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Enhancing the Competitive Advantage of U.S. Corporations by Incorporating a Foreign Trade Zones Strategy

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Dino Adolfo Scott

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Enhancing the Competitive Advantage of U.S. Corporations by Incorporating a Foreign
Trade Zones Strategy

by

Dino Adolfo Scott

MS, American Public University, 2013

BS, University of Phoenix, 2012

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

March 2019

Abstract

Some leaders of U.S. companies fail to implement proper decision-making strategies to enact and execute strategies to realize the benefits provided by a foreign trade zone (FTZ). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and to identify the proper decision-making strategies used in successfully implementing a FTZ. The target population consisted of 5 leaders, including a senior leader, a supply chain manager, and 3 department managers of a company located in the midwestern region of the United States that successfully implemented a FTZ. Porter's competitive advantage theory was the conceptual framework used for the study. Semistructured interviews were conducted with the 5 participants; company documents served as additional sources of data. Triangulation and member checking were used to ensure the trustworthiness of the data interpretation. Three themes (import and export, training, and new processes) emerged from the analysis. The findings of this study could contribute to social change by presenting leaders with information about how to enhance decision-making skills when considering the application of a FTZ to enable the capacity for improvement of social infrastructure that includes telecommunications, electricity, water, and roads.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to grandparents, my parents, my brothers, my sister, my daughter, my nieces, my nephew, and my wife: my maternal grandparents, Adolfo Enrique Masdeu (Ecuador) and Armanda Mosquera de Masdeu (Colombia); my paternal grandparents, James Scott (United States) and Julia Barahona Scott (Honduras); my parents, Efrain Scott (United States) and Francelina Masdeu (Panama); my brothers, Danilo Enrique Scott and Efrain Scott; my sister, Darcilyn C. Scott; my daughter, Leandra Kaye Scott; my nieces, Darcilyn A. Scott Curry, Damaris E. Scott Patxot, and Danielle E. Scott Patxot; and my nephew, Danilo E. Scott Patxot. My wife, Nubia del Carmen Zamora Cita-Scott, carries a special dedication because she had to sustain the long hours I spent writing, rewriting, correcting, and editing this document. My grandparents did not have the opportunity to complete higher educational degrees. My parents completed some higher education degree but, because of family responsibilities, were unable to achieve their full potential. The dissertation is dedicated to the Scott-Masdeu family generation that was unable to meet their educational dreams and to current and future generations who should realize that their educational goals can become true through hard work and dedication.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my chair, coworkers, and stepchildren, who provided the assistance that permitted me to complete this academic achievement. Dr. Jill Murray, my chair, deserves a great acknowledgment because of her ability to endure my impatience and constant questioning of the process. I need to recognize Mike and Jackie Brown, owners of M&J Liquor, where I worked part-time and spent countless hours working on this dissertation as I stocked the shelves, as well as my coworkers at M&J, Stan Phippen and Steven Wright, who helped me by encouraging me to complete the task. Camilo A. Mesa and Alicia V. Mesa, my stepchildren, who also supported me with great enthusiasm during this process, require my acknowledgment.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Background of the Problem

The growing global commercial environment has compelled many organizations to explore, pursue, and foster innovative strategies that permit them to maintain and augment their competitive advantage in a global marketplace (Florica, Constantin, Felicia, & Ioana, 2015). To keep a competitive advantage, leaders of enterprises in the United States often focus on developing global supply chains strategies that center on standard supply chain components (United States Government Accountability Office, 2017).

However, few leaders of U.S. firms consider applying a foreign trade zone (FTZ) approach to gain a competitive advantage over domestic and global competitors (National Association of Foreign-Trade Zones, 2016). One reason why may be that the leaders responsible for reaching any final decision often lack relevant subject matter information, the input of team members with the most knowledge of the topic, and a basic understanding of the issue, according to Bailey and Peck (2013). Their organizations end up operating under conditions of uncertainty because of the absence of information or a lack of clear understanding that could affect the decision-making abilities of leaders (Comfort & Wukich, 2013). With more knowledge and information sharing, organizational leaders may be more inclined to incorporate the strategy of FTZs in the development of supply chain strategy. Their doing so could deliver not only profitability but also a competitive advantage to their organizations over domestic and international commercial rivals (Foreign-Trade Zones Board, 2017).

Problem Statement

The continuous growth of global markets has increased the use of FTZs by U.S. corporations seeking to gain a competitive advantage by lowering cost and deferring, eliminating, or reducing import and export duties when importing parts, raw materials, and semifinished components into the United States (Ghosh, Lockwood Reynolds, & Rohlin, 2016). Between 1995 and 2015, foreign and domestic trade zone entries in current dollars increased more than six-fold from \$104 billion to more than \$659 billion (U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones Board, 2017; United States Government Accountability Office, 2017). The general business problem is that senior leadership of some U.S. companies that import and export goods fail to consider various logistical business strategies that enhance positive business outcomes. The specific business problem is that the leaders of some U.S. companies fail to implement proper decision-making strategies to enact and execute the schemes that would produce the benefits provided by a FTZ.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and to identify the proper decision-making strategies used in successfully implementing an FTZ. The target population consisted of five leaders, composed of a senior leader, a supply chain manager, and three other department managers, of a company located in the midwestern region of the United States who successfully implemented and now operate in an FTZ. The implication for positive social change includes the potential to create additional employment positions that stimulate economic growth allowing for increased investment in social projects, such as improvements to school systems, development of parks and

green areas, and improvement of other social services. Warr and Menon (2016) stated that FTZ operators in Cambodia were required to provide electricity, build roads, and supply portable water to the facility and surrounding villages and township. By providing drinkable water, electricity, and roads the FTZs permit the federal, state, and local government agencies to provide social services, such as hospitals, clinics, daycares, and other social services to citizen residing near the FTZ (Yao & Whalley, 2016).

Nature of the Study

I concluded that a qualitative research method and a case-study design were appropriate for this study's examination of decision-making strategies that realize the benefits provided by a FTZ. As Yin (2017) noted, qualitative case-study research involves recording and exploring human experiences. Collins and Cooper (2014) said that when observing human behavior requires human contact that requires emotional maturity and strong interpersonal skills. Qualitative case-study encourage the researcher to collect in full description the stories and words used to describe the phenomena (Collins & Copper, 2014). Conducting a case study enables the investigator to complete an exploratory and flexible investigation that provides a profound understanding of a phenomenon (Løkke & Sørensen, 2014) while also maintaining the necessary rigor required to describe the context and development of the phenomenon and preserve the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). A researcher conducting a case study has the capacity to identify and explore sources that, regardless of the outcome, describe the complexity of the object of the investigation (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). I selected the case-study approach

because it was helpful in introducing concepts. The case-study also facilitating the understanding of the subject under examination by putting them into real-world contexts immediately.

Researchers employing a mixed method, or the quantitative research method seek to arrive to a derived conclusion of the sampled population through the collection and quantification of data to measure the instances of various occurrences or reactions (Gelling, 2014). Investigators using the quantitative and mixed-method approach depend on the accumulation of data facts and causes of behavior through isolation, measurements, and control over time while researchers using the qualitative case-study design focus on the changing and dynamic nature of reality by exploring a point in time (Gelling, 2014; Carayon et al., 2015).

I considered but opted against using an ethnographic, grounded theory, narrative, or phenomenological qualitative research design for the study. As researchers have noted, these designs do not provide the trustworthiness contributed by using the case-study design (Khan, 2014; Quick & Hall, 2015; Yin, 2017). The flaw with the narrative design pertains to the researcher's inability to verify the ownership of the story, producing skewed information that affects the study (Bruce, Beuthin, Sheilds, Molzahn, & Schick-Makaroff, 2016). An investigator using phenomenological research aspires to arrive at an unbiased understanding of the subject's life experience (VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015; Willis, Sullivan-Bolyai, Knafl, & Cohen, 2016). The grounded theory research design requires that the researcher approach the problem using conceptual thinking and theory building, instead of empirically testing the theory (Khan, 2014). Quick and Hall (2015)

stated that the central focus of ethnography consists of the researcher's close observation, recording, and evaluation of the participants' social culture, social practices, and social interactions. Investigating the processes and information required by business leaders to arrive at a decision requires for the researcher acquire the ability to understand, identify, and explore the sources in an open forum. Narrative, grounded theory, and ethnographic research methods limit or fail to provide the capacity to collect data that is relevant to the topic under investigation.

I chose the case-study design for this study. The capacity to explore the human experience through the case-study method provides the investigator with the ability to deliver the four criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability necessary to determine the trustworthiness of the qualitative research approach (Morse, 2015a). With this approach, I was able to use real-world examples to answer the research questions.

Research Question

The central research question was, What effective decision-making strategies do leaders of some U.S. companies use to successfully implement a FTZ?

Interview Questions

1. What changes to your company's domestic or global business environment contributed to considering a FTZ as a component of your business strategy?
2. What knowledge or understanding of FTZ did you need to gather or collect to trust that you have arrived at an informed decision to implement a FTZ?

3. What additional knowledge or understanding of FTZ did you require to implement an FTZ strategy successfully?
4. What methods did you use to increase your knowledge and understanding of FTZs?
5. What other information regarding the implementation of a FTZ did you consider as vital to reaching the informed decision of proceeding with the execution of the FTZ strategy?
6. What type of barriers, obstacles, or impediments did your company encounter during the implementation of the FTZ?
7. How did your company's leaders overcome these impediments, barriers, or obstacles during the implementation of the FTZ project?

Conceptual Framework

Porter (1998) developed the competitive advantage theory based on the observations he made on how a firm creates and defends its competitive position, surpassing its commercial rivals and continuing its attractiveness to consumers. A competitive advantage occurs because a firm seeks to build the value of the item offered to buyers to the point that it exceed the cost of providing that item (Porter, 1998). The ability to import raw, semifinished, and finished materials without paying import duties and then produce a new article, grants users of FTZs a competitive advantage against other corporations not operating in an FTZ environment (Post, 2015).

Porter (2008) stated that competitive advantage depends on the ability of a company to offer goods at low cost and produce a differentiation between the organization and its commercial rivals. The implementation of an FTZ grants the operator

the ability to lower operational costs, increase tax savings, and limit the nonapplicability of quota restrictions (Ghosh et al., 2016). The organization enabling the FTZ would produce a unique value from the tax savings and the tradeoff of gaining the lower of operational cost, providing the competitive advantage over commercial rivals.

Operational Definitions

Competitive advantage: The opportunity afforded an organization to create a superior and favorable position over commercial rivals, which permits the generation of considerable value for the firm and the firm's stakeholders (Porter, 2008).

Duty-free: The absence of the need for assessment of import taxes, duties, tariffs, or other monetary charges levied by the national customs agency to items entering through importation to the national territory (Mathiraj & SarojaDevi, 2016).

Export processing zones: Zones created by developing countries to attract foreign investment in exchange for government financial incentives that could include reprieve from value-added taxes (VAT), possible export subsidies, and tax-free importation of necessities for establishing manufacturing facilities in that developing country (Waters, 2013).

Export: An act of international trade where an article is manufactured, wholly obtained, or produced in one country and shipped to another country for future sale, processing, transformation, or sale (Bashir, Iqbal, & Nasim, 2015).

Foreign trade zones: Areas created by the Foreign Trade Zones Act of 1934 by the United States Congress to stimulate and facilitate exports by granting users the ability to import duty-free and quota-free into zones. FTZs are located within U.S. territory but

are considered outside of the domain of the U.S. Customs agency territory (United States Government Accountability Office, 2017).

Free trade zones: Areas consisting of a part of a national territory, which have been designated to operate outside of the national customs agency jurisdiction; goods can be imported into the FTZ without the assessment of import taxes, duties, or tariffs and have minimal completion of entry documentation (Lu, 2014).

Special economic zones: Geographically delimited areas designated by the national government which are physically secured and isolated from nearby cities, and which could exist outside or inside the customs territory of the hosting country (Arnold, 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions consist of statements that are accepted as established truth based on logic or reasoning without proof or verification (Yin, 2017). My first assumption was that the participants in the study would provide honest and truthful answers to the interview questions. For the study to receive accurate responses, the query needs a neutral tone and should not initiate with the interrogatory pronoun of *why* (Doody & Noonan, 2013). I maintained a neutral demeanor, kept eye contact, listened actively, and demonstrated empathy to ensure trustful and honest replies from the participants. The second assumption was that the study could produce beneficial social and economic information for groups considering the implementation of a FTZ operation. Habets, van Delden, and Bredenoord (2014) indicated that although direct welfare benefits could occur, the

principal purpose of any study is to generate knowledge through the collection and evaluation of data. The last assumption was that the conceptual framework of the research would align with the data analysis results. The population selected for the study ensures that the participants possess the knowledge and information regarding the topic under investigation and provides trustworthy and accurate responses to the study questions.

Limitations

Connelly (2013) defined limitations as the internal and external validities that identify the strengths and weaknesses of any research study. The vulnerabilities associated with this research were that I am a novice at completing research studies and that the participants could have provided answers to questions based on conjecture instead of real experience. The strength, I associate with the study is selection of participants that own an understanding and knowledge of the topic under study. Dang and Kaur (2016) stated that any investigation possesses challenges and limitations that could consist of inadequate infrastructure and lack of training. A final weakness was the possibility that the participants would prefer not to share their decision-making practices on the FTZ topic. The limitations should not deter the researcher from completing the investigation (Connelly, 2013).

Delimitations

Yin (2017) defined delimitations as the attributes that regulate the scope and outline the boundaries of a study. Two examples of delimitation associated with the study consists of the research questions and populations chosen as targets to study. The use of

only one FTZ, located in the Greater Kansas City Metropolitan area (GKCM), was one of the study's delimitations. Collecting additional data from a larger pool of participants from other FTZs in the Greater Kansas City area could have elicited more informative data. In addition, my use of a semistructured interview instead of a structured interview model could have resulted in my not receiving honest information from the participants.

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study could provide information to company leaders who are exploring or examining the possibility of implementing an FTZ. The conclusion and recommendations of this study provide descriptions of methods business organizations could use to enhance competitive advantage, control costs, increase profits, and influence social change.

Contribution to Business Practice

The results from this study could be valuable to managers and senior leadership of organizations considering the implementation of an FTZ to enhance competitive advantage, reduce costs, and provides other benefits. Gum (2014) stated that the objective of economic processing zones (EPZ) focuses on creating employment, generating foreign exchange, improving the export sector, and attracting investment. EPZs are a type of FTZ, established by the government of developing countries to promote industrial and commercial exports. FTZs located in Taiwan, China, and India have exhibited the standard benefits of successful implementation of these zones through the stimulation of basic manufacturing, reduction of import tariffs, and enhancement of companies' competitiveness, all contributing to the promotion of investment and an increase in trade

(Bräutigam & Tang, 2014; Saaed & Hussain, 2015; Yao & Whalley, 2016). Senior leadership and managers could acquire a better understanding of the strategies that are required when considering the implementation of an FTZ from this study.

Implications for Social Change

FTZs not only create economic advantages for the operators of the zones, but also contribute to social changes for the employees, their families, and the communities surrounding the FTZ (Ghosh et al., 2016). EPZs in Nicaragua generated an estimated 100,000 direct jobs and donated computers to schools; the operators of the EPZ assisted in organizing cycling marathons and participated in a nutritional program that provides additional food to the employees and their families (Waters, 2013). Using FTZs delivers the capacity for improvement of social infrastructure that includes telecommunication, electricity, water, and roads (Gum, 2014). The economic benefits catalyzed by FTZs tend to produce other secondary economic effects that provide positive social changes to the communities surrounding the FTZs (Ghosh et al., 2016). The transfer of modern technology and the increase of hiring of unemployed workforce serve as examples of positive social changes created by FTZ. The findings and recommendations that develop from this study could motivate current and future operators of FTZs to contribute to the social growth of surrounding communities.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

A literature review serves as a narrative evaluation of written work on a specific subject matter (Baker, 2016). Pautasso (2013) stated that the demand for literature reviews has increased because of the increase in the number of publications and

investigators' inability to examine in detail every new study related or relevant to their topic. Baker (2016) argued that the purpose of a literature review rests on reporting the contemporary knowledge on the subject and providing a summary of the best available research from previously published studies related to the matter.

In this literature review, I identify significant and essential literature concerning how U.S. companies gain a competitive advantage from the implementation of a FTZ. The decision-making skills required by managers to arrive at the determination to implement the FTZ is also examined in the literature review. In this section, I consider the background of FTZs, different conceptualizations of them, strategies necessary for competitiveness, and the economic benefits associated with FTZs. My intention for this study was to concentrate on exploring the approaches that realize the benefits of a FTZ. The composition of the literature review consists of journal articles and early work theories associated with the topic (see Wakefield, 2015). The literature review follows a design based on subject matter (see Pautasso, 2013).

I obtained valuable information for the literature review from the Walden University Library. My searches of multiple databases available in the library provided a variety of peer-reviewed studies on the research topic published between 2014 and 2017. Articles published before 2014 appear in this literature review because they contribute directly to this research study or provide background and foundation for the study. My database searches of EBSCOhost, ProQuest Complete, SAGE Premier, Business Source Complete, Google Scholar, and other academic databases and search engines included keywords and search terms such as foreign trade zones, free trade zones, special

economic zones, export processing zones, qualifying industrial zones, foreign direct investment, exporting, international trade policies, decision-making, and competitive advantage. I also used articles with content that revealed information regarding FTZ policies and politics, benefits derived from FTZs, and what implementation strategies ensure the success of a FTZ as part of the literature review.

The literature review consists of a total of 144 articles and books; 97% (140) of the sources cited were peer-reviewed. More than 85% (126) of the published articles were published between 2014 and 2017, within 5 years of this study. The remaining 15% (18) of the peer-reviewed published articles were published in 2013 or earlier. My analysis and subsequent synthesis of the literature will draw on data located in academic, research-based, peer-reviewed journals, policy documents, and expert opinion papers (see Wakefield, 2015).

This literature review encompasses the political and social implications of FTZs and the complexities related to the process of decision-making used by some business leaders when considering the implementation of a FTZ. A discussion of the history and background of FTZs provides the reader with an enhanced comprehension of the topic. The review contains a relevant analysis of the components that form the conceptual supply chain integration model necessary to manage, operate, and attain FTZ success (Sabet, Yazdani, & De Leeuw, 2017; Zhang, Gunasekaran, & Wang, 2015)

Background of FTZs

Understanding how and why operators of FTZs acquire and achieve a competitive advantage over rivals requires defining what a FTZ encompasses (National Association

of Foreign-Trade Zones, 2016). The gains that accompany the successful implementation of an FTZ provide an economic liberalization that extends to the local, state, and national financial systems (Warr & Menon, 2016). Special economic zones (SEZs), qualifying industrial zones (QIZs), EPZs, and FTZs serve as the different names used by countries that need to develop domestic industries by attracting foreign investment (Sigler, 2014). Bolle and Williams (2013) stated that the U.S. version of globally recognized FTZs carries the designation as foreign trade zones. Other countries use the designation of EPZ, or SEZ, which are not permitted in the United States. The U.S. Foreign-Trade Zone Board (2017) defined FTZs as a designated location in the United States but considered by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (USCBP) as a territory outside of its regulatory jurisdiction. Placing the FTZ in a territory outside of the jurisdiction of USCBP, permits the entry of the product without the requirement of payment of duties or completing a formal entry declaration to USCBP.

History of FTZs. The concept of FTZs dates back to at least the 16th century, but the establishment of the first modern zone occurred in Ireland in 1959 (Moberg, 2015). In 1986, the International Labour Organization estimated that 176 zones operated in 47 countries; by 2008 more than 3,000 zones functioned in 135 nations (Picarelli, 2016). National legislatures created SEZs, EPZs, FTZs, and other similarly designated zones to generate employment, promote the acquisition of technology, foment foreign investment, and expand their countries' export base (Azmeah, 2014; Waters, 2013). The National Association of Foreign-Trade Zones (2016) noted that FTZs employ about 66 million workers globally, including approximately 370,000 in the United States. China accounts

for an estimated 40 million persons employed by FTZs (National Association of Foreign-Trade Zones, 2016).

The concept of zones varies from type to type and country to country, but all zones embrace the essential character of industrial zones (Tabakis, 2015). Alam, Molla, and Murad (2014) stated that zones carry different designations in various countries; EPZ, FTZ, SEZ, and export processing factory (EPF) refer to similar concepts as determined by national policy prescriptions and objectives. All zones possess special incentives to attract foreign investors (Jing & Yong, 2014). In addition, imported material sustains some degree of processing before departing from the zone as export (Jing & Yong, 2014). Furthermore, the zones operate in an authorized delimited area (Jing & Yong, 2014).

U.S. FTZ facts. The U.S. Congress passed the Foreign Trade Zone Act during the Great Depression in 1934 to offset the competitive advantage possessed by foreign companies. The Act permitted organizations located in the United States to organize an FTZ to benefit from the reduction or elimination of duties (National Association of Foreign-Trade Zones, 2016; United States Government Accountability Office, 2017). Companies operating FTZs carry the designation of operators and use special procedures that help encourage activity and add value, permitting competition with foreign-made alternatives by allowing delayed or reduced duty payments on foreign merchandise (U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones Board, 2017). Other benefits for the operators of FTZs include lower inventory cost, distribution savings, and inverted tax benefits (National Association of Foreign-Trade Zones, 2016). The establishment of FTZs has accelerated in the United

States, as demonstrated by the value of exports that reflected \$40 billion in 2008 and increased to \$70 billion by 2012 (Benton, Napier, & Ulku, 2016). The implementation of a FTZ program not only provides organizations with economic and commercial benefits but could also lead to economic changes that affect the comprehensive economic development of local, state, and national economies (Sigler, 2014).

Strategic Decision-Making Capability Necessary for FTZ Implementation

The distinctive quality of a productive decision maker embraces the knowledge that focuses on context, constraints, personal experience, and opportunities for action that evolves into a strategy that produces the desired results (Comfort & Wukich, 2013). Bagdasarov et al. (2016) indicated that any decision-making process that expects the use of mental models that grant the user the capability make sense of the issues and generate a systemic and creative approach that stimulates innovation. The eventual result expected from the strategic decision-making rest on creating a unique and valuable position for the organization that integrates business and management knowledge (Kumar & Muthuvelayutham, 2014).

Businesses involved in global trading require decision-making thinking skills that consider the economic and social infrastructures, the centers of knowledge, and the human capital necessary for the success of the business involved in a global market (Lepora & Pezzulo, 2015; Morena, Del Gatto, & Gornati, 2014). FTZs depend on knowledgeable and well-designed supply chain strategies to maintain and sustain their competitive and innovative advantage (den Hertog, 2014). The formulation of any supply chain strategy required a decision-making process that encompasses the alignment of

company's comprehensive plan and centralized of the organization's supply management (Graham, Harvey, & Puri, 2015; Li, Wu, & Holsapple, 2015; Shepherd, Williams, & Patzelt, 2015).

Decision-making elements. Bailey and Peck (2013) pointed out that decision-making requires that the organization approach leadership with an understanding of strategic decision-making, the alignment of the interest, and efficient processes that grant the participants the capability to arrive at well-informed decisions that produce deployable and reliable outcomes. Moral and ethical vectors could affect the final decision-making results because of the penetration of particular issues; such as global sustainability, vulnerable ecosystems, social issues, and the effects on the personnel implicated in the action (Boholm, Henning, & Kryworzeka, 2013; Heyler, Armenakis, Walker, & Collier, 2016). Bagdasarov et al. (2016) stated that an ethical dimension of decision-making requires for the participants to identify and analyze causes, potential risks, and ramifications that should permit the individuals participating in the decision-making processes to arrive at ethical decisions.

Knowledge management. Graham et al. (2015) noted that business leaders' decision-making skills rely upon knowledge management that occurs through the collection of information, the delegation of the making of decisions to critical employees, and the contribution of technology that assist in perceiving risks, permitting for the flow of knowledge. Comfort and Wukich (2013) observed that for a person or group to arrive at a practical and valid decision, the group or person must first acquire knowledge, proceed to apply said knowledge, and finally integrate the various pieces of knowledge to

create a new resolution. The forward influence of expertise contributes to the ability to understand how actions and other dynamics directly affect the decision-making process (Lepora & Pezzulo, 2015).

An example of the appropriate use of knowledge management for decision-making becomes apparent by the decision of the Chinese Central Government to establish the Shanghai Pilot Free Trade Zone intended to serve as an economic growth engine, after experiencing economic stagnation and slowdown in foreign trade (Xu & Jiang, 2014). Taiwanese entrepreneurs applied a decision-making strategy that enhanced the free trade zones operations by consolidating and integrating information and communication technology that complement the flow of cargo information that improved global management and competitive advantage (Chen, Chiang, Hsu, & Hsia., 2016; Shepherd, Williams, & Patzelt, 2015). However, Moberg (2015) noted that the investors and government officials need to reduce the known distance between the expectations of the investor's decision makers and the policy makers because each group seeks different benefits and reasons for the establishments of the FTZs.

FTZ influences on decision-making. The entrepreneur's FTZ decision-making skills reside on understanding and developing long-term business strategies that incorporate information systems, investments, and developing additional opportunities (Morena et al., 2014; Shepherd et al., 2015). Bogoviz, Ragulina, and Kutukova (2016) argued that the formation and further development of SEZs compel and encourage the necessity of decision-making skills that seek solutions to problems that embrace economic policy, development of foreign activities, competitive qualities, and policy

issues. By possessing a thorough understanding of the costs, benefits, restrictions, and regulations associated with FTZs permits an organization to reach an informed decision, regarding the FTZ strategy need to implement (Benton et al., 2016).

Chakraborty, Sarkar, and Majumdar (2013) observed that group decision making produces better results than decisions made individually; however, group decision-making processes could become a yes/no voting system, which would not accurately reflect the decision makers real intention. Reducing the possibility of the group's decision from becoming a simple yes or no vote; the group should possess a shared vision that translates into an alignment that moves people emotionally and intellectually, assuring a decision based on informed rhetoric (Bailey & Peck, 2013). Simaškienė and Dromantaite-Stancikienė (2014) stated that the decimation of knowledge in any group responsible for deciding is a primary necessity of the decision-making process to ensure the alignment of the group and the decision.

The final decision should take place based on the knowledge management of possible benefits to the cost and risks associated with the proposal under consideration (Chakraborty et al., 2013). Knowledge management assists in the creation, collection, organization, analysis, and use knowledge as through the administration of resources that foster the ability to adapt to the changes and arrive at factual decisions enabling firms to continue to compete in the global market (Simaškienė & Dromantaite-Stancikienė, 2014). To implement the competitive advantages of an FTZ, the leadership managing or considering the implementation of the FTZ needs to collect necessary knowledge and arrive at solidly informed decisions (Wan, Zhang, Wang, & Chen, 2014).

Developing Competitive Advantage Strategies , oWith FTZs

The global economy causes companies to develop strategies and implement methods that assure a competitive advantage over commercial rivals (Porter, 1998). The strategists that use the theory of competitive advantage stresses the need to focus on five competitive forces that threaten the sustainability and longevity of any business organization (Ungerer & Cayzer, 2016). The risk of new competitors pose to existing competitors, the power of suppliers, the threat of substitutes, the rivalry among existing competitors, and the power of the buyers constitute the five competitive forces that require businesses to consider when developing a strategy that protects their market shares (Porter, 2008).

With 95% of the world's consumers located beyond the borders of the U.S. and with a projection of 85% global economic growth to occur outside the U.S. by 2050; U.S. companies need to capture those global consumers and establish a competitive advantage over international and domestic commercial rivals (International Trade Administration, 2017). Honeywell Aerospace, Inc. (Zone 75J, Phoenix, Arizona); Mercedes-Benz U.S. International (Zone 98A, Birmingham, Alabama); and ExxonMobil Oil Corporation (Zone 154A, Baton Rouge, Louisiana) serve as examples of FTZs operation in the U.S. that create and assist companies in establishing global competitive advantage (Lu, 2014). These companies established FTZs that sought to market their goods and services not only in the domestic U.S. markets but also venture into foreign markets, as a method to expand to global markets and gain additional consumer shares (U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones Board, 2017).

Companies operating on a global platform found that competition occurred not only in producing losses to the domestic market shares but also affect the global market shares, causing the organizations to seek methods to sustain and enhance their competitive advantage (Bräutigam & Tang, 2014). Global companies must operate a multiple of supply chains, referred to as a global platform, that businesses count on to not only deliver goods on time, but also to customize and respond timely to different customer and supplier expectations regarding pricing and packages (Busse, Meinlschmidt, & Foerstl, 2017). Trappey, Trappey, Lin, Lee, and Yang (2013) indicated that changes to the global business model discourage companies from merely migrating to the next developing countries to seize the low labor costs; but instead needs to develop a modernized, dynamic, and flexible logistics models that create a sustainable competitive advantage. Defending and countering the threat of new competitors, substitution, the power of suppliers and buyers, and the rivalry among existing competitors, some corporate strategists found that the use of FTZs could assist in protecting the five forces (Chen, Chiang, Hsu, & Hsia, 2016).

Competitive advantages offered by FTZs. The effects of competitiveness of U.S. companies using U.S. FTZs occur through the allowance of savings that result from duty reduction, inventory efficiencies, duty exemptions on goods exported, and the scrapping or destruction of raw materials or imported goods into the foreign trade zones (U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones Board, 2017). FTZs also offer the reduction of supply chain costs by improving security, processing cycles, and customer response time (International Trade Administration, 2017). Seyoum (2017) observed that FTZ operate in a secure

perimeter, surrounded by fences and walls that impede the entrance or exit of unchecked cargo or raw materials, enhancing the security of the goods produced, imported, or exported from the FTZ.

The ability to transfer the imported goods directly from the arrival entry port to the FTZ, improves the processing cycles, permitting for the faster production of finished goods (National Association of Foreign-Trade Zones, 2016). As the FTZ produces finished goods at a more rapid pace, a boost to the delivery of product to the end user occurs (Benton et al., 2016). Li, Wu, and Holsapple (2015) indicated that the supply chain's adaptability permit organizations to respond to the macroeconomic changes, economic progress, and political and social reforms giving firms the ability to maintain and sustain competitive performance. Lu (2014) argued that a FTZ possesses the capacity to change from distribution hubs to logistics networks that are more refined and externally integrated that maximize the value added and lower service cost, providing the competitive performance.

Companies are facing constant changes in the global business environment that require businesses to consistently evaluate their competitiveness and adapt rapidly to any new threats (Li et al., 2015). Trappey et al. (2013) stated that companies operating in an FTZ environment possess the capability to form new global ventures, try new strategies, and integrate channels that permit the rapid improvement of the firms' competitiveness capacity against commercial rivals that operate in non-FTZs environments. Firms operating in FTZs environment use the low costs associated with FTZs to enhance competitive advantage and the ability to increase global market shares (Seyoum, 2017).

Competitive strategies of clustering used by FTZs. Clustering displays a future trend that with government support and industry innovation should enhance and contribute to the expanding global competitiveness (Rivera, Gligor, & Sheffi, 2016). Clusters promote for businesses to establish relationships by encouraging the exchange of strategic resources, knowledge, technologies, information, and infrastructures that provide and enhance the competitiveness of companies comprising the clusters (Connell, Kriz, & Thorpe, 2014). To improve companies' international competitiveness, companies operating in SPZ; SPZs function identically to FTZs, create industry and logistical clusters that forge relationships that assisted the businesses in sustaining and maintaining competitive advantages (Rivera et al., 2016). Connell et al. (2014) stated that clusters carry differentiation by specializations of the cluster use and that clusters could focus on logistics or industrial strategies. Savage and Fransman (2014) observed that efficient logistics clusters facilitate the movement of goods, information, and financials through space and time, enhancing a territory's economic growth and that could evolve into a geopolitical weapon that improves their strategic competitiveness by offering positional and added value benefits for global supply chains. The interaction between process integration and the differentiation strategy should demonstrate a significant improvement in the performance of the supply chain (Huo, Qi, Wang, & Zhao, 2014). Organizations gain certain flexibility that appears or develops by groups that operate the FTZs, granting the capability of not only to defend their business from the five competitive forces but also to compete against commercial rivals using the organization's supply chain (Wan et al., 2014).

Benefits of U.S. and Foreign FTZs

The establishment of a FTZ offers companies certain advantages that grant them the ability to compete in the global markets (Kostadinovic & Petrovic-Randelovic, 2015). However, the government of the countries forming the FTZs also expect to gain benefits from the foreign and domestic investors that implement and operate the FTZ (Gum, 2014). Waters (2013) stated that national governments expect that FTZs should generate direct and indirect jobs that permit those employed to pay income and social security taxes, increasing the economic and financial future of the nation. Both the operators of FTZ and the central governments that provide the permits for the establishment of FTZ, expect to receive some form of benefits from the operation and management of FTZs (Maslikhina, 2016; Terziu, 2015). Each government involved in the creation of FTZs using formal legislature seeks to gain the excellent benefits from the investment, management, and operation of the FTZs (Moberg, 2015).

Florica et al. (2015) argued that governments of various countries focus on FTZs as a proven model that promotes export strategies as a method for national economic growth. The states establishing FTZs expect a social welfare increase that depends on the economic variables, such as external tariffs, market size, and the differences in cost between local input caused by the elimination of trade barriers (Azmeah, 2014; Saaed & Hussain, 2015; Yankov, Moiseev, & Efgrafov, 2016). Nath (2013) noted that if skilled labor serves as a substitute for the imported input and FDI in the FTZ, then the production incentives to the FTZ demonstrated a reduction in tariff rates of goods imported used by the zone and permitted for a decrease in the levels of outstanding debt.

Benefits gained by other countries when implementing FTZs. Picarelli (2016) indicated that when the Nicaraguan legislature considered the formation of EPZs (Export processing zones are similar to FTZs) that would promote the generation of employment, attract foreign investment, increase the non-traditional export, acquire new technology, and expand international trade. Russia introduced the concept of SEZs that sought the attraction of foreign direct investment, improve employment opportunities for the local workforce, and strived to increase development of underused areas through the expectation of an increase in exports expansion (Maslikhina, 2016; Yankov et al., 2016). Ji, Li, and King (2015) noted that Hong Kong's free trade model that includes financial services, FTZs, and medical services provide a link between international trade and tourism that mainland China seeks to exploit by attracting additional tourists from the affluent Yangtze River region and other locations overseas.

The Mauritian government sent researchers to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other East-Asian countries in the 1960s to examine the export-based models of these countries in an attempt to break the Mauritian economy from its dependence on the sugar industry (Mushanyuri & Mzumara, 2013). After reviewing the research, the Mauritian government decided to establish EPZs that not only brought the expected progress for the nation but also delivered unexpected economic growth that made Mauritius the best country in Africa to develop businesses, based on a World Bank study (Gum, 2014).

In 1986 the Vietnamese government selected special economic zones model (SEZs) as a vehicle used towards achieving global commerce integration, increasing the volume of trade, and overcoming a financial and economic stagnation that plagued the

country (Pan & Ngo, 2016). Lu (2014) stated that national government establishes FTZs, not for concessions offered to the investors but for the potential of gaining financial liberalization, economic prosperity, and bring stability to other sectors of the national economy. Jenkins and Arce (2016) indicated that host nations could increase additional economic concessions from FTZ by the generation of backward linkages between the FTZ, located downstream and the local suppliers and vendors located upstream. Countries that permit the operation EPZs witnessed an increase in trade by offsetting the protectionism on imported inputs and usually grow their exports by 10% (Yücer & Siroën, 2016). Benton et al. (2016) stated that FTZs differs between countries, but a review of the benefits and reasons why countries establish FTZs; provides a better understanding of how and why the U.S. companies use the FTZs as a tool for global sourcing and deriving benefits from the operation of U. S. FTZs.

U.S. FTZ benefits. In 1934, the U.S. endured a prolonged economic downturn from the Great Depression. As a response, U.S. Congress passed the Foreign-Trade Zones Act, to expedite and encourage international trade and at the same time promote domestic and foreign investment that should assist in the economic recovery of the United States (United States Government Accountability Office, 2017). The initial introduction of the FTZ Act failed to produce the expected economic and foreign direct investments (FDI) results. However, by 2015, U.S. FTZs grew to over 186 facilities with more than 420,000 individuals employed, and the value of shipments into zones totaled nearly \$660 billion (U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones Board, 2017). The benefits offered to the investors of U.S. FTZs granted the FTZ operators the ability to import raw materials and

semi-assembled units free of payment of import duties (The United States Government Accountability Office, 2017). They could export the raw materials or sub-assembly with no assessment of taxes and improve the liquidity of cash flow for the companies operating FTZs (Seyoum, 2017). Additional benefits for the FTZ operators include providing unlimited time for inventory storage, decreasing or removing delays in the clearance process managed by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and suspension of national quotas or restrictions on specific imported products (United States Government Accountability Office, 2017). Taking the benefits offered by the FTZ program, some U.S. firm strategies recognize that the implementation of a FTZ could permit the company's capability to gain, sustain, and maintain a competitive advantage over both domestic and foreign commercial rivals (Seyoum, 2017).

The foreign direct investment (FDI) introduced by the U.S. FTZs contribute to the creation of employment that assists in economic growth in the local and regional areas enveloping the FTZs (Terziu, 2015). Gouider and Nouira (2014) argued that by enhancing the competitiveness of the domestic product, the undervaluation of the dollar encouraged the attraction of FDI to the United States. The benefits provided to the U.S. FTZs tend to extend to the communities surrounding the FTZs area (Waters, 2013). Zones create employment positions directly and indirectly through the increasing demand for domestic production (Moberg, 2015). Ghosh et al. (2016) indicated that FTZ located in specific U.S. zip codes demonstrated the capability to encourage new and existing non-manufacturing businesses growth and economic stimulation for the FTZ zip codes and the areas bordering the FTZs zip codes. Other countries that developed FTZs tend to

demonstrate similar economic development for not only the operators of the FTZs, but also towns, cities, and eventually the nation hosting the FTZs (Kostadinovic & Petrovic-Randelovic, 2015).

New international business markets and global economic growth. Some of the benefits rendered to the operators of FTZ permit for the countries sponsoring the FTZs projects to receive supplemental advantages that trigger improvement to local firms that export and the technology used by the domestic firms (Yücer & Siroën, 2016). Azmeh (2014) stated that the bases for the institution of qualifying industrial zones (QIZ) by the Egyptian government centered on the Egyptian apparel exporters facing a possibility of losing their competitive advantage on the global business stage to Jordanian and Israeli ventures that operated in QIZs. The QIZs in Jordan and Israel, granting the exporters with an influx of foreign investments and the introduction of modern technology (Azmeh, 2014). The Republic of Serbia adopted the Law of Free Zones in 2006 to stimulate the country's economic growth and attract foreign investment that resulted of 143% increase in exports valued at 2.1 billion Euros demonstrating remarkable results of FTZs (Kostadinovic & Randelovic, 2015). Alam, Molla, and Murad (2014) argued that Malaysia decides to replicate the FTZ model economic success used by Bangladesh that granted Bangladesh's exports to increase and unlock the capacity to gain economic growth for the country.

The China of the 1980s carried the designation of a backward nation with no comparative advantages, underdeveloped transportation and logistics infrastructures, a low-income GDP, and low technology industries, caused the Chinese government to

consider the implementation of FTZs that would open China to the global economy (Wan et al., 2014). China's opening to the worldwide economy initiates the development of government action to permit the operation of FTZs in China that increased China's GDP per capita to \$7,600 in 2014 and the introduction of modern technology granting the Chinese industries to become competitive in the global economy (Lin, 2015). The development of a FTZ that focuses on managing outsourcing services illustrate an innovative method of how China would use a FTZ to enhance core competitive ability and establish a new source of business development (Zhang, 2014). Wang (2013) indicated that Chinese SEZs display an increase of FDI at an average of 6% in the year the SEZ implementation occurred. In 2011 the total global FDI amounted to \$18 trillion, and China share of FDI grew to \$628 billion, and Hong Kong's FDI increased to \$1 trillion (Milner, 2014). However, Yong, Yew, Huang, and Chin (2016) observed that most of China's FDI occurred in the Eastern coastal region, causing an unbalance of quality infrastructures, logistical disadvantages, and absence of technological and economic development in the Central and Western areas of China.

Kosovo's government decided to introduce the use of FTZs to overcome the isolation from the global economy and improve the exportation of Kosovan manufactured goods, caused by Kosovo's declaration as an independent nation in 1990 (Terziu, 2015). The establishment of an SEZ in Shenzhen not only assisted in China attempts to enter the economic transition of globalization, decentralization, and marketization caused a population growth and infrastructural development to the city and areas that bordered the Shenzhen SEZ (Huang et al., 2015). Zacharevič and Dzemyda (2015) noted that

exporting serves as a fundamental component to achieving economic growth for the state and permits for the development of a higher level of competition for the domestic and international markets.

Egypt and Jordan's trade initiative of employing SEZ to reduce the bureaucratic red tape that promoted the development of manufacturing by unskilled labor and attracted buyers, such as Wal-Mart, J.C. Penney, Hanes, and Kohl's (Azmeah, 2014). The achievement of Bangladesh's EPZ could carry a label of modest but recorded \$2,581.7 million in exports that accounted for 16% of the total national export and attracted slightly over a \$1 billion in FDI (Alam et al., 2014). Cambodia's SEZs captured a significant amount of foreign investment, created 68,000 employment places, and bolstered the economic growth for the Cambodian population and promoting the export of Cambodian manufactured goods worldwide (Warr & Menon, 2016). Vietnam's SEZs policies attracted foreign capital by offering incentive packages and a degree of openness, but for the incentive to provide a favorable outcome required for the Vietnamese government commitment to improve the legal framework as well as addressing the high inflation and debt crisis currently affecting Vietnam (Pan & Ngo, 2016).

Infrastructural benefits introduced by FTZs. The modernization and upgrading of transportation infrastructures and the dynamic use of spatial areas that support the FTZs the ability to operate an efficient business environment, serve as compelling factors for the countries seeking economic growth through the use of FTZs (Hirschinger, Spickermann, Hartmann, Von Der Gracht, & Darkow, 2015). Improved transportation infrastructure systems ease the movement of inbound and outbound shipments and could

lead to a reduction in general costs (Mellat-Parast & Spillan, 2014). Menike (2016) noted that Sri Lanka's communication, technology, and transportation infrastructure experienced a development and improvement phase, caused by the introduction and establishment of FTZs and other similar zones. Lam (2013) argued that the export sector promotes the establishment of transportation and communication infrastructures that become essentials for other industries to grow and prosper. The development of FTZs in Taiwan motivated the Taiwanese government to invest in the improvement or building of six harbors and an airport that would provide an additional tool to augment the competitiveness of the FTZs (Chen et al., 2016).

The benefits produced by using spatial areas for FTZs. The foreign trade zones provide an additional beneficial effect by promoting the methods to develop and utilize underused or unused spatial areas (Huang et al., 2015). The South African government passed a Special Economic Zones Act in May 2014 that promoted the planning and use of spatial areas that improved the economy of lagging regions and potentially contribute future of South Africans (Nel & Rogerson, 2014). Huang et al. (2015) indicated that in South China, the lands once considered as rural experienced a resurgence with China's introduction of SEZs that acquired the grounds to build the new industrial and warehousing complexes.

However, TK and Arul (2016) noted that compulsory land acquisition for use by India's SEZs occurred to areas inhabited by poor people and the compensation given to the people reflected less than the actual market price of land. The transition of remaining spatial areas into productive FTZ causes the formation an urban outgrowth that connects

existing cities and the zones that translate into higher real estate values for the regions surrounding the FTZ (Huang et al., 2015). The urban outgrowth motivates workers to migrate into spaces that could alter the incomes of laborers and firms located within the FTA economic influence region (Picarelli, 2016). Wang (2013) emphasized that SEZs achieve accumulation of economic benefits that promote the efficient use of spatial areas, an increase of laborers wages, and the mobilization of urban development in the districts neighboring the FTZs. Nel and Rogerson (2014) stated that the use of spatial areas tends to shift the competition for investment from inexpensive low-skilled labor to skilled labor that would offer the capability to establish innovation and development; granting for new economic growth and social progress for those living in the newly developed spatial area under the FTZs processes.

Competitive Advantages Generated by FTZs

Lu (2014) stated that FTZs make use of the laws that regulate the zones to conceive a competitive edge that enable the development of competitive industries and increase resource utilization. Anatan (2014) noted that successful businesses must obtain the capability to collaborate with other companies through the integration of supply chain channels and realize that the organization no longer possesses the ability to depend on a single supplier or vendor. Benton et al. (2016) indicated that to achieve competitiveness objectives, companies operating as FTZs need to expand and enhance their management of the supply chains and logistics that support the business. To increase the competitiveness of any firm the process of integration of the logistics and supply chain must occur (Vagner, 2015).

Sabet et al. (2017) observed that superior performance of firms could occur through their ability to accumulate resources, possess rare capabilities, and retain challenging to imitate processes that enable organizations to create and maintain competitive advantages and competencies. Trappey et al. (2013) noted that FTZs function in a business environment that encourage procedures and practices that seek to produce competitive advantage and establish proficiencies in the management of the FTZs supply chain. Porter (2008) argued that the power of technological change influence the industry structure and competitive advantage, signaling that the organization's technology strategy becomes an essential component in the firm's general controlling strategy.

den Hertog (2014) argued that competitive capabilities depend on the deployment of resources and services that serve as the source of the firm's competitive advantage. Huo, Qi, Wang, & Zhao (2014) indicated that process integration establishes collaboration and synchronize the integration with vendors, suppliers, and customers that aim to support the manufacturing and delivery procedures. Free zones act as international logistics interfaces that influence the introduction of more value by bringing logistics infrastructures that improve the quality of supply chain services (Lavissiere, Fedi, & Cheaitou, 2014).

Competitive advantages gained by FTZs through system integration. The integration of the supply chain and logistics roles needs to include a partnership based collaboration that contributes to lower costs and raising differentiation, two critical concepts to the establishment of competitive advantage (Li et al., 2015; Mellat-Parast & Spillan, 2014). Integrating of the logistics and supply chain elements into the functions

of any FTZs operation enables the FTZ operators the capacity for the formation of innovative methods, such as reverse logistics that produce not only a value-added benefit but also enact the competitive advantages of differentiation and customer satisfaction (Yankov et al., 2016). Designing a supply chain for a FTZ requires the incorporation of an Enterprise Resources Planning system (ERP) to gain traceability and serialization of the items imported and exported providing a method to keep track of the duty deferment, and that lead to cost-effective ways to manage the FTZ (Benton et al., 2016).

The integration of an internal and external environmental management that establishes a sustainable supply chain evolved into a requirement to address the concerns of stakeholders, consumers, manufacturers, and government agencies (Yu, Chavez, Feng, & Wiengarten, 2014). Busse et al. (2017) argued that sustainable and restorative systems not only serve to engage an environmental solution but that the implementation of the solution introduces green and economic competitiveness to the organization.

Globalization contributes to worldwide organizations finding a balance between economic and environmental performance that grants the organization the capability to achieve a sustainable supply chain that delivers and maintains a competitive advantage (Cosimato & Troisi, 2015).

Zhang, Gunasekaran, and Wang (2015) noted that a successful integration requires that supply chain partners also merge into the resource flow, processes and organization, planning, and control activities and strategies. Mellat-Parast and Spillane (2014) indicated that to gain a competitive advantage from integration firms need to use knowledge-based view (KBV) that suggest that a company's resources could prevail

within the organization's boundaries, and could also exist outside the company's boundaries. The elemental concept of supply chains management rests on generating value-creating activities that use information technology and systems that foster collaboration (Busse et al., 2017).

Ke, Windle, Han, and Britto (2015) argued that managers need to consider the alignment of supply chain strategies with the industry's characteristics to ensure that competition, working capital, and demand remain constant and relevant. Porter (2008) stated that sharing activities augment the potential for differentiation and leads to the lowering of the cost that delivers a boost of efficiencies, increases productivity, and facilitate the enhancement of customer satisfaction. Converting ports, located near FTZs, from distribution hubs to becoming refined and externally integrated high-end logistics infrastructures aim to enhance the logistics network that should produce lower service costs and a better flow of inbound and outbound cargo from the FTZs (Lu, 2014). The supply chain and logistics components of organizations functioning as FTZs need to incorporate the use of information systems that support the traceability and serialization of imported and exported parts (Benton et al., 2016). Giovannetti, Marvasi, and Sanfilippo (2015) stated that by organizing an efficient supply chain, companies could offset competitive disadvantages, improve the probability of exporting, and raise the intensive margin of export shipments.

The successful integration of the FTZs supply chain should demonstrate the organization's export maturity by illustrating on-time deliveries to customers, reliance on information technology, and product development (Rivera et al., 2016). Mellat-Parast and

Spillan (2014) indicated that effective integration only occurs when both internal and external processes undergo the integration procedure. However, the inclusion of the supply chain by the FTZs produced a challenge to the rules of origin that envelop the identification of local contents of items shipped to countries that offer a low tariff or no tariff based on the geographical content of the products going through the import process (Terziu, 2015). FTZs figure as a prime setting for the implementation of green supply chain initiatives because the zones possess the technology and innovations processes that continually pursue methods to enhance competitiveness and economic performance (Cosimato & Troisi, 2015). Green sustainability extends to the economic, environmental, and social dimensions that need to appear stated on the code of conduct of the buyer, supplier, and any other stakeholder or vendor (Busse et al., 2017).

The competitive advantage offered to FTZs by politics. The competitiveness of the operators of FTZs depends on the sponsoring country's availability of specific resources such as human, capital and natural resources (Mushanyuri & Muzumara, 2013). The political environment of the nation that accords the legislation for the operation of FTZs also could decrease or increase the competitive ability of companies functioning as FTZs (Moberg, 2015). Girón (2015) emphasized that any political concept should encompass a multidimensional and structured approach that permits for the advancement of industrial, fiscal, and technological sectors to ensure the economic development of the country. Policy changes that remove trade policies that impede the facilitation of commerce tend to increase the quantity of export permitting for the promotion of economic growth (Otsuki, Honda, & Wilson, 2013).

Mauritius' political stability, independent judiciary system, and transparency at every level of the national government supported the capability for FTZs operators to create and institute a competitive environment that contributed to the improvement and promotion of production and exportation of manufactured goods (Mushanyuri & Mzumara, 2013). VuKovic, Dokovic, and Pavicevic (2015) highlighted the case of Serbia, a country that realized that to increase competitive advantage, achieves economic development, and effectively engages in international trade, it would need to attract foreign investment and modern technology, and activate the local workforce to compete in the global commercial environment. In 2008 Serbia's politicians took note of the economic advantages brought about by FTZs and established the Free Zones Administration at the Ministry of Finance that passed policies to attract foreign investors and created a favorable business environment that edified the economic development of the country (Kostadinovic & Petrovic-Randelovic, 2015).

The effects of political involvements on FTZs. Political participation in the development of the approach used to administer and manage the operations of FTZs contribute a significant, if not an essential part in shaping the policies that permit economic development and growth of global trade (Hicks, Milner, & Tingley, 2014). However, the organization of SEZs in the Republic of Kazakhstan failed because of the absence of a centralized regulatory body that served to protect the investors and ensure the completion of SEZ projects and infrastructure (Algiev, 2015). Godlewska-Majkowska, Komor, and Typa (2016) stated that Poland experienced adverse effects with economic zones because of poorly executed programs that caused a reduction of the tax

base and permitted the introduction of low-quality investments that caused instability and a weakening of the economic and social environment of the areas surrounding the zone. However, the government of Dubai invested in creating software and hardware infrastructures that included traffic facilities, communication, and energy supply that not only attracted foreign investors to the local FTZs but also improved the education, health, banking and leisure ventures of Dubai (Jing & Yong, 2014).

China's decision to establish zones generated a political challenge to the Chinese Communist Party by permitting provincial cadres to make crucial decisions that draw the political power from the Communist Party, leading to a possible political decentralization behavior (Wan et al., 2014). Moberg (2015) indicated that a politically decentralized system could result in national reform policies that not only affect the FTZs but also affect other domestic policies. Menike (2016) argued that the success or failure of economic growth and development of countries depend on the application of economic policies by the government in power.

FTZ political effects on neighboring countries. Since 1977, the national government of Sri Lanka initiated aggressive policies that included the establishment of FTZs that created export-oriented industrial sectors assisted by foreign capital that accelerated the economic development (Menike, 2016). Yankov et al. (2016) observed that FTZ enclaves serve as mechanisms that promote growth, development, optimize the utilization of resources, and reduce inefficiencies, granting economic expansion through the production frontier. The FTZs not only provide a competitive edge to the companies

operating FTZs but also for the countries sponsoring the FTZs to enter into economic competitiveness with surrounding nations (Bogoviz, Ragulina, & Kutukova, 2016).

Bolychev, Osmolovskaya, and Zverev (2015) pointed out that Russia's FTZ, located in Kaliningrad, exhibited a commodity structure of export better than that of the entire Russian nation becoming a source of motivation to the dynamics and structure of Russian trade. The Russian imports transfer through the Kaliningrad and Magadan FTZ permitted for a robust import-substitution position in the post-Soviet Russia and the gaining commercial entrances with countries surrounding the FTZ (Maslikhina, 2016; Yankov et al., 2016). Russian SEZs proved their potential and efficiencies by the effects SEZs caused to the Russian Federation's economic structure of particular regions and the financial processes of operation and the productive process (Bogoviz et al., 2016)

U.S. Foreign Trade Policies

The liberalization of international trade generated a fierce global competition that affected U.S. industries that witnessed the departure of manufacturing, assembly, and other processes facilities from U.S. locations to re-establish the facilities in other countries (The National Association of Foreign-Trades Zones, 2016). Seyoum (2017) stated that U.S. FTZs demonstrate an evolution of U.S. companies' global competitive strategies and U.S. government policies to increase the efficiencies and enhance the modern productive systems of U.S. industries that encourage the reduction of worldwide trade barriers and intensify the U.S. firms' competitiveness in the globalized economic environment. The increase in the mobility of global enterprises that seek to manufacture goods in places that exhibit lower production costs motivate the U.S. government to re-

examine the existing foreign trade policies (Peters, 2014). The U.S. foreign trade policies recently focused on widening and reinforcing the international trade with Asian nations because of the perceived threats of China's global trade policies (Geib & Pfaff, 2015). The U.S. trade deficit with China pushed the U.S. government to develop trade policies that would eliminate the trade imbalance caused by the unfair Chinese trade practices, China's manipulation of the national currency, and China's poor record on protecting intellectual property rights (Kim, Martin-Hermosillo, & Jia, 2014).

The effects of U.S. foreign trade policies on countries. Bailey and Bosworth (2014) noted that even China surpassed the U.S. as the world's largest manufacturer, but the U.S. remains a substantial manufacturer that maintains its advantage over the Chinese by implementing significant technological innovation. China's foreign trade policy seeks to expand economic and political influences worldwide, includes the financial backing and construction of 19 SEZs in various African countries, creating dependency on Chinese-made product and reducing the opportunities for the United States and other nations products from gaining entrance to these African nations (Bräutigam & Tang, 2014). The U.S. policies that govern the FTZs contributed to sustaining the technology and innovation advantage by affording an increase of foreign direct investment (FDI) that facilitate the transfer of technology and necessary skills to manage the technology (The United States Government Accountability Office, 2017; Foreign-Trade Zones Board, 2017). However, specific U.S. policies, such as lowering the corporate tax rate from a combined 39% that exceed the global average of 14%, require consideration to stimulate the attraction of additional FDI to the FTZs (Baily & Bosworth, 2014).

Kelly (2014) indicated that the goal of U.S. foreign trade policy centers on the attempt to push the progressive liberalization of Asian politics and economics by focusing on the promotion of long-term democratization, liberalization of trade barriers, and ensuring the safety and security of U.S. allies in the Asia region. In 2009, China's President Jintao and U.S. President Obama signed an agreement that would consider increasing China's voting power at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; however, the U.S. Congress denied the deal, demonstrating the U.S. intentions of maintaining a strategic advantage in Asia (Lin, 2015). The foreign trade policies of the United States surpass the focal point of imports and exports issues and tend to include topics such as human rights, environmental issues, and labor matters (Kelly, 2014; Peters, 2014).

Transition

The introduction of the business problem that stated that the leaders of some U.S. companies lack the decision-making strategies to implement and execute the schemes that would produce the benefits provided by the operation of a FTZ appears in Section 1. Provided also in Section 1 is the complete background of the problem and the generation of the academic literature review that explores the existing body of knowledge and establishes the basis of the study on decision-making strategies. The design of the research and the method used occurs in Section 2. In addition to presenting the description of the population, Section 2 includes the data collection technique and the reliability and validity of the information. The results of the study, the researcher's

recommendation for future research and the discussion of the possible social changes that the investigation could introduce all appear in Section 3.

Section 2: The Project

In this section, I delineate the approach of the study and my rationale for examining the factors that influence the decision-making strategies used by some leaders to implement a FTZ. The qualitative single case-study technique constituted the appropriate research method and design to explore this topic. Yin (2017) stated that case-study researchers attempt to focus on dissecting a decision or a set of decisions to find what resulted from the decision, why a particular choice was selected, and how the decision become implemented.

In this section, I restate the purpose statement; examine the role of the researcher; provide an overview of the participants, population, and sampling; and consider the ethical parameters of the research. Data collection, the method used to analyze the data, and the reliability and validity appear in this section. The data collection occurred through the process of interviewing the senior leader and managers of an operational FTZ and analysis of the company documents.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and to identify the proper decision-making strategies used in successfully implementing a FTZ. The target population consisted of five senior leaders who included the supply chain manager, FTZ manager, warehouse manager, accounting manager, and the senior leader of a company located in the midwestern region of the United States that successfully implemented and now operates in an FTZ. The implication for positive social change includes the potential to create additional employment positions that stimulate economic growth that permits

for an increase of investment in social projects, such as improvements to the school systems, development of parks and green areas, and improvement of other social services.

Role of the Researcher

The role of researcher requires for the researcher to limit the aspects of self, biases, and expectation, permitting for the collection of information in an impartial and balance form. Qualitative research requires that the researcher possess an emotional maturity that minimizes cognitive bias and a robust interpersonal character that permits for the collection of reliable data, management of the interview process, and presentation of impartial findings (Collins & Cooper, 2014). The credibility and accuracy of the research method used are essential components that the researcher needs to ensure when conveying the results of the study (Yin, 2017). My interest and experience in the implementation and operation of FTZs assisted me in the interaction and development of trust with the participants. The preparation for the case study required a complete review of literature that encompassed the elements needed for decision making, the use of FTZs, international trade policies, and the economic effects to the areas neighboring the FTZ.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2016), researchers should rely on a foundation of three ethical standards in conducting their investigations: justice, respect for persons, and beneficence. Demonstrating the significance of these three moral principles in this research study, I completed the Human Research Protection Training on March 9, 2015, offered by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research. Dekas and McCune (2015) stated that the

researcher aims to build and sustain a healthy relationship that demonstrates to the participants that the research conducted occurs under the highest ethical standards. Ethical issues related to research involving human participants requires for the establishment of processes and procedures that protect the health, dignity, integrity, privacy, and confidentiality of the participants. Yip, Han, and Sng (2016) stated that the formulation of guidelines, created by various organizations and authorities serve to promote integrity, compliance, and uphold ethical standards when conducting research.

To instill the trust, respect, and comfort required for participants to contribute their life experiences necessitates that the investigator set the appropriate interview environment. The interview location should provide privacy, a quiet surrounding, and preferably be in an area that is not heavily transited by nonparticipants of the study (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). A private room that presents a sense of security and confidentiality for the participants should create a climate of confidence and respect that permits the participants to deliver honest and reliable answers to the interview questions (Yin, 2017).

Collins and Cooper (2014) indicated that the researcher needs to demonstrate not only an ethical behavior but also exhibit a level of emotional intelligence that strengthens the ability to connect with the participants and enhances the investigator's listening skills during the interview. The researcher needs to demonstrate empathy and the capacity to distinguish and label the participant's emotions and apply the proper controls that should ensure the continuous flow of information during the interview (Doody & Noonan, 2012). Demonstrating the possession of emotional intelligence should grant the

researcher the ability to acquire a more precise understanding of the life experiences of the partaker (Wittmayer & Schöpke, 2014). Demonstrating empathy, paying attention and listening carefully to the participants responses, and building a positive interaction with the participants during the interview session should ensure the collection of trustworthy and dependable data.

One of the primary roles of the researcher focuses on ensuring that the interview protocol uses procedures and guidance that established the elements of validity, credibility, and guarantees that the ethical demeanor expected from the researcher and the participants are upheld in the case study (Collins & Cooper, 2014). To establish the credibility and validity of the study, I sent the participants a letter describing the purpose of the research and the parameters the topic would comprise. In the letter, I also explained that the participant could withdraw from the interview at any point. Being told that they can withdraw from the meeting, before or during the interview session, by submitting a verbal or written notice ensures that the participants understand that the research conducted happens under ethical standards (Yin, 2017). Participants should also receive a consent form for review and signature before the interview (Yin, 2017).

Bias behavior or beliefs by the researcher could affect the validity and reliability of findings, and consequently affect the results of the study. The bias of the researcher could affect the administration and results of the case study (Poos, van den Bosch, & Janssen, 2017). Focusing on the data rather than on my judgment mitigates the possibility bias being introduced into the results of the study. Concentrating on the data collection, analyzing the data, converting the data into information, and reporting the knowledge

without prejudice to present a valid outcome should mitigate or reduce any bias (Raeburn, Schmied, Hungerford, & Cleary, 2015). The investigator should not rely on first impressions but instead apply reflective thinking. Doing so should reduce or eliminate the inclination to make biased judgments.

Participants

To complete an adequate study, the participants in a qualitative study need to possess real-world experiences that encompass the subject matter being studied (Yin, 2017). Using the single case study approach permits the researcher to focus on understanding the complexity of the object of the investigation (Hyett et al., 2014). The participants of this case study contributed their individual experiences, ideas, and opinions, concerning decision-making and how the decision directs a company to decide on implementing and establishing a FTZ. The criteria to be used for the selection process of the participants for the study consisted:

- A company operating in a FTZ business environment
- Documented evidence that the firm's senior leadership and different department managers developed decision-making strategies that led to the implementation of a FTZ.
- A geographical location of the FTZ that permits ease of accessibility to the researcher.
- The organization needs to operate for a minimum of 5 years of successful operation of a FTZ.

The potential participants and their company received an introductory letter that informs them of the study's purpose, process, and expected time of completion (Appendix C). The document required that the firm and the participants return signed consent forms giving me permission to conduct the interviews and review the company's documentation.

The enlistment strategy to be used to select the appropriate FTZ company and its participants consist of reviewing the annual report of Foreign Trade Zones presented to the United States Congress that list all operational FTZ in the United States (Foreign-Trade Zones Board, 2017). The report identified companies in the area that meet the criteria necessary to complete the study. The account should produce at least five enterprises that meet the precedents. After reviewing each company's operations, I selected the company based on the knowledge of the topic and judgment that the chosen company would provide the best data for the study. Warwick-Booth (2014) warned researchers to carefully consider their background knowledge of the study topic because it could both assist and hinder the data collection, during the interview process.

The investigator should seek participants that possess knowledge of the subject, competencies in the area of study, and objectivity, rather than selecting participants based on hierarchical power or an authoritative position (Wittmayer & Shäpke, 2014). After enlisting the proper participants, the researcher needs to develop a relationship of trust and respect with the participants that could occur by sharing the investigator's background, and experiences of FTZ permitting the creation of an interview environment of ease and serenity that should help with the data generation. McIntosh and Morse

(2015) stated that before conducting the interview, the investigator should develop and practice a pilot interview guide.

Doody and Noonan (2013) indicated that to complete a successful interview the researcher needs to initiate and finish a trial run of the interview. After the researcher completed the testing phase, the researcher should continue with the actual one-to-one interaction with the participants. The researcher should realize that the interview process permits the participants to present sensitive and elicit narratives that in some circumstances provide answers that fail to contribute to the study (Dasgupta, 2015). To minimize receiving incomplete, erroneous, or unsolicited information from the participants, the investigator needs to establish an interview environment that is not tightly controlled or exhibits a perception of rigidity (Dang & Kaur, 2016).

None of the participants in the study belonged to a vulnerable group, and the study did not include participants under the age of 18 years. A requirement by Walden University Doctoral Study program dictated that the company and the participants in the research needed to complete a consent form executed by the firm's executive board that granted direct access to the employees and internal documents. The consent form presented to the enterprise board of directors and participants states that the researcher would preserve and safeguard the identity of the participants and the organization. All data collected from participants and the organization would remain on secure hard drives for five years after conducting the study. The data would undergo destruction after five years. The participants received no compensation.

Research Method and Design

The qualitative research method used in the study grants the capability of gaining a general understanding of the factors enveloping decision-making skills about the establishment and implementation of a FTZ. Hyett et al. (2014) suggested that investigators who use case study encourage the development of a relationship between the researcher and the participants that extend to the readers, by inviting the readers to participate in the interaction and take part in the discovery of the case study. The following subsection explains the importance of acquiring insight into administrative decision-making skills and why the qualitative case study method is appropriate for this research to obtain the necessary comprehension of the topic.

Research Method

The qualitative case study method conforms to the needs of the topic under study that focuses on exploring the decision-making processes used by senior leaders, global supply or logistics managers, and other managers to establish and implement a FTZ. Using the qualitative method grants the researcher with the ability to complete an exploratory and flexible study that provides a profound understanding of a phenomenon (Willis, Sullivan-Bolyai, Knafl, & Cohen, 2016). Dasgupta (2015) stated that the qualitative research focuses on the processes rather than the outcomes or results obtained. A researcher using the qualitative method realizes that the method provides the capacity to identify and explore the sources that regardless of the outcome describes the complexity of the object of the topic (Hyett et al., 2014). To collect data and explore the subject, the researcher needs to develop questions that disclose the operational links that

occurred over a period, rather than the frequencies or incidences (Yin, 2017). The qualitative approach maintains the necessary rigors required inquiry that describes the context, development of the phenomenon, preserves credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability for this study.

The use of quantitative and mixed methods research does not afford as suitable methods for the study. Gelling (2014) stated that mixed method approach introduces complexities, such as inappropriate justification, additional expertise, establishing teamwork, and maintaining quality; that creates challenges for the research and the researcher. Quantitative analysis carries a foundation of statistics, requires a definition of the relationship between the data and the observation and requires the identification of the vectors and variables (Carayon et al., 2015). The information collected as part of the study will not produce numerical data that would permit the statistical analysis of the data, providing another reason not to use the quantitative method. The qualitative method enables the exploration of the problems when the participants find it difficult to articulate, or when the problem encompasses the complexities and subtleties of how the participants interact to accomplish goals. The issue of decision-making explored in by the study comprises a complex and challenging topic that requires the interaction between the participants to achieve the expected target.

Research Design

Narrative, ground theory, phenomenology, ethnography, and case study comprise the five designs or approaches available under the qualitative research method. The case study becomes the preferred method when the researcher asks questions that start with

why or *how* and the researcher possesses little or no behavioral control over events, and the study involves a contemporary phenomenon (Dasgupta, 2015; Raeburn et al., 2015; Yin, 2017). The case study design guidelines conform to the needs to establish the parameters of the topic under research. Yin (2017) said that a case study exhibits the explanatory side of the research and not only the descriptive or exploratory functions of an investigation. Because the researcher focuses on explores the viewpoints, knowledge of the topic, and the life experiences of the participants, I chose the qualitative case study design as a proper method to gain an understanding of the problem under investigation.

The qualitative narrative approach requires that researcher play a central role in not only as an observer but also as someone who collaborates with the participants involved in the research (Bruce et al., 2016). McAlpine (2016) argued that the narrative design requires that the researcher develop the skill of a narrator and depends on the ability of the participants to recount their long-term stories or experiences. The narrative design would not deliver the tentative assessment because of the participating of the investigator.

The ethnographic approach compels the ethnographer to immerse themselves in the culture as an active participant and requires the maintaining of extensive field notes (Quick & Hall, 2015). Studies using ethnography could fall short of offering definitive answers to why people do what they do, leading to a lack of meaningful data, the creation of an ethical and a possible bias matter, and the possibility of producing unreliable and untransferable information (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014; Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2014).

The problem under study focuses on programs and individual decision-making reasoning, eliminating the possibility of using the ethnographical method.

The grounded theory research approach encourages the use of conceptual thinking and theory building rather than testing the theory through empirical methods (Khan, 2014). Cho and Lee (2014) argued that the grounded theory design present certain disadvantages including, the subjectivity of the data could lead to causing issues reliability and validity, and difficulty in detecting or preventing the possibility of researcher-induced bias. The grounded theory method would not serve as a research tool to uncover the parameters that affect the decision-making process.

In phenomenological research, the investigator attempts to objectively and rationally comprehend the person's subjective making an effort to acquire the ordinary meaning or essence of the interviewee's life experience (Lien, Pauleen, Kuo, & Wang, 2014; VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015). Attempting to interpret the usual sense or nature of a persons life experience could cause the researcher to lose their objectivity of the study's topic and skew the data surrounding the life experience of the participants (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013). The phenomenological design would not work because the topic under consideration does not encompass the understanding of the participants' life experiences.

Population and Sampling

The population sample for this study consisted of five participants from one operational FTZ. A member of the company's senior leadership, the FTZ manager, the global supply chain and logistics managers, and the director of the finance department

composed the group that met the minimum of the demographics and eligibility criteria.

The purposive sampling method permitted the selection of a specific population.

Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2016) observed that unlike quantitative studies that use a power calculation that determines sample size, qualitative interview studies fail to possess similar standards for assessment of sample size.

The sampling consisted of five participants from a FTZ that met the following eligibility criteria:

- A company operating in a FTZ business environment
- Documented evidence that the firm's senior leadership and different department managers developed decision-making strategies that led to the implementation of a FTZ.
- A geographical location of the FTZ that permits ease of accessibility to the researcher.
- The organization needs to operate for a minimum of 5 years of successful operation of a FTZ.

The selection of the FTZ through the review of FTZ information from the 78th Annual Report of the Foreign-Trade Zones Board to the Congress of the United States to obtain the population that met the eligibility criteria. The number of successful FTZ operations that met the eligibility benchmark sampling permitted for the capacity to contact the firms and get a company willing to participate in the study.

Data saturation could occur during the interview process of the population. Morse (2015b) defined saturation as the ability to build on rich data within the process of

inquiry, by attending to scope and replication, and permitting the construction of the theoretical aspects of the investigation. The range encompasses the comprehensive data, not only in the domain but also the depth of topic; and the definition of replication consists the data from different participants possessing similar characteristics (Malterud et al., 2016; Rotello, Heit, & Dubé, 2015). Saturation gauges where the data collection halts offering different, pertinent, or new information that occurs in a case study when the researcher explores various sources within the established parameters of the case (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Yin, 2017). The data saturation would occur when the 5 participants provide responses that offer no new information to the in-depth and open-ended questions presented to the participants.

The sample size of qualitative case study contributes to the quality and credibility of the research (Løkke & Sørensen, 2014). Yin (2017) considered that a case study provides a generalization of a hypothesis and not a population. Malterud et al. (2016) argued that the sample size in qualitative studies should not rely on a prediction formula nor anticipated redundant, but should depend on the shared methodology for estimating an adequate number of events or participants. The appropriate amount of participants for any study should ensue based on the knowledge and ability of the topic and capacity of the participants to provide intelligent and informative responses.

I obtained commitments from the participants by sending them a consent form and confidentially agreement to review, complete, and return signed to me. Receiving the signed forms from the participants permitted for the scheduling a time and location to conduct the interview. The programming of the meeting took into consideration the

accommodation of both the participants and the interviewer. The selected site provided a quiet and comfortable environment that would permit the interview to occur uninterrupted. The privacy, confidentiality, and ethical standards affecting the participants carry particular respect in this study.

Ethical Research

Yip, Han, and Sng (2016) defined ethical research as embracing the concepts of respect for the persons participating in the study, eliminating harm, maximizing benefits, and applying the model of justice towards the individuals and their societal level. Throughout this ethical study, standards protect the participants and project the ideals of trust, respect, confidence, and honesty. Yin (2017) stated that the researcher studying a contemporary phenomenon is obligated the use of ethical practices similar to the ethical practices followed in medical research.

The responsibility of protecting and maintaining the privacy of the company's information and the confidentiality of participants information occurs by enforcing the current federal and ethical standards. The researcher demonstrates their moral commitment through the display of building a relationship and gaining the trust with the people contributing the information and maintaining the parameters established by the ethical review committee that oversees the study (Zhang, 2017). To obtain formal consent and buy-in to the study, the participants and the company received a letter describing the topic and objective of the research. The company and all participants received for their consideration and signature a consent form and confidentiality agreement before the initiation of the interview process and the review of documentation. The information

regarding the study informed the participants and the company of any potential risks and benefits that the survey is expected to generate. The consent form detailed that the firm nor the participants would receive any compensation for their participation in the research.

Fletcher (2017) found that a tension exists between the ethical process and the research process compelling the researchers to put aside their self-interest and emphasize an ethical behavior to ensure participants well-being surpass the collection of data and the purpose of the study. To provide an ethical practice occurs throughout the research, the researcher should receive approval of the plan from an institutional review board (Yin, 2017). The study would adhere to the Walden's University ethical guidelines and directives of the Internal Review Board.

The consent forms sent to the participants that inform them they can withdraw from the interview or the study at any point. Capturing, protecting, and reporting the information collected in an ethical format transcends the importance of the research topic. All transcripts, data, materials associated with the study and any other information related to the research would reside in an electronically password protected and encrypted hard disk file for five years. A fireproof and secure lockbox would serve as the storage facility for the disk. Upon formal completion of the study, the participants and the company received a summary of the findings for their review.

Data Collection Instruments

Castillo-Montoya (2016) described the instrument used in a qualitative method needs to understand the participants' experiences, how partakers describe their

experiences, review of documents, and the meaning gained from the experiences. I served as the primary data collection instrument for this study. To collect sufficient data, the investigator needs to apply active listening, provide a comfortable environment to hold the interview and complete a comprehensive review of the interview process (Willgens et al. 2016; Wilson, Onwuegbuzie, & Manning, 2016). The collection of data occurred in a stable and secure interview environment and from the related documents shared by the company. A total of 5 participants shared their experiences.

Semi-structured interviews permit the researcher to explore new paths as new information emerges that the investigator did not initially consider when organizing the meeting (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The semi-structured interview consisted of open-ended questions that encourage a productive dialogue between the participants and the researcher. Wilson et al. (2016) argued that semi-structured interviews use a guide, but an alteration to the order of the questions is permissible and permits for the inclusion of additional inquiries. The semi-structured interview method served as the best mechanism to present the queries to the participants of this study. A copy of the interview protocol resided in Appendix A, and the interview instrument appears in Appendix B.

Before starting the interview process, the researcher should develop an interview protocol (IP) that permit the researcher to prepare for managing the case study, enables the strengthening of the study's reliability and enhances the quality of the data (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Yin, 2017). The IP detailed how the investigator would explain the parameters of the interview to the participants, nature and general format the interview, and state to the participants that no reply given to the questions of the discussion carry the

consideration of being right or wrong. (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The use of the IP permitted the researcher to maximize the collection of data that should establish the construction of the validity and reliability of the information (Yin, 2017). Therefore, I organized and followed an IP that ensured a well-organized process that delineated the method to use in the interview phase.

For the research study to display reliability, and validity, require that the instrument use triangulation of the data source, establish the study's database, maintain a chain of evidence, and demonstrate care and caution when using data from electronic sources (Yin, 2017). As the primary collector of data, I ensured the validity by identifying possible biases and setting approaches to reduce or eliminate the biases that could affect the results. To establish the validity of the study required that the researcher evaluate their actions, assumptions, and expectations; compelling the researcher to provide reasons for how decisions and what processes occurred to generate the results and findings of the research (Darawsheh, 2014; Noble & Smith, 2015). Presenting an accurate and detailed summary of the personal experiences and perspectives of the participants served as another factor that adds to the validity of the study.

The reliability factor requires the investigator to account for custody of the information collected, and establishing a consistency that permits for other researchers to arrive at similar or related findings (Leung, 2015; Noble & Smith, 2015). I showed through the analysis process the objective of the data collected, the custody of the data, and the method used to develop the coding system to interpret and analyze the data establishing the reliability of the study. The reliability element depends on the analysis of

the narrative and composition of the data collected (Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, & Casey, 2015). An audit trail or demonstrating the chain of custody of the data and information added to the factor of reliability (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Data Collection Technique

The technique used to collect the data consisted of observation, review of documents, and interviews conducted with 5 participants. The discussions occurred face-to-face and lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. A digital recorder provided the method to document the responses furnished by the participants to the open-end questions. Doody and Noonan (2013) argued that a semi-structured interview format could permit the participants to respond to the open-ended questions spontaneously, granting the opportunity to explore additional information, during the interview process.

The IP developed by the investigator permitted the opportunity to conduct a pilot or test case study before performing the actual research. Castillo-Montoya (2016) stated that administering a test or pilot case study interview, using an IP framework granted the researcher the ability to develop a robust approach to the initial meeting by allowing the researcher to practice the delivery of the questions and to test the recording methods for the data collected in the pilot study. Yin (2017) stated that operating and administering a model case study provides the researcher with the benefit of refining the questions, enhancing the interview procedures, and measuring the length of the interview. I conducted a test case study using the interview instrument with two managers to ensure the discussion will not exceed 45 minutes and evaluate my data collection skills. I could

find that the questions may require an adjustment and that I could see the need to improve my listening and data collecting skills.

Maintaining consistency during the interview process and collection of data should establish a quality standard that should transfer to the coding and analysis of the data (Wilson et al., 2016). Conducting each interview using the identical procedures and asking the questions in the same order at each meeting established a rigor of quality for the case study. The firm agreed to allow the researcher to review and inspection of papers associated with the topic. The recorded interviews sustained a transformation to a transcription from oral to written form that enables the creation of observations notes and detailed transcripts. Yin (2017) commented that documented information serves as relevant data that could corroborate and augment the evidence provided by the responses given by the participants. Microsoft Word serves as the tool to capture the information.

The transcription of the recorded interviews permits the researcher to develop a coding method that produces a synthesis for making comparisons between data, objects, and incidents (Dasgupta, 2015). The raw data collected from the interviews enabled a conversion into a coding method that should allow the use of the NVivo software. The software NVivo assisted the researcher to organize and analyze the qualitative data recovered from interviews. In qualitative research, the researcher's analysis of the data needs to demonstrate transparency by using an analytical approach that validates the link to the interpretation, identifying the sources, and how the review and the results interrelate (Darawsheh, 2014). Applying the NVivo software to the coded data enabled

the investigator the capability to convey to readers the observations, reasons, and understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Data Organization Technique

Each interview had a digital recording of the process. The digital recorder used consisted of the uploading of the Smart Recorder application onto my cell phone. The recorded interviews underwent the transcription process that converted the recorded verbal information into a written document. The participants received copies of their transcribed interview to perform the member check, as recommended by Houghton et al. (2015). Through the member check procedure, I confirmed with the participants my understanding of the information rendered during the interviews.

Ensuring the confidentiality of the participants and the information that was provided by them in the interviews occurred by assigning an alpha-numerical label to the transcribed recorded information. The naming process would start with the letter P, followed by the number that identifies the order the participant presented their interview. The transcription of the data sustained a sorting process that would determine the emerging themes. An Excel spreadsheet that would contain the precoded and coded data required for the development and management of the transcribed data. The spreadsheet permitted for the categorization of data that would reveal the finding of additional themes and assist in enabling supplemental exploration.

Safeguarding and securing journals, notes, documents containing the observations made, and the interview recording and transcriptions occurred by using a USB drive that is password protected. I alone possess the password for the USB drive. The destruction of

the interviews and all other documents will occur five years after the completion of the study. The destruction of the hard copies of the papers, notes, and journals will occur using a professional paper shredding company, and the USB drive will also undergo destruction using a professional service.

Data Analysis

Qualitative case studies depend on four different types of triangulation to complete the evaluation of coded data (Yin, 2017). The coded data collected from the interviews are expected to display similarities, and the sameness of the data conveys the opportunity to use data triangulation as the method to examine the data. The assessment of similar data endorses the use of data triangulation method because of the conceptual labels that grouped to form the categories referring to the substance of decision-making strategy (Dasgupta, 2015). The data collected from semi-structured interviews, observations, and documents were submitted for analysis. The coding of the received data occurred using an Excel spreadsheet, and the completed coded data were analyzed using NVivo, a data analysis software.

The process of coding the data portioned the data into segments. These segments permitted the identification of themes under study, allowing the comparison and contrast between the responses given by the participants. Maintaining the quality of the database should guarantee that the coded data used during the analysis phase and helped establish the components of rigor and validity of the study. St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) argued that the coded data require a careful review to ensure that the codified data displays worthiness for sustaining the quality of the database. Qualitative data analysis comprises

the most complicated phase of a qualitative project; however, the evaluation aims to find patterns and elicit themes in the data creating logic and a framework for the review (Houghton et al., 2015). The elimination of redundancies when coding the data, permitted for the identification of the themes that focus on the decision-making strategies used to explore and implement FTZs. The initial coding would classify the words into the following topics: management, import duties, reduction of cost, service to customers, government regulations, inventory control, competitive advantages, and reduction of duties through transformation. Additional words that would possibly emerge as further review of the interviews, documents, and other sources contributing to the study occurred. The Excel spreadsheet used for the initial coding of the data counts with six columns, adding extra columns as new topics emerge.

Correlating the key themes with the literature review and the conceptual framework of the study occurred by examining the literature that provided additional forms of evidence. The researcher also possesses the comprehension that new theories could emerge during the study that could require review and consideration of including additional literature that reinforces the study. Wakefield (2015) stated that the literature review generates a synthesis of existing knowledge, permitting the researcher a solid understanding of previous research, but the researcher needs to maintain awareness that new information could develop. The theme of the study derives from the analysis and clarification of the data gained from the interview questions (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Identifying the themes allowed me to understand how the decision-making process works and the effects of specific concepts on the decision method.

Reliability and Validity

The use of different criteria to ensure the rigor of a qualitative study may vary in description, however, the criteria seeks to establish the credibility, reliability, dependability or validity, confirmability, and transferability of the qualitative study (Morse, 2015a). The concepts of reliability, validity, and generalisability associated with quantitative research fail to take into account the additional rigor or increased integrity concepts required and applied to a qualitative study (Noble & Smith, 2015). Reliability refers to five approaches of refutational analysis, constant data comparison, comprehensive data use, inclusive of the different case, and use of tables to permit the replicability of the qualitative process used and the correlation of the data (Leung, 2015). Yin (2017) defined validity as the capacity of the research to represent the phenomenon under examination applying a rigorous data collection process, a reliable and reproducible data analysis method, and defined research design.

Reliability

The credibility and duplicability of the data, serve to define the reliability of a qualitative case study (Yin, 2017). Corroborating reliability in a case study does not establish a direct correlation with the validity of the research (Darawsheh, 2014; Lueng, 2015). The replication of data through the identification of saturation of data and the reduction of the researcher's bias should increase the research's reliability (Morse, 2015b; Sokolov, 2014). To ensure the reliability factor, I used several processes that permitted the readers to monitor and verify the reliability of the study, the examination processes used, and the instruments employed to collect data. Collecting data from

interviews, reviewing the organization's documents, permitting the member inspection of the transcripts by the participants served as one method to assure accuracy and to secure the reliability of the research. Employing a well established and standardized qualitative case study collection and data analysis added to augmenting the study's reliability. The continual reexamination of the research notes and taking the time to approach the topic using critical and reflective thinking reduced or minimized the possible introduction of bias into the research. The use of the chain of evidence produces a source of reliability demonstrating to the reader that the researcher's analysis of the data occurred in a controlled form (Yin, 2017). I maintained a log detailing the management, coding, and analysis of the collected data to illustrate the chain of evidence used in this study.

Validity

The confirmation that the collection of data occurred using appropriate processes applied the correct interpretation, and adopted procedures and methods that the researcher documented creating a well-audited trail of the findings defines the validity of qualitative case study. The use of triangulation lends confirmation and completeness to the data gathered from multiple sources enhancing the validity of the research (Houghton et al., 2015). I applied the data triangulation technique to the data collected from the interview, the inspection of the documentation made available by the company, and direct observation. Yin (2017) stated that the of the four types of triangulation used for evaluation, triangulation of data sources or data triangulation encourages the collection of information from multiple sources, but focuses at corroborating the findings.

I completed the reinforcement of the validity of the study by applying member checking to the transcribed records. If the participants found any anomalies or requested specific revisions to ensure the correctness, I complied with the request made by any participant during their member checking. The member checking improved not only the validity, but also the reliability, accuracy, and credibility of the case study (Darawsheh, 2014). By applying analytical procedures that demonstrate a rigor, permitting for the member checking of transcribed records, and reflecting on the accuracy and precision of the findings based on the collect data, the researcher uses procedures that strengthen the validity of the qualitative case study.

Credibility

Morse (2015a) defined credibility as the value and believability of the findings. The incorporation of methods of triangulations that includes the data triangulation could establish the credibility of the research (Yin, 2017). I used semistructured interviews, review of company documents, and observation to collect the data as data triangulation as the analysis method. Quick and Hall (2015) stated that the researcher needs to acknowledge that the researcher could influence the findings. Reducing the researcher's influence requires requesting for the participants to perform a member check that reviews and validate their answers that appear on the transcribed data, raises the credibility of the study (Morse, 2015a; Noble & Smith, 2015). I completed a return visit to the participants' company to present the participants with the transcribed data and asked them to review and inspect the transcription for accuracy.

Confirmability

Confirmability defines the neutrality and accuracy of the data (Morse, 2015a). Darawsheh (2014) stated that reflexivity permits the confirmability of the study by controlling the biases and enabling the researcher to provide a rationale for their decisions, and in altering the research process to generate relevant findings. Establishing an audit strategy would reinforce the confirmability of the study. The audit examined the raw data, process notes, and the synthesis of the data. The frequent inspection of the data collected and the analysis procedure contributed to the reduction of the potential bias or distorted judgment brought by the researcher.

Attaining data saturation demonstrates to the investigator that no new or additional information occurs. Fusch and Ness (2015) claimed that through data saturation the study results should assist in supporting the validity and confirmability of the research. When the researcher notices continuous similarities in the data, the investigator should cease sampling and confidently assert attaining data saturation level. Reaching saturation served as an element that demonstrated the validity and transferability of the study. The data saturation materializes in a case study when the researcher explores numerous sources of data within the parameters of a case study (Yin, 2017).

Transferability

Assessing the research's transferability requires the use of systematic sampling, constant comparison, establishing a proper audit, and documentation (Leung, 2015). Interviewing and maintaining a journal with of the interview procedures on the collection

of the qualitative data ensured the transferability of study. Morse (2015a) stated that the responsibility of the researcher to provide detailed descriptions for the reader to reach an informed decision based on the transferability of the findings outlined in the research.

The maintenance of a journal of the procedures used in the study, retaining a copy of the spreadsheet used to code the data, and safeguarding the transcriptions of the interviews present the evidence of the systems used to enhance and secure transferability.

Demonstrating the ability to transfer the phenomenon to a similar situation or condition with similar participant indicates the transferability of the study (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included the design of the study and the methods used to achieve the collection of the data, coding of the data, and the analysis of the data. The section also developed a description of the population, discussion on achieving data saturation, and method to organize the data. The delineation of the data analysis and the reliability and validity of the research and data appear in this section.

Section 3 initiates with the review of the purpose statement and research question. This section contains the results of the study, an explanation of the methods used to analyze the evidence, demonstrating the relationship between the conceptual framework and the research question, and supporting the conclusion of the study. Section 3 concludes with a discussion of possible implications for social change, reflections, and the recommendations made by the researcher.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and to identify what effective decision-making strategies are used by the leaders of some U.S. companies to successfully implement a FTZ. The specific business problem was that the leaders of some U.S. companies fail to achieve adequate decision-making strategies to enact and execute the schemes that would produce the benefits provided by a FTZ. The findings presented in this section stem from my review of internal documents and my interviews of personnel with knowledge of the FTZ.

I conducted five semistructured interviews with the FTZ leaders from a company that met the four eligibility requirements. The requirements for the selected company consisted of matching the following criteria:

- A company operating in a FTZ business environment.
- Documented evidence that the firm's senior leadership and different department managers developed decision-making strategies that led to the implementation of a FTZ.
- A geographical location that I can access easily.
- The organization operating in a FTZ for a minimum of 5 years.

The interviews took place in a private room at the company's facility. An audio recording of the conversations permitted for the transcription and coding of the information gathered. I provided each participant with a summarized transcript of interview responses

to ensure that the information the participant attempted to convey during the interview was accurate.

I completed the data analysis by mapping information using Microsoft Excel and inputting the information into the NVivo software program, which granted the capability to triangulate the data, correlate data, and identify themes, phrases, and codes from among the collected data. The identification of similar terms, ideas, and expressions from the participants' data sources should furnished an understanding of the experiences of the contributors. The combination of evidence and data analysis should substantiate the findings of this study. In this final section, I considered the relevance of the results to professional practice, considered the ramifications of the study for social change, provided recommendations for future research, and offered final reflections.

Presentation of the Findings

The central research question was, What effective decision-making strategies do leaders of some U.S. companies use to successfully implement a FTZ? The participants of the study responded to the interview questions based on their experiences regarding the decision-making strategies needed to achieve the successful implementation of an FTZ. The participants who contributed to the survey consisted of one member of the company's senior leadership, the FTZ manager, the global supply chain and logistics managers, and the director of the finance department. Data saturation occurs when enough information appears replicated in the collection of data and the ability of collecting new information is no longer feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Data saturation for this study occurred during the fifth interview. Upon completing the fifth interview, it became apparent that no new or additional information would emerge and that no further interviews would be needed. I completed the transcription of the recordings collected during the sessions in handwritten format. The participants received summarized versions of the transcriptions for review, possible amendments, or corrections. I gave the participants days to review, approve, and return the summaries. After receiving approval from the participants, I began the coding phase of the data in which I sought to develop a meaningful interpretation of the data that conveyed the participants' understanding and knowledge of the topic. The participants received copies of their summarized transcribed interview to perform the member check. Hyett et al. (2014) stated that member checking of the transcribed interview serves as a triangulation method that assists in establishing validation.

The collected and organized data yielded three themes and two subthemes derived from the analysis. Information, import and export, and training and new processes comprised the three main subjects. The two subthemes consisted of consultants and USAGs and payment of duties. The similarities presented by the participants between the training required for the operation of the FTZ and the new procedures needed to sustain the FTZ led me to combine the two topics into one central theme. During the interviews, the participants used the words *information* and *knowledge* interchangeably, to describe the particular facts or factual data required for the operation of a FTZ, leading to the emergence of a single theme (information).

The participants characterized training as any coaching, guidance, activities, duties, or other actions and instructions considered as essential to operating a FTZ. The participants indicated that learning the rules and regulations necessary to run the FTZ lawfully, the correct methods for the entering materials into the zones, and any other process required for the management of a FTZ carried the designation of training. New processes or procedures cited by the participants consisted of practices such as inventory management, possible new accounting methods, or introducing measures to administer the destruction or scrapping of unused or old materials. The similarities between the new procedures and the training issues contributed to the combination of the two themes into one central theme. The ranking of themes and subthemes information occurred based on the most frequently used words or combination of words.

Keywords

I used a list of the keywords created from the collected data to establish the themes. Table 1 displays the words or combination of words used most frequently by the participants in their responses to the interview questions. I used Microsoft Excel to initiate the codification and review of the interview questions and participants' answers to obtain clarity and identify the repetition of terms.

The emergence of the themes occurred after I completed the coding and I reviewed the analysis of the NVivo results. By answering the interview questions, the participants conveyed and revealed their perspectives on the effective decision-making strategies used by leaders to successfully implement a FTZ that would deliver the company's needs and requirements. I used the semistructured interviews to collect

accurate data and provide a mechanism that would permit me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic. A detailed summary of the responses given by the participants for each interview question appears later in this section. A discussion on the development of the themes and the correlation of the themes with the conceptual framework and literature review emerges later in this section.

Table 1

Frequency of Words and Combinations of Words in Participant Interviews

Words and word combinations	Count
Information and knowledge (Theme)	85
Import and export (Theme)	65
Training (Theme)	50
New processes (Theme)	50
Consultants and USAG (Subtheme)	45
Payment of duties (Subtheme)	30

Note. The table includes words and word combinations that appeared 10 or more times in the interviews.

Interview Question 1

The first question posed to the participants was “What changes to your company’s domestic or global business environment contributed to considering a FTZ as a component of your business strategy?” The scope of the question should provide an awareness of the global and domestic issues and forces that became the elements affecting the competitiveness, economic, and growth potential of the company. The responses presented by the participants indicated or identified the reasons why the incorporation of an operational FTZ would benefit and augment the business strategy of the organization.

Participant 1 (P1) replied that the increase in imports and exports and the large payment of duties were determining factors that motivated the leadership to initiate the search for alternative methods to manage the import and export shipments that would lower, reduce, eliminate, or defer the payment of duties. P1 elaborated that the US organization also needed to increase their global competitiveness and market shares, based on the vision of international business expansion introduced by the leaders located at the organization's headquarters. P1 stated that the US leadership considered that the concept of an FTZ could deliver the expected global competitive advantage and the potential to grow the organization's domestic and international market shares. P1 also discussed the possibility of receiving a cost reduction on the payment of the import duties and eliminating the need for the filing of duty drawback.

Participant 2 (P2) linked the growth of the imported raw materials and semi-finished product and exportation of finished products as one of the reasons for the consideration of the FTZ. P2 indicated that the payment of duties and the burdensome method used to file for duty drawbacks served to compound the interest of the organization to explore ways that could reduce import duties and possibly eliminate the filing of duty drawbacks.

Import duties are collected by the US Customs and Border Protection (USCBP) on all items entering the US territory from abroad. If the imported item or items are re-exported after entering the US territory and paying the assessed import duties, the importer of record could file a petition, requesting that USCBP refund a portion of the

import duties paid. Duty drawback is the USCBP official title for the import duty refund program.

P2s final comments encompassed the need for the corporation to become more competitive in the global markets. P2 upheld the organization's central office's vision of using the US facility to gain, maintain, and sustain additional global market shares. But, as P2 stated, the US facility needed to identify a program or concept that would assist in growing the market shares, contribute to establishing a competitive edge over commercial rivals, and deliver cost reductions and savings simultaneously.

Participant 3 (P3) discussed the how the company's leadership need to demonstrate to the corporate headquarter directors that the installation of the FTZ concept would reflect a positive financial gain and produce the expected return on the investment. Before the formation of the FTZ, P3 noted that the company's management and maintenance of an accurate inventory of the raw materials used for the manufacturing finished and semi-finished product displayed one of the organization significant deficiencies. The mishandling and inefficient administration of the stock reflected an excessive creation of residual and waste material created in the inventory process that produced loss of not only product but also incurred an increase in the general overhead cost. The incompetencies of inventory management generated the organization's interest in finding a solution that assisted in the control and management of the inventory and address the issues of waste and residual material, according to P3. The rules and regulations that govern the operation of FTZs demand that the operators maintain a strict tracking and tracing of all materials and supplies that received an entry into the FTZ. The

inventoried items departing from the FTZ carry the same accountability and scrutiny as the items that entered the FTZ. Tracking and accounting for every shipment that entered and exited from the FTZ would reduce or eradicate the organization's previous inventory failures stated P3 at the close of this question.

Participant 4 (P4) stated that the essential reason for examining the possibility of the FTZ surrounded the surge in the importation of raw materials experienced by the company. The difficulties of tracking and tracing the raw material inventory that sustained transformation into finished or semi-finished produced and the waste and scrap produced by the manufacturing process never generated the organization's expected inventory balance. Because of the sensitivity of the raw materials, several USAGs required that the company maintain accurate records that detailed the whereabouts of every unit of raw material imported into the US territory. Keeping accurate records, sustaining the traceability and trackability of the inventory from arrival, transformation, and departure as semi-finished or finished products contributed to P4 consideration for the possible implementation of an FTZ program. Delays caused by the inspection and handling of the inbound raw materials, by USGA, indicated to P4 the need for an applicable solution that could reduce or waive the examination process. The physical inspection of the raw materials by USAG caused interruptions to the timely arrival of the raw material that in turn created a setback to the manufacturing process. P4 speculated that if the company realized the establishment of an FTZ, the inspection of the shipments could experience a reduction. The formation of the FTZ could assist the organization to

maintain and acquire additional global market shares based on the perspective of growth set by the company's central office, P4 stated as a final response to the question.

Participant 5 (P5) recognized that the reason for seeking the FTZ as a possibility of improving the management of both the inbound shipments of raw materials and the outbound shipments composed of semi-finished and finished materials. P5 recognized the organization's difficulties in the management of the unprocessed stock created by the weak administration of the inventory and the inability to account for the amounts of raw materials used to produce the finished and semi-finished products. The payment of duties and the attempt of requesting the duty drawback involved a lengthy process that often failed to deliver the expected results suggested to P5 that the company needs to consider alternative mechanisms. P5 said that the issues of lack of accountability of the primary inbound material, the failure to chronicle the amounts of unprocessed materials converted into semi-finished and finished commodities affected the organization's global competitiveness and possibly created the inability to sustain or established losses of global market shares.

The National Association of Foreign Trade Zones (2016) stated that the FTZ program assisted U.S companies to compete globally by establishing a deferment in the payment of tariffs and reducing the transit time and eliminating the physical inspections of imported materials by instituting the use direct delivery procedures by the importing company. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (2017) reported that U.S. companies using the FTZ program could defer, lower or eliminate the duty rate on the imported components or a final product derived from the imported material, canceling the

need for the companies to file for duty drawback upon exporting the finished or semi-finished goods.

Interview Question 2

The second question presented to the participants was “What knowledge or understanding of FTZ did you need to gather or collect to trust that you have arrived at an informed decision to implement a FTZ?” The purpose of the question surrounds the need for the researcher to understand how and where the decision makers collected the sufficient information that would assist in arriving at the final decision. Bailey and Peck (2013) suggested that some business organization decision makers move to decide once the collection of relevant information considered completed and that the analysis of the information presented the decision makers grants a clear understanding of the topic and exposes the possible effects of the decision on the organization.

P1 replied that the compilation of knowledge and understanding focusing on the operating of FTZs became a significant challenge for the decision makers and other stakeholders involved in the FTZ project. P1 discussed the lack of resources available for an organization contemplating the implementation of the FTZ. The search for consultants, U.S. Government agencies, state and local agencies, and the nationwide search for FTZ professionals that could contribute knowledge, understanding, and explain the possible risks and benefits associated with the operation of a FTZ became an obstacle that group needed to overcome. P1 stated that the collection of information for the decision-making team that would provide an accurate understanding of the operation, maintenance, rules, regulations, and general administration required to manage and

operate the FTZ appeared lacking and incomplete. P1 elaborated that because of the scarcity of information, the decision-making team decided to contract the services of a legal firm that specialized in assisting businesses in establishing and operating FTZs. The group also decided to hire the aid of a consulting firm that would supply additional information and knowledge to the organization's decision-making crew, according to P1 response.

P2 acknowledged that the legal firm that focused on the assisting businesses in organizing FTZs provided considerable support in gaining the necessary knowledge and understanding, regarding the details of the FTZ operation. The limited amount of expertise in the field of FTZ compelled the stakeholders to meet on a weekly basis, permitting the exchange of gathered information and a forum to ask questions or address other concerns was an observation made by P2. According to P2, the meeting became the setting for the decision makers and other stakeholders to attain and exchange the essential understanding and knowledge of the functions and operation of the FTZ program. P2 indicated that the consulting group usually attended the meeting and used the forum to disseminate additional FTZ information and clarify any questions or confusions the stakeholders or the decision-making team could possess, regarding the FTZ process.

Information to gain a complete understanding and acquire the necessary knowledge of an FTZ became an essential factor for the organization, stated P3. Pursuing the expertise of legal firms, freight forwarders, and other consultants proved crucial for decision-makers to arrive at final decision P3 indicated. P3 responded that the

organization felt at times that not enough FTZ information appeared available for companies to consider the FTZ program as a solution.

P4 stated that the organization's stakeholders played an important in collecting and disseminating the information to everyone needing to obtain the knowledge and understanding of the FTZ. The weekly meeting provided a suitable venue to achieve and acquire additional information on FTZs. P4 detailed that the lack of expertise in the topic of FTZ caused some delays in the implementation of the FTZ.

The lack of understanding of the how FTZ functions and a shortage of experts in the FTZ topic delayed some the decision making, according to P5. P5 answered that the use of the legal firm proved essential in promoting the understanding of the FTZ topic and serving a focal point in providing the decision makers with the crucial knowledge to arrive at informed decisions. According to P5, the agencies involved with promoting the FTZ programs would benefit from enhancing and expanding the information available on FTZ programs, which assist organizations in deciding if the FTZ program meets the needs and wants of any business.

Acquiring knowledge and proceeding to apply the knowledge to the decision-making process grants the decision makers the capability to arrive at an informed decision that takes into consideration the context, constraints, and immediate opportunities presented by the knowledge (Comfort & Wukich, 2013). Lepora and Pezzulo (2015) argued that effective decision making requires preparation and planning. The development and planning require the use of the knowledge acquired regarding the

topic and an understanding of the cause and effects encompassing the implementation of the matter.

Interview Question 3

The third question asked, “What additional knowledge or understanding of FTZ did you require to implement an FTZ strategy successfully?” The query attempts to explore further how the collection of additional information would allow the decision makers to gain extra knowledge or understanding enabling them to reach better-informed decisions. Shepherd et al. (2015) said that the decision makers focused on exploring and accumulating as much knowledge and understanding as possible before entering the final decision.

P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 stated that most of the fundamental training, regarding the FTZ operation, was provided by the legal firm hired by the company to assist in the enabling of the FTZ. The participants defined training as the duties, activities, or other actions required to perform the functions surrounding the day to day operation of the FTZ. However, the information and training provided by the legal firm presented the components needed to constitute the FTZ, but the participants did not comprehend how all parts merged to assemble an operational FTZ. The consulting firm, P3, and P5 indicated, boosted the group understanding of how the small pieces interacted with the more significant parts of the FTZ operation, permitting the participants to gain a total understanding of the processes of the FTZ. P4 stated that the consulting group dissected the significant elements into essential components granting the participants and other stakeholders the capability to better understand the aggregated FTZ process. P4 expressed

that the decision-making group realized that additional training for specific departments would become a crucial factor to ensure that each element would support the totality of the system needed by a functioning FTZ. P2 indicates that P2's group required to gain an understanding and operational knowledge of the manufacturing process, functioning in the FTZ environment. P4 stated the necessity for all groups and departments to acquire the knowledge, understanding, and training of how the FTZ would affect each department's daily operations.

P2 discussed how the group found it necessary to amass a clear understanding of the FTZ operation, to obtain the ability to create metrics that would measure actual savings, collect import and export data, and maintain the accuracy of the inventory. P5 discussed the difficulty in finding specialized training that would contribute to elevating the knowledge and understanding of how the FTZ components would compose a complete system that established an operational FTZ.

Morena et al. (2014) stated that the decisive factors that drive to deciding requires complete information of the critical elements that would permit the decision-making process take consideration of risk, and economic factors. Arriving at an informed decision requires the analysis and review of all available information, but may expect for the decision makers to seek additional and possibly not easily found information.

Interview Question 4

Question four inquired, "What methods did you use to increase your knowledge and understanding of FTZs?" The primary intent of the inquiry focused on compiling the number of resources and location of the resources available for groups evaluating the

implementation of an FTZ. P2 said that the law firm hired by the company became the primary source of information and the consulting group serves a secondary source of knowledge. P1 and P3 discussed the pursuit of outside sources, government sources, and the possibility of meeting with a company that operated an FTZ, as other methods to achieve supplementary understanding and knowledge of the FTZ operation.

P4 and P5 wanted an incremental involvement and training from the FTZ guarantor. The FTZ guarantor is an organization assigned a regional area by the U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones Board. The FTZ guarantor serves as the regional grantee of the national FTZ program and is expected to promote the establishment, operation, and maintenance of the zones that receive operational status granted by the U.S. FTZ Board (Foreign-Trade Zones Board, 2017). All participants agreed that the United States Customs and Border Protection (USCBP) did not afford any seminar or another forum for prospective FTZ operators to meet and discuss with USCBP the operator's concerns or address the potential operator's questions, regarding the FTZ rules and regulations that are enforced by the USCBP.

The success of knowledge management requires meticulous research, analysis of data, and addressing the core of competency development (Kumar & Muthuvelayutham, 2014). The participants demonstrated that even when it seems difficult to attain the necessary knowledge and understanding of the operation of FTZ, the participants and the stakeholders sought alternative methods to obtain supplementary information that would guide and enhance the capability the decision makers to arrive at an informed decision.

Interview Question 5

Question five requested, “What other information, regarding the implementation of an FTZ did you consider as vital to reaching the informed decision of proceeding with the execution of the FTZ strategy?” The decision makers could possess the knowledge and understanding of a FTZ. However, this particular question sought to discover what other elements or factors needed clarification before the decision makers would commit to establishing the FTZ. Simaškienė and Dromantaite-Stancikienė (2014) indicated that knowledge composes an intangible resource that governs and influences the effectiveness of strategic decision making.

P5 stated the critical gap related to the selection of the person responsible for the daily operation of the FTZ failed to appear as a consideration by the decision-making group. P5 discussed the lack of concern that the decision makers exhibited when attempting to decide if the organization should consider recruiting a person with experience in the administration of a FTZ or selecting an internal candidate. The decision-making group realized that the selection of an internal candidate would require providing the candidate with proper training and development of the person’s operational and management skills needed for the administration of the FTZ. However, the advantage of selecting an internal person centers on the person’s capacity of possessing an understanding of the company’s strategies and the organization’s needs, customers base, and the company’s procedures that would take months for an outside hire to acquire, P5 noted. The advantage owned by hiring external candidate would focus on the practical

knowledge and understanding regarding the administration and operation of the FTZ but would lack the familiarity with the company's internal functioning.

P2 focused on how to acquire a better comprehension of the government requirements necessary for the operation of the FTZ. The collection of import and export data, USCBP audits and gaining a grasp of the record keeping of the raw materials used when manufacturing finished or semi-finished items comprised some of P2's concerns. P2 response's focused on the lack of accessible knowledge for the prospective users of the FTZ that centered on regulations, operational requirements, and transaction needed for maintaining the FTZ in compliance with the federal and state agencies.

P1's responses nearly aligned with P2 but sought to obtain more information from the United States Government Agencies that carry the responsibility of promoting, monitoring, or supervising the FTZ operations. P1 stated that in some occasions when contacting USAG, the representatives of the USAGs could not provide precise answers or provided incorrect responses that created more confusion to the decision-making team. P1 expressed the need to develop a working relationship with the Greater Kansas City Foreign Trade Zones (FTZ guarantor for the area), the U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones Board (Federal agency), and the National Association of Foreign Trade Zones (FTZ Professional Association). P1 considered that these relationships vital to maintaining and sustaining a contemporary operational FTZ.

P3 and P4 replies centered on the functional and practical operation of the FTZ. Acquiring information on how to account and manage the daily introduce and exit of products, and when the reporting of the process should occur. The undefined timelines of

reporting, generate ambiguity, confusion, and anxiety for P3 and P4. P3 and P4 considered that the team needed to place more attention on attaining the facts of what reports required filing, the schedule of when to file the reports, and how to submit the reports as necessary and essential knowledge.

Graham et al. (2015) noted that business leaders tend to seek information based on their professional background, training, and setting that grant them the ability to reach an informed decision by acquiring an understanding of the elements composing the topic. Each participant dissected the need for vital information based on their professional knowledge and experience. The participants demonstrated a pattern that considered as essential information any facts that could directly affect the operation of their departments.

Interview Question 6

“What type of barriers, obstacles, or other impediments did your company encountered during the implementation of the FTZ?” comprised the sixth question presented to the participants. After deciding to proceed with the FTZ, the decision-making group needed to examine specific issues not discussed or addressed during the initial discovery period. The unidentified topics tend to develop or appear as the strategy for implementation advances or receives approval to proceed.

P2 provided a response that resonates with the other participants. P2 carried the concern of entering the uncharted or unknown territory, once the decision to proceed with the FTZ implementation became the mandate. P2 stated how the fear of the unknown developed among the group. The possibilities of embracing and establishing new

methods to conduct daily business functions, and finding new techniques to identify and manage the inventory. The reporting of profits, losses, and excess capital created from the nonpayment of import duties and other cost reductions introduced by the FTZ prevailed as potential obstacles or barriers to P2.

P5's response focused on how to receive, process, and retransmit the data collected from the FTZ processes. The management of new materials, communication with USGA, and ensuring the timely payment of fees to USCBP composed some additional concerns for P5. P5 indicated the apprehension and uneasiness that enveloped every department of the company, regarding the effects of the FTZ on routine business processes.

P1, P3, and P4 addressed similar concerns, as declared by P2 and P5 in their replies when presenting their responses to the question. P4 and P3 discussed their trepidations and suspicions of the potentially new processes required to operate the FTZ and the possible effects of the new procedures to the departments that constitute the business entity. The possibility of needing to modify the current inventory system to meet that reflect compliance with USCBP regulations, the introduction of unique operating methods incorporated by the implementation of the FTZ, and the installation of a modern security system represented some of the uncertainties for P1.

The United States Government Accountability Office (2017) argued that USCBP failure to assess compliance risks associated with the FTZ program that caused FTZ operators the improper calculation of the duties that impaired the operators from receiving the expect cost saving and reduction by implementing the FTZ program. The

FTZ operators need to receive dependable and trustworthy information from the USCBP, and other USAGs that allow the operators to decrease their anxieties associated with the introduction of new processes and procedures contributed by the implementation of the FTZ. Lepora and Pezzulo (2015) said that decisions made first and then followed by immediate action usually fail to take into consideration the costs or possible effects produced by the act.

Interview Question 7

The final question presented to the participants was “How did your company’s leaders overcome these impediments, barriers, or obstacles during the implementation of the FTZ project?” The subsequent decision-making process used to overcome unexpected issues generated by the decision to implement the FTZ focalized the reason to present this question. Lepora and Pezzulo (2015) stated that actions initiated after the completion of the decision-making stage could produce the lack of action preparation. Correcting the lack of action preparation could require a subsequent decision-making process.

P1 and P4 stated that the leadership encouraged the collaboration between departments by promoting meetings that permitted departments to develop a cooperative alliance. The intention of the collaborative partnership by the departments concentrated on creating a discussion between departments to foresee the possible effects of specific actions or requirements during the implementation of the FTZ. P1 detailed that the meetings also served a preparation stage for the live tests of the FTZ software. Live testing grants the users the opportunity to gain an understanding of the how the software

works, and identify the errors, missteps, or other omissions that could emerge before the software becomes activated for daily use by the organization.

P2 replied that the encouragement of working as a team and continuously asking questions aided in surmounting the barriers and obstacles. P3's response indicated how the company requested the support of outside vendors and USGA to ensure that the federal regulations and internal company guidelines aligned with each other permitting for the FTZ to operate in a compliant environment. P5 said that at the beginning of implementation every process and procedure gave every department the feeling of chaos. During the start of the FTZ execution, some of the personnel assigned the task of monitoring or interaction with the daily FTZ responsibilities for their departments expressed confusion in the management of the FTZ processes. Some of the staff struggled to attain complete comprehension of the FTZ procedures. But, the leadership arranged for the meeting and discussion sessions, led by the consultants or the hired legal team that granted the team to develop a collaborative and cooperative setting, that allowed the for the departments to ask questions, receive accurate responses, and establishing affirmation that persons could manage and handle the FTZ procedures assigned to the team members. As the FTZ implementation processes advanced the sense of turmoil for the personnel and their departments subsided, and the sentiment of confidence and assurance started overtaking the company.

Bagdasarov et al. (2016) indicated that decision makers tend to direct the group's attention to establishing relationships to resolve the causes identified earlier by the decision makers. The identification of the elements that envelope the formation and

implementation of an operation that could cause problems or delays requires that the stakeholders receive notice of the possible issues, allowing the organization to develop strategic solutions that build core competency and knowledge assets (Kumar & Muthuvelaytham, 2014). Recognizing and identifying the probable matters and disclosing these situations to the decision-making group should minimize the obstacles and create a collaborative and cooperative collective that should develop solutions that surmount any barriers that could appear during or after the implementation of an operational FTZ.

Emerging Themes

The discussion of the results of the study by emerging theme occurs in this section. The three major themes and two sub-themes that appeared after the analysis of the data collected during the interview reflected the information needed by the decision makers to arrive at an informed decision. The leadership arrived at the informed decision by examination and determination of the collected data that converts into acquired knowledge and understanding of a subject or situation under review.

Information, import and export, training and new processes were the major themes. Consultants and USAGs and payment of duties composed the subthemes. Information constituted Theme 1. The subtheme accompanying Theme 1 encompassed the acquiring knowledge and understanding on how a FTZ operation should function from consultants and USAGs. Theme 2 consisted of import and export and carried the sub-theme of payment of duties. Training and new processes composed theme 3.

Theme 1: Information. Arriving at an informed decision requires the decision makers to collect information and data that after sustaining an analysis produces the

knowledge needed by the decision makers to attain an understanding of the topic (Lepora & Pezzulo, 2015). Understanding the relevant topic grants the decision makers the ability to reach an informed decision, based on factual data and a strong comprehension of the subject matter (Mora et al., 2014). For any business to conclude that the use of a FTZ as a business strategy is viable and present competitive and commercial advantages requires for the collection, examination, and interpretation of information (Connell et al., 2014). All of the participants of the study stated that being deemed responsible for determining if the FTZ strategy would deliver the anticipated benefits and savings brought about the realization that the availability of information would constitute a challenge because of the limited number of sources that could provide reliable information.

As pointed out by P1 and P5 responses to the interview questions, the availability of FTZ information proved to difficult to collect because of the narrow and restricted amount of available expertise in the discipline of FTZs. The data regarding the establishment, benefits, and regulations appeared in a multitude of locations managed by some United States Government Agencies, non-profit and for-profit groups, and other associations interested in promoting the FTZ programs, according to P2 and P3. However, all of the participants of the study agreed that the gamut of sites presenting the information regarding FTZ operations failed to provide a clear and understandable blueprint of the steps to follow and what agencies needed notification or involvement, or offer advice on how the implementation of a FTZ would affect the different departments comprising a business.

P3 indicated that the inability of acquiring specific information related to cost set-up off a FTZ, the return on investment (ROI), and methods of reporting the daily operations encompassing a FTZ, compromised the expected implementation dates planned by the company. At different points in the interview, all of the participants discussed the subtheme of consultants and USAGs. All of the participants agreed that the USAGs presented a source of disappointment because of the lack of capabilities to introduce instructive and informational materials for an organization considering the use of a FTZ. The deficiency in accumulating a totality of the needed information and instead of having to piece together information from different sources delayed the resolution of implementation, according to the participants.

Decision making requires not only the review of the business analytics but also requires the human interactions attained through the exchange of communications with consultants, legal advisers, other FTZ operators, and government officials as indicated by the responses provided by the participants of the study. Knowledge-based decision making (KBD) is the process that involves the analysis and review of collected data that ensure the generation of a suitable outcome for a specific topic (Comfort & Wukich, 2013). The responses provided by the participants demonstrated that decision to enable and implement the operation of a FTZ sustained the analysis and venting necessary for the decision makers to gain and understand and knowledge of the FTZ topic (Wan et al., 2014).

Theme 2: Import and Export. The primary reason to explore the possible institution of a FTZ operation, as declared by the study's participants, involved the

importation and exportation of raw materials, semifinished, and finished product and the expectation to reduce, defer, or eliminate the payment of duties to the USCBP. The FTZ presents the business with the advantage and ability to improve a company's competitive position by avoiding the payment of import duties if the goods that enter the FTZ are stored, sorted, kitted, or experience a specific transformation within the FTZ, without entering the U.S. marketplace (National Association of Foreign-Trade Zones, 2016). The conversion that the materials experience within the FTZ could determine whether or not the items would experience the assessment of import duties to the FTZ operator by the USCBP (Bolle & Williams, 2013).

P2 acknowledged that the leading motivation for the company's decision-makers to consider the FTZ rested on the increasing number of imported raw materials and semifinished product and delays caused by the inspection of the shipment by USCBP, upon arrival the US seaport. P2 and P5 affirmed that the organization also sought to obtain reductions in cost, elimination of the duty drawback filing procedure, and enhance the company's global competitiveness as some of the additional reasons for the organization to search for a solution that would produce favorable commercial results. P3 and P1 discussed the need to initiate a methodology that would collect the number of projected import, the expected value of dutiable merchandise of exported goods, average duty rate, and other information that would allow for the creation the analysis of benefits, costs, and risks related with the activation of a FTZ. The delays in the delivery of importation of raw material and semifinished materials that were used to produce the finished product; the inefficient method of filing duty drawback, the pressure from headquarter to reduce

cost and become a more globally competitive organization, encompassed P4 respond and summation of the reasons why the organization considered the FTZ strategy as an appropriate solution.

Subtheme 1: Payment of Duties. The subtheme of payment duties appeared as an important factor throughout the entire interview process. The primary attraction of a FTZ comprises the concept of introducing goods, whether foreign or domestic items into the zone without the subjections to USCBP duties or certain other excise taxes (National Association of Foreign-Trade Zones, 2016). P2 stated that the product exported without transformation could depart from the area, free of duty and taxes and the zone also permits for the FTZ operator to participate in the duty deferral program, if applicable to the item undergoing the export process from the FTZ. P5 focused on the payment of duties and excise taxes appraised on foreign merchandise admitted into the FTZ. P5 expected that the FTZ program would grant the FTZ operator the ability to receive a deferral for the payment of the duties or experience a reduction in the assessment of taxes when the goods underwent a transformation or entered into the USCBP territory for sale to a domestic consumer.

P3 and P4 indicated that imported raw materials, semi-finished, or finished merchandise, entered into the FTZ could sustain a manufacturing process or conversion in condition while in the zone, granting the FTZ operator a substantially lowering the duties paid if the goods entered into the USCBP territory. However, if the products are re-exported, the items would not experience the assessment of duties or taxes. The payment of duties, the postponement of taxes, or the lowering of a duty assessment

through transformation would play a significant influence for decision makers to determine if the establishment of a FTZ operation would fulfill this expectation of the management and executive group (Lepora & Pezzulo, 2015).

Theme 3: Training and New Processes. The implementation of a FTZ operation would require training of personnel and the introduction of new processes, evolved as two issues the participants agreed that could create obstacles or delays. The decision-making group composed of the participants defined training as any action, activity, other related responsibilities necessary to perform the functions surrounding the day to day operation of the FTZ. The participants stated that the preparation to operate a FTZ involves the participation of all of the staff in all of the functional areas of the organization affected by the FTZ operations.

Operating a FTZ requires for the organization to introduce new processes and procedures that align with the federal regulations and rules, surrounding the operation of an FTZ (Bolle & Williams, 2013). New procedures would compel the company to revise, change or introduce new practices or programs that could affect the management and handling of the inventory, and require the weekly filing of entries and exit of merchandise (United States Government Accountability Office, 2017). The participants of the study realized that other, unique FTZ processes that would necessitate the organization consideration include the presentation of a plan on how to handle the disposal of waste, damaged, or residual material; and the assessment of the accounting methods used to record the financial procedures to ensure alignment with USCBP accounting methods.

P5 indicated that the need for the itemization of each bill of materials, permitting for the identification of each component used during the manufacturing process, introducing a new method of verification and reexamination of the total manufacturing process and the materials used in the said process. According to P5, the new procedures found some discrepancies and inaccuracies associated with the items listed on the bill of materials. For P5, the introduction of a new method that elevated the accuracy and would lead to improving the performance of inventory management and assist in repairing inconsistencies in the financial records would demonstrate and display to the entire organization that the decision to implement the FTZ strategy was correct and would deliver the expected benefits.

P2 and P1 stated that their fear of the launching of new processes and the need for training for the personnel. Not possessing a clear understanding of what new procedures would need implementation and not comprehending what training would best prepare the staff to operate the FTZ, troubled P2 and P1. P2 concerns extended to what type of training would best benefit the team, who could provide the training, and how much would training cost to the company.

According to P4, the regular meetings focused on asking and discussing how the new procedures could affect specific business departments and who would carry the designated responsibility of managing the planning and implementation of the new processes. The meeting assisted in developing approaches to administer the introduction of the new procedures. P4 emphasized the need and demand for training by the business departments; however, P4 indicted the group's concern with the lack of qualified FTZ

trainers affected the group's ability to select a company that could present the training or design internal training modules.

P3 declared that the legal firm rendered the best services for training and clarification of the new procedures required when implementing a FTZ operation. However, the absence of training seminars, and no clear explanation of what new methods may be needed to operate a FTZ by USGA, FTZ associations, and other groups associated with the promotion of FTZ, created some disappointment and uncertainties with P3.

P1 and P4 thought that FTZ training seminars should serve not only as an introduction for the persons working in activated FTZ, but also foster and deliver an education regarding the procedures that provide an understanding of the FTZ operations and the USCBP regulations and procedures surrounding the FTZ. P5 and P2 declared that the training should present how to implement new systems and processes that would launch the advantages and benefits expected from the FTZ, assist in minimizing or lessen the possible mistakes in the FTZ transactions and aid in enhancing the accuracy of the inventory, recordkeeping, and government reporting. All participants indicated that the subtheme of payment of duties would needed inclusion in the training and implementation of new processes because, with the implementation of the FTZ, the nonpayment of import taxes would appear as a surplus of funds on the accounting books. P4 considered that the training would alert and explain to the finance and accounting departments the surplus funds that would permit the departments to develop proper methods to report and manage the excess funds that appear on the business' ledger.

Subtheme 2: Consultants and USAGs. The consultants and the USAG subtheme consisted of the groups and agencies that would provide the training, understanding, and guidance to the organization's personnel, according to the participants of the study. P3 stated that organization sought outside consultants to assist in the training of the personnel that would manage the daily operations of the FTZ. P3 further added that the consultant services assisted in ensuring the alignment of the federal rules and regulations with the internal organization's guidelines. P1 and P2 discussed the lack of information and assistance available from USAGs. All of the participants mentioned that the introduction of consultants provided the necessary support for the organization and the personnel to gain an understanding of how the new procedures would affect the daily operations of the company.

Applications to Professional Practice

The decision to establish and execute an operating FTZ requires careful consideration. The collection of information and the analysis of the data to gain the understanding and acquire the knowledge of the subject matter should assist in reducing or eliminating the possible consequences of implementing based on the informed decision to enact a FTZ. The participants of the study elevated the awareness to the issues and concerns related to arriving at an informed decision. The responsibilities for leaders to reach any final decision requires possessing the relevant information of subject matter, knowledge of the topic, and a basic understanding of the issue (Bailey & Peck, 2013; Comfort & Wukich, 2013; Lepora & Pezzulo, 2015; Morena et al., 2014). All of the participants indicated the need to gather the data regarding the establishment, benefits,

and regulations required for the operation of an FTZ. The participants all mentioned the lack or absence of information from the groups responsible for the promotion, supervision, and policing of the FTZ programs.

The decision-making skills of business leaders depend on the management of knowledge that occurred through the collection of data that grants the participants the ability to arrive at informed decisions, producing the development of strategic plans that culminate in deployable and reliable outcomes (Graham et al., 2015). P1, P2, and P5 discussed the importance of collecting information to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the magnitude of implementing a FTZ and the type of training that would assist the organization's personnel to obtain the knowledge of how the implementation would affect their business departments. Benton et al. (2016) stated that understanding and developing long-term business strategies that considered economic policy, competitive qualities, costs, benefits, and risks associated with the FTZ warrants the organization the capability to arrived at an informed decision.

The organization's decision makers prevailed in the ability to collect enough information and data to decide that a FTZ would provide the organization with the capacity to compete in the global market and receive additional benefits from the operation of the FTZ. Arriving at the final decision based on knowledge management demonstrated that the decision makers took into considerations all benefits, cost, and risks and followed the process of collecting, analyzing, and understanding the topic under scrutiny (Chakraborty et al., 2013; Simaškienė & Dromantaitė-Stancikienė, 2014; Wan et al., 2014).

The subject of import and export appeared prominently as a response from the participants of the study. The focal reason for the operation of a FTZ centers on the import and export of items from the zone (Bolle & Williams, 2013). The company's importation of raw materials and semi-finished commodities, exportation of transformed products, and minimizing or reducing the inspection of the articles by USCBP, provided a summation of the feedback given all of the participants, during the interview. The global platform sought by the organization, supporting the statement of Busse et al. (2017) and Trappey et al. (2013) that an organization supply chain needs to not only receive timely deliveries but also needs to create and establish unique methods that reflect modernization, dynamics, and a flexible logistics model that possess the capability to sustain a competitive strategy.

Training and the introduction of new processes that ensure the organization's observance of the rules and regulations when operating a FTZ converged the attention of the participants of the study. Businesses that compete in the global markets need to invest in human capital to ensure the success of the business venture (Lepora & Pezzulo, 2015; Morena et al., 2014). Operating a FTZ requires the introduction of modern technology and innovative processes that promote the strengthening of the business management practices and procedures (Sabet et al., 2017; Vagner, 2015). Trappey et al. (2013) and den Hertog (2014) argued that organizations need to deploy and sustain the resources and services that contribute as a primary source of creating and establishing the competitive advantage of the firm.

The development of any competitive advantage rests on the theory of how a firm creates and defends its competitive position, sustain its current markets shares, attracts new consumers, and outpaces its commercial rivals (Porter, 1998; Porter, 2008). Operating a business in a FTZ environment grants the operators the ability to produce a unique competitive advantage over commercial rivals by receiving the tax savings, lower operational costs, and capability to import and export materials without paying import duties or export duties (Ghosh et al., 2016; Post, 2015). The participants mentioned the organization's pursuit of a reduction in the payment of taxes that should enact a competitive advantage over commercial rivals. The decree of the Foreign Trade Zone Act of 1934, created a method for U.S. firms to become competitive by receiving a reduction of duty payments, lowering inventory costs, and decreasing or eliminate some of the import and export formalities instituted and enforced by USCBP and other USAGs (U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones Board, 2017; International Trade Administration, 2017; National Association of Foreign-Trade Zones, 2016).

Graham et al. (2015) indicated that for leadership to arrive at a well-informed decision, required the collection of information. The participants of the study through their interviews presented the common topic of information as an essential element to decide to implement the FTZ strategy emerged as theme 1. The data collected grant the decision makers the capability to use knowledge management to assess the potential risks and arrive at a practical and valid decision (Comfort & Wukich, 2013).

U.S. companies that operate on a global platform require the advantage offered by the FTZ strategy that permits the importation and exportation without the interference or

inspection from the USCBP or the other USGA (U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones Board, 2017; International Trade Administration, 2017). The transfer of the imported goods directly from the port of arrival to the FTZ demonstrates the reduction of delays that permit the importer to experience lower operational costs (National Association of Foreign-Trade Zones, 2016). Theme 2 constituted the discussion of import and export as a competitive advantage the participating organize expected to gain from the establishment of a FTZ. The competitiveness of U.S. companies that use the FTZ benefit from the exemption of paying import duties and not being assessed export duties during inbound or outbound transactions (U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones Board, 2017). The subtheme of duties payment, deferral, or exemptions emerged throughout the participants' interview contribution.

Finding assistance in advancing the practical knowledge of a FTZ and gaining the understanding of how to operate a FTZ accurately, established the subtheme of consultants and USAG their relationships to the lack of available information. The United States Government Accountability Office (2017) stated that the USCBP failed at providing appropriate and accurate information, regarding the rules and regulations governing FTZ operation to prospective and current FTZ operators. The National Association of Foreign-Trade Zones (2016) argued that since 2012, the organization increased the number of seminars and webinars demonstrating an increased engagement with the FTZ community.

Training and the introduction of new processes that occur when instituting a FTZ developed into theme 3 of the study. In 2016, The National Association of Foreign-Trade Zones (2016) announced the expansion and broadening of the number of training

seminars and webinars to assist their members in acquiring additional instruction and guidance on how to enhance their FTZ operations. Benton et al. (2016) indicated the need for FTZ operations to consider the implementation of ERP that would facilitate the incoming and outgoing tracking of goods. The deployment of an ERP system would align with the participants' concerns about new processes required to achieve and promote a successful FTZ operation.

The principal intention of this study concentrates on determining the decision-making strategies used by leaders of some U.S. companies to decide if the implementation of a FTZ would deliver benefits and establish a competitive advantage for the business organization. The findings could contribute to understanding the challenges encountered by companies considering the establishment of a FTZ operation. The U.S. FTZs offer any U.S. company the opportunity to initiate a competitive plan by introducing the allowances of costs savings, duty exemptions on goods imported or exported, and capacity to transform raw materials into semi-finished or finished items (Busse et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2016; U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones Board, 2017). The themes that appeared after the analysis of the interviews demonstrated that the magnitude of information and data required to reach an informed decision by the leaders of the organization.

Theme 1, information that after analysis becomes knowledge exposed the difficulties in collecting informative data concerning the formalities, regulations, and rules required to operate a FTZ from the USGA, for-profit, and non-profit groups involved in the promotion and advocacy of the FTZ program to U.S. businesses. Theme

2, import and export, introduced a topic that the organization considered as an essential component to establish a competitive position against commercial rivals. Theme 3, training and new processes presented the concepts that the participants regarded as possible obstacles or impediments that could hinder or delay the decision to proceed with the implementation of the FTZ. Bailey and Peck (2013) and, Comfort and Wukich (2013) stated that before reaching any final decision, the organization needs to approach the issue with a plan that should include the alignment of the interest, a process that grants the participants to arrive at a well-informed and knowledge-based decision that should produce deployable, reliable, and implementable results.

According to all of the participants, one goal for the consideration of the establishment of a FTZ centered on the need for the organization to build a global competitive advantage against any commercial rival and demonstrate the organization's ability to retain, sustain, and expand market shares worldwide. The leadership responsible for the making and executing the final decision encountered some challenges. The limited or scarcity of data or information, instituting new processes to become compliant with the rules and regulations of a FTZ and verifying and ensuring that the effects of the implementation would not hinder the operations of business departments upon the execution of an operational FTZ comprise some the challenges. However, the participating organization's decision-making team found and develop solutions that permitted for the implementation of an operational FTZ. Implementing a fully functional FTZ relied on the acquired knowledge that the decision makers amassed, during the exploratory phase of the process. The leadership responsible for the decision making

should follow a particular procedure to ensure that the final decision meets the alignment to the company's comprehensive strategy that produces the desired results (Graham et al., 2015; Li et al., 2015; Shepherd et al, 2015).

This study could assist U.S. corporate leadership to consider the challenges encountered, during the consideration of the possible establishment of a FTZ. The investigation could also provide some insight into the techniques used by the participating organization used for the deployment of a FTZ. The leaders should contemplate reviewing the themes presented by the participants of the study to augment and bolster their capability to collect information, analyze the data, and attain the necessary knowledge and full understanding of the subject matter. Gaining an understanding of the topic should grant the decision-makers the ability to reach a final decision based on informed knowledge management.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study could contribute to social change by presenting leaders with information on how to enhance their decision-making skills when considering the application of a FTZ. FTZs not only creates economic advantages for the operators of the zones, but also contribute to social changes for the employees, their families, and the communities surrounding the FTZ (Ghosh et al., 2016). FTZs serve as a catalyst of employment for the communities located in the proximity of the FTZ facilities. The National Association of Foreign-Trade Zones (2016) stated that FTZ programs employed an estimated 420,000 persons in 2014, demonstrating the potential of the FTZ to create and establish meaningful employment.

Communities surrounding the FTZ facilities could experience an expansion of new and existing non-manufacturing businesses growth and economic stimulation from the FTZ facilities located in the vicinity. The development or improvement of infrastructures that provide support for the FTZs brings about social changes to communities in the proximity of the facilities. Gum (2014) indicated that the establishment of FTZ operations causes the improvement of infrastructures, such as telecommunication, electrical distribution, an enhancement to the water and sewage systems, and expansion or construction of roadways.

Promoting employment, attracting new forms of investments, the introduction of new technology, and increasing the development of unused areas compose some of the social and economic advancement contributed by FTZ operation. The economic benefits catalyzed by the FTZs tend to produce other secondary economic effects that provide positive social changes to the communities surrounding the FTZs (Ghosh et al., 2016). This study through its findings could motivate current and future operators of FTZs to further contribute to the social growth of the communities surrounding the FTZ operations.

Recommendations for Action

Companies contemplating or searching for a mechanism to generate a competitive advantage over domestic and foreign commercial rivals should become interested in reviewing the methodology used by the participating organization to gather information, compile data, and examine the data that permitted the organization's leadership to arrive at an informed decision, regarding the establishment of a FTZ. The individuals

interviewed discussed the experiences and lessons they acquired and learned when approaching the ambitious and complicated project of implementing an operating FTZ. The decision-making skills used by the participants demonstrated their ability to confront and find solutions to problems caused by the absence of FTZ information. The leaders of the company displayed the capacity to establish collaboration and interest among the groups involved in arriving at the final decision of the FTZ demonstrated the group's ability to take a deliberate and systematic approach to resolve any issue created by the introduction of the FTZ.

Companies engaging the concept of a FTZ could improve their final decision by preparing and developing their techniques and proficiency in the collection of data, research of needed information, and making contact with USGA, non-profits, and for-profits institutions and firms that promote and advocate the FTZ programs. Local, state, and federal government agencies need to provide more progressive and continuous support to the businesses inquiry about the FTZ program. The promoters of the FTZ programs need to disseminate more materials that detail not only the benefits of the FTZ but also provide instructions and advice on how to plan, what resources are required, and the possible effects of the FTZ could afford on the business departments composing the organization.

It is essential that information, concerning FTZs, become more accessible to those interested in the program. The accessibility and availability of the data permit the process of acquiring knowledge contributing to the leaders reaching informed decisions. Knowledge sharing stimulates the collaboration, innovation, and enhancing the

advancement of the topic under consideration by the decision makers. Extending the understanding and incrementing the knowledge management of the FTZs should assist companies examining and considering the implementation of a FTZ operation.

The outcomes derived from this study could find their way to other business leaders through the distribution of the information in lectures, FTZ workshops, and professional conferences. Government agencies, non-profit, and for-profit groups associated with FTZ implementation could use the results presented to enhance and improve the dissemination of information to business organizations with potential interest in establishing an operational FTZ. The findings could also become recognized by the scholars and business professionals through the circulation of the study in scholarly and business journals.

Recommendations for Further Research

Limited research exists, regarding the FTZ programs and the decision process required to reach the determination to implement the FTZ. Future researchers should consider deepening the examination into these areas of the FTZ program. Continued studies should address the availabilities of information and the ancillary requirements required to execute an operational FTZ facility. The recommendation for further research that determines a specific set of decision-making indicators that could assist business leaders to transfer the knowledge to any business decision in any industry.

The limitation of this study received data from a small number of participants and a selected geographical location. Performing multi-case studies in other states in the United States or locations outside the United States would become another

recommendation. The use of different research methods could expand the current finding and improve the validity of the research. The questions presented to the participants could address other aspects not discussed or could focus attention on other factors.

Reflections

My experience with the DBA Doctoral Study process served as a great learning and growth experience. I gained knowledge and understanding about decision-making and the effect of the decision on the launching of an operational FTZ facility. The research required to obtain the understanding incurred meticulous and revealing information. Before embarking on the study, I became acquainted with the concept of research bias and did all I could to minimize researcher bias. Following my understanding of research bias and the doctoral process, I ensured that my preferences made no influence on the research findings. The findings gained from the study, aligned with the data collected from the audio-recorded interviews, the interview transcripts, notes, and company documents reviewed.

The study indicated that companies examining FTZ as a favorable business option, need to engage in conversation and interaction within the organization to develop and enact actionable strategies based on knowledgeable and informed decisions. Completing the research, I maintain that the collection of data and converting the data into understandable and knowledge, through analysis comprises an essential part of decision making. Augmenting the body of knowledge and broadening the concept by collecting initial data provides affirmation and authentication to the research. Finally, I

am of the opinion that this study could unfold or present resolutions or answers to other business problems.

Conclusion

The business competition faced by U.S. corporations from foreign and domestic commercial rivals requires that the U.S. firms explore, pursue, and foster innovative strategies that permit the companies to maintain and augment their competitive advantage in a global marketplace. The U.S. Government introduced the concept of the foreign trade zones (FTZ) in 1934 that grants the U.S. companies the ability to compete on an even platform with commercial rivals located outside of the United States. However, before an organization could determine if the use of the FTZ would serve as a probable solution, the company needs to reach a determination using decision-making skills based collecting, organizing, analyzing, and applying knowledge to achieve an informed decision.

Arriving at an educated decision permits the leadership of any firm to deploy strategies that once implemented enables the shaping and influence the direction the company should follow. Knowledge management should increment the ability of any organization to attain competitive advantage and build a framework that could provide business success. The correlation between informed decision-making and successful implementation of a strategic plan provide validation of this study.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

- Arrive approximately 15 to 20 minutes before interview time to prepare the room, set up recording device and ensure that no interruption could occur during the interview
- Confirm that the participant has signed a Consent Form
- Meet participant, greet the participant, and present my thanks and appreciation for participating in the study
- Explain the interview process and advise the participant that I will be audio recording the entire interview.
- I will advise the participant that if any point they feel uncomfortable or decide to stop participating they can do so.
- Ask if the participant has any questions before we start the interview and provide answers to any of the questions presented.
- Commence the interview using the interview instrument.
- Start taking notes and carefully observe the participant's behavior and mannerisms during the interview.
- Ask the participant if they have any additional comments once completing the presentation of the interview questions
- Turn off the recording device and again thank the participant for taking the interview.
- Advise the participant that the member checking process that will occur.

- Schedule an appointment for the review of the member checking. Advise the participant that the review is an important part of this process and can occur face-to-face or on the telephone.
- Again, extend a thank you to the participant and formally close the interview.

Appendix B: Interview Instrument

Interview Questions

1. What changes to your company's domestic or global business environment contributed to considering a FTZ as a component of your business strategy?
2. What knowledge or understanding of FTZ did you need to gather or collect to trust that you have arrived at an informed decision to implement a FTZ?
3. What additional knowledge or understanding of FTZ did you require to implement a FTZ strategy successfully?
4. What methods did you use to increase your knowledge and understanding of FTZs?
5. What other information, regarding the implementation of a FTZ did you consider as vital to reaching the informed decision of proceeding with the execution of the FTZ strategy?
6. What type of barriers, obstacles, or impediments did your company encounter during the implementation of the FTZ?
7. How did your company's leaders overcome these impediments, barriers, or obstacles during the implementation of the FTZ project?

Appendix C: Invitation Letter

LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT ON DECISION MAKING IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FOREIGN TRADE ZONES (FTZ)**Project Title: Enhancing the Competitive Advantage of U.S. Corporations by Incorporating the Foreign Trade Zone Strategy**

My name is Dino A. Scott and I am a graduate student in the College of Management and Technology at Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota. I am conducting a research on decision making in the implementation of foreign trade zones (FTZ) to fulfill my Doctor of Business Administration degree. I would like to extend an invitation to the company and individual company employees to participate in this research.

If you decide to participate, an interview would be arranged at a time and place of your convenience. The interview would last about 1 hour. During this interview, I will be asking questions, regarding the decision-making strategies used by the company's managers to successfully implement a FTZ. I would like to know what changes to the business environment contributed to the consideration of a FTZ; what knowledge needed gathering to arrive at an informed decision and what experience or understand was required to implement a FZ strategy successfully.

The information collected will be kept private and confidential. All the participants will be identified by a code that consists of an alpha character followed by a numeral. No identifiable information will be used in a publication or presentation that could lead to the recognition of the company or of the participant. I will not pass on your details to any organization or company. The research is for academic purposes and not connected with any local, state, or federal government agency or bureau. No compensation is offered to the company or the participants for their participation in the study.

This interview will take approximately 1 hour. The interviewer will use a digital recorder to collect the statements and opinions of the participants. There are no right or wrong answers. What is essential is your opinions. After the interview, I will contact you, so you can review the transcript of the meeting, ensuring that I have transcribed your

statements and views correctly. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time or not answer questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. A participant information and consent form is included with this letter for your review and information. If you have any further questions about the research, please feel free to contact me via email at [redacted] or call me at [redacted]. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact a staff member of the Walden University Institutional Review Board, Attention: Mr. Bryn Saunders, Research Ethics Support Specialist, Office of Research Ethics and Compliance, at [redacted] or email: irb@mail.waldenu.edu.

Sincerely,

Dino Scott

Graduate Student

Walden University

Email: [redacted]