him to discuss my study, explained the process on the phone, and followed up with a subsequent letter (see Appendix A).

During the initial telephone conversation, I introduced myself, mentioned the referral source as a point of familiarity, and explained the purpose of my study. I also provided a copy of my resume, for further relationship building, that included my previous roles in a food marketing company and marketing manager of a restaurant chain and professional references upon request.

Research Method and Design

The following section includes a justification for the chosen research method and design. The design selection emerged after the research method and aligned with the problem statement and the overarching research question as noted by Ali and Yusof (2012). I also submitted academic support for my protocol decisions based upon qualitative research theory, ethics, and principles.

Research Method

My study was qualitative, given the research goal was to explore the factors contributing to small businesses' failure before the fifth year. Qualitative research reveals the causes behind and conditions surrounding a phenomenon, rather than studying the relationship between variables, a characteristic of quantitative studies (Hlady-Rispal & Jouison-Laffitte, 2014; Howard & Rennie, 2013). Baškarada (2014) wrote qualitative research contains questions starting with *what* or *how* to open investigation of a particular phenomenon. The qualitative research methodology is valuable when (a) the study is exploratory, (b) yes-or-no responses are inadequate to explain the circumstances, (c) themes help to explain the data, (d) a large sample is not used, (e) the researcher attempts to interpret a lived experience, or (f) the researcher provides an interpretation of the data (Baškarada,2014). As this study reflects the lived experiences of an SBO during the first 4 years of operation, the qualitative format was appropriate.

Some scholars may doubt the validity of qualitative research, blaming subjective inquiry and inadequate sample sizes as reasons for insufficient data saturation (Dworkin, 2012; Marshall et al., 2013). Quantitative studies reflect the relationship between variables numerically and do not include the reasons behind a circumstance (Barnham, 2015). In a quantitative study of new business failure in three countries, outcomes were inconsistent and produced no new insights (Lussier & Halabi, 2010). When research results are difficult to measure, a quantitative methodology is inconsequential and futile (Barnham, 2015). Watkins (2012) wrote when a hypothesis requires the analysis of numbers and measurements, a quantitative approach works well, which was not the case with my study.

Mixed method researchers blend the quantitative and qualitative techniques to display a comprehensive review of the circumstance (Zhang & Watanabe-Galloway, 2014). Dumbili (2014) wrote combining quantitative and qualitative research is a credible strategy to create a complete picture of a research topic, but my study does not include any quantitative analysis. Additionally, due to the time required to complete an impactful mixed method study and its limited value, I decided to proceed with the qualitative methodology.

Research Design

The appropriate research design depends upon the overarching research goal (Yin, 2014). In the following subsection, I considered three study designs: (a) case study, (b) phenomenology, and (c) ethnography. With respect to qualitative choices, case studies allow a researcher to compile information on real life issues and circumstances from the participants through a variety of data collection techniques (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Case studies are appropriate when the environment and the circumstance are difficult to separate, as with a struggling entrepreneur in a business setting (Dasgupta, 2015; Lyons, Goodwin, McCreanor, & Griffin, 2015). Case studies are not dependent on controlled environments, as in an experiment; the researcher seeks a current understanding of the members' experience in a specific circumstance in their words (Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012). Turner and Danks (2014) wrote a major advantage of case study research is its real-world application. Case study research contains any number of participants, with the exact number up to the researcher (Hyett et al., 2014).

Themes arise during the inquiry that identify and explain the member's actual lifestyle conditions and challenges (Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012). The case study design contains opportunities for theme and concept pattern coding, leading to improved circumstance understanding. Tracy (2012) concurred, stating an added benefit is chronological preservation.

A researcher validates these trends or factors by adding another information source to the study (Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012). Methodological triangulation or validity, created by using more than one research method, adds strength to the objectivity of a study's outcome (Marshall et al., 2013; Turner & Danks, 2014). Additionally, case studies are flexible; a researcher will start with one data collection tool and add others as needed or desired for increased erudition (Hyett et al., 2014; Turner & Danks, 2014). The data becomes saturated when no new information appears from the research tools as discussed by Fusch and Ness (2015) as well as Peredaryenko and Krauss (2013).

Qualitative research also includes ethnography and phenomenological designs. An ethnographic study includes data on an entire group of culturally similar people, which was not the focus of my study (Cayla, Beers, & Arnould, 2014). A phenomenological design is similar to a case study. For example, phenomenological research consists of searching for similar experiences of a group of people who have lived through a unique phenomenon, such as divorce (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). Neither of these design choices was appropriate for my study of the first 4 years of a nascent entrepreneur.

Population and Sampling

For this case study, I interviewed one Ohio, independent, small restaurant owner, 21 years old or older, as a representative of the small business community. The business launched at least 4 years prior to the interview. A small business is an enterprise that employs less than 500 employees (SBA.gov, 2014). I conducted the interview at the SBO's place of business.

This sample was purposeful; the restaurant owner had similar experiences in the start-up phase of his or her business as others in his industry. I methodologically triangulated the interview results with an examination of the firm's financial records and other research studies on small business sustainability, thereby securing data saturation as recommended by Hurt and McLaughlin (2012). Triangulation is the process used to confirm a study's results by employing two or more different research methods (Calheiros & Patrício, 2014). The goal of using multiple research methods is to reach data saturation, or the point when no new information is produced (Rowley, 2012). If a majority of the research methods produce the same outcome, then the data is saturated (Calheiros & Patrício, 2014).

Ethical Research

Ethical behaviors are the principles that demonstrate the acceptable practices of inquiry and are essential to research (Mikesell et al., 2013). The Belmont Report (United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979) established three guiding principles that guard against research misconduct: (a) participants should be treated with respect and given all necessary information to make an informed decision about their involvement, (b) researchers must carefully evaluate the risk to the participants and avoid unnecessary harm or mistreatment, and (c) the research risk must not lie solely with one group of people, but spread across the entire population. I fully accepted these principles and adhered to them throughout the research process.

Additionally, I obtained IRB approval for my study from Walden University prior to any contact with a participant. Following IRB approval, I contacted the chosen participant by phone, introduced myself with respect to the referral source, requested a meeting to explain my research request, and delivered an introduction letter (see Appendix A) and a consent form for his or her signature. The consent form clearly stated (a) my contact information, (b) my university as the sponsor, (c) the purpose of my study,

(d) any possible risks, and (e) the right to withdraw from participation at any time by email or phone. Once the participant submitted a signature (see Appendix B), he received a scanned copy of the consent form. I offered to purchase a $20.00 gas card from the SBO as an acknowledgment of the time and effort expended after the interview process as recommended by Collier, Colarossi, Hazel, Watson, and Wyatt (2015). The participant for this study voluntarily participated and agreed to omit any question that caused discomfort. The participant name and any identifying information are confidential and I refer to him as *the participant* in my study. All data remains private and locked up for 5 years to maintain anonymity. After the fifth year, I will destroy all data by deletion or shredding. The final study contains the IRB approval number; it is #919716.

Data Collection Instruments

The researcher is the data collection instrument in qualitative case studies (Glaser & Strauss, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Hanson and Moore (2014) were the data collection instruments in their study of business student ethics at a faith-based college in a southeastern state. In a study of trust repair within a U.K. utility firm after a data breach, researchers also acted as the data collection instrument (Gillespie, Dietz, & Locke, 2014). The balance of power shifts in data collection and analysis stages, with both the interviewer and the participant possessing some control over the outcome (Anyan, 2013). Although the researcher creates trust and connectivity through conversation with the participants, bias is a possible flaw during the data collection process (Gillespie et al., 2014; Yin, 2014).

The researcher wields the power to guide the direction of the questions and monopolize the conversation (Anyan, 2013). To guard against subjectivity and undue influence, I checked with the participant frequently during the interview to ensure I captured the correct meaning and context, and that no personal discomfort surfaced as recommended by Awad (2014), Drew (2014), and Othman and Abdul Rahman (2014). I conducted the interview, observed participant behavior, reviewed and analyzed documents, and electronically recorded the meeting on a tape recorder. I employed semistructured questions regarding the first 4 years in his business (see Appendix D). Mojtahed, Nunes, Martins, and Peng (2014) and Davies, Bukulatjpi, Sharma, Davis, and Johnston (2014) proffered semistructured interview questions offered the opportunity to enrich the discussion with follow-up questions and additional, relevant conversation.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) wrote semistructured interviews are appropriate when the researcher desires a detailed response to the questions, the protocol contains questions that are open-ended without fixed response categories, and flexibility requires a second visit to the participant for further inquiry. Gillespie et al. (2014) also used semistructured questions during interviews with firm employees. To encourage the participant to describe his experience, I sat quietly as he spoke and maintained eye contact to foster rapport as recommended by Yin (2014). Mojtahed et al. (2014) wrote researchers should respect the participants' response expressions and discourse to encourage rich phenomenon description. Rowley (2012) declared the interview represents a personal relationship between the researcher and the participant, in which power, emotion, and roles are factors.

I conducted member checking after the interview to ensure the meaning intended for his responses was appropriate as discussed by Awad (2014) as well as Ali and Yusof (2012). Othman and Abdul Rahman (2014) proffered member checking validated the themes in their study of ethical governance in Malaysian businesses. A 2014 study of HIV prevention and barriers included member checking with its participants at an AIDS conference in the United States (Andrasik et al., 2014). The interview was limited to 2 hours. Two hours is adequate time for a robust discussion and within a reasonable amount of time away from work duties (Gillespie et al., 2014; Glowik & Sadowski, 2014; Yap & Webber, 2015).

Following the interview, I requested time to review the financial statements of the business onsite, with all documents kept confidential. The private financial statement examination enhanced the interview with quantitative data and confirmed the verbal account of the first 4 years in business, insuring methodological triangulation as described by Calheiros and Patrício (2014), Glowick and Sadowski (2014), and Gillespie et al., (2014). At the close of the first meeting, I thanked the participant, scheduled the final meeting for transcript review, and departed. I returned for the final meeting in one week of the first encounter to maintain continuity.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection includes gathering unadulterated information for analysis (Englander, 2012). I employed a face-to-face interview format with the restaurant owner and recorded the conversation with a digital recorder, with the participant's approval. Trevelyan, Crath, and Chambon (2014) recommended personal interviews reflect the individual experiences and perceptions of the participant to retrieve relevant data. I sent the 10 semistructured interview questions to the participant one week before the meeting to assist with preparation, in addition to the interview format and timeframe (see Appendix D). There was no pilot study. The participant received a copy of the signed consent form (see Appendix C) before the interview confirming the legitimacy, confidentiality, and parameters of the relationship as recommeded by Kerstetter, Green, and Phillips (2014) and Kiguba, Kutyabami, Kiwuwa, Katabira, and Sewankambo (2012).

I conducted the interview in a quiet room in the participant's business to facilitate a comfortable environment for a candid discussion about the participant's experience of the phenomena as recommended by Haahr, Norlyk, and Hall (2014), Carter (2013), and Wahyuni (2012). Researchers should strive to make the participant feel at ease by using a conversational interview style and chatting informally at the beginning of the session (Hirose, Itao, & Umeda, 2012; Isaacs, 2014; Wahyuni, 2012). I created manual notes to capture the context and mood of the interview and as a check against personal bias as discussed by Snook and Oliver, (2015), Ivey, (2012), and Van Cranenburgh, Liket, and

Roome (2013). One weakness of the personal interview instrument is the possibility the participant decides against the interview, retracts a statement, or exhibits an unexpected behavior due to anxiety about the interview procedure (Babbie, 2013). The interview lasted less than 2 hours. I asked to review the last 4 years of financial statements for approximately 1 hour and addressed any remaining questions regarding the financials before leaving for the day.

All data collected remains confidential on a password protected flash drive, locked in a cabinet for at least 5 years and then erased; I will shred hard copies. Following the interview, I used Dragon Naturally Speaking Software for interview transcription and NVivo qualitative data analysis software to interpret and facilitate theme coding. I conducted member checking after 1 week. Member checking is the process whereby the researcher returns to the participants with an interpretation of what was said by the participant to ensure that one has captured the meaning (Harper & Cole, 2012).

Data Organization Technique

The researcher is responsible for maintaining the interview data in a confidential, secure location and must always adhere to IRB possession requirements especially locking up data in a secure cabinet for 5 years, and then permanently destroyed (Wahyuni, 2012). During the interview, I kept a journal of various concepts, observations, and phrases critical to the study’s purpose as posited by Van Cranenburgh et al. (2013) and Wahyuni (2012). After the interview transcription, I carefully read the document several times for content accuracy and followed up with the participant to clarify any concerns about intent through member checking. Member checking insures the context accuracy of the data collection instrument (Harper & Cole, 2012). Hoflund (2013) wrote the researcher should study the data thoroughly before drawing any themes or conclusions. The notes from the financial statement review and other business documents change from hand-written notes to a Word document for analysis and comparison to the interview quotes. This methodological triangulation procedure transforms the study to data saturation, when no new information is presented as discussed by Fusch and Ness (2015), Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013), and Marshall et al. (2013). Following the analysis, I kept the notes in a locked secure cabinet with any other interview related materials.

Data Analysis

Yin (2014) recommended analyzing qualitative data preliminarily from a general perspective down to a detailed scrutiny. Cameron, Lewis, and Pfeiffer (2014) began the analysis of nonresident workers in Gladstone, Australia with a broad view in the beginning before the focus on details. Researchers in the UK reviewed key concepts first in a study of how leaders use web based applications in a business setting, before examining specifics (Savolainen, 2014). In my study, the general information was demographic: the business name, location, ownership, product or service, etc. From this foundation, I reviewed the specific answers based upon each year in business through year 4. As the interview questions pertained to annual results, so did the transcription.

Using a chronological examination hastened the comparison of yearly trends or deviations. The financial statements and other available business documents offered methodological triangulation by contrasting the financial results with the participant's recollection of the business operation on a yearly basis as discussed by Glowick and Sadowski (2014) and Gillespie et al. (2014). Li, Gray, Lockwood, and Buhalis (2013) also used internal documentation for methodological triangulation while studying management in the U.K. hospitality industry.

The conceptual framework in Section 1 of this document was the role and economic impact of entrepreneurship in society, and the reasons for nascent entrepreneurial failure (Schumpeter, 1934). For this study, the concepts reviewed are (a) nascent entrepreneurship, (b) the elements of entrepreneurial activity, (c) the factors contributing to the success, (d) factors leading to the failure of small businesses, (e) the business model and innovation, and (f) restaurant industry characteristics. These terms provided the direction for my research, thereby leading to emergent themes. Lawrence and Tar (2013) wrote themes, or recurring ideas or concepts within the data, identify significant factors or concepts. In my study, themes, identified through the NVivo transcription, converted into codes based upon factors that appeared to shape business sustainability. Rauch, Doorn, and Hulsink (2014) recommended content analysis be the basis for coding decisions, while deploying standard coding policies. An annual chronological comparison of coding offers insightful direction regarding the challenges faced by start-up restaurants specifically and small businesses as a group (Rauch et al., 2014). When supplemented with conclusions from the business operating statements, the study illustrated internal or external factors on entrepreneurial success. Schumpeter, the first economist to label the entrepreneur as the creator of economic growth and the originator of creative destruction, laid the groundwork for all future entrepreneurial investigation (Schumpeter, 1942). Entrepreneurial actions require resource exploitation, but few entrepreneurs have the capacity to succeed (Schumpeter, 1934).

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Quality is of paramount importance in research, from the inception of a proposal to the results (Ali & Yusof, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rowley, 2012). Reliability and validity are the primary characteristics in qualitative studies (Ali & Yusof, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rowley, 2012). Some researchers suggested the terms credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability more accurately describe the trustworthy traits of research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reliability is the ability to produce the same results every time; validity is a measurement of the accuracy of the findings internally and externally (Ali & Yusof, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rowley, 2012). Carefully following the research design procedure aids in achieving reliability in the research results (Ali & Yusof, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rowley, 2012). I followed actions necessary to maintain consistency with the research design and documented steps and decisions to create a path for other researchers to follow if necessary.

Validity

Validity is the term used to describe the legitimacy of qualitative research, including themes, concepts or findings (Ali & Yusof, 2012; Houghton et al., 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Validity implies all facets of the research process are trustworthy and possess dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Farokhzadian, Nayeri, & Borhani, 2015). Researchers have developed several tactics to address validity including (a) prolonged engagement, (b) triangulation, (c) peer review or debriefing, (d) negative case analysis, (e) clarifying researcher bias, (f) rich, thick description, and (g) member checking (Schaik, O'Brien, Almeida, & Adler, 2014). Validity appears through data saturation, or the process of testing the results of a study until no new or different outcome surfaces (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). The data were saturated by repeatedly comparing the interview coding results to the business documents and financials until expert confirmation ensued.

To achieve dependability, I used Dragon Naturally Speaking Software for interview transcription and NVivo qualitative data analysis software to interpret and facilitate theme coding consistently. I pursued credibility with participant engagement and member checking early in the interview process, to insure the appropriate meaning of various statements as discussed by Ali and Yusof (2012), Davis and Friske (2013) and Houghton et al. (2013). Transferability occurs from a comparison of the transcripts with internal documents and financial statements, to form a pseudo-audit trail for others as noted by Ali and Yusof (2012), Davis and Friske (2013), and Houghton et al, (2013).

Confirmability is through checking the research procedures, data collection techniques, data coding, and interpretation rigorously throughout the study and again at the conclusion as stated by Ali and Yusof (2012), Davis and Friske (2013), and Houghton et al. (2013).

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the factors small businesses face during the first 4 years of operation that impact sustainability. The participant was a small, Ohio restaurant owner who had surpassed the year 4, and was willing to discuss the start-up experience and present financial or other documents from the same timeframe. Section 2 included (a) the purpose statement, (b) the role of the researcher, (c) the participant, (d) the research method, (e) the research design, (f) the population and sampling, (g) ethical research, (h) data collection instruments, (i) data collection technique, (j) data organization techniques, (k) data analysis, (l) reliability and validity, and (m) summary. I now present the results of my study, recommendations for practical application, impact on social change, and opportunities for further research in Section 3.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to investigate what strategies small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 4 years. It can be stated that 66% of small business ventures fail before Year 5 (Ji & Hanna, 2012). Nascent SBOs recognize this challenge, with 60% of those surveyed citing business sustainability and growth as their top concerns (Geho & Frakes, 2013). The overarching research question is *what strategies do small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 4 years?* I employed the qualitative research method and case study design to capture the lived experiences of this participant in his own words. The interview included 10 semistructured questions (see Appendix D) that facilitated rich data on the experiences and decisions during the business launch and stabilization period.

On my second visit, I conducted the transcript review and the correct meaning of several statements through member checking. I triangulated data from the business tax returns, marketing collateral, and business documents that reflected the 4-year progression from enterprise launch to stability. The data were saturated when no new insights or data emerged. The NVivo qualitative data application facilitated the identification of four principal themes from the data that cultivated business success: (a) knowledge and experience, (b) work ethic and commitment, (c) human capital, and (d) opportunity recognition as the fundamental principles for restaurant sustainability during the first 4 years in business. When compared to the sources in the literature review and conceptual framework, the study's theme demonstrated alignment and consistency.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was what strategies do small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 4 years? The semistructured interview and subsequent member checking provided the majority of the data, and a review of the pertinent business documents and field notes generated triangulation as demonstrated by Fusch and Ness (2015), Peredaryenko and Krauss (2013), and Walker (2012). Schumpeter's (1942) theory of the entrepreneur as leader of the economy was the conceptual framework. I employed NVivo 11, a data analysis application, to categorize the data and create nodes (themes). Four overarching themes, denoting best practices for small business sustainability, emerged from the interview transcript: knowledge and experience, work ethic and commitment, social capital, and opportunity recognition through creative discovery. The literature review and conceptual framework confirmed these themes as best practices for business sustainability and specifically addressed the overarching research question.

Demographic Characteristics of the Participant

The participant owned an independent restaurant in Central Ohio that started in 2006 with less than 100 employees, supporting the research criteria. After 30 years in the food industry, the participant decided to fulfill a lifelong dream of creating and operating his own establishment. A former chef, the participant acquired a culinary degree and management experience leading large hotel and freestanding restaurants in various cities. His Louisiana heritage became the market niche for his restaurant through Creole food. The restaurant launch and operation included his three children as employees.

Emergent Theme 1: Knowledge and Experience

Knowledge results from training and experience (Malach & Malach, 2014). Expertise is the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the owner (Chinomona, 2013). With management training, an entrepreneur makes more-informed decisions (Putta, 2014). Innovation and creativity emerge from a seasoned leader who looks toward sustainability as the goal (Putta, 2014). My discussion of the subthemes of training, work experience, and mentoring are included within the dominant theme of knowledge and experience (see Table 1).

Table 1

Frequency of Themes Related to #1-Knowledge and Experience

Theme	Number of References
Knowledge	25
Training	15
Work experience	15
Mentoring	8
Total	63

Knowledge or experience was a frequent reference from the participant about business sustainability (personal communication, June 8, 2016; confirmed through member checking on June 15, 2016). The participant's introduction to cooking originated in his grandmother's Louisiana kitchen as a child (personal communication, June 8, 2016). The participant completed high school, enlisted in the service, and then enrolled in a culinary institute to become a chef (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of newspaper article, June 15, 2016; analysis of online marketing article, June 15, 2016). He realized that cooking was a small component of running a restaurant and learned every job, from washing dishes to preparing food for hundreds of people (personal communication, June 8, 2015; review of business plan, June 15, 2016). The participant worked for 2 years as an intern for a master chef who mentored him on all aspects of food service (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of photo, June 15, 2016). He also travelled to Chicago for training in hotel restaurant operation (personal communication, June 8, 2016; analysis of business plan, June 15, 2016; confirmed through member checking on, June 15, 2016).

The participant became a business owner after over 30 years of managing and sustaining other restaurants (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016; review of newspaper article, June 15, 2016). The participant was prepared to start his business when he believed he was knowledgeable of the industry, the business model, and the ability to identify the best market opportunity (personal communication, June 8, 2016; analysis of business plan, June 15, 2016; confirmed through member checking on June 15, 2016). He repeatedly stated that without prior knowledge and training, he would not have acquired the skills necessary to start and sustain a business, especially through the start-up years (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016; confirmation through member checking, June 15, 2016; online article, June 15, 2016). Training minimizes mistakes and leads to financial success (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of tax returns, June 15, 2016). The restaurant survived the recession due to the participant's ability to make critical decisions regarding resource allocation from experience and training (personal communication, June 8, 2015; confirmation through member checking, June 15, 2016). In spite of the failing economy, the participant deployed a business model that aligned with the conditions surrounding his restaurant (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016; review of online article, June 15, 2016). During the recession, the business model was to use a carryout process only to eliminate labor costs (review of menu, June 8, 2016; personal communication, June 8, 2016). Recipes with low cost ingredients facilitated profitability when sales were down (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of menu, June 15, 2016; confirmation through member checking, June 15, 2016).

Entrepreneurial risk often leads to an entrepreneurial crisis (Skeel, 2014). Nascent entrepreneurs believe that proper training, previous business experience, and market conditions are key factors for entrepreneurial success and risk mitigation (Huang-Yao Hong & Chieh-Hsin, 2016; Ipiranga & Aguiar, 2014; Malach & Malach, 2014; Sloka et al.; 2014; Tervo, 2015). Crises occur during the launch period that require a review of the contributing qualitative and quantitative factors; education and experience foster a realistic response to atypical circumstances (Spillan, 2015). Crises also lead to positive outcomes for the business, such as debt restructure, improved systems, elimination of unnecessary over-head, and organizational knowledge (Cvilikas et al., 2015). Although business success relies upon the experience of the founder, some nascent entrepreneurs launch a business prematurely for personal survival and failure follows (Baptista et al., 2014). From my conceptual framework, Schumpeter (1934) wrote that an entrepreneur survives when he or she acquires the resources and opportunities to avoid failure, and the literature review supports this statement. The data in this study confirmed the value of the participant's knowledge as the primary resource for business success and the vision to identify a void in the restaurant market, during failing economic times.

Emergent Theme 2: Work Ethic and Commitment

Successful entrepreneurs develop an affective commitment to the enterprise that demonstrates allegiance regardless of the circumstances (Evick, 2014; LaRocca & De Feis, 2015; Tasnim, Yahya, & Zainuddin, 2014). Nascent SBOs spend long hours in the beginning of the enterprise; a 2012 study included data confirming 12 hour work days with most tasks, especially those regarding marketing and sales (Malmström, Johansson, & Wincent, 2015; Mueller et al., 2012). The commitment to work until the business is sustainable (work ethic) is the second most mentioned theme (see Table 2).

Table 2

Frequency of Themes Relative to #2-Work Ethic and Commitment

Theme	Number of References
Commitment	16
Work Ethic	25
Total	41

The participant stated that his work ethic began as a child with household responsibilities and chores (personal communication, June 8, 2015). He worked through school and each summer in his grandmother's Louisiana kitchen (personal communication, June 8, 2015; review of business plan, June 15, 2016). Restaurant work is physical and mental; mistakes create longer hours and more unnecessary labor (personal communication, June 8, 2016; confirmed through member checking, June 15, 2016). Hotel restaurants are often open 365 days per year and the participant was often the only available manager (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016).

In the beginning of the restaurant, each workweek is a 7-day operation from sunup to sundown, leaving no time for personal or family activities (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016). The participant's work ethic and drive minimized the risk that the operation failed before year 4 (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of tax returns, June 15, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016; confirmed through member checking, June 15, 2016). From sweeping in front of the restaurant each morning to adding the receipts at the end of the day, the participant managed the internal and external aspects of the business (personal communication, June 8, 2016; confirmed through member checking, June 15, 2016). His personal motivation was not wealth or fame; it was completing a life-long dream to be the owner and decision-maker for his restaurant (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016). Every aspect of the restaurant reflected his personal brand and he knew the work required to maintain the brand would eventually lead to success (review of online article, June 8, 2016; personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of tax returns, June 15, 2016). Even after he experienced a minor stroke, he continued to work from home and with limited hours until his blood pressure was under control (personal communication, June 8, 2015 confirmed through member checking, June 15, 2016). He began to ride his bicycle to work to stay healthy and eliminate transportation expense (personal communication, June 8, 2016; confirmed through member checking, June 15, 2016).

Starting a small business requires commitment and dedication to every facet of the enterprise (Hassman, Schwartz, & Bar-El, 2013; LaRocca & De Feis, 2015). More than 80% of food entrepreneurs confessed starting a business is harder than they imagined and required more time than the non-food SBOs with 73% (Bullough et al., 2014; Hassman et al., 2013; Liang & Dunn, 2014). To address the marketing and managerial challenges in a day, entrepreneurs must sometimes work 60-80 hours per week to be comfortable with their market position, while planning the next strategic maneuver (André, 2013). The SBO's level of commitment to the start-up venture can be related to persistence, and a competitive climate had little to do with disengagement (Khan et al., 2014). When launching a new enterprise, an individual experiences loneliness and isolation; without a personal support system to manage stress, surrender becomes a viable option (Lamine et al., 2014). The conceptual framework reference from Schumpeter (1934) refers to the desire to own and control a business, but also states that few individuals will have the capacity to withstand the sacrifice of time and resources, confirming the merit of commitment and work ethic. The participant demonstrated the level of work ethic, commitment, and sacrifice required to stabilize the nascent restaurant.

Emergent Theme 3: Social Capital

Social capital, or the persons or groups that support an entrepreneur's aspirations through engagement, facilitate opportunity exposure, problem solving, and branding recognition (McKeever, Anderson, & Jack, 2014). Social capital is a resource that includes a mutual benefit for each contributor and meaningful interaction for continued value. The third largest theme to emerge was social capital (see Table 3).

Table 3

Frequency of Themes Relative to #3- Social Capital

Themes	Number of References
Community	14
Family	10
Contacts	4
Total	28

The participant capitalized on the available social capital in each position along his career path (personal communication, June 8, 2016; confirmed through member checking, June 15, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016). He sought the advice of others to learn the best methods for food preparation and customer service (personal communication, June 8, 2016). After culinary school, he repeatedly applied to work for a popular chef so he could enhance his style and procedures, even when his salary was less than his current job (personal communication, June 8, 2016; confirmed through member checking, June 15, 2016). When launching the restaurant, the participant contacted a local small business nonprofit agency for assistance with the business plan and financing (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of business document, June 15, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016).

His COO daughter, participant 1A, stated her team includes an attorney, accountant, business consultant, and others as needed; she recognized early on that she did not have all the skills necessary to foster success for the enterprise (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016; review of business correspondence, June 15, 2016). His son and other daughter participate on the management team, representing food preparation and customer service, respectively (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016). The participant believed that community commitment is necessary for an urban restaurant and nurtures the interaction with all customers or prospects (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of business correspondence, June 15, 2016). In the restaurant industry, customers are social capital who determines the success or failure of an establishment (Ryu et al., 2012).

Student interns from the nearby community college learn culinary skills in the restaurant's kitchen (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of photo, July 15, 2016; review of business correspondence, July 15, 2016). Previous industry colleagues referred new contacts to the participant when the restaurant opened to build the customer base (personal communication, July 8, 2016; confirmed through member checking, July 15, 2016; review of business cards, July 15, 2016). The participant regarded every personal encounter as an opportunity to advance his brand and build his support system through networking (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of photos, July 15, 2016).

When entrepreneurs have access to action-oriented social capital, the result leads to improved financing arrangements, greater market opportunities, production improvements, and wider information access (Fornoni et al., 2012). Another key subset of entrepreneurial social capital is the owner's family (Werbel & Danes, 2010). Family members, especially the owner's spouse, often contribute significant support to the business, as well as sacrificing time, money and energy for the firm's stability (Werbel & Danes, 2010). Community and familial connections or informal institutions contribute to nascent entrepreneurial success; financial resources and social networks are available to those who fit the community success profile (Hopp & Stephen, 2012).

With limited social capital, the SBO relies heavily on a few individuals to assist with crucial activities during a crisis, placing the enterprise and the remaining employees at risk (Parsa et al., 2015). Although some researchers proffered that previously acquired human capital resources no longer apply to the start-up venture, others state mentoring assists nascent entrepreneurs gain skills and knowledge (Baptista et al., 2014; Laukhuf & Malone, 2015; St-Jean, 2012). For the contextual framework, Schumpeter (1934) wrote that an entrepreneur combines resources with opportunities; social capital and launching a business exemplify the resource-opportunity pairing. The research in the literature review also supports the importance of social capital for entrepreneurial success.

Emergent Theme 4: Opportunity Recognition through Creative Discovery

Entrepreneurial opportunity recognition is the result of alertness and intuitive business acumen, supported by experience and training (Shrestha, 2015). Opportunity recognition (OR) is a key talent within an entrepreneur's skillset (Shrader & Hills, 2015). Food service offers career opportunities in a variety of industries (Noke & Chesney, 2014; Yen, Cooper, & Murrmann, 2013). For creative individuals, entrepreneurship offers the possibility of success from an innovative idea new to the market (Schumpeter, 1934; Zanakis et al., 2012). The final theme in frequency is opportunity recognition through creative discovery (see Table 4).

Table 4

Frequency of Themes Relative to #4- Opportunity Recognition through Creative Discovery

Theme	Number of References
Creativity	12
Opportunity	12
Risk	3
Total	27

The participant recognized a career opportunity in food service at an early age from his grandmother (personal communication, June 8, 2016). Following retirement from corporate restaurant management, the participant searched for new opportunities as an entrepreneur (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016; review of online article, June 15, 2016). The participant noticed an elevated interest in the state of Louisiana, Creole, and Cajun culture during and following Hurricane Katrina (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016; review of newspaper article, June 15, 2016). He confirmed his intuition by offering his seasonings to the local market, and conducting informal marketing research to test the affinity to creole cooking (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016). He and his children worked together to lay the groundwork for an authentic Creole food enterprise, a new concept to the local market (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016; review of marketing document, June 15, 2016).

He decided to search for a location that would include an adequate customer base, easy access to downtown, and sufficient parking (personal communication, June 8, 2016). A colleague presented a location to the participant as a possible site, given its history as a successful restaurant several years earlier (participant communication, June 8, 2016; review of business plan, June 15 2016). Although the location was not his ideal choice, he believed the size, amenities, and customer traffic would offset any negative aspects and minimize risk (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016; review of business correspondence, June 15, 2016; review of photo, June 15, 2016). After considerable contemplation, the participant decided that the environment and its residents could become a competitive advantage for his restaurant and moved forward on leasing the site (participant communication, June 8, 2016; business correspondence, June 15, 2016; confirmed through member checking, June 15, 2016).

The inner city may include a large number of low-income residents, but business opportunities are yet available to those with vision (Robinson & Hayes, 2012). When the entrepreneur has access to the social networks within and surrounding an urban location, opportunities appear (Robinson & Hayes, 2012). The participant combined his vision of success with social capital to seize the Creole restaurant opportunity within the inner city (participant communication, June 8, 2016; review of business plan, June 15, 2016; review of business correspondence, June 15, 2016). As another example of opportunity recognition, the individuals who previously loitered in front of the restaurant became stakeholders when the participant hired them to do odd jobs (participant communication, June 8, 2016; confirmed through member checking).

When the restaurant opened, inventory was limited (personal communication, June 8, 2016). The participant created new dishes daily from existing ingredients to encourage customers to return to sample the specials (personal communication, June 8, 2015; review of menu, June 15, 2016). He recognized internal opportunities to build the restaurant brand by generating excitement over foods with unique names, presentations, and tastes (personal communication, June 8, 2016; review of menu, June 15, 2016).

Opportunity recognition emanates from creativity and the resultant innovation (Putta, 2014). Creativity is the generation of new and different ideas; innovation is finding practical uses for those ideas (Jacka, 2014). The classic entrepreneur is attracted to innovation and creativity, with secondary regard to the benefits of a comfortable lifestyle (Endres & Woods, 2010). Entrepreneurs make more-informed operational decisions with management training, and innovation and creativity emerge from a seasoned leader who looks toward sustainability as the goal (Putta, 2014). Although creativity leads to opportunity recognition, experienced SBOs express greater optimism with risky circumstances when they analyze risk based upon information and not sentiment (Podoynitsyna et al., 2012). A key element to sustainability is the continuing attraction to the restaurant because of its ambience, which requires constant creativity in service styles and menu selections from the entrepreneur (Su, 2011).

The literature review included academic support of the significance of opportunity recognition for entrepreneurial success. In the conceptual framework, Schumpeter (1942) wrote that entrepreneurs seek to create new products and processes as an extension of their desire for knowledge and growth. As economic agents, entrepreneurs make decisions to capitalize on marketplace opportunities, by creation or exploitation (Endres & Woods, 2010). Envick (2014) identified the themes in this study as four of the critical resources for entrepreneurial success: (a) ambition, (b) work ethic/commitment, (c) continuous learning/education/informed risk taking, (d) innovation/opportunity recognition, (e) human capital, and integrity. The participant performed the following activities that require opportunity recognition: (a) the creation of new products or new product traits, (b) the formulation of new production processes, (c) the introduction of new industrial production methods, (d) the entry to new markets, and (e) the discovery of new supply sources as outlined by Schumpeter (1942).

Summary

Reflecting on the first 4 years, the participant stated that without God, his family, and community support, he could not have sustained the start-up period (participant communication, June 8, 2016). From the uncertainty of location selection to the launch of an unfamiliar ethnic food restaurant, he accepted the risk in exchange for entrepreneurial freedom (participant communication, June 8, 2016). He remembered the long days and nights of the first two years, when systems were not in place, and the brand was obscure to potential customers (participant communication, June 8, 2016). Cash flow was meager in the first two years and payroll for the family was not possible (participant communication, June 8, 2016; confirmed by member checking, June 15, 2016).

Vagrants lined the sidewalk in front of the restaurant, and crime frightened others away from the neighborhood (participant communication, June 8, 2016). The recession's economic conditions prevented many individuals from the luxury of dining out or travelling to the other side of town (participant communication, June 8, 2016). He and his family vowed to stay the course and work through every challenge, problem, or barrier that materialized, believing that success was forthcoming with hard work, quality products and service, and sound decisions (participant communication, June 8, 2016; confirmed by member checking, June 15, 2016).

The participant's experience and training in all aspects of restaurant management prepared him for owning and managing his own establishment; his 30 years in the food industry provided the crucial knowledge and experience to identify and mitigate most challenges with food or operations (participant communication, June 8, 2016; confirmed by member checking, June 15, 2016). The shopping center neighbors, professional colleagues, and community allies supplied the social capital that fueled sales growth and fostered stability through the rocky first 2 years (participant communication, June 8, 2016; review of tax returns, June 15, 2016).

Schumpeter (1934) identified the entrepreneur as the leader of the economy, which included the following traits: (a) the desire to own a business, (b) the longing to be in control and free of restrictions, (c) the pleasure of winning a competition, and (d) an attraction to creativity and accomplishment (Schumpeter, 1934). The participant expressed the fervent desire to own and manage his own enterprise after successfully building restaurants for others, demonstrating traits (a) and (b) above. Entering a new market with a mission of success through brand recognition captures the intent of trait (c), the pleasure of winning a competition. Finally, as a chef, the participant enjoyed creating new dishes and originating new methods of social capital engagement, reflecting trait (d) above. His knowledge/experience, commitment/work ethic, social capital utilization, and opportunity recognition provided the foundation for entrepreneurial success, reflecting the Schumpeter (1934) entrepreneur as the leader of economic growth.

Applications to Professional Practice

Entrepreneurial activity is the launch, organization, and utilization of resources to start an economic enterprise, with the founder accepting the risk of reward and the possibility of failure (Njoroge & Gathunga, 2013). The principal goal of this qualitative study was to explore strategies that small businesses can implement to gain sustainability after year 4. A successful restaurant owner in Central Ohio participated in the study and provided his account of the activities and challenges of the restaurant launch and stabilization period. Sustainability strategies are crucial to small businesses; more than half fail before year 5 (Holloway & Schaefer, 2014). With more information about enterprise survival, nascent businesses may avoid some of the pitfalls that appear in years 1-4.

The results of this study introduced themes for consideration as *best practices* for business sustainability: knowledge and experience; commitment and work ethic; social capital; and opportunity recognition through creative discovery. Nascent entrepreneurs, unsure of what risk lies ahead, may learn from a seasoned SBO strategies to overcome critical obstacles during the first 4 years in business. Although the participant operated a restaurant, the lessons learned in this study apply to service enterprises that experience economic variations in a competitive urban environment.

Although small businesses are the creators of most new jobs, many are unprepared for long-term sustainability (Ji & Hanna, 2012). Restaurants are the second largest private employer in the US with approximately 14 million workers, but smaller enterprises experience a premature death with additional industry-related risk (Frazer, 2012). The failure trend among SBOs stems from many factors including (a) resource insufficiencies, (b) inadequate management training, (c) family challenges, (d) incommodious regulations, (e) economic conditions, and (f) disruptive technology (Elmuti, Khoury, & Omran, 2012; Ferguson, Green, Vaswani, & Wu, 2013; Miles, 2014b; Nnamseh & Akpan, (2015).

Education and experience familiarize the SBO with the industry, enterprise, and business management strategies (Ipiranga & Aguiar, 2014). Commitment and work ethic are necessary to persevere through the challenges in the beginning years (Hassman, Schwartz, & Bar-El, 2013). Social capital provides human resources for growth, support, and brand recognition (Fornoni et al., 2012). Opportunity recognition alerts the entrepreneur to new products, processes, or services (Shrestha, 2015). These traits provide definite tools for business sustainability needed to reverse the small business failure trend (Bressler et al., 2013). This study enhances the current knowledge of SBO sustainability with recommendations that may help other entrepreneurs survive the first 4 years in operation.

Implications for Social Change

Entrepreneurship contains significant risk, yet there is limited information on this topic, in spite of the growing numbers of nascent entrepreneurs (Miles, 2014a). This study includes a credible discussion on small business survival that may shed light on strategies to remain viable during the first 4 years. Small businesses are major contributors to the economy and without their presence, the community suffers with unemployment, crime, and declining taxes (Pellikka & Malinen, 2014).

Conventional education is expensive and nascent entrepreneurs cannot afford the time or financial resources necessary to launch a business (Nunes & Serrasqueiro, 2012). Perhaps government sources may offer grants to finance entrepreneurial training for individuals with limited financial resources. New information may compel community organizations to develop training programs or internships for would-be SBOs, especially immigrants, ex-offenders, or veterans (Brixy et al., 2013). For social capital, community organizations can create networking groups to facilitate relationships between entrepreneurs and community stakeholders (Hopp & Stephen, 2012). To provide improved access to capital, government agencies may create lending programs with lenient underwriting criteria with government support, and lower rates to provide working capital loans for SBOs (Mazzarol et al., 2015; SBA.gov, 2014). Private businesses, such as insurance companies, may introduce new policies to attract and retain small business clients formerly uninsurable (Blazy &Weill, 2013.)

Strategy and innovation depend on the changing conditions of the internal and external environments, and the SBO must carefully analyze the process to attain compatibility (Zabala-Iturriagagoitia, 2012). When entrepreneurs lack sustainability strategies, they can face barriers when introducing new products and processes (Aldrich & Yang, 2014). Imitation alone cannot provide enterprise sustainability; entrepreneurs must continue to develop and advance existing practices to foster innovation, stabilize the organization, and withstand market risk (Aldrich & Yang, 2014). Schumpeter (1942) also noted that the role of the entrepreneur is to lead the economy through creative destruction, replacing outdated and ineffective products and services with new ones that improve the operating environment. With increased resources and support for entrepreneurial experimentation, new cures for diseases or technological remedies for expensive processes may arise. The ultimate outcome for contributing to stronger SBOs is economic growth through healthier citizens, lower unemployment, reducing the need of public assistance for poverty-stricken families, a larger tax base, reduced crime, and resilient communities.

Recommendations for Action

To avoid premature business mortality, individuals considering entrepreneurship would benefit from adhering to the best practices demonstrated in this study. The primary themes should be viewed *collectively* to foster sustainability; adopting two of the three may not foster success. For example, opportunity recognition without the appropriate education and experience may still end in failure. Each trait enhances sustainability, when added to the entrepreneurial toolkit for survival.

Prior to entering the competitive marketplace for goods or services, an individual should consider enrolling in an entrepreneurial training program through a university or community organization. Experience aids critical thinking skills and problem solving; an internship or employment in the selected industry offers hands-on, practical application of theories and procedures. The other sub-themes in the study are also valuable, but not as fundamental or impactful as knowledge/experience, social capital, commitment/work ethic, and opportunity recognition through creative discovery.

The participant data provided content for a compelling case study for entrepreneurial students to identify the survival strategies exemplified in capstone exercises. Although this participant represents the food/ tourism/ entertainment industry, students may filter information from other industries to compare and contrast the findings. A service business, such as an adult daycare operation, includes a different set of risks; students could explore how the themes in this study are instrumental for success or failure within that business model. Professors may use this data to demonstrate the challenges nascent entrepreneurs face, thereby facilitating real-world applicability for analysis and discussion. Instructors may use case studies from different industries for problem solving exercises that may enhance survival strategies for entrepreneurial students to prepare them for future ownership.

I would also recommend that entrepreneurial training programs include stronger emphasis on apprenticeship, internships, and industry employment before launching a business. There is no *one-size-fits-all* path to entrepreneurial success, however hands-on experience in the field before ownership expands the knowledge of best practices in business operation, which includes lessons often absent from textbooks. Each day in the life of an entrepreneur introduces a new set of challenges and opportunities, requiring the ability to think critically and problem-solve quickly; combining knowledge with experience creates a powerful foundation for enterprise launch and survival. An SBO needs an unwavering commitment to survival and a tireless work ethic. Social capital can open doors and fill voids to mobilize the entrepreneur's dreams and goals. A creative mindset leads to opportunity recognition. I plan to take the results of this study and other anecdotal data and publish a book on small business *best practices* during the first four years for the public, to facilitate accessibility to a wider audience. Small business service providers and consultants may enhance their knowledge with the data in this study, expanding their knowledge on the first 4 years.

Recommendations for Further Research

The study results add to the limited information on small business survival beyond year 4, utilizing an independent Ohio restaurant owner as the participant. The limitations identified in the beginning were education, industry, culture, and sample size. Although the themes presented have general application to most business models, a study with a small manufacturer may yield different results.

There are several opportunities for further research. Although case studies may utilize one participant, a larger number of participants may add a wider range of themes for business sustainability (Yin, 2014). I would recommend a focus group of a retail, service, manufacturing, and online business to enhance the theme discussion from this study. A different industry may also add theme diversity, such as an online business, which may require minimal education or experience (Schaik, O'Brien, Almeida, & Adler, 2014). Another suggestion is to compare other family owned businesses in the restaurant business to explore if the themes remain.

Themes represent the participant’s set of beliefs, values, customs, and aspirations (Amyan, 2013). A participant’s culture may influence the themes due to the customs and values germane to their residency (Anyan, 2013). For example, in India, women do not normally appear in leadership roles due to religious beliefs (Anyan, 2013). A younger participant may present different themes for business longevity, given the values and characteristics of their generation (Anyan, 2013). Millennials, those individuals born after 1980, may not rate experience as highly as baby boomers, and believe that social capital is most important. Millennials use social media applications as a routine communication method, whereas baby boomers may still prefer email or telephone conversations.

Finally, alternative research methods or designs may offer new information and minimize researcher or participant subjectivity (Bailey, 2014). A mixed method format offers the opportunity to compare the themes level of influence to business sustainability, while penetrating the lived experiences of the participant (Dumbili, 2014). Quantitative studies capture the relationships between variables; a study of the relationship between male vs female business success within the restaurant industry is another opportunity for knowledge creation on business sustainability (Barnham, 2015).

Reflections

My DBA journey began in 2011 after a successful career in a variety of industries, but primarily in the business arena. The research and time required each day kept me focused on expanding my knowledge of business and entrepreneurship, as I was deciding what my next career might be. I looked at my life from week to week as a ladder leading up the stairs of wisdom. Faith, balance, patience, and commitment were my marching orders as I moved from one course to another in the midst of personal and professional uncertainty. My quest was to become an entrepreneurial scholar and fulfill my desire to share my knowledge with others in the classroom and in print.

Globally, individuals with limited education and resources turn to self-employment to survive. Entrepreneurship provides the vehicle to self-sufficiency. I desired to *know* entrepreneurship, in a manner and depth that nurtures the possibility of economic stability for people and cultures around the world. I desired to *know* the theories, the applications, the innovations, the risks and the rewards of entrepreneurship to share knowledge with others. With the DBA degree, I reaffirm my commitment to work with entrepreneurs to help them reach their goals.

Summary and Study Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore what strategies small business owners need to succeed in business beyond 4 years. One independent Ohio restaurant owner, over 21 years old, participated in a face-to-face recorded interview to share his individual perspectives and lived experiences during the first 4 years of operation. I methodologically triangulated the data by reviewing the internal operating statements and other documents from the participant's first 4 years in business. Member checking clarified unclear phrases and intent.

The data revealed, through coding analysis, that four concepts themes primarily contributed to the participant's ability to sustain the enterprise beyond year 4: (a) knowledge and experience, (b) work ethic and commitment, (c) social capital, and (d) opportunity recognition through creative discovery. The participant gained sustainability through meaningful training and work experience, unwavering work ethic and commitment, supportive colleagues as social capital, and the creative vision to see opportunity in the business environment. The references in the literature review and conceptual framework aligned with these themes and confirmed the validity of the study (Farokhzadianet al., 2015). These themes reflect entrepreneurial *best practices* that may benefit nascent entrepreneurs, and enhance the prior knowledge of small business sustainability. In conclusion, the data and the academic references collectively support the aforementioned themes as crucial components of enterprise sustainability, leading to a greater probability of nascent entrepreneurs surviving the first 4 years in operation.

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Appendix A: Invitation letter

<Date>

<Address

Block> Dear

Sir/Madam,

As a requirement of my doctoral study completion from Walden University, I sincerely request your participation in a research study on small business sustainability. My study will document the events and activities of the first 4 years of a small business to identify possible methods of reducing business death for other start-up entrepreneurs before the fifth year. It appears that you have the qualifications for this study: an independent Ohio restaurant owner, over 21 years old, with less than 500 employees and more than 4 years in operation. Participation in the research study is strictly voluntary and is confidential. Please review the enclosed consent form carefully and ask any questions that you may have before you make a decision to participate. If you agree to participation, I will contact you again to deliver consent forms, and to set up two (2) personal meetings: one for a recorded interview and financial/legal document review and a second to check the interview transcript for accuracy and intent. I anticipate the total time to be less than 90 minutes per meeting. You will receive a copy of my study upon its conclusion. Thank you very much for your valuable time and anticipated cooperation with my educational endeavors.

Respectfully,

Iris Cooper

Appendix B: Site Approval

Dear Iris Cooper:

I understand that you have asked for my participation in a research project for your doctoral study at Walden University. This study is titled The First 4 Years: A Small Business Sustainability Study and the research is conducted at ______offices in Columbus, Ohio. You have my permission to utilize our ________room to conduct two interview/meetings, approximately 90 minutes each, and collect documents that pertain to the financial and operational results for the first 4 years of my business. Semistructured interviews will facilitate the data collection for your study from and I am willing to help. You can have access to our __________room ____________. I am the owner and founder of ______________ and

understand that our organization's responsibilities include access to our _____ room and the provision of certain business documents. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change. I affirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting. I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and will not be shared to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University.

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 staff verify any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).

Appendix C: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study concerning small business sustainability. You were chosen for the study because you are the owner of a restaurant that has passed the fourth year in business. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to participate. Iris Cooper, who is a doctoral student at Walden University, is conducting the study.

Background Information:

The purpose of the qualitative exploratory case study is to explore the strategies you used to sustain your restaurant for more than 4 years.

Procedures:

If you agree to be part of the study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a face-to-face interview that is audio recorded and will span approximately 90 minutes. During this meeting, I will also ask to examine financial statements and legal documents pertaining to the first 4 years in business for comparison to the interview content.
- Participate in a second meeting of approximately 90 minutes to review the final transcript for meaning and accuracy.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in the study is voluntary and I will accept your decision if you decide not to participate in this study. There is no repercussions to you or your restaurant if you refuse to participate. If you decide to join the study now, you are at liberty to opt out at any time if you change your mind during the study. You may choose to stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable during the study, and you may ignore any question(s) that you do not choose to answer for any reason.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Given the nature of the study, the possibility of any harm to you is minimal as the study focuses only on examining the events and activities of your first 4 years in business; no confidential information or trade secrets is sought. The potential benefit of being in the study is your contribution to increasing the sustainability of other small restaurants and businesses past the fourth year.

Compensation:

Compensation will be a gas card worth $20.00 that will be given to a potential customer.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide is confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of the research project and will not disclose your name or anything else that could identify you in the study.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. You may contact the researcher via email iris.cooper@waldenu.edu or via telephone 614-XXX-XXXX. If you have questions later. If you want to confidentially discuss your rights as a research participant, you may call the Walden University's Research Participant Advocate on XXX-XXX-XXXX or email irb@waldenu.edu. Walden University's approval number for this study is #919716 and it expires in one year from the date on this form. The researcher, Iris Cooper, will provide you a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understand the above information and the purpose of the study sufficiently to make an informed decision about my participation. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of participant --

Date of Consent --

Participant's Written or Electronic* Signature --

Researcher's Written or Electronic* Signature --

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an electronic signature can be the person's typed name, e-mail address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix D: Interview Questions

The following are the interview questions:

1. How did you become a business owner?
2. What is your business model (BM)?
3. How do you make decisions?
4. What training or preparation did you pursue to operate this business?
5. Describe how the business developed from year one to year four.
6. What challenges, if any, did you face while developing this business?
7. How did you manage these challenges?
8. What community resources have you used to help with your business?
9. What assistance did you need to strengthen your business that is not available?
10. What other comments can you offer to others on starting a restaurant?