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Strategies of Small Business Owners to Acquire Federal Government Contracts

Delores Ann Tyms
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Delores Tyms

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

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Strategies of Small Business Owners to Acquire Federal Government Contracts

by

Delores A. Tyms

MA, Webster University, 2000

BA, St Leo University, 1998

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

April 2017

Abstract

Small business owners are not acquiring U.S. federal government contracts at the government established target rate. The government's small business procurement goals remain unmet, which represents an underutilized source of revenues for many small business owners. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies of 3 small business owners operating in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability. The thematic findings were in the context of the resource-based view as the conceptual framework. The participants answered questions in semistructured interviews and provided organizational documents for review. Triangulation of multiple data sources and the constant comparative data analysis method led to 3 major themes: planning to target both government and commercial civilian customers through a top-down approach; developing core competencies including backgrounds and experiences and staffing choices to improve chances of success in obtaining government contracts; and knowing the company's audience, assets, and niche, which encompassed essential knowledge stemming from education and training oriented toward successful government contract work. Findings included the importance of planning before embarking on a process to bid for government contracts. Application of the findings may lead to a social change of higher small business revenues and lower unemployment, support for innovation, stimulation of the economy, and increased tax revenues to sustain government programs that can benefit society in general.

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Dedication

First and foremost, all honor and praise go to my Lord and Savior for it was only by His grace that I completed this journey. This doctoral study is dedicated to the one person who stood by me for this entire process. To my wonderful husband, Mr. Cassius Hall, thank you for staying the course with me. You have been my wind beneath my wings. You pushed while sometimes carried me to the finish line. All the sacrifices you made to ensure I completed this process made all the difference in the world. Your unwavering support and love mean the world to me. It will always be Cassius and Delores 4 Life!

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

American small businesses are widespread sources of a variety of goods and services, often provided in association with federal contracts (Dimitri, 2013). The U.S. Small Business Association (SBA) assists small business owners with federal contracting procurement opportunities (Gale, 2013). However, federal contract access, participation, and equity remain concerns within the business community and to policymakers in the federal government (Dimitri, 2013). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that small business owners use to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability. Knowledge of successful ways to secure federal government contracts is crucial for small business growth and profitability (Nicholas & Fruhmann, 2014).

Background of the Problem

Small businesses make fundamental contributions to federal agencies by providing goods and services through federal contracts (SBA, 2016). Laws and regulations mandate that the U.S. federal government award federal contracts equally to all business types (Federal Government Contracting, 2013). However, small businesses of many different types and their owners have been subjects of an ongoing concern for federal contract access, participation, and equity (Bublak, 2014; Snider, Kidalov, & Rendon, 2013). According to the U.S. Federal Procurement Data System (FPDS, 2015), there could be significantly less underuse of funding if small business owners applied the correct strategies to secure federal contracts and subcontracts.

The problem occurs, in part, because many small business owners do not have the knowledge required to build and implement strategies based on procedural and relational capabilities for success in securing contracts (Flynn & Davis, 2016). Programs such as the FPDS, in affiliation with the SBA, help small business owners learn about federal contracting opportunities and increase their market capabilities (Snider et al., 2013). The SBA provides rules, regulations, policies, and procedures to small business owners, with the objective to enhance their knowledge about acquiring federal contracts, thereby helping to meet federal government needs (SBA, 2016).

Problem Statement

Small business owners in the security industry are not implementing the necessary procedural and relational strategies to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability (Flynn & Davis, 2016). Of the \$404 billion earmarked to outsource services to small business owners, only \$89 billion in requests for awards were by small business owners (FPDS, 2015). Schooner and Couture (2016) noted declining government spending on federal contracts, consistent with the FPDS (2015) report of only 22% of federal contracting funds available to small businesses utilized. The general business problem is that some small business owners may miss revenue-generation opportunities, which affects profitability when business owners have no revenue-generation strategies to help them access federal contracts. The specific business problem is that some small business owners lack revenue-generation strategies to acquire federal government contracts that would increase profitability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that small business owners use to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability. The population encompassed small business owners from three organizations in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area who had acquired federal contracts in the security industry. This population was appropriate for the study because, due to elevated security needs, the security industry has a significant presence. This study has implications for positive social change in that it may lead to increased business opportunities for small business owners in the security industry by providing additional strategies for securing government contracts. Securing government contracts can lead to higher revenues, which can support new and ongoing employment opportunities resulting in higher tax revenues that can fund government programs that enhance the well-being of society in general.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative multiple case study involved exploration of the revenue-generation strategies that small business owners use to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability. Qualitative researchers explore the lives of individuals (Dikko, 2016), and qualitative research is often applicable to business settings (Baškarada, 2014; Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because according to Yin (2016), qualitative researchers have the ability to address multiple levels of analysis related to the data that emerge from business settings. A quantitative study, in contrast, requires a statistical approach encoded

by asking closed-ended questions (Cohen, 1988). Mixed method studies became more popular in 21st-century research contexts, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods, but these require additional time and expertise (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). The quantitative method would not allow for an in-depth inquiry into small business owners' experiences, and a mixed method approach would require additional time and resources beyond the scope of the research. Therefore, a qualitative research method was an appropriate choice to meet the goals of this study.

Qualitative methodology options consist of several research designs, including ethnography, narrative, phenomenology, and case study (Moustakas, 1994). Chronological accounts are a major component of a narrative study, and a phenomenological study usually involves a focus on personal experiences leading to an understanding of an essence of an experience (Bruce, Beuthin, Sheilds, Molzahn, & Schick-Makaroff, 2016; Willis, Sullivan-Bolyai, Knafl, & Cohen, 2016). In this study, the focus was on business settings and not on chronology or the essence of the meaning of personal experiences. Ethnography often pertains to cultural groups and involves immersion (Patton, 2002), which was beyond the scope of this study. Case studies lead to an understanding of real-life events, such as those about leaders within organizations and managerial techniques (Yin, 2016). In a descriptive case study design, the analysis unit can be an individual, group, or organization (Baškarada, 2014), and the steps involve triangulation, which heightens the trustworthiness of findings (Anney, 2014). Thus, a descriptive case study design was appropriate because using this rigorous design involved the exploration of the lived experiences of multiple participants relevant to the research

question in order to gather and analyze data derived from multiple business settings (Hyett et al., 2014).

Research Question

The research question for this study was the following:

RQ: What strategies do small business owners use to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability?

The research question aligned with the specific business problem and the purpose of the research.

Interview Questions

The open-ended interview questions that guided the semistructured interviews in alignment with the research question were as follows:

1. How do you formulate your market segment strategy, in general?
2. How do you formulate your market segment strategy with respect to government contracts?
3. What revenue-generation strategies do you use to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability?
4. What beneficial training have you received about securing government contracts?
5. With respect to government contracting, what assets of your business enhance the competitive state of your business?
6. What resources of your business enhance the competitive state of your business, with respect to government contracting?

7. What capabilities of your business enhance the competitive state of your business, with respect to government contracting?
8. What are your competitive strengths that help you secure government contracts?
9. Of everything you mentioned, what are the most important strategies for successfully acquiring government contracts?
10. What additional information would you like to add?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the resource-based view (RBV). Penrose first introduced the concepts of RBV theory in 1959 (Penrose, 1959). Wernerfelt coined the term *resource-based view* in 1984, but it is Barney who is known as the progenitor of the modern RBV (Barney, 1991). The focus of modern applications of this theory is an organization's use of its value to create worth (Jang, 2013). In 21st-century research, the RBV involves four empirical concepts as indicators for the generation of competitive advantage: value, rare, imperfectly imitable, and non-substitutability (Burton & Rycroft-Malone, 2014; Ferlie, 2014). I applied RBV theory to this study in comparing data to achieve the goal of gaining a better understanding of the assets, resources, and capabilities that business owners emphasized in the procurement of government contracts. The RBV indicates that when effective strategies are applied, businesses will gain competitiveness (Jang, 2013).

Operational Definitions

Acquisition: Acquiring of appropriate funds to purchase supplies or services for use by the federal government (Federal Acquisition Regulators [FAR], 2014).

Small business: A business that does not have more than 500 employees (FAR, 2014).

Solicitation: A request from a small business owner to submit an offer to the government (FAR, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2013), an assumption is something perceived to be true but not verified. An assumption in this study was that a qualitative case study design would be appropriate for exploring small business owners' strategies for acquiring federal government contracts. An additional assumption was that small business owners have strategies to improve participation in federal government contracts and small business owners have a thorough knowledge of strategies used to participate in government contracts. A related assumption was that small business owners who participated in individual interviews would be able to offer and discuss strategies in a detailed and truthful manner. Eligible participants represented small businesses that were competitive, and they may have wanted to keep their strategies hidden to maintain competitive advantages. However, as a criterion for selection, participants agreed to provide answers in the interviews that were truthful and accurate, as well as to provide additional data to the best of their abilities.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses in a study that are out of the control of researcher and that pose a threat to aspects of the trustworthiness of the study (Venkatesh et al., 2013). This qualitative multiple case study involved interactions with small business owners by telephone and in face-to-face interviews. Validating the truthfulness of responses from the participants was a limitation because I lacked the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to judge truthfulness when interpreting the data collected. However, this lack of direct knowledge to discern the truthfulness of responses also indicated a lack of bias in interpretation (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Acquiring a census sample of participants leading to data saturation is important in qualitative research (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013), but this was a challenge in this study. A related limitation involved the self-selection of participants and the possibility of participants withdrawing from the study; incomplete data or self-selection bias could have led to results that did not reflect the perspectives of those who did not choose to participate in the study, which Moravcsik (2014) identified as a threat to research. Another potential limitation of the qualitative research is the experience of the researcher in conducting interviews and collecting data (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). In that I acted as the primary instrument for data collection, there were limitations on my knowledge about when to go beyond the scripted questions to get the complete answers needed. How to be sensitive to the point of data saturation and how to seek information that would be most useful in triangulating data were additional components of the research process with which I lacked significant experience.

Delimitations

Delimitations limit the scope and define boundaries in research (Simon & Goes, 2013). This study involved three small businesses with owners who were knowledgeable about their businesses and about securing government contracts. This qualitative multiple case study included business owners in the security industry who had fewer than 500 employees. The business owners had obtained federal government contracts within the last 5 years. All participants had businesses in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. Additional geographic locations, a larger study sample, and the inclusion of different types of businesses and data were not possible in this study, given the additional time and expense that would have been required to broaden the scope of the study. Readers must apply prudent judgment on the transferability of findings (Anney, 2014). To help others judge the appropriateness of transferring the findings, I have provided detailed descriptions of the population, sample, method, design, sources of bias, and purposeful choices applied in the study.

Significance of the Study

This study is of value to businesses because it involved new research on acquiring government contracts for small business owners within the United States. Although a wealth of research has been conducted on the startup of small businesses (Blackburn, Hart, & Wainwright, 2013; Halabi & Lussier, 2014), relatively little research has addressed securing government contracts. Published research results about government contracts in association with different types of small businesses and their owners have led to conflicting findings or criticisms of methodologies and designs (Bublak, 2014; Snider

et al., 2013). Research results that help small business owners understand how to improve profitability using strategies to acquire federal contracts may strengthen the value of the small business sector's contributions to the American economy. Strategies to combat ongoing failures in the fulfillment of the government's small-business procurement goals are valuable for stakeholders who support the government's interests in continuing to provide opportunities to small business owners through procurement goals (Beale, 2014).

Improvement of Business Practice

This study is significant to the field of management and contributes to existing research about small business practices in acquiring contracts to operate in the shifting economic dynamics of the 21st century. This study contributes to the field of leadership engagement concerning securing government contracts to remain viable during economic recessions. The findings from the data in this study may bring about positive change in small business practices by providing small business leaders with an in-depth understanding of strategies for improving their participation in acquiring federal contracts. Winning government contracts can lead to a greater leadership focus on business practices that address diverse sources of revenue involving stakeholders, such as the government, that small businesses owners might otherwise overlook (Steyn & Niemann, 2013). The improvement of small business practices in acquiring government contracts also helps small business owners participate competitively, leading to innovation and supporting the government's goals for small business contract acquisition, which currently remain unmet (Beale, 2014).

Implications for Social Change

This study has implications for positive social change, in that application of the findings may increase business opportunities for small business owners, who can put their companies to work to benefit the federal government and society in general. Small businesses have important roles in American economic development (Bressler, Campbell, & Elliott, 2014). Although small business operations involve challenges related to revenue generation and growth, increases in small business ownership continue among both genders in diverse demographic groups (Bressler et al., 2014; Carter, Mwaura, Ram, Trehan, & Jones, 2015; Ferguson, 2012). Small businesses are a major source of diverse employment, innovation, and job creation, so their success benefits society through the provision of employment, applications of innovations, and the generation of investments and tax dollars that support the needs of society (Bressler et al., 2014; Gupta, Guha, & Krishnaswami, 2013). Even though small businesses serve vital roles in national and regional economies, their underrepresentation in federal government contract markets continues; thus, public contract procurement remains insufficiently exploited (Tammi, Reijonen, & Saastamoinen, 2014). Measures reducing disparities in government contracting can benefit diverse small businesses, which can help sustain employment, fuel competition leading to innovation, and contribute to the economy, leading to the resources required to support additional positive social change (Bressler et al., 2014; Nicholas & Fruhmann, 2014).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

This qualitative multiple case study involved exploration of the strategies that small business owners use to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability. Using a foundation construct, I conducted a review of the literature with a focus on small business owners with contracts. The review of the literature included a detailed report of appropriate and scholarly literature about small business revenue strategies and involvement with government contracts.

Use of key terminology in literature searches is important in research on small businesses. Literature databases were the main research resources for the literature review. Searching for the following keywords aided in the retrieval of articles synthesized in this literature review: *small business, federal, procurement, bidding, certification, eligibility, outsourcing, resource-based view, and government contracts*. Business and management databases consulted included Business Source Complete/Premier, ABI/INFORM Complete, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest. Seminal books and doctoral studies at Walden University added to the findings. I used several online search engines including Google, Google Scholar, Bing, and Yahoo. Verification of peer-reviewed literature occurred using Ulrich's Serials Analysis Systems website.

Table 1 includes a summary of the resources incorporated into the document and the review of the literature. The literature reviewed included 170 online scholarly publications, of which 102 were peer reviewed, as confirmed by Ulrich's Serials Analysis Systems website. The study included 249 online scholarly publications. Of the 249 periodicals included, 222 were published after 2013 (within 5 years of CAO approval),

and 93% were peer reviewed and published after 2013. Additional sources were not peer reviewed and not published within 5 years of CAO approval but added historical perspective and context to the more recent findings.

Table 1

Sources for Study

Reference type	Published 2013-2017	Published 1959-2012	Total sources	Peer reviewed 2013-2017	Lit review PR 2013-2017
Journals	222	28	249	93%	93%
Seminal books	N/A	5	5	N/A	N/A
Dissertations	4	1	5	N/A	N/A
Government	11	2	13	N/A	N/A

Government and nonprofit organization information reviewed included the SBA that provides rules, regulations, policies, and procedures for small business owners. Data retrieved from the FPDS (2015) catalogs were from 66 federal agencies. Although the peer-reviewed literature was comprised of rigorous research, studies provided few publications regarding small businesses and government contracts; a larger number was available regarding small business practices and federal contracts in general. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small business owners use to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability. I focused on those studies that pertained directly to the topic.

This qualitative multiple case study involved exploration of the strategies small business owners use to improve small business participation in government contracts. The research question that was the focus of this qualitative multiple case study was: What strategies do small business owners use to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability? Based on the organization of related topics, the review of literature unfolds in the following order: resource-based view theory, definitions of small business, revenue generation strategies, procurement purposes, small business procurement legislation, eligibility for procurement, organizational procurement assistance, mentoring of small business owners, small business success and failures, lagging small business procurement, additional small business procurement studies, and the uncertain economic outlook. These concepts and constructs were most prominent in the literature reviewed, and together the information established the necessary background for understanding the context and goals of the study.

Resource-Based View Theory

The conceptual framework for the study was the RBV theory. The RBV encompasses the idea that valuable, rare, inimitable, and nonsubstitutable (VRIN) resources are the collective basis of business competitiveness, competitive advantages, and performance (Jang, 2013). The theory is a relationship between the accumulation of valuable and rare resources and competitive advantages as well as a relationship between competitive advantages and business performance (Gupta et al., 2013). RBV analysis has led to findings that the innovation strategies of small and medium enterprises resemble those of larger firms; research findings have indicated the idea of the accumulation of

VRIN resources is an accepted part of the fundamental academic, scholarly, and managerial, strategic-thinking literature (Teece, 2014).

Barney was the progenitor of modern RBV (Jang, 2013). Penrose (1959) suggested businesses consist of a bundle of internal and external resources that help the business build competitive advantages. The governance of enterprising activities depends on the dynamic interactions between the internal and external environment; these interactions include all the productive possibilities that the business leaders envision, dependent upon administrative coordination and authoritative communication (Penrose, 1959). Revenue generation and growth depend on the scope of managerial resources, coordination capabilities, and the introduction of new resources into the business (Gupta et al., 2013).

Gupta et al. (2013) discussed the resource-based perspective that revolves around a company's resources related to business activities, in addition to the financial and human resources necessary to identify, exploit, and manage growth opportunities. The focus of the RBV theory is on an organization's use of its value to create worth (Jang, 2013). The RBV theory applied to this qualitative multiple case study is a comparison of the data from participants to achieve the goal of better understanding the assets, resources, and capabilities business owners emphasize in the procurement of government contracts. Using the RBV theory, businesses leaders will gain competitiveness when strategies are applied (Gupta et al., 2013).

The RBV of a company is a strategy management theory applied widely by managers in business (Almarri & Gardiner, 2014). The RBV theory helps to frame how

examinations of resources drive competitive advantages, especially in long-term projects customized to specific organizational environments (Sodhi, 2015). The RBV is an influential perspective within the organizational and managerial research sciences (Sodhi, 2015). Although the RBV emerged from a focus on strategic management research, researchers with a small business or entrepreneurial focus continue to leverage the RBV tenets (Kellermanns, Walter, Crook, Kemmerer, & Narayanan, 2014).

Some critics of the RBV, such as Almarri and Gardiner (2014), have attacked the possibly excessive enthusiasm for the theory, emphasizing a lack of definitional criteria and threats to generalizability. Despite the concerns, considering the relatively strong conceptual and empirical findings within the published body of peer-reviewed literature, Almarri and Gardiner supported the rejuvenation of RBV in practice and the continued applications of the theory to various organizational contexts. Other criticisms, such as by Kellermanns et al. (2014), encompassed the idea of entrepreneurial and strategic management concepts and the differences that bring about questions regarding if and to what extent RBV fits well with the small business perspective. To help answer such questions, Kellermanns et al. focused on resources (as the RBV building blocks) to present a content-analytical comparison. The comparison of the resource conceptualizations from researchers and practicing entrepreneurs occurred to gain greater appreciation and understanding of the similarities and differences between the theory and small business practices. Kellermanns et al. also noted the two conceptualizations exhibited overlap but that differences existed in resource dimensions as well as how resources shape outcomes considering small business ownership requirements. These

results suggest important contextual conditions when applying the RBV's tenets within the field of business.

Innovation. Innovation through an RBV perspective has been the focus of research in small business studies aligned with prior findings that the concept is a potential explanation for performance in different types of small businesses (Price, Stoica, et al., 2013). For example, Hashimoto and Nassif (2014) contributed to the discussion of the relationship between unique resources, such as diverse human resources possessing the valuable knowledge, leading to business innovativeness, performance, and growth. Montiel-Campos, Haces-Atondo, and Ruiseñor-Quintero (2014) stressed the RBV theory related to the study of entrepreneurship, small business strategy, and innovation.

Montiel-Campos et al. (2014) noted that small business, strategy, and innovation research goals on theory should encompass the aim to understand better the strategic posturing adopted in competitive environments. Strategic posturing, considering RBV, can help explain the competitive behaviors adopted by new companies about their strategy and performance (Jang, 2013). From the results of their research, Montiel-Campos et al. claimed an entrepreneurial orientation combined with certain dynamic capabilities improved company performance and suggested future research oriented toward RBV related theory.

Pergelova and Angulo-Ruiz (2014) applied an RBV perspective to examine the influences of governmental financial support on new business performance. The application by Pergelova and Angulo-Ruiz stemmed from the mixed results of prior

research indicating an RBV theoretical model could apply to the formation of competitive advantage that linked financial support and business performance. The results, considering the application of the RBV theory by Pergelova and Angulo-Ruiz on governmental support of new business, suggested that policymakers' efforts to award contracts to small businesses should also encompass helping new businesses build the necessary capabilities to compete successfully in the procurement process.

Jalali, Jaafar, and Ramayah (2014) advanced research about small and medium enterprises considering RBV applications, with a focus on entrepreneurial orientation (including facets of innovativeness, risk taking, and proactiveness), customer (relational) capital, and how customer capital shapes firm performance. Jalali et al. applied a correlation design using data from 150 surveys (one respondent from each international business, collected from 150 manufacturing businesses). Jalali et al. reported a high customer capital strengthened the link between innovativeness and risk-taking but weakened the link between proactiveness and performance. Conclusions that were customer capital is an intangible resource that strengthens the relationships of innovativeness and risk-taking with business performance. Jalali et al. did also note that governmental relationships were important considerations and encouraged future researchers to continue to try to overcome limitations of previous frameworks combining RBV with customer capital.

Ferlie (2014) critiqued the attempts of Burton and Rycroft-Malone (2014) on the use of RBV in publicly funded organizations, such as healthcare organizations, emphasizing core content, attempts to extend RBV to the analysis of large-scale quality

improvement efforts, and the migration of the RBV into new contexts in management research. In addition to a focus on complex publicly funded firms, Ferlie noted the concept of knowledge mobilization is a theme of major interest in several industrial parts of the world, stimulating scholarly and academic activity by management researchers interested in RBV theory. The focus of this interest is on the access of knowledge and knowledge-orientated theoretical perspectives, especially in industries of different sizes and types of ownerships based on rapidly changing scientific and technological innovations (Price, Stoica, et al., 2013).

Knowledge is context-specific (Sergeeva & Andreeva, 2015). Knowledge in various contexts continues to be the focus of research involving the development of SMEs in different economies (Bissola, Imperatori, & Biffi, 2016). Bissola et al. (2016) emphasized experiential and collaborative learning approaches leading to knowledge building that can enhance an organization's competitiveness through optimal management of interdependencies. Hashimoto and Nassif (2014) claimed that business success, including innovations, are likely to originate from the coalescing of many types of knowledge derived from diversity and a culture of transparency in knowledge sharing.

The effective mobilization of knowledge influences organizations' abilities to maintain competitive advantages and create value for their customers and society in general (Price, Stoica, et al., 2013). According to Ferlie (2014), an important question pertains to ways complex organizations mobilize organizational and management knowledge to stimulate innovation, productivity, and performance, especially in publicly

funded settings. The RBV is the focus of interest in strategic management literature to provide new ideas for organizations (Burton & Rycroft-Malone, 2014; Ferlie, 2014).

Ferlie (2014), as well as Burton and Rycroft-Malone (2014), wrote about RBV theory to analyze the impact of complex organizational quality improvement efforts. Their publications included basic discussions of RBV theory (with terms reviewed such as VRIN, dynamic capability, and absorptive capacities) about the idea in the organizational research literature that organizational contexts shape local receptivity toward change (Burton & Rycroft-Malone, 2014; Ferlie, 2014). An assumption of the RBV theory that bundles of underlying organizational resources may be tacit and difficult to identify by formal analysis efforts (Ferlie, 2014). Therefore, competitors find imitation difficult, or planners may be unable to replicate good practices (Burton & Rycroft-Malone, 2014).

However, Ferlie (2014), as well as Burton and Rycroft-Malone (2014), also highlighted the perceived limitations of RBV theory in publicly funded settings which can be more complex than the private companies serving the public. Companies funded in part by governments consist of more complex inter-organizational networks instead of simple, vertically aligned and inter-organizationally integrated organizations (Ferlie, 2014). According to Ferlie, complexities cannot reduce to one or few variables; although there are other theoretical prisms, including complexity theory, systems thinking, or work around organizational receptivity theories through which to analyze increasingly complex organizations, RBV is a worthy beginning. Ferlie claimed higher level RBV concepts (such as VRIN, dynamic capability, and absorptive capacities) need better

operationalization and customization, but RBV theory enables companies to understand determinants of their performance and identify tools to improve.

Other theories apply to the study of small business procuring government contracts. For example, Gupta et al. (2013) highlighted four different theoretical perspectives about small businesses: RBV, motivation perspective, strategic adaptation, and configuration perspectives. Small business studies applying strategic adaptation perspectives would encompass concepts such as power distributions, structural complexity, and controls (Crawford & Kreiser, 2015). A motivation perspective would focus on individuals and their actions. Configuration perspectives encompass managerial problem-solving at various stages of business growth. When the focus of the business is on resources oriented toward expansion of business activities, a study from an RBV is appropriate (Gupta et al., 2013).

Small Businesses Defined

Small businesses in the United States have different classifications, based on tax status and liabilities. For example, sole proprietorships are unincorporated businesses, owned and run by single individuals (Gale, 2013). Partnerships, Limited Liability Corporation, and S corporations consist of more than one owner, called pass-through entities (Kirkland, 2015). Although these classifications exist, the common use of the term small business has a conceptual application, based on data about employment, assets, gross and net income, and other industry characteristics (Gale, 2013).

The United States SBA provided a definition of small businesses as businesses that employ fewer than 500 employees (SBA, 2013). By 2014, approximately 28 million

small businesses existed, responsible for 64% of the net new jobs created during the previous decades (Bressler et al., 2014). Small business owners provide for two of every three new American jobs within the country (SBA, 2013). In 2010, small business owners were responsible for approximately half of all employment in the United States (Gale, 2013).

Annually, small businesses with incomes averaging more than \$1 million accounted for only 6% of total small business incomes (SBA, 2012). Small business tax filers with adjusted gross income reports between \$200,000 and \$1 million accounted for less than 10% of small business owners but represented up to half of the total of small business incomes combined (Gale, 2013). Small business owners who reported less than \$200,000 in adjusted gross income comprised more than 90% of small business owners, representing 24% of all small business income (SBA, 2012).

Small business ownership has an important role in the economic development of the United States (Bressler et al., 2014; Chamberland & Witchel, 2016; Williams, 2016). Small businesses created the majority of new jobs in the United States over time (McManus, 2012). In the United States, small businesses employ over 50% of the workforce and 97% of exporters (Yang, 2012). Although small-medium company figures are growing to 80% for established owners (Mohamad & Ismail, 2013), over 50% of owners fail within the first 5 years (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012). Gale (2013) also revealed several technical and application errors in statistical practices and reporting over time, and highlighted findings that after 5 years, 40% of the initial jobs created by small startup businesses are lost .

Hurst and Pugsley (2011) used longitudinal secondary data from the U.S. Census Bureau to reveal that close to 90% of small businesses have no more than 20 employees. In the same study, Hurst and Pugsley showed over 90% of small businesses are young firms (in operation for fewer than ten years) and 86% of mature firms (operating for more than ten years) are small. Hurst and Pugsley interpreted their findings as implying most small businesses do not grow as they age; instead, most small businesses start small and stay small. The longevity of small businesses of various sizes, numbers of employees, and levels of revenues continues to be the focus of rigorous research studies (Bressler et al., 2014; Gandy, 2015; Williams, 2016).

Based on data from a Kauffman firm survey, Robinson (2012) presented a picture of small business funding. Startups in various stages of development (seed, early stages, expansion, and later stages) rely on primary sources of financing from the owners, insider equity, and debts, and personal bank loans often secured by owners' personal assets as collateral (Jagtiani & Lemieux, 2016). Outsider equity, angel investors, venture capital firms, and formal bank business lending are often significant components of financing at every stage of small business development (Gale, 2013). However, Miller, Hoffer, and Wille (2016) noted how traditional forms of financing became more difficult for small business owners to obtain after the 2008 financial crisis.

According to Ferguson (2012), the majority of small business owners are native-born Caucasian males over the age of 45. Bressler et al. (2014) reported that Caucasian males make up the majority of small business owners, while also recognizing the growing diversity, including women, minorities, military veterans, and disabled individuals who

are starting their businesses. Williams (2016) and Ferguson also acknowledged the increases in entrepreneurship and small business development across diverse demographics, including age, gender, and race/ethnicity groups. Ferguson noted an equal number of owners hold bachelor's degrees as those who hold only a high school degree or less. Most self-employed individuals operate in suburban and urban locations with fewer in rural areas (Ferguson, 2012); however, as Bressler et al. noted, the industry can affect the locations that small business owners choose.

Revenue Generation Strategies

Small business owners provide for two of every three new American jobs within the country (SBA, 2013) and have been responsible for 64% of all new net jobs created since 1993 (Bressler et al., 2014). Representing 99.7% of American employers, small business owners are fundamental to the health of American economics but face challenges related to profit-loss activity, sustainability, and growth (Bush, 2016; Gandy, 2015; Williams, 2016). Although the use of the terms applied to revenues generation strategies and growth differ by various authors, the concepts and events are largely the same (Gupta et al., 2013). Revenue management practices involve the management of demands and pricing to maximize revenue capacities (Shields & Shelleman, 2013).

Gupta et al. (2013) emphasized quality controls, financial controls, and the process of creating a niche in the marketplace. However, multiple factors, such as the health of owners, personalities, leadership styles, motivation, competition, community involvement and support, strategic planning, and incorporation of outside assistance, impact revenue generation; specific factors with contradictory results in the literature

include gender and age of owners, size and age of businesses, and educational levels of owners (Ferguson, 2012). Wright and Stigliani (2013) also called attention to the need to know more about small business owners' cognitive processes, as well as how they access and configure resources, calling for the recognition of a wider variety of contextual dimensions that could influence revenue generation and small business growth. Similarly, Zahra, Wright, and Abdelgawad (2014) emphasized the complexities of contextualization within small business research related to different dimensions of entrepreneurial contexts, such as temporal, industrial, spatial, social, and organizational contexts. The nature of the heterogeneity of small businesses further challenges the understanding of revenue generation strategies and growth (Gupta et al., 2013; Miron-Shatz, Shatz, Becker, Patel, & Eysenbach, 2014).

Small business owners must identify opportunities for the pursuit of new ventures and their environment, discover opportunities, and exploit those opportunities following proper evaluations (Gupta et al., 2013). Carayannis and Grigoroudis (2016) discussed the quintuple helix model toward innovation-based revenue generation and business growth based on 5 helixes: educational system, economic systems, and natural environments, media-oriented and culture-based public and political systems. Gupta et al. (2013) accounted for similar factor but emphasized the concepts of internal and external environments; revenue generation depends on the exploitation of productive possibilities resulting from perceptions of the dynamic interactions between the internal and the external environments of an organization.

According to Gupta et al. (2013), external political environments encompass factors related to the management of public affairs, whereas economic environments encompass planning (such as a 5-year plan), budgeting, and monetary-fiscal policies. Gupta et al. further explained that the internal business environment includes resources, synergy, and employee competencies oriented toward functional areas such as marketing, operations, human resources, financial planning, and technical capabilities. One example of the influence of the internal environment of company performance would be the significant relationship demonstrated by Sheehan (2014) between human resource practices and performance; human resource practices positively enhance sustained competitive advantages.

No single approach. Many different approaches could help small businesses attract consumers' attentions, rather than a single approach. Different revenue building strategies of various small business owners are necessary to profit and positively grow businesses (Bressler et al., 2014; Bush, 2016; Gandy, 2015; Williams, 2016). Multi-strategic initiatives lead to a higher probability of revenue generation and the attainment of growth objectives (Bressler et al., 2014; Bush, 2016; Gupta et al., 2013; Williams, 2016).

There are no guarantees that activities will lead to the financial outcomes intended. Rice, Liao, Galvin and Martin (2015) stressed the concept of dynamic capabilities and that business performance stems in part from purposeful strategies. Investments can succeed or fail to various degrees depending on multiple factors so performance may instead depend on how well business leaders adapt to dynamic

circumstances about their competitors (Price, Rae, et al., 2013). Price, Rae, et al., (2013) claimed small businesses survive and thrive because of their flexibility in adapting to changes in resources, inputs, processes, prices, and products in ways that exploit resource acquisition, mobilization, and market opportunities.

An understanding of owners' motivations to start and continue the business, as well as their definitions and measures of success must occur to grow effectively (Ferguson, 2012). Many factors contribute to business successes, with several precursors that allow businesses to move from one stage to the next (Oyeku, Oduyoye, Olalekan, Kabuoh, & Elemo, 2014). Business history, entrepreneurial and leadership characteristics, different industries, and geography are a few factors that influence revenue generation strategies and associated management practices that can lead to business growth (Gupta et al., 2013).

Management actions. Revenue generation strategies leading to growth could depend on company size, age, and characteristics of the business owners and leaders (Gupta et al., 2013). Teece (2014) stressed the processes leaders experience regarding operational and financial strategizing required to build customer loyalty and attain a strong presence in the marketplace. Small business momentum builds over many years as companies become profitable (Gibbons, 2015).

An understanding of owners' different motivations to start and continue businesses and their individual definitions and measures of financial and non-financial success help researchers identify successful business strategies (Ferguson, 2012; Oyeku et al., 2014). Strong relationships exist between managerial practices and philosophies

and sales growth (Messersmith & Wales, 2013). Jaouen and Lasch (2015) showed small business owners and managers have varied and sometimes profoundly divergent views that ultimately have substantial effects on their businesses, their strategies, and revenue generation.

Price, Rae, and Cini, (2013) noted that scholars argue the survival and prosperity of small businesses depend on the instincts of owners and managers, who are likely to internalize the successes of their businesses as personal goals. Jayawarna, Rouse, and Kitching (2013) called entrepreneurs either convenience driven; economically driven; social, learning and earning oriented, or prestige and control oriented. Regardless of orientation, confidence in the economic conditions of the market and forecast-driven expectations about future sales, was a key driver noted by Price, Rae, et al. for small business growth, which the authors claimed was similar to the concept of owner optimism.

Small business success depends on owners' insights, managerial skills, and the experiences including training and education of the leaders (Gupta et al., 2013; Jayawarna, Jones, & Macpherson, 2014). Davee, Hannon, and Penaluna (2016) stressed the increasing importance of entrepreneurial education to small business success. According to Gupta et al. (2013), external skills required of entrepreneurs such as small business owners include innovativeness, creativity, and risk-taking. Creative investments in newer products or services through risk-taking in research and development could generate new sales that could make it possible to strategize future investments in resources (such as marketing, staff, equipment, and capital) that enable additional

revenues and subsequent investments (Price, Rae, et al., 2013). However, as Lechner and Gudmundsson (2014) noted, risk-taking and competitive aggressiveness were negatively associated with differentiation and cost leadership strategies (both had a positive relationship to the authors' measures of business performance).

Small business owners may attribute positive results to personal actions and negative results to factors beyond their control (Ferguson, 2012). Hashimoto and Nassif (2014) completed a qualitative study that showed leaders in more autonomous environments take more risks to enhance creativity and growth, whereas leaders of companies with constricted autonomy focus more on minimizing threats. Risk-propensity, openness to experiences, and emotional stability are related to small business performance, and owners of small businesses may have higher risk propensities than business leaders of other types of companies (Ferguson, 2012). Oyeku et al. (2014) described this management attributes as part of the “Personality Based Model” (p. 18), which includes creativity and problem-solving orientations, the ability to tolerate ambiguities, and risk-taking propensities. Also, Oyeku et al. highlighted affective and social personality traits, including assertiveness, stress hardiness, emotional stability, and interpersonal reactivity

Stakeholders. Organizations of all types and sizes include internal and external stakeholders who shape their organizations' decisions, strategies, and growth (Gibbons, 2015). Business owners often exercise discretion when selecting revenue-generating strategies; however, their choices are subject to constraints of resources and relations with stakeholders that can limit performance outcomes (Price, Rae, et al., 2013).

Stakeholder theories focus on the purposes of individuals and responsibilities that management owes to stakeholders (Gibbons, 2015). These individuals influence organizational actions and strategic planning, including revenue generation strategies (Burga & Rezania, 2016; Van Looy & Shafagatova, 2016).

Bush (2016), Williams (2016), Latham (2014), Tideman, Arts, and Zandee (2013), and Fassin (2012) discussed the roles of multiple small business stakeholders to small business success. For example, Fassin categorized stakeholders as primary and indirect; the primary category includes the company's human resources, customers, suppliers, and investors who actively contribute to the day-to-day business activities and who leverage demands and have expectations. Bush applied the definitions of Tang and Tang (2012) who defined internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders are people working within the company; employees, managers and active owners are examples of internal stakeholders (Bush, 2016; Tang & Tang, 2012). According to Tang and Tang, external stakeholders as those outside of an organization who somehow benefit, impact, or influence that company, such as suppliers, investors, and customers. Small business owners operate under pressure from internal and external stakeholders; those pressures pertain to decisions about the effective use business resources (Bush, 2016). Internal and external as well as primary and indirect stakeholders influence the processes of managements' strategizing and decision-making process (Gibbons, 2015).

Small business successes in the highly competitive American marketplace require owner recognition of multiple stakeholder expectations (Kearney & Meynhardt, 2016), especially on value creation as well as other fundamental elements of strategic

management (Harrison & Wicks, 2013; Williams, 2016). Small business owners must focus on revenue generating business strategies that incorporate the principles and ideas of stakeholders (Steyn & Niemann, 2013). Pitsis, van Marrewijk, Ybema, Smits, and Clegg (2016) highlighted how diverse business owners articulate formal strategic views and philosophies regarding partnerships to help stakeholders with their involvement with the decision-making of leaders. The development of relationships and partnerships generates capital, widens groups of stakeholders, enhances business goals, strengthens competitive advantages, and could facilitate employees' levels of job satisfaction (Liu, Eng, & Ko, 2013).

Williams (2016) wrote about the importance of strategically addressing the involvement of stakeholders, aligning the concept with the idea expressed by Doh and Quigley (2014) about the creation of value for the community. Pitsis et al. (2016) discussed the variances of stakeholders' involvements in key revenue generating decision-making processes and strategies toward organizational partnerships and growth. Burga and Rezania (2016) stressed the need for attention toward stakeholders through engagement and other necessary actions involve others as the organizations matured.

Blower and Mahajan (2013) concluded from their quantitative study business leaders who ignore stakeholders' contributions fail to benefit from input about strategic revenue generating opportunities that can sustain and grow their businesses. The authors concluded that ignoring the attitudes, opinions, expressed needs, and perceptions of internal and external stakeholders can be fatal to small business successes (Blower & Mahajan, 2013). However, other authors claimed successful, profitable businesses with

limited time for external stakeholder involvement depend on other sources of internal input to be successful, such as employee tacit knowledge within the company that can drive performance (Garriga, 2014; Gibbons, 2015; Hashimoto & Nassif, 2014).

Garriga (2014) conducted a mixed method study leading to the findings suggesting stakeholders' contributions to value creation are multidimensional and complex. Despite this complexity, small business owners who develop stakeholder understanding can build long-term strategic relationships (Delgado-Ceballos, Aragon-Correa, Ortiz-de-Mandojana, & Rueda-Manzannares, 2012). However, there are no guarantees that all stakeholder relationships will work in the best interests of every small business (Gibbons, 2015). The ongoing debate about stakeholder relationships, stemming from conversations of the 1980s, continues on the ideal involvement of different kinds of stakeholders in small business pursuits of profits and organizational successes (Madsen & Bingham, 2014).

Measures of success. Small business owners often receive acknowledgment of their contributions to the creation of new jobs and sustaining productive and growth of the economy, especially with their survival through recessionary periods (Fraser, Bhaumik, & Wright, 2015; Miller et al., 2016; Solomon, Bryant, May, & Perry, 2013). A company's success is not a measurement of financial performance alone (Harrison & Wicks, 2013; Kearney & Meynhardt, 2016; Oyeku et al., 2014). Non-financial measures may be as important to owners as financial performance; however, financial success, driven by revenue generation, is what predominantly sustains the tangible resources for ongoing operation and growth (Bush, 2016; Fraser et al., 2015; Oyeku et al., 2014;

Williams, 2016). Small business owners may not endure the same pressures as do large corporations because small businesses entail more limited capital and human resources (Miller et al., 2016).

Scholars, such as Fraser et al. (2015) and Miller et al. (2016) emphasized financial responsibilities and business profits as the top priorities for small business owners. Other scholars stressed company priorities such as social networking and economic responsibility (Kearney & Meynhardt, 2016; Wilburn & Wilburn, 2014) as well as compliance with legal issues and ethics as business priorities (Coppa & Sriramesh, 2013) that can ultimately lead to profit maximization as a definition of success. Price, Rae, et al., (2013) noted several links between management actions and business performance, varied in their degrees of success and dependent upon products, labor, and capital market conditions considering the meaning of success. Growth-oriented businesses are significant contributors to the nation's economic health, but the meanings of growth and success vary among different small business owners (Gupta et al., 2013; Oyeku et al., 2014).

Oyeku et al. (2014) and Ferguson (2012) stressed that the various stakeholders of small businesses also potentially view the meanings of growth and success differently, as follows. The federal government may view small business growth or success regarding increasing unemployment and tax funds (Oyeku et al., 2014). Suppliers and debtors of small businesses may view success as the payment of debts in timely manners (Ferguson, 2012). Banks, funders, and investors may view business success as continued business associated with account balance growth, renewed loans, and timely payments of

principal, interest, and fees (Fraser et al., 2015). Small business owners could view success as generating personal income, leisure time, or experiencing personal fulfillment, professional achievements, among a myriad of other individualized perceptions of success factors (Ferguson, 2012; Oyeku et al., 2014).

Financial resources. Gupta et al. (2013) emphasized the need to have enough capital to either invest in further business opportunities as well as continue those opportunities that worked. Sluggish demands, late payments, and restricted access to financial resources such as credit and investors continue to hamper many small businesses leading to poor sales and undermining financial well-being and confidence in the business (Miller et al., 2016; Price, Rae, et al., 2013). Small business owners often experience economic uncertainties as their leaders struggle to borrow money and ensure the collection of revenues promptly (Corluka, Radic, & Matosevic, 2013; Miller et al., 2016). Small business owners may also face debt collections and the results of bad debts that can limit business performance (Corluka et al., 2013; Fraser et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2016).

The National Federation of Independent Businesses (2013) reported in 2013, almost one-third of small business owners borrowed money to avoid bankruptcy at a frequency of at least one time per quarter, while also missing potential opportunities that could lead to better organizational growth and fiscal stability. Ferguson (2012) reported sales revenue of businesses that had bank loans were almost twice that of businesses with no bank loans. Han, Benson, Chen and Zhang (2014) claimed small businesses alleviate the severity of their financial problems significantly through the use of banking support

that involves the development of a long-term relationship with the bank that can serve as a primary network partner.

Despite these conflicting findings, to propel revenue generation, many small business owners seek to fund from internal sources (Miller et al., 2016). Internal financing sources include family members who can help small business owners reduce their financial dependence on external financing sources that could be more difficult to obtain (Miller et al., 2016; Price, Stoica, et al., 2013). Miller et al. (2016) highlighted the need for additional research that would explore the relationships between different non-bank sources of finance and small business performance and growth. Fraser et al. (2015) noted the potential roles of cognition, objectives, ownership type, and the stages of the business lifecycle in financing and investment decisions and their potential impact on various aspects of business performance, such as revenue generation.

Flexibility and adaptation. The paths businesses follow that lead to revenue generation, and growth are either linear and predictable or opportunistic and unpredictable (Gupta et al., 2013). Growth can reflect revenue generation, value addition, the volume of businesses, market position, quality of products, and customer loyalty (Singh & Pattanayak, 2014). Flexible organizations adapt quickly and efficiently to market-related changes involving pricing, promotion, distribution, operations, and personnel capabilities (Baltar, 2013; Williams, 2016). Operations involve capacities, locations, layouts, product and service design, automation, and integration, and personal capabilities involve attracting, retaining, and training people (Gupta et al., 2013).

Many different types of small businesses remain vulnerable to market changes, and their leaders may struggle with revenue generation strategies and plan for growth (Gibbons, 2015; Miller et al., 2016). The variation of sales and business operations inherent in businesses could lead to decreased sales, unpredictable of business conditions, and revenue challenges, affecting small business profits with possible impact on the local or regional employment (Gandy, 2015; Shields & Shelleman, 2013). Many types of small businesses struggle to capture customer loyalty and during periods of slow growth or must generate enough revenues to sustain the business (Corluka et al., 2013). Some small business owners may lose momentum during economic downturns and seasonal shifts in demands for good or services (Gibbons, 2015).

Business leaders often use forecasting techniques to prepare for future quarters that may pose revenue generating challenges, such as a seasonal nature of the business or anticipated prospective shifts in consumer behaviors (Segarra et al., 2016). Small business projects, practices, activities, and strategies vary over time in response to changing circumstances and levels of performance that encourage business leaders to adjust their products and processes to become more profitable (Price, Rae, et al., 2013). For example, small business leaders may strive to expand non-peak season sales of good and services through extensive marketing, public relations initiatives, and discounted contracts or services (Gao, Demirag, & Chen, 2012).

Adjustments to pricing strategies might involve discounts during non-peak (or trough) phases (Shields & Shelleman, 2013). However, Bamiatzi and Kirchmaier (2014) found small businesses intentionally search for high-margin products, avoid aggressive

pricing competitions, and maintain tight controls of cost. Shields and Shelleman (2013) showed businesses might boost sales in ways consistent with the revenue generation literature, such as increasing advertising, running promotions, and expanding business capabilities while focusing on revenue management strategies about the peaks and troughs of annual sales.

Networks and relationships. Small business owners must be able to emulate flexibility, professionalism, and abilities to collaborate with other enterprises (Gupta et al., 2013). Small businesses of all types and sizes are necessary for the American economy and require rigorous development within their surrounding communities (Kearney & Meynhardt, 2016). Collectively, local small businesses constitute most businesses in their localities; business community involvement pertains to the relationships businesses have with the stakeholders in their communities and industries (Liu et al., 2013). These ideas involve the cultivation of networks and relationships geared toward strategic sustainability (Arney, Yadav, Miller, & Wilkerson, 2014; Gao et al., 2012; Gibbons, 2015).

Businesses that support their local communities are more likely to be successful (Ferguson, 2012), partly because of increased status and reputation (George, Dahlander, Graffin, & Sim, 2016). Kim and Johnson (2013) conducted a case study that showed moral emotions were the basis of human connectedness to purchasing. Gibbons (2015) suggested some small business owners who collaborate with outside organizations, such as others in their local communities, charities, and governmental programs may experience feelings of richer purposes in their roles. Associated improvements to

marketing, leading to heightened customer loyalty from outside collaborations can improve profits (Corluka et al., 2013). Eikenberry (2013) conducted a case study that showed one-on-one contact and intermingling among customers and business owners established increased consumer spending more than not engaging in social interactions.

Ferguson (2012) noted memberships informal industry-based associations and community-based networks can help small businesses become or remain successful. Ferguson also reported planning, use of professional advisors, educational levels of owners, and ease of optimal staffing significantly related to business successes and failures. Williams (2016) characterized these types of planning strategies, association affiliations, and educational programs as success-oriented approaches to “continuous organizational improvements” (p. 88). For example, small business leaders may participate in educational programs to more effectively implementing cost and revenue management strategies related to opportunities and threats in different peak and trough phases on the fiscal year (Shields & Shelleman, 2013). Other entrepreneurs may participate in university programs or other formal means to business education (Galloway, Kapasi, & Whittam, 2015).

Marketing and social relationships. Gibbons (2015) discussed marketing synergy and marketing segmentation as innovation processes important to business performance. New marketing strategies aimed at revenue generation are common ways for small business owners to act on knowledge gained about their target market to ensure business growth and reduce concerns about financial failures (Gandy, 2015; Gibbons, 2015; Williams, 2016). Koryak et al. (2015) also examined the processes, routines, and

resources that lead to substantive revenues and enable businesses to grow, emphasizing the role of marketing in daily competition to support the leaders' sustained pursuits of new opportunities.

Madsen and Bingham (2014) claimed that marketing strategies should be contingent on decision-making processes that encompass the relationships forged to lead to revenue generation and financial growth. Donnelly, Simmons, Armstrong, and Fearne (2015) noted small business owners should include employees in marketing planning that the authors described as often informal in nature requiring more attention to business market orientation. Madsen and Bingham examined the relationship between financial performance and other corporate social factors, emphasizing the benefits of strategic positioning and competitive marketing strategies appropriate for the business.

Wang, Tong, Takeuchi, and George (2016), Hollensbe, Wookey, Loughlin, George, and Nichols (2014), and Flammer (2013) focused on the increasing number of debates in the expanding literature on the complex role of social purpose in business performance. Kim and Kim (2016) showed customers were more apt to purchase goods or services based on personal choice or perception about the significance of a campaign or the social meaning of the company's activities. Liu (2013) noted instrumental campaigns entailed commercial marketing of specific products and services whereas relational campaigns focused on stakeholder relationships and perceptions of social performance in association with the promotion of specific products and services.

The cause and social responsibility adopted by a company may influence consumer decisions more than the other goals of the company. Jones, Willness, and

Madey (2014) claimed that socially responsible organizations might also attract socially responsible staff who are high performing job seekers. Lam and Harker (2015) explored the role and significance of marketing in different stages of the small business lifecycle through an 11-year longitudinal study. The authors claimed ends and means do not drive marketing, which is instead a consequence of the social context and interactions between business leaders, staff, and customers to meet their ends (Lam & Harker, 2015).

O’Cass and Sok (2014) examined the extent to which the combination of intellectual resources, innovation capabilities, reputation resources, and marketing capabilities influenced the abilities of small businesses to achieve performance goals, such as sales goals. Findings from the 171 participating businesses in the O’Cass and Sok study suggested positive goal achievement when the combination was high; however, even when there were high levels of intellectual and reputational resources but low levels of marketing capabilities, the combination did not significantly relate to growth. The results from O’Cass and Sok implied high levels of resources and innovation could not compensate for low levels of marketing capabilities.

Customer understanding and market diversification. Sun and Ifeanyi (2014) emphasized that in service-oriented businesses, customer loyalty is imperative as competitors in the marketplace. Enhanced understanding of customers and consumer segments is a critical aspect of effective revenue generation management strategies (Bell, 2012). Businesses must continuously identify new client bases for existing products and mobilize resources effectively to access and exploit both new and existing markets, to realize profit increases (Price, Rae, et al., 2013). Profits can grow from collaborations

oriented toward consumer needs involving products, processes, and services (Bocken, Short, Rana, & Evans, 2014). Competitors may have difficulty grasping the origins of others' competitive advantages based on unique insights into customers (Gibbons, 2015). Increasing demand can stem from strategies capitalizing on promotional events, public relations to draw customers, improved target marketing, and enhanced advertising (Shields & Shelleman, 2013). Sun and Ifeanyi (2014) stressed the power of the Internet to provide wider reach to potential clients and serve in a crucial capacity leading to successful business operations.

The revenue generating actions to stimulate business to include increasing demand, market diversification, and adjustments to pricing (Shields & Shelleman, 2013). Regarding revenue-generating strategies, Price, Rae, et al. (2013) stressed market and product diversification as successful forms of small business responses to stagnant, failing, or declining sales, due in part to challenging economic times. Product or market diversification is a successful form of adaptation involving sales of the same product or service with one or more minor modifications to reach new and wider client bases, to avoid overdependence on potentially dwindling groups of potential buyers (Price, Rae, et al., 2013). Market diversification might be promoting alternative applications for the company's capacity (Shields & Shelleman, 2013). Price, Rae, et al., noted market and product diversification, separate or in combination with other strategic practices, can be successful in revenue generation strategies under certain conditions.

Knowledge management and technology. Small businesses face numerous challenges related to knowledge management about revenue generation leading to profit

and growth (Bush, 2016; Gandy, 2015; Williams, 2016). Organizational leaders involved in various types of business partnerships depend on knowledge management oriented toward well-defined marketing strategies, consistent branding, and the wider spread communication of the goals, vision, and mission of their businesses for successful outcomes from those partnerships (Kihl, Tainsky, Babiak, & Bang, 2014). McAdam, Antony, Kumar, and Hazlett (2014) presented findings from a case study of small businesses that indicated a need for greater understanding of the dynamic underlying processes about knowledge absorptive capacities. Valuable knowledge is inclusive of measures available for business operations, consumer behaviors, local and global economic conditions, and human resource needs (Hashimoto & Nassif, 2014). Knowledge management is also important in innovation, especially in technology-oriented small businesses, that can ultimately lead to profits and performance gains (Alegre, Sengupta, & Lapidra, 2013; Flagg, Lane, & Lockett, 2013)).

Bush (2016), Williams (2016), Gandy (2015), and Ferguson (2012) reported most small business owners complete some strategy involving business planning processes; the majority create goals and most monitor progress toward achieving objectives based on knowledge management. Garriga (2014) highlighted the importance of knowledge exchange regarding value creation, appraisals of business capabilities, evaluation of management practices, and feedback geared toward generating optimal performance and profit-building. However, Sergeeva and Andreeva (2015) stressed a better understanding of the context of knowledge exchange in research within business settings. Garriga emphasized knowledge management on production, and service delivery, among other

business initiatives that should be strategically designed to bolster business performance and profit-building.

Revenue generation depends upon administrative coordination and authoritative communication of this knowledge (Gupta et al., 2013). The optimal use of technology can help small businesses across a variety of industries stay competitive among constantly growing numbers of competitors (Sun & Ifeanyi, 2014). Small businesses leaders more frequently incorporate technology to differentiate their businesses' capabilities and competencies to compete on multiple dimensions, including product design and development, innovation, manufacturing, costs, distribution, communication, marketing, and advertising (Gupta et al., 2013). Sun and Ifeanyi (2014) stressed how technology tactics in many industries led to improved efficiency and productivity. Solomon et al. (2013) commented technology relates to the idea of the survival of the fittest, calling for technical assistance to small businesses for survival and growth.

Scholars also focused on the Internet as a means for enhanced revenue generation and improved performance for businesses of all sizes operating across the globe, based on more effective knowledge management and access to different sources of capital and other forms of income (Miller et al., 2016). According to Alijani, Mancuso, Kwun, and Topcuoglu (2014), Gandy (2015), and Sun and Ifeanyi (2014), the flexibility of e-business technology gives companies the abilities to expand their services to include more options available to the visitors of their websites, to expand Internet marketing to the world, and to communicate priorities and personality profiles. Sun and Ifeanyi promoted the integration of e-business tools as an efficient approach to enhance revenue

generation of many types of small businesses. According to Sun and Ifeanyi, integrating e-business strategies into any industry is likely to improve services, increase revenues, maximize competitive advantages, and lead to customer loyalty. E-business strategies can lead to higher levels of interactivity between clients and suppliers, increase opportunities for uniting businesses and market logics, and reduce operating, production, and marketing costs (Alijani et al., 2014; Gandy, 2015; Sun & Ifeanyi, 2014).

Others readily agree the applications of a technological environment can affect revenue generation strategies and growth of businesses (Gupta et al., 2013). Miller et al. (2016) noted that the Internet even connects business borrowers with lenders, in a shopping format that the authors compared to online sales of other goods and services. Novikov, Pykhtin, Gureva, Sozinova, and Prokhorova (2016) also indicated that information systems had become a significant part of strategy requiring that business leaders continuously restructure, reorganize, and re-engineer to manage rapid change. Sun and Ifeanyi (2014) also highlighted the potential costs of setting up technology systems, maintenance expenses, confidentiality issues, and periodic evaluations required.

Procurement Purposes

Williams (2016), Bressler et al. (2014), and Ferguson (2012) pinpointed factors that make small businesses important components of the American economic landscape, worthy of governmental support. The first factor is small businesses produce more than half of America's Gross Domestic Product (Ferguson, 2012). The second factor is small businesses employ millions of Americans, and represent more than 99.7% of all employers (Bressler et al., 2014). The third factor is government spends billions of

dollars to encourage small business growth (Ferguson, 2012). A fourth factor is that small business owners have been essential providers to federal government agencies that operate both domestically and globally (Williams, 2016).

Government promotion of the small business sector includes product reservations, infrastructural support, credit and tax concessions, procurement of equipment and contracts, and provisions for market networks (Gupta et al., 2013). In most diverse economies across the world, the public sectors are important buyers of goods and services from private sectors (Tammi et al., 2014). American governmental goals to help small businesses thrive stretch back to before the early 1930s associated with the Great Depression, leading to additional economic and wartime stresses on business, including those stemming from the Great Depression, World War II, and the Korean War (McManus, 2012). The United States government relies heavily on private companies to provide goods and services versus governmental agencies. Economic justifications for small business related policies derives from the notions that awarding government contracts to small businesses promotes innovation and entrepreneurship that contributes to job creation, economic growth, local and regional development, and society in general (Nicholas & Fruhmann, 2014).

The Investment Company Act of 1958 created a role for the SBA in licensing, regulating, and helping to provide funds and investments to higher risk small businesses (McManus, 2012). The justification for more help to small businesses related to the idea that if small businesses thrived, then the United States, would profit (Gale, 2013). The interventions that structured governmental preferences for small business contracting

stemmed from the belief that legislative action was necessary to offset the failures of the unattended market to adequately support those businesses (Federal Government Contracting, 2013). A large part of the motivation of the SBA to protect small businesses relates to goals to help small businesses attract a fair proportion of federal government contracts (McManus, 2012).

Securing federal contracts represent opportunities that help small business owners take their businesses to higher levels, expand their volumes, and create well-compensating jobs (Gale, 2013). The award of government contracts to small businesses can spur expansion and lead to more and better-educated business leaders to create and expand larger, better-established, profitable companies (Tammi et al., 2014). The harness of the power of small businesses to meet government needs should drive innovation (Georghiou, Edler, Uyarra, & Yeow, 2013). Increasing the viability of small businesses leads to more jobs, enhanced tax revenues, decreased government subsistence payments, and contributes to the improved levels of the quality of life and standards of living for all Americans (McManus, 2012).

Tammi et al. (2014) also noted additional benefits in increased government contract participation of small businesses including heightened efficiency, improved access to market knowledge, the creation of value-added, and a larger number of innovative solutions. Tammi et al. also noted the economic, logistical, and societal benefits of partnerships between local, regional, and national contracting authorities. The public sector, as a buyer, represents commitment, typically reliable remitters of timely payments. Supplying the public sector also serves to shield small businesses from the

recessionary periods that greatly affect private sector economic activities (Tammi et al., 2014).

Partnerships with government agencies build trust, commitment, and a better relationship between small businesses and government agencies (Johnson, Feng, Sitzabee, & Jernigan, 2013). Small business owners sometimes have limitations of time and resources to do everything required to manage a business; therefore, outsourcing with contracts is viable (Sonfield, 2014). Sharing with others that possess like skills and assets could be advantageous to organizations lacking competencies and resources (Noor, 2013). Most owners perceive government funding as a partnership versus an adversary (Moseley, 2012).

Small Business Procurement Legislation

The topic of small business procurement of federal contracts in the United States is the focus of ongoing debate among small business owners, the SBA, legislators, and government officials (McManus, 2012). American small businesses have been a prominent subject of public policy debates (Gale, 2013). Many different public policies subsidize small businesses as the political leaders of different political parties of the United States express diverse opinions about support for the sector (McManus, 2012). The ideas prevail that public support for small businesses stimulates innovation, creates jobs, and leads to a healthy general economy (Flynn & Davis, 2016; Gale, 2013; Williams, 2016).

Different programs enable the United States federal government to meet contracting goals through the help of small businesses (Gale, 2013; Williams, 2016). The

history of small businesses, the SBA, and federal contracting practices is complex with intricate legislative, social, and economic factors that emerged and evolved over the years (McManus, 2012). Stenholm and Heinonen (2015) described pro-growth policies as representing politically encouraging language. The legislative branch enacted laws to acknowledge and establish goals regarding the procurement issues related to small businesses (McManus, 2012; Williams, 2016).

The Small Business Act of 1953 introduced policy objectives that small businesses in the United States receive a fair proportion of the total federal government purchases (Beale, 2014). Creation of the SBA by the United States Congress in 1953 occurred with the goal of supporting independently owned and operated small businesses (Gale, 2013). Federal policy structures appear to favor and support American-led small businesses in the United States; for example, Bublak (2014) addressed small businesses and the federal government in the contracting arena, as well as the origins of relevant public laws and practices, noting a lower percentage of federal contracts awarded to small businesses that perform outside of the United States. Tax incentives and programs operated and administered by the SBA in conjunction with federal agencies continue to support, founded on the ideas that small businesses operating within the United States are integral to the American economy, job growth, and innovation (Gale, 2013).

The Small Business Act amendment of 1978 included measures to a Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization Office to help meet the different federal agencies' goals (McManus, 2012). The amendment ordered federal agencies to award contracts to minority-owned small businesses, and federal agencies were accountable to Congress for

failures about those goals (Manuel & Lunder, 2013). The Small Business Reauthorization Act of 1997 mandated the award of almost 25% of federal contracts to small businesses to give small business a chance to participate fairly in the process (McManus, 2012).

Small Business Eligibility for Procurement

To meet eligibility requirements for SBA assistance and government contracts reserved for small businesses, the income or employment of qualifying businesses must be under the thresholds established by the SBA (Gale, 2013). In most industries, the size standard reported for 2014 was \$7 million in average annual net income receipts over three years (SBA, 2014). For some industries, such as manufacturing and mining, the SBA applies employment size standards for eligibility and definition purposes, with the threshold being no more than 500 employees on average during 12 months (Gale, 2013).

According to Gale (2013), although these general standards exist, the SBA adjusts definitions in some cases, based on industry characteristics. For example, Gale described how, in some service and retail industries, annual receipts thresholds for small businesses could be as much as \$35.5 million annually, and businesses in some industries can employ as many as 1500 and remain classified as small businesses. The SBA implemented several measures to fortify and enforce the eligibility and examination procedures involving specific documentation provided by small business owners (Office of Management and Budget [OMB], 2016).

Government contract awards have specific monetary limitations in addition to the stipulations that award be fair and reasonable for the goods or services (McManus, 2012). One proposed condition the SBA rejected was a limitation to how many contracts a

company receives, but the SBA reasoned that, although the limitation would hypothetically increase the number of small businesses that could benefit from government contracts, it would not serve the purpose of allowing small businesses to compete effectively with each other (SBA, 2014). The ideas of ceilings on contract prices and limitations to the number of contracts won were subject to attacks by legislators. Constituents protested the contract limits and price caps, describing them as too low or unnecessary (McManus, 2012).

According to Kim and Brown (2012), there are six different types of payment for those eligible for government contracts: unchanging price, reimbursement of cost, products and time, person-hours, combination, and others. Small business owners must understand the processes of obtaining contracts. There are two types of contracts - fixed-price and cost-plus contracts. President Obama (2009) stated upon taking office the contract process needs streamlining to help fixed-cost approaches become more conducive to the economy. Therefore, during the procurement stage, finding the fixed cost is optimal and cost effective (Lee & Xie, 2013). However, Yang (2012) argued that a cost-plus-fixed-fee leads to cost reductions more than a firm-fixed-price.

Although there are 66 federal agencies currently reporting numbers to FPDS, the purposes of qualitative multiple case study encompass a focus on eligibility for three: Department of Defense (DOD), Department of State, and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). DOD is the largest contracting agency, and it continues to increase (Wang & Miguel, 2013). According to data from the 2012 report, DOD gave 20%, DOS gave 39%, and VA 35% of government contracts to small businesses (FPDS, 2015). This report

reflected, although a vast amount of funds allotment was for small businesses, only a small percentage went toward actual awards. As an example, DOD allotted \$274 billion but only awarded \$56 billion. DOS allotted \$3 billion but only awarded \$1 billion. The VA allotted \$17 billion dollars but only awarded \$6 billion (FPDS, 2015).

Gale (2013) reported results from data derived from the National Research Council about Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) award recipients. The results indicated a little more than half of those surveyed attributed over half of their business growth to SBIR awards (Gale, 2013). Link and Scott (2012) showed although smaller and larger businesses are eligible for the awards, smaller businesses spend higher fractions of their revenues on research and experimentation than larger firms. Although 11 government agencies are a part of the SBIR program, 5 of the agencies (the Department of Defense, National Institutes of Health, National Aeronautics Space Administration, Department of Energy, and the National Science Foundation) comprise 96% of the program expenditures, with almost \$2 billion disbursed in time-phased awards to innovative eligible small firms (Gale, 2013).

Organizational Procurement Assistance

Many small business owners receive education through inexpensive learning sessions with their areas' Chamber of Commerce. They learn marketing intelligence, among other essential business knowledge, are keys to the successes of small business owners (Dubihlela & Dhurup, 2013). Although marketing innovation may lead to the successes of small businesses, marketing or general business knowledge alone is not sufficient for successful federal contract procurement (Bublak, 2014). Ownership,

leadership, strategic development, and innovation intertwine, but assistance in building the partnerships between small businesses and governments can help propel innovation and growth benefitting both sectors (Sahut & Peris-Ortiz, 2014).

Federal government funding directed toward small businesses for SBA programs and administration annually totals in the range of billions of dollars (OMB, 2016; Ferguson, 2012). The SBA assists small businesses to obtain business opportunities from the United States federal government (SBA, 2015). The SBA delivers millions of loans, loan guarantees, contracts, counseling sessions and other forms of assistance to small businesses (Ferguson, 2012). The SBA works with the different federal agencies to improve the opportunities for small business contract awards (Gale, 2013). According to the law, the award of 23% of federal contracting must be to small businesses (SBA, 2012). Several federal agencies and departments support small businesses through assistance in contract procurement opportunities, with each federal agency maintaining an Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization that helps small businesses maximize the procurement of government contracts (Gale, 2013). Also, the State Small Business Credit Initiative subsidizes state-level programming to facilitate credit to small businesses; the Small Business Lending Fund helps banks leverage capital to small businesses (McManus, 2012).

There are 61 Procurement Center Representatives who serve multiple procurement offices and who travel between offices located across several states. Those representatives do not have staff, although they may have small-business technical advisors as assistants. More than 40% of the representatives perform other functions, and

some of the 61 positions remain vacant for extended periods (Beale, 2014). The System for Award Management (SAM) is an administrative system for the registration of federal contractors and prospective federal contractors, reflecting their willingness and abilities to participate in federal contracting. Continuously updated, SAM data includes SAM registrants by industries, sizes, and demographic characteristics (Beale, 2014).

Mentoring Small Business Owners

The amount of government funding for the growth and success of small business in America, considering small business failures, is an indication of the need to understand and better assist small business success (Ferguson, 2012). The SBA (2015) proposed amending its regulations about contract award processes to implement provisions of government-wide mentor-protégé programs for all small business concerns. According to the SBA, these programs would be consistent with the SBA's mentor-protégé programs for participants in the business development program. One of the goals of the program is to improve the protégés' abilities to compete for government contracts; the mentor would share expertise, resources, and capabilities so protégés can more fully develop competitive capabilities (SBA, 2015). The case study results reported by Williams (2016) included a need for additional mentoring for that could help small business leaders with contract procurement.

Some scholars argued that very little research has been conducted on the effectiveness or beneficial of executive coaching for individuals in organizations, especially as related to government contract procurement (Williams, 2016). Mentoring is a personal relationship between a mentor and a protégé whose sole purpose is to assist the

mentee and enhance knowledge and competence (Coad, Frankish, Roberts, & Storey, 2016). Mentors can be teachers, business advisers, friends, financiers, confidantes, and colleagues, among others who are credible and knowledgeable in their fields (Giacomin, Janssen, & Shinnar, 2016; Lahti, 2014). According to Boxer, Perren, and Berry (2016), mentors often work closely with management teams to address gaps in capabilities. Scurry, Rodriguez, and Bailouni (2013) provided examples of how individuals who do not receive formal training can embrace the experience and hard work to become successful; mentorship, gender, personality, and temperament lead to even greater successes. Patton (2014) suggested that founders, advisers, mentors, and directors who work collaboratively with each other can improve the absorptive capacity of new firms.

Few scholars focused on research involving mentoring of small business owners who participate in government contract procurement (Williams, 2016). Bublak (2014) studied small business representatives from the District of Columbia in a phenomenological study about federal government contract procurement. Bublak revealed 100% of the respondents in the study believed a mentor-protégé program would be successful if there were incentives for these types of partnerships. However, 50% of the participants in the study believed these mentoring programs about small-business government contract procurement would impose additional administrative burdens on the government (Bublak, 2014). Despite added burdens, Martin and Wilson (2016) noted that mentors, industry networks, and professional forums could be valuable sources of information to promote opportunity recognition. Fiedler, Fath, and Whittaker (2016)

noted that trust and a focus on goals should be among the elements of effective mentor-protégé programs oriented toward learning about opportunities.

Small Businesses Failures

Small business operations, fundamental to the health of American economics, involve challenges related to profit-loss activity and growth. Approximately half of American small businesses fail within the first 5 years after the start of operations (SBA, 2013). Ferguson (2012) reported owners of American small businesses experience failure rates more than 60% during the first six years after start-up. There is a great deal of literature on the success of owners and a limited amount of failures (Gamble, Lorenz, Turnipseed, & Weaver, 2013). Gupta et al. (2013) noted education, industry, location, size, prior revenues, turnover, and the owner's aspirations toward growth relate to growth strategies as well as failures. For example, although small businesses in urban areas typically have fewer employees and are more likely to report larger higher profits, they are also more susceptible to failure; small business owners with prior family-business experience or work experiences in similar types of business were more likely to show higher profits and less likely to fail (Ferguson, 2012).

Gupta et al. (2013) differentiated entrepreneurs from small business owners, claiming that both concern themselves with profits, but business owners more aggressively focus on innovation and growth whereas small business owners focus more on stability and sales. About failures, there is a consensus that the origins are complex, but many researchers attributed the responsibility of failures to the nature of the business rather than the entrepreneur or business owner (Walsh & Cunningham, 2016). Others

claimed that lack of financial management contributes to small business failures (Byrd, Ross, & Glackin, 2013; Chow & Dunkelberg, 2013; Hartt & Jones, 2013). Contributing factors to small business failures were a lack of managerial skills and financial resource shortages (Chamberland & Witchel, 2016).

Gupta et al. (2013) labeled these types of barriers to revenue generation and business growth for small businesses as institutional and financial barriers. Institutional barriers Gupta et al. discussed include governmental setbacks and limited governmental support, licensing and legal issues, regulatory and taxation burdens. Financial barriers, according to Gupta et al. are more simply a lack of financial resources to sustain the business activities. Small businesses may also face several external and internal barriers such as social barriers to market position, access to ideal human resources, and the inability to optimally network (Gupta et al., 2013). Referencing the top 5 barriers, Bressler et al. (2014) added misaligned aspirations, lack of formal business education, limited access to small business owners to capital, possible discrimination of business owners, and poor communication skills.

Ferguson (2012) noted work ethic, management skills, and effective communication were factors perceived by small business owners as contributory to success, while others identified external factors, such as regulations, competition, and economic conditions, as the main factors contributing to failures. Kitching, Hart, and Wilson (2015) also emphasized regulatory burdens in small business performances. Gibbons (2015) highlighted some small businesses struggle to manage or overcome

market uncertainties and instabilities associated with the lack of strategies to improve business revenues and experience organizational growth amidst market changes.

Fear, lack of support, and insufficient education and training were factors Walsh and Cunningham (2016) included in their review of reasons for small business failures. Bissola et al. (2016) concluded experiential and collaborative learning approaches that promote entrepreneurial capabilities are critical for successful ownership. The educational levels of small business owners vary; however, it is a common perception that the more education business owners have, the more likely they are to maintain a faster-growing business (Loi, Castriotta, & Di Guardo, 2016). Ownership and business success relate to vast knowledge (Marinova & Borza, 2013). Chinomona (2013) conducted a study leading to findings that expertise and having skill set training has a great impact on small business performance. As evident in a study completed by Shields and Shelleman (2013), small business owners should create or access educational programs to gain knowledge and skills for being more effective and to implement management strategies that will generate more revenues for their businesses.

Gupta et al. (2013) discussed how businesses start, grow through various challenges and crises, and finally, mature and decline; businesses can experience growth, stagnation, and a decline in any order. Gibbons (2015) highlighted some small businesses struggle to manage or overcome market uncertainties and instabilities associated with the lack of strategies to improve business revenues and fail amidst market changes. Dynamic market conditions and continuous economic reforms lead to constant pressure on small

business owners to perform, deliver quality, and reduce operational costs (Gupta et al., 2013).

A significant number of company owners who participated in prior studies were not motivated to grow and some planned for limited viability (Gupta et al., 2013). Wennberg and DeTienne (2014) noted entrepreneurial exit is not necessarily the same as a small business failure but that most view exit negatively and business survival positively. According to Wennberg and DeTienne, empirical models and data do not account for planned exits that some small business owners consider as the ultimate fulfillment of their venture processes. Mason and Botelho (2016) also emphasized the need to study entrepreneurial exit, which is largely ignored in the research literature.

Lagging Small Business Procurement

Small businesses that benefit from government contracts are a major source of employment and job creation around the world (Gupta et al., 2013). Despite the fact small businesses serve vital roles in national and regional economies, they continue underrepresented in federal government contract markets; as a result, the public contract procurement remains insufficiently exploited (Tammi et al., 2014). The description of government contracts for small businesses included the characterization of the opportunities as severely underutilized national resources (McManus, 2012). Measures reducing the disparities in government contracting can benefit established as well as new small businesses, given their aggregate contributions to economic performance; however, targeting 99% of the market may be unrealistic (Nicholas & Fruhmann, 2014). The

ongoing failures to meet small-business procurement goals remain frustrations and challenges to those involved in the process (Beale, 2014).

The SBA publishes data, categorized by agencies about the actual procurement rates achieved (SBA, 2015). Failure to meet contract goals for small business awards may be due to underutilization of small businesses (Beale, 2014). Considering the failure to meet goals, Congress, in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2013, ordered independent assessments of the small business procurement goals (Manuel & Lunder, 2013). The assessments included: (a) descriptions of the domestic industries, sizes, and socioeconomic compositions of federal prime contractors and subcontractors; (b) the processes used in establishing various procurement goals; (c) the quality and availability of data about contracting and subcontracting; and (d) the barriers to procurement practices that prevent the maximization of application and implementation of small businesses (Beale, 2014).

Among the sectors with relatively higher small business contract procurement, the procurement rates ranged from approximately 12% in manufacturing to 45% in construction; among collective industries and agencies, there is small-business federal contract procurement rate of almost 10% (Beale, 2014). Compared to the 23% national goal, Beale reported the actual rate represents a small-business federal contract procurement shortfall of over \$28 billion. Beale also determined the ratios of average procurement funds of larger businesses to average procurement funds of smaller business indicated that the concentration of federal contract procurement funds is to a relatively few large businesses. Many smaller scale businesses often provide support to those larger

scale businesses by supplying products and services in relatively small quantities that help both businesses build competitive advantages (Gupta et al., 2013). Findings also showed the high concentration of contract procurement in a few industries (Beale, 2014).

Variabilities among industries and subclasses are complex and depend on the availability of small businesses and the application and implementation rates (Beale, 2014). Bressler et al. (2014) noted a correlation between certain demographics of business owners and industry. Beale (2014) also showed correlations exist between low (or high) availability and participation rates and among low (or high) small business owner procurement rates and individual industries. However, Beale also reported that availability and utilization overlaps and offsets do not vary sufficiently nor consistently enough to explain significant differences in procurement rates between and across industries.

The Committee on Small Business gave several reasons, based on analysis of testimonies, for the lagging percentage of small business procurements of government contracts, especially for women (Manuel & Lunder, 2013). One reason was contract bundling (the combining of smaller contract requirements into larger contracts) (Manuel & Lunder, 2013; McManus, 2012). Purposes of contract bundling included simplifying and streamlining the acquisition of contracts when appropriate and necessary (Maréchal & Morand, 2014; McManus, 2012); however, the problematic effects of contract bundling on smaller, more vulnerable businesses are prominent in the related literature.

The SBA acknowledged the negative effects of contract bundling on smaller businesses and minority-owned and economically disadvantaged small businesses in

particular (Snider et al., 2013). The SBA acknowledged the economic community could benefit from protections of the smaller businesses' interests instead of reinforcing models of procurement efficiency (Beale, 2014). According to Beale (2014), the National Defense Authorization Act of 2013 represented the most recent modifications of the SBA's goals for federal contract procurement. The act, like other acts established by the government, served a purpose to revise goal guidelines to align with more realistic and comprehensive approaches to federal contracting and small business procurement (OMB, 2016).

Brux and Desrieux (2014) used an incomplete contract framework to study the consequences of allotments in public procurements. Allotments divide public services into several lots awarded to different businesses (Maréchal & Morand, 2014). According to Brux and Desrieux, allotment practices can increase the number of competitive bidders and reduce the sizes of the services into manageable services. Brux and Desrieux concluded allotment affects business incentives, does not maximize payoffs to the public or private parties, and mainly benefit the public entities. However, Maréchal and Morand (2014) claimed that allotment procedures do enable extensive small business participation while also minimizing costs for public buyers.

Other reasons for the lack of success in federal contract procurement include the government relying on well-known firms (Beale, 2014). The Committee on Small Business stressed the negative impacts of these government-led practices on many small businesses, especially minority-owned businesses, claiming the government's drive for efficiency in procurement practices jeopardizes opportunities to meet congressionally-

mandated contracting goals for small businesses, and minority-owned businesses in particular (Manuel & Lunder, 2013). Updates to government rules focus on discrepancies in contract procurement by allowing previously disadvantaged businesses better access to resources provided by the federal government for contract bidding (Beale, 2014).

The SBA assumed the responsibilities involved in ensuring the alignment between the agency's goals and the federal contracting goals; however, there are limits to the SBA authority, and benchmarks mostly pertain to data about historical performance (Manuel & Lunder, 2013). Independent, external studies showed size and youth were factors in previous research that revealed that small businesses with more limited financial resources, such as research and development companies, have difficulties accessing effective contract-oriented leadership and staff (González-Benito & González-Benito, 2010). Despite the liabilities of small businesses related to their size or youth, they can continue to compete with larger or older organizations (Tammi et al., 2014).

Tammi et al. (2014) and Williams (2016) noted that the underrepresentation of small and medium enterprises in the awarding of government contracts, emphasizing the sparseness of literature and research about the strategic and behavioral factors associated with small business participation in government contract procurement. Tammi et al. emphasized the generation of market intelligence for small businesses to use in the procurement of government contracts. Williams also emphasized the importance of competitive intelligence as a valuable resource for contract procurement. According to Hsueh and Yan (2013) and Tammi et al., market intelligence implies small business

owners can assess their strengths, resources, partnerships, and contracts available to them to meet the needs of the public sector.

Tammi et al. (2014) also indicated failures to procure government contracts could stem from capacity constraints, lack of related skills, and unproductive attitudes about public procurement. Owners' personalities and attitudes to become successful are integral aspects of a successful organization (Jain & Ali, 2013). Nicholas and Fruhmann (2014) suggested that the small business owners may fear the loss of personal autonomy as a reason to avoid government contract bidding, associated with the lack of public sector related growth ambitions.

Prior research findings indicated small businesses often fail to plan and apply formal customer acquisition processes (Mosoti & Kamau, 2014). Small businesses may experience difficulties using or accessing resources in new ways. Small business owners often experience problems securing financial, human, legal, and administrative resources (Gibson, McDowell, & Harris, 2014). The majority of the labor to secure contracts is via some form of information technology (for example, through computers); therefore, the limited use and information technology knowledge can cripple businesses' aspirations to compete for contracts (Harris & Patten, 2014).

Inadequate empirical information about small business procurement is a major impediment to small business participation in federal contract procurement (Mishory, 2013). Nicholas and Fruhmann (2014) also pointed out the various validity and reliability issues with the analysis of data on small businesses. Nicholas and Fruhmann noted the need for the realistic evaluations of entrepreneurs, avoiding composition fallacies.

Stenholm and Heinonen (2015) called for a closer examination of the academic, regulatory, and commercial literature about different small businesses and their roles in the economy and innovation, considering the muddled conclusions and related research problems compounded by the plethora of issues threatening the quality of relevant data.

Small Business Procurement Studies

Despite the documented experiences and surveyed perceptions of small businesses owners, a lack of an adequate understanding of the underrepresentation of small businesses and the factors that foster their participation in federal government contract procurement continues (Department of Health and Human Services, 2016; Tammi et al., 2014). The literature about procurement, competition, and contract law in the context of government contract awards to small businesses are beginning to grow (Weishaar, 2013; Williams, 2016). Rigorous research on the strategic and behavioral factors the participation of small businesses in government contract procurement is largely absent (Tammi et al., 2014).

Tammi et al. (2014) noted two different paths to understanding the underrepresentation of small businesses in public procurements. Tammi et al. noted one path pertains to market structure, governmental procurement designs, and laws to promote participation of small businesses in procurement processes. The other path pertains to the abilities and aspirations of the small business owners and their explicit strategies and organized utilization of the information needed to improve procurement rates (Tammi et al., 2014). Williams (2016) also reported the need to understand small

business leaders' explicit strategies applied in the processes of government contract procurement and fulfillment.

Prior research emphasized the role or the process of bidding on government contracts that periodically changes (De Silva, Kosmopoulou, Pagel, & Peeters, 2013). Several laws are subjects of review and updates, based on research reports, to protect contractors and sub-contractors in the participation and award processes (Manuel & Lunder, 2013). Sub-contractors must enter agreements with prime contractors before the contract awards, and incomplete contracts affect the award of contracts (Miller, 2014), but because of the flux and complexities of the procurement processes, small business owners must continuously strategically plan how to secure contracts (Williams, 2016).

A procurement strategy provides owners with a road map to end results and the steps it takes to reach those results (Sandada, Pooe, & Dhurup, 2014). Procurement is a complicated process that requires a great amount of personnel to acquire goods and services (Rotchanakitumnuai, 2013; Sonfield, 2014; Yeow & Edler, 2012). Professional procurement processes and procedures involve careful management and documentation; attempting to bypass procurement laws is illegal and unethical (Ntayi, Ngoboka, Ndahiro, & Eyaa, 2013). Procurement as a government-secured process involving private funds utilized for contracts (Snider et al., 2013). Contracts are primarily for securing government purchases (Wang & Miguel, 2013). Procurement is an important part of securing contracts. However, effective procurement processes and procedures are still in the development phase (Olang & Gerald, 2014) and small business owners expressed numerous concerns and barriers to the procurement process (Williams, 2016).

A few studies focused on the lived experiences of small business owners on federal contract procurement. Bublak (2014) used a qualitative phenomenological design to explore perceived obstacles faced by small businesses in the procurement of specific types of federal contracts. Reijonen, Tammi, and Saastamoinen (2014) examined entrepreneurial orientation and public sector procurement. Gale (2013) suggested further research for understanding the small business sector, the entrepreneurial sector, federal government role in contracts and innovations, and federal policies.

According to McManus (2012), regarding studies of contract procurement, some small business owners expressed perceptions of unfair treatment and exclusion from the bidding process by overly inclusive protective programs that distort what they consider fairer bidding processes. Data from studies of participants in and contributors to the process reflected an overall concern about the fairness of the certification, bidding, and procurement process involved with the award of government contracts (McManus, 2012). McManus noted those concerned with the interest of fairness called for easier, more streamlined processes; those focused on the integrity of the system called for constraints and vigilance of the screening, evaluation, and approvals of the certification processes.

Bublak (2014) identified several small business procurement themes from data collected from 20 small business representatives of the District of Columbia. Internal barriers were the most significant factor in the prevention of government contract procurement by the small businesses in the Bublak study. For example, Bublak reported 80% of the study sample identified internal barriers such as working financial and human resource capital (legal, technical, subject matter experts, and consultants in contract

writing) for preparing successful proposals. Bressler et al. (2014) identified similar internal barriers to small business success, including limited access to capital and education, discrimination, and poor understanding of necessary communication skills.

Bublak (2014) also revealed 85% of the sample believed the lack of knowledge about government contracting resulted in complacent attitudes of small business owners in contract procurement. Williams (2016) reported similar findings of the need for a good understanding of the bureaucracy by small business owners who want to win government contracts. Additional findings reported by Bublak were 25% of the members of the sample believed contracting officers did not understand or appreciate the barriers faced by small businesses and lacked the desire to establish working relationships with small business representatives.

Prior research showed that different types of small business dimensions have impacts on government contract awards, such as product innovation (Gale, 2013), firm performance, competitors, and customer orientation (Kaňovská & Tomášková, 2015). Reijonen et al. (2014) researched and revealed the processes of how small businesses gain information from public sector when bidding. Small businesses benefit from gathering information about prospective customers and potential competitors, integrating different cooperative network partners to integrate their resources in the process of bidding for government contracts (Tammi et al., 2014).

Business owners must consider accessing wider markets for their firm's products and services and exploring new sources of competitive advantages (Cuervo-Cazurra, Inkpen, Musacchio, & Ramaswamy, 2014). Competitor orientation involves the

identification of weaknesses and strengths in choosing competition strategies in the process of assessing the possibilities for success in government contracting award processes; competitor orientation can affect small business owners' willingness to take part in government contract bidding (Tammi et al., 2014). A company's inter-functional coordination reflects the coordinated efforts and resource utilization that leads to superior value for customers and maximizes customer satisfaction (Kaňovská & Tomášková, 2015). Inter-functional coordination can affect how small businesses approach government contract bidding (Tammi et al., 2014).

Research of strong market orientation showed a positive influence on several aspects of small business performance such as competition, resource utilization, finding new opportunities and markets, and responses to customers' needs (Tammi et al., 2014). Tammi et al. (2014) conducted a quantitative study of market orientation dimensions. Tammi et al. applied the conceptual construct of market orientation that addressed a firm's orientation regarding the collection of information about competitors and customers in such ways the information could lead to competitive advantages. Results were that market orientation did have a positive effect on how small businesses search for information about opportunities and participate in bidding processes (Tammi et al., 2014). Fiedler et al., (2016) similarly researched elements involved with how small business owners learn about opportunities that align with their goals. Martin and Wilson (2016) also noted the positive effects of mentors, industry networks, and professional forums on small business owners' market orientation and searches for new opportunities.

Tammi et al. (2014) reported customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination all had positive associations with government contract procurement, but only inter-functional coordination was statistically significant. The results of the Tammi et al. study indicated heightened inter-functional coordination is one of the ways company leaders can increase their chances of obtaining public sector customers. Tammi et al. suggested market orientation, with strong functional coordination, should be a strong component of the strategic design process of procurement activities and should be a focus of small businesses involved in procurement. Williams (2016) reported similar findings of performance orientation, which the author called competitive intelligence and organizational competitiveness, requiring effective intra-organizational coordination efforts.

Uncertain Economic Outlooks

McManus (2012) stressed the uncertainty of the economic outlook for the United States as well as the difficulty of evaluating effectiveness or durability of the federal government's measures on federal contracting policies and procedures. Federal agencies will continue to grapple with how to increase the number of small businesses hired for government contracts, in light of pledges to cut government spending (Gale, 2013). In 2012, the government spent \$535 billion on contract spending, a decrease of \$15 billion and hoped to reduce contract spending by another \$25 billion following fiscal policies that will include a 10% reduction in professional-technical services contracts (McManus, 2012).

Future government efforts will continue to include cuts of unnecessary costs, elimination of redundant contracts, and confrontation of the trends toward the uncontrollable growth of government spending. With the impending cost cuts, officials are reluctant to identify the sectors that will most suffer, which jobs will be lost and if cancellations or reductions of contracts will occur. With these unprecedented federal contracting reductions, small business owners who rely on government contracts may feel less security about their futures. While the American economy struggles to recovery and the federal government continues to decrease spending, concerns continue about the most optimal ways to preserve small-business contracting protections (McManus, 2012).

Summary of Literature Review

The conceptual framework for the study is the RBV theory that encompasses the relationship between the accumulation of valuable and rare resources, competitive advantages, and business performance (Gupta et al., 2013). The RBV theory applied widely in prior research about managers in business (Almarri & Gardiner, 2014). Because the focus of the research is on business and resources oriented toward expansion of business activities, a study from a resource-based view is appropriate (Gupta et al., 2013).

Small business ownership has an important role in American economic development (Chamberland & Witchel, 2016). Increases in small business ownership continue among both genders in diverse demographic groups (Ferguson, 2012). Small business operations involve challenges related to revenue generation and growth (Mills & McCarthy, 2014).

Small business owners and managers have varied and sometimes profoundly divergent views (Jaouen & Lasch, 2015), and there is a strong relationship between their practices and philosophies and sales growth (Messersmith & Wales, 2013). Small businesses have internal and external stakeholders that shape their organizations' strategies, practices, and commitments (Burga & Rezanian, 2016) and influence decision-making processes (Gibbons, 2015). The development of relationships and partnerships generates capital, enhances business goals, and strengthens competitive advantages (Liu et al., 2013).

The paths of businesses to revenue generation and growth can be linear and predictable or opportunistic and unpredictable (Gupta et al., 2013). Multiple factors have an impact on revenue generation, including cognitive processes and personalities of owners, leadership styles, and stakeholder involvement and support (Ferguson, 2012). Other factors that impact revenues generation include strategic planning, political and regulatory influences, competition, customer loyalty, and use of resources (Gupta et al., 2013). Processes, routines, and resources that lead to substantive revenues and enable businesses to grow to include marketing strategies (Madsen & Bingham, 2014) requiring attention to business market orientation (Donnelly et al., 2015) and strategic positioning (Madsen & Bingham, 2014). Lam and Harker (2015) described marketing at different stages of the small business lifecycle as dependent on the social context and interactions between business leaders and customers. Bell (2012) claimed enhanced understanding of customers and consumer segments is a critical aspect of effective revenue-generation management strategies. Price, Rae, et al., (2013) noted the importance of continuous

identification of new client bases for existing products and the effective mobilization of small business resources to access and exploited both new and existing markets, to increase profits.

The knowledge exchange regarding value creation, appraisals of business capabilities, evaluation of management practices and feedback geared toward generating optimal performance and profit-building is essential to successful small business revenue generation (Garriga, 2014). Revenue generation also depends on administrative coordination and authoritative communication of essential knowledge (Gupta et al., 2013; Kneller, Mongeon, Cope, Garner, & Ternouth, 2014). Business leaders must continuously restructure, reorganize, and re-engineer information technology systems to effectively impart knowledge and manage rapid change (Novikov et al., 2016).

Federal governments spend billions of dollars to encourage small business growth (Ferguson, 2012). American governmental promotion of the small business sector includes product reservations, infrastructure support, credit and tax concessions, equipment, and contract procurement, and market network provisions (Gupta et al., 2013). There are many economic, logistical, and societal benefits of partnerships between local, regional, and national contracting authorities (Tammi et al., 2014). Partnerships with government agencies build trust, commitment, and better relationships between small businesses and government agencies (Johnson et al., 2013), thereby stimulating innovation, creating jobs, and leading to a healthy general economy (Gale, 2013).

The Investment Company Act of 1958 created a role for the SBA in licensing, regulating, and helping to provide funds and investments to small businesses; a series of

additional acts led to the current mandates of almost one-fourth of federal contracts awards to small businesses along with opportunities to bid fairly (McManus, 2012). The SBA applies standards for contract procurement eligibility (Gale, 2013). Registration in SAM provides a measure of a small business's eligibility and availability to receive contract awards (Beale, 2014).

Of the 61 Procurement Center Representatives, more than 40% of the representatives perform other functions and positions may remain vacant for extended periods (Beale, 2014). The SBA (2015) proposed amendments to its award process regulations to include government-wide mentor-protégé programs for all small business concerns. A mentor would share expertise and resources for protégés to more fully develop competitive capabilities (SBA, 2015).

Despite legislation, resources, and SBA support, small businesses continue underrepresented in federal government contract markets; public contract procurement remains insufficiently exploited (Tammi et al., 2014). Failures to meet small-business procurement goals frustrate and challenge those involved in the process (Beale, 2014). Tammi et al. (2014) discussed the sparseness of literature and research about the strategic and behavioral factors associated with lagging small business participation in government contract procurement. Mishory (2013) noted inadequate empirical information about small business procurement, calling it a major impediment to small business participation in federal contract procurement. The literature about procurement, competition, and contract law in the context of government contract awards to small businesses is beginning to grow (Weishaar, 2013).

Transition

Small businesses are essential sources of jobs, foster entrepreneurial spirit, promote innovation, propagate competitiveness, and sustain employment (Nicholas & Fruhmann, 2014). Revenue received from the government, as just a part of the small business revenue-generation strategies, helps create new jobs for a local community (Beale, 2014). These contracts help fulfill government requirements (Kim & Brown, 2012). Determinations of owners' successes are by the government, local community groups, and financing availability (Gamble et al., 2013).

Government officials such as political leaders maintain interests in small business growth (Manuel & Lunder, 2013). Profits from small businesses stabilize the local, state, and federal economies (Shukla & Shukla, 2014). Economic issues associated with small business innovation and government support are complex, with questions about how public policies and governmental support activities should lead to the subsidization of small businesses (Gale, 2013).

Government support includes the design of economic theory applications, tax policies, spending programs, and partnerships (Beale, 2014). However, some researchers like Gale (2013) claimed small business owners confront special barriers to government support, and others claimed they enjoyed preferential treatment. Gale reported evidence suggesting young firms that start small businesses involve more job growth and innovation with a greater investment of governmental support for hiring, expansion, and innovation. Gale also noted that existing literature shows the impact of governmental

policies on small business behaviors such as entry, exit, duration, employment, investment, growth and firm form, as well as new ventures and innovations.

The SBA continually adopts promising methodologies for estimating opportunities for expanding small-business federal contract procurement (SBA, 2015). Significant expansion of small-business federal contract procurement will require progress for both small business owners and government (Manuel & Lunder, 2013). Progress includes techniques for the identification and revisions of requirements as necessary and appropriate for small businesses, pinpointing opportunities involving market research, and leadership emphasis on small-business procurement priorities (Beale, 2014).

Volery and Mazzarol (2015) noted the significant growth in the number of published, peer-reviewed, research articles about the concepts of entrepreneurship and small businesses. The authors' analysis of the peer-reviewed literature revealed a rise of theoretical studies with improved rigor coinciding with the relative decline of descriptive articles. According to Volery and Mazzarol, small businesses appear to have unique characteristics that distinguish the study of contract procurement from that of broader economics and general management disciplines.

Stenholm and Heinonen (2015) recommended closer examinations of the different types of small businesses and their roles in innovation and the economy. Waller, Waller, Haapio, Crag, and Morrisseau (2016) noted the importance of the development and application of successful proposal strategies for small businesses. Researchers such as Bublak (2014) continue efforts to study small business owners to determine barriers to

contract procurement and recommend further research to fill the gap in the literature about these areas of underutilized small business opportunities.

Section 2 contains descriptions of the elements of the research method and design. The section includes the identification of the research population and sample, the sampling techniques for qualifying or excluding research participants, and the ethical nature of the study required for human subject research compliance. The section includes the detailed information about the role of the researcher, instrument, means for data collection, and data analysis procedures, as well as a discussion of issues about the trustworthiness of qualitative research studies. Section 3 follows with a report of the results and findings of the study.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that small business owners use to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability. The population encompassed small business owners of three organizations who had acquired federal contracts in the security industry and were in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. This population was appropriate for the study because due to elevated security needs, the security industry has a significant presence. This study's implications for positive social change include possible increased business opportunities for small business owners in the security industry by providing additional strategies for securing government contracts. Securing government contracts can lead to higher revenues, which can support new and ongoing employment opportunities and higher tax revenues that can fund government programs that enhance the well-being of society.

Role of the Researcher

Researchers establish the framework for the research, including the background, problem, purpose, and conceptual-theoretical underpinnings of the study (Roller, 2015). Researchers also design the study, follow the guidelines established by Walden University, and gain approval from the institutional review board (IRB). I stayed within ethical boundaries and maintained the strictest of confidentiality of participants. Self-examination leading to an understanding of the role of the researcher in case study research is necessary to communicate how roles influence interactions, choices, and findings (Hyett et al., 2014). The responsibility for the selection of the method and design

falls to the researcher, who must align those selections with well-stated research questions, justifications, and rationale for those choices (Yazan, 2015). I also defined the population, justified ideal sampling strategies, and provided the means of data collection, free from biased approaches in ways recommended by research experts (Fassinger & Morrow, 2013; Guetterman, 2015; Hyett et al., 2014). The analysis of data and report of findings involves the responsibilities of safeguarding of the data and compliance with the ethical promises of confidentiality and informed consent terms (Check, Wolf, Dame, & Beskow, 2014).

Although I have not acquired contracts as a small business owner, I held a previous position of a contractor with the federal government, and in my current position as a Senior Program Specialist, I am a contracting officer representative. Researchers navigate methodological and ethical challenges in research processes (Check et al., 2014). The process of designing a study and collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data includes various ethical challenges for researchers, especially those with insider knowledge or connections to participating organizations (Greene, 2014). Compliance with the research rigor and the ethical standards of the IRB of Walden University occurred. Compliance of the IRB was important to respect the rights of human participants in all stages of the research process. No data collection occurred until after each participant signed an informed consent form that complied with the human research subjects' rights under the Belmont Report, which occurred after IRB approval.

Human research subjects participating in research in the United States have protections under the Belmont report, which encompass three main ethical principles that

guided this research: respect, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research [NCPHSNNR], 1974). When conducting research, these ethical standards must guide the treatment of participants in the study. In accordance with the rules documented in the Belmont report, the three established fundamental ethical principles involving human interactions during research, emphasized in the rigorous research literature (Bowser & Wiggins, 2015; Ferreira, Buttell, & Ferreira, 2015), applied to the respect of persons, motivations of beneficence, and application of justice.

I respected all participants by advising them that the study was strictly voluntary and withdrawal was possible at any time before, during, or after data collection and before study publication. Requests for withdrawal could have occurred in person, by telephone, or mail. Acceptance of withdrawal requests would have been effective immediately after the participant communicated the desire to withdraw in writing by mail or orally by telephone or in person, consistent with the recommendations for ethical and confidential research. Data already collected from any participant would have remained confidential and would not have been a part of the final data used for analysis; destruction of that data would have occurred immediately following the request for withdrawal to maintain confidentiality (Melham et al., 2014). The steps that apply to confidentiality and respect of persons are those recommended for rigorous research (Tammi et al., 2014).

Beneficence maximizes benefits and minimizes possible harm (NCPHSNNR, 1974). Protection of individuals from harm occurred through applied confidentiality

procedures, consideration of their personal and professional time, and the lack of interest in or collection of sensitive personal, psychological, or financial information. These approaches toward protection of individuals are recommendations for rigorous research involving human subjects (Beskow, Check, & Ammarell, 2014). Before conducting research, each participant received by e-mail comprehensible information on the consent form about the purpose of the study, use of the results, and the benefits to participating in the study. Communication of this information conformed to recommendations for rigorous research involving human subjects (Tammi et al., 2014). Fictitious names for reporting and publication purposes replaced the identities of all participants, and all documents will remain in a locked file for 5 years, after which the documents will be destroyed.

The principle of justice determines who receives the benefits and who bears the burdens of the research (NCPHSNNR, 1974). I did not influence the participants' eligibility or likelihood of receiving future contracts from the government for participating in the study. There were no incentives or consequences for participating or not participating in the study. There were no restrictions to the published results and findings for anyone.

Bias can enter the research process at crucial steps, such as the selection of the sample from the population, the data collection process, data analysis procedures, and interpretations. Established means for sampling in qualitative research and the justification of the selection of the cases can reduce bias in sampling (Hyett et al., 2014). The recognition of sources of bias can be a part of the research report (Greene, 2014).

Bias in this research could have stemmed from the possibility that I worked as a contractor for one or more of the prospective participants and could rely upon personal preconceptions. Conscious efforts occurred to recognize and set aside preconceived notions and to actively recognize and document when bias could affect the steps in the research process.

Proper data collection protocol is essential to maintaining the integrity of the research. I served as the instrumental tool for data collection (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). The role of the researcher involves the use of consistent procedures and protocols in data collection to reduce bias in the collection of meaningful information from participants in a systematic way (Guetterman, 2015). I used an interview protocol (Appendix) to provide step-by-step instructions regarding the interview process. Audio-recording of interviews with verbatim transcriptions can help reduce bias inherent to interview data collection efforts (Bugos et al., 2014). Later, member checking included a process whereby the participants reviewed the interpretations of data, a process recommended to reduce the possibility of researcher bias in data collection.

Qualitative researchers can collect through interviews in-depth, prolific, verbal data from individuals that reflect the strong authenticity of participants' perspectives (Harvey, 2014). In qualitative research data analysis, the researcher is a part of the analysis process of discovering meaningful information embedded in the data; therefore, there is an appreciation for the role of subjectivity and need for reflexivity (Anney, 2014). Technology tools such as Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software programs can help to reduce biased interpretations; peer scrutiny can also help to reduce the

likelihood that bias during the analysis process will occur (Anney, 2014). Peer scrutiny is an inherent part of the doctoral research process that guided this study.

Participants

The participants selected for the research process were small business owners residing in the Washington D.C, metropolitan area who had less than 500 employees. The Washington D.C, metropolitan area includes Washington D.C. and parts of Virginia, West Virginia, and Maryland. The small business owners had acquired federal government contract within the security industry. The criteria planned for the participant selection process include small business owners who are (a) applied strategies successfully to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability and (b) have been in the business for more than 5 years. All interviewees were older than 21 years. There was no age limit; however, they acquired a federal government contract within the last 5 years.

A census sampling technique was the process to select the three participants. Census sampling that encompasses the sampling of all the members of the population is an appropriate strategy for case study research involving established boundaries (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigam, 2013; Babbie, 2014). Each participant owned their own small business within the security industry. Each owner successfully won government contracts within the past 5 years. The identification of the three companies with federal contracts in security industries in the Washington D.C, metropolitan area occurred using publicly available contact information, using websites (Fed Biz Ops, Fed Bid, Government Bids, LinkedIn, and U.S. Contractor Registration).

Three small business owners received an informed consent form to participate in the study through electronic mail. An informed consent form conforms to the ethical principles of human subject research (Check et al., 2014; Tammi et al., 2014). The electronic mail conveyed the purpose of the research representing an invitation to prospective participants to be a part of the sample for the study. A recruitment approach that includes the introduction of the informed consent terms conforms with the recommendations for sampling in rigorous research made by Szolnoki and Hoffmann (2013). Qualitative research requires rapport with informants (Dikko, 2016). A researcher's effective communication skills (such as listening and feedback) can build rapport, trust, caring, and understanding, so participants will be honest in reports of their background, qualifications, experiences, and explanations of their viewpoints (Chetty, 2013; McDermid, Peters, Jackson, & Daly, 2014). A consent letter communicates the qualifying criteria that require participants be business owners of security companies that received government contracts. The use of the consent form conforms to the recommendations made by prior researchers for rigorous case study research (Guetterman, 2015; Hyett et al., 2014; Leahy, 2013).

Research Method and Design

Research Method

A qualitative research method was the suitable choice for this study. The differences between qualitative and quantitative research methods pertain to sampling, data collection, data analysis approaches, and issues of reliability and validity; the suitability of the choice of method depends on the alignment of the method with the

research questions and purpose of the study (Antwi & Hamza, 2015; Maxwell, 2015; Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). The research questions and purpose of this study of small business owners' acquiring federal government contracting to increase profitability align with the qualitative research method more than a quantitative method. Qualitative research is appropriate when attempting to understand human behaviors and the reasons for the behaviors when related variables are largely unknown (Mukhopadhyay & Gupta, 2014). A qualitative study was more appropriate for this study than a quantitative or mixed method because it enhances the meaning of lived experiences of small business owners; qualitative researchers' concerns include social realities of human creation they can study, interpret, and contextualize to provide a meaningful understanding of beliefs and practices (Baškarada, 2014). Beliefs and practices common to businesses are frequent subjects of qualitative research in part because business practices and behaviors are often fluid, dynamic, and situational, composed of different realities and perspectives about changing conditions (Antwi & Hamza, 2015).

The more narrowly applied quantitative method involves the collection of data that numerically represents select, known variables from relatively large samples; the purpose of statistical hypotheses testing is to apply generalizations, but generalization may not apply to business settings involved in unique situations (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). Whereas a quantitative method involves hypotheses testing and statistical generalizations (Omair, 2015), a qualitative method often involves multiple types of data, such as personal interviews, observations, and artifacts to arrive at more comprehensive conclusions from in-depth data about context (Roller, 2015). Qualitative researchers

focus on understanding human behaviors and practices rather than drawing conclusions about the interactions of defined quantities of known variables (Agbedeyi & Igweze, 2014; Guetterman, 2015; Omair, 2015). The focus of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify the successful strategies small business owners use to acquire government contracts, which were behaviors and practices appropriate for qualitative studies involving questions of how and why.

Research Design

Multiple case study was the design of this research study. Among the different designs for the qualitative method, a case study was an appropriate choice for this research study. A case study design involves the collection and analysis of data, bound by time and space, limited to a specific case or cases, such as businesses (Baškarada, 2014; Hyett et al., 2014). Case studies can be single case studies involving a single distinctive case or multiple case studies involving several identified cases (Guetterman, 2015). Yin (2016) claimed the case study design is appropriate for the exploration of problems lacking treatments, interventions, and predictable outcomes. Widely applied in academic and scholarly settings, a case study design is appropriate for studies involving research questions about matters of organizational importance (Baškarada, 2014; Hyett et al., 2014; Mukhopadhyay & Gupta, 2014). A case study design, among the most popular types of qualitative research, enables researchers to achieve objectives related to the understanding of organizational practices and business management (Eno & Dammak, 2014).

Several other qualitative research designs were less appropriate for the study. The narrative design was not an appropriate selection because narrative designs rely upon personal chronological storytelling of few participants with the goal of understanding potentially complex meanings and contexts from constellations of stories from the past (Guetterman, 2015; Wang & Geale, 2015). I rejected an ethnography design because ethnography largely pertains to the process of research involving immersion in cultures (Eno & Dammak, 2014). The phenomenology design was not appropriate for this study because phenomenologists aim to explore lived experiences with the intention of interpretation to extract meaning about the essence of those experiences (Guetterman, 2015).

Multiple case study design, as with most qualitative research designs, involves the concept of data saturation (Marshall et al., 2013). According to Mason (2010), in most instances, especially in doctorate level studies, an adequate sample size in a qualitative research depends largely on data saturation. Marshall et al. (2013) advised data saturation is more likely with more participants, but the determination of data saturation is subject to the observations and experiences of the researcher. During data collection and analysis, attention to the concept of data saturation occurred with the purpose of recognizing the point at which data became redundant. Recognition of redundancy stems from the reading and re-reading of transcripts of interviews and the attention to the repetitive nature of the data obtained for the study (Marshall et al., 2013).

Population and Sampling

The sampling of participants involved confirmation that the participants were from the population of the three small business security owners who had previously secured a contract with the federal government. A census sampling technique was the process to select all three participants from the population of three owners of small business security companies who successfully won government contracts. Although qualitative research involves other types of non-probabilistic sampling, purposive sampling is appropriate for multisite qualitative case study research that requires the selection of information-rich informants from a larger population who are willing to communicate their knowledge about the subjects of interest in the study (Palinkas et al., 2013). Instead, when sampling the entire population under study, census sampling is an appropriate approach (Acharya et al., 2013; Babbie, 2014). This qualitative multiple case study was a multiple case study of all three organizations that make up the population of small business owners of security companies who successfully won government contracts. Therefore, census sampling that involves the study of all the members of the population is an appropriate strategy for the case study that involves well-established, clearly delineated boundaries (Acharya et al., 2013; Babbie, 2014).

Because of the limited number of companies with security contracts with the federal government in the Washington D.C, metropolitan area, the study consisted of participants who represented the small business owners operating within the geographical area that acquired contracts with the federal government. Sullivan (2013) noted sample size in case study research could pertain to personal choice, but saturation is a concept

discussed by many qualitative researchers. Saturation is the point at which a qualitative researcher does not discover new information from additional data collected (Marshall et al., 2013). Guetterman (2015) reported the absence of data saturation discussions in their analysis of peer-reviewed case study research. Guetterman claimed data saturation might not be the best marker of an adequate sample size, especially for studies involving census sampling. Instead of data saturation involving the recruitment of additional participants, data saturation involved the collection of additional data from the three participants, which was necessary and appropriate to reach data saturation.

The identification of the three companies with federal contracts in security industries in the Washington D.C, metropolitan area occurred using publicly available contact information, using websites (Fed Biz Ops, Fed Bid, LinkedIn, Government Bids, and U.S. Contractor Registration). Semistructured interviews with open-ended questions with a guided discussion script were the primary means by which I collected interview data. Participants received a list of the interview questions by electronic mail within one week of the interviews. Semistructured interviews with open-ended questions are acceptable, respectable means for a gathering of pertinent data in case study research (Guetterman, 2015; McDermid et al., 2014; Yin, 2016). The time was scheduled and conducted at the convenience of the participants. The preference was for a face-to-face interview, but I offered interviews by Skype or telephone to accommodate a participant's schedule or personal preferences.

The selection of the interview locations accommodated participants' comfort levels. The interview days were Monday through Sunday between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.

Eastern Standard Time. The interview location was behind closed door in a location free from distraction. Pacho (2015) emphasized the importance of the interview environment and recommended settings that allow participants to communicate openly. Dikko (2016) also emphasized settings that lead to trust and comfort and a timeframe for the interview that allows the interviewee's opportunities to ponder and reflect on their experiences to provide thorough, meaningful answers to the interview questions.

Ethical Research

Prospective participants voluntarily signed informed consent forms before data collection, which occurred only after IRB approval. The Walden IRB approval number for this study is 06-29-16 0403396. The informed consent form was consistent with the mandates for protections of human research subjects recommended by research experts (Beskow et al., 2014). Emails were the means by which an informed consent form reached each participant. Upon receipt of the consent form, prospective participants had one week to determine if they would like to participate in the study. After receiving signed consent forms from participants that advised them of the risks, benefit, and purpose of the study scanned signed forms will remain in my personal, password-protected computer for 5 years.

The consent form includes the purpose of the study, background information, risks, benefits, and incentives. There were no tangible incentives offered or provided. Pacho (2015) emphasized the importance of the voluntary nature of participants in case study research. Resnik (2015) also discussed the ethical concerns about enticing research subjects with financial incentives including “undue inducement, exploitation, and biased

enrollment” (p. 35). However, each participant will receive a summary of the findings, and a completed, published copy of the study, upon request. Although the matters of financial incentives remain a debatable subject of concern (Halpern, 2011), there was no compensation for participants and no other incentives other than contributing to the body of knowledge.

Any participant could have withdrawn from the study at any time, before during or after data collection. Withdrawal could have occurred by communicating the desire to withdraw or not participate in writing or orally through telephone, mail, or in person. Pacho (2015) emphasized the importance of the participants’ knowledge that they can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalties. After the request to withdraw, immediate destruction of any data collected would have been excluded the data from the analysis, a process recommended by experts in rigorous research (Melham et al., 2014; Tammi et al., 2014).

To protect the confidentiality of participants and safeguard the data, as recommended by research experts (Check et al., 2014), all signed forms and electronic data remain on a password-protected computer. All hard copies and hardware containing data will remain in a locked cabinet in my home for 5 years. Only I know the password and possess the key. After 5 years, electronic data will undergo permanent deletion and destruction of hard copies of papers and hardware will occur by burning, to ensure the protection of participants and adhere to the recommendations for the safeguarding of human research participants.

To minimize possible harm (NCPHSNNR, 1974), no collection of sensitive personal, psychological, or financial information occurred. Fictitious names such as Company 1, Company 2, and Company 3 for reporting and publication purposes replaced the identities of all participants. Participants' names, titles, and the company names are not identifiable in the published study. Assurances of confidentiality improve participation rate and the truthfulness of data because of reduced fears of consequences or the risks of identity disclosures (Wallace, Gaye, & Burton, 2014).

Data Collection Instruments

I served as the primary data collection instrument; the researcher creates a record by collecting and recording data (Yazan, 2015). Although I served as the primary instrument for data collection, a collection of information occurred from semistructured interviews, document reviews, and observations. The fore mentioned types of data collection are among the recommendations by a case study expert (Yin, 2016).

Yin (2016) suggested six types of data case study research: documents, records, answers to interview questions, direct observations, participant observations, and artifacts. For this qualitative multiple case study, data for methodological triangulation came from interviews (face-to-face, Skype, or telephone), documentation (for example, actual contracts, protocols, guidelines, handbooks, manuals, or instructional content regarding contract preparation), and direct observation (through note taking during interviews). Methodological triangulation is a recommendation by case study experts that encompasses the collection of data by different methods (Eno & Dammak, 2014). Semistructured interviews with open-ended questions with a guided discussion script

were the primary means by which I collected interview data. Participants received a list of the interview questions by electronic mail within a week of the interviews.

Semistructured interviews with open-ended questions are acceptable, respectable means for a gathering of pertinent data in case study research (Guetterman, 2015). Used in various types of qualitative research designs, semistructured interviewing begins with a general idea of the initial questions in mind while accommodating additional lines of inquiry as necessary and appropriate to the goals of the study (Harvey, 2014).

Open-ended interview questions are more appropriate for this qualitative multiple case study than close-ended questioning because they allow participants to provide in-depth accounts of experiences to provide meaningful information about the topic (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). A set of open-ended questions stemmed from the initial comprehensive review of related literature, which is a recommended approach to preparations for semistructured interviews with open-ended questions (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). A guided discussion script helps to ensure the intent of the interview and participants do not stray from the topic (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). The interview questions and protocol for this qualitative multiple case study are in the Appendix.

Preparation and scrutiny of the planned process can lead to changes based on feedback before the implementation of data collection for the formal study (Baškarada, 2014). According to Yazan (2015), the initial guiding questions should undergo evaluation and assessment for relevance, appropriateness, clarity, unnecessary intrusiveness, or the possibility of provoking any undue duress or stress. I prepared and

scrutinized the questions and the data collection plans that were subject to thorough peer-review processes inherent in doctoral research studies.

Multiple researchers suggested up to 10 substantive questions was enough to help guide interviews in the direction of answering the fewer, broader, overarching research questions (Stake, 1995; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2016). Accordingly, there was an initial set of 10 questions serving as a guide for the main data collection instrument. The instrumental questions revolve around the broader goal to determine how small businesses in the security industry become successful at acquiring federal government contracts. The questions used as a part of the instrument for data collection pertain to the strategies small business owners in the security industry utilize to successfully acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability. These instrumental areas of inquiry encompass revenue generation strategies, important steps, beneficial competitive strengths, assets, resources, factors, capabilities, and challenges the informants can report that helped them successfully compete for government contracts.

Interviews protocols are common in business-oriented case studies (Baškarada, 2014; Hyett et al., 2014). The interview protocol in the Appendix includes the ten open-ended interview questions that guided the semistructured interviews. The first two questions were about how interviewees formulate market segment strategies, in general, and on government contracts. The second question pertained to revenue generation strategies used to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability. The following four questions were about beneficial training, assets, resources, and capabilities that enhance the competitive state of businesses, on government contracting. The eighth

question was an inquiry into competitive strengths that help the interviewee's business secure government contracts. The last two questions pertained to additional information interviewees could add that could help others understand the strategies needed to acquire government contracts.

The researcher who acts as the instrument for data collection relies upon the accurate collection of data through interviews, transcriptions, and the collection and interpretation of documents (Hyett et al., 2014). Therefore, participated in a process known as member checking. Member checking is the process of reviewing subsequent interpretations to heighten the trustworthiness of the research process, as suggested by research experts (Eno & Dammak, 2014; Harvey, 2014; Kornbluh, 2015).

Data Collection Technique

For this qualitative multiple case study, data came from direct observations and participant interviews. Data from interviews was a verbatim record of face-to-face interviews based on participant's schedule or meeting restrictions. The advantage of relying upon interviews for data informant's express authentic verbal knowledge, understanding, perceptions, and expertise to an interviewer that can ask for clarifications or additional in-depth information about the topic (Dikko, 2016). Data collection through interviews has disadvantages; some informants may have problems with articulation or poor recall (Yin, 2016). Interviews are time-consuming and generate voluminous data for transcription and analysis that can lead to lengthy or overwhelming processes (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Pacho (2015) also noted advantages and disadvantages of the use of document review in case study research. The disadvantages noted by Pacho included the

possibility that information in the documents may not apply to the study and may be disorganized or outdated. Pacho emphasized the possibility of bias stemming from the lack of access to important documents or the selective nature involved with the selection process. Furthermore, Pacho warned that the collection and review of documents could be time-consuming as documents become voluminous. However, according to Pacho, document review can be a relatively inexpensive source of background information. Pacho concluded that the collection of documents for review could involve an unobtrusive internal view of data not readily observable, noted, or discovered by other means.

Scheduling of times and dates for the interviews was a mutual convenience in a quiet, private setting. Before participating in interviews, prospective participants receive an informed consent form, following the ethical human subject research process recommended by experts in the field (Check et al., 2014; Udo-Akang, 2013). After confirmation of eligibility and interest, and the return of the signed informed consent form by mail or email, follow-up contact occurred to schedule interviews; follow-up contact helps to ensure participants feel informed and prepared for the interview process (Sullivan, 2013). Using a qualitative approach allows one to focus on face-to-face interviews or prepare for alternative Skype or telephone interviews if necessary due to time and meeting limitations of participants; Skype and telephone interviews are acceptable alternatives when face-to-face interviews are not possible (Sullivan, 2013).

The process of listening and reflexivity in private semistructured interview settings helps participants feel comfortable to be open and honest and is a technique

recommended by research experts (McDermid et al., 2014). Data from direct observations resulted from thorough note taking during interviews. Observations may be helpful in capturing data not otherwise available but are subject to the bias of the observer (Yin, 2016).

Yazan (2015) discussed how guiding questions could help provide the minimum level of structure for semistructured interviews, so the focus of interviews remains on data collection that leads to my ability to answer the fewer, broader, overarching research questions Stake (1995) and Yin (2016) suggested. Accordingly, there was an initial set of 10 questions revolving around the broader goal to determine how small businesses in the security industry become successful at acquiring federal government contracts. The questions led to other questions not initially anticipated emerged as a follow-up to relevant information offered by participants. Additional questions prompted informants to share information they thought was important or could help others understand better the strategies needed to acquire government contracts.

Data collection from conducting face-to-face, semistructured interviews involved a technique for voice recording following participants' consents. The recorded data underwent transcription to text in a word processing document using Dragon Naturally Speaking speech recognition software; the Dragon Naturally Speaking software, recommended by qualitative research experts, functions to convert audio speech to textual data (Sullivan, 2013). A detailed report in writing followed each interview to maintain the integrity of the interview session; this report was part of the process

recommended by case study experts who claimed the process helps maintain the trustworthiness of data (Anney, 2014; Hyett et al., 2014).

Transcription of interview data following each interview helps maintain the integrity of the interview session, and informants may review the initial interpretations (Anney, 2014). Based on the transcripts of the interview data, thoughts, clarification, or explanations of those interpretations was analyzed. Participants participated in a process known as member checking by asking participants to review the analysis and interpretation, in addition to advising me if the interpretations were reasonable. Participating in subsequent member checking heightens the trustworthiness of the research process (Kornbluh, 2015).

Data Organization Technique

Electronic data existed as files in the appropriate computer software programs. Scanning of all documents and records collected resulted in electronic files of data. I ensured the organization of the electronic data into manageable pieces. The organization of data into manageable pieces allows case study researchers to deconstruct, reconstruct, and reflect the realities of the data (Yazan, 2015). The use of software such as Dragon Naturally Speaking (voice recognition software), Microsoft Word (word processing software), NVivo (computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software), and image preservation enabled me to organize and manage data. The computer database consisting of files from the software programs such as word processing files scanned images of records and documents, and computer-aided analysis programs lead to well-organized data that can transfer from one program to another as necessary and appropriate. A case

study database also allows researchers to develop and maintain an audit trail, recommended by research experts (Yazan, 2015). The audit trail started with data collection and continue through data analysis leading to the report of results and conclusions.

Conducting semistructured interviews provides the minimum level of structure (Yazan, 2015). The data from my direct observations resulted from thorough note taking during interviews. In face-to-face and Skype interviews, nonverbal cues and vocal inflections may alert me to the context of answers so clarification or follow-up may occur. Using semistructured interviews allows the participants to ask questions and could aid participants to be candid (McDermid et al., 2014). The direct observations of the individuals of the business in the processes involved with contracts occurred during scheduled times to visit the business for observations. Extensive note taking occurred during both interviews and site visits leading to the type of reflective journal recommended by case study experts (Anney, 2014).

The use of technology, such as video and audio recordings of interviews with verbatim transcriptions helps reduce bias inherent to data collection efforts (Sullivan, 2013). A video recorder captured participants' interviews and extensive note taking occurred, leading to the production of a reflective journal recommended by case study research experts (Anney, 2014). The data transcription resulted from the use of Dragon Naturally Speaking speech recognition software; the software was successful in assisting prior case study research efforts (Sullivan, 2013). The generation of a detailed report followed each interview to maintain the integrity of the interview session, and

participants may review analysis. Participants participated in a process known as member checking by reviewing the analysis of the interview.

The data for each interview from each participant remain in electronic files labeled with each respective fictitious name (Company 1, Company 2, and Company 3). Such files allowed me to read, study, and observe the data. The NVivo software program enabled me to label, code, classify, and categorize data, thereby maintaining the organization of data into manageable, meaningful pieces. Data in these electronic files will remain in my password-protected computer for 5 years, followed by permanent deletion. Hard copies of data printed will remain in a locked cabinet for 5 years, followed by destruction, consistent with recommendations for the protections of confidentiality of human research subjects discussed by Tammi et al. (2014).

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data occurred through both within the case and cross-case comparisons, with methodological triangulation, which according to case study experts, could strengthen findings and conclusions leading to more effective propositions than case studies employing only one of those two approaches (Baškarada, 2014; Yazan, 2015). Case study data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, recombining, and triangulating evidence to draw conclusions guided by prior theory and the conceptual underpinnings of the study (Yazan, 2015). Case study data analysis relies on analytical techniques leading to the display of data analysis results, separate from interpretations (Yin, 2016). The analysis involved consistently applied analytic techniques to all sets and subsets of data, adequately relating findings across cases,

presenting an approach that aligns with recommendations by qualitative case study researchers (Hyett et al., 2014; Yin, 2016).

The initial steps of the logical and sequential process for data analysis typically involve reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, notes, and relevant documents that could lead to the development of preliminary ideas about categories, coding, and relationships about possible themes (Yazan, 2015). Cross-case analysis and synthesis apply to case studies involving the collection of data from more than a single case and involves coding of data following the initial review of data (Guetterman, 2015).

Başkarada (2014) noted the importance of descriptive, topic, and analytical coding in the qualitative data analysis process. Descriptive coding involved the identification of broad topics I wished to develop. Topic coding involved those issues that became apparent during data analysis. Analytical coding was a process of arranging data into the abstract form. I applied all three coding processes following the initial review of data.

Integral to the coding process is what Başkarada (2014) described as the OTTR model, otherwise known as the processes of observing, thinking, testing, and revising during case study data analysis. The OTTR model planned for applications in this research requires during and after data collection, researchers think about the meanings of data collected; this process of thinking may lead to ideas about additional types of data required for triangulation as necessary and appropriate for confirming existing interpretations (Eno & Dammak, 2014; Hyett et al., 2014; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2016). Başkarada described testing that involves the collection of additional data that could lead to subsequent revisions of my initial interpretations; those revisions could lead to

additional testing phases. Like the concept of data saturation discussed by Marshall et al. (2013), this process continued until plausible explanations emerge, no unexplained data remained, or further interpretations seem impossible. As prior researchers described, the process continues until it fails to lead to new information or insights (Guetterman, 2015).

The constant comparative method follows, developed with the purpose of inductively discovering latent patterns in the words of multiple participants with attention to possible differences in interpretations or reports between case study participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The comparison is the main data analysis tool of qualitative data analysis, applied with the purpose of identifying constructs and grouping them into themes (Yazan, 2015). The main objective of the qualitative data analysis is the identification of conceptual similarities and differences in the data to reveal processes and patterns that researcher's group into major themes (Guetterman, 2015).

The conceptual plan included the aid of the software NVivo for coding leading to the identification of themes. According to QSR International (2015), NVivo allows for coding of data sources in ways that reference specific topics of interest. Such computer-aided coding brought relevant references together in what NVivo creates as nodes. NVivo's auto coding and query-based coding features help researchers move through large amounts of data more quickly and efficiently. Applications of the NVivo software also include the generation of visualizations and creation of reports and extracts that illustrate the patterns in the data to arrive at substantiated themes (QSR International, 2015). The focus of analysis remained on identifying key themes, correlating the key themes with the prior literature reviewed as well as newer studies published after

proposal approval, and the theoretical/conceptual framework established for the study.

The consideration of the findings considering the conceptual-theoretical framework and prior literature leads to the contribution of significant context; the explanation of findings, interpreted through the lens of the conceptual-theoretical framework, contributes to the usefulness of findings and conclusions (Grant & Osanloo, 2015).

Several prominent case study experts discussed the use of triangulation to improve the trustworthiness of case study findings (Anney, 2014; Baškarada, 2014; Hyett et al., 2014). Denzin (2012) discussed four types of triangulation in case study data analysis. Denzin discussed data triangulation as involving varied time, space, and persons; accordingly, data from more than one informant from more than one company provided a type of informant triangulation. Denzin described investigator triangulation as involving multiple observers; however, only I served as an observer and collected data for the study. Theory triangulation, according to Denzin, involves the application of multiple theoretical schemas during interpretations; however, the application of multiple theories was beyond the scope of this qualitative multiple case study. Denzin discussed methodological triangulation as data collection occurring through multiple within-method or between-method strategies; I collected more than one kind of qualitative data through more than one means leading to methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation applies to a combination (Denzin, 2012), such as with the combination of the informant and methodological triangulation planned for this qualitative multiple case study. Data analysis began informally and continued during transcription until the theme becomes evident based on the response received. I focused data collection around

keywords and phrases of the theme of acquiring contracts. Once I code responses into proper themes, I organized data by codes for ease in identifying and aggregating themes for analysis.

Reliability and Validity

Case study experts discussed issues of reliability and validity and suggested different means for approaching rigor in qualitative case study research (Anney, 2014; Konradsen, Kirkevold, & Olson, 2013; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2016). The majority of Qualitative research and case study experts discussed the issues of reliability and validity regarding the trustworthiness of the research (Yazan, 2015). That trustworthiness includes dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability, addressed in the following subsections.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the reliance upon a defensible and defensible design, in which findings remain stable over time (Anney, 2014). Study replication was beyond the scope of this research. However, an audit trail, triangulation, and peer scrutiny may improve the expectation repeated or future studies occurring among similar contexts with like conditions would result in similar findings (Morse, 2015). An audit trail represents the thorough documentation of research steps, decisions, and activities with the purpose of recording the justifications and rationales about choices such as sampling selections, data collection, data organization, and analysis (Yazan, 2015). Providing an audit trail involves the recording, organization, and safekeeping of data for a period that enables

others to cross-check and verify findings, including those involved in the peer scrutiny process (Anney, 2014; Yazan, 2015).

Peer scrutiny heightens dependability of reported findings due to the heightened rigor added transparency and by my explanations and defense of findings; peer scrutiny extends to the involvement of experts in qualitative research to improve the dependability of findings and the likelihood other trained experts would arrive at the same or similar conclusions (Morse, 2015). The opportunity for participants to engage in member checking heightens the dependability by enlisting participants to correct errors and challenge what they may perceive as wrong interpretations (Anney, 2014). To ensure member checking, I asked participants to review data collected for accuracy and ask for clarity of answers provided by participants. Secondly, I allowed participants to provide additional inputs into the findings from my data analysis.

Credibility

The term credibility pertains to the confidence levels of readers about the truthfulness of study findings (Anney, 2014). Credibility relates to the plausibility of the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data (Hyett et al., 2014). Qualitative researchers address rigor by adopting recommended strategies to enhance credibility (Noble & Smith, 2015). The strategies selected for this qualitative multiple case study include assessing my experience in the field, use of purposive sampling techniques, methodological triangulation, member checking, peer scrutiny, and refined interview protocols, all recommended strategies discussed by research experts (Anney, 2014; Eno & Dammak, 2014; Takyi, 2015; Yazan, 2015).

Many qualitative researchers have prior experiences with the subject or sites that are the focus of research or were at some time immersed in the participants' worlds (Check et al., 2014; Greene, 2014). This prior immersion informs me with insights into the context of a study (Greene, 2014; Takyi, 2015). The experiences can minimize distorted interpretations or introduce bias, so recognition of sources of bias heightens credibility of the study (Yazan, 2015). Prior immersion can also facilitate the purposeful sampling strategy that is also a source of credibility (Palinkas et al., 2013). As the primary researcher, I was familiar with the surroundings of the study and can express some level of understanding of the core issues; research experts claimed the familiarity could lead to trust and rapport, so participants feel comfortable providing honest, thorough, and detailed data (Dikko, 2016; Takyi, 2015; McDermid et al., 2014).

Peer scrutiny of the research steps and findings exposes the project to rigorous standards. Peer scrutiny offers researcher's opportunities to justify, explain, and defend choices and discuss insights and interpretations (Morse, 2015). Peer scrutiny promotes transparency and consideration of alternative viewpoints, additional findings, and explainable conclusions (Moravcsik, 2014). Peer scrutiny is inherent to the doctoral level research process that involves scholarly guidance from committee members, review boards, research methodology experts, and other peers to improve the credibility of the research process, findings, and conclusions (Anney, 2014).

Methodological triangulation involving interview data, documents, and observations heightened credibility through the analysis of multiple sources of data. Triangulation helped reduce bias and provide opportunities for cross-examination of the

data collected from participants. A collection of different data enhances the study and can lead to more accurate, complete, and insightful results and conclusions (Yazan, 2015).

To ensure the credibility of the study, I used member checking. Member checking addresses issues of credibility (Kornbluh, 2015). Member checking is a recommended approach to quality enhancement, especially when recorded interview data undergo transcriptions to textual data (Anney, 2014). Member checking helps eliminate sources of researcher biases during the collection and organization of data (Harvey, 2014). Member checking involves participants' reviews of the analysis and interpretation data to confirm accounts, offer changes, or make additions they perceive are necessary and appropriate (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Member checking ensures researchers capture and analyzes the most credible information about participants' actual viewpoints and experiences (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

Transferability

Transferability pertains to how the results of the study appropriately transfer to other contexts; the concept of transferability is similar to the purpose of generalizability of quantitative study results (Morse, 2015). The appropriate transferability of qualitative research results is dependent on the prudent judgments readers (Anney, 2014). However, researchers can improve the likelihood of appropriate judgments of readers by providing thick descriptions and using a purposeful sampling strategy (Morse, 2015). Because the sampling strategies applied in this qualitative multiple case study involve detailed information and descriptions about the selection of participants, noted by research experts as important steps (Palinkas et al., 2013), detailed documentation about the criteria and

thick descriptions of the selection process help readers make prudent judgments about appropriate transferability. Thick descriptions include extensively detailed facts about the research population, sample, method, design, and context research experts claim can improve the likelihood others can make well-informed judgments about transferability (Morse, 2015).

Confirmability

Research efforts and interpretations of findings confirmed by other represent the concept of confirmability (Anney, 2014). The means to confirmability of qualitative multiple case study research are similar to those activities that heighten dependability and credibility, such as the generation of an audit trail, the process of triangulation, and peer scrutiny (Anney, 2014; Morse, 2015). A reflexive journal additionally helps provide proofs I reflected on the steps leading to the interpretations from the study (McDermid et al., 2014). The reflexive journal for this qualitative multiple case study includes recordkeeping of the events, personal reflections, and assessments related to my steps, processes, perceptions, and interests, by the recommendations of qualitative case study research experts. The interviews continued until I reached data saturation. Saturation is the point at which a qualitative researcher does not discover new information from additional data collected (Marshall et al., 2013).

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included the role of the researcher, the selection of the method and design aligned with research questions, justifications, and rationales for those choices. I also defined the population, justified ideal sampling strategies, and described the means

of data collection including an address of potential bias, as suggested by research experts (Fassinger & Morrow, 2013; Guetterman, 2015; Hyett et al., 2014). Data collection includes an audio recording of interviews with Dragon Naturally Speaking, transcribing verbatim texts, creating records of observations, soliciting documents and records for the organization, and analysis, as recommended by case study experts (Baškarada, 2014; Fassinger & Morrow, 2013; Hyett et al., 2014). Electronic data exist as documents in the appropriate computer programs, suggested by prior researchers to deconstruct, reconstruct, and reflect the realities of the data (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2016). Methods to heighten the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of the study stem from recommendations of case study experts who suggested triangulation, peer scrutiny, member checking, thick descriptions, and a reflexive journal (Anney, 2014). Use of NVivo during data analysis was used for coding of data sources in ways that reference specific topics of interest to bring relevant references together in what NVivo creates as nodes, leading to key themes (QSR International, 2015). The explanation of the thematic findings considering the conceptual-theoretical framework and prior literature contribute to the usefulness of findings and conclusions (Grant & Osanloo, 2015).

Section 3 follows with the findings and results. The section includes the applications of the results of the study to professional practices. The conclusions were drawn and address the implications of this qualitative multiple case study to social change lead to the recommendations for leadership and future study. The section concludes with the researcher's reflections and conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore strategies that small business owners utilize to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability. The population encompassed small business owners who acquired federal contracts in the security industry. Section 3 includes the details of the sample and the data analysis that led to the thematic findings for this study. The presentation of findings leads to a comparison of the thematic findings to previously published research and a discussion of the results situated in the RBV conceptual framework for this study.

Following the presentation and discussion of findings, the section continues with explanations about how the findings apply to professional practices and may lead to positive social change. Consideration of the results and limitations of the study helped form the recommendations for leadership and suggestions for further research. The section ends with my reflections and concluding thoughts about this study.

Presentation of the Findings

The research question for this study was the following: What strategies do small business owners use to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability? I used qualitative data analysis to identify the three major themes outlined in this section. Three participants completed the informed consent process and followed through with answering interview questions. I downloaded the recorded electronic audio files from the interviews into my personal computer and transcribed the audio files into verbatim text that represented the interview data from the interview sessions. Transcriptions occurred

in word processing files, and NVivo supported the computer-aided qualitative data analysis process.

The three participants in this study were recruited due to their established success in winning government contracts in the security industry. Topics discussed as additional data for triangulation included business plans, revenue statements, personal biographies of participants, records indicating repeat business based on past performance, and human resource roles and responsibilities. Member checking occurred following the formulations of my initial interpretations of data, which resulted in the conclusions that the initial interpretations of data reflected the strategies participants used to procure government contracts successfully. The following subsections contain a detailed report of the thematic findings that emerged from the data collected for this study.

The discussions of the thematic findings from this study occur considering the conceptual framework for this study. Providing explanations about the relationship of the three major themes to the existing literature and conceptual framework are the purpose of the following subsections. Explanations about the relationship of the three major themes to the existing literature and conceptual framework include how the results are consistent or inconsistent with previously published peer-reviewed literature and RVB that represented the framework for this qualitative case study.

Theme 1: Planning for Specific Target Markets

The major planning theme included subthemes that pertained to targeting both government and civilian (also called commercial) customer bases and targeting specific segments of the government in a top-down approach. Documentation offered in support

of this theme included a review of revenue summaries, which included revenues from both civilian and government markets as well as revenues that reflected a strategic focus on specific government agencies. Table 2 includes the findings from the data that led to the first major theme. There were 14 references to the idea of planning. The notion of general planning encompassed the idea that two of the three participants felt planning benefitted them as a strategy for successfully winning government contracts. The third participant admitted to poor planning but would not suggest poor planning as a strategy.

Table 2

References to Planning for Target Markets

Major theme	References	Frequencies
Theme 1: Planning for specific target markets.	Plan(ing)	14
	Commercial	23
	Civilian	5
	Sector	5
	Top-down	5
	Segments	18

About general planning, P1 said, “Know your possibilities. Have a plan.”

However, P2 said, “I have no plan. That’s probably one of my problems . . . but nobody has ever asked me for a business plan; nobody's ever asked me for a marketing plan or a strategy plan.” P2 added, “I just tell folks, that's my story, and I don't recommend that for anybody.” P3 advised, “Create the business plans to set goals, and strategic plan. . .

We've been able to plan carefully, strategically . . . those relationships with our customers, and their contracting offices, and the agencies." The major planning theme that emerged from the data involved goals and ways to strategically achieve those goals.

Rice et al. (2015) stressed the concept that business performance stems in part from purposeful strategies, which is consistent with the data in this study. All three participants in this study emphasized the importance of planning and targeting specific markets through a purposeful, strategic approach. Participants expressed strategies that illustrated the relationship that Messersmith and Wales (2013) described between managerial practices, philosophies, and reported growth. The participants' emphases on planning were also consistent with what Ferguson (2012) reported about small business owners who complete some strategy based on their business planning process. Jaouen and Lasch (2015) claimed small business owners have varied and sometimes profoundly divergent views, which was consistent with the finding that P2 expressed regarding experiences with planning processes that were divergent from the other two participants in the study. However, all three participants reported that they were successful in winning government contracts; therefore, those divergent views were not associated with substantial effects on their revenue generation from government contracts. Strategic posturing, considering RBV, helps explain the competitive behaviors that lead to business performance (Jang, 2013), representing an idea that converges with the participants' ideas related to planning.

Targeting both government and commercial customers. According to all three participants in the study, planning should include targeting both government and

commercial civilian customers. There were 23 references to commercial markets by the three participants. There were five references to the sector and five references to the civilian market.

P1 said, “You may have to do 90% federal government, but you have to do 10% commercial.” P1 explained, “They don’t want you to become dependent, so they force you as a requirement for staying in their program to generate revenue from both sides of the house, commercial and government.” P2 discussed the need to work with a variety of different kinds of customers in the different sectors, with emphasis on the different people who make up those sectors, claiming, “We're agile, you have to work with people.” P3 said, “We have capabilities and work effort we can use or believe is marketable to the commercial market, . . . marketing for contracts and work, work on a totally different plane, or means by which you attain contracts, then the federal sector.” The major planning subtheme that pertained to targeting both government and civilian customer bases involved flexibility in revenue generating strategies.

The revenue generating actions to stimulate business that Shields and Shelleman (2013) identified included increasing demand and market diversification, which were consistent with the targeting of both government and commercial or civilian markets that participants in this study described. Regarding revenue-generating strategies, Price, Stoica, et al., (2013) identified market and product diversification as successful small business strategies, which was not entirely consistent with the expressed strategies of participants in this study. Although participants described levels of market diversification, they did not stress product diversification and instead discussed

narrowing products and services in a type of specialization approach to winning government contracts. Participants did agree that an appropriate level of market diversification helps them maintain a wider client base than just the government, which Price, Stoica, et al., claimed can prevent overdependence on limited buyers. Establishing specific goals with government and civilian or commercial customers was a finding consistent with what Ferguson (2012) reported about successful small business owners who create goals and monitor progress toward achieving objectives.

Top-down targeting of specific government segments. According to all three participants in the study, planning should target agencies and specific segments through a top-down approach. There were 18 references to segments, with five references to a type of top-down approach. P1 said, “Our first approach is to determine what segment of the market/population we want to target. Be it government or be it commercial, we have to determine who would be our primary customers.” P1 added, “Depending on the level we’re aiming for, we try to target from the top-down; . . . the headquarters will procure for the entire group. . . There are certain targets, certain components headquarters will take off for a lot of their agencies.”

P2 admitted to having no strategy except to stay with the segments already secured. The top-down approach to P3 meant securing new business from old business. For example, P3 said, “When I get a customer, I just stay with that customer and just grow that particular contract. . . Your best customer is the one that you have; . . . customers often turn you onto another customer because you provided good services for them.” P3 said, “I designed and sent most of my work and strategy towards the customer

based on a certain segment. . . We have contracts in other federal sector areas, but we target most of them, in specific segments.” P3 added, “I have learned that if you try to do too many things, and you usually end up doing, not so well; . . . we limit the number of agencies, because of small businesses, you know, tend to be unable to have enough resources to go in all areas.” The major planning subtheme pertained to targeting specific segments of the government in a top-down approach.

The consensus of the participants expressed in the data was that planning should target agencies and specific segments through a top-down approach. Price, Rae, et al., (2013), as well as the participants in this study, claimed that business successes could stem from the discretion of business owners in the selection of their revenue-generating strategies. The finding in this study of a successful strategy that involves targeting government segments is consistent with the previous reports by Bell (2012) that enhanced understanding of target market segments is a critical aspect of effective revenue-generation management strategies. Nicholas and Fruhmann (2014) claimed that targeting 99% of the market may be unrealistic, consistent with the participants’ descriptions of specialization and focus on a limited number of segments to successfully win government contracts.

Theme 2: Development of Core Competencies

The development of core competencies emerged from the data as a second major theme. Table 3 includes a summary of the findings from the data that led to the identification of the second theme and related subthemes. Participants referred to competencies on six occasions during the interviews, with 17 references to the concept of

“core” competencies, knowledge, and strengths. Subthemes pertained to the background and experiences of an effective staff, mentoring and resource development for the development of core competencies and understanding of government contract procurement, and the idea of past performance as a significant resource. Documentation in support of this theme included the personal biographies of participants, discussions regarding repeat business based on past performance, and human resource roles and responsibilities, as outlined below.

Table 3

Core Competency Data

Major theme	References	Frequencies
Theme 2: Development of core competencies.	Core	17
	Competencies	6
	Military	20
	Background	9
	Experiences	16
	Staffing/Employees	20
	Mentoring	8
	Past performance	17

About core competencies, knowledge, skills, and strengths, P1 said, “our initial core competency...this particular skill set of tasks had prepared us to venture out into the three primary areas that now make up what we consider our core competencies.”

Although P2 did not refer to the concept of the core, as did P1 and P3, P2 did talk about

strengths and the need to “know what's your base of self-assessment.” P3 advised, “developing and understanding what your strength are...find your core strength, what you do best, marketing yourself for those things.” P3 added, “Our customers and clients we are familiar with our core competencies ... we pick the opportunities of the work based on the core strengths in security, protection, training, administrative services, and strategic planning.” The development and identification of core competencies were essential to the strategic success of participants in procuring government contracts in the securities industry.

Participants referred to competencies, with an emphasis on core competencies, knowledge, and strengths that they relied upon to help them win government contracts. All the participants in this study, like Gupta et al. (2013), credited resources, synergy, and employee competencies for business success. Aligned with what Gupta et al. previously reported, participants described the importance of their orientation of these competencies toward functional areas such as operations, human capital and resource development, and strengthening of internal, collective capabilities. The assumption of the RBV theory is bundles of underlying organizational resources may be tacit and therefore difficult to surface by formal analysis efforts (Ferlie, 2014); therefore, competitors find imitation difficult, or planners may be unable to replicate good practices (Burton & Rycroft-Malone, 2014). Participants in this study credited their backgrounds and experiences as well as their successful past performance as unique resources responsible for winning government contracts, consistent with the practical applications of the RBV theory that Ferlie (2014) and Burton and Rycroft-Malone (2014) described.

Background and experiences of an effective staff. Participants mentioned the relevance of their backgrounds (nine references) and experiences (14 references) to their success in obtaining government contracts. All three participants relied upon their personal backgrounds and experiences in the military as beneficial in their strategies to secure government contracts.

There were 20 military references in the interview data from all three participants. About personal background and experiences, P1 said, “Put your skill sets together, based on your individual background ...I tend to rely heavily on my military background and the military background of a lot of the staff members I have because of this common practice for the military.” P2 talked about “using your background experience and training to seek government contracts...You have to kind of know your environment” and develop “institutional knowledge” starting with the leader’s background and experiences. P3 said, “I am the core person for the company. I base it on my core knowledge, strength, and background, and based upon that in the security area.” P3 added, “Core strengths are what service, abilities, and capabilities you have, that you can market to the customer base that you have...my, core training and strength came, again, from the military.” On government contract procurement in the security industry, there appears to be a benefit, according to participants, to prior military experiences.

About effective staffing, there were 20 references regarding the importance of the roles that employees and staff have in winning government contracts. P1 said, “I developed a core group of people that led the front lines that got us through the different doors... [I could] analyze their experience and either tailor or modify their approach to

meet my company's needs." P1 added, "And, my ability to say I have this many people on staff with a combined, 200 plus years of experience in this field is gonna give me a distinct edge on a lot of my competitors." P2 said, "I think the competitive edge would be that person who's in charge of that company or that person who's in charge of that particular contract...the person that's representing that company . . . that director or program manager." P2 added, "If that person is, doesn't have people skills that could make or break your contract." P3 emphasized, "Understanding the hiring practices for employees, developing the benefits packages, managing people, giving direction, and guidance, taking care of those folks and using the information they do." P3 added, "Being technically smart about what your customer base needs and employees that you hire, what they need to do, and how they do it, is what gets you there." Optimal staffing and human resources appeared to be strategies beneficial to government contract procurement in the security industry.

Sheehan (2014) demonstrated that human resource practices positively enhance sustained competitive advantages, consistent with the reported experiences of the participants in this study. The participants' emphases on including employees in planning and market orientation are also consistent with the reported strategies by Donnelly et al. (2015) who noted small business owners should include employees, both formally and informally to enhance the effectiveness of their organizations. According to the participants in this study and Sonfield (2014), when business owners have limited time and resources to do everything required to manage a business, dependence on employees, staff and other resources including outsourcing with contractors is a viable business

strategy. Like Noor (2013) stated, participants expressed the idea that others who possess needed skills and assets could be advantageous to organizations lacking competencies and resources. The participants' descriptions of harnessing the background and experiences of staff to expand resources and core competencies were consistent with the tactics reported by Price, Rae, et al. (2013), that involved business owners are strategically building resources through relationships that can help overcome limitations to performance outcomes. Jayawarna et al. (2014) similarly noted that investments in human capital could lead to diverse and collective educational and work experiences accrued to enhance entrepreneurial success.

Mentoring and resource development. There were eight references to mentoring in the data, in addition to related concepts. P1 said, "You're a great business person, but you're gonna need somebody to guide you through the federal arena... I would tell any business owner to find you an associate or mentor ... you can rely on." P1 added, "It's gonna be a costly learning experience if you don't because you're competing against a lot of people that already understand what you don't know and what you're trying to know." P1 continued, "The best training I received was from mentorship... find a successful veteran business owner who's been in the system for a while, which you can call on, can talk to, advise you... that is the best training by far." P2 said, "I did a little ... they showed me how to do brochures and marketing." P3 said, "guidance, taking care of those folks and using the information they do." Mentoring and the development of related resources appeared to be strategies beneficial to government contract procurement in the security industry.

Participants in this study described mentoring in similar terms used by Coad et al. (2016), which was a personal relationship that can enhance the knowledge and competence of mentees. Scurry et al. (2013) provided examples of how individuals who do not receive formal training can embrace mentorship that can help them achieve successes, which was consistent with the experiences described by participants in this study on winning government contracts. Bublak (2014) studied small business representatives from the District of Columbia in a phenomenological study about federal government contract procurement. Bublak revealed 100% of the study respondents believed a mentor-protégé program would be successful if there were incentives for these types of partnerships. Although participants did not identify the SBA mentor-protégé program as particularly beneficial to them, they did identify incentives for participating in mentorship, which included the benefits of reliance on experienced advisors, receiving basic training and guidance through the federal arena, and understanding competition, among other benefits.

Past performance as a significant resource. There were 17 references to the past and past performance discussed by all three participants in this study. P1 said, “call your past performance a resource that’s going to enhance your competitive nature... I classify your past performance as a resource... it is the best resource that we have and that we will ever have, bar anything else.” P1 asked, “Do I spend tons of money to look good on a website or paper, or do I spend the time to make sure my reputation and the work I’ve done far exceeds any expectation and can speak greater than anything?” P1 answered, “Agencies and contracting officers wanted to know your reputation and based

on your past performance; that's how they know your reputation . . . past performance will do a lot for you." P2 said, "Take care of what you apparently have. That's your first goal, take care of what you currently have. Don't step out further than you need to, but take care of what you currently have." P3 said, "The customer base started, based on my prior experience . . . the customer base grew into multiple opportunities . . . my experience has been that we usually win contracts and get more contracts, based upon the customer base that we know." P3 added, "As we grow, expanding out to other agencies to do . . . our customers are our best sources to learn about new opportunities." Maintaining positive records of past performance appeared to be a strategy beneficial to government contract procurement in the security industry.

The RBV encompasses the idea that valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources are the collective basis of business competitiveness, competitive advantages, and performance (Jang, 2013), which were the overarching sentiments expressed by participants in this study. According to this sample, the accumulation of valuable and rare resources and competitive advantages stem from past business performance. Johnson et al. (2013) noted that partnerships with government agencies build trust, commitment, and better relationships between small businesses and government agencies, which are concepts that participants cited are crucial to their ongoing success in winning government contracts. Jalali et al. (2014), considering RBV applications, focused on entrepreneurial orientation toward customer relations as capital and how customer capital shapes firm perform, which was concepts that converged with

the participants' claims that building reputations and relational capital with government agencies was a strategy that led to their contracting success.

Theme 3: Knowledge of Audience, Assets, and Niche

Table 4 includes a summary of the concepts that emerged from the data that led to the identification of the third major theme and related subthemes. Participants discussed the idea of knowing their audience 5 times, which participants also related to fostering of relationships, cited 11 times. References to assets occurred eight times in the data.

The idea of knowing the niche or establishing expertise in a certain type of market occurred an additional 5 times in the data, with more discussions that revolved around these same ideas. Subthemes that pertained to this major theme included developing knowledge of audiences, becoming smart before one starts, and developing and maintaining relationships as a major company asset. Documents supporting this theme included business plans outlining assets and target audiences. Although there were no specific references to learning and knowledge, participants described the different means they used to build knowledge as an asset for procuring government contracts, as described below.

Table 4

Reference to Audience, Assets, and Niche

Major theme	References	Frequencies
Theme 3: Knowledge of audience, assets, and niche.	Education/Learning	24
	Knowledge	11
	Smart	8

Audience	5
Relationship(s)	11
Assets	8
Niche	5

Participants in this study provided data consistent with what Garriga (2014) stressed the importance of knowledge exchange regarding value creation, appraisals of business capabilities, evaluation of management practices and feedback geared toward generating optimal performance and profit-building. The RBV theory represents the relationship between the accumulation of valuable and rare resources, competitive advantages, and business performance (Gupta et al., 2013), all concepts that participants described in other words during their interviews. The participants attribute their successes in winning government contracts to those assets they believed were unique and different from their competitors. Based on that idea, the participants in this study emphasized the importance of recognizing those assets and how they represent a niche that aligns well with their audience (target markets and potential customers).

Knowledge of the audience. P1 said, “We don’t eliminate anyone, but if we’re sending a salesforce out, and are going to minimize the use of our sales force . . . we send our salesforce out the door with a client in mind, a target audience, not just randomly.” P1 explained, “We wanna know before we head out the door where we’re going, what we’re going for, what our potential is, and try to be effective, and we’re going to reduce sales cost with that approach as well.” P1 added, “arrow down your target; you know your audience, and the whole purpose and that strategy are to increase your percentages.”

About the concept of audience, P2 similarly stated, “I’m not one to do a blanket, broad, I’m just everywhere to everybody. I started off like that, and it wasn’t good for me . . . what I try to do is promote my customer to tell someone else.” About audience, P3 said, “We select our customers and clients. . . if you try to do too many things, you usually end up doing not so well . . . small businesses, you know, tend to be unable to have enough resources to go in all areas.” A good knowledge of the prospective audience appeared to be among the strategies beneficial to government contract procurement in the security industry.

The data in this study included expressed concepts that represented a difference between identifying target markets and developing knowledge about target markets; participants in this study believed that both were responsible for their success in winning government contracts. According to Gibbons (2015), small business owners act on knowledge gained about their audiences in their markets to ensure business growth, which is consistent with what participants expressed about the development of knowledge about their target audiences. Bell (2012) reported that enhanced understanding of customers and consumer segments is a critical aspect of effective revenue generation management strategies, which participants in this study described as knowledge of their target audiences.

Relationships as an asset. All three participants discussed the importance of relationships; this concept was cited 11 times during the interviews. P1 said, “your best asset is going to be your project or program manager running your contract on-site . . . they have to establish a relationship.” P2 said, “Business is about relationships,

period...there's so many small businesses out here, if I don't have a personal relationship with any one of them, they're not going to call me. It's all about personal relationships.” P2 added, “you get a Business Developer that knows some opportunities because of his relationships or her relationships... that's the only way you're gonna grow the business.” P3 said, “my experience and success in government contracting, started from my own personal, professional relationships.” The cultivation of relationships, as assets, appeared to be among the key strategies beneficial to government contract procurement in the security industry.

According to Liu et al. (2013) and the participants in this study, the development of relationships and partnerships generates capital, enhances business goals, strengthens competitive advantages, and facilitates job satisfaction. Small business owners who develop stakeholder understanding can build long-term strategic relationships (Delgado-Ceballos et al., 2012), which are tactics that participants in this study identified as central to their successful strategies for winning government contracts. Gao et al. (2012) and Gibbons (2015) reported that small business success could stem from the cultivation of networks and relationships geared toward strategic sustainability, also described by participants in this study as an asset responsible for their government contract success. Johnson et al. (2013) described how relationships with government agencies could build trust and commitment, which participants in this study described as among the main reasons they cultivated and nurtured relationships with leaders in government agencies. According to Pitsis et al. (2016), learning and knowledge attained through alliances, such as partnerships and the preservation of knowledge-rich relationships, can enhance

business performance, which was concepts that participants also expressed during their interviews for this study.

Becoming smart before one starts. There were 24 references to education and learning in the interview data from all three participants, with eight references referring to being smart and 11 references to having knowledge. About being smart, P1 said to, “be smart before you start, rather than a whole lot of on-the-job training . . . if you could know a lot of the pitfalls, it would help your survivability.” P2 said, “I’m not a smart guy, I can outwork you, but I’m not smart . . . I learned this very early in the game . . . Often, you’re hiring people that are a lot smarter than you are . . . They don’t teach this in school.” P3 advised, “being technically smart about what your customer base needs . . . understanding and developing and having knowledge to, to run and operate a business, and when you have that basic background and knowledge, then you can achieve the rest.” The attainment of relevant knowledge through learning appeared to be among the successful strategies beneficial to government contract procurement in the security industry.

About knowledge, P1 said, “I consider the strength is that the owner in most cases, is the most knowledgeable, most effective sales, business developer, a finder that any business is gonna have.” P1 added that some, “small businesses don’t have the knowledge and the experience to go about acquiring what is available to them. And for that reason, light needs to be shed on the fact that it is doable.” P2 claimed that staff contributed the most knowledge to his business and successful government contract revenues, describing the staff as, “institutional knowledge guys.” P3 said, “When you

have that basic background and knowledge, then you can achieve the rest by developing and attending forums and classes to help you get the contract... training programs for businesses who want to obtain, the knowledge and the edge.” P3 claimed, “Investing in those techniques and skills and training your employees is what helps you be better prepared to identify the right contracts to go after and make decisions to minimize resources and improve your probability of success.” Investments in education, skills, and training related to the steps of government contract procurement appeared to be strategies beneficial to government contract procurement in the security industry.

About learning, P1 said, “You’re gonna be 5 people initially . . . you’re trying to learn to be a manager, a technical expert, a marketing guru, finance, and accounting... a lot of small businesses give up on their journey . . . It takes a while to learn.” P1 described, “way too many new tasks... taking on as many roles as you can until you get funding . . . I was it, I went to a small business banking class and started to get going . . . Learn proposal preparation. That’s key.” P3 said, “I have attended some of those courses... many of those things have been beneficial and useful for the staff, and the team that I hire.” P3 talked about, “Determining the right time to use the SBA programs because there is a tremendous amount of training resources . . . you can send your staff and employees . . . contract management, contract administration, business development, accounting, you name it.” P3 added that although one can learn through “all the tools and things you need to make your business successful and grow . . . when you are a one or two-person company, it doesn’t serve you as well, because you learn everything yourself, and nobody else.” Learning appeared to be strategies beneficial to government contract

procurement in the security industry; however, participants did warn against trying to assume too much too soon.

Davee et al. (2016) and Galloway et al. (2015) stressed the role of formal and informal education in entrepreneurial success. Ferguson (2012) further noted that associations and community-based networks could help small businesses become or remain successful; however, the consensus in the data was that participants felt these associations and networks were sources of information useful for starting a business or after hiring staff. The participants in this study, like Ferguson, also reported planning, use of professional advisors, education, and optimal staffing significantly related to business successes. The small business leaders in this study felt that participation in educational programs that emphasize the skills and concepts required to successfully win government contracts helped them and their staff more effectively implement their revenue management strategies, which coincided with the advice of Shields and Shelleman (2013) for identifying small business opportunities and threats.

The study findings of Chinomona (2013) were that expertise and skill set training had a great impact on small business performance, which was concepts expressed by participants in this study. As evident in a study completed by Shields and Shelleman (2013), small business owners who access educational programs to gain knowledge and skills can be more effective and implement management strategies that will generate more revenues for their businesses. Participants similarly emphasized a successful strategy for winning government contracts involved the access of their staff to educational programs to gain knowledge and skills that can help staff members become

more effective in generating government contract revenues for their businesses. The accumulation of knowledge and skills that participants described represents the types of accumulation of valuable resources that, according to the RBV, can lead to competitive advantages that boost business performance (Gupta et al., 2013).

Summary of Thematic Findings

This case study involved triangulation of multiple data sources that led to three major themes. Table 5 includes a summary of the three major themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. Participants reported the need to plan to target both government and commercial civilian customers. In the process of identifying government contract opportunities, participants suggested planning to target agencies and specific segments through a top-down approach. The participants emphasized the importance of developing core competencies and discussed how their personal backgrounds and experiences improved their success in obtaining government contracts. It was evident that participants in the study relied upon effective staffing choices that could also help facilitate government contract awards. The most important competence participants felt helped them the most in their competition to win government contracts is past performance. Mentoring and resource development were additional strategies that participants felt boosted their government contract competence. There was an obvious consensus in the data collected from all three participants that knowing one's audience, assets and niche was essential to successful government contract work. Data included the importance of planning for education and training before embarking on a process to bid for government contracts.

Table 5

Summary of Thematic Findings

Major Themes and Subthemes
<hr/> Theme 1: Planning for Specific Target Markets. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeting both government and commercial customers. Top-down targeting of specific government segments.
Theme 2: Development of Core Competencies. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Background and experiences of an effective staff. Mentoring and resource development. Past performance as a significant resource.
Theme 3: Knowledge of Audience, Assets, and Niche. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of the audience. Relationships as an asset. Becoming smart before one starts. <hr/>

Applications to Professional Practice

The three major themes and subthemes apply directly to professional practices. The findings of this study apply to professional practices of small business leaders and government leaders interested in meeting government contracting goals. This study is significant to the field of management, contributing to existing research about small business practices in acquiring contracts to operate in the shifting economic dynamics of the 21st century. Nijmeijer, Huijsman, and Fabbriotti (2014) noted that government

funding, together with a strong reputation, can legitimize small businesses and increase the likelihoods that small businesses will survive, demonstrate positive financial performance and growth, and capitalize on competitive advantages.

Applications to professional practice include contributions to the field of leadership engagement concerning securing government contracts as avenues to stay afloat during economic recessions. Research efforts focused on small business leadership and government contract procurement can advance innovation, development solutions for specific societal needs, and reduce the risks of small business failures through access to government support that may enhance the likelihood of commercial successes (Johnson et al., 2013). The findings contribute to knowledge about small business practices, providing small business leaders with an understanding of strategies for improving participation in acquiring federal contracts.

Strategic procurement practices used to secure federal government contracts may lead to long-term contracts or smaller repeating purchasing orders issued over defined periods of time, thereby supporting mutual relationships derived from the American procurement systems (Arney et al., 2014). Knowledge about winning government contracts can help small business owners consider diverse sources of revenues they may otherwise overlook. The applications of these findings by small business owners may help them compete for government contracts, helping to meet the unmet government goals for small business contract acquisitions.

Implications for Social Change

Findings from this study apply directly or indirectly to individuals, organizations, and society, with implications for social change. The consideration of the results of the study may lead to social changes stemming from the efforts of small business owners and government leaders. The implications of positive social change include opportunities for small business owners to use the findings in this study to increase business opportunities and put their companies to work to benefit the federal government and society in general. Small business owners, leaders, and scholars can use research findings about business processes to continue to expand their important roles in supporting American economic development, increasing employment, innovation, and tax revenues to support the needs of society (Van Looy & Shafagatova, 2016). Overcoming the underrepresentation of small businesses with diverse owners in federal government contract markets can reduce the disparities in government contracting and fuel competition leading to positive, social change. Use of these findings by small business owners of both genders in diverse demographic groups can help those owners strive to meet the government's contracting goals while also expanding opportunities for small business owners across a variety of industries and neighborhoods.

Recommendations for Action

The three major themes that emerged from the data analysis in this study led to the following recommendations for actions. The leadership of small businesses, government, and the SBA are in the best positions to make use of the results of this study because they are the individuals who can directly apply these findings in the practices and

programs. The recommendations, based on the results of the study, follow the same order of the thematic discussions presented earlier in the section.

The first theme that emerged from this study pertains to planning for specific target markets. Planning, according to participants, should include strategies for targeting both government and commercial customers. Gugler et al. (2015) recommended planning include government sources as a means for sustainability during economic crisis. Planning to target specific government segments in a top-down approach were also a part of the planning strategies that participants thought contributed to winning government contracts. The idea of planning encompasses the idea of being prepared for the work involved in researching, identifying, and pursuing revenue generating strategies that give the highest likelihood of winning government contract awards with the least amount of resources involved in the bidding process. Planning should involve staff members who are informed about market segments and who have the skills and knowledge to contribute to the planning process.

The second major theme that emerged from the data in this study pertains to the development of core competencies based on backgrounds and experiences of staff members. The idea of harnessing the background and experiences of staff includes first identifying the strengths of the business leaders and then enlisting staff members who can add to those competencies. Kneller et al. (2014) stressed the effectiveness of direct communications and the meeting of minds among staff to avoid the ineffectiveness that can stem from poorly defined goals or a lack of staff competence. Mentoring is a way to augment core competencies and is an avenue to resource development. Whether it is

through the SBA, private relationships or other avenues, mentoring should continue as a means to understanding how to win government contracts. According to participants in this study, past performance is a significant resource for winning government contracts. Accordingly, company leaders should strive to maintain positive past performance, which can lead to new business, based on reputation and the new referrals that stem from satisfied customers.

The third major theme that emerged from the data in this study pertains to knowledge of audience, assets, and niche. Small business leaders should assess their assets, their fit, and their knowledge of their audience and contracting processes to align those assets with the most appropriate audience. Although knowledge and training of all small business staff are essential strategies for learning about and bidding on government contracts, important assets, according to participants in this study, are relationships. Cultivating and maintaining positive relationships with stakeholders should involve small business staff and government employees from the SBA and government agencies to build valuable resources and assets that can expand growth through government contract revenues. However, leaders should remain aware that, because government policy can change over time, small businesses may significantly change their strategies in the future, to develop new knowledge to respond to the changing circumstances of their business environments (Karadimitriou, 2013).

Recommendations for Further Research

Scholars such as Miron-Shatz et al. (2014) advocated for ongoing research-based knowledge derived from bringing together the academic and business worlds in ways that

would maximize the success of start-up companies and small businesses. Accordingly, several suggestions for further qualitative and quantitative research are in the subsections below. The suggestions for further research are based on the three themes that emerged from the data analysis performed on the data collected for this study. The recommendations for future research pertain mostly to improved practices and practical applications in businesses, as well as ways to extend the research efforts that were subject to limitations identified in this study.

The first major theme that emerged from this study stemmed from data about planning for specific target markets. However, the three participants in this study were from a specific industry that specializes in the security industry. Research can expand to other industries, which may have small business owners who have divergent backgrounds and experiences utilized to acquire federal government contracts. It is possible that small business owners from other industries and with dissimilar backgrounds and experiences may suggest different strategies for targeting government and commercial customers. Flagg et al. (2013) emphasized the complex interactions between multiple sectors, methods of research, and the different stakeholders involved in different industries that could affect both businesses and societies.

The second major theme identified in this study revolves around the development of core competencies, based on backgrounds and experiences of small business staff. The ideas expressed here pertained to human resource practices, which could be the focus of additional research. The three participants in the study discussed how staff contributes to major competencies, so additional research could explore the more specific strategies

small business leaders use to align their human resource practices with the competencies required for government contracting success. Additional research could include the identification of how small business leaders align government contracting processes with human resource development. Because mentoring emerged as a subtheme, additional research about mentoring in small business government contract acquisition may also contribute more valuable knowledge about optimal and effective mentoring relationships. While participants in this study emphasized past performance as a significant resource, additional research could reveal the extent to which past performance could predict future success in the government contracting arena. Hsueh and Yan (2013) similarly suggested the development of an assessment model to serve as an indicator of relative competitiveness that can help small business leaders, as contractors and subcontractors, evaluate themselves.

The third theme about knowledge of audience, assets, and niche stemmed from participants' perceptions that knowledge and relationships were essential assets that helped them win government contracts. Davies et al. (2013) viewed education for business leaders as important assets providing business leaders with essential business models, supplemented by individuals who operate successful businesses. However, there was some divergence in the data about the ideal time, programs, and the extent of the benefits they gained from different learning programs, including those provided by the SBA. Additional research into learning and training programs considered ideal for winning government contracts across different industries would be worthwhile. A comparison of the benefits of the different types of learning programs at different stages

of small business development and government contract procurement could help fill a gap in knowledge about the actual benefits of the different programs available to leaders who seek government contracts.

Reflections

My engagement in this DBA doctoral study process led to a greater appreciation for the ethical roles that scholars assume when they endeavor to undertake research. As a contributor to the body of knowledge, I also learned how to evaluate the credibility and relevance of diverse resources related to the research topic. I grew in my ability to act as an instrument for data collection and hones skills that including recognizing data saturation, conducting data analysis, and adhering to research protocols. The process of winning government contracts can be elusive to individuals like me who lack the background and experiences in this arena, which is why this research is important to those interested in narrowing the disparities between government contracting goals and small business procurement. The opportunity to engage in a research process that applies to professional practices with positive social implications fuels my interests in continuing scholarly efforts that can result in similarly significant outcomes.

Conclusion

The focus of modern applications of the RBV theory revolves around an organization's use of their value to create worth (Jang, 2013), which perfectly aligned with the sentiments expressed by participants in this study. RVB theory aligned with what the participants expressed was necessary to achieve their goal of government contract procurement. It was obvious that each participant's understanding of small

business assets, resources, and capabilities were necessary for the development of successful strategies in the procurement of government contracts. When strategies are applied, business owners can realize gains from their competitiveness, which was true for the participants in this study. Federal contract access, participation, and equity remain concerns within the business community and to policymakers in the federal government, but ongoing research and the implementation of recommendations based on a scholarly study of the problem contributes to solutions that can help to ease those concerns.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol with Company Owners

Interviewee: Time of Interview: Date:

Position of Interviewee:

I will use a qualitative case study to research strategies small business owners use to acquire federal government contracts. The interviewees will consist of company executive officers that are responsible for making decision to acquire government federal contracts. The intent of this study is to explore revenue generation strategies small business owners use to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability.

Questions:

1. How do you formulate your market segment strategy, in general?
2. How do you formulate your market segment strategy, with respect to government contracts?
3. What revenue generation strategies do you use to acquire federal government contracts to increase profitability?
4. What beneficial training have you received about securing government contracts?
5. With respect to government contracting, what assets of your business enhance the competitive state of your business?
6. What resources of your business enhance the competitive state of your business, with respect to government contracting?
7. What capabilities of your business enhance the competitive state of your business, on government contracting?

8. In participation with government contracts, what are your competitive strengths that help you secure government contracts?
9. Of everything you mentioned, what are the most important strategies for successfully acquiring government contracts?
10. What additional information would you like to add?

I will thank each participant and remind them again that no incentive is associated with this study, however; they will be provided a summary of the findings at the initial interpretation stage. I will also advise them in a couple of weeks; I will contact them with the findings of my analysis so they can comment on them and provide their input about the relevance and accuracy of those interpretations.

During this member checking period, I will ask each participant if there is any additional information that needs to be added to help add clarity, relevance, or accuracy to those interpretations of the data. Questions I plan to ask include:

1. Based on these interpretations, what do you think is correct, if anything?
2. Based on these interpretations, what do you think could be errors or wrong interpretations, if anything?
3. What in these interpretations would you want to challenge, if anything?
4. How do you think the interpretations may be more adequate or accurate?
5. What information do you think might add to these interpretations?

I will thank each participant and remind them again that no incentive is associated with this study, however; they will be provided a summary of the final published findings.