

LEARNING DISABILITY AS AN INFLUENCE ON  
ENTREPRENEURIAL CALLING AND SUCCESS

by

Christopher Stemple

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

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Liberty University, School of Business

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### **Abstract**

The phenomena identified as the relationship between learning disabilities, entrepreneurial calling, and entrepreneurial success or failure is a timely and relevant topic that necessitated exploration. To build upon this research, this qualitative case study was conducted. The goal of this case study research is to understand how learning disabilities affect the success or failure of entrepreneurs, while also exploring how the entrepreneur was called to be an entrepreneur. The first theme identified in this research study was individual entrepreneurial resilience. Entrepreneurial resilience, hardiness, and optimism were commonly found personality traits amongst research study participants. The second theme to emerge from this study is that individual characteristics, traits, and symptoms of those afflicted with learning disabilities have consequences and advantages. Some of the specific personal characteristics appear to be caused by the disability condition, whereas other personality traits arise due to the individual's ability to adapt to challenging situations. The descriptors of adaptation, compensation, flexibility, and delegation were found to be a commonality among the majority of research participants. In contrast, many participants spoke directly about their originality, positive affect, innovativeness, ability to multi-task, a propensity for risk-taking, an inclination towards creative thinking, and high energy. The third theme to arise from this research study involves the manner in which how those approach risk and risk mitigation with learning disabilities. Participants noted that elements of risk and hard work are behind almost every great success. However, many entrepreneurs worked very hard to minimize and diminish risk. The fourth and final theme to develop from this study surrounded the way that the learning-disabled entrepreneur found entrepreneurship. Many of the participants felt that entrepreneurship was truly a calling rather than a job and could identify an exact moment when they felt they became an entrepreneur.

*Key words:* learning disability, entrepreneurial calling, resilience, personality traits, risk-taking and mitigation

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## **Dedication**

Soli Deo Gloria.

### **Acknowledgments**

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### **Section 1: Foundation of the Study**

Even though the majority of small entrepreneurial business start-ups often fail, individuals with disabilities are twice as likely to be engaged in self-employed, entrepreneurial businesses compared to non-disabled individuals (Boso, Adeleye, Donbesuur, & Gyensare, 2018; Renko, Parker, Caldwell, & Harris, 2016; Viriri & Makurumidze, 2014). Although there is a high rate of participation of disabled individuals in the field of entrepreneurship when compared to those entrepreneurs without disabilities (Maritz & Laferriere, 2016), their success and failure experiences have not been highlighted, resulting in a dearth of academic and professional knowledge (Bagheri & Abbariki, 2017; Kabir, 2014; Saxena & Pandya, 2018). Additionally, evidence has shown that individuals who become entrepreneurs because of necessity are underrepresented in current studies, specifically those that are disabled with learning disabilities such as dyslexia and Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), as well as various other mental and physical disabilities (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017).

Attempting to understand and conceptualize the phenomenon recognized as the influence that learning disabilities have on entrepreneurial endeavors has not yet been highlighted in the current research studies. According to Verheul et al. (2015), little is known about the relationship between entrepreneurship and the extent of psychiatric symptoms, such as those found with individuals diagnosed with ADHD. The phenomena identified as the relationship between learning disabilities, entrepreneurial calling, and entrepreneurial success or failure is a timely and relevant topic that necessitates further exploration.

Research studies that do explore the disabled entrepreneur tend to underestimate the effects of physical and mental impairments in enabling or constraining new venture creation (Kašperová, Kitching, & Blackburn, 2018). As such, both the failures and successes of learning-

disabled entrepreneurs deserves further inquiry. The objective of the research study was to explore how learning disabilities affect an individual's entrepreneurial calling and success. Furthermore, illuminating how these entrepreneurs have both succeeded and failed forms the foundation of the study.

### **Background of the Problem**

Research has shown that individuals with disabilities are twice as likely to be engaged in self-employed, entrepreneurial businesses when compared to able-bodied individuals (Renko et al., 2016), with the majority of these small entrepreneurial business start-ups resulting in failure (Boso et al., 2018; Viriri & Makurumidze, 2014). Disabled individuals are generally entrepreneurial at a higher rate than other demographics, such as the general population, driven in part by the barriers to employment success encountered in the workplace (Kitching, 2014). Disabled individuals have long been called to entrepreneurial endeavors because of how society undervalues their potential for employment, thus often requiring this underserved group to create their economic opportunities and prosperity (Caldwell, Harris, & Renko, 2012; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017). Disabled entrepreneurs are often challenged to pursue life differently from other non-disabled entrepreneurs, as conventional approaches to life's barriers are frequently out of reach of a challenged population, while concurrently obtaining and using different skills necessary for survival (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017). For example, those afflicted with the learning disability dyslexia often experience useful personal attributes, some caused by the condition, and others by adaptation to it. Furthermore, those with dyslexia are innately able to "develop original ways of questioning and redefining situations and can see opportunities others fail to ever imagine" (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017, p. 12). As such, "many dyslexics

develop unusual right-brain capabilities having to do with creativity, superior interpretive capability, and intuition” (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017, p. 12).

Despite a plethora of research on entrepreneurship, there is a dearth of scholarship distinguishing those with or without disability (Bagheri & Abbariki, 2017; Kašperová et al., 2018; Renko et al., 2016; Saxena & Pandya, 2018). According to Verheul et al. (2015), little is known about the relationship between entrepreneurship and the extent of psychiatric symptoms, such as those found with individuals diagnosed with ADHD. Renko et al. (2016) offered several important directions for future research including contextualizing the entrepreneurial process of disabled individuals to help researchers better understand the nuances of the social context for entrepreneurship while illuminating the experiences of entrepreneurs with learning disabilities by providing a more socially aware analysis of mainstream management-driven studies of entrepreneurship (Renko et al., 2016). Additionally, Renko et al. (2016) propose that future research directions should examine the individual-level attributes and motivations of the disabled entrepreneur and how these characteristics interact and impact the differences observed between nascent entrepreneurs, both with and without disabilities.

Aligning with research by Renko et al. (2016), Saxena and Pandya (2018) note that there is a vast scope of future research that is needed to bridge the gaps spanning the divide between entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship for the disabled. Scholars consistently point to this gap, calling for research focusing specifically on entrepreneurs with disabilities. Research by Saxena and Pandya (2018) established that entrepreneurs with disabilities face unique external business challenges to success, including unequal opportunities, limitations in infrastructure and facilities, unwanted pity, and lack of awareness about the disabled. As such, Saxena and Pandya (2018)

suggest extending the scope of future research to include a detailed analysis of the entrepreneurial and managerial practices shared among entrepreneurs with disabilities.

### **Problem Statement**

The general problem to be addressed is there is a high rate of failure in the field of entrepreneurship (Alstete, 2014; Boso et al., 2018; Lee & Miesing, 2017), leading to financial, social, and emotional consequences (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2017). The specific problem addressed in the study is that there is a high rate of failure in the field of entrepreneurship among individuals with learning disabilities located in the United States, illuminating a gap in our understanding of whether these contributors to failure or success differ for disabled entrepreneurs.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the qualitative case study research was to explore the unique challenges, barriers, and solutions encountered by learning disabled entrepreneurs that appear to affect the success or failure of their entrepreneurial endeavors, while also examining how the individual was called to be an entrepreneur.

### **Nature of the Study**

The summation of worldviews, strategies, and methods combine to form a research inquiry methodology that is either quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method in construction (Creswell, 2014). The advantages and limitations between the three types of research methodologies are evident in the extant literature. The following section briefly defines the elements of each of the three research methodologies, namely qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research approaches.

### **Discussion of Method**

For the dissertation, the qualitative research methodology was utilized. Qualitative research methods can use a wide range of approaches, including interviews, case studies, and focus groups to obtain narrative-based data to understand a topic further and to generate a potential theory to describe a phenomenon (Claydon, 2015). Furthermore, the qualitative research methodology is a fundamental part of scholarship across all fields of study (Trainor & Leko, 2014).

#### **Qualitative research.**

The core goal of qualitative research is to give a voice to the exploration, understanding, and meaning of both groups and individuals to describe a human or social problem (Creswell, 2014). Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that numerous existing perspectives that describe, establish, and define the importance of validation and reliability as being core constructs within the domain of qualitative research. Creswell and Poth (2018) presented research in which the critical criteria for qualitative validation are found to be the overall research credibility, the research authenticity, the criticality of all aspects of the research, and the integrity of the researchers. Several strategies can be employed by the use of qualitative research to address issues surrounding validation. These core strategies are listed by Creswell and Poth (2018) as being trustworthiness, triangulation (Moen, 2006), peer reviews and external audits, and clarifying preexisting researcher bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

#### **Quantitative research.**

A quantitative research inquiry can be an optimal research method used to gather and analyze large amounts of data-centric information which usually results in findings that are then testable, evaluated, and verified using statistical functions (Bassett, Bassett, & Tanner, 2003). In



the instance of the quantitative research methodology, a high level of data reliability can be obtained from this approach (Bassett et al., 2003). As such, a quantitative research methodology is explanatory, deductive, and uses collected data to test a theory (Barczak, 2015; Claydon, 2015). The central goal is the development of reliable and accurate measurements and data that can be represented numerically and allowing for extensive statistical analysis (Goertzen, 2017).

### **Mixed-Method research.**

According to Creswell (2014), mixed-method research designs are placed on a continuum between qualitative and quantitative research designs, typically involving the combined use of both qualitative and quantitative data resulting in a single research design. Quantitative and qualitative research elements are interlinked and integrated into a mixed-method approach allowing a researcher to answer research questions with deeper thoroughness than would be possible by using a monomethod approach (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). Halcomb and Hickman (2015) noted that the integration of the qualitative and quantitative research elements could occur at any stage of the research process. Still, the integration of both qualitative and quantitative elements is central in ensuring absolute rigor in the mixed-method research design.

### **Discussion of Design**

Selecting a suitable method for thoroughly exploring a problem is a significant step in the research design process. After it has been determined that the qualitative research design is more closely aligned with the research problem to be examined, there are several different options available for inquiry design. These include grounded theory and ethnography, the narrative research approach, phenomenological research designs, and the case study research design.

### **Grounded Theory and Ethnography Design**

The grounded theory research method is a widely utilized qualitative research approach that aims to inductively refine issues of importance that affect specific groups of people, thus creating relevance and meaning about those subjects through the modeling and analysis of theory (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). Cheer, MacLaren, and Tsey (2015) describe that grounded theory methods of analysis are intended to assist researchers in the understanding of social phenomena in the fields of research that have little to no existing knowledge. Reeves, Kuper, and Hodges (2008) revealed that the ethnographic approach to a research inquiry is the study of social interactions, perceptions, and behaviors that happen within organizations, teams, groups, and communities. As such, the primary goal of the ethnographic research inquiry is to provide a rich and holistic understanding of the culture, views, ethnicity, and actions of people through the collection of comprehensive observations and interviews of research participants (Reeves et al., 2008). The primary advantage for a researcher to select the ethnographic research methodology lies in its ability to record and observe behavior as it occurs (Nurani, 2008).

### **Narrative Research Design**

Polkinghorne (2007) stated that narrative research design is concerned with the study of stories. Narrative researchers obtain these stories through oral accounts obtained during interviews and written descriptions via targeted requests (Polkinghorne, 2007). The researcher then takes these collected data elements and retells them in a narrative chronologically ordered sequence from a first-person perspective (Creswell, 2014; Moen, 2006). Creswell (2014) stressed that this narrative could be both a method and the phenomenon of a research study. To successfully implement a narrative research design, the researcher must gather pertinent data by

collecting stories of the subjects and chronologically ordering the overall relevancy and meaning of these stories into a cohesive narrative (Creswell, 2018).

### **Phenomenological Research Design**

DeFelice and Janesick stated (2015) the phenomenological research methodology is applicable when a researcher seeks to discern the universal essence of the studied participants lived experiences through the use of a reiterative analytical process. Much of the phenomenological research requires conducting multiple interviews, multiple re-readings of collected text, and the process of collecting, creating, and analyzing this obtained core data (DeFelice & Janesick, 2015). This reiterative process allows the researcher to preserve the principles of the phenomenological process while allowing the researcher to expend time, energy, and resources aimed at learning about the real lived experiences of the research study participants (DeFelice & Janesick, 2015).

### **Case Study Design**

As established by Ridder (2017), the case study research methodology finds use when research demands that a real-life phenomenon, or case, is explored in-depth and within its environmental context. As established by Harrison, Birks, Franklin, and Mills (2017), the case study research methodology has grown in reputation as being a useful qualitative research inquiry tool in which complex issues in real-world settings and situations are investigated. Several academic domains have found the case study research design to be particularly valuable in answering a wide range of research questions, including fields such as education, business, social sciences, health, and law (Harrison et al., 2017). Case study research designs are used when the investigator wishes to develop a thorough analysis of a specific case that is based on interpretive data and exhibits explicit boundaries (Creswell, 2014). As such, the case study

research methodology is typically useful when an individual, individuals, event, program, process, or activity needs to be explored in-depth (Creswell, 2014).

The research design used in the dissertation was the case study research design. The case study research methodology finds use when research demands that a real-life phenomenon, or case, is explored in-depth and within its environmental context or environment, and can include cases such as groups, individuals, organizations, events, anomalies, or problems (Ridder, 2017). Case study research designs are utilized when the investigator wishes to develop a thorough analysis of a specific case that is based on interpretive data and exhibits explicit boundaries (Creswell, 2014). As such, the case study research methodology is typically useful when an individual, individuals, event, program, process, or activity needs to be explored in-depth, (Creswell, 2014), such as exploring how learning disability influences one's entrepreneurial calling and success.

Seminal research presented by Schell (1992) established the advantages and benefits of applying the case study research design. For example, the strength of the case study approach lies in its ability to accommodate a full range of evidential data, including artifacts, documentation, observations, and interviews (Schell, 1992). Guetterman and Fetters (2018) state that case study research is a commonly used approach to research and evaluation in many disciplines which involves the examination of one or more real-life cases to capture its details and complexity. When a researcher aims to explore and obtain a meaningful understanding and appreciation of an event, phenomenon, or issue, the case study approach is particularly useful as a research method (Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery, & Sheikh, 2011).

The goal of the case study research was to understand how learning disabilities affect the success or failure of entrepreneurs, while also exploring how the entrepreneur was called to be an

entrepreneur. The required research group was comprised of individuals that identify as being learning disabled and identifying as entrepreneurs. To explore the research participants' experiences, a combination of interviews and interview transcripts, field notes, researcher journals, and unsolicited and solicited emails were systematically collected. Several potential sources can be utilized in order to find the necessary participants required to conduct this case study research. As such, numerous resources that were able to produce the needed participants necessary to perform this research.

### **Summary of the nature of the study.**

The summation of worldviews, strategies, and methods combine to form a research inquiry methodology that is either quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method in construction (Creswell, 2014). The advantages and limitations between the three types of research methodologies are defined in the previous section. In the case of this dissertation, it was determined that the qualitative research design is more closely aligned with the research problem to be examined; therefore, there are several different options available for inquiry design. These research designs of grounded theory and ethnography, the narrative research approach, phenomenological research designs, and the case study research design have been explored in the previous section.

### **Research Questions**

RQ#1 How was the individual called to be an entrepreneur?

RQ#2 Why are learning disabled entrepreneurs experiencing entrepreneurial failure?

RQ#3: What are the factors that lead to entrepreneurial success or failure of individuals with learning disabilities?

## **Conceptual Framework**

Two theories that were considered to form the foundation for this case study research, namely opportunity identification theory and locus of control theory. An amalgamation of these two theories served dual functions in this potential research. Firstly, opportunity identification theory and locus of control theory are two conceptual frameworks that provided this research with a reference point in which the results of this dissertation can be triangulated back to the current literature. Second, the combination of these two theories provided a structure to this potential case study research in which the results and outcomes can be put into the proper context, which can be related across the disciplines of business, strategic management, and entrepreneurship.

### **Opportunity identification theory.**

Opportunity identification theory is the process of one's business opportunity recognition and then the subsequent development of entrepreneurial activities related to that opportunity (Ardichvili, Cardozo, & Ray, 2003). The opportunity identification theory attempts to identify and conceptualize the personality traits, background, social networks, alertness, prior knowledge, and information asymmetry that an individual possesses which can then lead to business opportunities (Ardichvili et al., 2003). A combination of these factors equates to an individual's overall entrepreneurial alertness, which in turn is a necessary condition for the opportunity identification triad, namely recognition, development, and evaluation of a possible entrepreneurial venture (Ardichvili et al., 2003).

Research presented by Shane and Venkataraman (2000) provides the substantiation of the opportunity identification theory as a conceptual framework that aims to explain and predict a set of empirical phenomena that cannot be explained or predicted by other conceptual frameworks.

For example, Shane and Venkataraman (2000) described one's discovery of entrepreneurial opportunities to be formed from the possession of two elements, namely information corridors and individual cognitive properties. The identification of prior information, which is necessary to recognize an entrepreneurial opportunity, comes along with the cognitive properties required to value this opportunity and has been shown in prior research to differ significantly among individuals (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Additionally, Shane and Venkataraman (2000) explained that the identification of an entrepreneurial opportunity is not sufficient in itself, as one's decision to exploit the identified entrepreneurial opportunity is a function of the joint characteristics of both the opportunity and the nature of the individual.

#### **Locus of control theory.**

The second conceptual framework employed in this research was the locus of control theory. Rotter's (1966) seminal research describing the locus of control theory is noted by Asante and Affum-Osei (2019) as being formed by two distinct types of control perceptions, either internal or external locus of control. Research has shown that individuals with an internal locus of control typically believe that the outcome of a specific event is influenced and the result of a person's behaviors or actions (Asante & Affum-Osei, 2019). Conversely, research has shown that those with an external locus of control often believe that the outcome of a specific event is mostly out of that person's control. Whether one has an internal or external locus of control can be correlated to whether one believes that entrepreneurial opportunities are either created using an internal locus control or that opportunities are discovered, suggesting an external locus of control (Asante & Affum-Osei, 2019).

The locus of control theory is an important construct, as numerous studies have shown that locus of control is a factor that influences work satisfaction, motivation, and performance

(Schjoedt & Shaver, 2012). Schjoedt and Shaver (2012) have shown the use of the locus of control theory is applicable and relevant to the study of business, and more specifically, the domain of entrepreneurship. Furthermore, Schjoedt and Shaver (2012) noted that the concept of locus of control continues to receive warranted attention from entrepreneurship researchers, as this theory is considered to be an essential measure of an individual's motivation and intentions to start new business ventures.

### **Discussion of the relationships between concepts.**

The use of locus of control as a conceptual framework has seen use in the domain of entrepreneurial business research, as it often reveals the factors behind an individual's intentions and motivations, but these results have produced mixed results (Asante & Affum-Osei, 2019; Schjoedt & Shaver, 2012). As such, modified approaches to measuring an individual's locus of control have shown results that are more empirically confident and more specific to the targeted population (Schjoedt & Shaver, 2012). In the case of the opportunity identification theory, an entrepreneur's prior knowledge and experience has shown to play a vital role in recognizing a potential entrepreneurial opportunity. Still, few studies have explored the role that opportunity identification theory has played in the context of an individual's entrepreneurial discovery (Arentz, Sautet, & Storr, 2013).

### **Summary of the conceptual framework.**

Two theories were considered to form the foundation for this case study research, namely opportunity identification theory and locus of control theory. An amalgamation of these two theories served dual functions in this potential research. First, opportunity identification theory and locus of control theory are two conceptual frameworks that provided this research with a reference point in which the results of this dissertation can be triangulated back to the current



literature. Second, the combination of these two theories provided a structure to this potential case study research in which the results and outcomes can be put into the proper context, which can be related across the disciplines of business and entrepreneurship.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined for the purpose of the study.

*Disability* - Disability is defined by Button (2018) as (a) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual, (b) a record of such an impairment, or (c) being regarded as having such an impairment.

*Entrepreneur* - According to Cantner, Goethner, and Silbereisen (2017), the description of the modern entrepreneur arises from the seminal work of Schumpeter (1934) who defined an entrepreneur as being an individual who is willing to break through the traditional structures and to challenge the way things are typically done.

*Learning Disabilities/ Specific Learning Disabilities* - In the United States, learning disabilities are defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) as being classified as Specific learning disabilities (SLD) (McDowell, 2018). The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (2019) defines SLD as:

a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, Dyslexia, and developmental Aphasia (para 1).

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

### **Assumptions**

The research study assumed that the participants were to be non-biased by answering all forms of communication truthfully, while the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were preserved. The researcher assumed that the participants are wholly volunteers who may withdraw from the research study at any time, for any reason, and with no ramifications. The researcher assumed that the population chosen for investigation would be representative of the population necessary for this study, namely learning-disabled entrepreneurs. Finally, the research study assumed that the lessons learned from this exploration would apply to other disabled entrepreneurs.

### **Limitations**

The first limitation of the study was the planned use of purposeful sampling. The participant population for the study was entrepreneurs that have identified as having a disability that is classified as being a factor that impacts one's learning. The participants needed for this study were small in number and may not have been reflective of the entire research population. Finally, time posed a limitation, as a study conducted over a specific time interval is a snapshot that is mostly dependent on the unique conditions occurring during that time.

### **Delimitations**

The research study was limited to exploring learning disabled entrepreneurs located in the United States, while these learning-disabled entrepreneurs that have noted successes and failures were investigated. This research was limited to exploring why learning-disabled entrepreneurs experiencing a high rate of entrepreneurial failure, what are the factors that lead to entrepreneurial success or failure of these individuals with learning disabilities, and how was the

entrepreneur called to be an entrepreneur. Finally, only the conceptual frameworks of opportunity identification theory and the locus of control theory were applied to this research study.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study was substantial for multiple reasons. As previously noted, disabled entrepreneurs face unique business challenges to success, including unequal opportunities, limitations in infrastructure and facilities, unwanted pity, and lack of awareness about the disabled (Saxena & Pandya, 2018). The factors suggest that that the societal barriers that keep people with disabilities from participating in the typical labor force may also affect their entrepreneurial start-up efforts (Renko et al., 2016). Second, even though there is a high rate of participation of disabled individuals in the field of entrepreneurship, their experiences have not been highlighted, resulting in marginalized academic and professional knowledge (Bagheri & Abbariki, 2017; Kabir, 2014; Saxena & Pandya, 2018). Contextualizing the entrepreneurial process of disabled individuals helps researchers better understand the nuances of the social context for entrepreneurship while illuminating the experiences of entrepreneurs with disabilities by providing a more socially aware analysis of mainstream management-driven studies of entrepreneurship (Renko et al., 2016). Finally, individuals with disabilities are twice as likely to be engaged in self-employed, entrepreneurial businesses when compared to non-disabled individuals (Renko et al., 2016), even though the majority of these small entrepreneurial business start-ups often fail (Boso et al., 2018). This study aimed to understand and conceptualize the phenomenon recognized as the influence that learning disabilities have on entrepreneurial endeavors, as this phenomenon has not yet been highlighted in the existing academic or professional literature.

### **Reduction of Gaps**

Recent research exploration has revealed that there are still significant gaps that remain in the current business literature surrounding the concepts of entrepreneurship and disability. As noted by Kašperová et al. (2018), the topic of “disability is largely absent in the entrepreneurial identity literature, where entrepreneurs are assumed to be a homogeneous group in terms of embodied properties and therefore equally capable of starting and running a business” (p. 245). Renko et al. (2015) stated that “one person out of 10 has a disability, yet entrepreneurship literature remains silent on the contributions of this population” (p. 555). Saxena and Pandya (2018) revealed that “there is a lack of studies available that focused on entrepreneurship with disabilities” (p. 3). Bagheri and Abbariki (2017) stated that “empirical research on disabled entrepreneurs and particularly their entrepreneurial competencies is extremely scarce” (p. 70).

The phenomena identified as the relationship between learning disabilities and entrepreneurship is a timely and relevant topic that necessitated a reduction in gaps of knowledge. Research has shown that start-up efforts by entrepreneurs with disabilities are less likely to result in the emergence of a viable organization than the entrepreneurial efforts of those who are not disabled (Renko et al., 2016; Viriri & Makurumidze, 2014). Furthermore, research studies that do explore the disabled entrepreneur tend to under-theorize the effects of physical or mental impairments, such as learning disabilities, in enabling or constraining new venture creation (Kašperová et al., 2018). Equally, research has also noted that disabled entrepreneurs are often challenged to do things differently from other non-disabled entrepreneurs. Still, these challenges can encourage attempts to be creative, invent new ways, and discover unfamiliar niches that can lead to numerous business opportunities (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017). Both the failures and successes of learning-disabled entrepreneurs deserved further exploration, as

well as the elements that influence these entrepreneurial endeavors. Also, the characteristics that are present that influence a disabled individual's entrepreneurial calling was necessary to investigate to gain a complete understanding of the entrepreneurial environment in which these individuals participate.

There is a vast scope of future research that is needed to fill the gaps in the area of entrepreneurship for the disabled (Saxena & Pandya, 2018). Saxena and Pandya (2018) suggested extending the scope of the present research to include a detailed analysis of the entrepreneurial and managerial practices shared among entrepreneurs with disabilities. As previously noted, Verheul et al. (2015) noted that little is known about the relationship between entrepreneurship and the extent of psychiatric symptoms, such as those found with individuals diagnosed with ADHD. To fill the gaps in the current research, Renko et al. (2016) recommended contextualizing the entrepreneurial process of disabled individuals can help researchers better understand the nuances of the social context for entrepreneurship. Thus, revealing the experiences of entrepreneurs with learning disabilities by providing a more socially aware analysis of mainstream management-driven studies of entrepreneurship (Renko et al., 2016). Additionally, Renko et al. (2016) proposed that future research could focus on the individual-level attributes and motivations of the disabled entrepreneur and how these characteristics interact and impact the differences observed between nascent entrepreneurs, both with and without disabilities.

### **Implications for Biblical Integration**

To accurately identify and analyze the topic of disability and entrepreneurship without discussing their relationship to the Bible and the impact on God's world would be in error. Keller and Alsdorf (2016) stated that work matters in the earthly world, as "all work has dignity

because it reflects God's image" (Keller & Alsdorf, 2016, p. 39). The concept of work is considered to play an essential role in people's lives, allowing individuals to enjoy social inclusion (Behrani & Rajput, 2017), emotional and physical well-being, and monetary income (Lysaght & Cobigo, 2014). The importance of work is a commonly found construct that is emphasized throughout the Bible. For example, Deuteronomy 32:4 notes that all God's work is good work by stating, "He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He" (NIV). Additionally, Ephesians 4:28 affirms that work is important to God by announcing that "Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need" (NIV).

In Genesis 1:27 (NIV), it is described how God created man in his image. God creates everything in the universe, but humans are the only thing that the Bible says are created in the image of God. Unfortunately, theologians and biblical scholars disagree amongst themselves on what the image of God means to humanity (Walker-Jones, 2017). Walker-Jones (2017) presented research that does give summative guidance on what image bearing means based upon three interpretations, namely functional, relational, and ontological viewpoints. First, a functional approach to the concept of God's image-bearing recognizes image bearing as being some function humans have in the world as created by God (Walker-Jones, 2017). Second, a relational interpretation of image-bearing suggests "that image-bearing has to do with the human ability to enter into relationships with God and other human beings" (Walker-Jones, 2017, para. 2). Finally, an ontological interpretation associates image-bearing with one or more human traits, including reasoning, free will, morality, language, or spiritual capacity (Walker-Jones, 2017). Regardless of functional, relational, and ontological viewpoints of extant literature, as every

human is a reflection of God, the image of God is shared by each of us, including those with disabilities. As noted by Gordon (2018), “the image of God sits in a wheelchair, walks with a cane, has a companion animal, and has trouble learning” (para. 3).

The first thing that the Bible tells us about God in Genesis 1:1 (NIV) is that God is a creator, as he created the heavens and the earth, making God the first entrepreneur (Baugus, 2013). The cultural mandate as outlined by God in Genesis 1:28 (NIV) instructs humans to be fruitful, increase in number by filling the earth, and subduing the earth by ruling over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and over every living creature that moves on the ground. The supervision of God’s creations extended beyond just the natural environment to include all things that God fated to exist, including the products of human culture, including books, art, music, tools, and computer technologies (Twartz, 2015). In the case of entrepreneurship, “human beings had a responsibility to care for and develop God's own creation even before sin fractured the relationship between God and humankind” (Bailor & Claar, 2016, p. 121). Furthermore, Bailor and Claar (2016) reflect upon seminal research performed by Novak (1982) suggesting that every entrepreneur is following God’s mandate by fulfilling his or her sacred biblical calling to subdue the earth.

### **Relationship to Field of Study**

Disabled individuals have long been entrepreneurial because of how society systematically undervalues their potential for employment. This undervaluation often requires this underserved group to create their economic opportunities and prosperity (Caldwell et al., 2012; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017). The elements of strategic management can influence these unique challenges, barriers, and solutions encountered by disabled entrepreneurs that affect the success or failure of these entrepreneurial endeavors approaches to entrepreneurial endeavors

(Dhar & Farzana, 2017; Kitching, 2014; Maziriri, Madinga, & Lose, 2017; Mwangi, 2013; Viriri & Makurumidze, 2014).

### **Summary of the significance of the study.**

The significance of the study is significant for numerous reasons. First, previous research has noted that there are unidentified factors that may be influencing the success or failure of entrepreneurial activities that are created by learning disabled individuals. Second, research has shown that start-up efforts by entrepreneurs with disabilities are less likely to result in the emergence of a viable organization than the entrepreneurial efforts of those who are not disabled, but the reasons as to why this phenomenon happens remains unclear. Finally, the extant literature on entrepreneurs with disabilities is scant, fragmented, and full of unanswered questions.

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

### **Introduction**

It is commonly known that there is a dearth of research on the topic of disability and entrepreneurship, with the scant available evidence showing that self-employment and entrepreneurial venture participation are regular occurrences among those with disabilities (Dodd & Keles, 2014; Kašperová & Kitching, 2014). Individuals identified as having a disability comprise the world's largest minority, yet these individuals are twice as likely to be unemployed when compared to those without disabilities (Alroaia, Azizi, Aghvami, & Jafari, 2018; Bommersheim & Chandra, 2015; Kabir, 2014). Further research by both Mello (2015) and Hardy (1990) note that the disabled are a minority group, but a minority group that anyone can unexpectedly and unfortunately join in the future.

Research has shown that individuals with disabilities prefer being employed rather than being unemployed (Lysaght & Cobigo, 2014), as "living on disability benefits begets



demoralization and passivity” (Drake, Bond, Thornicroft, Knapp, & Goldman, 2012, p. 110).

Unfortunately, the employment rate for individuals with disabilities is much lower when comparing to the employment rate for the non-disabled (Baker, Linden, LaForce, Rutledge, & Goughnour, 2018; Behrani & Rajput, 2017; Schur et al., 2014). This inequality in employment makes those identified as being disabled to be one of the largest underutilized labor pools (Schur et al., 2014) and the group with the highest percentage of unemployment in the United States (Mello, 2015).

The exploration of the topic of how learning disabilities affect entrepreneurial calling and success required the examination of multiple topics found in the extant literature in order to place the phenomenon in the proper context. This topical investigation required an established definition of what constitutes an entrepreneur while also identifying the characteristics, skills, human capital, social capital, and behaviors that affect an entrepreneur’s motivation and calling. The current literature notes that any entrepreneurial endeavor has its inherent risks, and these risks can ultimately result in entrepreneurial success or failure. Finally, the resilience of entrepreneurs needed examination, as did the most current trends that are influencing the present-day literature surrounding entrepreneurship.

The examination of the topic of how learning disabilities affect entrepreneurial calling and success also required a definition of disability, while also providing a statistical interpretation of the disability measurements in the United States. A discussion of disability required an understanding of the legal landscape protecting those with disabilities in the United States, as did an understanding of the stereotypes encountered by those Americans with disabilities. The definitional characteristics of individuals with learning disabilities were likewise necessary, as was an exploration of how disabled entrepreneurs and nascent entrepreneurs have

been interpreted in the current literature. Finally, an examination of nascent entrepreneurs with learning disabilities was required to establish a baseline of interpretation for this specific dissertation topic.

### **Characteristics of Entrepreneurs**

#### **Entrepreneur definition.**

According to Cantner et al. (2017), the description of the modern entrepreneur arises from the seminal work of Schumpeter (1934) which defines an entrepreneur as being an individual who is willing to break through traditional structures and to challenge the way things are typically done. Casson and Casson (2014) also revealed that Schumpeter (1934) viewed the entrepreneur as a heroic innovator in which a world without the entrepreneur would result in a society that would have none of the innovations created by these pioneering individuals. Schumpeter (1934) found it judicious in distinguishing the multiple types of entrepreneurial innovations by placing these innovations into one of five categories, namely technological innovations based on a new production process, marketing innovations based on a new product, opening a new export market, exploiting a new source of supply, and the creation of a new type of institution (Casson & Casson, 2014).

Plotnikova, Romero, and Martínez-Román (2016) noted that Schumpeter (1934) also described entrepreneurs as those individuals whose function is to carry out novel combinations of production. An entrepreneur is also known to have the characteristics of being self-directed, individualistic, have an innate inner drive to innovate, and seeks independence and autonomy to be in control of one's destiny (Canter et al., 2017). Furthermore, a Schumpeter (1934) description of an entrepreneur is described as one who does not purely adapt to changing circumstances but is one who can overcome skepticism and social resistance (Canter et al.,

2017). Research conducted by Casson and Casson (2014) suggested that the modern theory of entrepreneurship is approached in three ways, namely by the function of the entrepreneur, by their role, their personality, and their specific behavior.

Research conducted by Lindner (2018) explained that entrepreneurial initiatives are critical to the development of regions. In some instances, entire countries, as entrepreneurial endeavors, can help the situation of the unemployed or the underprivileged. Research presented by Eschker, Gold, and Lane (2017) noted that within the United States, new small and medium businesses are the cornerstone of many small rural communities, providing both needed products and services, while also developing new opportunities for employment. Eschker et al. (2017) reported that both nascent entrepreneurs and serial entrepreneurs rely heavily on the networking and social support of family and friends to survive the first stages of entrepreneurial venture creation. Regardless of past entrepreneurial efforts, new business owners typically rely on initial funding of the entrepreneurial effort, either through external sources or through personal funds (Eschker et al., 2017).

Jurinski, Down, and Kolay (2016) surprisingly noted that U.S. Census data shows that over the past 30 years, the number of U.S. business startups has declined. More specifically, U.S. Census data reveals that in 1977, there were 16.5% of businesses that were less than one year old, whereas, in the year 2011, just 8.2% of these new business ventures were less than one year old. This data shows 50% decrease in startup business in the United States over the past 30 years (Jurinski et al., 2016). Jurinski et al. (2016) also noted that in 2008 the number of new businesses created in the United States is smaller than the number of businesses closing, revealing that the number of new startup firms was, in fact, diminishing over time.

Innovation is one of the differentiating attributes that separates entrepreneurs from those that are considered to be self-employed (Plotnikova et al., 2016). Shelton (2013) presented research distinguishing between entrepreneurs, the self-employed, and the small business owner. In the case of describing entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs are known for specific capabilities, namely drive, vision, perseverance, optimism, risk tolerance, negotiation, critical and creative thinking, and opportunity recognition (Shelton, 2013).

### **Characteristics, skills, and behaviors of an entrepreneur.**

Aligning with previous literature, Østergaard (2019) concluded that entrepreneurs often share similar characteristics across domains and industries. The personality traits measured signifying an entrepreneur include the performing roles of creator, the team organizer, the rebel, and the adventurer. The combination of these four characteristics ultimately determines the distinctions among entrepreneurs, namely profound diversity in the directions of entrepreneurial activity and predictable variation in growth (Østergaard, 2019).

Panigrahi (2016) offered research noting that when entrepreneurs are viewed from a leadership viewpoint, the two primary skills that affect perceived entrepreneurial success, namely communication skills and human relation skills. Kiss (2016) stated that one's social relationships could have a direct effect on whether one becomes a nascent entrepreneur. Kiss (2016) noted that functional relationships play an essential role in the process of entrepreneurial development. Still, these functional relationships diminish in importance and relevance over time as the business venture becomes more operationally established. Furthermore, an entrepreneur's institutional relationships, such as being a member of various entrepreneurial associations or participating in the chamber of commerce activities, become progressively crucial throughout the business ventures lifetime (Kiss, 2016).

Baptista, Karaöz, and Mendonça (2014) argued that the entrepreneurial characteristics one possesses play a particularly important role in the critical early years of a business startup. As the mission and organization of a new business is being established and key personnel is hired, the characteristics of the founding members are vital, as “opportunity evaluation and exploitation involves knowledge about demand, technology, organization, customers and suppliers that may be learned by founders prior to entry” (Baptista et al., 2014, p. 845). As such, the prior knowledge of emerging entrepreneurs is a significant determinant of whether the venture will survive the early period of business establishment (Baptista et al., 2014).

### **Entrepreneurial Calling**

Theology of professional calling. Vocational calling, or the mission of every individual Christian believer to serve God in everyday life and work, is an important feature of a Protestant approach to work (Vos, 2017). Sixteenth-century Protestant theologian William Perkins described one’s calling as being the ideal occupation or vocation, based on their individual and unique being (Bezuidenhout & Warne, 2018). The term calling has been historically regarded as a religious experience. In contrast, modern researchers have adopted a broader conceptualization of calling to include meaning and personal fulfillment found in one’s work (Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010). As noted by Messenger (2011), when Christians describe the term calling, they typically refer to whether God is calling one to perform or participate in a particular job, profession, or type of work.

Autin, Allan, Palaniappan, and Duffy (2017) explained that vocational calling is defined as one’s choice of career that is motivated by intrinsic reward, passion, meaningfulness, and the act of helping others. As noted by Duffy, Autin, Allan, and Douglass (2015), “a calling is typically viewed as a type of work that is highly personally meaningful, prosocial in nature, and

often arises as the result of an internal or external summons” (p. 351). Calling has been linked to an increase in job satisfaction, life meaning and satisfaction, personal well-being, organizational commitment, and positive organizational outcomes. Even though research has shown that work can hold meaning and purpose without religion, contemporary American workers have a more favorable view of their job or workplace if their work is perceived as having an element of spiritual calling (Kent, Bradshaw, & Dougherty, 2016; Kent, 2017).

Keller and Alsdorf (2016) stated that work and business matters in the earthly world because “all work has dignity because it reflects God’s image” (Keller & Alsdorf, 2016, p. 39). The notion that business is a legitimate calling for Christians has been a familiar and prevalent theme found throughout recent literature. Business, like all human-run institutions, is subject to the consequences of the fall, as noted when exploring the Bible’s grand narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration (Martin, 2011).

When exploring the Biblical elements of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration, the premise of redemption is a dominant theme. The theme is demonstrated best by exploring how Jesus Christ died for our sins, rose to life after three days, and then reigns as the supreme power of the universe (Romans 8:34, NIV). After the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the disciple Paul continued on the work of Jesus by spreading the word of God to all who would listen. God’s unending work is further conveyed in Thessalonians 4:11-12 (NIV) in which Paul stated that “and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.” As such, it can be demonstrated that as Christians, we can use the word of God to further our available work opportunities while maintaining our resolute faith in Christ (Van Duzer, 2010).

Rotman (2017) suggested that the divine vocational calling that some experience may not in itself consist of a call for a particular job or specific profession but consists of a calling of one to seek the fellowship and justice of Christ under God's reign. According to Bickerton and Miner (2019), individuals who believe that they have a transcendent, Godly summons that is lived out at work exhibit several common characteristics, including a more vigorous strive for task accomplishment while being more absorbed when carrying out these tasks. Bailor and Claar (2016) noted that God is calling the human entrepreneur to be more than a mere Christian worker but to see ourselves as an agent in his world that pursues our entrepreneurial work as part of God's plan for the world.

McKenna et al. (2015) proposed that one's calling can be very specific to a job or behavior, while also extending beyond the work role in which they perform to include a calling to apply the behaviors, skills, or abilities of the individual. McKenna et al. (2015) demonstrated that one's calling is a directive, urging, or request received by an individual or group from God, who calls them to be something or do something impactful in their world. As such, in modern U.S. Christian culture, many individuals consider one's "calling as something to do, and not only something to be" (McKenna et al. 2015, p. 301).

As highlighted by Tian, Wu, and Wang (2018), the notion of one's calling originates in Judeo-Christian beliefs and thoughts where God summons one to "engage in a particular vocation or to serve and answer God's requests" (p. 696). According to Haney-Loehlein, McKenna, Robie, Austin, and Ecker (2015), meaning plays a vital role in the lives and work of many individuals, and a substantial source of meaning can be attributed and derived from fulfilling one's calling or one's purpose in work. Once only limited to a religious perspective, one's calling has been shown by researchers to have a context in both religious and secular

situations (Haney-Loehlein et al., 2015). In a similar resultant study, Kolodinsky, Ritchie, and Kuna (2018) revealed that a calling is “a sacred and divine summons from a transcendent God to do morally responsible work” (p. 408). A calling is performed out of a strong sense of inner direction, transcending self-interest in order to serve others, which provides oneself with a deep sense of purpose and meaning for one’s life (Kuna, 2018). Tian et al. (2018) reported that a strong sense of career calling had been shown to generate positive results throughout numerous elements of work and life. In the case of the nascent entrepreneur, determining how to measure and cultivate the elements of the entrepreneurial calling with the aim of encouraging satisfaction and performance is critical (Tian et al., 2018).

Da Palma, Lopes, and Alves (2018) noted that entrepreneurial passion could be a compelling indicator of entrepreneurial motivation to continue the pursuit of their business goals, even if encountering difficulties. Additionally, the role of entrepreneurship as a calling has a positive effect on an entrepreneur’s motivation to proactively develop a search strategy to attract resources (Da Palma et al., 2018). Individuals who experience an entrepreneurial calling state that this calling was a decisive factor in triggering strength and courage in the pursuit of overcoming challenging goals while having the drive and willingness to persist in the face of obstacles (Da Palma et al., 2018).

The motivators for an individual to become an entrepreneur are vast and varied. Jayawarna, Rouse, and Kitching (2013) explained that previous research into the motivators of the nascent entrepreneur typically include economic gain, personal development, desire for achievement, desire for independence and control, improved social status, opportunity to innovate, emulation of role models, and a contribution to the welfare of the community. Research presented by Manish and Sutter (2016) suggested that entrepreneurs are motivated not



only by the desire to maximize profits but also by the desire for mastery. In this case, the entrepreneurial motivation arises from more than a desire to maximize profits, but from a motivation to outcompete other entrepreneurs by producing the best product or service, in turn achieving external validation using a measure of the satisfaction of consumer preferences (Manish & Sutter, 2016).

A research study outlined by Mahto and McDowell (2018) began to link entrepreneurial motivation with the development of one's social identity in an attempt to explain the behaviors behind and actions behind entrepreneurial motivation. For example, Mahto and McDowell (2018) propose that the most compelling reasons an individual would desire to become an entrepreneur are that they seek either a higher social identity or wish to establish a new social identity altogether, usually arising from an antecedent reflective self-assessment. When an individual is exposed and impacted by an environment and actions that encourage entrepreneurship, the individual often desires to either improve their social identity or establish a new identity based on their entrepreneurial motivation (Mahto & McDowell, 2018). Thus, an individual's identity influences their motivation and behavior, including their career choices (Mahto & McDowell, 2018). Furthermore, if an individual is exposed to an entrepreneurial environment, that individual will tend to follow on a similar future entrepreneurial path (Mahto & McDowell, 2018).

Novel research investigated by Hill, Perkins, and White (2015) concluded that an individual's religion could have significant influence over whether one becomes an entrepreneur. As noted by Hill et al. (2015), the strength of one's individualistic association with religion can significantly influence one decision to become a self-employed entrepreneur. Furthermore, the

Hill et al. (2015) findings indicate that the level of one's religiosity decreases the level of entrepreneurial self-employment participation.

Chen and Thompson (2016) argued that Lazear's (2004) theory of entrepreneurship, also known as the jack-of-all-trades theory, is a well-known concept that aims to explain that individuals with an array of balanced skills are more likely to become entrepreneurs.

Additionally, these balanced skills can be amassed by studying a varied academic curriculum, working in a variety of operational functions, and working for a variety of different employers (Chen & Thompson, 2016). Chen and Thompson (2016) suggested that entrepreneurial founders of new ventures need the ability to competently work on a variety of different tasks to be successful competently.

### **Success Factors for Entrepreneurs**

When exploring the success of any entrepreneur, the extant literature has identified several critical success factors that can lead to favorable entrepreneur results. Based on a search of the relevant literature, Selig (2014) noted that a one's personality traits could influence their success in becoming an entrepreneur. The most important characteristics of an entrepreneur are being highly motivated, possessing a winning attitude, having passion, and employing a strong work ethic. Further personality traits of successful entrepreneurs recognized by Selig (2014) include having a customer focus, displaying a high risk-taking mentality, and employing a persistent and principled focus. Conversely, Selig (2014) observed several significant impediments to successful entrepreneurship, namely as having no passion, exhibiting a low tolerance to risk, and showing a preference to uncertainty and procrastination, while being unclear of the necessary objectives, scope, and responsibilities required for entrepreneurial success.

Lee (2019) posited that an entrepreneur's human capital increases the likelihood of venture success. Lee (2019) noted that human capital theory asserts that knowledge and skills that one can obtain through industry knowledge or general education are likely to increase an individual's abilities to create successful ventures. Additionally, human capital can assist an entrepreneur in developing their social capital and skills, both of which have been shown in research studies to increase the access to critical resources necessary for business success (Lee, 2019).

According to Windapo's (2018) research, factors that lead to successful entrepreneurial outcomes are influenced by three personality characteristics: a high degree of self-confidence, employing a task-result oriented approach to achievements, and being a risk-taker that encompasses the tenants of innovation, creativity, flexibility, and resourcefulness. Research presented by Razak, Said, Ahmad, and Jumain (2017) suggested that several critical factors affecting entrepreneurial success. Razak et al. (2017) proposed that an individual's entrepreneurial success is influenced by four primary success factors, which include an expressed risk-taking behavior, locus of control, perceived barrier, and self-efficacy.

As noted by Razak et al. (2017), an expressed risk-taking behavior as displayed by an entrepreneur is manageable and controllable with the application of risk management which allows an entrepreneur the ability to research and evaluate that potential risks as a way to reduce uncertainty and apply advantageous strategies to manage potential risk. Razak et al. (2017) noted previous research that describes an entrepreneurial locus of control was associated with better entrepreneurial outcomes, including higher fiscal income and an elevated perception of intrinsic success. Findings by Razask et al. (2017) revealed that an entrepreneurs perception of obstacles and barriers to business success may have both positive and negative effects on intrinsic

entrepreneurial success. Still, most entrepreneurs are viewed as optimistic and positive minded individuals that perceive barriers as positive challenges that can further drive an entrepreneur towards better achievements. Finally, an entrepreneur's self-efficacy can be used to drive entrepreneurial success, as highly efficacious individuals typically prefer to engage in challenging activities while displaying a higher endurance for success and failure when attempting those entrepreneurial pursuits (Razak et al., 2017).

Staniewski, Janowski, and Awruk (2016) offered research that illustrates the personality traits of entrepreneurs that most positively contribute to economic success. These personality traits of the successful entrepreneur include emotional stability, a need for achievement, innovativeness, and self-efficacy (Staniewski et al., 2016). In addition, a personality with resistance to stress, the need for autonomy, the ability for disagreeableness, innate conscientiousness, and openness to various experiences each contribute entrepreneurial success (Staniewski et al., 2016).

As defined by Ayala and Manzano (2014), "resilience refers to the human ability to adapt in the face of tragedy, trauma and other adversity" (Ayala & Manzano, 2014, p. 127). Ayala and Manzano (2014) suggested that within the framework of small companies, there is a noted positive correlation between the resilience of entrepreneurs and the growth of their companies. When faced with adverse circumstances, resilient entrepreneurs can develop and deploy resources that were previously unrealized and untapped, resulting in an audacious fight to achieve their goal of success while maintaining a sense of optimism (Ayala & Manzano, 2014).

Entrepreneurs participating in different sectors, industries, or domains may judge their success in different ways (Chen, Chang, & Lo, 2015). Research by Wach, Stephan, Gorgievski, and Wegge (2018) drew attention to the suggestion that many entrepreneurs gauge success in

more than monetary measures, but in terms that have a range of subjective indicators associated with success. As such, the subjective measures of entrepreneurial success have emerged as a five-element conceptual framework used to gauge personal success (Wach et al., 2018). These five elements of success include multifaceted measures of firm performance, the establishment of workplace relationships, personal fulfillment, community impact, and personal financial rewards (Wach et al., 2018).

Scheers (2016) presented a literature review that explores the varying characteristics of the successful entrepreneur. First, Scheers (2016) research defined the modern entrepreneur as one who introduces a new or improved product or service, opens a new market, uses a new source of supply of raw materials, or creates a new business. Second, Scheers (2016) noted previous research that describes the characteristics of a successful entrepreneur to include the ability to take risks, possessing core business management skills, innovativeness, knowledge of how various markets function, marketing skills, manufacturing knowledge, and the ability to cooperate. Finally, Scheers (2016) explained that the traits of the successful entrepreneur include the characteristics of raw intelligence, high energy, a vivid imagination, a consuming passion for succeeding, and a resolute sense of self-determination.

Lee (2019) stated that the extant literature describing entrepreneur personality suggests that the characteristics exhibited by entrepreneurs are essential predictors of venture performance. Three such characteristics that correlate to entrepreneurial success include extraversion, the need for achievement, predilection to risk-taking, and a desire for personal independence (Lee, 2019). Research by Ayala and Manzano (2014) offered research promoting that the success of an entrepreneur is typically a result of their resilience. Resilient entrepreneurs demonstrate a high degree of tolerance for situations that are formed of ambiguity and

competitiveness, thus adapting quickly to initiate change in order to achieve success (Ayala & Manzano, 2014). Further results advanced by Ayala and Manzano (2014) suggested that the personal characteristics of hardiness, resourcefulness, and optimism have a statistically significant positive relationship with both objective and subjective entrepreneurial growth and success.

Fisher, Maritz, and Lobo (2014) established that entrepreneurial success is a phenomenon characterized by exploring the result of positive consequences as perceived by the entrepreneur. As a result, entrepreneurs innately know when they have reached a satisfactory level of entrepreneurial success (Fisher et al., 2014). Similarly, entrepreneurial failure shares many research connections to entrepreneurial success, as both extremes of measure are often determined by metrics that are set and measured by the perception of the entrepreneur (Fisher et al., 2014).

### **Entrepreneurial failure and resilience.**

Business failures are inevitable in any business climate, and the high odds of failure are similar across industries in the United States (Lee & Miesing, 2017). According to Lee and Miesing (2017), data obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau state that every year, 470,000 businesses fail, whereas only 400,000 new businesses are established. Furthermore, no industry in the United States has more than a 60% survival rate after the first four years of business operation (Lee & Miesing, 2017).

Creating a business from the foundation can typically be thought of as a lengthy process. At the same time, the challenges that are faced by the disabled entrepreneur can impart additional barriers that are recognized by this group. It is infrequent that one's entrepreneurial journey follows a smooth and unobstructed path, as this experience is often fraught with periods of

emotional elation and fulfillment while other times the experience feels nothing short of depleting and depressing (Wiklund, Nikolaev, Shir, Foo, & Bradley, 2019). Furthermore, the majority of new businesses fail, while those that do survive experience frequent barriers and challenges with customers, partners, suppliers, and competitors (Wiklund et al., 2019).

The study of how entrepreneurs perceive, learn from, and respond to failure has attracted interest by scholars over recent years. Ucbasaran, Shepherd, Lockett, and Lyon (2013) extended this research by examining the process and consequence of business failure for entrepreneurs. Business failure is defined by Ucbasaran et al. (2013) as being “the cessation of involvement in a venture because it has not met a minimum threshold for economic viability as stipulated by the (founding) entrepreneur” (p. 188). In this study, Ucbasaran et al. (2013) noted that the aftermath of entrepreneurial failure is fraught with psychological, social, and financial disorder. The consequences of business failure entail a feeling of loss and often involves the process of emotional recovery for these entrepreneurs (Boso et al., 2018), as coping and making sense of one's failure experience is an important challenge for entrepreneurs that is usually managed by the use of failure narratives (Mandl & Kuckertz, 2015). The socio-psychological pressures and potential public stigma faced by the failing entrepreneur can be minimized, and often avoided, by the use of failure narratives that are used to explain their individual entrepreneurial failure experience (Mandl & Kuckertz, 2015).

Entrepreneurial minorities often have to face multiple obstacles to success. In the United States, minority-owned businesses comprise more than a quarter of all businesses. Yet, these entrepreneurial minorities continue to have higher rates of business failure than none-minority owned businesses (Houchens, 2018). These minority-owned businesses experience what is known in the extant literature as *fast failure*, or the detrimental result of when a minority

entrepreneur fails to recover as quickly as their majority counterpart (Houchens, 2018). Business failure by entrepreneurial minorities can also affect these individual's social capital, as failing in an entrepreneurial endeavor can give others the perception that the entrepreneur will always fail (Houchens 2018).

Research provided by Renko et al. (2016) present data exploring the success and failure prospects for another minority group known as disabled entrepreneurs. As noted by Renko et al. (2016), most entrepreneurial endeavors end while the firm is still in the creation process. Renko's et al. (2016) study showed that after six years of progress, one-third of the disabled entrepreneurs had left the business creation process due to failure. One third of the entrepreneurs stated that they continue to work on the entrepreneurial initiative, and one-third noted that they succeeded in maintaining an on-going business. Additionally, impediments that were encountered by the disabled entrepreneur include difficulties with attitudes, culture, education, finances, and the physical environment of most parts of everyday societal experience (Renko et al., 2016).

In a research study that explored the types and outcomes of challenge-based entrepreneurship, Miller and Le Breton-Miller (2017) noted that underdog entrepreneurs (entrepreneurs that face additional challenges outside of the context of the innate difficulties that are always presented to all types of entrepreneurs) face one of three types of challenges. These challenges revolve around the factors of economic, sociocultural, physical and emotional, and cognitive (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017). The modes of entrepreneurs can be categorized into four categories, namely necessity entrepreneurs, immigrant entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs with physical handicaps, and entrepreneurs with ADHD or Dyslexia (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017).



**Human capital.**

Bastié, Cussy, and Le Nadant (2016) contended that many theoretical models of entrepreneurial business creation explore the impact that human capital has on these business ventures. Cañibano and Potts (2018) posited that the conceptual model of human capital is built upon a metaphor that the knowledge that one possesses is similar to the capital stock of a firm or of a nation. Human capital is often sub-categorized into two different categories, namely general human capital and specific human capital (Bastié et al., 2016). General human capital refers to skills that are typically acquired through formal education, training, or experience transferred from one job to another. In contrast, specific human capital refers to knowledge and skills that have a narrow scope of applicability and are less transferable across jobs (Bastié et al., 2016). Additionally, specific human capital includes the characteristics of industry-specific expertise, managerial abilities, and entrepreneurial experience (Bastié et al., 2016).

Lee (2019) noted that when examining the psychological characteristics of an entrepreneur, a measure of an entrepreneurs skill-sets have been emphasized as critical to their success as an entrepreneur's human capital assets such as industry experience and overall education have shown to be an enabler to entrepreneurial success by providing an entrepreneur the capacity to explore and exploit potential entrepreneurial opportunities (Lee, 2019). An entrepreneur's human capital can be a positive influence on reducing the risk of these businesses going out of business due to a lack of financial or cultural resources (Lee, 2019). Furthermore, human capital aids in building an entrepreneur's social capital, further increasing the chances that these ventures will experience long-term business success (Lee, 2019).

It is widely established in the literature that the human capital capabilities of an entrepreneur contribute to the chances that these beginning businesses will experience success.

Research provided by Baptista et al. (2014) showed that entrepreneurs with higher levels of education have a significant positive impact on the probability that early entrepreneurial ventures will succeed. In turn, the human capital elements of work experience, industry experience, and managerial experience were shown to only positively influence the survival of opportunity-based entrepreneurs versus those entrepreneurs that participate in necessity-based ventures (Baptista et al., 2014).

### **Social Capital.**

Widely acknowledged as crucial for the success in new venture creation, an entrepreneur's social capital is defined by Semrau and Hopp (2016) as the resource support provided by their social network structures. The social capital theory explores the ability of an entrepreneur to extract benefits from their social networks, structures, associations, and memberships (Bastié et al., 2016). According to Smith, Smith, and Shaw (2017), social capital is considered a foundational theoretical perspective in the study of entrepreneurship. Social capital functions as a way for entrepreneurs to capitalize on market opportunities, while also allowing for an entrepreneur to identify, collect, and allocate scarce resources while serving to gather information, influence, and sponsorship. An entrepreneur's social capital is vital to new venture success, as social capital assists an entrepreneur in realizing the potential business opportunity by serving as a mechanism for acquiring the necessary resources for venture success, while also serving to legitimize their newly created venture (Smith et al., 2017). Furthermore, advances in technological communications have allowed an entrepreneur to rapidly expand the depth and breadth of their social networking contacts by exploiting the technological platforms of online social networks, blogs and microblogs, collaborative projects, content-based communities, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds (Smith et al., 2017).

Neira, Calvo, Fernández, and Portela (2017) advance research was suggesting that the efficacy of social capital is critical in the early stages of venture creation as social capital is often used to obtain the required resources needed to launch a new business. As such, Neira et al. (2017) state that social capital can be measured. For example, social capital can be measured by the frequency of social interaction and by the intensity of contact among the entrepreneur and the social group (Neira et al., 2017). Furthermore, the consequences of using the respective social network to increase social capital can be used as a valid unit of measure (Neira et al., 2017).

Current research performed by Neumeyer, Santos, Caetano, and Kalbfleisch (2018) explored the effects of gender, venture type, race, ethnicity, and past venture experience on the boundaries of modern social capital and networks. In this study, evidence shows that the over-reliance on social capital promotes and results in mediocrity by creating barriers for historically disadvantaged groups, namely women, novice, or minority entrepreneurs (Neumeyer et al., 2018). Women entrepreneurs “need to focus on developing their bridging social capital, as it will enable them to access resources that are outside of their strong-tie networks, thus contributing to the survivability of their ventures” (Neumeyer et al., 2018, p. 12). Research has shown that various supporting organizations can be used by women entrepreneurs to increase their social capital exposure, including universities, incubators, or small business development offices (Neumeyer et al., 2018).

In one of the few quantitative research studies that examined the role that social capital plays in the entrepreneurial process, Stam, Arzlanian, and Elfring (2014) conducted a meta-analysis exploring the link between an entrepreneurs personal network and small firm performance by identifying new moderators influencing this relationship. An analysis of 61 independent samples indicated that there was a positive and significant link between an

entrepreneur's social capital and the performance of these entrepreneurs newly created business ventures (Stam et al., 2014). Furthermore, Stam et al. (2014) concluded that the link between social capital and the performance of startup business ventures indicated that the link was dependent on the overall age of these growing ventures and the industrial or institutional context in which these firms operated.

In line with the literature, Chen, Chang, and Chiang (2017) note that the elements of entrepreneurial human capital are critical for new venture success, namely an entrepreneur's experience in school, work, and venture creation. Also, an entrepreneur's human capital affects their social capital (Chen et al., 2017). One's social capital, or their family ties, business associations, and governmental relationships can influence an entrepreneur's social reputation, career achievement, and entrepreneurial satisfaction, resulting in business profitability (Chen et al., 2017).

#### **Entrepreneurial motivation (Four Forces Model).**

The motivational characteristics of entrepreneurs have found to be a relevant and focal factor in explaining the development of entrepreneurial endeavors (Kisker, 2016). In a literature review by Kisker (2016), the author noted that an entrepreneur's motivation clusters around four factors, otherwise known as the four forces model. The four forces model of entrepreneurial motivational influence includes the categories of need for achievement, financial reward, social recognition, and independence, thus providing a framework to analyze the impact that various motivational factors have on entrepreneurial venture creation (Kisker, 2016). As a result, the value of the four forces model stems from its ability to test and measure each of the motivational factors and their resulting impact on business survival and success (Kisker, 2016).

#### **Entrepreneurial risks.**

There are two types of approaches to understanding the risk perceptions of entrepreneurs, namely the cognitive approach and the trait approach (Dölarslan, Koçak, & öZer, 2017). The cognitive approach focuses on an entrepreneur's ideal manner of gathering, processing, and evaluating information. In contrast, the trait approach is concerned with the premise that an entrepreneur can be identified by characteristics and traits such as risk propensity, need for achievement, and locus of control (Dölarslan et al., 2017). According to Lopera and Marchand (2018), risk plays a fundamental role in economic decision-making. Herranz, Krasa, and Villamil (2015) stated that a willingness to take risks has always been an essential characteristics of a successful entrepreneur, oftentimes because entrepreneurs are skilled at managing their exposure to business risks, as risk is considered part of the terrain of entrepreneurship and these entrepreneurs work hard at reducing their business risks to a minimum. Choi, Kim, and Kim (2019) and Lopera and Marchand (2018) confirmed the premise that entrepreneurs are risk-takers by noting that these individuals show a higher risk propensity to engaging in commercial, entrepreneurial endeavors.

Cui, Sun, Xiao, and Zhao (2016) recognized that one's risk propensity might affect the result of an entrepreneur's entrepreneurial performance. According to Cui et al. (2016), the effect of alertness to potential business ideas on risk-taking, proactiveness, and degree of innovation, both positive and significant. Specifically, "the alertness to business ideas led to a significantly higher level of entrepreneurial capabilities with higher level of risk propensity, which can help an entrepreneur attain excellence" (Cui et al., 2016, p. 175).

### **Characteristics of Disabled Persons**

#### **Disability.**

Disability is defined by Button (2018) as (a) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual, (b) a record of such an impairment, or (c) being regarded as having such an impairment. There have been two models that have been used to classify an individual with a disability, namely a social model and a medical model (Kabir, 2014; Patel & Brown, 2017). The models of disability definition have evolved to be from beginning with a narrowly focused medical definition of disability that has progressed to a broader social definition of disability (Patel & Brown, 2017). As “the definition of disability has significant individual, societal, economic, and political and policy implications, it is difficult to construct an all-encompassing, unifying definition” (Patel & Brown, 2017, p. 247). Further complicating the establishment of a widely recognized definition of disability, different agencies and organizations frequently have different constraints, thresholds, and limits as to what qualifies as a disability (Patel & Brown, 2017). Even though disability is more readily associated with physical characteristics, the implications to those with intellectual disabilities are equally important to consider (Patel & Brown, 2017).

### **Disability statistics.**

Research presented by Stevens, Schneider, and Bederman-Miller (2018) revealed that the U.S. Census Bureau has been collecting data on disabilities since 1830, with a 2012 report issued by the U.S. Census Bureau stating that nearly 20% of Americans have a disability. A recent report published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showed that the figure for Americans with disabilities to be closer to 22% of the population (Peacock, Iezzoni, & Harkin, 2015). Furthermore, over 50% of the Americans described as being disabled are considered to be severely disabled (Peacock et al., 2015). Data provided by Maroto and Pettinicchio (2015) enumerated that the employment rate for those individuals of working age

and considered to be disabled to be 17%, whereas 65% of those without disabilities and of working age are employed. “Given the size of the population with disabilities in the United States and the hardships they face, it is particularly surprising that disability is often excluded from general sociological studies of stratification and inequality” (Maroto & Pettinicchio, 2015, para. 3).

### **United States disability legislation.**

Boellstorff (2019) noted that “disability is typically assumed to be incompatible with work, an assumption often reinforced by policies that withdraw benefits from disabled persons whose income exceeds a meagre threshold” (p. 1). According to Røed and Skogstrøm (2014), unemployment is a potentially destructive experience with empirical evidence suggesting that job loss can have dire results for any individual. These results can include undermining a worker’s future employment opportunities and earnings, raises their risk of divorce and early death, and increases the likelihood of these individuals entering disability programs. Conversely, job elimination and unemployment can also often serve as a spark to creativity that is the instigator of new venture creation (Røed & Skogstrøm, 2014).

Challenges and obstacles abound for those disabled individuals wishing to find employment, including having a lack of education, skills, and training to perform various job duties (Rozali, Abdullah, Ishak, Azmi, & Akhmar, 2017). Additionally, many employers often do not understand the capabilities of these disabled workers, adding additional layers of discrimination and prejudice against this marginalized group (Rozali et al., 2017). Entrepreneurs with disabilities experience distinct stigmatization and discrimination, raising the uncertainty of whether anti-discrimination legislation found in the United States, such as those found in the

ADA, provide sufficient or appropriate employment protections for people who are pursuing more than just employment but entrepreneurship (Caldwell, Harris, & Renko, 2016).

### **ADA.**

A cornerstone of the United States approach to civil rights for those with disabilities arises from the 1990 legislation called the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). According to Gould et al. (2016), the Congressionally passed ADA legislation provides a legal framework for those individuals with disabilities to challenge discriminatory practices. As noted by Gould et al. (2016):

The ADA considers it discrimination in employment (1) when an individual is denied a position based on disability for which he or she is qualified (Section 101-8), and (2) when a qualified individual with a disability is prevented from reasonable accommodation (Section 101-9). By preventing unequal treatment and facilitating reasonable accommodations, the law provides a clear legal definition of how to prevent discriminatory practice (para. 4).

Durlak (2017) offered additional insight to the passing of the ambitious act was to establish legislation to address the multiple forms of discrimination that contribute to the social and economic marginalization of individuals with disabilities by regulating the hiring practices of the majority of public and private workplaces in the United States. Additionally, the ADA legislation provided a vehicle to eliminating barriers faced by individuals with disabilities across many domains, including obstacles related to employment discrimination, public services, access to medical care, public facilities, and telecommunication services (Isetti & Eadie, 2015; 2016).

The ADA resulted in modifications to the legal definition of disability and to substantially affect



how those with disabilities may qualify for reasonable accommodations under the rule of American law (Isetti & Eadie, 2015; 2016).

Nearly 30 years after the passing of the ADA legislation, researchers and policymakers are still unsure about the actual effects that the ADA had on those individuals it was aimed to protect. Rothstein (2015) notes that the intent of the ADA of protecting those with disabilities often failed, as providing legal coverage to those with severe impairments created a dilemma that impeded the successful implementation of the ADA for several years. According to Rothstein (2015), “between 1999 and 2008, plaintiffs lost more than 90% of ADA cases, and the leading cause was the failure to prove that their disability was sufficiently serious” (p. 2221). Conversely, disabled individuals with severe impairments were often found to be unable to perform essential job-related tasks safely and efficiently (Rothstein, 2015). Many courts ruled that several individuals were either not impaired enough to be protected by the ADA or found to be too impaired to be considered a qualified individual with a disability under the legal guidelines established by the ADA.

### **ADAAA.**

To address the shortcomings that were inherent to the original ADA legislation of 1990, mainly redefining the definition of disability, the United States Congress voted to pass the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA) with the intent to improve the labor market and employability outcomes for individuals with disabilities. According to Henry (2014), the most significant result of the ADAAA is its expansion of the recognition of what constitutes an actual disability. The ADAAA’s broadening of the disability definition cured the shortcomings of the ADA, removing a stumbling block to many of the 90% of plaintiffs that lost their cases during the initial ADA legislation (Valderrama, 2010). Ultimately, the ADAAA legislation was enacted

to protect disabled individuals in the societal areas of employment, education, and public accommodations (Daniels-Bacchus, 2018).

Numerous changes were instigated to the ADAAA that affected the definition of disability (Isetti & Eadie, 2015; 2016). As such, several new disabilities were immediately recognized by the enhanced ADAAA law. The United States Department of Labor (2019) noted that the ADAAA now acknowledges the addition of afflictions that are classified as impairing major life activities or bodily functions (Dol.gov, 2019). These major life activities are defined as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working (Office of the Law Revision Counsel, 2019). Major bodily functions are defined as functions of the immune system, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive functions (Office of the Law Revision Counsel, 2019). Goren (2014) noted that specific mental impairments recognize under the ADAAA law now include social anxiety disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and autism. Wylonis, Wylonis, and Sadoff (2017) reveal other mental conditions that are almost always protected under the ADAAA act, namely obsessive-compulsive disorder, major depressive disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and intellectual disability.

### **Learning disabilities definition.**

In the United States, learning disabilities are defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) as being classified as specific learning disabilities (SLD) (McDowell, 2018). The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (2019) defines SLD as:

a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, Dyslexia, and developmental Aphasia (para 1).

In addition to the IDEA (2019) definition of learning disability, several disorders are not included in the definition of learning disabled. The diagnoses of SLD “does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of intellectual disability, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage” (IDEA, 2019, para 2).

McDowell (2018) revealed that many specific disorders that affect learning, thus are considered SLD’s. These disorders include Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Auditory Processing Disorder (APD), Dyspraxia, language-based learning disorders, and medical conditions with associated brain damage (McDowell, 2018). Within the field of learning disability, several specific domains and diagnoses that are identified. These include dyslexia that affects literacy, dyscalculia that impacts mathematics, dysgraphia affecting handwriting, and non-verbal learning disabilities that impact multiple areas of an individual’s learning (McDowell, 2018).

Research presented by Penney (2018) described the term *learning disability* as being defined in terms that identify deficits in various psychological processes that affect certain areas of academic achievement, namely working memory and attention. As learning disabilities are a result of neurological disorders associated with numerous mental processes, those with learning disabilities often find it challenging to acquire particular skills in subjects such as mathematics

and reading (Penney, 2018). Kenyon, Beail, and Jackson (2014) have shown research that individuals diagnosed with learning disabilities spend a significant amount of their lives managing the stigma associated with having a learning disability. Further research has demonstrated that the stigma of having a learning disability makes it difficult for these individuals to enjoy a positive self-concept (Kenyon et al., 2014). Zysberg and Kasler (2017) explained that most diagnosed cases of SLD are considered to be life-long afflictions and the anxiety these individuals feel makes it challenging to integrate into the mainstream elements of life and society in general (Kenyon et al., 2014).

Zysberg and Kasler (2017) provided empirical evidence that learning disabilities, or SLD's, affect approximately 8% of the children living within the United States, while the prevalence of the diagnosis of SLD has been on the rise. Further evidence has demonstrated that individuals with SLD experience an emotional and social world that is much more challenging when compared to individuals that do not have SLD. The areas of an individual's emotion identification, emotional management and regulation, and the expression of emotion can be significantly diminished (Zysberg & Kasler, 2017). The attribution of these challenges stems from the effects of the individual internal frustration of having an SLD, continuous academic difficulty inherent in the experience of students with SLD, and general aspects of common social adaptation (Zysberg & Kasler, 2017).

People with learning disabilities have poorer physical and mental health when compared with the general population (Russell, Bryant, & House, 2017). Individuals diagnosed with learning disabilities are also more likely to have comorbid conditions that can influence the severity and complexity of the condition (Pearce, 2017). For example, some of the conditions that are more commonly co-diagnosed with those already diagnosed with a learning disability

include depression (Klassen, Tze, & Hannok, 2013), schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and anxiety-based afflictions (Pearce, 2017). Mizen and Cooper (2012) noted that autism, mania, and pica are also found to exist comorbidly with learning disabilities. Pearce (2017) noted that several factors that contribute to a higher risk for the comorbid conditions of those with learning disabilities, namely having a poor self-image, reduced social networks, difficulty expressing emotions, and being economically disadvantaged.

### **Disability stereotypes.**

Coleman, Brunell, and Haugen (2015) note that society's attitudes toward individuals with disabilities depend on several factors. Still, the primary influence of attitudes is the multitude of stereotypes associated with having a disability. Meyer and Asbrock (2018) noted that individuals with physical disabilities commonly face negative stereotypes toward them, as society inclines to view physical disability as a personal misfortune and those with physical disabilities as inferior. Coleman et al. (2015) noted that individuals with disabilities are often stereotyped as having a lack of strength and endurance while being comprised of weakness that is viewed as requiring dependence on others. The negative connotative word *incompetent* is regularly used as a descriptor most commonly used when describing an individual with a disability. In contrast, many individuals in society that do have a positive attitude towards those with disabilities are because of their personal feelings of sympathy and compassion towards those viewed as less-able than themselves (Coleman et al., 2015). Furthermore, as being disabled is not considered to be the social norm, many in society feel a sense of discomfort and fear when interacting with a disabled individual, often seeking physical or social distance from those with disabilities (Coleman et al., 2015).

Many people in society hold misperceptions and misconceptions about those individuals with disabilities, leading to wide-spread alienation, oppression, and marginalization of the disabled (Kallman, 2017). Further compounding the typical stereotypes associated with the disabled, individuals with disabilities are often characterized as lazy, scary, isolated, incapable, rude, and emotionally unstable (Kallman, 2017). According to research by Lynch and Finkelstein (2015), individuals with disabilities are faced with negative evaluations and attitudes from multiple social sources in various social situations. Further research reported that people experience higher levels of anxiety when asked to interact with those with disabilities, as negative affect and anxiety are likely to cause those without disabilities to avoid contact and forgo future encounters with those individuals with disabilities (Lynch & Finkelstein, 2015). Kallman (2017) advanced the notion that even though those individuals with disabilities comprise that largest minority group in the world, individuals with disabilities commonly encounter personalized prejudice and routinely experience institutionalized prejudgment.

### **Employment Patterns of Disabled Persons**

Nelissen, Hülshager, van Ruitenbeek, and Zijlstra (2016) offered research exploring the barriers that individuals with disabilities face when attempting to enter the job market. One of the most significant obstacles faced by the disabled worker emanates from the stereotypes and attitudes of employers and fellow employees. This negative perception of the disabled worker is a primary reason why individuals with disabilities experience bias in the way that they are treated in the work environment (Nelissen et al., 2016). Also, the negative attitudes exhibited by the co-workers of the disabled have been empirically shown to prevent individuals with disabilities from fulfilling goals while also limiting the disabled from having equal access to every aspect of life (Nelissen et al., 2016).

Price and Payne (2015) conveyed statistics that have shown that individuals with disabilities are often unemployed, while those with learning disabilities often have the highest rate of employment when compared to those with other disabilities. While adults having learning disabilities are often proportionally employed when compared to the non-disabled, many of the individuals with learning disabilities that are employed are actually underemployed and working in part-time, entry-level, and minimum wage positions (Price & Payne, 2015). Furthermore, Parkes (2011) stated that an emerging theme of the stereotypical view of the learning disabled suggests that some individuals with learning disabilities are considered to be cheaters of the United States social welfare system, as our modern society often has a distorted view individuals with learning disabilities.

#### **The disability benefits trap.**

Persons with disabilities face an untenable dilemma when it comes to social welfare. In the United States, for example, if an individual must leave work or school due to illness, many of these people can only get benefits through the Social Security Disability Insurance or Supplemental Security Income (Drake et al., 2012). Applying and being approved for these benefits is an arduous process that is muddled with complex rules, often taking years of repeated attempts at trying to prove that one is severely disabled (Drake et al., 2012). Once these individuals are approved for governmental disability services and have received disability status, most are reluctant to do anything that threatens the status and disbursement of their social welfare benefits, like pursuing gainful employment or exploring the benefits of entrepreneurship (Drake et al., 2012). The social welfare system in the United States essentially pays those individuals to remain disabled by giving these people little to no support or incentive to escape

the financial constraints of disability, as these individuals become accustomed and socialized into a life of combined disability and poverty (Drake et al., 2012).

### **Professional Success Factors for Disabled Persons**

Research contributed by Saxena and Pandya (2018) attempts to offer an understanding of the trials and tribulations that are encountered by entrepreneurs with disabilities as they traverse their entrepreneurial journey. Using a case study methodology, Saxena and Pandya (2018) study eight disabled entrepreneurs based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India in a research effort that demonstrates that disabled entrepreneurs show similar personality traits and characteristics as those entrepreneurs that are not disabled. In addition, Saxena and Pandya (2018) found that the disabled entrepreneurs observed resulted in individual personality characteristics that were found to be more resilient and persistent while dealing with the entrepreneurial challenges of failure, stress, and uncertainty. These disabled entrepreneurs were able to confront difficult conditions and experiences of discrimination, which had the result of indirectly preparing these individuals to tackle challenges while pursuing entrepreneurship (Saxena & Pandya, 2018). As a result, the people that support and who are close to the disabled entrepreneurs play a vital role in shaping and supporting their entrepreneurial ventures (Saxena & Pandya, 2018).

Research performed by Kabir (2014) proposes that an individual's disability may, in fact, prove to be an advantage for those entrepreneurs that wish to create their own business as demonstrated by two measured factors. First, the disabled individual typically lives a disciplined lifestyle with strict daily routines that can be applied to various facets of entrepreneurship, namely the virtues of consistency and perseverance (Kabir, 2014). Second, the disabled individual often has a unique perspective of the world that allows the disabled entrepreneur to recognize and develop the needs of the community by distinguishing gaps that can be exploited



by an entrepreneurial effort (Kabir, 2014). The amalgamation of these two factors has shown to perform in concert to help the disabled individual to achieve entrepreneurial success (Kabir, 2014).

Saxena and Pandya (2018) found that disabled entrepreneurs were resilient and persistent when dealing with the challenges of failure, stress, and uncertainty of entrepreneurship. The common elements of repeated discrimination and the difficulties of facing continuous challenging conditions did prepare these entrepreneurs with the inherent challenges that one faces when starting an entrepreneurial pursuit (Saxena & Pandya, 2018). Furthermore, the individuals that are near the disabled entrepreneurs play a vital role in shaping their entrepreneurial venture through the direct and indirect form of social and moral support (Saxena & Pandya, 2018).

### **Experiences of Disabled Entrepreneurs**

Nations across the globe are experiencing a growing recognition that self-employment and entrepreneurship can be a vital source of labor participation for marginalized groups, such as those individuals with disabilities (Maritz & Laferriere, 2016). Entrepreneurship can lead to the removal of barriers faced by individuals with disabilities, while also serving as a vehicle for increased workforce participation, micro and macro-economic development, and social inclusion (Maritz & Laferriere, 2016). There are three established categories of barriers faced by disabled entrepreneurs, namely social, financial, and personal (Maritz & Laferriere, 2016). Financial barriers faced by disabled entrepreneurs include access to capital to fund a new business.

In contrast, societal challenges include the exclusion and discrimination that the disabled are commonly faced with each day (Maritz & Laferriere, 2016). Finally, the personal challenges faced by disabled entrepreneurs are varied and include a lack of personal confidence, while also

experiencing a lack of skills, business, and experience related to business creation and operation (Maritz & Laferriere, 2016). There have been various research studies that hypothesize that entrepreneurship can economically benefit those with disabilities. Anderson and Galloway (2012) also noted that the disabled often exhibit many of the characteristics that are advantageous for entrepreneurial success, namely creative problem solving, resourcefulness, sense of humor, flexibility, persistence, and a willingness to ask for help.

Bagheri and Abbariki (2017) engaged in a qualitative study based in Iran that set out to examine the competencies of disabled entrepreneurs by way of presenting their lived experiences in developing their capabilities to create and manage their own business. The dimensions and components of entrepreneurial competencies of disabled entrepreneurs are explored, while the personal competencies of attitudinal competencies, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and entrepreneurship learning self-efficacy are observed (Bagheri & Abbariki, 2017). Bagheri and Abbariki (2017) concluded that entrepreneurial competencies vary in different contexts as entrepreneurs with disabilities require a combination of specific competencies to deal with the complexities, difficulties, and challenges of their entrepreneurial tasks and roles. As such, this study provides some of the first empirical evidence exploring the entrepreneurial competencies of a highly marginalized group of disabled entrepreneurs (Bagheri & Abbariki, 2017).

Recent research performed by Renko et al. (2016) uncovered that entrepreneurial endeavors established by nascent entrepreneurs with disabilities are less likely to result in the emergence of an organization that is viable when compared to entrepreneurs who do not have a disability. This disparity in entrepreneurial success indicates that there are still substantial barriers faced by beginning entrepreneurs with disabilities (Renko et al., 2016). As a result of this research, it is recommended that policymakers should place further emphasis on building

mentoring relationships between the disabled entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs that have a track record of success. Furthermore, the nascent disabled entrepreneur should receive access to additional social support systems, as businesspersons typically enter the business start-up process with lower levels of education when compared to non-disabled entrepreneurs (Renko et al., 2016).

Kašperová et al. (2018) presented research which highlighted some of the complexities that the disabled entrepreneur must face when establishing their growing business, while also providing original insight into why and how individuals with disabilities become entrepreneurs. Kašperová et al. (2018) determined that the disabled entrepreneur had concerns in three categories which ultimately shaped the type of business venture pursued, namely concerns with well-being, performative achievement, and self-worth. For the disabled entrepreneur, this results in an entrepreneurial identity that is not static or fixed but is always affected by social relations and conditions that surround and shape an individual's motivation to pursue and to commit to venture creation (Kašperová et al., 2018).

Recent research presented by Mandiberg and Edwards (2016) showed that entrepreneurs exist in all population groups, as insightful and viable ideas are free of restrictions from one type of social class or group. For those with intellectual disabilities, such as severe mental illness, entrepreneurship can prove to be a successful experience. Thus, it is possible for people with severe mental illnesses to successfully start and maintain businesses (Mandiberg & Edwards, 2016). The success of these entrepreneurial endeavors typically hinges on three main factors. First, the disabled entrepreneur must gain as much knowledge and experience in the core elements of business before launching their entrepreneurial initiative (Mandiberg & Edwards, 2016). Second, the benefits of mutual support, mentoring, and social communication among

entrepreneurs is essential (Mandiberg & Edwards, 2016). Finally, finding ways to capitalize on the nascent entrepreneur's efforts is critical to the success of these businesses, as most of these disabled-owned businesses necessitate a stable source of capital to fund these efforts until they can become profitable (Mandiberg & Edwards, 2016).

Martin and Honig (2019) presented a measured model that highlighted the exclusionary practices in management research that fails to address the inimitable contexts of individuals with disabilities. Building upon the research of management, entrepreneurship, and vocational rehabilitation literature, findings show that individuals with disabilities who have been previously unsuccessful in the job-market can indeed create self-employment opportunities that have significant positive social-psychological effects for the individual (Martin & Honig, 2019). These positive social-psychological effects include an increase in the satisfaction of work, an increase in the work performed, and an overall improvement in the happiness of life (Martin & Honig, 2019). For any entrepreneur, starting a business consists of numerous small, inconsequential activities. In contrast, for the disabled entrepreneur, the completion of these simple foundational business development tasks provides the disabled individual with an increase in cognitive growth and the feeling of accomplishment (Martin & Honig, 2019).

Research submitted by Balcazar, Kuchak, Dimpfl, Sariepella, and Alvarado (2014) proposed that entrepreneurship can empower a disabled individual and can indeed be a valid employment option for those with disabilities. Caldwell et al. (2012) put forth a study in which entrepreneurship has become part of the national strategy in the United States to address the disparities in employment for individuals with disabilities. This national strategy is focused on helping the disabled make the transition from unemployment and underemployment that rely on entitlements-based programs, toward programs that foster self-sufficiency by offering these

individuals with the opportunity to achieve gainful employment through entrepreneurial initiatives (Caldwell et al., 2012).

Ostrow, Nemecek, and Smith (2018) offered research that notes that self-employment, including entrepreneurship, can be an alternative to wage employment for the disabled, namely those individuals with psychiatric disabilities. One of the challenges encountered by individuals with disabilities is that many have disrupted educational and employment histories, making opportunities in wage employment difficult (Ostrow et al., 2018). Entrepreneurship offers the disabled individual several advantages, specifically a viable career path, opportunities for self-care and empowerment, additional fiscal earnings, and having control over their particular career.

Anderson and Galloway (2012) articulated that research studies on business ownership and disability are scarce. The research studies that do take a look at both entrepreneurship and disability typically take the approach that entrepreneurship is a vehicle for disadvantaged groups to overcome economic adversity (Anderson & Galloway, 2012). Furthermore, previous research has shown that education was not a prerequisite for entrepreneurship and that the process of entrepreneurship could, in fact, have a positive impact on the lives of those that are lacking in formal education (Anderson & Galloway, 2012). As such, one's educational attainment was found not to be a factor in the start-up and entrepreneurial creation processes, therefore suggesting that entrepreneurship could be a possible option for empowering disabled individuals (Anderson & Galloway, 2012). Anderson and Galloway (2012) cited research conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom, which explained that disabled individuals are self-employed in significantly higher proportions than those that are noted to be able-bodied.

**Nascent entrepreneurs with learning disabilities.**

According to Verheul et al. (2015), little is known about the relationship between entrepreneurship and the extent of psychiatric symptoms, such as those found with individuals diagnosed with ADHD. Recent research by Antshel (2018) noted that emerging literature had described a correlation between ADHD symptoms and higher entrepreneurial intentions and orientations. As reported by Antshel (2018), the hyperactivity dimension of ADHD seems to be more influential than the inattentive dimensions of ADHD. Antshel (2018) further noted that adults diagnosed with ADHD might incline to entrepreneurial activities because there is a lack of other alternatives for suitable employment.

Thurik, Khedhaouria, Torrès, and Verheul (2016) presented a study that establishes the concept that an individual's ADHD symptomatic traits can be viewed as either bright and desirable or dark and undesirable, with each type of trait having offsetting effectiveness on entrepreneurial efficacy. Bright traits generally incline towards entrepreneurial effectiveness, but also involve paradoxical utility, whereas "non-impulsive entrepreneurs may fail to take control of ambiguous situations due to their reluctance to take risks" (Thurik et al., 2016, p. 569). Conversely, an individual's dark traits may compromise entrepreneurial efficacy (Thurik et al., 2016). Wiklund, Yu, Tucker, and Marino (2017) reported that recent entrepreneur literature had shown an awareness of how some of the negatively perceived traits exhibited by those with ADHD can have positive implications in the domain of entrepreneurship.

Pavey (2006) performed research that explores whether the training opportunities for young U.K.-based individuals with learning disabilities to become robust, successful entrepreneurs have merit. Pavey (2006) noted that for the disabled, the chance at nascent entrepreneurship holds the promise of economic salvation. The entrepreneurial efforts of these individuals can be found in diverse industries such as the arts, sports, non-profit entities, and

large commercial enterprises (Pavey, 2006). Therefore, young individuals with learning disabilities should not be excluded from entrepreneurship training (Pavey, 2006), as “an expanded view of entrepreneurship that extends beyond an income-generating function can enhance the learning opportunities available to young people with disabilities or learning difficulties” (p. 227).

Miller and Le Breton-Miller (2017) built on the perspective suggesting that some of the critical drivers of entrepreneurship arise from serious life challenges rather than originating from personal strengths, advantages, or favorable contexts. Additionally, evidence has shown that individuals who become entrepreneurs out of necessity are underrepresented in current studies (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017). These necessity entrepreneurs specifically include those that are disabled with dyslexia, ADHD, and various physical disabilities (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017).

Additional research performed by Miller and Le Breton-Miller (2017) noted that when it comes to entrepreneurs that are challenged by cognitive elements, namely ADHA or Dyslexia, many of these entrepreneurial individuals will typically follow an unusual career path. Further research into these entrepreneurs with cognitive challenges has shown that most of these individuals have already endured many failures and are used to asking for and receiving help from others (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017). Furthermore, many of these entrepreneurs with ADHD or Dyslexia are noted to be creative in their thinking, as many of these individuals have acute pattern recognition skills that aids in their ability to have imaginative thinking (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017).

Wiklund, Patzelt, and Dimov (2016) noted that individuals with ADHD might potentially have specific and measurable qualities that make them well suited for entrepreneurship. Wiklund

et al. (2016) posited that three different mechanisms might be at play. Firstly, the domain of entrepreneurship may be an occupational choice favored by people with ADHD, since those with ADHD are often pushed out of regular employment opportunities, thus making these individuals seekers of situations in which they can better capitalize on their strengths while minimizing their perceived weaknesses (Wiklund et al., 2016). Additionally, those individuals with ADHD typically have developed coping strategies to address and overcome challenges frequently presented by their disability (Wiklund et al., 2016). These strategies developed by individuals with ADHD to cope with being disabled can be highly applicable in their subsequent entrepreneurial endeavors, as resilience and persistence are critical attributes for any entrepreneur to possess (Wiklund et al. 2016). Finally, advances in neuroscience have recently revealed a hereditary neurological basis for ADHD, as “these brain differences have remained in the gene pool throughout evolution suggesting that they represent natural variations” of genetic traits that can be associated with an increase in risk-taking and novelty-seeking which are two key characteristics found in an entrepreneur (Wiklund et al., 2016, p. 15).

Current research presented by Lerner, Verheul, and Thurik (2018) takes an in-depth exploration of the effects that ADHD has on entrepreneurship. By extending recent studies that investigate the impact that ADHD has on an individual’s entrepreneurial activity, Lerner et al. (2018) found that those clinically diagnosed with ADHD can positively affect the likelihood of creating an entrepreneurial venture. Even though the characteristics symptoms of ADHD have enormous downsides for the afflicted individual, a “dark and pathological condition can serve as a wellspring for entrepreneurial action” (Lerner et al., 2018, p. 9). The reasons behind this phenomenon are not yet clear, but a leading hypothesis suggests that because there are innumerable unproductive and destructive behaviors associated with those who have ADHD, an



entrepreneurial initiative may be found to serve as a constructive outlet (Lerner et al., 2018). Additional research offered by Lerner, Hunt, and Verheul (2018) noted that there seems to be a unique connection between the diversity of perspective that connects an individual with ADHD to entrepreneurship.

ADHD is a significant influencer of entrepreneurship, with ADHD having both negative and positive impacts. Thompson, Bacon, and Auburn (2015) stated that some past research studies have shown that learning disabilities positively influenced the success of these disabled entrepreneurs. Finally, Lerner et al., (2018) noted that further research is needed to understand the effects of ADHD on entrepreneurial outcomes, as the outcomes of an entrepreneurial effort by an ADHD afflicted individual is sperate from measuring the resultant performance of these entrepreneurial initiatives.

There has been recent research that explores learning disability as an individual differences variable, which can be measured and then applied in predicting potential leadership emergence, role occupancy, and leader effectiveness (Luria, Kalish, & Weinstein, 2014). An individual's ability to learn is of particular importance for being a leader, as learning is considered central to exhibiting a decisive leadership role (Luria et al., 2014). Luria et al. (2014) suggested that individuals that do have difficulties participating in learning activities will be less likely to emerge as leaders. Conversely, Luria et al. (2014) posited that some of the most successful company founders in recent history had been afflicted with learning disabilities. These entrepreneurial business icons include Henry Ford of the Ford Motor Company, Steve Jobs of Apple, Ted Turner of CNN, and Bill Hewlett of Hewlett Packard, with some of these leaders actually attributing their success to the limitations of their learning disabilities (Luria et al., 2014).

According to Freeman, Staudenmaier, Zisser, and Andresen (2018), disabilities, such as psychiatric conditions, can influence an entrepreneur's affect, motivation, self-concept, creativity, and cognition in a manner that can influence business outcomes. Citing a French study of 306 entrepreneurs, Freeman et al. (2018) discovered that those individuals with ADHD symptoms had an elevated entrepreneurial orientation, which has been found to be a predictor of small firm endurance and growth. Furthermore, a study of 10,000 Dutch university students revealed that those students with ADHD behaviors and symptoms had a higher level of entrepreneurial career intentions when compared to those students without ADHD symptoms or behaviors (Freeman et al., 2018).

#### **Summary of the literature review.**

The exploration of the topic of how learning disabilities affect an entrepreneurial calling and success required the examination of multiple topics found in the extant literature to place this phenomenon in the proper context. This topical investigation required an established definition of what constitutes an entrepreneur while also identifying the characteristics, skills, human capital, social capital, and behaviors that affect an entrepreneur's motivation and calling. The current literature notes that any entrepreneurial endeavor has its inherent risks, and these risks can ultimately result in entrepreneurial success or failure. Finally, the resilience of entrepreneurs needed exploration, as did the most current trends that are influencing the present-day literature surrounding entrepreneurship.

The examination of the topic of how learning disabilities affect an entrepreneur's calling and success also required a definition of disability while also providing a statistical interpretation of how disability is measured in the United States. A discussion of disability required understanding of the legal landscape protecting those with disabilities in the United States as did

an understanding of the societal stereotypes that are encountered by those Americans with disabilities. The definitional characteristics of individuals with learning disabilities were necessary, as was an exploration of how disabled entrepreneurs and nascent entrepreneurs have been interpreted in the current literature. Finally, an examination of nascent entrepreneurs with learning disabilities was required to establish a baseline of interpretation for this specific dissertation topic.

### **Transition and Summary of Section 1**

Attempting to understand and conceptualize the phenomenon recognized as the influence that learning disabilities have on entrepreneurial endeavors has not yet been highlighted in the current research studies. According to Verheul et al. (2015), little is known about the relationship between entrepreneurship and the extent of psychiatric symptoms, such as those found with individuals diagnosed with ADHD. The phenomena identified as the relationship between learning disabilities, entrepreneurial calling, and entrepreneurial success or failure is a timely and relevant topic that necessitated further exploration.

In Section 1, the background of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the nature of the study were presented. Additionally, the conceptual frameworks that frame the research study, as well as the research questions, were used to guide the study, have been posed. Finally, the significance of the study and a comprehensive review of the professional literature was introduced.

## **Section 2: The Project**

As noted in Section 1, the phenomena identified as the relationship between learning disabilities, entrepreneurial calling, and entrepreneurial success or failure was a timely and relevant topic that necessitated further exploration. To provide a complete and detailed description of the topic, a comprehensive research methodology is required. The following sections serve as an outline to the research methodology established in Section 2: (a) purpose statement, (b) role of the researcher, (c) participants, (d) research method and design, (e) population and sampling, (f) data collection, (g) data analysis methodology, and (h) reliability and validity.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the qualitative case study research was to explore the unique challenges, barriers, and solutions encountered by learning disabled entrepreneurs that appear to affect the success or failure of their entrepreneurial endeavors, while also examining how the individual was called to be an entrepreneur.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As noted by Kyvik (2013), the role of the modern researcher is composed of several sub-roles and their corresponding tasks, which in totality encompasses a research effort. Six tasks related to the researcher role are distinguished, namely networking, collaboration, managing research, conducting research, publishing research, and the evaluation of research (Kyvik, 2013). Sutton and Austin (2015) acknowledged that the role of the researcher in qualitative research is to attempt to access the feelings and thoughts of the research study participants, even if this involves asking study participants to discuss topics that may be personal and difficult to speak about openly.

When approaching a research study from the perspective of a qualitative methodology, the human researcher is an integral part of the research process and is involved in all stages of the study (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014). These stages include defining an initial concept while resulting in performable research design, participant interviews and observations, transcription of data, data analysis, data verification, and the reporting of the resultant themes, concepts, and arguments. In the case of exploring the specifics of the learning disabled, the role of the researcher should not be limited to just listening to participants, as a focused effort is needed to help these participants situate their unique experiences in a broader, more detailed context (Walmsley, 2004). Furthermore, the primary role of the researcher aligns with safeguarding the research participants and their data.

### **Participants**

Data collection and analysis should continue until the point in which no new concepts or codes emerge, indicating that theoretical data saturation has occurred (van Rijnsoever, 2017). Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) observed that data saturation occurred between 10 and 30 participant interviews, with a maximum of 30 interviews providing pattern, category, and dimension saturation and growth. According to Mason (2010), 25 participant sources of evidence should be considered when conducting a case study research approach. The case study research strived to utilize data obtained from approximately 30 participants, as recommended by Mason (2010).

Additionally, the sample participants were obtained using a purposeful sampling approach. In contrast, the demographic composition of the sample participants included those of any age, gender, or ethnicity, thus allowing this research to explore a rich and diverse set of participants. The participant population for this study was U.S. based entrepreneurs that have

identified as having a disability that is classified as being a factor that impacts one's learning.

The research group was comprised of individuals that self-identified as being learning disabled and identifying as entrepreneurs. An exploration of the research participants' experiences used a combination of interviews and interview transcripts, field notes, researcher journals, and unsolicited and solicited emails were systematically collected. Several potential sources were utilized to find the necessary participants required to conduct this case study research. As such, there were numerous resources available that produced the needed participants necessary to perform this research. Access to participants was secured after approval from the Liberty University Internal Review Board (IRB). Participants who agreed to be included in this research study were contacted by the researcher who scheduled interviews which were performed in-person, via telephone, or through various types of internet communication platforms.

### **Research Method and Design**

The summation of worldviews, strategies, and methods combine to form a research inquiry methodology that is either quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method in construction (Creswell, 2014). As noted in the previous section, the purpose of qualitative research is to pursue a better understanding of complex situations using exploratory, empirical, inductive, and interpretative observations of a specific situation within a specific context (Pacho, 2015). The qualitative approach attempts to make sense of people's experiences, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and behavior in a given cultural context, thus having the advantage of collecting the views of the research study participants in a specified time and context (Pacho, 2015).

Within the domain of the qualitative research method, multiple types of research designs can be found. The most common qualitative research design types include phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, and the case study research methodology (Astalin, 2013). A case

study methodology is appropriate for this research study because of these designs ability to offer an in-depth level of study of a limited number of cases. This results in a research study that is formed of rich detail, which promotes further business understanding and can be utilized to inform practice for similar business situations (Pacho, 2015).

### **Discussion of the method.**

As noted previously in Section 1, the purpose of this qualitative research study was to give a voice to the exploration, understanding, and meaning of both groups and individuals to describe a human or social problem (Creswell, 2014). For this dissertation, the qualitative research methodology was utilized. As presented by Hlady-Rispal and Jouison-Laffitte (2014), “there is a documented need for qualitative research in entrepreneurship that allows for an in-depth study of a given phenomenon, mobilizing creative ways of producing and analyzing empirical data” (p. 594). Qualitative research methods can use a wide range of approaches, including interviews, case studies, and focus groups to obtain narrative-based data to understand a topic further and to generate a potential theory to describe a phenomenon (Claydon, 2015). Furthermore, the qualitative research methodology is a fundamental part of scholarship across all fields of study (Trainor & Leko, 2014). Qualitative research methods are adaptable and flexible, with traditional qualitative research norms encouraging “researchers to engage in bricolage and adapt the methods to their respective research question, the sample, or the context in which they collect data” (Köhler, Smith, & Bhakoo, 2019, p. 3).

Understanding the phenomenon of how learning disabilities affect the success or failure of entrepreneurs, while also exploring how the entrepreneur was called to be an entrepreneur necessitated a qualitative methodology to answer questions about the complex phenomena surrounding this topic. A qualitative research approach was useful in the case of this dissertation

as an attempt to observe and make sense of a person's experience, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and behavior in a given cultural context was required (Pacho, 2015). Furthermore, as a multifaceted exploration of involving learning disabilities and entrepreneurship was needed, a qualitative research study aimed to be inductive, empirical, and interpretative of the research participants' situation (Pacho, 2015), providing an ideal vehicle for this study's methodology.

### **Discussion of design.**

As described by Morgan, Pullon, Macdonald, McKinlay, and Gray (2017), qualitative "case study research is a comprehensive method that incorporates multiple sources of data to provide detailed accounts of complex research phenomena in real-life contexts" (p. 1060). Research presented by Schell (1992) establishes the advantages and benefits of applying the case study research design. For example, the strength of the case study approach lies in its ability to accommodate a full range of evidential data, including artifacts, documentation, observations, and interviews (Schell, 1992). Guetterman and Fetters (2018) state that case study research is a commonly used approach to research and evaluation in many disciplines, which involves the examination of one or more real-life cases to capture its details and complexity. When a researcher aims to explore and obtain a meaningful understanding and appreciation of an event, phenomenon, or issue, the case study approach is particularly useful as a research method (Crowe et al., 2011).

Woodside and Wilson (2003) proposed that a case study research approach should result in a deep understanding of the actors, sentiments, behaviors, and interactions that occur during a specific period. The research design used in this dissertation was the case study research design. The case study research methodology finds use when research demands that a real-life phenomenon, or case, is explored in-depth and within its environmental context or environment,



and can include cases such as groups, individuals, organizations, events, anomalies, or problems (Ridder, 2017). Case study research designs are utilized when the investigator wishes to develop a thorough analysis of a specific case that is based on interpretive data and exhibits explicit boundaries (Creswell, 2014). As such, the case study research methodology is typically useful when an individual, individuals, event, program, process, or activity needs to be explored in-depth, (Creswell, 2014), such as exploring how learning disability influences one's entrepreneurial calling and success.

The goal of this case study research was to understand how learning disabilities affect the success or failure of entrepreneurs, while also exploring how the entrepreneur was called to be an entrepreneur. The required research group was comprised of individuals that identified as being learning disabled and identifying as entrepreneurs. To explore the research participants' experiences, a combination of interviews and interview transcripts, field notes, researcher journals, and unsolicited and solicited emails were systematically collected. Several potential sources were utilized in order to find the necessary participants required to conduct this case study research. As such, numerous resources that were able to produce the needed participants necessary to perform this research.

#### **Summary of research method and design.**

The phenomena identified as the relationship between learning disabilities, entrepreneurial calling, and entrepreneurial success or failure is an appropriate and significant topic that necessitates further exploration. To provide a complete and detailed description of the topic, a comprehensive qualitative research methodology is required. Qualitative research methodology necessitates an appropriate research design in which the case study methodology

finds applicability in understanding how learning disabilities affect the success or failure of entrepreneurs, while also exploring how the entrepreneur was called to be an entrepreneur.

### **Population and Sampling**

The process of gathering data is crucial in research, as the collected data is aimed at contributing to a better understanding of a theoretical framework (Etikan, Musa, Alkassim, 2016). In the case of this research study, both the population and sampling method needed to be established. The following sections describe the population and sampling methodologies appropriate to this qualitative case study research study.

#### **Discussion of population.**

Asiamah, Mensah, and Oteng-Abayie (2017) stated that in order to gather data or information from research participants, these participants need to belong to the research population. A research population is defined as a group of individuals having one or more characteristics of research interest (Asiamah et al., 2017). As presented by van Rijnsoever (2017), a population is the “universe of units of analysis” from which a sample can be drawn" (p. 4). Additionally, the total set of information sources that are relevant to answer one or more research questions, such as interviews, archival data, existing documents, or observational data are collectively known as the research population (van Rijnsoever, 2017). It is from this population that one or more forms of informational sources are samples comprising of the iterative processes that include research data collection, analysis, and interpretation (van Rijnsoever, 2017). Each iteration of the sampling process allows the researcher the opportunity to adjust the sampling procedure, expanding or contracting the number of new sources of information to be sampled (van Rijnsoever, 2017).

The participants in this research study are required to meet specific criteria to warrant inclusion. The eligibility criteria established for this research study required participants to:

- (1) Be an entrepreneur
- (2) Identify as having a learning disability
- (3) Be based in the United States
- (4) Be 18 years of age or older

The above research study participant criteria allowed this researcher to answer the three overarching research questions that drive this research. As such, Appendix A exhibits the four pre-interview screening questions required to be completed in the affirmative to be a participant in this research study.

#### **Discussion of sampling.**

According to Abrams (2010), population sampling in qualitative studies is almost always naturalistic in which the research participants are observed in their typical settings. Moreover, qualitative studies are usually emergent in form, as the goals and strategies of the research are subject to change based upon continuing data analysis, ongoing reflections, and tentative alternative hypotheses (Abrams, 2010). Finally, qualitative sampling is “rarely predetermined or finite in its numerical size, as qualitative researchers often do not know when a study will be ‘theoretically saturated,’ or when further data collection will stop yielding new theoretical insights” (Abrams, 2010, p. 539). As noted by Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, and Young (2018), “samples in qualitative research tend to be small to support the depth of case-oriented analysis that is fundamental to this mode of inquiry” (p. 2). In the instance of this qualitative case study research, purposeful sampling was utilized, giving this researcher the ability to exercise their

judgment about selecting those research participants that would provide this study with the best perspective on the phenomenon of interest (Abrams, 2010).

Adequate sample sizes in qualitative research are necessary to provide complete data to answer the proposed research questions. The notion of data saturation is also relevant in qualitative research, as data saturation signifies the point in which no new additional meaningful themes or information are observed from the available research data (Boddy, 2016). The extant research has offered guidance as to the number of participants needed to sample for a qualitative research effort. For example, Mason (2010) noted that 25 participant sources of evidence should be considered when conducting a case study research approach. Aligning with the research, Marshall et al. (2013) observed that data saturation occurred between 10 and 30 participant interviews, with a maximum of 30 interviews providing pattern, category, and dimensional saturation and growth. In the case of this research study, 14 participants met the level of data saturation.

### **Summary of population and sampling.**

The process of gathering data is crucial in research, as the collected data is aimed at contributing to a better understanding of a theoretical framework (Etikan et al., 2016). In the case of the research study, both the population and sampling method needed to be established. The previous section describes the population and sampling methodologies appropriate to this qualitative case study research study.

### **Data Collection**

Sutton and Austin (2015) suggested that qualitative research can help researchers to access the thoughts and feelings of research participants. These captured participant thoughts and feelings can add further understanding to the meanings in which one ascribes to their personal

experiences, with the final goal of helping researchers in understanding how and why such behaviors take place (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The following section describes the qualitative data collection instruments chosen for this study, the techniques required to capture this data, and the data organization methodology applied to this research to reach a valid conclusion.

### **Instruments.**

According to Pacho (2015), data collection instruments are methods researchers utilize to gather research study data, often employing a collection of multiple data instruments into a single research study. These instruments can include interviews, websites, email, written documentation, audio-visual materials, focus groups, and observations (Pacho, 2015). The principle data instruments for this research study was confidential, in-depth interviews, email correspondence, researcher field notes, and websites, as these methods allowed for the answering of this study's research questions. The in-depth interviews and the email correspondence were comprised of open-ended questioning, as open-ended questioning allowed the interviewing researcher to pose questions that solicit more than a yes or no answer (Weller et al., 2018). Open-ended questions ask the participant to describe how and why they were useful in providing the participant the opportunity to illustrate their stories in their own words (Campbell, 2015). Additionally, open-ended questions allowed for the exploration of topics, themes, and processes suited towards this research study.

### **Data collection techniques.**

As recommend by Campbell (2015), a semi-structured interview protocol with probes and follow up questions was developed, making the researcher a listener in the in-depth interview process and further acting as a measure to reduce any researcher bias. Confidential interviews with research study participants were conducted in-person, over video conferencing,

over the telephone, using chat, or using email. There were ten interview questions and additional question prompts, as found in Appendix B, that served as a semi-structured interview template. These research questions were formed to reflect the need to answer the three overarching research questions. It was anticipated that the interviews would take approximately 45 minutes each, although extended interviews were encouraged by this researcher. To provide consistency and reliability, each of the interviews, regardless of the captured medium, was administered in the same manner, including participant consent and full participant confidentiality throughout aspects of this research study. The use of audio, video, email, or in-person interviews was captured in a verbatim transcript. In contrast, field notes captured by the researcher served as an additional source of data (Campbell, 2015). The culmination of the research data was entered into the NVivo qualitative data analysis software. NVivo, the CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis) software offered by QSR International, offered the investigating researcher a valuable tool for making sense of collected, qualitative data.

As presented in Section 1, two theoretical frameworks that drive this study, namely opportunity identification theory and locus of control theory. Questions for each theory were allocated in the interview process to explore the elements of these theoretical frameworks in the context of the case study research. In the case of locus of control theory, questions were presented that serves as a guide in order for researchers to determine whether one's locus of control is internal or external. As presented by Simmons (2010), using interview questions to determine one's locus of control consists of asking the participants about an obstacle situation, the actions taken to remedy that situation, and the result of this situation. In the study, the participants were asked about a time when they were faced with a dilemma or difficult obstacle.

They were asked to describe how they handled this presented obstacle, and a description of what were the end results (Simmons, 2010).

Opportunity identification theory was applied to this research by allocating questions in the participant interviews. These questions probed participants to reveal whether these entrepreneurial intentions could be identified as reflecting the elements of opportunity identification. As opportunity identification theory attempts to identify and conceptualize the personality traits, background, social networks, alertness, prior knowledge, and information asymmetry that the entrepreneur possesses which can then lead to business opportunities, the interview questioning solicited and probed for this data (Ardichvili et al., 2003). As such, a combination of these factors equates to an individual's overall entrepreneurial alertness, which in turn is a necessary condition for the opportunity identification triad, namely recognition, development, and evaluation of a possible entrepreneurial venture (Ardichvili et al., 2003).

#### **Data organization techniques.**

Data organization is fundamental to the research study, and CAQDAS NVivo was chosen to serve as the primary organizational tool for this research study. As noted by Feng and Behar-Horenstein (2019), NVivo is one of the most powerful CAQDAS available to researchers, as NVivo allows researchers to analyze open-ended responses to interview questions in a thorough manner. NVivo 12 Plus is purposely built for qualitative research, as it is widely used to import data from virtually any source and of any type, including text, video, audio, email correspondence, images, spreadsheets, field notes, web sources, and social media content. Furthermore, NVivo allows for numerous qualitative analysis techniques, including constant comparison analysis, classical content analysis, keyword-in-context, word count, domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, and componential analysis (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

NVivo was used as an instrument to organize, store, query, and retrieve research study data. The NVivo software package was installed on a password-protected Windows 10 Professional workstation that was disconnected from the broader internet adding a further level of data security. The Windows 10 Professional workstation used Windows native BitLocker data encryption to provide for 128-bit Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) full hard drive volume encryption of all collected research data.

### **Summary of data collection.**

As mentioned previously, Sutton and Austin (2015) suggested that qualitative research can help researchers to access the thoughts and feelings of research participants. These captured participant thoughts and feelings can add further understanding to the meanings in which one ascribes to their personal experiences with the final goal of helping researchers in understanding how and why such behaviors take place (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The previous section describes the qualitative data collection instruments chosen for this study, the techniques required to capture this data, and the data organization methodology applied to this research to reach a valid conclusion.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Belotto (2018), one of the advantages of the qualitative-based interpretive paradigm “is it allows the researcher to understand a phenomenon through a process of exploration of initial suspicions and development of preliminary theories” (p. 2623). Most importantly, qualitative research is a cyclical, non-linear process that includes recursive data analysis (Parameswaran, Ozawa-Kirk, & Latendresse, 2019). As clarified by Chowdhury (2015), the method of qualitative data analysis involves an open-ended process, flexibility, and strong orientation towards inductive reasoning when exploring the construction of “human meanings in



the context of their own making” (p. 1140). Within the domain of qualitative research, content analysis is a regularly used method in qualitative research (Kangas, Vuori, Luoto, and Kylänen, 2015).

### **Coding Process**

Skjott Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019) identified that coding in qualitative research studies is an essential tool in the process of turning raw qualitative data into a communicative and trustworthy story. Central to qualitative analysis, the fundamental operation of coding involves the examination of a portion of the study’s empirical material, such as a word, paragraph, or page, and labeling the material with a word or short phrase that summarizes its content (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Elliott (2018) explained that coding is a way for researchers to index or map data in order to provide an overview of disparate data, thus allowing the researcher to make sense of this data in relation to the proposed research questions. As such, the objective of coding is to take large quantities of empirical data and reduce this collected data into a format that is readily accessible for analysis with the ultimate goal of drawing verifiable conclusions to research study questions (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

As explored by Williams and Moser (2019), “coding in qualitative research is comprised of processes that enable collected data to be assembled, categorized, and thematically sorted, providing an organized platform for the construction of meaning” (p. 45). Qualitative coding approaches are an essential structural operation in qualitative research employing processes that reveal themes embedded in all types of collected data (Williams & Moser, 2019). This post-coded data is analyzed for meanings and which of these meanings can be negotiated, codified, and presented (Williams & Moser, 2019). Parameswaran et al. (2019) suggested the technique of coding collected qualitative data is not merely naming themes. Still, it is connecting these themes

back to the source data and then triangulating this data back to the research themes. As further noted by Parameswaran et al. (2019), non-textual data as such as photographs, music, films, videos, and social media elements will include the domains of theoretical underpinnings, types of data analyzed, the scope of the analysis, and the specific data to be analyzed.

The data analysis for the research study required that each of the participant interview transcripts, field notes, researcher journals, and unsolicited and solicited emails to be systematically collected and coded using the CAQDAS NVivo software application. Using the programmatic functions of NVivo permitted the measurement and logical arrangement of qualitative data, which finds its value when analyzing qualitative data from reflective writings, interviews, and open-ended participant responses (Feng & Behar-Horenstein, 2019). Furthermore, NVivo was used to provide a matrix coding feature allowing for the comparison of qualitative data that is found across and within categories (Feng & Behar-Horenstein, 2019). As such, NVivo allows for numerous qualitative analysis techniques, including constant comparison analysis, classical content analysis, keyword-in-context, word count, domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, and componential analysis (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

### **Summary of Data Analysis**

As explained by Castleberry and Nolen (2018), the fundamental aim of qualitative research is to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon to be explored. To achieve this understanding, the experiences of those who have directly experienced the phenomenon is examined (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The value derived from this qualitative approach to empirical research is that this type of research provides a deeper, richer understanding of the meanings that are placed on events, actions, and the relationships of the research study participants (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The previous section explained the methods of data

collection utilized for the research study. The section also described the role that data analysis and coding plays in the way that researchers can index data in order to provide an overview of disparate data, thus allowing the researcher to make sense of the data in relation to the proposed research questions.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity are vital aspects of all research (Cypress, 2017). Further research by Cypress (2019) confirmed that qualitative research is conducted when little is known about a phenomenon, as the researcher aims to expand an understanding of the poorly understood phenomenon in a naturalistic setting. The most crucial issue in conducting qualitative research is to ensure the reliability and validity of the complete research study (Bashir, Afzal, & Azeem, 2008). Within the domain of reliability and validity, the terminology of credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness is embodied (Bashir et al., 2008). Noble and Smith (2015) illustrated that in qualitative research, validity refers to the integrity and application of the methodology undertaken, while also addressing the precision in which the research findings accurately reflect the collected data. Furthermore, qualitative research suggests that reliability describes the consistency within the employed analytical procedures taken during the research study (Noble & Smith, 2015).

#### **Reliability.**

Vakili and Jahangiri (2018) revealed that the reliability or repeatability of a qualitative research study is defined as the stability of the findings through time. Furthermore, a research instrument is deemed reliable when the research study results can be repeated using the same cognitive methodologies (Vakili & Jahangiri, 2018). As concluded by Sanders and Cuneo (2010), the reliability of a qualitative research study refers to the “confidence in the stability of

the operationalization of a concept representing a phenomenon” with any observed changes experienced in the “phenomenon over time should be due to its observed variations rather than to the method of observation” (p. 327). According to Hayashi, Abib, and Hoppen (2019), reliability assesses the consistency of results over time in that research reliability contains an embedded notion of stability of the research results found, meaning that a research study will be repeatable over time. The concept of replication compliments a research studies' reliability.

Collingridge and Gantt (2019) established that the ability to replicate research findings increases confidence in the accuracy of the proposed hypotheses while a lack of replication decreases the confidence in the proposed hypotheses. Equally vital to replicability, reliability in qualitative research often denotes the methods adopted by researchers as appropriate ways of collecting and analyzing research data (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019). As such, qualitative methods that are viewed as reliable consistently produce detailed and meaningful descriptions of phenomena (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019). Furthermore, producing results that augment our understanding of the meanings that individuals attach to social phenomena is result of researchers who adopt reliable methods and conduct research analyses in a competent manner (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019, p. 440).

### **Validity.**

Leung (2015) stated that qualitative research describes validity as the appropriateness of the tools, processes, and data encompassing the research study. Research study validity can be established by the “use of systematic sampling, triangulation and constant comparison, proper audit and documentation, and multi-dimensional theory” (para. 7). Dikko (2016) determined that research validity is intended at ensuring that the instrument of measurement has detailed the concepts it set out to measure by recognizing an adequate representation of items that

operationalize the concept, equating to content validity. If the instrument of measure used suits the theories for which the test is created, construct validity is established (Dikko, 2016).

In the research study, information was considered reliable only if it was reported in at least two interviews, “or it found confirmation in the data collected through secondary sources, such as company reports and product literature” (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014, p. 22). De Massis and Kotlar (2014) suggested that the integration of these different data sources creates a triangulation process to reduce “post hoc rationalization and personal interpretation biases from the interviewed people” (p. 22). The structured procedures for data collection and analysis, including the use of the semi-structured interview question and prompt guide, enriched the construct validity, internal validity, and reliability of the proposed research (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014).

#### **Summary of reliability and validity.**

Jordan (2018) stated that validity and reliability are long recognized as central tenets of ensuring high-quality research. In the case of this specific research study, a reliable piece of information was only considered if it was the result of systematic sampling, triangulation, and constant comparison. The integration of these different data sources creates a triangulation process used to reduce any post hoc rationalization and personal interpretation biases.

#### **Transition and Summary of Section 2**

As noted in Section 1, the phenomena identified as the relationship between learning disabilities, entrepreneurial calling, and entrepreneurial success or failure is a timely and relevant topic that necessitates further exploration. To provide a complete and detailed description of the topic, a comprehensive research methodology is required. The previous sections serve as an outline to the research methodology established in Section 2: (a) purpose statement, (b) role of

the researcher, (c) participants, (d) research method and design, (e) population and sampling, (f) data collection, (g) data analysis methodology, and (h) reliability and validity.

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

As noted in Section 1 and Section 2, the phenomena identified as the relationship between learning disabilities, entrepreneurial calling, and entrepreneurial success or failure is a timely and relevant topic that necessitates further exploration. Section 3 presents an overview of the research study, states the themes and perceptions of this research, and provides an accurate reporting of the research study findings. Additionally, the section explores the relationship between the discovered research study themes to the three research questions forming the basis for this research study. Finally, the application to professional practice is summarized, recommendations for action are presented, and recommendations for further study are offered. Concluding this research, reflections and insights into this study are extended, as well as the final study conclusion.

#### **Overview of the Study**

A review of the current literature surrounding the topic of learning disability and entrepreneurship reveals a topic that is still young and necessitating further empirical data. The existing literature provides little data about the relationship between entrepreneurship and the extent of psychiatric symptoms, such as those found with individuals diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia. The phenomena identified as the relationship between learning disabilities, entrepreneurial calling, and entrepreneurial success or failure is a timely and relevant topic that necessitated further exploration. To build upon this research, this qualitative case study research study was conducted. The goal of this case study research is to understand how learning disabilities affect the success or failure of entrepreneurs, while also exploring how the entrepreneur was called to be an entrepreneur.

As presented in Section 1 and 2, three research questions form the basis of this study.

These research questions include:

RQ#1 How was the individual called to be an entrepreneur?

RQ#2 Why are learning disabled entrepreneurs experiencing a high rate of entrepreneurial failure?

RQ#3: What are the factors that lead to entrepreneurial success or failure of individuals with learning disabilities?

Furthermore, two theoretical frameworks have been identified to provide a means of triangulation between data obtained from this research study and research found in the extant literature, namely opportunity identification theory and locus of control theory. Questions for each theory were allocated in the interview process to explore the elements of these theoretical frameworks in the context of this case study research. In the case of locus of control theory, questions are presented that serve as a guide for researchers to determine whether one's locus of control is internal or external. To apply opportunity identification theory to this research study, participant interview questioning solicited and probed for areas that can produce entrepreneurial intentions that can be identified as opportunity identification. Opportunity identification theory attempts to identify and conceptualize the personality traits, background, social networks, alertness, prior knowledge, and information asymmetry that the entrepreneur possesses, which can then lead to business opportunities. The participant interview questioning solicited and probed for this data across all interviews.

The required sample group necessary to answer the study's research questions is comprised of individuals that identify as being learning disabled, identifying as entrepreneurs, are 18 years of age or older, and are geographically based in the United States. The exploration



of the necessary research participant experiences required a combination of interviews and interview transcripts, field notes, researcher journals, archived web sites, podcasts, video interviews, audio interviews, and unsolicited and solicited emails. A total of 14 participants were utilized for this research study and were given anonymous participant identifiers that are sequentially numbered from E01 through E14. Evidence of data saturation was noted as early as in the 10<sup>th</sup> participant interview, but 14 participant interviews were utilized for the research as each of the interviews was pre-arranged, thus requiring inclusion into the study. Each of the SLD's as described by the interview participants is noted in Table 1.

Table 1

*Entrepreneur Specific Learning Disability List*

<b>Entrepreneur Reference</b>	<b>Specific Learning Disability</b>
E01	ADHD & Dyslexia
E02	ADD & Dyslexia
E03	Dyslexia & Partially Blind
E04	Dyslexia
E05	ADHD & Dyslexia
E06	Dyslexia
E07	ADHD
E08	ADHD
E09	ADHD & Dyslexia
E10	Dyslexia
E11	Dyslexia
E12	ADHD & Dyslexia
E13	ADHD
E14	ADHD

A semi-structured interview protocol with probes and follow up questions was developed and administered for this study as found in Appendix B, establishing the researcher as a listener in the in-depth interview process and further acting as a measure to reduce potential researcher bias. A total of 10 interview questions and additional question prompts, serving as a semi-structured interview template, were developed. These research questions were formed to reflect the need to answer the three overarching research questions while using the two theoretical frameworks of opportunity identification theory and locus of control theory as a way of triangulating research study data. To provide consistency and reliability, each of the interviews, regardless of the captured medium, was administered or collected similarly, including participant consent and full participant confidentiality throughout all aspects of this research study and the use of transcripts that provided verbatim copies of the conducted interviews. The use of audio, video, email, archived, or in-person interviews were captured in a verbatim transcript.

In contrast, the field notes captured by the researcher served as an additional source of data, as suggested by Campbell (2015). The research data was cleaned of any extraneous and identifying data and was entered into the NVivo qualitative data analysis software. NVivo offered this investigating researcher a valuable tool for making sense of a large amount of collected, qualitative data obtained throughout the duration of this research study by the use of coding. Coding is vital in indexing and mapping data to provide an overview of disparate conceptual data, while also serving as the primary resource in discovering congruent research themes. Hence, this allowed this researcher to make sense of this data in relation to the three foundational research questions.

### **Anticipated Themes/Perceptions**

It was anticipated that specific and potentially reoccurring themes would begin to emerge during the participant interviews. The anticipated themes were derived from the comprehensive literature review and from relating and associating the themes to the real-world experiences of the researcher. For example, it was expected that the theme of personal resilience and the overcoming of significant obstacles would be a reoccurring theme. Additionally, the theme of risk-taking was projected to be a topic of conversation arising from the participant interviews, as the extant literature is rife with examples of entrepreneurs from all industries taking enormous risks. In terms of entrepreneurial calling, it was unknown and unexpected whether the research participants would have had a watershed moment in their lives that defined their future entrepreneurial inclinations or if these individuals generally stumbled into the field of entrepreneurship without the cognizant goal of doing so.

There was an initial perception that finding the needed research study participants would be a challenge due to the specific individual requirements of both being an entrepreneur and having a learning disability. Meeting both requirements was a small subset of the overall population, as only 10% of the general population are affected by SLD's such as dyslexia, autism, dyscalculia, and ADHD (Butterworth & Kovas, 2013). This perception proved to be false, as an exhaustive internet search revealed dozens of learning-disabled entrepreneurs that were open and willing to participate in this research study. Furthermore, each of the participants was approachable about their disability, background, and entrepreneurial thoughts, and each of the research study participants was very accessible in defining their specific learning disability without hesitation.

### **Presentation of Findings**

The objective of the participant interviews is to collect data to answer the research study questions. Furthermore, the themes that emerged from the collected data were critical in addressing the three research questions. The presentation of this research study's findings required an examination of the literature surrounding the topic of learning disability and entrepreneurship while employing the conceptual frameworks of opportunity identification theory and locus of control theory to provide data triangulation. Questions for each theory had been allocated in the interview process to explore the elements of these theoretical frameworks in the context of this case study research study. In the case of locus of control theory, questions are presented that serve as a guide for researchers to determine whether one's locus of control is internal or external. Opportunity identification theory was applied to this research study by participant interview questioning that solicited and probed for areas that could produce entrepreneurial intentions that could be identified as opportunity identification by pinpointing and conceptualizing the personality traits, background, social networks, alertness, prior knowledge, and information asymmetry that the entrepreneur possesses, which can then lead to business opportunities.

Interview questions one and two were formed to gain a historical background of the participant and the industry in which the interviewee participated, while also serving as a brief introduction between the researcher and the study participant. Interview question three was utilized to form an understanding of how the participant was called to be an entrepreneur, while also serving as a collection instrument used to establish one's opportunity identification in support of opportunity identification theory. Interview question four served as a method in which the success or failure of the entrepreneur could be established. Interview question five explored

how each participant's learning disability affected their entrepreneurial success and failure, while interview question six investigated how the effects of this learning disability influenced the participant's entrepreneurial endeavors over a sustained period. Question seven was formed to solicit participant data to discover the reasons behind the entrepreneurial failures of those with learning disabilities.

In contrast, question eight investigates how the research participants view their future entrepreneurial activities through the lens of one with a learning disability. In support of triangulating towards locus of control theory, question nine probed the participant for a time in which they were confronted with a dilemma or challenging obstacle. The question is used to discover whether the participant approached the situation from the viewpoint of an internal or external locus of control. Finally, question ten was formed to ascertain future entrepreneurial motivation in support of deducing how each participant is continually called to be an entrepreneur. The culmination of these ten questions resulted in the generation of four distinct themes that are related across research study participants. The theoretical frameworks and their association with the three research questions that form the foundation of this research study are found in Table 2.

Table 2

*Conceptual Framework Association with Research Questions*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Conceptual Framework</b>
RQ#1 How was the individual called to be an entrepreneur?	Opportunity Identification Theory
RQ#2 Why are learning disabled entrepreneurs experiencing a high rate of entrepreneurial failure?	Locus of Control

RQ#3 What are the factors that lead to entrepreneurial success or failure of individuals with learning disabilities?	Opportunity Identification Theory, Locus of Control
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### **Theme 1 - entrepreneurial resilience.**

Four primary themes emerged from this research. These four themes included entrepreneurial resilience, the unique personality traits of the learning disabled that affect entrepreneurship, the ability to take and mitigate risk, and the way that these learning-disabled individuals were called to entrepreneurs. Table 3 illustrates the major themes and their association with the three research questions that form this study.

Table 3

#### *Major Theme Association with Research Questions*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Major Theme</b>
RQ#1 How was the individual called to be an entrepreneur?	Entrepreneurial Resilience, Entrepreneurial Calling
RQ#2 Why are learning disabled entrepreneurs experiencing a high rate of entrepreneurial failure?	Personality Traits, Risk-Taking & Mitigation.
RQ#3 What are the factors that lead to entrepreneurial success or failure of individuals with learning disabilities?	Entrepreneurial Resilience, Personality Traits

Entrepreneurial resilience was a characteristic that was found to be a commonality among research study participants. Corner, Singh, and Pavlovich (2017) defined entrepreneurial resilience as one's capacity or ability to maintain comparatively stable and healthy levels of psychological and emotional functioning despite experiencing trauma or serious loss associated with ones failing business endeavors. As confirmed by Fisher, Maritz, and Lobo (2016),

entrepreneurship is a field characterized by stress, adversity, and at times, trauma. Consequently, an understanding of entrepreneurial resilience is a priority for exploring entrepreneurial success and failure.

Many of the research participants described examples of entrepreneurial resilience. For example, participant E02 describes their mindset towards resilience and persistence by stating that “You learn to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. You face naysayers all of the time saying no...you are not going to college or you’re not going to be doing this or be doing that and you have to disprove the naysayers. Sometimes you get a little chip on your shoulder where you say you know what...I’ll show you...and you get through these kinds of things. I think it (dyslexia) helped my persistence for sure. You just learn to outwork everybody...and it kind of sticks with you.”

Participant E11 reasoned that the core of a great entrepreneur is the ability to bounce back, as the big and great things in business and life seem always to be a result of overcoming some type of adversity. Exemplifying this example set by E11, after an embarrassing and public operational breakdown of business operations, Entrepreneur E09 decided to remove themselves from day-to-day operations, which proved to be a profoundly painful experience that E09 says took years to recover from, nearly driving E09 from the industry that they loved. At the time, E09 was unsure if they would return to the same industry. This dramatic life-change led entrepreneur E09 to other profound and lucrative life opportunities, reinforcing the adage given by E09 that "When one door closes.... another door opens!"

Participant E11 offered the data that every great thing that happened to them throughout their entrepreneurial career path was directly initiated on the heels of terrible and embarrassing business failure. Through reflection of their personal resilience and comebacks from failure, E12

noted that “Adults with ADHD should strive to be resilient by defining what it means to you, not others, to be successful, and if you never experience setbacks, you’re not trying hard enough, always keep trying and you will find success.” E14 noted that many ADHD entrepreneurs take risks with the chance of losing everything in the process but realizing that they always have the capacity to start over.

Entrepreneur E08 emphasized that there seems to be an exciting attribute about entrepreneurs with learning disabilities in that they tend to succeed, and they tend to fail, just like every entrepreneur. Entrepreneur E08 continued to note that a differentiating factor among disabled entrepreneurs is the resolve to not letting failure stop them from trying again, no matter how large the failure is perceived to be. Bullough and Renko (2013) confirmed that research has unequivocally demonstrated that given the difficult circumstances in which these entrepreneurs operate, self-efficacy and resilience are meaningful positive influences on entrepreneurial intentions. Corner et al. (2017) confirmed these findings by revealing that most entrepreneurs exhibit a resilient trajectory in their emotional and psychological functioning after entrepreneurial failure. Aligning with research conducted by Branicki, Sullivan-Taylor, and Livschitz (2018), findings show that the sources of resilience available to small and medium business owners “tend to be relational, contextual, attitudinal, and behavioral, rather than structural and resource-intensive” (p. 1256). As such, the research by Branicki et al. (2018) highlighted the significant “role that individual entrepreneurs play in promoting these alternative sources of resilience through their attitudes and behaviors” (p. 1256).

Overall, the research supports the findings of Fisher et al. (2016), who found that entrepreneurial resilience was comprised of the individual characteristics of resourcefulness, hardiness, and optimism. Furthermore, a cumulation of these personality traits did lead to further



entrepreneurial success (Fisher et al., 2016). As presented by Duchek and Duchek (2018), sustainably successful entrepreneurs, or those entrepreneurs that enjoy continued entrepreneurial success over time, require resilience capacity and endurance, allowing them to overcome precarious and uncertain situations, frequently allowing these individuals to arise from business failures stronger than before the failure experience. Awotoye and Singh (2017), as well as Croitoru, Duica, Robescu, Radu, and Oprisan (2017), argue that entrepreneurial resilience represents a vital cognitive process to achieve entrepreneurial success. Fatoki (2018) signified that the pursuit of entrepreneurship is typically accompanied by multiple obstacles, high-stress situations, and an environment of uncertainty concerning business outcomes requiring entrepreneurs to continually stay pace with shifting contingencies by adjusting and adapting their strategies and objectives.

The conceptual framework of locus of control emerged when exploring Theme 1. For example, participant entrepreneurs E02, E08, E09, E11, and E14 each mentioned that the consequences of their business endeavors and personal struggles as not being directly related to external factors. As such, the majority of participant entrepreneurs revealed an internal locus of control when confronted with adversity or significant life obstacles. Furthermore, most of the research participants inclined towards exhibiting an internal locus of control when exploring their resilience. Each of the participants took personal responsibility for the challenges that were encountered in their individual situations, whether the results were good or bad, revealing a telltale sign that one's locus of control is firmly planted internally. As such, each participant was skilled at controlling what could be controlled, while refusing attempts to control external environmental factors. These individuals have an external locus of control. Fatoki (2018) suggested that entrepreneurs often perceive the outcome of an event, whether the event is a

success or failure, to be either within their personal control. Learning disabled entrepreneurs are inclined to attribute success as well as failure only to their own actions, suggesting that crucial underlying factor for an entrepreneurial drive is resilience (Fatoki, 2018). It is under these conditions of risk and adversity that those entrepreneurs with a high measure of internal locus of control exhibit an unmatched resilience (Bulmash, 2016; Kusumawijaya, 2019).

### **Theme 2 – personality traits.**

The personality traits exhibited by the research study participants were both advantageous and detrimental to the success of the participant entrepreneurs. Various characteristic descriptors were uncovered during the code analysis phase of this research study that provided an overview of many of the personality traits that were found to be similar across participants. The personal characteristics of adaptation, compensation, flexibility, and delegation were found to be a commonality among the majority of research participants. For many participants, leveraging both the strength and weaknesses of their personality traits is pivotal. In the case of leveraging the strengths of ADHD, participant E02 noted that “The other things is that when you know that you can’t do something well....and you have to out-source the editing or something, from a very young age I had to outsource things that I wasn’t good at....and I just had to delegate.....to survive.” Furthermore, E02 reveals that many of the basic business skills that were essential to run any organization were learned by doing, rather than being taught in a formal or even informal arrangement.

As found in research performed by Johan Wiklund (Shankman, 2018), individuals who have ADHD are adept at things they like and enjoy but are found to be not as competent at performing tasks they do not like. In the case of entrepreneurship, countless tasks need to be addressed requiring the ADHD entrepreneur to either delegate or compensate for, with many of

these tasks being necessary, but unenjoyable to the ADHD mind (Shankmanm, 2018). Soomro, Shah, and Anwar (2018) noted that entrepreneurship is a tremendously stressful occupation bearing substantial risks and often demanding workloads. Entrepreneurs with ADHD can shape work the way they want it to be, allowing one to pursue the things they love. As such, there is a match between individuals with ADHD and entrepreneurship because they can then mold their work to fit their unique schedules.

E01 stated that being in charge of their life schedule is critical to being successful as a business owner and that time flexibility plays a vital role in their business success. E01 further explained that another aspect to being able to succeed with ADHD is to outsource most, if not all, of the tasks that are necessary for day-to-day business but are tasks that are found to be challenging to those with ADHD. Additionally, E01 noted that outsourcing and delegating the exigent tasks, whether mundane, simple, dull, or complex, allows the entrepreneur with ADHD to do the tasks that they enjoy performing without the thought of the other tasks burdening their easily distracted mind. As noted by participants E06 and E13, the learning-disabled entrepreneur must surround themselves with good people who are smart and can accomplish things they cannot when they get pulled in other distracting directions. Reinforcing this revelation, E11 noted that they have always loved the feeling of change, making the route to entrepreneurship easy to navigate. E14 confirms this thought by noting that they are happy to be an entrepreneur with ADHD because they can shape work the way they want it to be by doing the things they love to do.

E07 further supported the idea of delegating and outsourcing business tasks by suggesting that it is essential for the ADHD entrepreneur to focus on what they are great at while outsourcing the skills in which they have limited talent. E07 continued to note that when one is

afflicted with ADHD, you have a deep passion for the things that you truly love doing, whereas the responsibilities and tasks that ADHD entrepreneurs do not enjoy are nearly unbearable to face. Furthermore, E07 states that when the ADHD entrepreneur is forced to do things they do not enjoy, whether the task is tremendous or minuscule, the results include a high level of misery, even for the most rudimentary and simplistic tasks. E07 shows that ultimately, ADHD allows for a sense of sureness, like those with ADHD are typically of the mindset that there is typically no option for failure, as overcoming failures becomes a commonality with those individuals growing up with a learning disability.

The three commonly accepted core characteristics of an individual with ADHD include hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsivity (Shankman, 2018). Triangulated with current research by Wiklund (Shankman, 2018), these traits of hyperactivity and impulsivity appear to serve people with ADHD well in the context of entrepreneurship. Conversely, the inattention that is exhibited by those with ADHD seems to be a negative influence. According to participant E10,

Dyslexic's know from an early moment that we're wired differently..... and that's not bad... it is the gift of innovation in entrepreneurship. There are so many ways that we (Dyslexics) can adapt and it seems seamless to everybody else. Dyslexics have that entrepreneurial innovation and kind of edge that makes us work hard.... dyslexics work hard. We are always out there.... doing something, building something, creating something. We are in motion...and I think that has been a huge edge, too. You cannot be passive in this economy and it's only going to get more so.

Four specific dimensional features emerged from the research participants and were conclusively confirmed in the extant literature, namely risk-taking, originality, positive affect, and innovativeness (Kuckertz, Kollmann, Krell, & Stöckmann, 2017). Research offered by

Georgescu et al. (2019) triangulated with the research data collected from the research participant entrepreneurs by showing that the characteristics of many successful entrepreneurs include “social activism, resistance to social pressure, more optimistic people in self-assessment, creative and flexible solutions, and interpersonal relationships that are effective and constructive” (p. 9). In the case of E02, E06, E07, E08, E13, and E14, these participants stated that the ability to innovate creative and flexible solutions is indispensable in their roles as entrepreneurs. Furthermore, interpersonal relationships that are effective and constructive were essential to many of the research participants, as these relationships were leveraged to provide the learning-disabled entrepreneurs with resources that were not previously available, reflecting similar research by Georgescu et al. (2019).

When asked to identify and list some of the more common personality characteristics of the learning disabled entrepreneur, the characteristics of passion, curiosity, hyper-focus, creative thinking, and innovation were a collection of adjectives revealed from the research study participants. As demonstrated by E02, “Dyslexics never take the straight path through the maze....we always seem to zig-zag.....and we always try new things and innovate new things and all that...it’s part of the dyslexia experience.....and it is part of what makes us think different.” E04 stated that “Dyslexia forces you to rely on other tools to make your way through life.”

Miller and Le Breton-Miller (2017) presented research that proposes that those entrepreneurs who have dyslexia often exhibit specific personal attributes that can be considered useful in practice. Some of the specific personal characteristics appear to be caused by the disability condition, whereas other personality traits arise due to the individual’s ability to adapt to challenging situations (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017). The research found in the literature

has consistently shown that many individuals affected by dyslexia appear to develop unique right-brain capabilities that influence one's creativity, intuition, and superior interpretive capability (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017).

Analogous research presented by Miller and Le Breton-Miller (2017) revealed that those individuals afflicted with ADHD exhibit many common characteristics as those with dyslexia, such as the ability to multi-task, a propensity for risk-taking, an inclination towards creative thinking, resilience, and high energy. Confirming this research, participant E04 stated that "dyslexia forces you to rely on other tools to make your way through life.....I have a need to think... in many different directions at once...I am always multitasking." Furthermore, ADHD affected entrepreneurs typically do best when confronted with crises that seek an intuitive solution (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017). As such, learning disabled entrepreneurs develop original ways of questioning and redefining situations and can see opportunities that others fail ever to imagine (Logan, 2009).

An interesting minor theme associated with the personality traits of the learning-disabled entrepreneurs did arise during the interviewing phase of this research study. Several research study participants described their disability as almost a superpower, and some noted that they are fully content with the disability they have, as this disadvantage that their learning disability gives them can be repurposed into an advantage and asset in the world of business. The nature of dyslexia, for example, encourages innovation to hide or diminish their inability to read smoothly. As such, entrepreneurs living with dyslexia establish creative thinking and problem-solving skills to overcome these reading struggles. Creative thinking and problem-solving skills allow these individuals with learning disabilities to see existing structures from an entirely new perspective while being someone creative and persistent at finding innovative and practical solutions.

Other traits of the learning-disabled that develop to compensate for learning shortcomings are considered coping techniques. These assorted coping techniques have been developed over time and could be considered potential assets for business development. For example, many of the participants in the study noted that they have innate abilities to remember facts and data and possess valuable intuitions concerning business risks and risk mediation. For these individuals, their learning disability allows for intrinsic problem solving with an innate inquisitiveness.

The various personality skills that are developed by those with learning disabilities equate to societal survival skills that are used throughout their lives. Learning disabled entrepreneurs can make critical decisions reflexively using these adaptable character traits while making educated and informed risks. These risks are often apparent and easily recognizable by the learning-disabled entrepreneur. Those entrepreneurs with dyslexia seem to have an inherent personality that is keenly aware of their internal thoughts and mental processes. This self-awareness can be used to analytically identify personal strengths and weaknesses, resulting in a vivid awareness that can adapt to various presented challenges.

The conceptual framework of locus of control becomes apparent when exploring the composition of Theme 2. Previous research indicates that those entrepreneurs that possess the personality traits that encourage an internal locus of control tend to undertake innovative strategies (Wijbenga & van Witteloostuijn, 2007). As noted by Galvin, Randel, Collins, and Johnson (2018), the degree in which individuals perceive they control events and outcomes that affect their lives is measured by either an internal or external locus of control. In the case of the research participants, each had a relatively stable internal locus of control when measured over time. In the case of participants E02, E08, E09, E11, and E14, their belief that they can control

what happens in their lives was evident, indicating a strong internal locus of control. These entrepreneurs were confident in their ability to directly influence the outcome of events by their actions (Yin & Ao, 2014). The internal locus of control exhibited by the research participants corresponds with recent research by Asante and Affum-Osei (2019); it substantiates the premise that nascent entrepreneurs with an internal locus of control are more likely to recognize entrepreneurial opportunities. They were thus having a crossover influence on opportunity identification theory. Verheul et al. (2015) established that ADHD and its associated symptoms do, indeed, predict entrepreneurial intentions. In the case of participant E01, E02, E03, E06, E09, E11, and E13, the learning-disabled entrepreneurs investigated have created multiple businesses over time suggesting that their internal locus of control has continued to remain internally stable rather than drifting to an external position as their business development careers continue.

### **Theme 3 – risk-taking and mitigation.**

The act of risk-taking and mitigation emerged as a theme during this research study. As Participant E04 explained, risk and hard work are behind almost every great success, but even E04 worked very hard to minimize the business risks taken. E04 says that “Most good entrepreneurs do everything they can to limit and diminish risk.” Aligning with this comment, research given by Herranz et al. (2015) noted that many entrepreneurs do not like risk and are particularly adept at managing their exposure to risks. E03 suggested that “I trade in the business of risk..... I’m looking for the lowest risk to get the highest return.” Even though a willingness to take risks has been an essential characteristic of the successful entrepreneur, both the traditional and learning-disabled entrepreneurs actively work to reduce entrepreneurial risk to a minimum. Research presented Soomro et al. (2018) confirmed this sentiment by noting that



entrepreneurial activity is a risky venture where individuals bear high-risks with the potential of high rewards.

Participant E12 noted that one of the tools they employ to survive the uncertainty of business is to embrace struggle and risk. Most adults with ADHD who were educated through the public school system were taught as children and young adults to shy away from risk, even though it is now understood that the action of risk is a crucial component to becoming self-empowered. Participant E12 also suggested that many people seem to equate happiness with perfection, and in doing so, they strive to avoid struggle and risk. As noted by E12, taking risks begets a fear of failure and that only by taking risks will one grow and find success.

The importance of opportunity identification theory can be related between the current literature and the results gleaned from Theme 3 of the research study. In this research study, most of the participant entrepreneurs felt an elevated need for frequent cognitive stimuli. Four specific dimensional features emerged and were conclusively confirmed in the extant literature that is closely associated with opportunity identification, namely risk-taking, originality, positive affect, innovativeness (Kuckertz et al., 2017). According to Ko (2012), “individuals with a high need for cognition tend to seek, acquire, think about, and reflect back on information to make sense of stimuli, relationships, and events in their world” (p. 23). Furthermore, as confirmed by current literature, Bailor and Claar (2016) reasoned that the “entrepreneur will not creatively follow through on their insights unless they expect to receive rewards sufficient to make their entrepreneurial efforts appear worth undertaking” (para. 5).

It has been shown that entrepreneurs must remain alert to various sources of information, as this information has the potential to lead to creative knowledge that can then lead to potential entrepreneurial initiatives (Bailor & Claar, 2016). Even though less than entrepreneurial

counterparts may also possess the same source information, it is the adept entrepreneur who constantly seeks ways to release the creative potential of such information (Bailor & Claar, 2016), further supporting the notion that the learning disabled entrepreneurs are keenly adept at the advantages of opportunity identification theory, even if they cannot identify the theory by name.

Theme 3 was substantiated and triangulated with the extant literature surrounding opportunity identification theory by reviewing work developed by Ardichvili, et al. (2003), while also comparing this research with the data obtained from the research study participants. Research by Ardichvili et al. (2003) considered that the identification and selection of the correct entrepreneurial opportunities for new businesses are among the critical capabilities of a successful entrepreneur. Chen, Chan, Hung, and Lin (2020) revealed that perceived entrepreneurial opportunities acquired through a cognitive process based on perceptions are often influenced by entrepreneurial alertness, which it was found that most of the research participants possessed.

Participants E02, E03, E04, E09, E10, and E12 each expressed the adeptness of recognizing and evaluating external circumstances that could potentially combine in a new product or service. The adeptness of recognizing and evaluating external circumstances confirms and validates research presented by Zanella, Castro Solano, Hallam, and Guda (2019). Zanella et al. (2019) described entrepreneurs as having a “peculiar ability of recognizing and evaluating external circumstances that can potentially combine in a new product or service, enabling the creation of new economic activity” (p. 1537).

Creating a new and novel business is extremely difficult for any entrepreneur, requiring the mobilization of individual knowledge and the leveraging of personal networks and resources

(Al-Shami, Mamun, Sidek, & Rashid, 2019). Participant E11 stated that when they try any new endeavor, they commit all of their resources to see its success, as failing in business feels the same to the entrepreneur whether the failure is immense or insignificant. Echoing this thought, E01, E10, and E11 each described the difficulties that are creating business demands, as it takes every resource and means available to overcome many of the challenges that are faced by business creation.

There are many truths about entrepreneurship that some individuals fail to consider. As articulated by Patel (2016), when you are an entrepreneur, you answer to only yourself, producing an effect that is incredibly liberating and but can be exceptionally challenging. For instance, there are times where an idea or project will fail miserably, requiring the entrepreneur to let go of any attached emotions and do what is necessary to move the company forward (Patel, 2016). According to Boso et al. (2018), the experience and consequence of business failure contend that the aftermath of a failing business endeavor involves a feeling of loss and a process of recovery for entrepreneurs. Despite the typical losses of social, financial, and psychological measures, the literature argues that the phase of loss is often followed by a period of both sense-making and learning from the failure, leading to subsequent entrepreneurial re-emergence that is often more powerful than before (Boso et al., 2018).

Participant E11 noted that the core of a great entrepreneur is the ability to bounce back, as the big and great things seem always to be a result of overcoming some adversity. Exemplifying this example noted by E11, after an embarrassing and very public operational breakdown of business operations that was overseen by entrepreneur E09, entrepreneur E09 decided to remove themselves from day-to-day operations and move to a different country, seemingly putting themselves in a self-imposed exile. This event, which proved to be a

profoundly painful experience, was one that E09 says took years to recover. It was only through experiencing this dramatic change that led entrepreneur E09 to other profound and lucrative life and business opportunities. E09 returned to the industry they loved and ultimately ended up dominating the industry once again.

Highly successful entrepreneurs extolling the virtues of failure as a valuable teacher can be found in every industry. The effects of business failure have attracted significant scholarly attention in academic and professional entrepreneurship research. Even though entrepreneurial failures abound for disabled entrepreneurs, there have been recent measures that reveal that people with disabilities were more likely to be self-employed, to have greater flexibility to adjust to working life, and to be more satisfied at work than other workers (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017).

#### **Theme 4 – entrepreneurial calling.**

In terms of entrepreneurial calling, it was unknown and unexpected to discover whether the research participants would have had a watershed moment in their lives that defined and pinpointed their future entrepreneurial inclinations, or if that these individuals generally stumbled into the field of entrepreneurship. As many of the participants felt that entrepreneurship was truly a calling rather than a job, it was suspected that these entrepreneurs felt a higher level of spirituality connected with their profession. Research presented by Da Palma et al. (2018), articulated the notion that entrepreneurial passion can be a compelling indicator of entrepreneurial motivation to continue the pursuit of their business goals, even if encountering difficulties. Aligning with data obtained from the study participants, research shows that individuals who experience entrepreneurial calling regard this calling as a decisive factor in triggering strength and courage in the pursuit of overcoming challenging goals (Da Palma et al.,

2018). Several research study participants, namely E02, E03, E07, E09, E11, E13, and E14, revealed that their calling could be described as a passion, intuition, talent, chance, or opportunity. In contrast, other participants noted that there is a sense of spirituality associated with their careers. These results correspond to research by Badulescu (2014), explaining that a significant proportion of entrepreneurs feel that they are called or gifted for a life of business and that their careers follow a higher purpose or meaning.

In the case of E02, the entrepreneurial calling came in the way of being fired from a normal job. As noted by E02 ,

“It happened that the day I got fired and I was meeting for a beer with the consultants I used to work with. When I told them that I had been let go from my position, the consultants stood up and clapped and said, Thank God....We want to start a new company and we need you to be in charge of sales. It was that moment that I became an entrepreneur.”

Entrepreneur E04 relates a similar situation of job loss leading to entrepreneurial creation. Merely a few months after E04 moved out to the Rocky Mountains in search of better job opportunities, E04’s job in oil and gas exploration disappeared. At the time, E04 needed not just a job, but a new career, that required the arduous tasks of securing investments from over 30 different investors that ultimately led to the creation of a restaurant and pub that also brewed beer, a unique and unheard-of proposition at that time. Similar to E04, participants E05 and E11 began their entrepreneurial endeavor by borrowing a small amount of capital from family, and eventually, other small investors. Entrepreneur E05 provided a narrative in which they describe their humble origins as an immigrant to the United States who borrowed a small amount of capital from family and friends so they could work for themselves. Participant E06 offered

narration that describes their early career working as a waiter in a restaurant that made E06 miserable, with the power of this misery offering a source and pathway to entrepreneurship through the creation of a delivery service business.

Further comments by participants E02, E03, E06, E09, E13, E14 revealed that being called to become an entrepreneur allows them the freedom to do the things they enjoy doing. Even when the participants were struggling to learn new skills in support of their business, the entrepreneurs felt a sense of success when overcoming simple daily challenges. For many of the interviewees, owning their businesses gave them a sense of freedom and independence and shielded them from the possibility that they could be laid off, as found in typical employer/employee arrangements across any industry.

The importance of opportunity identification theory can be related between the current literature and the results gleaned from this research study. Theme 4 was substantiated and triangulated with the extant literature surrounding opportunity identification theory by reviewing work developed by Lundberg and Rehnfors (2018). Lundberg and Rehnfors (2018) revealed that an individual's background, comprised of one's prior education and experience, has been found as formative for an individual's entrepreneurial mindset, resulting in entrepreneurial knowledge that is regarded as a key aspect of entrepreneurial quality. The conceptual framework of opportunity identification theory was also applied as a useful measure in which the distinction between opportunity recognition and opportunity exploitation was confirmed. Four specific dimensional features emerged and were conclusively confirmed in the extant literature, namely risk-taking, originality, positive affect, innovativeness (Kuckertz et al., 2017). Most of the entrepreneurs noted that their prior knowledge and experience played an imperative role in recognizing a potential entrepreneurial opportunity, as well as their ability to create innovative

solutions, confirming the multifaceted dimensions of opportunity identification theory (Kuckertz et al., 2017). This result was confirmed by noting that many of the entrepreneurs credited their past experiences, whether good or bad, as directly influential on their entrepreneurial affect. For example, E02 and E07 noted that their past failures as being paramount in being able to create their current businesses, as their current successful businesses arose from the failures of previous entrepreneurial attempts and their resulting business collapses.

### **Relationship of themes to research questions.**

Research question RQ#1 was focused on discovering how the individual research participants were called to be an entrepreneur in an effort to discover the entry vector for entrepreneurship. The resultant themes of entrepreneurial resilience and entrepreneurial calling emerged as two themes that were closely associated with RQ#1. In the case of entrepreneurial resilience, Duchek and Duchek (2018) suggested that failure and setbacks are daily business for entrepreneurs. Additionally, many situations that encompass entrepreneurial endeavors involve permanent pressure and high levels of stress for entrepreneurs, resulting in psychological disorders such as entrepreneurial burnout (Duchek & Duchek, 2018). Long term psychological health of entrepreneurs requires a resilience capacity that enables these entrepreneurs to overcome crises and failure to cope effectively with precarious situations by adapting to ever-changing environments (Duchek & Duchek, 2018). As such, previous research suggests that entrepreneurial resilience may be a key factor for entrepreneurial success (Duchek & Duchek, 2018). How each participant was called to be an entrepreneur was varied. The results of an entrepreneurial calling were varied, with some participants identifying a watershed moment in which they objectively knew at that moment that entrepreneurship was their true vocational

calling, where others found their entrepreneurial identity through a series of seemingly random events.

The exploration of research question RQ#2 was formulated to identify the reasons why learning-disabled entrepreneurs are experiencing a high rate of entrepreneurial failure. Arising from an investigation of RQ#2, the dual themes of one's personality traits and the topic of risk-taking and risk mitigation of the learning-disabled entrepreneur emerged. Participants noted that past business failures were being paramount in being able to create their current businesses, as their current successful businesses arose from the failures of previous entrepreneurial attempts, and their resulting business collapses. An interesting point of conflict emerged concerning the success and failure propensity of entrepreneurs and their willingness to spotlight their failure, even if they have never enjoyed the successes of entrepreneurship. It was observed that entrepreneurs that have experienced business success were inclined to discuss their SLD and its role in influencing entrepreneurial intention. In contrast, it is suspected that there many unrecognized entrepreneurs having SLD's that have failed, are discouraged, and feel embarrassment at their failure, thus refusing to participate in academic or professional research studies. Future research inquiries should stress the use of purposeful sampling techniques to find information-rich cases that are more representative and inclusive or research study participants (Benoot, Hannes, & Bilsen, 2016).

The examination of research question RQ#3 investigated the factors that lead to entrepreneurial success or failure of individuals with learning disabilities, resulting in two themes that were closely correlated with entrepreneurial resilience, as well as the unique personality traits of the learning-disabled entrepreneur. Participant entrepreneurs explained that an individual predisposition for entrepreneurs with learning disabilities such as ADHD is that



they tend to succeed, and they tend to fail, just like every entrepreneur. What seems to be prevalent in those entrepreneurs with ADHD is that they do not let the failure stop them from trying again. Furthermore, as confirmed by the research study participants, the core of a great entrepreneur is the ability to recover from adversity.

In further support of answering RQ#3, it was discovered that entrepreneurial resilience was a fundamental personality trait that was found to be a commonality amongst research study participants, as were the characteristics of adaptation, compensation, flexibility, and delegation of each finding similarity among research participants. Moreover, the characteristics of passion, curiosity, hyper-focus, creative thinking, and innovation were adjectives revealed from the research study participants. In describing these characteristics, several research participants depicted their disability as almost a superpower, and some noted that they are fully content with the disability they have, as this disadvantage that their learning disability gives them can be repurposed into an advantage in the world of business. Creative thinking and problem-solving skills allow these individuals to see existing structures and intricate patterns from an entirely new perspective while being someone that can reliably produce creative and persistent solutions.

### **Summary of the findings.**

As previously noted, there is a vast scope of future research that is needed to bridge the gap spanning the divide between entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship for the disabled. The purpose of this research study is to begin to fill the void separating the topics of entrepreneurship and learning disability. To bridge this divide, the research aimed to be inductive, empirical, and interpretative of the research participant's situation. The 14 participant interviews provided data that reached category and dimensional saturation and growth. The resultant data revealed four

major themes, namely entrepreneurial resilience, advantageous traits, adept at risk-taking and mitigation, and various pathways that led to entrepreneurial calling.

The first theme identified was entrepreneurial resilience. Entrepreneurial resilience was a characteristic that was found to be a commonality amongst research study participants. As presented by Duchek and Duchek (2018), sustainably successful entrepreneurs require resilience capacity and endurance, allowing them to overcome precarious situations frequently emerging from failures stronger than before. Fatoki (2018) noted that the pursuit of entrepreneurship is typically accompanied by multiple obstacles, high-stress situations, and an environment of uncertainty concerning business outcomes requiring entrepreneurs to continually stay pace with shifting contingencies by adjusting and adapting their strategies and objectives. In support, Lee and Wang (2017) and Fatoki (2018) stated that resilience has been identified as a key to entrepreneurial success.

The individual characteristics, traits, and symptoms of those who have learning disabilities have consequences and advantages, leading to the second emergent theme of this study. Learning disabilities, such as dyslexia and ADHD, have various specific symptoms. It is understood from this research that these symptoms that have typically been associated with impaired occupational functioning indicate that these same symptoms may be an asset for those with entrepreneurial intent. The inherent obstacles encountered by the research study participants served as a notable source for entrepreneurial assertiveness, suggesting that entrepreneurial initiative may serve as a constructive outlet for what are otherwise inefficient and destructive behaviors. In the case of entrepreneurs with dyslexia, these businesspeople rarely share an emotional attachment to their business. For the dyslexic entrepreneur, their businesses are often treated like a tool whose purpose is to both make money while being able to work at a position

that provides enjoyability, flexibility, and safety from elimination. Both the dyslexic and ADHD afflicted entrepreneurs explored in this research were more likely to be successful in their business endeavors than those diagnosed without an SLD, but this could be due to the limited population sampling of the study. The learning-disabled entrepreneur knows that it is often challenging to find a regular position working as an employee for an employer; thus, the learning-disabled entrepreneur tends to exhibit a committed and driven work ethic to avoid having to work for someone else. Entrepreneurs identifying as having a learning disability overwhelmingly exhibited a degree of creativity and innovation that is unmatched and is considered a highly coveted business asset when compared to non-afflicted entrepreneurs. The source of this innovation and creativity almost certainly does not come from personal choice, but was developed out of a necessity to adapt, fit-in, compensate, and survive various societal situations that they have been confronted with throughout their entire lives. While ADHD and dyslexia are consistently seen as a weakness, this weakness becomes a strength and asset as they develop into entrepreneurs.

The third theme to arise from this research study involved how those approach risk and risk mitigation with learning disabilities. Participants noted that elements of risk and hard work are behind almost every great success. However, many entrepreneurs worked very hard to minimize risk by doing everything they could to limit and diminish risk. Further research shows that many learning-disabled entrepreneurs do not like risk and are particularly adept at managing their exposure to risks. Even though a willingness to take risks has been an essential characteristic of the successful entrepreneur, the learning-disabled entrepreneur actively works to reduce entrepreneurial risk to a minimum.

The fourth and final theme to develop from the study surrounded the way that the learning-disabled entrepreneur found entrepreneurship. In terms of entrepreneurial calling, it was unknown and unexpected to discover that some of the research participants would have had a watershed moment in their lives that defined their future entrepreneurial inclinations and that some of the participants generally stumbled into the field of entrepreneurship. Many of the participants felt that entrepreneurship was truly a calling rather than a job and could identify an exact moment when they felt they became an entrepreneur. The notion that entrepreneurial passion can be a compelling indicator of entrepreneurial motivation to continue the pursuit of their business goals, even if encountering difficulties, was substantial. Aligning with data obtained from study participants, research shows that individuals who experience entrepreneurial calling regard this calling as a decisive factor in triggering strength and courage in the pursuit of overcoming challenging goals.

In summary, the first theme identified in this research study surrounded individual entrepreneurial resilience. Entrepreneurial resilience, hardiness, and optimism were commonly found personality traits amongst research study participants. The second theme to emerge from this study is that individual characteristics, traits, and symptoms of those who have learning disabilities have consequences and advantages. Some of the specific personal characteristics appear to be caused by the disability condition, whereas other personality traits arise due to the individual's ability to adapt to challenging situations. The descriptors of adaptation, compensation, flexibility, and delegation were found to be a commonality among the majority of research participants.

In contrast, many participants spoke directly about their originality, positive affect, innovativeness, ability to multi-task, a propensity for risk-taking, an inclination towards creative

thinking, and high energy. The third theme to arise from this research study involved the manner in which risk and risk mitigation is approached by those with learning disabilities. Participants noted that elements of risk and hard work are behind almost every great success. However, many entrepreneurs worked very hard to minimize risk doing everything they can to limit and diminish the risk that their growing businesses faced. The fourth and final theme to develop from this study surrounded the way that the learning-disabled entrepreneur found entrepreneurship. Many of the participants felt that entrepreneurship was truly a calling rather than a job and could identify an exact moment when they felt they became an entrepreneur.

### **Application to Professional Practice**

From a functional perspective, the results of this research study have numerous implications for professional practice. In congruence with research presented by Lafuente, Vaillant, Vendrell-Herrero, and Gomes (2019; 2018), it is suggested that novice entrepreneurs should be encouraged to begin their entrepreneurial endeavors, even though the eventual successful outcome of their venture is low. It is only through the creation of this initial venture that incremental improvements will be made, allowing the nascent entrepreneur room to improve subsequent ventures (Lafuente et al., 2019; 2018). The development of resilient capabilities and the process of learning from previous venture failures results in subsequent ventures that are more likely to succeed (Lafuente et al., 2019; 2018).

### **Relationship to strategic management.**

The relationship between strategic management and entrepreneurship is comprehensive, specifically the topic of opportunity identification (Tavassoli, Bengtsson, & Karlsson, 2017). As noted by Brockmann and Lacho (2010), once an opportunity is identified and action has been taken to exploit and pursue the opportunity, the priority for leadership shifts from entrepreneurial

to strategic. To survive in a competitive market, strategic management skills are necessary, as are the already established entrepreneurial skills already possessed by these individuals (Brockmann & Lacho, 2010). The ability to recognize and obtain sufficient resources to accomplish the current and future mission of the business is required (Brockmann & Lacho, 2010). For the learning disabled entrepreneur, the social exclusionary experiences that these individuals have experienced throughout their lives is the impetus for motivating the learning disabled entrepreneur to adopt and develop adaptive tools and techniques that are well suited for exploiting opportunities to enjoy entrepreneurial success (Hsieh, Molina, & Weng, 2019).

Further relationships between entrepreneurship and strategic management can be found. According to Ireland, Hitt, Camp, & Sexton (2001), creating wealth is at the heart of both entrepreneurship and strategic management. Empirical evidence has overwhelmingly proven that entrepreneurship is a key source of job growth and is vital to the continued health of a free market economy (Bailor & Claar, 2016). Atsan (2016) noted that the exploration of entrepreneurial venture failure is an important concept to understand in the field of business and strategic management. Both the causes and consequences for the individual entrepreneur are relevant for further study.

The research had the goal of seeking to distinguish the characteristics and personality traits of learning-disabled entrepreneurs that lead to their business success or failure. The role that innovation and creative thinking plays in the domain of strategic management and entrepreneurship is substantial. According to Brown and Barnard (2019), innovation is seen as a vital portion of entrepreneurship, with radical innovations wholly and routinely changing how people live their lives and generating significant outcomes. Most of the learning-disabled entrepreneurs explored in this research study had a distinct ability to recognize the future and are

uniquely positioned because of their abilities to identify the problems necessary to solve these problems. These entrepreneurs have an innate ability to create solutions to varied problems by using their characteristics of abstract thinking, innovativeness, and curious problem-solving.

### **Relationship to entrepreneurship.**

The study revealed that the influence of personal characteristics on the entrepreneurial intentions of individuals with disabilities is extensive and should be encouraged. Several personality traits predicted the entrepreneurial self-efficacy and intention of creating a business from scratch, namely optimism and lack of a fear of failure. The descriptors of adaptation, compensation, flexibility, and delegation were found to be a commonality among the majority of research participants. In contrast, many participants spoke directly about their originality, positive affect, innovativeness, ability to multi-task, a propensity for risk-taking, an inclination towards creative thinking, and high energy. Furthermore, it was apparent that most adults with ADHD educated through the United States public-school system were taught as children and young adults to shy away from risk. Although it is now understood that the confrontation and resultant action to these risks is a key component to becoming self-empowered, as revealed from this study, taking risks begets a fear of failure and that only by taking risks will one grow and find success.

The results generated from this research study should serve as a vehicle for educating others about how learning-disabled entrepreneurs are called to be entrepreneurs, while also illuminating instances of both success and failure. The path in which an individual takes to become an entrepreneur is varied. After interviewing numerous entrepreneurs who identify as having a learning disability, it is evident that people who have a diagnosis of dyslexia or ADHD feel that the field of entrepreneurship is something that matches their situations. As disabled

entrepreneurs are often challenged to pursue life differently from other non-disabled entrepreneurs, conventional approaches to societal obstacles abound while others in society are often giving little thought to the complications the disabled face. It is those individuals that are shaded and naive to the challenges of others that this research begins to remedy.

It is a continuing fact that entrepreneurial failures are inevitable in any business climate, and the high odds of failure are similar across industries in the United States (Lee & Miesing, 2017). The results of the research can be triangulated back to the body of literature which supports the notion that an individual's disability may, in fact, prove to be an entrepreneurial advantage (Kabir, 2014). This entrepreneurial advantage that some disabled entrepreneurs seem to possess gives these individuals the ability to view the world from a unique perspective allowing for the recognition of distinguishing business gaps that can often be exploited. The unique world viewpoint and subsequent opportunity identification of potential business endeavors could potentially be leveraged by others with learning disabilities, further increasing their potential odds for entrepreneurial success.

The persistence and resilience exhibited by the learning-disabled participants observed in this case study were remarkable. Confirming data discovered during the literature review, it was found that disabled entrepreneurs were resilient and persistent when dealing with the challenges of failure, stress, and uncertainty of entrepreneurship (Saxena & Pandya, 2018). The personal characteristics of hardiness, resourcefulness, and optimism have a significant positive relationship with both objective and subjective entrepreneurial growth and success, as confirmed in the current literature (Ayala & Manzano, 2014). Moreover, the strategies developed by individuals with learning disabilities used to cope with being disabled can be highly applicable in their subsequent entrepreneurial endeavors, as resilience and persistence are critical attributes for



any entrepreneur to possess (Wiklund et al. 2016). If these personal characteristics, coping mechanisms, and strategies could be taught to others, this could have a significant impact on the professional practice of entrepreneurship and its relationship to empowering those with disabilities.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The primary purpose of the study was to close the gap in available research by providing an understanding of how learning disabilities, such as dyslexia and ADHD, influence entrepreneurial success, failure, and ones calling to be an entrepreneur. The researcher acknowledged that the findings of the research study are simple incremental contributions to the overall understanding and scholarship surrounding learning disability and its influence on entrepreneurial success, failure, and calling. In its contribution, this research study has attempted to forward the knowledge that encompasses this phenomenon.

#### **Recommendation for action 1.**

The results of the field study and its ensuing data analysis have created three recommendations for further action. The first action that is recommended is to provide a global resource of information surrounding the topic of learning disabilities and entrepreneurship. The resource could be formed together by business owners, entrepreneurs with learning disabilities, professionals in the industry, and academic researchers in an effort to form a repository of web-based resources and information to which potential entrepreneurs with disabilities could refer to at any stage of their entrepreneurial journey. This repository would be able to share the expertise and experience of learning-disabled entrepreneurs to others in the broader community with the dissemination of case studies and first-hand experiences while providing contacts, connections, and networking opportunities to those entrepreneurs with disabilities.

**Recommendation for action 2.**

The second action recommended is simple; continue extending research studies to include those with disabilities. A considerable scope of future research is needed that aims to bridge the gaps spanning the divide between entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship for the disabled. A comprehensive review of literature has uncovered evidence showing that individuals who become entrepreneurs out of necessity due to disability are underrepresented in current studies. Research exploring the relationship between disability and business is growing in size but is still a small percentage of overall research studies. Illuminating and contextualizing the entrepreneurial trials and tribulations of those with disabilities helps society better to understand the experiences of entrepreneurs with learning disabilities.

**Recommendation for action 3.**

The final recommendation for action involves the way learning disabilities are approached by society. The majority of disabled entrepreneurs interviewed for this study simply want to be treated like anyone else in society, not more - not less. As such, it is recommended that society at large should evaluate how those with disabilities are treated. Many of the research participants noted that their entrepreneurial inclinations occurred early in life, often in childhood. These participants were mostly marginalized, feared, and pitied, with most of the participants receiving little to no specific care for their learning disability from adolescence to adulthood. Only recently have various entrepreneurs publicly revealed their learning disabilities, with many of the entrepreneurs reaching substantial financial success and recognition in popular media. The exclusionary social experiences that these individuals have experienced throughout their lives is the impetus for motivating the learning disabled entrepreneur to adopt and develop adaptive tools and techniques that are well suited for exploiting opportunities to enjoy entrepreneurial success

(Hsieh, Molina, & Weng, 2019). In the case of the study, the learning-disabled entrepreneur participants did not view their disability as a tragedy, but often a wellspring of ideas and motivation. As a society, we should continue to “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8-9, NIV).

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Concerning potential extensions of the research, there are several directions in which the current model might be usefully enhanced. This research begins to close the gap in the literature surrounding the influence of learning disabilities on the success, failure, and calling of various entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, there are wide gaps that continue to persist within the existing literature and research surrounding the influence of learning disabilities on the success, failure, and calling of various entrepreneurs requiring addressing. Several directions for future study are noted.

#### **Recommendation 1.**

The small number of participants utilized in this study does not allow for the generalization of the results of an entire population. For future studies, a larger number of participants and an equal disability distribution is necessary. In the case of opportunity identification theory, improving the understanding of opportunity identification and how it relates to the learning-disabled entrepreneurs can ensure that new knowledge is translated into tangible business innovations and practical solutions. A future direction for research would be to follow a group of SLD diagnosed entrepreneurs from the first beginnings of entrepreneurship, perhaps through an entrepreneurship incubator program. The advantage of this approach is that there would be a more accurate study population, as the entrepreneur would be followed from

initial business idea inception through business execution and business sustainability, while hopefully reaching entrepreneurial success. As the failure rate for non-disabled entrepreneurs is substantial, intuition suggests that there surely are numerous learning-disabled entrepreneurs that have recognized only failure and are discouraged, embarrassed, and hesitant at discussing their failure. Capturing and analyzing these cases would undoubtedly produce intimate insights that could further illuminate the phenomena of entrepreneurial failure.

### **Recommendation 2.**

A second direction for future research would be to examine entrepreneurs that experienced SLD's later in life. There are unique cases of SLD happening later in one's life. For example, some entrepreneurs experienced Aphasia as a result of a stroke while being an otherwise healthy adult. This stroke resulted in a challenge generally described as a communication impairment. One example described this impairment as affecting the ability to form words – all while this individual's intelligence is intact and fully functioning. Another entrepreneur experienced a stroke on the left side of his brain while undergoing seemingly routine heart surgery. This disability left the entrepreneur with right-sided body paralysis and acute aphasia. Learning is a lifelong endeavor, and disabilities can affect one's learning throughout life – not just in adolescence. In these cases, many of the entrepreneurs led relatively normal and healthy lives and then are suddenly struck by an ailment that takes away a portion of their ability to communicate while leaving their intelligence and cognition intact. Research shows us that learning is not a static, finite, or binary action that only happens in one's youth, but is a continuous process that is part of everyday life for those with and without disabilities. An exploration into how these individuals succeed or fail through entrepreneurship would be of significant value to the overall research.

**Recommendation 3.**

The final area for future consideration is to explore the influence that being a member of multiple minority groups has on the success, failure, and calling of entrepreneurship. There remain many areas of research that are still needed that explore the elements of individuals with disabilities relative to how they are affected by being members of multiple discriminated employment groups (Travis, 2017). The role that gender, religion, age, and ethnicity play regarding discriminatory employment practices has compounding effects on those who identify with one of these minority groups and is also considered to be disabled. Women with disabilities frequently experience gender discrimination combined with disability discrimination (Coleman et al., 2015; Folguera, 2014). A faith-based exploration into the efficacy of entrepreneurship for adults with learning disabilities would also prove to be interesting, if just for the fact of learning about how spirituality and scripture affect those disadvantaged individuals.

**Reflections**

The larger story of the Bible includes the elements of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. These combined elements give a grand narrative of how God views His ultimate plan, story, and mission. Disability is unpredictable and can happen to anyone at any age. Everyone experiences less-than-ideal conditions. Thousands of Americans find themselves to be unwell suddenly, unexpectedly, and severely. People take their mental, physical, and spiritual well-being for granted. It is truly unconscionable that those around us have been impacted so directly by the Fall in the form of disability have largely been ignored, marginalized, and discounted. As noted by Spies (2019), people with disabilities are still viewed as less than fully human both outside and within the Christian church. Furthermore, those with disabilities still encounter negative stereotypes and frequent unfriendliness, prejudice, and distrust. Our society

has been slow to acknowledge and take responsibility for the wellbeing of disabled persons among us.

Creamer (2012) noted that societal attitudes toward those individuals with disabilities and impairments are complex and, in most cases, more negative than positive. Christian-based interpretations of disability and impairment range from describing it as a simple test of faith, a punishment for sins committed, an occasion to inspire others, or merely a cruel and mysterious act of God Creamer (2012). Although many of these modalities are outdated, how the disabled are marginalized by society is still significant.

As stated by Kebaneilwe (2016), disability is a challenge, not a crisis. Many successful entrepreneurs openly admit to having a learning disability or openly talk about their disability diagnosis. More than once did a participant in this research study refer back to the study by Professor Julie Logan of Cass Business School in London, who has carried out research on the subject. Logan (2009) stated that entrepreneurs in the UK are twice as likely to be dyslexic as the average person and individuals are three times as likely to be dyslexic in the US. An earlier 2007 study by Logan of the Cass Business School of London showed that 35 percent of the entrepreneurs she surveyed had dyslexic – a percentage she called “staggering.” In contrast, dyslexia is a diagnosed disability found in approximately 10% of the general population.

**Possible personal biases.** It was essential for this researcher to address possible personal biases, preconceived ideas, and predetermined values. Best practices for a well-conducted field study were followed, including (Chenail, 2011):

- Asking the research participants for feedback to identify ambiguous and problematic questions,
- Adhering to the standards and procedures defined by the IRB protocol,

- Evaluating whether each question provides a sufficient range of response,
- Establishing that participants responses can be elucidated in terms of answering the three research study questions,
- Rescaling or rewording questions that are not answered fully or as expected

In future studies, selection bias will need to be addressed. As previously discussed, a more representative population of learning-disabled entrepreneurs is needed, even though the difficulty in finding participants that meet the criteria for study inclusion would be difficult because of the need to find those that have only experienced failure.

**Effect of the researcher on participants.** The possible effects that this researcher had on the research study participants were deemed to be nil. The researcher was well informed of the Hawthorne Effect in which participant awareness of being observed or having their behavior being assessed engenders beliefs about researcher expectations, frequently skewing research results (McCambridge, Witton & Elbourne, 2014). Additionally, the researcher was cognizant of addressing confirmation bias, or “the tendency to acquire or process new information in a way that confirms one’s preconceptions and avoids contradiction with prior beliefs” (Allahverdyan & Galstyan, 2014, p. 1).

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

The research begins to close the gap in the literature surrounding the influence of learning disabilities on the success, failure, and calling of various entrepreneurs. As noted in Section 1 and Section 2, the phenomena identified as the relationship between learning disabilities, entrepreneurial calling, and entrepreneurial success or failure is a timely and relevant topic that necessitates further exploration. This research required many stages of achievement, including the definition of an initial concept that results in performable research design, participant

interviews and observations, review of archival information, transcription of data, data analysis, data coding, and the reporting of the resultant themes, concepts, and arguments. The strength of the case study approach was leveraged in its ability to accommodate a full range of evidential data, including artifacts, documentation, observations, and interviews.

A review of the literature surrounding the topic of learning disability and entrepreneurship revealed a topic that is still young and necessitating further emergent data. The existing literature provided little data about the relationship between entrepreneurship and the extent of psychiatric symptoms, such as those found with individuals diagnosed with ADHD. The phenomena identified as the relationship between learning disabilities, entrepreneurial calling, and entrepreneurial success or failure is a timely and relevant topic that necessitated further exploration. To build upon this research, this qualitative case study research study was conducted. The goal of this case study research is to understand how learning disabilities affect the success or failure of entrepreneurs, while also exploring how the entrepreneur was called to be an entrepreneur.

The 14 participant interviews provided data that reached category and dimensional saturation and growth. The resultant data revealed four major themes, namely entrepreneurial resilience, advantageous personality and characteristic traits, adeptness at risk-taking and mitigation, and an identifiable moment that led to entrepreneurial calling. Two theoretical frameworks were used to provide a means of triangulation to research found in the extant literature, namely opportunity identification theory and locus of control theory.

In summary, the first theme identified in this research study surrounded individual entrepreneurial resilience. Entrepreneurial resilience, hardiness, and optimism were commonly found personality traits amongst research study participants. The second theme to emerge from



this study is that individual characteristics, traits, and symptoms of those who have learning disabilities have consequences and advantages. Some of the specific personal characteristics appear to be caused by the disability condition, whereas other personality traits arise due to the individual's ability to adapt to challenging situations. The descriptors of adaptation, compensation, flexibility, and delegation were found to be a commonality among the majority of research participants.

In contrast, many participants spoke directly about their originality, positive affect, innovativeness, ability to multi-task, a propensity for risk-taking, an inclination towards creative thinking, and high energy. The third theme to arise from this research study involves how those approach risk and risk mitigation with learning disabilities. Participants noted that elements of risk and hard work are behind almost every great success. However, many entrepreneurs worked very hard to minimize and diminish risk. The fourth and final theme to develop from this study surrounded the way that the learning-disabled entrepreneur found entrepreneurship. Many of the participants felt that entrepreneurship was truly a calling rather than a job and could identify an exact moment when they felt they became an entrepreneur.

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**Appendix A: Pre-Interview Screening Questions**

- 1.) Are you at least 18 years of age?
- 2.) Do you consider yourself to be an entrepreneur?
- 3.) Do you identify as having a learning disability?
- 4.) Are you based in the United States?

### **Appendix B: Interview Questions**

- 1.) What is your background?
  - a.) What is your educational and business creation background?
  - b.) Did you have any friends or family who were entrepreneurs?
  - c.) What is your age, gender, geographical location?
- 2.) What is your business?
  - a.) When and how did you start your business?
  - b.) How did you get the idea for your business?
- 3.) How were you called to be an entrepreneur?
  - a.) What were the factors that pushed or pulled you into becoming an entrepreneur?
  - b.) What were some of the risks you took to become an entrepreneur?
- 4.) What are the factors that lead to your entrepreneurial success or failure?
  - a.) What were some of the challenges or opportunities that affected your entrepreneurship?
  - b.) How do you define success?
  - c.) What has been your most satisfying moment in business?
- 5.) How has your learning disability affected your entrepreneurial success or failure?
  - a.) What barriers did you overcome to be an entrepreneur?
  - b.) Do you feel these barriers are different from those faced by other entrepreneurs?
  - c.) How has your disability impacted potential success as an entrepreneur?

- 6.) How has your business changed over time?
- 7.) Why do you feel learning disabled entrepreneurs experiencing a high rate of entrepreneurial failure?
- 8.) How do you envision your future entrepreneurial goals as an entrepreneur with a learning disability?
- 9.) Tell me about a time when you were faced with a dilemma or challenging obstacle?
  - a.) How were you able to handle this obstacle or dilemma?
  - b.) What were the end results of facing this dilemma or obstacle?
- 10.) What motivates you as an entrepreneur?
  - a.) What are your ideals?
  - b.) What is your favorite aspect of being an entrepreneur?
  - c.) If you had the chance to start your career over again, what would you do differently?
  - d.) Who has been your greatest inspiration?

**Appendix C: Recruitment Letter/Email**

[Insert Date]

Dear Entrepreneur:

I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree and I am looking for entrepreneurs that meet the following criteria:

- 1.) Must be 18 years of age
- 2.) Must be based in the United States
- 3.) Must be an entrepreneur
- 4.) Must identify as having a learning disability

The purpose of my research is to further the understanding of how entrepreneurs are called to be an entrepreneur, how learning disabilities affect entrepreneurship, and what the factors are that lead to entrepreneurial success or failure of individuals with learning disabilities, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

To participate in this study, I ask that you complete a short questionnaire/interview that I have created on Google Forms. The transcript of your interview will be made available for your review to ensure its accuracy. Your name and other identifying information will be collected as part of your participation, but this information will remain confidential. A copy of the completed research study will be made available to study participants.

To participate in this research study, please contact me at (redacted) to schedule your interview.

Sincerely,

Christopher Stemple  
Doctoral Candidate  
Liberty University  
School of Business

## Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

The Liberty University Institutional  
Review Board has approved  
this document for use from  
1/2/2020 to 1/1/2021  
Protocol # 4089.010220

### CONSENT FORM

Learning Disability as an Influence on Entrepreneurial Calling and Success  
Christopher Stemple  
Liberty University  
School of Business

You are invited to be in a research study on Learning Disability as an Influence on Entrepreneurial Calling and Success. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an entrepreneur, identify as having a learning disability, are 18 years of age or older, and are based in the United States. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Christopher Stemple, a doctoral candidate in the School of Business at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to further the understanding of how the individual was called to be an entrepreneur, why learning disabled entrepreneurs are experiencing a high rate of entrepreneurial failure, and what the factors are that lead to entrepreneurial success or failure of individuals with learning disabilities.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a 45-minute interview. The interview will be audio-recorded.
2. The opportunity to review the interview transcript for accuracy before its inclusion in this research study will be given to all research participants. This should take approximately 45 min.

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**Benefits:** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include a further understanding of entrepreneurship and how it is affected by learning disabilities.

**Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher and the researcher's faculty chair and dissertation mentor will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Research study data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 1/2/2020 to 1/1/2021 Protocol # 4089.010220

- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Christopher Stemple. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty chair, Dr. Scott Quatro, at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu)

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

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Signature of Participant Date

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Signature of Investigator Date

**Appendix E: IRB Approval**

**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 2, 2020

Christopher Stemple

IRB Approval 4089.010220: Learning Disability as an Influence on Entrepreneurial Calling and Success

Dear Christopher Stemple,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*  
**Research Ethics Office**

**LIBERTY**  
UNIVERSITY.  
*Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971*