THE IMPACT OF A PROJECT MANAGEMENT APPROACH ON MICRO-BUSINESSES IN

ACHIEVING STRATEGIC GOALS

by

Karen M. Lowe

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Dissertation

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

This flexible case study delves into the challenges micro-businesses in Ontario face, where the informal nature of operations and unique goal-setting processes are seen as obstacles to achieving strategic goals. Despite project management being proven to improve business success, many micro-businesses do not engage in formal processes. The research, employing a flexible case study methodology involving 15 micro-business founders in Ontario, explores the approaches used, differences in outcomes when goals are achieved versus not, and the role of project management in mitigating potential business failure. Analysis reveals five key themes, including lack of defined strategic goals, the unintentional use of an informal project management approach, and referrals and relationship building as an informal strategy for business sustainability. The findings provide an understanding of the dynamics at play in micro-businesses, offering practical implications for integrating systems into business planning and operations for sustained success. This study contributes valuable insights to micro-business owners, researchers, and project management professionals, emphasizing the importance of integrating informal project management processes into business operations for sustained success in the micro-business landscape.

Keywords: Project Management, Micro-Business, Small Business, Strategic Goals.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my big sister, Kimbley Marjorie Lowe-Bennett, my best friend and one of my dreams' biggest inspiration and supporters. You started this journey with me long before I decided to enroll in a doctoral program. You were my reader, my shoulder to cry on; you helped me craft letters when I was struggling in the program and didn't know if I would continue; you were my middle-of-the-night help even though you were in a different time zone; you told me giving up is not an option. You are now in a completely different zone, looking down. I am crying as I craft this dedication to you because you are only here in spirit to see me get to the end. You deserve this as much as I do because of all the time you put in; there are not enough words to thank you for your belief that I could do anything. I know I took your love for granted, but without you sacrificing your time, this would not be possible. Thank you. I love you.

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My family has been a source of support and contributed in one way or another. My mother, Janette Cox, instilled in me that education is important and the one thing we should try to attain above all. Nicole, my sister, my other reader, and telephone listener, made me realize that all I need to generate ideas is a listening ear. My friends said, I don't know what you are talking about, but I will listen. My entire family, who did all the big and little things to make this happen, I love you all, and I don't thank you enough, but I thank you and love that you value me as much as you do.

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Section 1: The Foundation of the Study

Project management structures allow organizations of all sizes to maximize limited resources (Bourgault & Niknazar, 2017). Project management impacts businesses because applying project management skills provides insights that further lead to knowledge gained by the organization (Bredillet et al., 2018). Knowledge gained by the organization's owners increases the effectiveness and efficiency of human efforts (Badewi, 2016). However, according to Bouwman et al. (2018), small businesses do not apply the formal project management processes required to achieve strategic goals. Strategic goals drive behavior, and project management improves performance (Bredillet et al., 2018; Gagné, 2018). For this study, project management was researched within the context of micro-businesses to gain insight into their understanding of and behaviors regarding project management. The existing micro-business research is within the small business literature and not as standalone research (Dineen et al., 2017). Thus, a need to understand how micro-business owners can use project management to improve business success remains important. (Barzotto et al., 2018).

This research aims to better understand the relationship between project management and micro-business in the context of achieving strategic goals. Therefore, this qualitative study employed a flexible design with the case study method to understand the use of project management by micro-businesses. This study is divided into three sections: the foundation of the study, the project, and application to professional practice. Section 1, the foundation of the study, consists of the problem, the nature of the study, the conceptual framework, and the literature review. Section 2, the project consists of the role of the researcher, the research methodology, population, data collection, organization and analysis plans, and validity and reliability. Section 3, and application to professional practice, consists of the final analysis of data collected from

interviews of micro-business owners.

In developing the foundation of the study, the following was discussed: the background of the problem, purpose statements, research questions, the nature of the study, conceptual framework, assumptions, limitations and delimitations, significance of the study, and the literature review. Using the layout mentioned above, the researcher provided a roadmap, making it easier to see the phenomenon that was addressed. Another roadmap was the data collection and organization plan that allows the reader to know the thinking behind how the data was collected and organized to allow the reader to draw conclusions that may include participant and researcher bias. Section 3 is the analysis of the findings and includes visual representations of the data and connecting the data findings to the literature review and the conceptual framework.

Background of the Problem

Small businesses play a vital role in the global economy and are crucial to a country's economic development (Abdilahi et al., 2020; Barzotto et al., 2018;). Small businesses have a high failure rate, and up to 55% do not survive the first five years in business (Albuquerque et al., 2017; Gray & Jones, 2016). The failure of small businesses results from their inability to achieve strategic goals (Katsikeas et al., 2017). Small businesses improve operational efficiency in pursuit of strategic goals, leading to success (Aidoo et al., 2018). The application of project management provides small businesses with knowledge, skills, and processes to achieve strategic goals (Abdilahi et al., 2020; Berhan et al., 2016;). Therefore, the lack of project management hinders the business' ability to achieve strategic goals (Katsikeas et al., 2017).

Different countries classify small businesses at varying sizes, but regardless of location, all have common characteristics (Barzotto et al., 2018; de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). Characteristics include the small number of employees, close working relationships, little to no

hierarchical levels, and informal communication methods (Barzotto et al., 2018; de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). Given the unique characteristics and the present understanding of small businesses, little is known about the decision-making process employed by small businesses regarding the use of project management in achieving strategic goals (Dineen et al., 2017). Strategic goals are the results business owners plan to achieve over a specified time, such as increasing market share, increasing customer satisfaction, and becoming an international company (Aidoo et al., 2018; Haverila & Haverila, 2018). In the strategic management literature, experts concede that strategic goals drive organizational output and are a significant step in achieving the company's vision (Aidoo et al., 2018; Gan & Yang, 2019).

Project management is an undertaking when business owners manage business resources to accomplish strategic goals (Haverila & Haverila, 2018; Řehoř & Vrchota, 2016). According to Abdilahi et al. (2020), project management contributes to the timely achievement of strategic goals by applying processes, knowledge, and skills. Project management consists of initiation, planning, executing, monitoring and control, and closing processes, providing the small business with an organized framework to achieve strategic goals (Berhan et al., 2016; de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). However, challenges remain for effectively implementing project management, such as a lack of resources and qualified personnel (de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020).

Ultimately, small business strategic goals are attained through the effective and efficient use of projects (Aliahmadi et al., 2017). The project's alignment is done through project management processes (Aliahmadi et al., 2017). Project management benefits operation and growth activities, therefore achieving strategic goals (de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). Despite research showing that project management improves organizational success, small businesses do

not engage in formal processes like project management (Bouwman et al., 2018).

Problem Statement

The general problem addressed was the failure of small businesses to use a project management approach to achieve strategic goals, resulting in potential business failure. Řehoř and Vrchota (2016) frame project management as controlling the achievement of strategic goals to avoid business failure. Bouwman et al. (2018) and Achtenhagen et al. (2017) affirm that small businesses do not have formal processes like project management to achieve strategic goals, resulting in potential business failure. de Almeida Parizotto et al. (2020) state that project management benefits small businesses in addressing business challenges when trying to achieve strategic goals. Sane (2019) characterizes project management as an approach to initiating, planning, and executing business processes, therefore averting potential business failure. Micro-businesses are an essential subset of small businesses, and it is vital to understand the decisions that contribute to their growth (Sane, 2019). Therefore, the specific problem addressed was the failure of micro-business owners within Ontario to use a project management approach to achieve strategic goals, resulting in potential business failure.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this flexible design single case study was to add to the body of knowledge in understanding why micro-businesses failed to use project management to achieve strategic goals and how this decision affected business failure. The research investigated, identified, and clarified the decision-making factors that determine how micro-business owners approach the achievement of strategic goals. The study added to the literature for micro-business owners, researchers, project management professionals, and project management processes and their impact on achieving strategic goals (Ledwith & Turner, 2018).

Research Questions

The research questions explored small businesses' failure to use project management in achieving strategic goals. Research questions are essential to highlight the themes that emerge from investigating a central phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to McCartan and Robson (2016), research questions should relate to an objective in that 'what' questions require a descriptive answer, and 'why' questions seek to clarify something. 'How' questions indicate a desire for change, and 'how' questions should not be applied to case study research questions (McCartan & Robson, 2016). 'What' questions were utilized in the study, which allowed participants to describe the approaches used by micro-businesses and find themes in the research.

RQ1: What are the approaches micro-business owners use for achieving strategic goals?

RQ1a: What was the approach when the strategic goals were achieved?

RQ1b: What was the approach when the strategic goals were not achieved?

RQ2: What are the differences between when micro-business owners achieve strategic goals and when those goals are not achieved?

RQ3: Given the understanding of these differences for micro-businesses, what is the role of project management in achieving strategic goals and minimizing potential business failure?

According to Creswell (2014), research questions should start with the broadest possible question. Therefore, research question one examined the diverse perspectives on micro-businesses' approaches to achieving strategic goals. Therefore, allowing a broad exploration that revealed approaches employed by micro-business owners to attain strategic goals. One type of 'what' question is a 'how' question, seeking to understand how something works (Yin, 2014). Therefore, question two endeavored to understand the variations between approaches, and

insights were unveiled into the differences. According to Yin (2014), 'what' questions are also exploratory and aim to learn something from the study. Hence, question three sought to discover the value of a project management approach to achieving strategic goals and minimizing failure, all within the context of the understanding gained from analyzing the differences.

The failure to use a project management approach to achieve strategic goals is a business decision (Dineen et al., 2017; Gong et al., 2017). The research questions sought to uncover the impact of using an approach, like project management, to achieve strategic goals. Further, the research questions above were intended to deduce project management's role in achieving strategic goals for micro-businesses and the impact the failure to use project management has on micro-business success or failure. The research was conducted with a flexible design using qualitative methods, discussed below.

Nature of the Study

This study was conducted with a flexible design using qualitative methods; specifically, a single case study design was used. Research approaches are plans and procedures that include broad assumptions and detailed methods for collecting data, investigating, and analyzing (Creswell, 2014). Fixed, flexible, and mixed designs are discussed at a high level. The philosophical worldview that guides how the researcher directs the study is a vital decision of the research approach (Creswell, 2014). Most researchers use worldviews such as positivism, post-positivism, pragmatism, and constructivism (Creswell, 2014). The research problem guides the data collection, analysis, and interpretation methods (Creswell, 2014). The methods discussed are narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (McCartan & Robson, 2016). Four triangulation methods to ensure the validity of the research are data, observer, theory, and methodology (Yin, 2014).

Discussion Research Paradigms

A research paradigm is a worldview used by researchers to analyze all elements of the study (McCartan & Robson, 2016). Researchers must identify the worldview because it influences the comprehension of the study results (Creswell, 2014). Paradigms provide a theoretical lens for understanding the research, structures relating to the characteristics of the reality being studied, and what can be known about the realities (Corry et al., 2018). Researchers use positivism, post-positivism, pragmatism, and constructivism to interpret the studied phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Paradigms guide selecting research questions and qualify what constitutes an answer (McCartan & Robson, 2016).

Positivism and Post-Positivism. Positivism was created to understand society's dynamics from a scientific perspective and based on objective knowledge attained from direct experiences or observations (Corry et al., 2018). Post-positivists believe reality is constructed through research and statistics; post-positivists believe cause and effect is a probability that may or may not occur (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Post-positivism is not a unit of thought but a group of theorists who share a range of views (McCartan & Robson, 2016). Positivism and post-positivism can be used in qualitative data (Anderson & Chirkov, 2018). However, because these theories are primarily for quantitative analysis, gaps exist in the analysis when applied to qualitative data (Anderson & Chirkov, 2018). Therefore, positivism and post-positivism are not appropriate for this study.

Pragmatism. Pragmatism is best employed when focusing on the problem versus focusing on the participants' view of reality (Korte & Mercurio, 2017). Therefore, pragmatism is appropriate for action, change, and understanding the relationship between knowledge versus action (Goldkuhl, 2017). The pragmatism paradigm includes ascertaining the meaning of things

and is outcome-oriented (Shannon-Baker, 2016). Compared to other paradigms, pragmatism offers more research options for resolving the problem within the philosophical structure of a study because it can draw from both qualitative and quantitative assumptions (Goldkuhl, 2017). However, Stake (2010) defines a case study as a choice of what is framed by time and place. In contrast, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), within the pragmatism worldview, the solution for a case study may not be bound by the range of experiences the participants bring to the research. Therefore, pragmatism is not the best option for this case study, as finding meanings in the realities as perceived by the participants is the aim of this study.

Constructivism. Constructivism aims to understand how realities are derived from participating in social activities and how participants take action due to the beliefs derived from the social activities (Goldkuhl, 2017). The constructivist believes reality is decided by those studied because participants form subjective meaning based on their experiences (Bogna et al., 2020; Creswell, 2014). Four elements of the constructionist paradigm are situation, cooperation, conversation, and meaning construction, where knowledge is constructed through people's interaction with external stimuli (Shi & Xu, 2018). Constructivism is best for comprehending the participant's reality, which informs decisions regarding which approach to choose in achieving strategic goals (Bogna et al., 2020). A research paradigm must inform the research method and design (Bogna et al., 2020). Therefore, the paradigm used for this research is constructivism.

Discussion of Design

The research design is laid out at the proposal stage and is vital as it sets the stage for the study's success or failure (McCartan & Robson, 2016). Fixed and flexible designs are at different ends of a continuum, quantitative and qualitative designs, respectively, with mixed design in the middle (Creswell, 2014). The choice of one design over another is more than numbers versus

text, as text can be converted to numbers, and numbers can be converted to text using content analysis (Morgan, 2013). Research designs are concerned with purpose, conceptual framework, research questions, methods, and sampling procedures (McCartan & Robson, 2016).

The Fixed Design. In applying fixed designs, the subject of interest is quantified and fixed at the study's early stage (McCartan & Robson, 2016). According to Morgan (2013), fixed design is analytical as it tests theory through observation and is oriented to cause and effect. Additionally, fixed design is objective; it emphasizes things that can be measured (Morgan, 2013). Therefore, fixed designs are based on aggregates or averages instead of individual actions (McCartan & Robson, 2016). The benefit of the fixed design is the direct link to research theory. However, it is not ideal for this study as the focus was on qualitative data collection to understand the participants' views regarding using an approach to achieve strategic goals (McCartan & Robson, 2016).

The Mixed Method Design. A mixed method design is best applied when substantial qualitative and quantitative data collection is in the same study (McCartan & Robson, 2016). Mixed method designs are applied by defining the general concept and collecting and analyzing the data (Creswell, 2014). Further, qualitative and quantitative data are embedded or merged in the design analysis (Creswell, 2014). The benefit of a mixed method design is that it increases the research findings' validity through the corroboration of qualitative and quantitative data (McKim, 2017). A mixed method design can be applied to a broader range of research questions than a fixed or flexible design (McCartan & Robson, 2016). The mixed method design is unsuitable for this study because no quantitative data was collected and applied (McCartan & Robson, 2016).

Flexible Design. According to McCartan and Robson (2016), the flexible design allows

the investigator to understand the studied problem by starting with a broad assumption. Further, the focus is narrowed as the research progresses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Flexible design highlights meaning and interpretation, making it subjective (Morgan, 2013). Flexible design offers an inductive and deductive analysis of the data, providing the researcher with insights into the participants' actions in the study and their consequences (Creswell, 2014). Flexible design is inductive because it is oriented to exploring a problem or situation and discovering answers, while it is deductive because it allows the answers to be tested (Morgan, 2013). Inductive and deductive data analysis allows the researcher to construct patterns and themes from data obtained through observations and check if additional evidence can support emerging themes (Creswell, 2014; Morgan, 2013). Therefore, giving a holistic account of the situation by identifying the various factors involved (Creswell, 2014). Flexible design is the best option because of the holistic approach that allows for in-depth analysis.

   Appropriateness of Chosen Design. The flexible design works well with constructivism and case studies, allowing multiple approaches to obtaining a solution (McCartan & Robson, 2016). A benefit of flexible design is the ability to capture the complexities and nuances of human behavior, as well as perspectives (McCartan & Robson, 2016). Understanding human behavior and perspectives is vital to comprehending micro-businesses' failure to use a project management approach to achieve strategic goals (Dineen et al., 2017). The characteristics of a flexible design are that it is a rigorous approach to data collection, analysis, and report writing (McCartan & Robson, 2016). These characteristics are essential to verify accuracy because of the multiple types of data collection utilized in the study (McCartan & Robson, 2016). Collecting data and deducing multiple participants' perspectives needs a flexible design approach to reveal the ideas the researcher seeks to understand (McCartan & Robson, 2016).

Discussion of Method

Qualitative research is a method of collecting data by observing activities in the world (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research makes sense of or interprets a phenomenon regarding the meaning people bring to their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research begins with assumptions and approaches to inform the study's procedures (McCartan & Robson, 2016). Five qualitative methods considered consistently by qualitative researchers are narrative, grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography, and case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McCartan & Robson, 2016). The research questions should inform the researcher of the most appropriate methical approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For example, studying a single individual or a group helped decide on an ethnography or case study.

Narrative Method. According to Lindsay and Schwind (2016), narrative inquiry is a collection of stories and a way to understand the experiences of one or more individuals. The researcher seeks to comprehend how these experiences are created and then lived in social and historical narratives across time and place (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). The narrative method is a collaboration between the researcher and participants over time, in the social or physical setting where the event occurs (Berendonk et al., 2019). Narrative inquiry is more about honoring experiences as a source of information and less about objective knowledge (Berendonk et al., 2019). Hence, it is not suitable for this study to view a phenomenon from a subjective perspective, but it seeks to comprehend the complex and simple meaning in the participants' views of the occurrence (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Grounded Theory. Clancy and Vince (2018) describe the grounded theory as a discovery method that allows the general features of a topic to be developed as a theory. The theory is general, abstract, centered around the participants' views, as well as based on action,

process, and interaction (Creswell, 2014). In generating the theory, the researcher aims to experience the problem from the participants' perspective (Clancy & Vince, 2018). A key component of grounded theory is that no theory exists but is generated from the data of participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Grounded theory aims to explain a specific action (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The grounded theory method is unsuitable because this study aims to develop an understanding of a case starting from a broad perspective, as opposed to the participants' narrow perspective found in the grounded theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenology. Phenomenology describes the common meaning of the lived experiences of multiple individuals to uncover the essence or nature of the lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). Researchers believe things exist independently of being understood; therefore, the phenomenology methodology aims to comprehend individuals' subjective points of view (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). Phenomenology illustrates what participants have in common, such as the universal grasp of grief or feeling suicidal (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology is not the best option because this study aims to look at the similarities and differences in the data collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethnography. Using ethnography, the researcher aims to describe and interpret cultural patterns from individuals, thereby capturing the unbiased nature of human behavior in real-time (Abada et al., 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher looks at the social interaction between participants living in a particular environment, observing the behavior during a particular situation or event (Abada et al., 2020). The researcher compares participants' opinions and behaviors within the period and presents a set of rules and generalizations regarding how the group functions culturally (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The ethnography method is unsuitable, as

the study requires an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon outside the scope of ethnography research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Case Study. The research method employed is a single case study. The case study methodology is best to develop an in-depth description and analysis of an individual or group (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2014). As a research method, the case study contributes to the body of knowledge of groups or individual occurrences (Yin, 2014). Further, a case study enables the interconnectedness of data collection, analysis, and writing, which is needed for the case study's complex nature (Yin, 2014). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), case study research is a case happening in a real-time, modern setting, bounded by time and place. The research can be analyzed without an oversaturation of data with parameters (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The flexible case design allowed different levels of complexity to be studied (Yin, 2014). A case study is best for understanding a real-world case involving contextual conditions (Yin, 2014).

Discussion of Triangulation

Triangulation is an authentication strategy using multiple sources to increase the study's rigor and validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McCartan & Robson, 2016). Observer triangulation is where more than one researcher or observer is used in the study to provide multiple observations and conclusions (Blythe et al., 2014; McCartan & Robson, 2016). Observation data is collected when multiple researchers observe physical behavior simultaneously (Blythe et al., 2014). Therefore, observer triangulation is unsuitable for this study, where the focus is on documentation and participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2014). Methodological triangulation uses qualitative and quantitative data; hence, best suited for mixed methods research design (McCartan & Robson, 2016). Methodology triangulation allows the convergence toward a

conclusion; therefore, it is unsuitable for a flexible design, where the conclusion is unknown and developed as the study progresses (Bright et al., 2019). Theory triangulation seeks to apply multiple theoretical perspectives or hypotheses to a standard data set to establish agreement and disagreement (Tibben, 2014). Theory triangulation is best suited for fixed, not flexible (Tibben, 2014).

Data triangulation involves data collected from multiple sources to arrive at one conclusion (Yin, 2014). Data triangulation is best suited for a case study because convergent evidence strengthens the construct validity (Yin, 2014). With data triangulation, the collected data was compared across data sources, not individually (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017). In addition to strengthening data validity, the researcher better understands the phenomenon being studied because triangulation orientates toward a reality (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017). Therefore, the researcher can identify patterns outside the researcher's biases (Creswell, 2014). Data triangulation enables the researcher to look and listen from multiple viewpoints (Stake, 2010). Triangulation is a way to confirm with participants what was said and meant, a form of differentiation that equips the researcher to see the differences in perspectives, with multiple meanings emerging and analyzed (Stake, 2010).

Summary of the Nature of the Study.

Along with the qualitative method, this study used a constructivist worldview, focusing on hermeneutics and the case study method, as seen within the boundaries of a flexible design (Creswell, 2014). Participants' experiences can be captured and analyzed to understand the research problem and all possible solutions (McCartan & Robson, 2016). An in-depth case study allows broad assumptions and perspectives to demonstrate that study results can benefit other micro-businesses (Morgan, 2013). The constructivist worldview enables the researcher to

analyze the data from the participants' perspective, describing the approaches to achieving strategic goals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation increases the data's credibility, depicting the research's authenticity (Yin, 2014). Data triangulation uses multiple points to retrieve data from various sources, helping to locate the solution to the problem being studied (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017). Studies involving data from multiple interviews are susceptible to criticism; hence, triangulation is essential for credibility (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017). Below is a discussion of the main factors studied within the context of a flexible design using a qualitative method.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is a written or visual product that shows the main factors being studied, the concepts, theories, actors, constructs, and the links between them, as depicted in Figure 1 below (Cardoso et al., 2014). This conceptual framework was intended to illustrate to the researcher the mechanisms and problems of goal achievement in micro-businesses while providing an understanding of best practices when researching the execution of project management for micro-business (Cohen et al., 2018). Micro-business refers to organizations with zero to nine employees, experiencing different challenges than small businesses and contributing to 90% of businesses (Achtenhagen et al., 2017; Harrington et al., 2020). The concepts explored were strategic goals drive behavior, project management improves performance, and poorly executed strategy leads to business failure. The theories discussed were the resource-based view (RBV) and dynamic capabilities theories. Constructs explored were strategic goals, entrepreneurial competencies, project management phases, and the informal execution of strategy used by micro-businesses. The actors considered were micro-business and the owner-manager entrepreneur. This framework is vital to understanding the connections and whether businesses need a project management approach to manage the strategy execution process in an

organized way that achieves strategic objectives, reducing the probability of failure (Řehoř &

Vrchota, 2016).
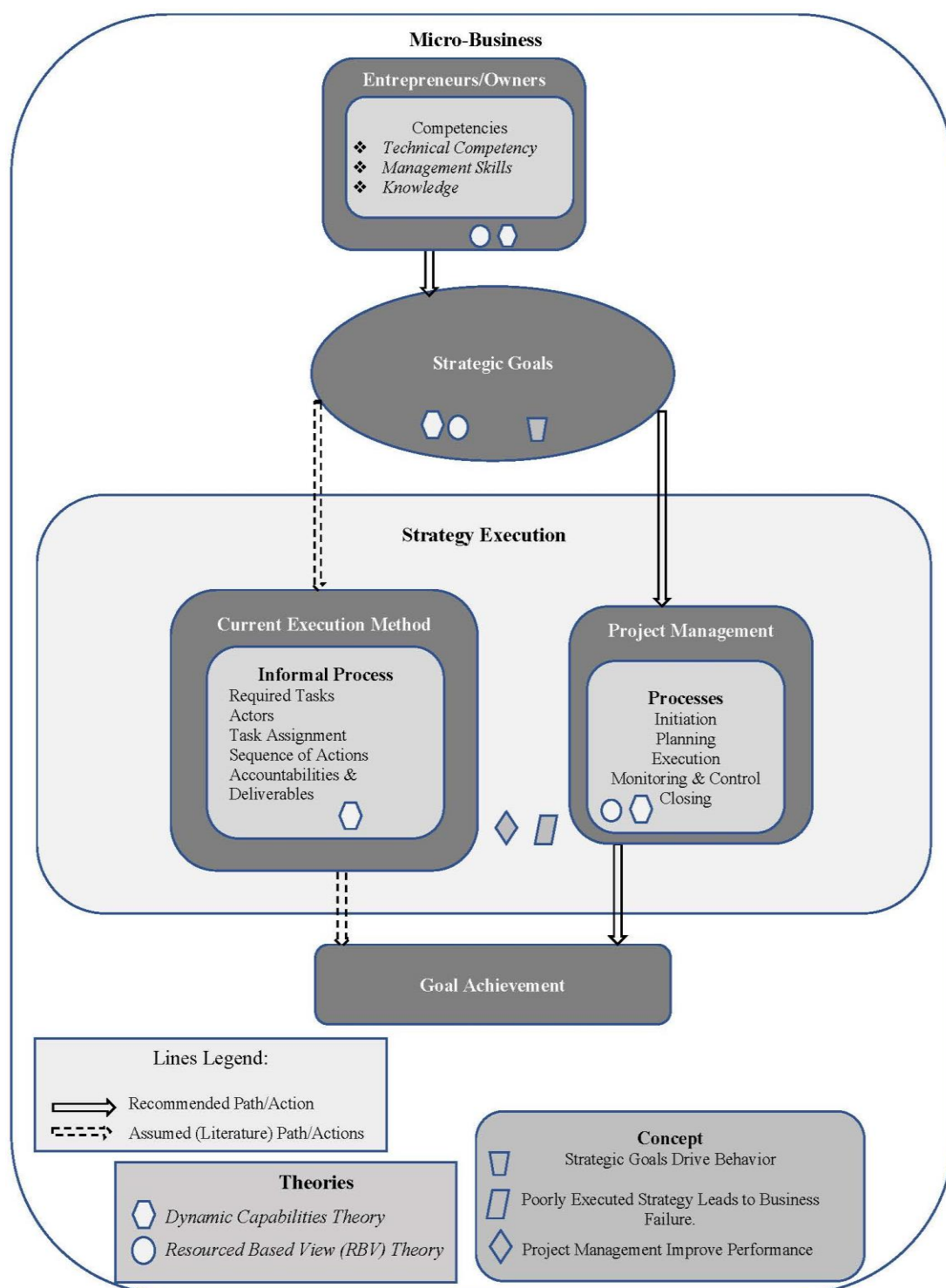
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Concepts

Concepts are popular beliefs that provide opportunities to understand the mechanisms of the problem being studied further (Cohen et al., 2018). Concepts comprise individual elements, like project management and productivity, that together build a relationship in showing the ramifications of the problem being studied (MacKenzie et al., 2016). For example, three concepts to provide information on the current state of micro-businesses, discussed below, are strategic goals drive behavior, poorly executed strategy leads to business failure, and project management improves performance.

Strategic Goals Drive Behavior. The first concept is strategic goals drive behavior, as seen in the strategic goals section of Figure 1 (Gagné, 2018; Srivastava & Sushil, 2017). A well-executed strategy creates preferred employee actions and behaviors, influencing goal achievement (Srivastava & Sushil, 2017). Over a third of strategy value is lost without a structured execution, while only 10 percent achieve at least two-thirds of their strategic objectives (Galpin, 2018). A repeatable set of actions should be created and integrated, centered on strategic goals, therefore aligning behavior to strategy (Galpin, 2018). Strategic goals are necessary to achieve business success to increase stakeholders' motivation and direct their behavior in achieving business objectives (Gagné, 2018). Researchers believe strategy execution should be included at each stage of strategic management, not be an afterthought, to increase the success rate of businesses (Srivastava & Sushil, 2017).

Poorly Executed Strategy Leads to Business Failure. A lack of relevant entrepreneurial competencies contributes to poorly executed strategy (Monauni, 2017). Poorly executed strategy leading to business failure, seen in the strategy execution section of Figure 1, is a concept that brought insight into why micro-businesses fail (Amankwah-Amoah & Wang,

2019). The research questions in this study seek to understand the approaches micro-business owners use, why these approaches fail, and the role of project management in achieving strategic goals (McCartan & Robson, 2016). Early research has shown that strategy execution is as important as strategy formation, even though little emphasis has been placed on execution (Srivastava & Sushil, 2017). According to Monauni (2017), three elements must be present for a strategy to be appropriately executed: there must be an understanding of the strategy; success factors, such as improved communication and increased customer satisfaction, are clearly defined; an understanding of the implementation of performance metrics allows strategic goal alignment to goal achievement, therefore increasing the probability of business success. Finally, the best strategies can fail if poorly executed, validating a need for effective systems to improve the business' success potential.(Srivastava & Sushil, 2017).

Project Management Improves Performance. Owners of organizations of different types and sizes react differently to challenges in the external environment, such as economic change (Bredillet et al., 2018). Researchers believe that organizations, regardless of size, can use the same structures and processes seen in project management to reap the benefits of increased output with their current resources (Bourgault & Niknazar, 2017). However, project management applies a formal approach in the various phases of implementation (Albala et al., 2021; de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). Companies can improve competitive capabilities by gaining knowledge and applying project management skills while engaging successfully with external challenges, like economic change (Bredillet et al., 2018; de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). As depicted in the strategy execution section of Figure 1, project management improves performance and provides insight into its consequences on the achievement of strategic goals

(Adler & Pollack, 2016). By applying processes, knowledge, and skills, project management has improved operational growth and innovative processes, therefore improving overall performance (Abdilahi et al., 2020; Adler & Pollack, 2016). According to Aliahmadi et al. (2017), one objective of organizations is to create and deliver better value than their competitors. Project management can keep businesses functioning by aligning strategic goals with projects that yield success, thus reducing business failure (Tan & Wenu, 2019).

Theories

The theories discussed are in the literature and provide a lens through which the researcher views the problem studied and potential solutions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For example, how can micro-business owners use a project management approach to achieve strategic goals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Theories include intellectual insights into a phenomenon, for example, organization structure or learning (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2021). In addition, theories provided visibility between the phenomena and their relationships without physical allusions, like the relationships between project management and strategic goals (Campis et al., 2020). The theories discussed are resource-based view (RBV) theory and dynamic capabilities theory.

Resource-Based View Theory. Figure 1 shows the resource-based view (RBV) theory, a widely applied idea to project management, and the relationship among owner-manager entrepreneur, strategic goals, and strategy execution (Almarri & Gardiner, 2014). The theory examines how firms drive strategic goals using project management (Almarri & Gardiner, 2014; González-Rodríguez et al., 2018). Initially, Wernerfelt (1984) and Barney (1991) defined the resource-based view (RBV) as the theoretical framework for understanding how firms achieve and sustain competitive advantage with limited resources (Almarri & Gardiner, 2014). RBV

builds on Penrose's (1959) idea that resource capacity can be extended by focusing on scarce resources like managerial expertise (Mitchell & Vidal, 2017). The resource-based view explains the value creation of micro-business projects in achieving strategic goals and the current use of project management in organizations (Drouin et al., 2019). Further, due to the perceived inadequacies of RBV, as referenced by Mitchell and Vidal (2017), researchers developed the dynamic capabilities theory to explain why distinct types of firms operate differently in different environments (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000),

Dynamic Capabilities Theory. According to Barney (1991), the dynamic capabilities theory, depicting relationships among owner-manager entrepreneurs, strategic goals, and strategy execution in Figure 1, explains how firms assimilate, develop, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address the firm's challenges like fast-changing economic conditions (González-Rodríguez et al., 2018). Dynamic capabilities theory excludes ordinary capabilities such as everyday operational and administrative functions like scheduling and quality assurance, ensuring things are managed correctly (Sainsbury, 2019).

Instead, dynamic capabilities theory looks at high-level activities, like product development, which connect technology and operations to a firm or service demand, creating a combination of technological and operational capabilities, leading to a higher level of operation (Sainsbury, 2019). The dynamic capabilities theory is externally oriented plus entrepreneurial (Sainsbury, 2019). Dynamic capabilities theory can divided into three areas: the recognition of opportunities, the development of technical and organizational capabilities, as well as the renewal of the firms' capabilities, leading to the business's success or failure (Arranz et al., 2020; Sainsbury, 2019). In understanding whether the project management approach benefits micro-businesses in achieving strategic goals, the researcher discovered how the business learns, grows,

and transforms to align projects with tools and processes (Ismail et al., 2019). Therefore allowing change capabilities to develop and the agility to pivot when necessary (Ashill et al., 2020; Ismail et al., 2019). Dynamic capabilities theory explains how firms can better adapt to market demands by looking at broad business success measures, for example, improved customer satisfaction (Ashill et al., 2020).

Actors

In studying human problems, it is crucial to analyze the people and their settings, referred to as the actors of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The actors are responsible for the alignment of strategic goals to entrepreneurial competencies and the execution of strategy to achieve strategic goals (Geraldi et al., 2020). Therefore, researchers endeavor to see the viewpoints of operators such as entrepreneurs to gain insights into the business environment and to comprehend better the impacts of the phenomenon (Headley & Plano Clark, 2019). The actors in this conceptual framework are the micro-business and owner-manager entrepreneurs, the primary decision-makers.

Micro-Business. Micro-business, depicted in Figure 1, is the basis of the study, so understanding how these organizations operate and achieve strategic goals is vital to the study (Achtenhagen et al., 2017). The unique characteristic of micro-businesses is the less formal way of operation, which impacts decision-making regarding strategic goals and the execution of strategy (Bustami & Wong, 2020; Engström & McKelvie, 2017). As a result, micro-businesses do not presently include formal strategy processes, as seen in the various phases of the implementation of a project management approach (Albala et al., 2021; Bouwman et al., 2018). Micro-businesses' capabilities are the same as the owner-manager entrepreneur because the business is centered around the founder (Engström & McKelvie, 2017). Therefore, understanding

the micro-business' characteristics, nuances, and needs allowed factors affecting business failure to be addressed, decreasing the probability of business failure (Albuquerque et al., 2017).

Owner-Manager Entrepreneurs. The owner-manager entrepreneur, depicted in Figure 1, makes decisions for the business; their knowledge level and other capabilities determine the business's probability of success or failure (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). Duller et al. (2020) define an entrepreneur as a person who takes risks under uncertainty. Micro-businesses are led by owner-manager entrepreneurs who impact the business's success or failure (Brooks et al., 2020). Therefore, the success of micro-businesses depends on entrepreneurs' skills to make the correct execution decisions in achieving strategic goals (Duller et al., 2020). One reason for a micro-business failing is the owner's inability to understand the factors contributing to the failure, like linking strategy execution to opportunities (Albuquerque et al., 2017). However, a gap in the research literature remains for why micro-business entrepreneurs fail to link strategy execution to the achievement of strategic goals (Brooks et al., 2020). According to Gherhes et al. (2016), the lack of information on the context in which micro-businesses achieve strategic goals becomes a growth constraint for owner-manager entrepreneurs because it extends to the business environment, causing a lack of support in policy and government.

Constructs

Constructs are the study's broad topics or building blocks that add clarity to understanding the problem by showing how or why a phenomenon occurs (Chakraborty et al., 2020). Since constructs are the foundation of conceptual frameworks, choosing suitable constructs strengthens the understanding of the problem (Chakraborty et al., 2020). Further, the researcher examined the relationships between the constructs and the problem. Constructs discussed below are strategic goals, entrepreneurial competencies, project management phases,

and the informal execution of strategy.

Strategic Goals. As seen in Figure 1, strategic goals are the outcomes business owners plan to accomplish over a particular time, such as increasing customer satisfaction, increasing market share, or becoming an international company (Aidoo et al., 2018; Haverila & Haverila, 2018). According to Van den Steen (2018), a tendency to emphasize strategy formulation rather than strategy execution exists, resulting in a high failure rate of goal achievement. To mitigate this tendency, strategic goals must first be formulated and then executed well, enabling strategic goals to be achieved successfully (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020). Examples of elements that impact goal achievement are financial resources, leadership, and strategy execution (Katsikeas et al., 2017; Van den Steen, 2018). The organization's accomplishments result from its strategic behavior, which is driven by its strategic goals (Katsikeas et al., 2017). To achieve strategic goals, entrepreneurial competencies must be visible and work in tandem with a strong execution strategy (Van den Steen, 2018).

Connection to the Findings. Cardoso et al. (2014) define a conceptual framework, depicted in Figure 1, as a visual display of the planned sections of a study to be explored. In this study, the planned sections included strategic goals, which led to the discovery through interviews that goals defined by micro-businesses differ from other businesses because of the tendency towards informal processes. Based on the findings, goals for micro-business owners are not strategic based on a formal definition of the term strategic; goals are either personal or ad hoc and do not have planned tasks and objectives in achieving said goals except to work hard. As a result, Figure 1, the conceptual design that spoke to the factors studied, depicts strategic goals. However, the field data showed general goals that are often unrelated to the business but are achieved through the success of the business. However, the study of strategic goals, depicted in

Figure 1, through semi-structured interviews was essential to learn new data as experienced by participants. The goals, as defined by participants in the data, are discussed in more detail in Section 3 in the Presentation of the Findings.

Entrepreneurial Competencies. As depicted in the owner-manager entrepreneur section of Figure 1, entrepreneurial competencies are characteristics of a person, such as motive, skills, body of knowledge, or traits that affect the entrepreneur's ability to do a job successfully (Choi et al., 2019). In addition to technical skills, entrepreneurial competencies include characteristics such as motivation, influencing, and decision-making (Tan & Wenu, 2019). Projects are entrepreneurially oriented (Bredillet et al., 2018). Therefore, if the best execution method for strategy is project management, entrepreneurial competencies in project management and micro-business in general must be included (Bredillet et al., 2018). Regardless of the strategy execution method chosen, entrepreneurial competencies, like leadership, are needed to navigate the challenging business environment to achieve strategic goals (Tan & Wenu, 2019). Entrepreneurial competencies allow knowledge and skills to be converted to economic growth and business success based on the decisions made regarding formal or informal execution processes (Behling & Lenzi, 2019; Salomaa & Seikkula-Leino, 2020). Entrepreneurial competencies are essential elements of businesses and impact how strategic goals are formulated and how strategy execution processes are chosen to achieve strategic goals (Hysa et al., 2017).

Project Management Phases. The project management phases construct, represented in the execution section of Figure 1 within the strategy execution box, is depicted with a solid line. Therefore, the strategy represents the lack of project management but is recommended for micro-businesses to execute strategy to achieve strategic goals. Project management increases organizational value by increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of human effort, as seen in

entrepreneurial competencies (Badewi, 2016). Project management applies knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements, thereby offering a way to deliver strategic goals (Bredillet et al., 2018; Ika et al., 2020). Further, project management phases are used to organize and manage resources to accomplish a project within the specified scope, cost, quality, and time limits (Samset & Volden, 2016). According to the Project Management Institute, the project management phases are initiation, planning, executing, monitoring and control, and closing (Project Management Institute, 2021). Project management aligns projects with strategic goals, increasing investment returns and reducing the probability of micro-business failure (Badewi, 2016).

Informal Execution of Strategy. The execution of strategy by micro-businesses is depicted in the execution section of Figure 1 as an informal execution of strategy. Strategy execution is a discipline as well as a set of behaviors that companies must master to achieve success (Galpin, 2018). The current execution of strategy by micro-businesses is performed through any combination of the following components: how the organizational manager identifies decisions that must be made; tasks to resolve issues and problems; how objectives are set; the assignment or delegation of tasks; the sequence of decisions and actions taken; as well as the accountabilities and deliverables demanded from organizational actors (Chrisman et al., 2016). According to Sull (2007), as noted by Harrington et al. (2018), micro-business reflects a disjointed perspective in the formulation and execution of strategy; therefore, it becomes a linear process. However, to overcome the linear method, one must understand that the processes involved in formulating and executing strategy should be iterative (Harrington et al., 2018). Processes in the current execution of strategy by micro-businesses are separated into the following components: required tasks, actors, task assignment or delegation, sequence of actions,

accountabilities, and deliverables (Chrisman et al., 2016). According to Kozyra and Radomska (2020), an ideal execution process integrates intangible factors, like leadership, with activities to ensure success. However, the failure to execute strategy effectively remains an ongoing issue in achieving strategic goals (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020).

      Connection to the Findings. According to Cardoso et al. (2014), a conceptual framework, depicted in Figure 1, graphically displays the studied components of a study to arrive at the findings. According to Figure 1, the literature demonstrates that micro-businesses do not include a project management approach based on their informal structures (Bouwman et al., 2018; Chrisman et al., 2016). However, according to the findings, micro-business owners utilized an informal project management approach. As seen in Table 3 and Figure 21, all phases of project management are utilized informally, with phases overlapping. Also, accountabilities and deliverables mentioned in Figure 1 are described in the informal process of micro-business owners in describing their procedure of monitoring and control and closing phases.

      Relationship Between Concepts, Theories, Actors, and Constructs

      The relationship between the concepts, theories, actors, and constructs is depicted in Figure 1. Strategic goal achievement is essential in a micro-business to avoid potential failure (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020). The decisions made regarding the formulation and execution of strategic goals are based on the competencies of the owner/manager entrepreneur, which impacts goal achievement (Choi et al., 2019). The method chosen for the execution of the strategy is based on entrepreneurial competencies, with informal processes implemented more often in micro-businesses instead of a project management approach, which is most often supported by a formal strategic management process (de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020; Engström & McKelvie, 2017). The informal execution of strategy by micro-businesses is depicted by a broken line in

Figure 1 to show the current or assumed execution method being utilized.

The dynamic capabilities theory explains how firms can create capabilities with limited resources to extend limited resources to implement formal and informal processes effectively in achieving strategic goals (Sainsbury, 2019; Sane, 2019). The resource-based view explains how project management could provide micro-businesses with formalized processes to extend the knowledge and skills of owner/manager entrepreneur competencies, allowing improved strategy execution and goal achievement (Almarri & Gardiner, 2014; Harrington et al., 2020). Hence, project management should improve the performance of the business (de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). The concept, strategic goals drive behavior, compliments the dynamic capabilities theory and the resource-based view theory, explaining how strategic goals are formulated and how behavior is influenced to achieve strategic goals (Gagné, 2018). Even with the best strategic goals, poorly executed strategy leads to business failure in micro-businesses (Srivastava & Sushil, 2017).

Summary of the Research Framework.

The project management approach to executing strategy in micro-business reduces the probability of business failure (Abdilahi et al., 2020). Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework, which lays out a graphical representation of the recommended and assumed methods of strategy execution based on the literature (Cardoso et al., 2014). The potential method is the project management approach. In contrast, the current method is an informal approach that does not look at all processes required to achieve strategic goals, leading to the business' failure (Harrington et al., 2018). Further, the conceptual framework explains that strategy execution must be an integral part of achieving strategic goals, as poorly executed strategy does not yield success regardless of how well-defined the strategic goals are (Srivastava & Sushil, 2017). According to González-

Rodríguez et al. (2018), the resource-based view theory, when applied to project management, allows scarce resources to be used effectively.

Further, the resource-based view theory explains the parameters that positively impact the micro-business' goal achievement (Drouin et al., 2019). The dynamic capabilities theory provided further insights into the connections of concepts and constructs (Sainsbury, 2019). Concepts applied in understanding the conceptual framework are project management improves performance, poorly executed strategy leads to business failure, and strategic goals drive behavior (Adler & Pollack, 2016; Amankwah-Amoah & Wang, 2019; Srivastava & Sushil, 2017). Strategy implementation should not be done in isolation; it is guided by entrepreneur competencies and strategy execution processes (Tabesh & Tawse, 2021).

Definition of Terms

Business strategy: Business strategy is a set of initiatives and actions used to identify, drive, and execute the business' position regarding operational conditions and competitive advantage (Simeone, 2020).

Strategic goals: Strategic goals are the outcomes business owners plan to achieve over a particular time, such as increasing customer satisfaction, increasing market share, or becoming an international company (Aidoo et al., 2018).

Micro-business: Micro-business is a firm consisting of zero to nine employees and is often led by owner-manager entrepreneurs; the owner often works in the firm; the business has minimal formalization (Gherhes et al., 2016; Sawicki et al., 2019). Micro-businesses have characteristics that differentiate them from larger businesses, such as size, the owner's dominant role in the business's daily operations, and the use of intuition in managing the business (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017).

Owner-manager entrepreneur: Owner-manager entrepreneurs are the founders and owners of and currently lead micro-businesses and impact the business's success or failure based on their decisions (Brooks et al., 2020).

Project Management: Project management is "the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet project requirements" (Brathwaite, 2018; Feldmann & Lückmann, 2017).

Project Management Phases: Project management phases are a group of structured processes to create manageability and achievability in the execution of projects (Pace, 2019). The five phases of project management are initiation, planning, executing, monitoring and control, and closing (Bosslet et al., 2021; Project Management Institute, 2021).

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations

A clear discussion on assumptions, limitations, and delimitations provides clarity and understanding regarding the boundaries and risks within the study (Goes & Simon, 2017b). Bounding the study to distinguish what was included and what was not is essential. For example, the group and immediate topic studied must be stated to determine the scope of data collection and differentiate the phenomenon from the context (Yin, 2014). Assumptions are the researcher's initial beliefs about the study in general (Algozzine & Hancock, 2016). Assumptions are underlying premises and are out of the researcher's control (Goes & Simon, 2017b). However, all qualitative studies have assumptions, without which the study becomes irrelevant; for example, without the belief that the sample is a representation of the general population, the results are useless (Goes & Simon, 2017b). Discussing the assumptions explains, at the outset, any risks associated with the study's validity (Goes & Simon, 2017b).

Limitations may impact the study's results and are not within the researcher's control

(Algozzine & Hancock, 2016). Limitations arise from the design and method of the study; for this study, limitations arose from the flexible design and the case study (Goes & Simon, 2017b). A discussion on the study's limitations shows the potential weakness of the study, meaning what is and what is not included in the study and how the results contribute to understanding the studied problem (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Delimitations are restrictions used to create boundaries and are placed on the study by the researcher before conducting the investigation to reduce the study's scope to increase the study's accuracy by focusing on the specific problem (Goes & Simon, 2017b). Examples of delimitations are variables of interest, location, and objectives, discussed below (Goes & Simon, 2017b). Below is a further discussion of the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations included in the study.

Assumptions

The first assumption discussed is the sample size used to represent the population (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A case study does not require a specific number of participants or data collected (Creswell, 2014). Instead, evidence from multiple micro-businesses was collected until data saturation was achieved (Creswell, 2014). Data saturation provides confirmatory evidence and happens when data analysis no longer yields new insights or new information, meaning preestablished and newly discovered themes do not yield new information; themes are discovered during data analysis (Blaikie, 2018; Creswell, 2014). The researcher decides when data saturation is reached based on the researcher's judgment, and if necessary, the researcher conducts follow-up data collection until data saturation is achieved (Blaikie, 2018; Creswell, 2014).

Further, in a qualitative case study, generalization is the application of conclusions

obtained from sample size to a larger population and includes a risk that the conclusions made

from the sample size were not generalized (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McCartan & Robson, 2016).

The inability to generalize occurs when the selection of participants or observable settings is

biased; for example, the researcher is selective in choosing the participants interviewed to

exclude micro-businesses deemed too successful (McCartan & Robson, 2016). To mitigate the

risk of the inability to generalize conclusions drawn from sample data, the selection of

participants from multiple geographic locations in Ontario helped to ensure the sample closely

mirrors the population of micro-businesses in Ontario in terms of characteristics, actions, and

diversity regardless of success or failure (Maxwell, 2021).

Another assumption made by the researcher is that owner-managers within micro-

businesses did not wholly understand the formal approach to strategy execution or the phases of

project management due to their informal mode of operation (Harrington et al., 2018). The risk

inherent in assuming what the participants know or do not know is incorrect or incomplete

evidence was collected (Stake, 2010). Study propositions were employed to mitigate the risk of

making this assumption (Yin, 2014). Study propositions are statements that are applicable to

educating the participants on the discussed topic and redirecting the participant in answering

questions based on their new informed understanding (Yin, 2014). Study propositions allow the

researcher to understand the phenomenon by allowing participants to reflect on important issues,

enabling new information and new perspectives to be unearthed (Yin, 2014).

The third assumption is that the participants are telling the truth (Goes & Simon 2017b).

To mitigate the risk of response dishonesty, participants were encouraged to be truthful by

ensuring anonymity and confidentiality (Goes & Simon 2017b). Member checking is one way to

mitigate dishonesty or incorrect information by seeking the participants' views on the reliability

of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McCartan & Robson, 2016). Member checking includes returning to participants and asking them to corroborate what was said previously by them or other participants while maintaining anonymity for everyone (McCartan & Robson, 2016). Data triangulation ensured that the data received from the participants was valid (Yin, 2014). Data triangulation uses data collection from multiple modes, enabling confirmatory evidence (Yin, 2014).

Limitations

According to Yin (2014), a limitation of the study is the inability to collect documentation that could add another layer of data analysis, for example, a micro-businesses financial statement. Having multiple data sources is vital to increase the reliability of the study's results (Yin, 2014). Quality of evidence is essential to perform data analysis effectively for this study and future studies (Stake, 2010). Multiple data sources also increase the ability to do data triangulation (Stake, 2010). Additional sources of data collection mitigated the risk of data collection limitations (Yin, 2014). Allowing data not deemed sensitive by the micro-business to be used instead, therefore increasing the amount of data analyzed and increasing the study's accuracy (Yin, 2014).

The second limitation to consider is the experience level of the researcher, which impacts the ability to collect and assimilate data properly (Yin, 2014). The data collected, and the interpretation of the data by the researcher are essential to the accuracy of the study's results since qualitative studies include experiential data, and the collection of qualitative data is not a routine process (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2014). Furthermore, researchers are prone to bias and can be tempted to use information or systems that favor a particular line of reasoning, creating a risk to the study (Yin, 2014). To mitigate the risk created by the skill level of the researcher, a study

protocol was necessary to increase the reliability of the study (Yin, 2014). A case study protocol

is intended to guide the researcher in carrying out the data collection and includes items like data

collection procedures and a guide for the case study report (Yin, 2014). Triangulation also helps

mitigate the risk of low researcher skill levels as themes were developed from multiple data

sources (Stake, 2010).

Delimitations

The study delimitated micro-businesses, companies with zero to nine employees,

excluding small and medium businesses with ten or more employees. The impact of delimiting to

micro-business is that generalizations of this study can only appear to other micro-businesses

(Achtenhagen et al., 2017). Studies of micro-businesses are usually done as a subset of small

businesses, so minimal data exists within the literature on the operational processes of micro-

businesses as a stand-alone group (Dineen et al., 2017). Micro-business owners face challenges

regarding developing resources and capabilities necessary to achieve strategic goals (Harrington

et al., 2020). Delimiting the study to micro-businesses allows the researcher to gain insight into

why businesses with zero to nine employees fail to use a project management approach.

The second delimitation to restrict the scope of this study is the location, and the impact

is the existence of boundaries to remove the risk of having a study that is too broad (Creswell &

Poth, 2018). Bounding the study by location is important for the researcher to determine the

study's parameters and scope of data collection to remove ambiguity and confusion (Creswell &

Poth, 2018; Yin, 2014). Therefore, the study delimited micro-businesses in the Ontario, Canada

region, excluding other provinces, as Ontario currently has the highest number of micro-

businesses in Canada compared to other provinces (Easton et al., 2020).

The third delimiter is the waterfall project management method, which includes the five

project phases: initiation, planning, executing, monitoring and control, and closing (Bosslet et al.,

2021). The waterfall method is the basic level of project management methodology; the impact

of using it is to provide a simple framework for discussing project management with non-project

managers or those who lack project management knowledge (Pace, 2019). Therefore, allowing

for focused and structured answers, extracting quality data, and mitigating the risk of a broad

study scope (Yin, 2014).

Significance of the Study

Micro-businesses are the backbone of a country's economic success; however, little is

known about micro-businesses as a separate group and how the owners of these organizations

execute strategy because micro-businesses are usually included in the research of small

businesses (Dineen et al., 2017; Gherhes et al., 2016). Further, the literature on project

management does not include micro-businesses; instead, it focuses on large organizations (Sane,

2019). Micro-businesses dominate most industries, forming an essential mechanism for

economic growth and making their success essential to Canada's economic success (Harrington

et al., 2020). Project management is important in helping micro-businesses achieve success

(Bourgault & Niknazar, 2017). This study adds insight to the current literature regarding how

micro-businesses operate to reduce failure rates of businesses (Barzotto et al., 2018). Biblical

examples show the use of project management, the importance of strategy in achieving success,

and the effective use of project management by micro-businesses (Duzer, 2010; King James

Bible, 1769/2017, 1 Chronicles 29; Genesis 6-7; Nehemiah 2-3). Christianity can provide an

ethical and moral approach to conducting business (Karanda & Toledano, 2017). The next

section includes the reduction of gaps in the literature, the implications for biblical integration,

and the academic importance of the study.

Reduction of Gaps in the Literature

Micro-entrepreneurs are often included in the study of small and medium-sized businesses; however, micro-businesses have distinctive characteristics than small businesses, leaving a gap in the literature regarding how micro-businesses operate and execute strategy (Barzotto et al., 2018). Therefore, this study aims to reduce the gap in the literature from the perspective of micro-businesses' use of project management as a group, not as a subset of small businesses, and from the viewpoint of project management in micro-businesses within the Canadian economic landscape. Size and ownership differentiate micro-businesses from small businesses; examples of micro-businesses are sole proprietorships, unincorporated businesses, and registered businesses with fewer than nine employees (Bustami & Wong, 2020). Further, strategy is vital to micro-businesses' survival, but little is known about strategy within micro-businesses (Harrington et al., 2020).

Project management studies occur on large firms, leaving a gap in the literature on project management within micro-businesses (Sane, 2019). Bosch-Rekveldt et al. (2020) wrote that weak project management practices happen because businesses are unaware of the value of project management phases, creating a literature gap. As a result, a void in the literature remains on how micro-business owners perceive the use of project management in the achievement of strategic goals (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). Hyder and Lussier (2016) point out that understanding why businesses fail should increase the success rate, but researchers find it difficult to understand why businesses fail while others succeed. This study adds to researchers' understanding of why micro-business owners fail to use project management. Further, this study aims to add to the existing body of project management knowledge and understanding of the current impact of project management processes in micro-businesses.

Another gap reduction is related to understanding the knowledge gap found in micro-businesses (Feldmann & Lückmann, 2017). Studies have focused on understanding student learning while ignoring an understanding of industry-integrated learning that would impact micro-business owners in reducing their knowledge gap (Cagle et al., 2018). Because of micro-business size, owner-manager entrepreneurs and employees tend to be generalists, not project management specialists, therefore, operate differently from project managers in larger firms because of their limited knowledge of project management (Feldmann & Lückmann, 2017). However, the lack of project management knowledge affects the ability to successfully implement a project management approach in the achievement of strategic goals (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). Therefore, this study aims to provide an understanding of the knowledge gap of owner-manager entrepreneurs within micro-businesses regarding the use of project management to increase success factors in the implementation of strategy (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017).

Implications for Biblical Integration

Strategy and project management are important to God, as seen at various stages of the Bible (Duzer, 2010; Keller, 2014). Strategy is an essential area of concern from the beginning because strategic planning is the key to succeeding (The Message Bible, 1993/2018, Proverbs 24:6; Srivastava & Sushil, 2017). Poorly planned and executed strategy leads to failure; as Jesus points out, the probability of failure increases with lack of planning before laying the foundation of a project (Amankwah-Amoah & Wang, 2019; King James Bible, 1769/2017, Luke 14:28-30). Micro-entrepreneurs' role as business leaders requires linking business strategy to opportunities in achieving strategic goals (Albuquerque et al., 2017). The book of Luke supports Albuquerque et al. (2017) by describing the scenario where a king goes to war and plans how many soldiers are needed and where to place them to avoid losing the battle (King James Bible, 1769/2017, Luke

14:31-32). Therefore, strategy and goal achievement should be applied to micro-businesses and entrepreneurs in building their businesses (Srivastava & Sushil, 2017).

The first phase of project management is initiation, where the needs and objectives of the project are identified, such as the reason for the project, resource identification, and teams, including the project manager (Migosi et al., 202; Project Management Institute, 2017). Project initiation is seen in the book of Chronicles in King David's identification of the building of the temple as a significant project (King James Bible, 1769/2017, 1 Chronicles 28:11-18; 1 Chronicles 29). A sponsor is a person or group who advocates and provides resources for the project and is accountable for ensuring success (Project Management Institute, 2017). As the project sponsor, David initiated the project; he chose Solomon to lead the project and identify other resources needed, such as building materials and personnel to support the project (King James Bible, 1769/2017, 1 Chronicles 28:11-18; 1 Chronicles 29).

Project management phases, such as initiation, planning, execution, monitoring and control, and closing, are seen in the Bible and are also used in business practices today and should be used in micro-businesses to increase the probability of success (Duzer, 2010; Sane, 2019). A successfully managed and executed project in the book of Genesis that had characteristics of a micro-business is the use of project management by Noah in building the ark (Bogacz-Wojtanowska et al., 2019; King James Bible, 1769/2017, Genesis 6-7). The building of the ark included a small size of 10 persons, initiation, planning, execution, and closing of the project, and Noah as the owner-manager of the project (Bogacz-Wojtanowska et al., 2019; King James Bible, 1769/2017, Genesis 6-7). The project was initiated when God identified the need for the project and assigned Noah to manage and execute the project (King James Bible, 1769/2017, Genesis 6:11-13).

The project planning phase happened when the tasks and description of resources used to build the ark, the animals included on the ark, and the resources such as food and water (King James Bible, 1769/2017, Genesis 6:14-21). The execution phase happened with Noah building the ark, taking the animals, family, and resources onto the ark (King James Bible, 1769/2017, Genesis 6:22-7:9). The Project Management Institute describes the project's closing as finalizing all activities; for the building of the ark, closing happened when the door to the ark was closed (King James Bible, 1769/2017, Genesis 7:16; Project Management Institute, 2017).

Benefit to Business Practice and Relationship to Cognate

According to Ledwith and Turner (2018), understanding the fit between organizational structure and project management positively influences the achievement of strategic goals. Small size can be a liability in terms of competing for labor, raising capital, and limiting resources such as labor and capital, therefore leading to business failure (Barzotto et al., 2018). Therefore, micro-business owners need to understand the potential for failure within the current business environment, such as limited resources and business size (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). Also, micro-business owners should adopt any best practices identified in the study being used by other micro-businesses to improve their probability of success (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). Based on knowledge of perceived business value, like profitability and organizational learning, and the micro-businesses' characteristics, like size and informal processes, the study could benefit micro-business practices in decision-making regarding project management to achieve strategic goals (Ledwith & Turner, 2018).

Project management is rooted in institutional performance rules and academic literature from the perspective of the study and best practices of large businesses, not from the viewpoint of micro-businesses (Anderson & Ziek, 2015). According to de Almeida Parizotto et al. (2020),

despite the positive implications for a country's economic development, limited publications for project management in micro-businesses suggest limited research of the micro-business environment. Therefore, this study adds to the literature for researchers and project management professionals, informing micro-firms on the need for project management processes in the achievement of strategic goals (de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). Cisneros et al. (2018) state that future research should highlight how non-academic experience, such as on-the-job learning, can be included in academic learning to enhance the value gained by micro-businesses. To add to the sustainability of the academic project management literature that impacts micro-businesses' success, there must be an understanding of the micro-business discovered through this study, thereby adding another dimension to the field of project management (Cagle et al., 2018). Therefore, this study should inform researchers on micro-business project management processes that influence strategic goal achievement.

Summary of the Significance of the Study.

The project management approach to achieving strategic goals is essential to micro-business' success (Anderson & Ziek, 2015; Sane, 2019). Micro-businesses fail at an enormous rate despite being the backbone of a country's economic health (Brooks et al., 2020). Limited research on micro-businesses in the literature, while project management research focuses on large firms, ignoring the impact of project management success on smaller firms (Sane, 2019). Therefore, this study is essential to add to the project management body of knowledge, academic research, and micro-business practices. Biblical implications also impact ethical considerations with micro-businesses (Karanda & Toledano, 2017). The ethics portrayed by Christianity is becoming more important to the success of the business regarding moral issues, which affects the success of the business in terms of ethical actions of leaders, resulting in a sustainable business

reputation and an increase in customers (Karanda & Toledano, 2017). This study aims to benefit owner-manager entrepreneurs regarding current best practices and academia regarding project management that was more impactful to micro-businesses.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

A literature review is an academic examination of existing knowledge in previous research to explain and support the problem's existence by mapping, evaluating, and validating the study (Snyder, 2019). An effective literature review creates a foundation to determine gaps in the literature, therefore allowing room for the advancement of knowledge (Snyder, 2019). The literature review includes three main areas: micro-business, business strategy, and project management (Brathwaite, 2018; Bustami & Wong, 2020; Engström & McKelvie, 2017; Simeone, 2020). The micro-business is the combination of characteristics such as size, informal communication, and no hierarchical levels, as well as operational composition such as owner-manager capabilities and decision-making aligned to the business (Barzotto et al., 2018; de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). Understanding how business strategy is formulated and executed provides insight into how and why micro-business owners make specific decisions on the approaches employed in achieving strategic goals. Additionally, perspectives that add context to micro-business owners' approaches to achieving strategic goals will be explored (Behling & Lenzi, 2019). Project management focuses on planning, managing, and developing projects based on capabilities (Feldmann & Lückmann, 2017; Guertler & Sick, 2021). However, the application of project management varies based on business structure, for example, characteristics such as size and technical expertise like budgeting, planning, and scheduling (Feldmann & Lückmann, 2017; Guertler & Sick, 2021).

The literature supports the existence of the failure of small businesses to use a project

management approach to achieve strategic goals, resulting in potential business breakdown (Achtenhagen et al., 2017; de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). Concepts and theories in the literature helped explain the mechanisms of the problem examined and provided the researcher with a foundational context to conduct the study and discover possible solutions (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Further, related studies and anticipated and discovered themes were outlined to understand the existence of the problem (Cronje et al., 2017; Galpin, 2018). Themes are broad elements of information aggregated to form a common idea and are essential to inform the study over a broad spectrum in understanding the study from multiple perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Micro-Business

Bustami and Wong (2020) and Engström and McKelvie (2017) define micro-business in terms of the configuration of the business, such as the characteristics and operational composition of the businesses with less than nine employees, including sole proprietorships working from home. Dineen et al. (2017) indicated that characteristics, size, and ownership, along with firm strategic variables, training, and technical activities, are significant factors in determining the business' success in achieving strategic goals. Furthermore, the micro-business structure is essential because structure impacts the resources available, and how the resources are managed in achieving strategic goals differs from large businesses (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). Therefore, the configuration and operational practices of micro-businesses are essential to understanding business failure in achieving strategic goals (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017).

The capabilities and characteristics of micro-businesses are the same as the owner-manager entrepreneur because the business is centered around the founder, and often, micro-businesses start with the founder and no other employees (Engström & McKelvie, 2017).

Capabilities are what businesses can do, such as technological know-how, marketing, and customer service (Feng & Valero, 2020; Ismail et al., 2019). Capabilities differ from business to business; firms may have multiple capabilities that intertwine (Feng & Valero, 2020; Ismail et al., 2019). However, businesses can have similar capabilities; businesses succeed when capabilities are used more effectively than the competition (Feng & Valero 2020; Ismail et al., 2019). Capabilities define the capacity for a business to grow and sustain itself (Brooks et al., 2020). The expertise of the owner/manager in managing and directing growth affects the micro-business' growth potential (Brooks et al., 2020).

The owner-manager entrepreneur makes decisions for the business; their knowledge, experience, and other capabilities determine the business's probability of success or failure (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). Knowledge is the theoretical or practical information on a subject, while capabilities are what the business can do and vary from one micro-business to the next (Feng & Valero, 2020; Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017; Ismail et al., 2019). Knowledge, experience, and capabilities are resources that work together to impact the achievement of strategic goals (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). Micro-businesses' long-term survival is often measured in terms of profitability and self-funding operations, even though early-stage profitability predicts long-term sustainability (Chu & Luke, 2021). Further, profitability is determined based on the cost incurred and is measured after implementing and executing strategic goals (Chu & Luke, 2021).

Some challenges experienced by micro-businesses are limited resources like financing, education, labor, and lack of management skills (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). Ezennia and Mutambara (2019) define a skill as the capability to do something with the individual's abilities to address a need in the formal economy. A lack of management skills is a challenge that micro-

businesses experience, leading to poorly formulated and executed strategies (Ezennia & Mutambara, 2019). According to the resource-based approach, limited resources force micro-business owners to use said limitations to become a source of competitive advantage (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). However, the lack of knowledge and management skills hinders the efficient use of the competitive advantage gained, creating a circular problem, often leading to business failure (Brooks et al., 2020; Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). Micro-business owners tend to focus on current tasks without thinking of documentation and knowledge development long-term (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017).

Owner/Manager Entrepreneur. Micro-businesses are led by owner-manager entrepreneurs who impact the business's success or failure based on their decisions, thereby impacting the problem studied (Brooks et al., 2020). The management style utilized in formulating and executing strategy depends on the knowledge, experience, capabilities, and personal qualities of the owner/managers (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). Because of the size of the business, drawing on the experience of the owner/manager, their social associations, such as informal advisors, are also considered in decision-making (Cronje et al., 2017). Success can be judged on achieving the intended results or anticipated performance (Chu & Luke, 2021). Some success indicators are outputs, outcomes, and the impacts of outputs and outcomes (Chu & Luke, 2021). As leaders of micro-businesses, entrepreneurs influence internal and external stakeholders towards the attainment of outputs and outcomes in the achievement of strategic goals (Ezennia & Mutambara, 2019).

Owner/manager entrepreneurs tend to take on all business tasks and roles by themselves, learning everything at their own initiative, thereby creating a culture of informal learning that leads to informal business practices (Brooks et al., 2020). With expertise in some and not other

elements of the activities being performed, owner/managers cannot make connections and interpretations or analyze essential factors regarding the external and external business environment that would positively impact the achievement of strategic goals (Dimov & Emami, 2017). Further, as a result of performing multiple roles and being immersed in the day-to-day running of the business, time constraints become a challenge, impacting the quality of productivity and delaying growth due to limited time on strategy (Brooks et al., 2020). However, to achieve success in strategic goals, managers must maintain consistency between the goals and the processes and activities involved in the overall process (Bouwman et al., 2018).

Due to the level of involvement of owners/managers in the business, decision-making in micro-businesses differs from that of larger firms (Cronje et al., 2017). In decision-making, owners/managers consider economic outcomes, reputation, and personal values, such as culture, which tend to impact the rest of the company's belief system or customs (Cronje et al., 2017; Efni et al., 2019). The managerial activities, which the owner/manager directs, determine how resources are acquired and utilized to allow the micro-business to achieve strategic goals effectively and productively (Cronje et al., 2017). The main roles of managers, also seen in project management, are planning, organizing, leading, and controlling (Cronje et al., 2017). The sociocultural aspect of the marketplace impacts owner-managers' decision-making; therefore, knowledge of the micro-business structure helps understand owner-managers (Blankson et al., 2018). Management knowledge, or lack thereof, impacts the achievement of strategic goals and the application of project management (Eggers et al., 2020).

Entrepreneurial Competencies. McClelland (1973) says the concept of competencies is initiated on the individual level with knowledge, skills, and conduct that makes the individual perform better (Figueiredo et al., 2017). However, at the organizational level, competencies are

global, covering capacity, ability, skill, and knowledge collectively, encompassing multiple individuals (Figueiredo et al., 2017). The work of Hamel and Prahalad (1994) shows that a company's competencies are connected to business strategy (Figueiredo et al., 2017). As a result, researchers have looked at entrepreneurs and their impact on the firm's performance to understand the importance of entrepreneurial competencies (Choi et al., 2019). To successfully achieve the business' strategic goals, the essential element of successful projects is having people with the relevant competencies to execute the project (Hysa et al., 2017).

Choi et al. (2019) describe entrepreneurial competencies as attributes of a person that include motive, skills, the body of knowledge, or traits that affect the entrepreneur's ability to do a job successfully, converting value to the company. Entrepreneurial competencies are multidimensional in that traits that affect the entrepreneur's success involve being innovative, risk-taking, proactive, and competitive (Brathwaite, 2018). Entrepreneurial competency facilitates the strategy-making process, like formulation and execution, and is enhanced by dynamic capabilities (Brathwaite, 2018). Entrepreneurial competencies are essential to the study because knowledge and skills, such as product or service knowledge, leadership skills, as well as technical knowledge and skills, must convert to economic growth and business success (Behling & Lenzi, 2019; Salomaa & Seikkula-Leino, 2020). Economic growth and success are based on the decisions made, for example, whether to use formal or ad hoc execution processes with no consideration for the overall execution process, impacting the achievement of strategic goals (Behling & Lenzi, 2019; Salomaa & Seikkula-Leino, 2020).

Entrepreneurial competencies, like knowledge and technical and management skills, are essential for businesses and impact how goals are formulated, and strategy execution processes are utilized; hence, strategic goals are achieved (Hysa et al., 2017; Tan & Wenu, 2019).

Flexibility is required in project management because it contributes to positive time performance due to the ability to adapt to shifts in project conditions; flexibility can be regarded as entrepreneurial competency (Bosch-Rekveldt et al., 2020). Strategy formulation is the creation of a strategic vision for the long-term direction and growth of the business, along with objectives to measure and track performance to ensure goals are being met (Gamble et al., 2019). According to Lussier et al. (1995), size plays a vital role in strategy formulation, where the smaller the firm, the higher the risk inherent in the strategy.

Entrepreneurial behavior starts with individual characteristics and skills that generate additional experience and knowledge to grow a business (al Mamun et al., 2018). Skills combined with personal competencies develop entrepreneurial knowledge (al Mamun et al., 2018). Entrepreneurial competencies are considered an important factor that allows poorly organized businesses to be transformed into well-structured businesses (al Mamun et al., 2018). Therefore, entrepreneurial knowledge is an essential element that supports a company's performance in achieving strategic goals (Yan, 2018). However, knowledge alone is not productive; knowledge must be used with processes and systems, like project management, to achieve strategic goals (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019). Project management increases knowledge competency's capacity in that acquiring knowledge from internal and external sources stimulates the integration of existing knowledge (de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). Further, knowledge integration enhances the firm's capacity to achieve strategic goals (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019).

Technical Competency. González-Loureiro and Sousa (2017) and Kee and Ng (2018) explain that technical competency is knowledge and proficiency in a specific area or activity and the ability to use the appropriate tools, systems, and techniques to undertake specialized and functional issues in certain industries. (González-Loureiro & Sousa, 2017; Kee & Ng, 2018).

According to Abdullah et al. (2018), while the primary elements of technical competency are skills and knowledge, additional elements include performance in diverse settings, achievement of outcomes, attitudes, and specific skills and standards. Examples of technical competencies within project management are cost management, resource utilization, and scheduling (Abdullah et al., 2018). Technical competencies are important managerial characteristics that impact the various phases of project management (Afsar et al. 2017). For example, the lack of technical competency may negatively impact characteristics like communication, which is vital to achieving strategic goals (Afsar et al., 2017). Technical competency is positively related to behavior and productivity, therefore crucial in achieving strategic goals (Kee & Ng, 2018). For long-term performance, micro-business owners should incorporate technical competencies with leadership and organizational innovation, which impacts sales process, product, and behavior, therefore affecting business productivity (Kee & Ng, 2018). Despite the trend toward soft skills in project managers, technical skills are still required to impact the businesses' success (Alvarenga et al., 2019).

Management skills. According to Bhanugopan et al. (2017), management skills include abilities, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that contribute to a person's effectiveness in various managerial jobs, drastically impacting the business' performance. Human capital, which forms the basis for the value of management skills, is knowledge and skills people acquire through work experience, schooling, and training (Alonso-Dos-Santos et al., 2021; Bhanugopan et al., 2017). Management skills are considered human capital essential to the business' performance (Alonso-Dos-Santos et al., 2021). According to Feng and Valero (2020), management skills account for 30% of a firm's productivity. Management skills, such as problem-solving and flexibility, are strategic tools for dealing with the current business

environment because of constant changes in market conditions (González-Loureiro & Sousa, 2017). With management skills comes tacit knowledge, which defines the firm's strategic direction (Alonso-Dos-Santos et al., 2021). Skilled managers are better performers and are better equipped to discover and act quickly on business opportunities that impact the business's strategic goals (Bhanugopan et al., 2017).

  Knowledge. Abdullah et al. (2018) define knowledge as "the ideas, wisdom, and facts managers acquire through experience, theory, and practice; the acquisition of which gives them an ability to understand," whereas skills are defined as "the activities or patterns of behavior which managers undertake in order to accomplish a given desired outcome" (p. 158). Knowledge differs from information and data because knowledge brings awareness and understanding of the subject matter, where information is the raw data (Hansson et al., 2016). Knowledge is a resource that can be shared and used together, therefore moving the micro-business from just the owner/manager to others in the micro-business (Efni et al., 2019). Knowledge is the key value driver for a company's success because knowledge allows strategic goals to be achieved therefore, the management of entrepreneurial knowledge is essential to the success of business practices/processes (Efni et al., 2019; Yan, 2018). The relationships between knowledge and strategic objectives can appear in the role of knowledge assets, such as organizational expertise or personnel, to the organization's performance objectives and strategic value requirements (Yan, 2018). Entrepreneurial knowledge competency and business strategies that drive organizations toward their strategic goals should direct strategic resources (Yan, 2018). The main obstacle that causes micro-businesses to be less developed is the absence of knowledge in areas like production, marketing, and finances, which affects the achievement of strategic goals (Efni et al., 2019).

Understanding diverse types of knowledge is vital to recognizing the implications for goal achievement (Hansson et al., 2016; Kinchin et al., 2019). Types of knowledge include expert knowledge, general knowledge of the project or business objectives, and process knowledge (Harris & Ormond, 2018). In any business area, informal knowledge tends to be loosely organized, where concepts and strategies are poorly connected (Kinchin et al., 2019). At the same time, experts have a highly organized and well-structured knowledge base, allowing information to be used meaningfully to solve problems (Kinchin et al., 2019). Furthermore, businesses exist in a knowledge economy that is believed to be essential to achieving strategic goals, therefore increasing economic outcomes (Harris & Ormond, 2018).

Dynamic Capabilities Theory. According to Barney (1991), the dynamic capabilities theory is a formalized idea found in the literature that informs the researcher on how firms assimilate, develop, as well as reconfigure internal and external competencies to address the firm's challenges like fast-changing economic conditions (González-Rodríguez et al., 2018; Pisano, 2017). Sudden and pronounced changes in the business environment impact the business planning, life cycle, and input needed to sustain the business (Srivastava & Sushil, 2017). The dynamic capabilities theory emerged in 1997 by David Teece, Gary Pisano, and Amy Shuen to explain the firm's ability to integrate, create, and redesign the firm's competencies in changing economic environments (Arranz et al., 2020). The field of strategic management needs dynamic theories that explain the progression of the differences in performance among different business styles and, therefore, look to managerial decision-making as the source of modern dynamics in strategic goal achievement (Yan, 2018).

According to Coraiola et al. (2019), the ability to manage past experiences is an important factor of dynamic capabilities. Coraiola et al. (2019) argue that the capability to

manage the interpretation of past knowledge and activities at present to impact the future is a crucial skill that informs a firm's capacity to enact necessary changes in adapting to the current business environment. Historical information has been important in developing business strategies (Coraiola et al., 2019). Dynamic capabilities theory is needed to convert the business' knowledge resources and operational routine into strategic processes, enabling the organization to solve problems and address change (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019). By using historical and current information to develop new knowledge, the dynamic capabilities enable firms to pursue business solutions (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019).

Uunderstanding the differences when micro-business owners achieving strategic goals versus when those goals are not achieved is essential, as the role of project management in achieving strategic goals, and the minimization of potential business failure (Olivier & Schwella, 2018). Understanding the differences allows monitoring, learning, and improvement (Bhimavarapu et al., 2020). The dynamic capabilities theory provides insight into whether the project management approach benefits micro-businesses in achieving strategic goals and discovering how the business learns, grows, and transforms to align projects with tools and processes (Ismail et al., 2019). According to Pisano (2017), dynamic capabilities theory is an essential aspect of strategy for owner-managers, not just researchers. Dynamic capabilities aid in identifying capabilities in deciding on opportunities to pursue and, as such, are just as important as markets to enter, how to position, and other traditional strategy variables (Pisano, 2017).

Dynamic capabilities look at high-level activities that connect technology and operations to a firm or service demand, which creates a combination of technological and operational capabilities, which leads to a high level of operation (Sainsbury, 2019). Dynamic capabilities theory infers different impacts of the capability at different stages of the project or business life

cycle (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019). In addition, dynamic capabilities explain the micro-business owners' ability to follow a project management approach based on their current capabilities (Arranz et al., 2020). Dynamic capabilities theory can explain the changing conditions of activities and processes needed to continuously develop temporary conditions of the business' existence, which depends on the firm's competencies (Buzzao & Rizzi, 2020). Ordinary capabilities allow firms to make profits in the short term, while dynamic capabilities allow strategies to be realized in the long term (Buzzao & Rizzi, 2020).

Business Strategy

Simeone (2020) and Yang (2021) define business strategy as a set of initiatives and actions used to identify, drive, and execute the business' position regarding operational conditions and competitive advantage. In another definition, Ansoff et al. (2019) state that strategy is a set of rules for decision-making to guide the firm toward desired performance regarding the changing conditions internally and externally, conditions like an unexpected increase in demand or loss of internal resources. Seminal author of business strategy, Porter (1998), defines strategy as a broad blueprint for how a business competes; the blueprint should state the goals and the policies needed to achieve goals. Porter (1998) adds that if a business leader does not know the competitors, how the firm competes, what the goals or objectives are, and how the goals or objectives are achieved, the business will fail. Within the strategy definitions, goals and objectives are used interchangeably, which was done for this research (McConnell, 2022). Another Seminal author of business strategy, Mintzberg (1978), believes strategy is not as straightforward as the conventional definition of Porter (1998) and is not always planned; instead, strategy falls into five categories: intended, unrealized, deliberate, emergent, and realized. Intended strategies are from the organization's overall objectives but may be

realized or unrealized strategies; realized intended strategy becomes deliberate strategy;

emergent strategies are realized but never planned or intended strategic goals (Graham & Hede,

2016).

Strategy includes the art and science of planning and organizing resources for the most

efficient and effective use (Mercy Ekwy & Tagbo Uchenna, 2019). The purpose of strategy is to

respond appropriately to the opportunities and threats in the external environment while

addressing internal strengths and weaknesses (Olivier & Schwella, 2018).

Strategy is continuous and involves decisions and actions. As such, a strategy must be

evident in all company areas, from goal setting to strategy creation to resource allocation and

day-to-day execution (Powell, 2017). According to Powell (2017), entrepreneurs have developed

a new set of strategic principles called diligence-based strategies founded on data,

communication, and technology. Diligence-based strategies include measuring and managing the

activities that determine business success (Powell, 2017). These principles allow strategic goals

to be communicated, tracked, measured, and changed throughout strategy creation and execution

(Powell, 2017).

The objective of business strategy is to create success that enables long-term growth

(Katsikeas et al., 2017; Van den Steen, 2018). Therefore the literature on business strategy is vital

to the study because business strategy facilitates the achievement of the business' performance

targets, aiding the business' success or failure (Katsikeas et al., 2017; Van den Steen, 2018).

Strategy has become more critical in all areas of a firm because all businesses operate in a global

and constantly changing environment, and strategy allows businesses to react accordingly

(Gamble et al., 2019; Mercy Ekwy & Tagbo Uchenna, 2019). Powell (2017) argues that

problems in business strategy can be described as random and continuous due to interaction with

the external business environment. However, strategy provides the ability to see trends in and out

of the business that affect the final plans and react accordingly (Mercy Ekwy & Tagbo Uchenna,

2019). More than maintaining the business, growth is essential to provide a place of strength in

navigating the constantly changing environment, and strategy aids in this area (Gamble et al.,

2019; Mercy Ekwy & Tagbo Uchenna, 2019).

Gamble et al. (2019) explain that the hierarchy of strategy exists because the larger and

more diverse a firm the greater the need for different levels of strategy. The four levels of

strategy in the hierarchy are corporate, business, functional-area, and operating strategies

(Gamble et al., 2019). Corporate strategy is the company-wide plan for dealing with a set of

businesses and is decided at the CEO's level (Gamble et al., 2019). Business strategy is used to

build competitive capabilities and strengthen market position in gaining competitive advantage

(Gamble et al., 2019). Functional-area strategy adds relevant details on how to execute the

business strategy to provide a plan to manage specific activities (Gamble et al., 2019). Operating

strategy provides more information to the business and functional-area strategies, allowing

lower-level activities to be executed and providing completeness to the overall business strategy

(Gamble et al., 2019). Gamble et al. (2019) conclude that a firm's overall strategy is a group of

strategic initiatives and activities conceived by leaders up and down the organizational hierarchy.

However, according to Svatošová (2018), micro-business owners consider functional and

corporate levels of strategy to be unimportant. As a result, the levels of strategy are incorporated

into one action, with the overall strategy in micro-businesses being referred to as business

strategy (Svatošová, 2018).

Business strategy considers the assumption that the business's capability to adjust to a

distant and uncertain future environment is centered on resources acquired in the past and

utilized in the present (Coraiola et al., 2019). To adjust, a successful business strategy must consider the business' operational context (Olivier & Schwella, 2018). Context can be defined as the environment or conditions within which an organization operates and performs (Olivier & Schwella, 2018). The organization operates in relation to its context, meaning the environment or conditions influence the micro-business, while the micro-business also impacts the environment or conditions (Olivier & Schwella, 2018). Understanding business strategy in terms of interdependencies is important to comprehend why business performance and the connection with project management focus on linkages in successfully contributing to goal achievement (Project Management Institute, 2017; Yang, 2021). Interdependency in business strategy forces businesses to connect actions with set goals, leading to increased goal achievement (Yang, 2021). Strategy focuses on interdependencies between organizational goals and practices seen in project management (Yang, 2021).

Formal Process for Strategy Formulation and Execution. The conventional components of business strategy that impact business success are formulation and execution (Gamble et al., 2019; Harrington et al., 2018). According to Mintzberg (1978), strategy formulation implies that strategies are constructed, planned, or positioned based on analysis, reasoning, or formal process; however, strategies can emerge as a pattern without previous intentions (Graham & Hede, 2016). Strategy formulation is the role of the leader (Gamble et al., 2019). For the process of strategy formulation, Gamble et al. (2019) propose three stages: the first stage is developing a strategic mission, vision, and values; the second stage is setting objectives; and the third stage is crafting an approach to achieve the objectives in advancing the company to its long-term plan. Another process in formulating strategy put forward by Armstrong (1982) is to use the following: a SWOT analysis, providing alternative strategies,

evaluating all strategies and choosing the best, then monitoring and evaluation after implementation (Cavallo et al., 2020). In addition, essential elements that should be considered when formulating a strategy are internal processes, systems, people, and the environment (Ribickis & Zeps, 2015). de Almeida Parizotto et al. (2017) believe strategy formulation is never complete because strategy is dynamic, changing constantly depending on the business environment. In a single business, the different strategy hierarchies merge (Gamble et al., 2019). The size of the business impacts the strategy formulation process; the smaller the business, the lower the probability of a strategy being formulated, and all the steps mentioned above utilized (Svatošová, 2018).

According to the research literature, strategy and execution processes vary depending on business leaders' choices (McConnell, 2022). The process for implementing and executing strategy, as described by Gamble et al. (2019), includes deciding on and prioritizing critical activities to be performed, allocating labor and other resources to ensure critical activities are completed, providing systems to enable employees to perform essential activities, ensuring policies and procedures enable good execution, attaching rewards to achievement of performance, and push continuous improvement how value chain activities are completed. However, Galpin (2018) provides a seven-stage process for strategy execution that overlaps with the formulation process proposed by Gamble et al. (2019). The steps are to identify possible strategic initiatives, record implementation priorities, determine an implementation structure, apply implementation management, create action plans, align organizational culture with business strategy, develop momentum, and constantly adjust (Galpin, 2018). Examples of strategic initiatives are cost, business process, and market improvement, while examples of goals are revenue growth and service improvement (Galpin, 2018). For the second step, multiple

initiatives are often undertaken by the company with limited resources; hence, prioritizing

initiatives ensures that the allocation of resources is done effectively (Galpin, 2018). According

to Galpin (2018), for the third step, an implementation structure has three entities: a team of

executives to provide oversight, an implementation project management team, and an

implementation task force assigned to each strategic initiative. The fourth step, the

implementation management process, ensures coordination between teams and across the

organization where necessary, identifies issues, and course corrections when needed (Galpin,

2018). The fifth step, implementation action plans, enables the standardization of project

management tools, which helps the implementation process of each initiative based on previously

established priorities (Galpin, 2018). The sixth step, aligning the firm's culture with the overall

business strategy, was accomplished through hiring, communication, and training. Finally, the

seventh step is to build momentum, and adjustments can be made through quick, visible wins and

constant communication (Galpin, 2018).

Strategy execution is the main reason business strategy fails, and therefore, all actions

necessary must be used to create a successful business strategy by using a logical set of

connected activities (Olivier & Schwella, 2018). To ensure connectivity happens, MacLennan

and Markides (2021) discuss the use of mapping to lay out the process of strategy execution. A

visual representation of activities and outcomes in the business strategy execution process and its

relationship to strategy formulation is called strategy execution mapping (MacLennan &

Markides, 2021). Further, MacLennan and Markides (2021) argue two things must occur for

execution to be continuous and effective: the first is the translation of conceptual goals into

precise, actionable activities; the second is the continuing identification and improvement of

essential activities. Both ensure the most suitable actions are used, allowing strategy execution to

be continuous, with required changes taking place when needed (MacLennan & Markides, 2021). Kozyra and Radomska (2020) believe strategy execution has tangibles, such as deciding on the activities to be executed, resource distribution and task delegation, and the organization's structure of the overall execution. Also, intangibles include the execution process along with employee management support (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020). The intangibles allow the integration of organizational resources with the execution processes (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020).

       Strategic Goals. Aidoo et al. (2018) define strategic goals as the outcomes business owners plan to accomplish over a particular time, such as increasing market share or becoming an international company. Goal achievement refers to whether the plans, when employed, contribute to attaining specified goals (Hansson et al., 2016). Strategic goals drive strategic behavior, which drives organizational output, leading to business success; hence, the achievement of strategic goals increases the success and growth of the business (Gan & Yang, 2019). Establishing strategic goals, like growing sales or pricing strategy, enables the identification of suitable business strategies and directs business owners' attention and existing resources to accomplish said strategies, therefore enabling goal achievement (Katsikeas et al., 2017). Once goals are established, asking a series of 'how' questions, like how to respond to changes in the market, how to achieve performance targets, or how to compete, often reveal information on opportunities for suitable strategies (Gamble et al., 2019). Therefore, an essential role of the business leader is to set strategic goals to guide the behaviors of employees and other stakeholders (Katsikeas et al., 2017). To set strategic goals, leaders establish and document specific performance targets that align with the business' vision, mission, and core values (Gamble et al., 2019). Performance targets are quantifiable and include timelines for

achievement (Gamble et al., 2019).

Strategic management deals with everything affecting the success or risks of failure of the business, with the setting of clear and focused strategic goals being critical to the business' success (Bugwandeen & Ungerer, 2019). Strategic goals are first formulated by developing a strategic vision and then setting objectives for measuring and tracking the progress toward the long-term vision (Gamble et al., 2019; Kozyra & Radomska, 2020). A strategic vision is established by the owner/manager's decision on the direction of the business regarding product, customer, market, and technology for the company (Gamble et al., 2019). To realize goal achievement, strategic goals must be executed according to the leader's predetermined guidelines and timelines, but the business must be willing to pivot when uncertainty arises (Gamble et al., 2019; Kozyra & Radomska, 2020). Strategic objectives should incorporate both short-term and long-term performance targets, with the short-term focusing on delivering change or improvements now (Gamble et al., 2019). The long-term should concentrate on how current activities affect future targets and make changes as required (Gamble et al., 2019). The probability of achieving strategic goals is tied to the ability to evaluate and act to make changes efficiently where necessary (Bugwandeen & Ungerer, 2019). Evaluating means analyzing the performance targets with the external and internal business conditions to decide if the long-term and short-term targets are being achieved and remain attainable (Gamble et al., 2019). Where unattainable or business conditions are different, necessary adjustments based on the situation should be made (Gamble et al., 2019). When goals are being defined, the long-term vision, decided on by the leader, of where the company aspires to be regarding the intended purpose or mission must be the focal consideration (Svatošová, 2018). In micro-businesses, operational management usually takes precedence over the strategic goals, for example, oral communication

over the written plans, because of an underestimation of the value of a business strategy
(Svatošová, 2018).

      Strategic Goals Drives Behavior. A concept that examines how goal achievement
depends on employees' actions and behaviors is strategic goals drive behavior (Srivastava &
Sushil, 2017). Galpin (2018) asserts that the environment drives a person's behavior, so setting
strategic goals based on the internal and external environment impacts their decisions,
influencing the business' achievement of strategic goals. Business strategy at the macro level is
intended to drive the organization's performance (Bjorvatn, 2021). In his book, *The Handbook of
Project-Based Management*, Turner (1999) points out that organizational strategy objectives
cascade from the organizational level to the individual level using project or program
management once goals are set (Bjorvatn, 2021). Individual and collective behaviors are guided
when specifying the goals, processes, outcomes, and relationships required to ensure success
(Bjorvatn, 2021).

      The researcher sought to address the failure of micro-businesses within Ontario to use a
project management approach to achieve strategic goals, resulting in potential business failure;
hence, strategic goals are essential to this study to drive behavior toward the achievement of
strategic goals, which leads to the strategy being achieved and business success (Gagné, 2018).
According to research by Gollwitzer and Heckhausen (1987), human motivation is an intangible
organizational resource (Gagné, 2018). Further, goals should be communicated to be clear,
desirable, and feasible, creating an inspirational and stimulating internal business environment
(Gagné, 2018). As a result, human motivation propels people to see the goal as good for the
organization and themselves, thus working towards achieving strategic goals (Gagné, 2018).

      As a concept, strategic goals drive behavior when business strategies are aligned with

performance measurements, like a specific number of new customers or sales in six months (Gurd et al., 2017). To align strategic goals with performance measurements, the organizational culture must be considered while developing the business' vision, mission, and core values, and ensuring the performance measurements align with the business' resource capacity (Galpin, 2018; Gamble et al., 2028). Further, evaluation and analysis of external and internal environments, as well as the individual performance of employees to make appropriate changes to keep alignment with strategic goals, is an important element to business success; however, successful strategy happens through implementation and execution of strategy (Galpin, 2018). To accomplish strategy implementation and execution that drives behavior, a repeatable set of processes should be created and integrated with strategic activities centered on strategic goals (Galpin, 2018; Gurd et al., 2017). In addition, performance attainment must be constantly monitored and measured to ensure the achievement of strategic goals (Gurd et al., 2017).

Poorly Executed Strategy Leads to Business Failure. Amankwah-Amoah and Wang (2019) noted that poorly executed strategy leads to business failure is a concept that negatively impacts the achievement of strategic goals and is important to the problem being studied to gain insight into why micro-business fail. Business failure refers to bankruptcy, foreclosure, exit, insolvency, or interruption (Albuquerque et al., 2017). Olivier and Schwella (2018) note that execution includes examining and reviewing the strategic plan to ensure the specified objectives are being achieved effectively. Therefore, if an organization's manager cannot execute its strategic plan effectively, nothing else that the business does matters; for example, a well-thought-out strategy, an innovative business model, or internal difficult-to-replicate skillsets, the business will fail (Olivier & Schwella, 2018).

Bossidy et al. (2002) believe the fundamental factors in successful business execution

need three core pieces: people, strategy, and operations (Olivier & Schwella, 2018). A lack of effective use of entrepreneurial competencies, like technical competency and knowledge, contributes to poorly executed strategies when people cannot be effective resources due to the lack of required competencies (Monauni, 2017). Examples of poorly executed competencies are poor strategy communication and unclear responsibilities (Monauni, 2017). Leadership is a factor in execution because leaders control the unity between vision and the actions taken to achieve goals (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020). Leadership also impacts the level of knowledge involved in the strategy execution and communication to the organization (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020). Carneiro et al. (2019) point to five operational factors that are often not done correctly: communication, control and feedback, coordination, development of human resources, and translation of the strategy into specific actions. (Carneiro et al., 2019). These are ever present throughout the strategic process at all levels of strategy. (Gamble et al., 2019).

Strategy execution ensures that the business structure stays aligned with the strategy, removing conflicting priorities and activities while proactively handling execution problems; however, the lack of an execution framework is a reason for poor execution, leading to business failure (Srivastava & Sushil, 2017). The business structure and processes must also be aligned with the strategy for execution to be effective (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020). Alignment can be done by ensuring the business resources are used according to the objectives, as seen in project management (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020). A well-executed strategic plan should yield a competitive advantage, resulting in business growth and longevity (Sull, 2007). The general gap between strategic planning and execution is large, so micro-business owners must try to close this gap to stay operational (Bhimavarapu et al., 2020). Childress (2013) found that, on average, businesses realize only 40 percent of their strategic goals, leaving an average gap of 60 percent

between strategic planning and execution (Olivier & Schwella, 2018). Businesses can ask the right questions and put together processes to develop long-term directions for the business but fail to do what the strategic plan says due to not giving enough attention to following the steps for strategy execution (Olivier & Schwella, 2018). Bhimavarapu et al. (2020) argue that successful strategy execution components include leadership, alignment, evaluation, learning, and improvement, which are also included in project management. Project management enables strategy execution to improve coordination, monitoring, and timely review to ensure execution activities are completed (Srivastava & Sushil, 2017).

Informal Execution of Strategy. Unlike larger businesses, micro-businesses do not follow a formal way of formulating and executing strategy (Figueiredo et al., 2017). Carneiro et al.(2019) and Gamble et al. (2019) point out that strategy execution converts strategy into satisfactory results and is critical to a business' success. However, in pointing to factors that may impact the informal execution of strategy, Carneiro (2019) states that many businesses fail because strategies are poorly executed due to factors that affect strategy execution, such as knowledge, environmental uncertainty, organizational structure, and lack of clarity on owner strategy. Often, micro-business owners do not have a written strategic document, and it is unclear if the strategy is in the mind of the owner/manager or is non-existent (Svatošová, 2018). Formal information gathering within micro-business is limited; therefore, accurate information on how the micro-industry achieves strategic goals is limited (Blankson et al., 2018). Because micro-businesses are often driven by poverty, lack of employment, and lack of knowledge, owner/managers are often forced to start small using informal methods (Bhuiyan & Ivlevs, 2018).

According to Harrington et al. (2018), informal execution of strategy is a disjointed

perspective of strategy execution often seen in micro-businesses. Few rules and processes exist as well as inconsistent following of the rules and processes (Harrington et al., 2018). Understanding the processes of the current strategy execution of micro-businesses is important to the study to discover further solutions aligned with the business structure mentioned above (Albala et al., 2021; Barzotto et al., 2018). A firm's lack of capacity and capability often prevents processes from being executed, as capacity and capabilities are aligned with the owner-manager entrepreneur (Brooks et al., 2020). Insight into strategy execution processes allows solutions to be tailored to the micro-business instead of accepted management practices seen in larger businesses (Harrington et al., 2018). According to Chrisman et al. (2016), the current processes in executing strategy by micro-businesses involve how the organization's owner identifies decisions that must be made, tasks to resolve issues and problems, how objectives are set, the assignment or delegation of tasks; the sequence of decisions and actions taken, and the accountabilities and deliverables required from organizational actors.

According to Liesch et al. (2016), informal execution of strategy is also called simplistic strategies. The three types of simplistic strategies are centralized strategy-making, internal participation, and external participation. Internal participation is communication between owner-manager and employees (Liesch et al., 2016). External participation is based on communication with customers and other external stakeholders (Liesch et al., 2016). Centralized strategy-making refers to a top-down approach where the owner-manager sets strategy, and then information is passed down to employees for execution (Liesch et al., 2016). Both internal and external participative strategy-making models are adaptive and allow the owner-manager to take advantage of opportunities presented by stakeholders (Liesch et al., 2016). The strategy execution model impacts the success or failure of the goal achievement (Alasgarli, 2019).

The gap between strategy execution and formulation is caused by different factors, such as lack of knowledge and inability to track progress. The gap may affect the failure of both stages, suggesting the problem of strategy execution failure remains a significant and ongoing issue (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020). Leadership is the most prevalent factor in strategy execution because it determines the cohesion with vision and action in the execution of strategy; also, leadership impacts the knowledge needed to execute strategy (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020). Barriers faced by micro-businesses in successfully executing strategies include limited knowledge of specialization, resources, and capabilities (Harrington et al., 2018). However, business strategy must impact all aspects of an organization, like goal setting, strategy formulation, resource allocation, and daily execution (Powell, 2017).

Strategy provides businesses with tools and processes to learn how to assess industry structures and patterns, competitive trends and positioning, and judge probabilities and payoffs (Powell, 2017). However, micro-business owners do not consider all areas of strategy equally important (Svatošová, 2018). Size plays a role in which areas of strategy are formulated; the smaller the business, the lower the probability that strategy was formulated (Svatošová, 2018). Strategy must link the needs of the market the business operates in and the capacity of the company to satisfy such requirements (Svatošová, 2018). Furthermore, strategy execution is an operations-driven activity that manages people and business processes, with micro-business owners lacking management skills (Gamble et al., 2019). Strategy execution complements strategy formulation because strategies have no value if not implemented properly (Carneiro et al., 2019). Carneiro et al. (2019) believe strategy execution and strategy formulation are separate processes but cannot occur without considering the other because achieving strategic goals depends on a properly formulated and well-executed strategy.

Project Management

Project management started in 1950 to meet the demands of increased complexity and the management of multiple projects simultaneously (Abbasi & Al-Mharmah, 2000). According to Musiał-Kidawa (2020), project management is as old as the beginning of time and includes the creation of the world by God because the creation of the world was a temporary endeavor. Project management became a distinguished field in the 20th century to become an organizational capability, creating the need for a systematic implementation method (Ahmad et al., 2021). According to Crawford (2006), the development of project management within organizations started from two perspectives that converged to achieve strategic goals (Drouin et al., 2019). The first perspective is the evolution of strategic tools and techniques, while the second is practiced theory, the analysis of repetitive practices (Drouin et al., 2019). Both perspectives lead to organizations' capabilities, like knowledge and management capabilities, regarding project management and standards in project management, like uptime requirements (Drouin et al., 2019). According to Aubry et al. (2007), in 2003 the Project Management Institute considered project management in organizations as "a new sphere of management where dynamic structures in the firm are articulated as a means to implement corporate objectives through projects to maximize value" (Drouin et al., 2019, p. 500). Project management requires a continuous and imaginative response to minor problems to prevent the growth of obstacles in achieving strategic goals (Musiał-Kidawa, 2020).

The Project Management Institute defines project management as "the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet project requirements" (Brathwaite, 2018, p. 63; Feldmann & Lückmann, 2017, p. 440). Tools in project management are tangible, such as a template, used in activities to generate a result or product (Project

Management Institute, 2017). Techniques are defined as a systematic method used by a person to perform an activity in producing a result or product (Project Management Institute, 2017). Projects are relevant because of their problem-solving nature and capacity to deliver strategic value (Martinsuo, 2020). As a result, projects are perceived as an essential value-creation mechanism for the organization (Martinsuo, 2020). Decisions for projects are made at different levels of the organization, with the project manager often operating in different fields or skills depending on the type of decision (Drouin et al., 2019). Project management was initially based on the operational aspect of projects, meaning how to better achieve project efficiency without linking to the business' strategy (Ashill et al., 2020).

Project management is different from general management because it requires improved communication, monitoring, and professional management due to the internal and external environment, which impacts the management of the projects and business strategy (Chang et al., 2018). Project management competencies, which can be seen as a combination of knowledge, skills, and relevant experience, are core assets for goal achievement success and represent a large number of concepts, tools, and approaches (Battisti, 2018; Chen et al., 2019). Project management competencies are dynamic and are often considered a specialized role compared to technical and managerial competencies (Chen et al., 2019). Project management provides a means for individuals to learn new skills and move into management from the dynamic nature of project management (Chen et al., 2019). Researchers believe project management has contributed locally and globally to the business community to the point where businesses must now develop project management competencies at the individual and corporate levels to compete effectively (Al-edenat et al., 2020). In impacting the long-term success of a business, project management allows sustainability by enabling the exploitation of resources for current situations

and future changes (Al-edenat et al., 2020). In enabling the sustainability of businesses, implementing project management facilitates the required changes between business strategies and projects to ensure success (Al-edenat et al., 2020).

Project management has increasingly become the method for achieving strategic goals, thus impacting understanding the elements of the problem to be studied, achieving strategic goals, project management, and business failure (Abaladas et al., 2019). The framework, functions, and processes that guide project management activities are needed to meet strategic goals (Ali et al., 2017). The framework includes processes, tasks, and tools required to complete the project; functions are scope, time, and costs, while processes include initiation, planning, execution, monitoring and control, and closing (Ali et al., 2017; Project Management Institute, 2017). Traditionally, project management success is determined based on cost, time, and scope constraints, with organizational goals being assessed later (Ali et al., 2017; Drouin et al., 2019). Project management has grown to include success factors such as business success and future opportunities, impacting the longevity of a business (Gao et al., 2018). Further, strategic alignment must be included at the start for the strategic goals of the organization to be measured and met (Ali et al., 2017).

The project management methodology is intended to connect project governance and project management (Drouin et al., 2019). Project governance defines the project's process, roles, responsibilities, milestones, and control points (Drouin et al., 2019). One characteristic of project management that impacts the achievement of strategic goals is the ability to problem-solve, creating the conditions to execute tasks to ensure operations are continuous and productive (Martinsuo, 2020). Project management practices are essential to reduce performance loss in terms of poor product or service delivery quality and missed opportunities for the business,

contributing to business failure (Asgary et al., 2021). Project management can be seen as the operational arm of problem-solving through strategies and actions (Battisti, 2018). Project management is also viewed as an adaptation tool created to achieve strategic goals based on the effectiveness and changing aspects of the actions involved in strategic plan execution (Musiał-Kidawa, 2020).

Waterfall Approach. The traditional formal project management methodology is called the waterfall approach (Pace, 2019). The waterfall approach was pioneered by Winston Royce in the 1970s as an instance of an imperfect methodology, although mentioned as early as the 1950s in a presentation by Herbert Benington (Pace, 2019; Royce, 1970). The waterfall approach concentrates on cost, schedule, and scope (Kisielnicki & Misiak, 2017). The five phases of project management are also included in the traditional project management method: initiation, planning, executing, monitoring and control, and closing (Bosslet et al., 2021; Project Management Institute, 2021). With the waterfall method, the tasks of one phase continue down to another phase and are highly structured (Pace, 2019). Further, the waterfall focuses on processes, predictability, and upfront planning (Kisielnicki & Misiak, 2017). As a result, increased consistency within the waterfall approach allows consistency in the achievement of strategic goals (Agrawal & Chari, 2017). The simplicity of the waterfall approach allows planning, execution, and expected results to be communicated easily (Burchardt et al., 2021). The waterfall approach allows projects to be executed in a goal-oriented manner with deadlines, responsibilities, and expectations, allowing projects to be aligned with the achievement of strategic goals (Burchardt et al., 2021).

Kettunen and Lejeune (2020) wrote that project completion might be uncertain with the waterfall approach because planning is based on a static business plan. The changes can become

costly when issues arise during various project phases (Lisovskaya et al., 2020). However, the traditional approach no longer needs specialized training, removing the barrier to education that can be an issue in the general area of project management (Burchardt et al., 2021). The simplicity found in using the traditional approach for micro-businesses due to the knowledge capacity is a trade-off that positively impacts the achievement of strategic goals (Burchardt et al., 2021). Simplicity is important because the choice of project management methodology depends on factors such as firm size, type, and availability of human capital (Lisovskaya et al., 2020). Documentation in the waterfall methodology is essential and increases knowledge within the organization because it is the basis for increasing knowledge (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021).

The idea behind choosing the right project management approach is to increase the probability of success by removing or being able to work around resources that may be limited, such as technical skills and knowledge (Pace, 2019). The waterfall model is essential to the study because it brings consistency and organization to micro-businesses in that it removes the chaos and uncertainty in micro-business execution processes (Ghilic-Micu et al., 2016; Project Management Institute, 2017). Further, it is a simpler model to follow, details the definition of requirements such as the business issues, the needs of the stakeholder, the functions, and characteristics of the product or service, and focuses on documentation such as requirements, communication, and technical documentation (Ghilic-Micu et al., 2016; Project Management Institute, 2017).

Project management phases are a logical grouping of processes used to accomplish detailed project objectives (Project Management Institute, 2021). The phases are intended to help the organization's management, regardless of the organization's size, in achieving the planned objectives (Asgary et al., 2021). The five phases are initiation, planning, executing, monitoring

and control, and closing (Bosslet et al., 2021; Project Management Institute, 2021). The waterfall method states that each phase should have a distinct start and end to establish what is included in individual phases (Asgary et al., 2021). Project management phases complement each other, ensuring an increased success rate due to communication and accountability (Asgary et al., 2021). Project management processes are essential to provide perspectives that set a foundation for answering the differences when micro-businesses achieved strategic goals versus when those goals were not and to understand the role of project management in achieving strategic goals in micro-businesses (Ledwith & Turner, 2018).

Initiation. According to Aldaghlas et al. (2020), the initiation phase is essential because it offers the most options in deciding the best plan to execute the project successfully with the best cost factor. The decisions made in this phase are considered riskier and most influential (Aldaghlas et al., 2020). Within the initiation phase, needs and objectives are ascertained, including assessment, project objectives, and critical project requirements (Migosi et al., 2020). The initiation phase is the first phase with a start, end, and control point (Aldaghlas et al., 2020). In the initiation phase, project benefits should be targeted regarding strategic goals, ensuring that projects are strategically and operationally aligned with the business (Asgary et al., 2021; Simeone 2020). The initiation phase addresses industry-specific issues like business size and resources (Aldaghlas et al., 2020). Further, organizational practices are essential to ensure the alignment of tasks to business strategy, which must be evident and adjusted accordingly at the initiation stage (Simeone, 2020). Decisions taken during the initiation stage must consistently align the project purpose with the business' strategic goals (Aldaghlas et al., 2020).

Planning. The planning phase refers to defining, preparing, and organizing the plan's components and then consolidating them into a project management plan (Asgary et al., 2021;

Project Management Institute, 2017). The planning phase includes activity definition, cost planning, and communications management plan (Project Management Institute, 2017). If planning is not correct, a significant impact can occur on costs and performance, which ultimately affects the achievement of strategic goals (Bosch-Rekveldt et al., 2020). A lack of knowledge is an essential impact of failed projects, which can be negated in the planning phase (Ahmad et al., 2018). The planning phase includes tasks that define and refine objectives, allowing missed information to be caught, thus improving requirements quality and controlling scope creep (Ahmad et al., 2018; Project Management Institute, 2017).

Execution. The execution phase is completing the work outlined in the project management plan and making appropriate changes to ensure the project's objectives are met (Project Management Institute, 2017). This phase also includes working with internal and external stakeholders (Asgary et al., 2021). An advantage of this phase is that the activities needed to achieve the strategic goals are necessary in this phase (Project Management Institute, 2017). Project management and control can occur based on three steps: performance specification, comparing actual with expected performance, and making necessary changes (Pellerin & Perrier, 2018). Further, risk and uncertainty within this phase can result from unattainable goals, external market changes, and inadequate resources (Pellerin & Perrier, 2018). With the waterfall or traditional project management method, execution tasks are often suggested to be completed sequentially, but in practice, it is done by overlapping where necessary to accelerate in meeting milestones and strategic goals (Pellerin & Perrier, 2018).

Within the execution phase is the execution processes group, which consists of processes like project procurement management, project communications management, and project resource management, accomplished to complete defined work in the project management plan

(Project Management Institute, 2017). Execution processes provide overall management of deliverables and work being achieved and are performed throughout the project (Project Management Institute, 2017). During the execution phase, the project framework is checked to assess, remove, and replace irrelevant tasks and resource usage, enabling realignment to happen where necessary to ensure the project successfully achieves strategic goals (Ahmad et al., 2021). The framework is the list of tasks, tools, and resources needed to ensure the project is achieved from beginning to end (Ahmad et al., 2021).

Failure of project management often happens during the execution phase because changes to avoid failure must be made during the execution phase if the need for changes is not caught prior; failure occurs when the changes are not made (Ahmad et al., 2021). The ability to track the changes throughout the project is done throughout the execution phase (Ahmad et al., 2021). A significant condition of success is recognizing issues and making the changes in real-time (Ahmad et al., 2021). External factors like competitive market and client demand regarding quality also impact the execution processes because the requirements of the external factors must be considered along with the firm's internal resources (Chang et al., 2018). When businesses have a low routine factor with processes and results, such as the informal way of operating seen in micro-businesses, there needs to be a high level of project management knowledge to increase the probability of success (Chang et al., 2018). Project management allows the successful coordination of multiple factors internally and externally for efficient execution (Chang et al., 2018).

Monitoring and Control. The monitoring and control phase is the process of tracking, reviewing, and reporting the complete progress to meet the performance goals found in the project management plan (Project Management Institute, 2017). Some activities involved in this

stage are anticipating potential difficulties, suggesting pre-emptive actions, and influencing

factors that may impact the project (Project Management Institute, 2017). Monitoring and control

phases are critical because it allow any deviation from the plan to be resolved while enabling

changes to be made if alignment to strategic goals does not exist (Asgary et al., 2021).

Monitoring and control allow planning and exerting intentional control over resources spent on

activities to increase project effectiveness and efficiency (Battisti, 2018).

  Closing. Finalizing all activities for the project, including archiving and documentation,

is the closing phase (Project Management Institute, 2017). Closing is important because it is the

phase responsible for recording the challenges and lessons discovered during the project's life

cycle, thus building knowledge within the business (Asgary et al., 2021). Examples of

documents involved in the closing phase are the basis of estimates, quality control measures,

project communication, milestone lists, and lessons learned log (Project Management Institute,

2017). For knowledge to be evident, lessons learned must be examined, documented, and utilized

in current and future problems and strategies (Asgary et al., 2021).

  Project Manager. The Project Management Institute defines a project manager as the

person the firm assigns as the team leader responsible for ensuring the project objectives (Project

Management Institute, 2017). Ahmad et al. (2021) define project managers as change agents who

can determine the sustainability of organizations through project success. Project managers bring

change and renewal to organizations through the benefits seen in projects and measured in

economic terms like increased revenue or non-economic, such as customer enjoyment (Dupont

& Eskerod, 2016). Project managers increase the probability of success because direct

accountability for the benefits can be realized by the business (Dupont & Eskerod, 2016). Project

managers fulfill numerous roles to meet the triple controls of scope, time, and budget (Bourdeau

et al., 2019). Roles include decision-makers for technology, operations, and strategy (Drouin et al., 2019).

Bourdeau et al. (2019) explain that project managers are responsible for the success of projects in achieving strategic goals and must possess a good understanding of the various technical skills and tools used in projects. However, project managers need more than the application of technical skills like planning, scheduling, and budgeting (Bourdeau et al., 2019). Ideally, project managers require specialized management skills different from other managers' and skills that must vary based on the business's environment (Ekrot et al., 2018). According to Cullen and Leavy (2017), technical abilities are the minimum requirements for a project manager; challenges often present themselves based on the operation's environment, such as the informality of the business environment. In addition, project managers need competencies like communication, leadership, and organization to ensure that project management successfully achieves strategic goals by meeting progress according to previously set activities and milestones (Bourdeau et al., 2019). To improve the probability of success, the project manager needs to minimize any challenges along the project life cycle (Gao et al., 2018). Regardless of the organization's size, project management involves multiple internal and external stakeholders and needs a project manager to oversee the relationship in a way that benefits the organization (Martinsuo, 2020).

The capacity to implement the strategy in organizations through project managers is not always possible, which creates challenges that must be navigated (Dupont & Eskerod, 2016). As a result, project managers often work in challenging work environments, including changing workloads, unclear project requirements, and time pressure (Ekrot et al., 2018). Challenges exist for project managers operating outside the realm of traditional management structure and

working on temporary endeavors (Cullen & Leavy, 2017). The nature of temporary projects and working with temporary stakeholders creates a challenging environment for project managers (Cullen & Leavy, 2017). Further, leadership or management styles may change as work environments change (Drouin et al., 2019).

Researchers consider the role of project managers in terms of competencies like budgeting, communication, leadership, planning, and the ability to manage change, enabling the achievement of strategic goals when responsibilities are met, and activities are completed according to specifications with the use of the competencies mentioned above (Alvarenga et al., 2019; Boyd & Meng, 2017). Project managers are better able to respond rapidly to threats and opportunities than other managers (Colabi et al., 2020). As a result, the role of project managers has become more important with the increase in competition in the marketplace (Colabi et al., 2020). The specific role of project management is different from leadership in that project management is task-oriented with processes and functions (Cullen & Leavy, 2017). In contrast, leadership focuses on motivating and directing staff to achieve strategic goals (Cullen & Leavy, 2017). Both skills are necessary for a project manager to succeed, but leadership styles vary, and one must choose the most suitable for the current project (Cullen & Leavy, 2017). Therefore, a project can be re-interpreted as a temporary assembly of different experiences, knowledge, and skills, allowing micro-businesses to acquire what is needed and not be the specialist usually expected in project management (Cullen & Leavy, 2017).

Resource-Based View Theory. According to Dwyer et al. (2019), the resource-based view theory was first developed by Wernerfelt in 1984 and later refined by Barney in 1991. The resource-based view theory states that firms can perform above average with a critical set of resources and capabilities that are rare, valuable, and hard to imitate (Barney, 1991; Dwyer et al.,

2019; Wernerfelt, 1984). The resources and capabilities, such as information, knowledge, management skills, technology, financial, and organizational learning, are considered tangible and intangible (Amran et al., 2016). Barney (1991) contends that the specific internal resources of the organization drive strategic goals and performance because the resources used in executing its strategy are unique, diverse, and non-transferable to other companies (Amran et al., 2016; González-Rodríguez et al., 2018). A resource can be a strength or a weakness (Damnjanovic & Govan, 2016). However, businesses need to think about internal and external situations when formulating and executing strategy because success also depends on the contingencies for external conditions (González-Rodríguez et al., 2018).

The resource-based view (RBV) theory is a hypothetical framework widely applied in project management that examines how firms drive strategic goals using project management (González-Rodríguez et al., 2018). With the resource-based view theory (RBV), micro-firms can differentiate their resources and capabilities from the competition (Harrington et al., 2018). In addition, the resource-based view (RBV) is vital in knowing how firms achieve and sustain competitive advantage with limited resources, as seen in micro-businesses (Almarri & Gardiner, 2014). The resource-based view allows opportunities to focus on long-term survival instead of solely short-term objectives (Arregle et al., 2020). To achieve long-term survival, firms need to reconfigure resources and capacities according to internal and external business environment changes, achievable through the resource-based view (Arregle et al., 2020). Resources can be reconfigured because of the diverse nature of them (González- Rodríguez et al., 2018). Further, project management facilitates changes quickly in line with the environment, thus keeping the business relevant and competitive (González-Rodríguez et al., 2018).

The resource-based view explains the value creation of micro-business projects in

achieving strategic goals and using project management in organizations (Drouin et al., 2019).

Also, RBV helps to understand the systematic processes involved in organizations through

analysis, allowing the alignment of resources to strategy (Aranda-Usón et al., 2018).

Understanding the difference between resources and capabilities is important for analysis to be

effective (Aranda-Usón et al., 2018). However, for RBV to be effective, management and

reporting systems must be present (Dwyer et al., 2019). Further, RBV analyzes how micro-

business owners create, innovate, and use their resources because it explains the connection

between resources and productivity (Dwyer et al., 2019).

   Project Management Improves Performance. Adler and Pollack (2016) state that

project management improves performance is a concept that examines the conditions under

which business performance increases through the achievement of strategic goals. Project

management improves performance by applying a formal approach in the various

implementation phases through initiation, planning, executing, monitoring and control, and

closing phases (Project Management Institute, 2017). Project management allows guidelines,

policies, and established procedures, therefore increasing formalized strategy execution (Krisnan

et al., 2020). Further, project management enables business processes to match the organization's

needs, thus increasing performance (Ledwith & Turner, 2018).

   Companies can improve competitive capabilities by gaining knowledge and applying

skills to project management while engaging successfully with external challenges, like

economic change (Bredillet et al., 2018; de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). In addition,

competitive capabilities are improved by appropriately applying processes, enabling tighter

budgets, scarcity of resources, and shorter timelines (Project Management Institute, 2017).

Researchers believe the cost and barriers to project management are less than the value received

(Ledwith & Turner, 2018). Therefore, by presenting project management to reveal this truth, micro-business owners were willing to put in the time and effort needed to improve their management processes (Ledwith & Turner, 2018). In aligning project management processes to the performance of the micro-businesses, three determinants must be factored in: the business' characteristics, strategy, and the external environment in which it operates (Dineen et al., 2017).

The concept that project management improves performance is vital to examine how organizations, regardless of size, can use the same structures and processes seen in project management to reap the benefits of increased output with their current resources (Bourgault & Niknazar, 2017). Project management can help keep businesses functioning by aligning the organization's goals with projects that yield success, thus reducing business failure (Tan & Wenu, 2019). Limitations in using project management methodologies can reduce project success (Pace, 2019). By aligning resources with output requirements at the high level and predetermined points, adjustments are made throughout the phases of project management, increasing the possibility of project success and leading to business success (Project Management Institute, 2017; Srivastava & Sushil, 2017).

The concept that project management improves performance is essential to the overall study to understand the impact on micro-businesses when processes, knowledge, and skills are applied in a structured way, how their operations, growth, and innovative processes improve, thus improving overall performance (Abdilahi et al., 2020). Further, a contextual understanding of the role of project management in achieving strategic goals and minimizing potential business failure for micro-businesses is important as strategies are successfully achieved using projects (Bhimavarapu et al., 2020). Processes need to change as firms grow due to improved performance, which is done through structured strategy implementation such as project

management (Ledwith & Turner, 2018). Improved performance leads to the growth and sustainability of the business (Ledwith & Turner, 2018).

   Discussion Connecting Micro-Business, Strategy, and Project Management. Many micro-business owners choose an industry in which to operate based on the technical competency or skill of the owner/manager entrepreneur, even without the management skill required to develop strategies to grow the business (Brooks et al., 2020). As a result, micro-business owners tend to focus on the technical competencies needed to create the product or service, not on the strategy required to build the business (Feldmann & Lückmann, 2017). Technical competencies are the knowledge directly related to creating the product or service, compared to capabilities that look at the capacity to accomplish something (Feldmann & Lückmann, 2017). Consequently, small businesses spend less time on the process or project management behind strategy execution (Feldmann & Lückmann, 2017). In addition, not focusing on the project management processes reduces the micro-business owners' ability to employ success factors such as leadership, alignment of strategic goals, and communication (Feldmann & Lückmann, 2017).

   Business strategies allow businesses to exploit their strengths and overcome weaknesses when reacting to market conditions (Euh et al., 2020). However, a challenge for micro-business owners is to focus the use of competencies toward achieving business strategy instead of the day-to-day operational tasks without long-term objectives, preventing micro-businesses from being effective (Figueiredo et al., 2017). Firstly, it is difficult for micro-business owners to identify all the business competencies initially, preventing them from operationalizing the competency to benefit the business (Figueiredo et al., 2017). Secondly, if competencies are identified, it is difficult for them to be directed toward making the company competitive in the market in which

it operates (Figueiredo et al., 2017).

Further, the scarcity of focus on micro-businesses in current research on business strategies makes it challenging for micro-business owners to understand which strategies to employ (Euh et al., 2020). Research tends to focus on small to large businesses, but according to Svatošová (2018), a business strategy for micro-business owners should consider characteristics such as size, informal culture, and hierarchy. In addition, firms formulate a business strategy but fail to put execution plans in place, resulting in no execution being attempted or done effectively, thus not achieving strategic goals (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020). Understanding the reason for unachieved strategic goals provides perspectives that set the foundation for understanding micro-businesses' approaches to achieving strategic goals (Dineen et al., 2017). While Svatošová (2018) acknowledges limited data exists in the research on micro-business regarding strategy, Aoussat et al. (2021) found that micro-business owners attempt to establish a viable business strategy but are unable to do so successfully due to a lack of knowledge. Further, project management differs from general management, and instead of project management teams, micro-business consists of multi-disciplinary teams with people multi-tasking instead of being specialists (Chang et al., 2018; Ledwith & Turner, 2018).

Many organizations use project management to achieve strategic goals because project management extends resource capacity using skills, knowledge, tools, and techniques in project management (Mitchell & Vidal, 2017; Řehoř & Vrchota, 2016). Project management creates an advantage because projects enable value creation due to the net quantifiable gain, such as shorter turnaround time or market share achieved (Project Management Institute, 2017). Net quantifiable gain is achieved when existing knowledge is used to create new knowledge (Project Management Institute, 2017). For example, current organizational knowledge is used to improve the project

outcome, and the knowledge gained from the outcome becomes new knowledge (Project Management Institute, 2017). In addition, resource capacity is extended with the application and integration of project management processes, such as defining, preparing, and coordinating plans and processes in the planning phase (Project Management Institute, 2017). Asgary et al. (2021) suggest project management can apply adaptive or continuous integration practices considering the informal nature of micro-businesses. Adaptive practices allow tasks to communicate activities in a clear, objective, and integrated way (Asgary et al., 2021). Continuous integration seeks to verify and validate all processes being applied (Asgary et al., 2021). Researchers argue that the success of micro-businesses is based on an implemented strategy more than on the resilience of the market (Svatošová, 2018). However, the research literature is limited in explaining strategic goal setting for micro-businesses, but researchers believe simply setting strategic goals is not enough to ensure goal achievement (Katsikeas et al., 2017).

Related Studies

Related studies are information already written down and relevant to the current study (McCartan & Robson, 2016). Studies with similar and conflicting findings allowed discrepancies to be explored (McCartan & Robson, 2016). Pace (2019) argues that multiple related studies are important because disparities between evidence supporting one methodology over another can exist. Scholarly research into project management shows different approaches and conclusions as well as strengthens the field of project management (Geraldi & Söderlund, 2018). Related studies provided diversity in the form of intellectual ideas and challenges (Geraldi & Söderlund, 2018). To benefit from such variety, researchers should look at how other studies are organized as well as adapt references and ways of conceptualizing businesses as a research field (Geraldi & Söderlund, 2018). Below are three studies on project management that show diversity in the

research field.

   The first related study is "Project Management in Small to Medium-sized Enterprises: Fitting the Practices to the needs of the Firm to Deliver Benefit" (Ledwith & Turner, 2018). Interviews of 19 businesses within Canada and the US and an online micro and small businesses survey were done (Ledwith & Turner, 2018). Explored in the paper is attention to what influences the type of project management practices adopted and how the practices changed with the size of the business. According to Ledwith and Turner (2018), project management is vital to small and micro-business success. However, personnel are often multidisciplinary and employ ad hoc tools less formally. Projects taken on by smaller businesses differ from larger firms and, therefore, need different methodologies, such as informal people-motivated project management practices. Projects are used for innovation and growth, so adopting practices that enhance the organization's growth is vital to the project's success.

   The second related study is "The Impact of Project Management (PM) and Benefits Management (BM) Practices on Project Success: Towards Developing a Project Benefits Governance Framework" (Badewi, 2016). An online survey of 200 respondents, comprising project and program managers, was used (Badewi, 2016). According to Badewei (2016), project management practices alone do not equate to success. The focus within project management on cost, time, and scope creates an output-focus mentality that further limits the business's effectiveness to benefit from project success. Benefits management focuses on the benefits of a successful project to the strategy of the organization and a project being successful without meeting the cost, time, and scope. Badewi's research looks at project management through the lenses of project governance, project reviews, and communication plans. A project may be delivered on time and within budget and scope but does not meet the business's strategic goals

because of changes in the business environment.

The third study is "The Adoption of Project Management Methodologies and Tools by NGDOs: A Mixed Methods Perspective" (Abaladas et al., 2019). This study analyzed traditional project management tools and methodologies with interviews of 68 small organizations and a mixed method research approach (Abaladas et al., 2019). According to Abaladas et al. (2019), project management has become the standard for strategy; however, a disparity between project management theory and practice remains. Project management theory does not consider the diversity in stakeholders, the scarcity of resources, and intangible objectives such as improving innovation and sustainability. The ability to adapt to the realities of the business utilizing project management yields a higher probability of success for the project. Controls determining the levels of project success should be based on the internal resources and the project's objectives, not cost, time, and scope.

Anticipated and Discovered Themes

Themes are repetitive ideas found in the literature, which are essential in developing additional layers of information to inform solutions revealed in the study (Creswell, 2017). Themes are necessary to this study to know how current knowledge intersects with new knowledge and what direction to start in conducting the study (Creswell, 2014). One theme is the knowledge gap, which leads to limited expertise in specialist business areas needed to achieve strategic goals that increase micro-businesses' longevity (Engström & McKelvie, 2017). Another theme is strategic decision-making, which impacts the performance of the business in achieving strategic goals (Bentz & Gauzelin, 2017). A good strategic decision-making process is critical to creating the bridge between strategy formulation and implementation (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020).

Knowledge Gap. For firms to perform well relative to rivals, knowledge must be embedded into organizational processes (Feng & Valero, 2020). However, according to Grabowski and Stawasz (2017), many micro-businesses fail due to the limited knowledge needed to do business effectively; hence, understanding the knowledge gap and the impact of using a project management approach was explored in the study. Most micro-ventures were not created to adopt formal entrepreneurial goals but to solve problems like poverty (Engström & McKelvie, 2017). Consequently, many micro-entrepreneurs lack formal education, which leads to a deficiency in primary knowledge in the relevant areas of business, such as financial concepts and tools like project management, which is important to achieve strategic goals (Engström & McKelvie, 2017). This lack of basic business knowledge negatively impacts their ability to evaluate the business' current and future performance accurately and, in some cases, to assess opportunities (Engström & McKelvie, 2017). The lack of knowledge of micro-business causes owners to gravitate towards an informal rather than a structured business approach (Gopaul & Rampersad, 2020).

Researchers have shown a positive correlation between education in entrepreneurship and running a business effectively in that knowledge is significant for developing and maintaining skills (Sharafizad, 2018). Developed skills improve micro-entrepreneurs' ability to process information and make decisions that enhance productivity and achieve strategic goals (Sharafizad, 2018). Like basic financial concepts, knowledge of project management in some form is required for micro-businesses to successfully implement structured processes that improve their probability of success (de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). Due to this lack of project management knowledge, micro-business owners cannot manage projects systematically (de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). When the opportunity or need arises, micro-business owners

adopt an informal learning process because of learning preferences, limited time, and money (Sharafizad, 2018). As per Grabowski and Stawasz (2017), one such learning tool is informal advisors to help develop the capabilities and knowledge of owner or managers in formulating strategic goals.

Projects in micro-businesses are performed by persons with a discipline in something else, like the technical expertise to develop the product or service, creating a knowledge gap in the proper procedures required for project management; hence, fewer formal procedures are employed when executing strategy (Ledwith & Turner, 2018). For project management to effectively achieve the goals set out, leaders must know the phases, activities, and environment progression in which all phases and activities were performed (Esteban-Navarro & García-Madurga, 2020). Collaboration with other businesses and non-businesses is a way to reduce the knowledge gap but is not always used (Chowdhury et al., 2019). Pace (2019) believes one way to reduce the knowledge gap in project management is through experience for individuals acting as project managers. Improved technical and management skills acquired through experience increased and consistent project success (Pace, 2019). Moreover, limited research exists on the informal nature of micro-entrepreneurs in project management, similar to other areas of entrepreneurship (Esteban-Navarro & García-Madurga, 2020).

Strategic Decision-Making. Strategic decision-making in small and micro-businesses refers to diagnosing the demands of the business, considering alternatives, and then taking the best action for the situation (Gopaul & Rampersad, 2020). Decisions come in multiple forms: strategic, non-strategic, operational, and organizational (Drouin et al., 2019). Strategic decisions can be precedent-setting, but unclear on how to create solutions; therefore, decisions must be appropriately analyzed before execution (Drouin et al., 2019). Decision-making is the most

crucial task for any organization because of the overall impact on the business' success (Johannesson et al., 2018). Effective strategic decision-making must follow a deliberate approach, not an ad hoc one, as seen in micro-businesses (Eggers et al., 2020). According to Johannesson et al. (2018), decision-making may take a path that includes sequential steps, meaning definitive activities from problem definition to action taken, or it may be ad hoc with a more chaotic process. With an organized decision-making process, solutions occur through rational analysis, while with informal decision-making, results are inconsistent with no apparent structure (Johannesson et al., 2018). Decisions are not always tangible but are seen as a result of consequences, like the achievement of strategic goals; thus, having a formal strategic decision-making process allows the tracking of business goals with the ability to consider alternatives to reach strategic goals (Johannesson et al., 2018). Despite its importance, strategic decision-making is a challenge for micro-businesses, leading to business failure (Gopaul & Rampersad, 2020).

Data used in decision-making considers the past, present, and future events, impacting the quality of the information used in making strategic choices (Bentz & Gauzelin, 2017). The better the decision-making, the better the organizational efficiency and productivity (Bentz & Gauzelin, 2017). However, micro-business owners do not always have information to make decisions due to the knowledge gap or uncertainty in the business environment (Sharafizad, 2018). Decision-making under uncertainty within micro-business owners uses visionary approaches, focusing on predictions (Berends et al., 2016). Other methods are learning and experimentation, where entrepreneurs discover from their experiences through trial and error, or adaptive and transformative, where entrepreneurs make changes based on what is happening within the business environment (Berends et al., 2016).

The absence of strategy refers to firms not following a tactical path but operating without a rational decision-making approach (Eggers et al., 2020). Strategy is a series of decisions and activities that become a logical pattern and then realized through the achievement of strategic goals (Eggers et al., 2020). Strategic decision-making is influenced by internal and external factors, allowing opportunities to be maximized and threats to be neutralized, thus positively impacting strategic goals and business sustainability (Gopaul & Rampersad, 2020). Internal factors include how the external market operates, while internal factors are resources and management competencies (Jeguirim et al., 2019). Micro-businesses are often resource-constrained, which impacts the achievement of strategic goals; one such resource is knowledge of competitive strategies and organizational goals (Eggers et al., 2020).

Strategic decision-making is essential to this study as the inadequacy of decision-making contributes to poor performance by the business (Gopaul & Rampersad, 2020). Realizing how owner-manager entrepreneurs make decisions helps us understand how these decisions impact small business success (Eijdenberg et al., 2017). Understanding the problem is important to the best solution; decision-making requires questions regarding trade-offs, competing interests, and priorities (Drouin et al., 2019). Businesses should be proactive in strategy execution activities by possessing the knowledge and necessary information to make effective strategic decisions (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020). An effective decision-making process should help the organization's leaders learn, leading to sustainability (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020).

Discovered Themes. The field study discovered five main themes and one sub-theme, which are discussed in further detail in section 3. The discovered themes are lack of defined strategic goals, working in the business versus working on the business, and the unintentional use of an informal project management approach. Additionally, referrals and relationship building as

an informal strategy for business sustainability, informal documentation process, and the importance of business knowledge despite the lack of formal business knowledge.

The theme, lack of defined strategic goal, described goals as primarily personal and ad hoc as opposed to planned with tasks and objectives that are directly related to the business as described by (Aidoo et al., 2018). According to the data from the field study, the lack of defined strategic goals can be attributed to micro-business structure (Albala et al., 2021; Bouwman et al., 2018). As a sub-theme of lack of defined goals, working in the business versus working on the business was also discovered during the field study, where participants spoke about the differences in focusing on immediate revenue-generating projects versus the more significant overview of the business. Participants explained that time constraints contributed to why working in the business took precedence over working on the business, supported by Brooks et al. (2020).

The unintentional use of an informal project management approach is a discovered theme based on the literature's description of micro-businesses' informal processes, as seen in the conceptual framework (Chrisman et al., 2016). With this theme, participants followed the five basic processes of project management as defined by the Project Management Institute when working on jobs, which is the source of all revenue (Project Management Institute, 2021). Drouin et al. (2019) define projects as temporary organizations within the larger organizations. For micro-businesses, projects are not one-offs as defined by the Project Management Institute but unique according to the creativity involved in each (Project Management Institute, 2021). Participants often used the monitoring and control phase to ensure clients were satisfied with the jobs. Similarly, the Project Management Institute states that projects are used to produce new products, services, or solutions that meet the clients' requirements (Project Management Institute,

2021).

According to participants, referrals and relationship building as an informal strategy for business sustainability was an unexpected theme instrumental in micro-businesses' success. Participants intentionally used performance to create opportunities for referrals and return clients. The informal culture within micro-businesses results in informal processes such as referrals and relationship building, which micro-business owners do not recognize as a strategy (Brooks et al., 2020). According to Grabowski and Stawasz (2017), the documentation process is not a focus for micro-business owners, which was evident in the field data. However, some data can be tracked informally and often used to help navigate tasks for future clients. The main source of documentation is mobile devices. The importance of business knowledge despite the lack of formal business knowledge was an important theme referenced in the field data and confirmed the expected knowledge gap theme (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). Participants accepted that a knowledge gap existed, which limited their ability to grow.

Summary of the Literature Review.

Project management is generally believed to be essential to achieving strategic goals (Al-edenat et al., 2020). However, researchers believe project manager competencies and the business structure impact the decision-making process, which influences the success gained from implementing project management (Al-edenat et al., 2020; Alvarenga et al., 2019). The literature review provides a foundation and adds context to which research questions are explored (Snyder, 2019). Within the literature review, three main themes are discussed: micro-business, business strategy, and project management. Within micro-business, owner-manager entrepreneurs make decisions for the business based on entrepreneurial competencies and capabilities (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). Entrepreneurial competencies such as budgeting, communication, and technical

skills are important to the study because knowledge and skills convert to business growth and economic success, contributing to achieving strategic goals (Choi et al., 2019).

Exploring business strategy provides a foundation for understanding how strategic goals drive behavior and why poorly executed strategy leads to business failure (Amankwah-Amoah & Wang, 2019; Srivastava & Sushil, 2017). The current method of execution used by micro-businesses is ad hoc and does not follow the rules set out by the micro-businesses themselves (Harrington et al., 2018). Project management is a structured method for achieving strategic goals through five phases: initiation, planning, execution, monitoring and control, as well as closing (Abaladas et al., 2019; Bosslet et al., 2021; Project Management Institute, 2021). The concepts, dynamic capabilities, and resource-based view theories mentioned in the outline provided a foundation for understanding the studied problem (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, anticipated themes, knowledge gap, and decision-making provided insights into what the impacts are on micro-business owners in creating a more formal strategy execution approach in their quest to achieve strategic goals (Gopaul & Rampersad, 2020; Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017).

Summary of Section 1 and Transition

The foundation of the study provided the baseline needed to conduct this study with the following building blocks: the background of the problem, the problem and purpose statements, research questions, the nature of the study, conceptual framework, assumptions, limitations and delimitations, the significance of the study, and the literature review. The background of the problem suggests that micro-business owners do not use project management to achieve strategic goals even though project management provides knowledge and resources for all organizations (Bouwman et al., 2018; de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). Therefore, the problem addressed is

why micro-business owners do not apply project management in achieving strategic goals. This research aims to understand the impact the decision not to use project management has on micro-business failure. Using a flexible design and a single case study allows for multiple approaches to obtaining a solution while allowing for a rigorous approach to data collection and analysis (McCartan & Robson, 2016). The conceptual framework provides a visual and written picture of the main factors studied, concepts, theories, actors, and constructs, as well as the linkages between the factors (Cardoso et al., 2014). The assumptions, limitations, and delimitations provide transparency and awareness regarding the boundaries and risks within the study (Goes & Simon, 2017b). The significance of the study is to address gaps in the literature, understand the implications of biblical integration, and discover the benefits of business practice with project management and micro-businesses. Finally, the professional and academic literature review is an assessment of existing information found in previous research to describe and support the problem's existence (Snyder, 2019).

Section 2: The Project

The problem studied focuses on the lack of micro-business usage of a project management approach to achieve strategic goals, resulting in potential business failure. This study undertook a flexible design, namely a single case study, which is discussed in detail below (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A flexible design case study requires planning and design (McCartan & Robson, 2016). Therefore, section two looked at the plans and design for three areas: the research, the participants, the population and sampling, and data collection and sampling. Explanations on the role of the researcher, biases, and the mitigation of biases are included in section 2. A discussion on planning and design consisted of the type of data collected, how it was collected and organized, and the instruments involved. Section two discusses how the data was analyzed to ensure accuracy regarding participants' perspectives of the phenomenon. Finally, the researcher included information for promoting trustworthiness in the study by ensuring reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this flexible design single case study is to add to the body of knowledge in understanding why micro-businesses fail to use project management to achieve strategic goals and how this decision affects business failure. The research investigated, identified, and clarified the decision-making factors that determine how micro-business owners approach achieving strategic goals. The study adds to the literature for micro-businesses, researchers, project management professionals, and project management, informing micro-businesses on the need for project management processes to achieve strategic goals (Ledwith & Turner, 2018).

Role of the Researcher

The researcher in flexibly designed research with a single case study is defined as an instrument (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McCartan & Robson, 2016). The researcher is an instrument because, like other tools or instruments such as a computer or a software program, the role includes collecting data by studying documents, interviewing participants, and observing their behavior (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In flexible design, the researcher did everything, including designing and using their questionnaires and other data collection sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McCartan & Robson, 2016). In this study, the researcher was an instrument. Considering multiple identities, such as knowledge of the situation, racial identity, and language identity, influences data analysis (Uliassi & Yoon, 2022). As an instrument for this study, the researcher observed the participants' environment or situations and used the experience gained to make interpretations (Stake, 2010).

Further, the researcher defines data at all levels of the research and, therefore, determines the quality of the research (Uliassi & Yoon, 2022). The researcher underwent several data interpretation phases during the data analysis process to convert data into themes, patterns, or theoretical models (Haven & van Grootel, 2019). The worldview used to guide the researcher in this flexible design case study was important because it impacted how the study was designed and data collected, in the case of a constructivist, to ensure the participant's views were captured (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher's role in this flexible design with a case study methodology was vital because it influenced the research's overall quality, validity, and interpretation (Uliassi & Yoon, 2022).

The researcher in a flexible design case study is the critical point in participant selection, data collection, interpretation, and presentation of the information (Uliassi & Yoon, 2022). As

stated by Creswell and Poth (2018), five tasks the researcher in this flexible design study did were to spend a vast amount of time with participants, engage in data analysis, provide descriptive narratives, embrace constantly changing and emergent methods, and anticipate and address ethical issues (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher spent extensive time in the field to collect accurate data by building relationships with participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Spending time with participants gave the researcher a deep perspective needed to collect enough data to provide analysis that reflected the participants' views (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Time spent in the field facilitated data collection and provided answers to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Further, the more data collected, the higher the probability of data saturation, essential to bringing completeness and validity to the research (Creswell, 2014). Also, spending time with participants provided an understanding of the social world in which the phenomenon was studied and provided context for interpreting the data (Haven & van Grootel, 2019).

Analysis in this flexible design case study was essential to find information from the data to obtain knowledge for decision-making (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this flexible design case study, the researcher decided how best to represent the data gleaned from the field through analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within this study's analysis stage, the researcher sorted through all collected data to find themes and patterns and understand causes and effects in understanding the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2010). Writing descriptively facilitated the evidence or research presented and showed multiple substantiated perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Writing descriptive narratives enabled the researcher to show details for the reader to understand the process, the situation, and the participants' and researcher's backgrounds involved in the study while providing the ability to understand any bias and validate

the study accordingly (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participant quotes were included in the research, showing the depth of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The analysis also facilitated the discovery of emerging themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To discover emerging themes, the researcher viewed the study as a form of social and human science. Procedures constantly change depending on the situation and participants (Haven & van Grootel, 2019). Understanding this need for change enabled emerging theories to appear, allowing the researcher to pivot from preconceived ideas or what appeared to be contradictory data (Haven & van Grootel, 2019). Recognizing emerging themes advanced knowledge and enabled theory development (Snyder, 2019). The researcher considered ethical issues that may have arisen and created contingencies to resolve them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethical issues considered were the need for privacy by participants and knowledge gained regarding specific business practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Specific steps considered regarding ethical issues were respecting the participants' worldviews, treating the participants equitably, obtaining consent from participants, and protecting their privacy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Addressing ethical issues was essential to protect the participants from risks such as personal and business security (Stake, 2010). Within this flexible design, participants cannot protect themselves; therefore, the researcher ensured that participants were shielded from the negative impacts of the study (Stake, 2010).

Bracketing

Dörfler and Stierand (2020) define bracketing as the researcher's attempt to put aside their previous understanding and assumptions while gaining experience of the current phenomenon before making sense. Another definition by Moustakas (1994) is that bracketing is where the researcher does not pass judgment or look at things the conventional way (Creswell &

Poth, 2018). As Creswell and Poth (2018) stated, the researcher bracketed themself by discussing their experiences with the phenomenon. Putting aside the knowledge of this researcher's past experiences, a fresh perspective of the phenomenon emerged by focusing on the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Bogna et al. (2020) and Creswell (2014), the constructivist view is that reality decided by individuals studied, focused on the participants' view gives a researcher a fresh perspective. Because flexible design is subjective, the researcher's perspectives were minimized to allow the study replication and evaluation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A discussion on bias is essential because bias exists in all research; therefore, the researcher attempted to lessen the bias through bracketing (Noble & Smith, 2014). Further, recognizing and bracketing bias was essential to bring objectivity to this study (Stake, 2010). In areas where bias when revealed, minimization is established, allowing for critical evaluation of the data by the researcher and the reader (Noble & Smith, 2014). Potential types of bias are participant bias, data collection bias, and analysis bias (Noble & Smith, 2014). Participant bias is the process by which participants are recruited, and the criteria for inclusion are necessary (Noble & Smith, 2014). For example, selecting micro-businesses that have all succeeded will create bias because of the lack of inclusion of failed businesses (Noble & Smith, 2014). Therefore, participants represented the studied population, allowing for comparison groups (Noble & Smith, 2014). Participants had various experiences, such as micro-businesses with zero to four employees, micro-businesses in different industries, and micro-businesses with varying numbers of years in business (Noble & Smith, 2014).

Further, participant bias was discussed, saying what the participant believes the researcher wants to know, defined by Yin (2014) as reflexivity. Reducing conversations that may

create personal relationships and using open-ended questions allowed the participants to focus on addressing the issue and not on what the researcher wanted to know (Yin, 2014). Data collection bias in flexible design may have arisen if the researcher's beliefs and experiences influenced information collection (Noble & Smith, 2014). For example, closed questions could lead to yes or no answers, while a question asking for a description provided insight into participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Noble & Smith, 2014). Analysis or dissemination bias happens when the researcher looks for and only uses data confirming their theory (Noble & Smith, 2014). Included in this study was data that appeared contradictory, which could allow for new or emerging theories, in addition to the ability to replicate the research (Haven & van Grootel, 2019).

All results in this flexible design single case study are subjective and interpreted through the researcher's lens (Haven & van Grootel, 2019). One challenge for this flexible design case study was ensuring adequate data was collected to provide enough data to reach saturation and ensure no bias exists (Doyle, 2019). Another challenge was under or over-reporting the data to fit the researchers' narrative, which is called analysis or dissemination bias (Berg et al., 2016). Bias by the researcher is clarified through self-reflection by including comments on how the researcher's background influenced the interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2014). Self-reflection establishes an honest narrative that enables the reader to see the study as objective (Creswell, 2014). Further objectivity was added to the study by including the research processes utilized, allowing the reader to track the progression of the study, detect whether bias exists, and then read the study accordingly (Haven & van Grootel, 2019).

According to Creswell (2014), in addressing bias, the researcher states through self-reflection how personal experience and culture influence the research, such as themes created

along with meaning ascribed to the data. The researcher has a background working with micro-businesses in Ontario. Further, the researcher owns a business magazine where micro-entrepreneurs write articles; the researcher's role in the magazine includes prospecting articles from micro-entrepreneurs in Canada. Additionally, the researcher works as a business consultant for micro-businesses in Canada, creating business processes and advising on business strategy development and execution, such as markets to enter and projects being undertaken that are unproductive. The researcher has encountered micro-businesses with no business strategy and is operating at a loss or struggling to maintain clients. To avoid previous micro-business interactions impacting the study, the researcher focused on the participants' experiences, including when experiences differed from what the researcher had previously seen. The researcher used codes to discover themes throughout the data collected from participants and observations.

Summary

The researcher's responsibility as an instrument is to collect and analyze data, select participants, conclude, and create final documentation (McCartan & Robson, 2016). The role of the researcher was embedded in the research process, enabling a close relationship with the setting (McCartan & Robson, 2016). Biases emerged or negated by including all data, not just those that fit the researcher's narrative, allowing new or emerging theories to be revealed (Haven & van Grootel, 2019). Three types of biases emerged: participant bias, data collection bias, and analysis bias (Noble & Smith, 2014). Bracketing reduced or revealed bias; bracketing revealed the researcher's previous association with the phenomenon studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, the researcher ensured the study was ethically done by treating all participants equally and respectfully (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Methodology

The research methodology is the overall framework for the study (McCartan & Robson, 2016). The chosen research methodology dictated the type of data collected in addition to how data was collected, analyzed, and reported (McCartan & Robson, 2016). This study included a flexible design with a single case study method. The research methodology section includes a flexible design, the case study method, and triangulation. The flexible design utilized methods that generated qualitative data and, as a result, was suitable for business and management (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The single case study enabled the researcher to focus on a single topic: micro-businesses' failure to use a project management approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As in other social sciences, the case study was used to collect, analyze, and present data accurately (Yin, 2014). With a flexible design and case studies, the researcher saw the problem being studied holistically, which is essential to prove or disprove the theory and discover any emerging theories (Yin, 2014). Finally, the researcher discussed triangulation techniques to validate the study's results (Yin, 2014).

Discussion of Flexible Design

This flexible design focused on the participants' views while presenting the data to reflect multiple realities and emerging themes and depended on the final data analysis (Haven & van Grootel, 2019; McCartan & Robson, 2016). This flexible design gathered qualitative data through multiple data collection techniques such as interviews, observations, and documentation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This flexible design had no restrictions on data accumulation and was non-numerical, making it suitable for collecting and analyzing qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Below are some attributes that impacted the purpose of this flexible design. This flexible design enabled the researcher to connect theories and observations, providing a roadmap for the

reader to follow the thought process from the conceptual stage to the data analysis stage (Bouncken et al., 2021). This flexible design allows the researcher to find new theories or extend old theories through the matches and mismatches of theoretical and observed patterns (Bouncken et al., 2021). This flexible design allowed the flexibility in capturing categories for analysis through the systematic approach of thought experimentation (Bouncken et al., 2021). This flexible design facilitated comprehensive data collection, a thorough analysis of questions asked of participants, and a comprehensive evaluation of data (Ertürk, 2022).

This flexible design allowed the behaviors and attitudes of individuals and communities to be explained, which was important in understanding micro-businesses behaviors and choices in achieving strategic goals (Creswell, 2014). Further, the flexible design provided insights into understanding mechanisms and processes that drive businesses (Bouncken et al., 2021). Therefore, this flexible design applied to researching business and management (Bouncken et al., 2021). This flexible design research included discovering why micro-businesses fail to use a project management approach in the achievement of strategic goals. As mentioned in section one, a strength of flexible design is the ability to use qualitative data and broad assumptions to decide how the interpretation should move and test existing theories (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McCartan & Robson, 2016). As the research focus progressed, new research questions were discovered, a strength of this flexible design (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Haven & van Grootel, 2019; McCartan & Robson, 2016).

Discussion of Case Study

Using the definition from Ertürk (2022) and Yin (2014), this case study was an examination taken from interviews and observations to investigate a modern-day phenomenon in detail. Further, the boundaries between the phenomenon and the setting were unspecified (Ertürk,

2022; Yin, 2014). Qualitative data dominated this case study, but quantitative data sometimes appeared (Lopes et al., 2021). As a research method, case studies are in economics, business organization structure, or a region's economy because of the complexity of social phenomena, which is why the case study methodology was chosen (Yin, 2014). This study focused on multiple micro-businesses to create a single case study. Case study research uses an integrated approach that offers a holistic view by fusing data collection methods such as archived documents, observation, and interviews (Lopes et al., 2021).

Single case studies and multiple case studies are available, along with the decision regarding which to use (Yin, 2014). The decision on which to use was made before the start of the research (Yin, 2014). A single case study was used for this study and focused on a single issue or concern (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Yin (2014), the single case study is best used when a case is critical, unusual, common, revelatory, or longitudinal. A critical case is significant about the theory of interest (Yin, 2014). For a critical case, the theory first specifies a set of criteria; the case is then used to determine if the theory holds or if alternative explanations exist (Yin, 2014). An unusual case is where the phenomenon deviates from theoretical customs or regular activities; an example for this research was where micro-business owners do not initiate project management like other business groups (Yin, 2014). A typical case allows the situations of a popular or commonplace situation to understand lessons learned (Yin, 2014). A revelatory case will enable the researcher to observe and evaluate a phenomenon not formerly accessible to social inquiry, allowing new information to be gained (Yin, 2014). Finally, a longitudinal case is where the same phenomenon is studied at different points to determine changes in conditions and processes over time (Yin, 2014). A single case study was appropriate to this research because of the unusual and revelatory nature of the information derived from

micro-businesses failing to use project management (Albuquerque et al., 2017). This research was unusual and revelatory because data on micro-businesses as a group is limited and often grouped with small businesses (Svatošová, 2018).

This case study was complex because of multiple stories or scenarios with numerous outcomes emerging into several themes. Complexity creates subjective opportunities for explanatory, interpretive understanding (Floersch et al., 2017). This single case study constructs and validates a theory; however, a theory in social science studies, such as business management, starts with a review of existing literature (Lopes et al., 2021). After completing the review of the existing literature, validation was completed, and a new theory emerged based on collected data and analyzed (Lopes et al., 2021). The flexible design allowed the collected data to be related to theoretical propositions, and the validity of the single case study was strengthened (Bouncken et al., 2021).

The reason for the study is clearly shown, along with the data collection criteria, how data analysis was done, and the results to ensure this case study was done correctly and the analysis is solid, as suggested by Lopes et al. (2021). In clearly laying out the reason for the study, the researcher explained the context in which the phenomenon occurred and the relationship between the existing literature and the real-world context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lopes et al., 2021). A detailed explanation of the strategy to investigate and assess the theory is also provided and discussed below in the sections Participants, Population and Sampling, in addition to data collection and analysis (Lopes et al., 2021). The researcher also examined the research questions in section one (Lopes et al., 2021). The data collection source, data triangulation, and the explanation of procedures were to understand the data collection criteria (Lopes et al., 2021).

Discussion of Methods for Triangulation

Triangulation is the merging of data compiled from multiple sources to determine the reliability of the findings (Yin, 2014). As suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018), various sources, techniques, and theories in addition to different sources to substantiate the evidence are necessary. Qualitative data validates through triangulation to allow the data to be replicable and for the study to be considered empirical and credible (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Validity is essential because consolidating data from multiple sources achieves the accuracy of concepts or investigated ideas (Heale & Noble, 2019). Biases will also occur through triangulation and removed by combining multiple sources (Heale & Noble, 2019). Triangulation is achieved when the study's findings include support from various sources of evidence (Yin, 2014).

Triangulation in this study was validated when the researcher found evidence to document a code in different data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Coding in flexible design is a process that makes it possible for data to be gathered, grouped, and thematically arranged, providing an established system for the meanings to be obtained (Williams & Moser, 2019). An example of a code would be when the phrase "understand business strategy" occurs in multiple sentences by multiple participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By grouping the phrases, a theme may emerge stating whether micro-business owners understand or apply business strategy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Field notes were used with interviews to develop codes, supplementing data collected through interviews and documentation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation improved the research by offering a broader and more precise grasp of the phenomenon when data from multiple sources was included; overlapping data that would have been otherwise missed was also detected (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017).

As mentioned in section one, this study employed data triangulation. Data triangulation

involves collecting data from multiple sources at various times in different spaces, such as semi-structured interviews, focus interviews, and observations (Yin, 2014). As Yin (2014) suggested, a convergence of evidence was used instead of comparing evidence. In a convergence of evidence, the coding of each data set revealed the same findings, therefore supporting each other (Yin, 2014). Examples of datasets for this study were the perspective of project management and strategic goals. The reason for collecting data from multiple sources was to corroborate the findings from each source (Yin, 2014). Asking different but complementary questions over multiple datasets facilitated corroboration through data convergence (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017). Further, converging evidence enables behavior or events of interest to reveal a single reality (Yin, 2014).

Summary of Research Methodology

The flexible design was chosen because of the ability to interact and create an environment that facilitated data collection in the context of the setting of the phenomenon (Yin, 2014). The single case study was chosen because the problem studied is unusual and revelatory (Yin, 2014). Current data in the literature tends to focus on small to large businesses with limited research on micro-businesses. Therefore, the problem is considered unusual and revelatory (Svatošová, 2018; Yin, 2014). Further, research on micro-businesses is minimal in the existing literature because of the informal way micro-businesses operate (de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). In addition, finding micro-businesses to interact with is not always easy because of their limited time and lack of knowledge in business management (de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). Triangulation succeeded through the collection of multiple sources and with the use of coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The convergence of evidence where different data sets reveal similar findings was used to validate the findings (Yin, 2014).

Participants

The participants in this qualitative research were individuals providing case study data through individual interviews and a focus group (Yin, 2014). This study's participants were entrepreneurs who founded micro-businesses in Ontario between 2013 and 2016, are decision-makers, and are responsible for the business's success. The chosen participants enabled data collection from failed and operational businesses on the various strategies used in the business's startup and operations. Participants selection was based on their knowledge of the business' operation. Participants whose businesses failed are essential to understand why and compare successful businesses' actions. In Ontario, participants came from multiple cities through business centers, chambers of commerce, emails, and online boards.

Population and Sampling

Choosing the right population and sample for a study impacts the study's success because individuals within the population add information to the body of literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McCartan & Robson, 2016). This study's population involved micro-businesses registered in Ontario between 2013 and 2016. The sample was done at the participant level and comprised micro-businesses from which the researcher learned the processes that contributed to the business' success or failure.

Discussion of Population.

A population is defined by McCartan and Robson (2016) Reducing the collected data into smaller, manageable pieces, called codes, is crucial. Codes or categories were used to represent discovered ideas in analyzing the information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Twenty to 30 codes were developed into themes using an iterative coding process through NVivo. Iterative coding involves starting with a larger number of codes and putting similarly coded data into smaller

categories of codes. Codes were single words, phrases, or sentences. NVivo and Excel were used in the analysis of the information collected. All transcripts, notes, and memos were uploaded to NVivo for analysis.

Discussion of Sampling.

The sampling method was stratified random sampling, and the sample source was taken from the population list acquired from the economic centers in Ontario (McCartan & Robson, 2016). The stratified random sampling method is probability-based and will involve separating the population into sub-groups or strata (McCartan & Robson, 2016). The two sub-groups were failed and operational micro-businesses (Taherdoost, 2016). Stratified sampling enabled comparison and ensured the representation of all categories within the population (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Taherdoost, 2016). In addition, the probability sampling technique gave everyone in the population the likelihood of being chosen, thus reducing bias in the sample (Taherdoost, 2016).

The sample frame identified respondents with contact information (Arora et al., 2021). The sample frame is the register of participants from which the samples were from (DiGaetano,2013). The sample frame was derived from the list supplied by the economic development programs maintained by cities across Ontario. Additionally, chambers of commerce in Ontario were approached to gain access to their database of micro-business. The sample frame included the business and founder's name, contact details, nationality, industry, business registration status, and operation status, showing whether the business was operational or closed. Including industry information created an opportunity for potential emergent themes and correlations.

The study's sample represented the larger population of micro-businesses in Ontario. The

desired sample size was 170 participants, with two subgroups of failed and operational micro-businesses. However, the actual sample size was fifteen. Subgroups provided ten existing business participants and five non-operational business participants for interviews, and a focus group of four was taken from the sample size of fifteen. The sample size was chosen based on research showing that saturation is reached between 15 and 30 interviews (Boddy, 2016; McCartan & Robson, 2016). A total of sixteen interviews were conducted, with an average of one hour per interview and two hours for the focus group. Data saturation was achieved when no new data was gained from each additional interview (Creswell, 2014).

Summary of Population and Sampling.

The micro-business population, the largest business population in Ontario, shares many characteristics and creates insights into why businesses fail or succeed. Participants were business owners who founded the business and were knowledgeable about the business' operation and strategies. The eligible population was all micro-businesses registered in Ontario between 2013 and 2016. The researcher created a stratified random sampling strategy. A stratified sampling method allows individuals to be randomly chosen and reduce bias (McCartan & Robson, 2016). The sample frame represented the entire population and included unique entries, accurate information, and auxiliary information., Allowing for stratified groupings of failed and operational businesses (DiGaetano, 2013). The final sample size was 16 interviews. Which is ideal for reaching saturation (McCartan & Robson, 2016).

Data Collection & Organization

Data collection and organization are essential to the reliability and validity of the study's data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). In addition, data collection and organization impact the analysis, influencing how the reader perceives the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Data

collection involved archival data from the literature review and current information from Ontario micro-business owners using interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data organization involved using NVivo, Microsoft Word, Excel, and local and online storage to keep data together and secure and facilitate analysis.

Data Collection Plan

The data collection plan is a set of activities that enable information gathering to answer the research questions being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The primary collection method was interviews (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017). The purpose of the collected data was to reveal the micro-entrepreneurs' descriptions of the use of business strategies and their perspectives on the themes discovered about the phenomenon (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017). Data was collected through online methods such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams interviews. The activities included in the collection plan were developing protocols for data collection, such as the qualification of participants for the study. The qualification of participant data was collected from government databases. Data from government databases included names and registration status of businesses to confirm registration and years in operation. Yin (2014) indicated that a literature review of previously published data should be prevalent.

The data collected from participants was based on their perspectives on the existence of strategic plans, goals, and project management within micro-businesses in Ontario, according to their experience. To address RQ1 and RQ2, the researcher sought information on the participants' understanding of and actions for setting strategic goals, business strategy execution, and understanding and implementing project management processes. Additionally, to answer RQ3, data on micro-business competency and participants' perceptions of profitability and business success was collected through interviews and archived data. Collected data allowed

analysis to answer the question in RQ3 on the differences for micro-businesses when project management is used, such as the benefits of using project management.

The collected data included descriptions of the data collection methods used and the rationale for each (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). An added layer of ensuring data accuracy was member checking, including follow-up interviews via telephone calls with participants to confirm accurate themes and descriptions. The report was not shown to participants, only the significant findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Not all participants were chosen for follow-ups.; Participants are randomly selected for follow-up interviews to avoid bias (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). There were also follow-up interviews to clarify missing or ambiguous information discovered before and during the data analysis (Creswell, 2014).

Instruments

Instruments used in this qualitative case study were the researcher, interviews, and archived data in the literature review. As the study's primary instrument, the researcher strived to be transparent by clearly documenting and communicating the processes and decisions used with recordings, field notes, and journaling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The researcher is an instrument because of the involvement at all stages of designing data collection, analysis, and presentation. In addition, the researcher is the main instrument in the data collection, analysis, and presentation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

This study used a semi-structured interview approach, (see Appendix A), with individuals and a focus group (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Overarching questions were followed by subsidiary questions addressing the different areas of the research questions. The semi-structured interview guide allowed a checklist of topics to be covered. However, the participants lead the conversations by providing necessary data to understand the phenomenon (McCartan & Robson,

2016). The research guide that addresses RQ1 and RQ2 was compiled from Gabler (2017) and

Olszak (2016) but edited for the current case study. The researcher used questions from Olszak

(2016) to understand the role of project management in achieving strategic goals, as stated in

RQ3. Questions such as "How do you define?" and "What are the benefits?" allowed the

participants to describe the phenomenon based on their perspective while providing the

researcher with an understanding of the micro-business' competency in setting strategic goals.

Questions such as "Do you use?" helped the researcher see the approaches mentioned in the

research questions. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and Microsoft Teams to access

participants from the entire province of Ontario.

Data from peer-reviewed articles occurred in the triangulation process to confirm the

findings of new data collected from participants. In addressing all research questions, the

researcher attempted to access archival documents from participants, such as business plans,

strategic plans, and financial information, but was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the literature

review addressed all the research questions. Archival data is specific in answering the questions

but is often difficult to access (Yin, 2014). Because the archival data aims to confirm the use of

project management, business planning, and strategic planning in some form, the lack of the

actual data involved did not negatively impact the study.

Data Organization Plan

Data organization includes transcribing interviews and field notes within two days of

completion to ensure information through observation was not lost (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Transcribing information allows immersion into the content, enabling the researcher to

understand better and explain the phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Interviews were

transcribed verbatim to include non-verbal nuances such as silences, laughter, and interruptions

(Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Transcripts, field notes, and memos grouped based on each participant interviewed, labeled with a code name corresponding to the participant, dated according to creation, and saved in separate file folders. The codes and corresponding participant names were saved in a separate file and copied to two cloud locations. All other information was backed up and saved on two different drives. Data recording included a phone recorder, zoom recorder, and note-taking. A database of codes and themes was created to keep track as the analysis continued, and new information was collected from follow-up interviews (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The codes and themes were saved separately from the raw data in file folders on hard drives. Transcripts were organized two tiers, individually in folders to read and make notes based on the researcher's observations, while folders were grouped according to codes and themes for analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Microsoft Excel, Word, and NVivo were used to organize and keep track of participants and responses to help with analysis. The method in which data was stored was essential to ensure ethical considerations were met.

Summary of Data Collection & Organization

Data collection and organization done correctly are essential tasks of the study and were needed for analysis and trustworthiness. Semi-structured interview questions from Gabler et al. (2017) and Olszak (2016) were employed. Archived data was utilized to add trustworthiness by corroborating data. Data organization was achieved with databases for transcripts, coding, and themes. NVivo and Excel, another level of data organization, helped with the analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis encompassed managing and organizing the collected data, reading and memoing emergent ideas, describing and classifying codes into themes, and developing and assessing interpretations and data representation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data analysis started

with the researcher reading the transcripts multiple times to view the entire study before dividing

transcripts into codes. Next, the qualitative analysis used NVivo and Excel software to assist the

researcher in breaking down the data using hypotheses, professional knowledge, and intuition to

understand the data as it pertains to what the participants wanted to portray in the data.

Emergent Ideas

Reading the research transcripts and field notes allowed the discovery of emergent

themes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The researcher read the collected data multiple times,

making it possible to become familiar with the content (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). While

reading the transcripts and field notes, the researcher made notes using short phrases, ideas, and

concepts seen in the data and developed significant and minor storylines (Creswell & Poth,

2018). Using memos and field notes, the researcher removed predetermined questions and then

focused on the more significant thoughts presented by the interviewees (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

While reading, the researcher asked questions such as what is this about? What is emerging? The

ideas generated were compared with the description in the conceptual framework.

Coding Themes

Reducing the collected data into smaller, manageable pieces, called codes, is crucial.

Codes or categories were used to represent discovered ideas in analyzing the information

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). Twenty to thirty codes were developed into themes using an iterative

coding process through NVivo (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Iterative

coding involves starting with a larger number of codes and putting similarly coded data into

smaller categories of codes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Codes were single words, phrases, or

sentences. NVivo and Excel were used in the analysis of the information collected. All

transcripts, notes, and memos were uploaded to NVivo for analysis.

Interpretations

Interpretation is the researcher's inference of the meaning of the findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The interpretation process for this study involved moving away from codes and themes to a more significant meaning of the data. The researcher provided detailed descriptions in excerpts from transcripts and documentation (Gilgun, 2015). Using detailed descriptions, professional experience, and a literature review, the researcher provided interpretations through commentaries. Gilgun, (2015) indicated using commentaries is good for interpreting. Judgments are made on what is essential in the generated patterns, themes, and categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Because the interpretation was based on intuition, insights, and hunches, the researcher linked interpretations to the existing literature review and initial hypotheses to ensure accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Questions that guided the interpretation were, "What surprising information emerged?" "What information is conceptually unusual or interesting?" and "What are the dominant versus alternate interpretations?" (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Representation

Data representation showed responses to the research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The researcher's aim was to tell the story richly and interestingly while preserving accuracy and credibility (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The data is presented in a narrative format, including participants' quotes and graphical representations such as tables and figures (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The graphical representation showed comparison and contrasting data and conclusions. This process makes it easy for the reader to follow and draw inferences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The graphical representation was essential to the study because visual representation creates and conveys meaning for the reader (Cajaiba-Santana & Parmentier-Cajaiba, 2020). The graphical representation added to the detailed data description for the coding

process and data theorizing (Cajaiba-Santana & Parmentier-Cajaiba, 2020). Participants' quotes were essential in including micro-business owners in the storytelling.
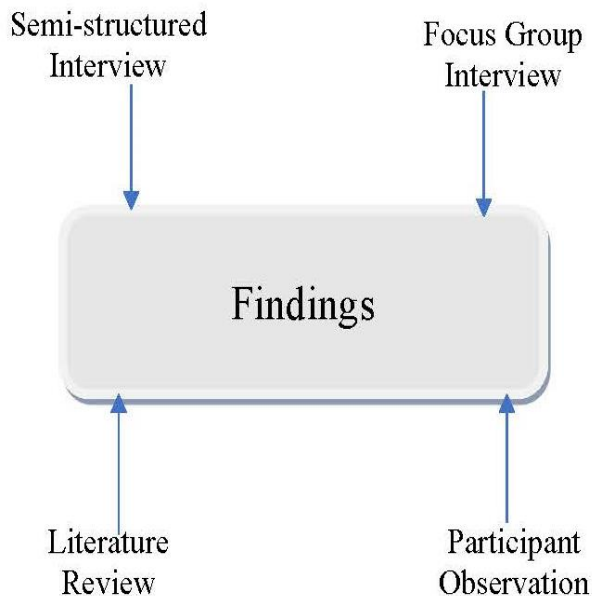
Figure 2. Convergence of Data

Analysis for Triangulation

Data triangulation is vital to strengthen the study. Data source triangulation includes information from different individuals, groups, and peer-reviewed articles to gain different perspectives (Blythe et al., 2014). The data types triangulated were individual interviews, a focus group, and literature reviews. Interviews and literature reviews are used in qualitative data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The triangulation process employed was the convergence method depicted in Figure 2, where analysis of each corroborated the same findings after comparison (Yin, 2014). Convergence of data is where independent findings acquired through different data collection or methodology instruments come together to support conclusions individually and

collectively.

Summary of Data Analysis

Data analysis was necessary for readers to see the phenomenon affecting micro-

businesses. Discussion of the process helped the reader decide how best to use the information in

similar situations. The researcher began by reading all collected data multiple times, looking for

emergent themes, and then categorizing data into smaller groups of themes. Data interpretation

was the researcher's interpretation of the data, but it was corroborated for the reader to trust the

researcher's insight. Finally, data representation was done in ways that made it easy for diverse

types of readers to follow the information and draw conclusions as to the accuracy of the data.

Reliability and Validity

Two key aspects of qualitative research are reliability and validity which create rigor for

the study (Cypress, 2017). Trustworthiness includes showing good and convincing qualitative

research and is achieved through validity and reliability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Validity

allows the study to reflect the world being studied, and reliability enables another researcher to

reach similar conclusions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). To show the study's trustworthiness, the

researcher discusses credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, bracketing,

triangulation, and saturation.

Reliability.

Criteria for reliability are credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability. Reliability ensures standardized research instruments (McCartan & Robson,

2016). Therefore, consistency occurred through interview guides to ensure all participants were

offered the same questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Credibility shows how well the

researcher depicts the participants' perceptions. The researcher accurately considered the

complexities of the study and addressed issues and themes not easily understood by the reader. The researcher used thick descriptions, member checking, and peer debriefing to ensure researcher biases were removed. Clarification of biases the researcher brings to the study through reflexivity was performed. Reporting on the overall processes used during the research procedure was done, allowing thick descriptions to be included. Multiple data sources and triangulation were used to add credibility to the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Member checking included participants reviewing transcripts to ensure their thoughts were captured, not the researcher's bias (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Transferability is the ability to understand how the processes took place at the research site for the reader to decide how to apply the results to similar settings. To achieve transferability, the researcher outlined the sampling strategy. Detailed descriptions and information about the research settings, participants, related experiences, and interactions were also provided (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Purposeful sampling showed participants' ideas, experiences, and context within the study, allowing the reader to form opinions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The researcher provided as much information as needed for the reader to visualize the context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Thick descriptions and information showed individual and shared experiences and were described in a way that allows the reader to compare similar situations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Dependability succeeded through properly documenting and making the research logical and traceable. Dependability was created by ensuring that the processes and procedures used in the data collection and analysis can be tracked. Further, dependability includes the stability and consistency of data collected over time and shows that the research question is being answered (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The researcher thoroughly explained data collection and analysis,

field notes, and the triangulation process. Researchers can make additional data available to researchers upon request (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). An audit trail can be provided as a clear record of field notes and transcripts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Confirmability is essential to prove that the findings and interpretations of the research are derived from the data. The researcher established how decisions were made and achieved conclusions through triangulation, an audit trail, and reflexivity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Confirmability proves that the findings and interpretations are not based on biases but on the result (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The discussions on how decisions were made throughout the research are included (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Validity.

Validity shows the reader that the data is accurate regarding what exists (Cypress, 2017). Lack of validity threatens the study and can be considered subjective. Therefore, constant checking by the researcher and transparency for the reader is essential (McCartan & Robson, 2016). The researcher demonstrated bracketing, triangulation, and data saturation to achieve validity. Because the researcher is an instrument, bracketing was essential to ensure bias does not impact the study (Cypress, 2017). By using reflexivity and stating the researcher's background, thoughts, notes, and perspectives throughout the study, bias was addressed and ensured that it did not impact the data collection and analysis (Cypress, 2017). Also, by showing the study's bracketing process, the researcher strengthened the validity by revealing the steps taken, allowing the reader to conclude (Ahern, 1999).

Triangulation ensures the research is valid to create a system of cross-checking information and conclusions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Data triangulation included using multiple data collection instruments such as individual interviews, focus groups, and archive data

(McCartan & Robson, 2016). By speaking and spending time with as many participants as possible, the data collected has rich and deep insights, providing quality conclusions. In addition, any negative data outside the regular patterns was analyzed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Convergence of evidence to extract findings was from multiple data sources (Yin, 2014).

Data saturation is necessary for study validity because sampling strategy and size impact the quality of data (Gill, 2020). Inductive thematic saturation was used for this study (Baker et al., 2017). Inductive thematic saturation focuses on new codes and themes that emerge through analysis (Baker et al., 2017). The reliance on analysis was necessary for rich data (Baker et al., 2017). Data saturation was judged on theoretical saturation when new data did not add more themes and codes (Baker et al., 2017). By showing the process by which data saturation was reached, the study showed the reader the study's rigor, thereby adding validity to the study.

Bracketing.

Bracketing is vital to address research bias. The researcher set aside previous perspectives on micro-businesses and focused on the data presented by participants (Åstedt-Kurki et al., 2015). The researcher stepped out of the situation and was an observer. To ensure bracketing, the researcher used reflexivity by asking questions to ensure bias was not a problem (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020). Example questions were, "What assumptions influenced the data collection and instrument used?" and "What bias impacted the chosen methods?" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

The steps used in bracketing this study include identifying and journaling the issues the researcher takes for granted, such as what may be needed to succeed and assumptions on race, gender, and education (Ahern, 1999). The researcher's beliefs and knowledge may bring subjectivity to the study. There was referral to those beliefs and knowledge throughout the

analysis to ensure objectivity. The researcher identified and recorded potential situational conflicts, such as the type of person the researcher felt uncomfortable around and individuals or groups on whom the study had a negative or controversial impact. The researcher identified and recorded emotions impacting neutrality, such as anger, excitement, negativity, and guilt. The researcher kept going back to these potential situations and emotions throughout the collection and analysis of data to ensure such a situation did not impact the study (Ahern, 1999).

The researcher was mindful of the lack of new information and checked to see if this resulted from data saturation or weakness on the researcher's part. A check on roadblocks and, when necessary, reframing to gather data or examine alternative perspectives. In writing reports, the researcher ensured the information was written objectively so that one person was not quoted more than others or sentiment was used more than others. The study was written in the first person when necessary and from an objective voice. Constant checks were conducted throughout the data collection, analysis, and writeup of findings to ensure that discovered or missed bias was addressed (Ahern, 1999).

Summary of Reliability and Validity.

Reliability included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To ensure reliability, the researcher adequately documented the processes used. The final report consists of detailed descriptions, a logical flow of information, and details on how conclusions were drawn. Validity included bracketing triangulation and saturation. To confirm validity, the researcher used bracketing to ensure bias is stated and, through reflexivity, constantly checked and announced. Confirming findings from multiple sources of data improved validity for the reader. Inductive thematic saturation, which looks at new codes and themes, achieved data saturation. Reliability and validity ensured the trustworthiness of the study for the reader.

Summary of Section 2 and Transition

Section 2, the project, covered the role and actions of the researcher, the research methodology to be utilized, and a description of the participants. In addition, this section included population and sampling, plans for data collection and organization, data analysis, and how reliability and validity were included. The researcher was an instrument and involved in all study aspects. Therefore, bracketing was used to guard against researcher bias. The research was a flexible design using a single case study because of the unusual nature of data on micro-businesses. The participants were micro-business owners in Ontario. Businesses registered between 2013 and 2016 were used for the population and chosen through random sampling. Instruments used in data collection were the researcher, interviews, and literature review. Data analysis succeeded with the help of NVivo and Excel to organize emergent themes and codes. Validity and reliability are important to show trustworthiness to the reader. To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher used detailed descriptions of the process that would inform the direction of the study, such as bracketing to remove bias and triangulation to confirm findings from multiple data sources. Section 3 consists of the presentation of the findings of the study, recommendations for future study, and application to professional practice.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 3 explores the practical applications and potential transformative impacts derived from the findings of the flexible case study (Yin, 2014). The researcher's overview explains the study's primary objective. The following section, the presentation of the findings, offers a detailed account of the study's discoveries. Five discovered themes and a sub-theme are discussed in the presentation of the findings. The themes are lack of defined strategic goals, working in the business versus working on the business, and the unintentional use of an informal project management approach. In addition, this section includes referrals and relationship building as an informal strategy for business sustainability, an informal documentation process, and the importance of business knowledge despite the lack of formal business knowledge.

The visual representation of the data section occurs in tables and figures to group results such as goals, strategy, and project management. Visual representation improves the experience for the reader by adding direct comparisons (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Addressing the research questions, the relationship of the study's findings also emphasizes the significance of strategy in micro-business survival, highlighting the research's focus on exploring approaches, differences, similarities, and the role of project management. The conceptual framework, anticipated themes, literature review, and the problem studied provide a theoretical connection to the study's findings, showing the knowledge gap identified in the literature.

The application to the professional practice section extracts actionable insights from the study's findings. To improve general business practices, the researcher identifies in the study strategies employed by successful micro-businesses that could positively impact customer retention, business growth, re-defined goal achievement, and decision-making. Potential application strategies include knowledge acquisition, an informal project management

framework, and a streamlined referral strategy. Recommendations for further study are intended to add to the literature by suggesting avenues for future research, including the long-term impact of referral strategies, technology adoption in micro-businesses, and the impact of knowledge acquisition strategies. Finally, the reflections section provides personal and professional growth and biblical perspectives. Section 3 consolidates the study's key findings and bridges the gap between academic research and practical application.

Overview of the Study

This flexible case study includes understanding the challenges micro-business owners face that impact the achievement of strategic goals and the roles project management plays (Barzotto et al., 2018). By exploring the processes and the factors influencing these micro-businesses in pursuing strategic goals, the research shed light on the pivotal role of project management processes in achieving success. The field study posed vital research questions regarding micro-business owners' approaches to achieving strategic goals, discerning differences in outcomes, and unraveling the role of project management in mitigating potential business failure.

Participants consisted of fifteen micro-business founders, five failed and ten operational. Participants were contacted through emails and social media notice boards. Data collection included interviews, observations, and secondary research through a literature review. All interviews occurred through Zoom and Microsoft Teams to allow reactions to be recorded and used as opportunities to develop follow-up questions and observation of body language to add to the analysis. In addition, a focus group interview confirmed or added context to individual interviews. Follow-up conversations with two participants allowed validation to occur. The analysis included listening to interviews and conducting note-taking, recording notes during the

interview, and later with NVivo and Microsoft Excel. NVivo and Excel allowed the discovery of

connections and visual trends. A structured process that includes trends and validation is

essential to the integrity of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The participants, entrepreneurs who founded micro-businesses in Ontario between 2013

and 2016, served as crucial sources of insights, including those whose businesses were no longer

operational. Which offered a comparative perspective on the actions of both successful and

unsuccessful enterprises. In the study, the researcher emphasized the significance of project

management in the context of micro-businesses., The intentions were to contribute valuable

knowledge to entrepreneurs, researchers, and project management professionals. In addition, the

intention was to understand the integration of project management processes in strategic

planning for sustained business success. The emerging themes, identified through participant

interviews and thematic analysis, provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and

opportunities micro-business owners encounter in their strategic endeavors, further enriching the

existing literature in this domain.

Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this case study is to use a sample group of micro-businesses in Ontario to

understand their perspective on whether there was a failure to use a project management

approach to achieve strategic goals. A combination of deductive and inductive analysis helped to

understand the findings. The problem statement and research questions helped in the deductive

analysis, while keywords were used in the NVivo coding. Additionally, the researcher's line-by-

line coding for inductive discovery. Fifteen micro-business owners were interviewed, five who

are no longer operational, and ten who are still operational. The interview was semi-structured;

therefore, some questions emerged because some interviewees mentioned the topic.
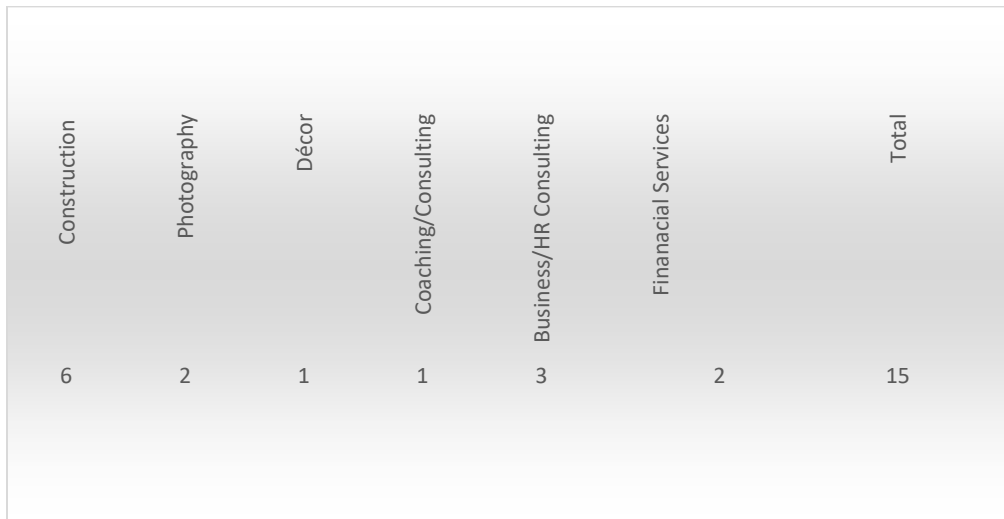
Five themes and a sub-theme emerged after interviewing participants through individual and focus groups. The themes include the lack of defined strategic goals and the unintentional use of an informal project management approach. The themes also included referrals and relationship building as an informal strategy for business sustainability, the informal documentation process, and the importance of business knowledge despite the lack of formal business knowledge. Each sub-theme will be discussed, and then the relationship of the themes, where applicable, to the study's five main areas: the research questions, conceptual framework, anticipated themes, the literature, and the problem. Visual representations accompany the data to help enhance the understanding of the data. The data will be discussed in terms of all participants to understand the group as a whole and based on successful and unsuccessful groups to see the differences and similarities as requested in the research questions to understand better the problem being studied. The discussions will include the gaps discovered in the literature and the connections between the research literature and the field data.
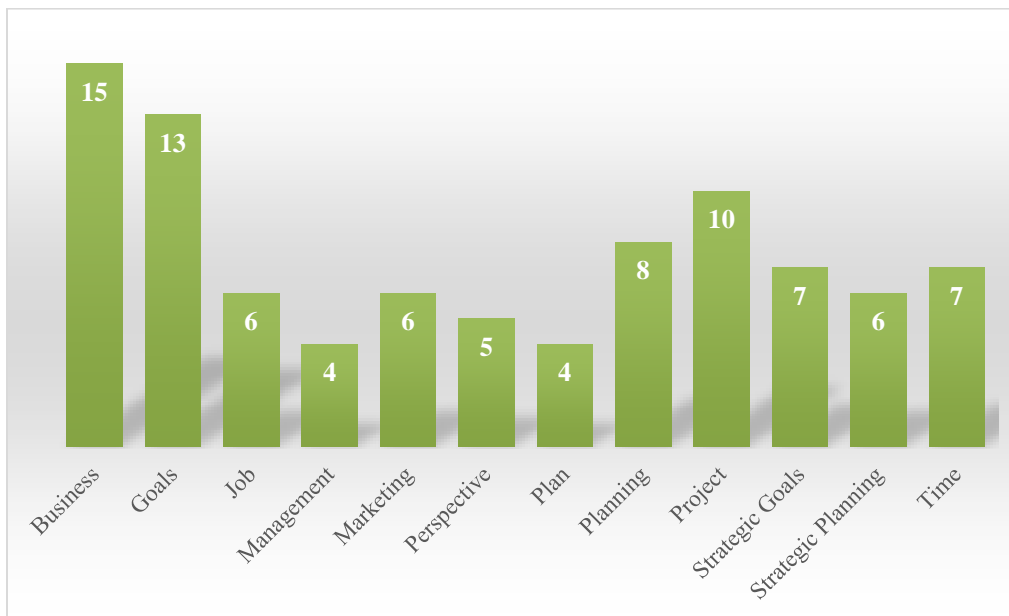
Themes Discovered

This flexible design single case added to the body of knowledge in understanding why micro-business owners fail to use project management to achieve strategic goals. Fifteen participants from six industries participated in the interviews, represented in Figure 3. NVivo software, software aided in transcribing and coding the participants' interviews. Twelve high-level codes discovered through NVivo were business, project, goals, planning, time, marketing, plan, job, perspective, management, strategic planning, and strategic goals. Figure 4 shows the number of interviews in which each code was mentioned, and Figure 5 shows the number of references to the high-level codes. The references allowed a deeper analysis of each code in developing the final themes (Creswell, 2014). NVivo helped in the deductive analysis, in that

keywords from the finalized themes were further analyzed using NVivo. For example, in understanding the theme informal documentation process, text searches for words like phone, email, work order, and taxes were plugged into NVivo to see references and word trees.

Construction	Photography	Décor	Coaching/Consulting	Business/HR Consulting	Finanacial Services	Total
6	2	1	1	3	2	15

Figure 3. Industry Representation

Figure 4. Number of Participants who Referenced High-level Keywords per NVivo
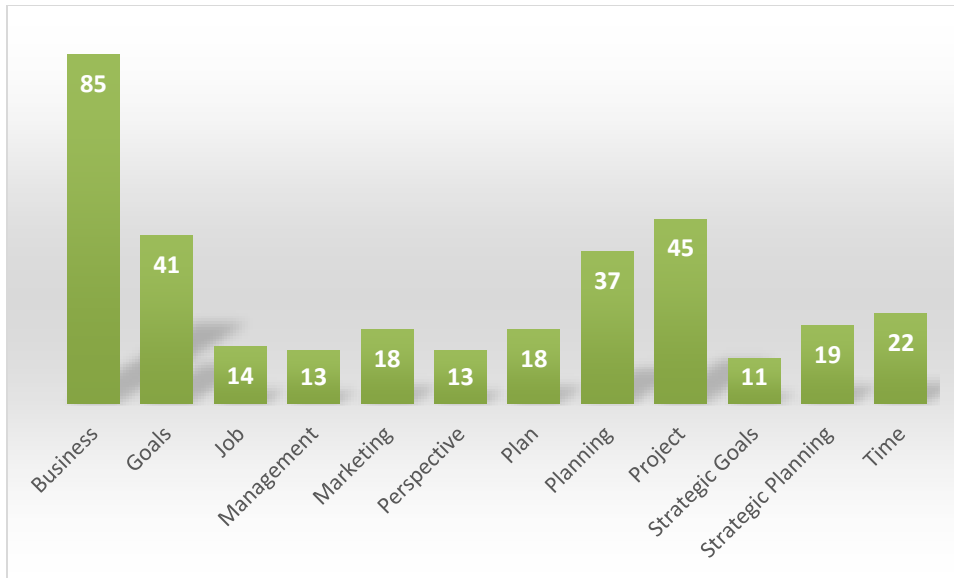
Figure 5. Number of References of High-level Keywords per NVivo

Using deductive coding with direction from the problem statement and the research questions, the researcher listened to each interview multiple times to see phrases with repeated meanings that NVivo may not have recognized. Five themes the researcher felt were predominant and valid to the study were finalized. One discovered theme had a sub-theme. Table 1 shows the main themes discovered, which were a lack of defined strategic goals, the informal use of a project management approach, referrals and relationship-building as an informal strategy for business sustainability, the informal documentation process, and the importance of business knowledge despite the lack of formal business knowledge. The five main themes that emerged from a combination of inductive and deductive coding are in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Discovered Themes

Theme	Description
1 1a	Lack of Defined Strategic Goals Working in The Business vs Working on The Business
2	The Unintentional Use of an Informal Project Management Approach
3	Referrals and Relationship Building as an Informal Strategy for Business Sustainability
4	Informal Documentation Process
5	The Importance of Business Knowledge Despite the Lack of Formal Business Knowledge

Interpretation of the Themes

Theme 1: Lack of Defined Strategic Goals. The theme, lack of defined strategic goals,

emerged through inductive and deductive analysis. When participants were asked to define

strategic goals or describe the business' strategic plans, the term was brought to the fore.

Participants either did not understand the term 'strategic goals' or answered by providing a

personal opinion of the definition of the terminology. According to Carneiro et al. (2019),

businesses are negatively impacted by a lack of knowledge and clarity of strategy. P14O said,

"I'm guessing; I'm thinking it through as I try to answer." P03O said, "I had to Google what

strategic planning was to understand the scope of the question." The question was asked if the

participants had strategic goals. Participants were then asked about defined metrics to help amplify the definition of strategic goal achievement. Figures 6 to 9 below show a visual representation of their answers. This data shows the lack of business knowledge associated with small businesses when forced to start a business with informal methods (Bhuiyan & Ivlevs, 2018).

For goals to be considered strategic, goals must be directly linked to the company, are the results business owners plan to achieve over a specified time, such as increasing market share, increasing customer satisfaction, and becoming an international company, and must be tracked (Aidoo et al., 2018; Haverila & Haverila, 2018). However, contrary to the definition by Haverila and Haverila (2018) and Aidoo et al. (2018), five participants had no goals (P01U, P04O, P08U, P10O, P15U), while five had personal goals (P02O, P06O, P07O, P09O, P12U), including retirement and lifestyle maintenance as depicted by Figures 10 and 11. Of the five participants with goals directly linked to the company, two occasionally tracked progress when business was slow (P02O, P05O). One operational goal was to give good customer service (P07O). However, no processes were written to ensure the desired outcomes, except for the final client sign-off, which, according to Kozyra and Radomska (2020), lacks a step in the strategy procedure. Similarly, almost two-thirds of all participants had no defined metrics and, therefore, could not track goals (P01U, P03O, P06O, P07O, P08U, P09O, P10O, P14O, P15U). Kozyra and Radomska (2020) stated that monitoring progress is a factor in the strategy process. Continuing with Kozyra and Radomska (2020), six successful participants had no defined metrics (P03O, P06O, P07O, P09O, P10O, P14O); of the other four participants with successful businesses who had metrics (P02O, P04O, P05O, P13O), two had a written plan that was tracked to see if the business was on the right path (P02O, P05O). One had the plan in their head (P04O), which

prevented formal tracking. Of the five unsuccessful businesses, three had no defined metrics (P01U, P08U, P15U), while two had, with one being personal (P12U) and one related to the business (P11U). Of the five unsuccessful businesses, one had strategic goals that spanned one-, two- and five-year plans that were tracked (P11U). When asked about metrics, P14O thought, "I don't feel like we have really clear metrics, recordings of what it is that we want to do." And P10O said, "No. I don't goal set either. I take it as everything comes, and we go from there." The lack of engagement in strategic planning and execution activities as described by P01U, P03O, P04O, P06O, P07O, P08U, P09O, P10O, P12U, P14O, P15U proved that micro-businesses did not have defined strategic goals (Galpin, 2018; Gurd et al., 2017).

Haverila & Haverila (2018) regarded strategic goals as linked to the company, but participants considered retirement and lifestyle management to be strategic (P02O, P06O, P07O, P09O, P12U, P14O), and therefore, goals ranged from retirement to operational goals, with most being of a personal nature. Of the five businesses no longer operating, one participant had a formal plan or defined business goal to help them strategically (P11U). Of the ten successful participants, two had a formal business plan and defined metrics (P02O, P05O), which were tracked. As stated by Yang (2021), goals related to the operations and longevity of the business were marketing (P02O), customer service (P07O), and building out departments' competencies needed to offer knowledgeable service to customers and business growth (P13O). However, the goals stated by the participants were informal in how the owner approached them, as defined by Bhuiyan and Ivlevs (2018). Participants with goals, strategic or otherwise, often had the goal "in their head" (P01U, P03O, P06O, P07O, P08U, P10O, P12U, P14O, P15U), suggesting informality (Bhuiyan and Ivlevs (2018). Continuing with the theme of informality, three participants had a retirement goal but no plan on how to achieve the goal (P06O, P07O, P09O).

One participant had an unwritten ten-year goal of sustaining the business through hiring administration (P14O). However, the ten-year timeline had passed without this goal achievement, and the participant did not remember the goal until after the ten years had passed due to not recording the goal and, therefore, not tracking the goals. P14O thoughts on goals were, "Even the strategic goal, the metrics, had we done it formally, we could have easily had them in our face where it's something we could have referred to on a daily, weekly basis. Even if it is as simple as based on the formal business plan board that says these are our goals, these are the steps that need to be taken to achieve them, where we are on the wall. I feel like had it been in our face more, we could have probably achieved them quicker or more effectively." The factors that define strategic goals, such as business outcomes, processes, and tracking (Aidoo et al., 2018), were missing; therefore, Ontario's micro-businesses lacked defined strategic goals.

Theme 1a: Working in the Business Versus Working on the Business. The sub-theme, working in the business versus working on the business, showed a lack of time to work on the business. Brooks et al. (2020) state that time constraint is a challenge for owner-manager entrepreneurs due to the time requirements of the business' day-to-day activities, reducing time spent on strategic planning. This theme confirms the literature. Comments and ideas regarding this theme occurred when discussing strategic planning, setting strategic goals, and then asking 'why.' According to the data from participants, and similar to Figueiredo et al. (2017), working on the business refers to the administration of the back end of the business (P02O, P03, P14O). For micro-business owners, working on the business involves administrative tasks like payrolls, taxes, marketing, long-term and short-term goal setting, implementation and execution, and evaluation of goals (Figueiredo et al., 2017). Confirming Figueiredo et al. (2017) theory, P02O quotes: "'I have gotten so busy that I haven't worked on things to generate more income.' So

now I have to go back to working on the business and try to figure out what worked in the past that I can do again to generate business consistently."

Conversely, as stated by Figueiredo et al. (2017) and Brooks et al. (2020), working in the business meant revenue-generating tasks where entrepreneurs worked directly with clients' projects or services, such as a wedding or building a house for which the client paid (P02O, P03O, P05O, P06O, P07O, P09O, P10O, P13O, P14O, P15U) (Figueiredo et al., 2017). To confirm Brooks et al. (2020), P02O quoted regarding working in the business, "I have had years where I am extremely busy, and without really doing much, it grows, and I am just working in the business" and P14O "I am able to focus more on the operational side of things; when I talk about the operation, I am talking about the day-to-day site management as opposed to administrative tasks." Additionally, Svatošová (2018) stated that micro-business owners allow operational management to take priority over strategic goals, for example, oral communication over written plans, because of an underestimation of the significance of a business strategy.

All participants understand that setting aside time to work on the business is vital to developing strategic goals and creating the steps required to implement and execute strategic goals to achieve business success, as Gagné (2018) stated. Salomaa and Seikkula-Leino (2020) note that knowledge and skills must be converted to business success based on the decisions made regarding execution processes. Further, according to Tan and Wenu (2019), leadership is necessary to navigate a challenging business environment to achieve business goals. P02O understood Tan and Wenu's (2019) theory on leadership and decision-making as quoted, P020 stated,

> The importance of working on the business, because as an entrepreneur, as a
> CEO, the visionary, I'm looking at the future, I'm not looking at my current,

where I currently am, to me that's the person executing everything. I'm working

present tense, but as a visionary, as a CEO, I have to be able to look at the future

tense, and looking at the future tense is when I'm thinking about working on the

business.

As stated by Brooks et al. (2020), ten participants talked about the lack of time to work on the business (P02O, P03O, P06O, P07O, P08U, P09O, P10O, P11O, P14O, P15O). The priority was working in the business because that was where the money came from to fund the business and, in turn, personal lifestyle goals (Brooks et al., 2020). Refusing a revenue-generating job was not an option unless the participants were busy with other clients. P05O quote confirmed Figueiredo et al. (2017) importance of working on the business, "One of my biggest failures initially was not having a financial plan, not having set a budget for myself, even on a monthly basis. I was more so getting the money."

According to de Almeida Parizotto et al. (2020), time is a constraint for owner-manager entrepreneurs, confirmed by P03O quote,

Time Working in the business and on the business are not the same thing. Being a

solopreneur and working in the business does not create a lot of time to work on

the business. I could see as one of the gatekeepers of progress is being able to

have sufficient time to work on the business and not all of the time operating or

running in the business.

Also, P11U, whose business failed, said of working on a business plan "It takes up so much more time from actually just doing the business." All participants agreed that working on the business is essential for long-term success by tracking what is being done and making necessary changes. Similarly, diligence-based strategies include evaluating and managing the

activities that influence business success (Powell, 2017). As confirmed by P08U, who is no longer operational,

>If I had understood where I was compared to where I wanted to be, I would have been able to make more strategic moves or be able to say 'no, I need to do less of this and more of that' in the present tense versus not having the strategy or the plan as a CEO and not setting the framework, projecting myself ahead of time to understand 'am I meeting my goals long-term?'

Despite understanding the importance of strategy, time as a resource is limited, and therefore, participants choose to work in the business instead of working on the business (Brooks et al., 2020).

Theme 2: The Unintentional Use of an Informal Project Management Approach. This theme emerged with the information given by the participants over two different topics of discussion, which suggested to the researcher that project management is unintentional and should be explored further (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews began with a discussion on strategic goals. During the discussion on strategic goals, participants (P02O, P03O, P05O, P06O, P07O, P09O, P10O, P11U, P12U, P14O) described areas of project management in the approaches taken at various times in the business operation, which led to a deductive analysis of the theme regarding the use of an informal project management approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In discussing strategic planning, P03O said,

>So if I were thinking about an event that I was doing, I'm thinking about after I've executed that job. When I think about how I market my work online to attract the type of clients that would want me to replicate something like this for them, that is exactly what the strategy is. I'm actually already thinking about content creation

before I start installation because I know how pivotal it is to get proper content.

I'm making sure my client is pleased with the job.

The second area of discussion was project management, which started with asking participants about perspectives on project management. These participants expressed no use of it (P01U, P03O, P05O, P06O, P07O, P08U, P09O, P10O, P11U, P12U, P14O, P15U). The discussion on the use of project management then confirmed the unintentional use of an informal project management approach through their disjointed style of operation as described by Harrington et al. (2018). Table 2 highlights participants' perspectives on project management, which were not consistently implemented and were sometimes thought of on the spot during the interview. Further discussion of the phases of project management often reveals to the participants that a project management approach is utilized in some business areas (P03O, P05O, P06O, P08U, P09O, P10O, P11U, P12U, P14O, P15U).

Participants initially believed project management applies to large businesses that have dedicated project management personnel (P01O, P03O, P06O, P08U, P09O, P10O, P11U, P15U) and stated in the literature by Anderson and Ziek (2015) and Sane (2019). P11U confirmed the literature: "I also look at project management in the sense that if I'm working for somebody, not necessarily working for myself." As seen in the quotations above, a disjointed perspective in business practices by micro-business owners coupled with the lack of business knowledge (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017; Harrington et al., 2018) explains the unintentionality of project management. The steps in informal project management are a logical sequence based on how micro-business owners identify decisions, the order of decisions and actions taken, and the accountabilities and deliverables demanded by clients (Chrisman et al., 2016). Instead of planning, the steps in informal project management are intuitively done by the study participants,

with no planning, making the results unintentional.

Table 3 shows the informal project management process group developed based on descriptive words and phrases used by participants (P02O, P03O, P05O, P06O, P07O, P09O, P10O, P12U, P13O, P14O) in describing their process of executing jobs and when comparing their process with those of the formal project management process according to the Project Management Institute's definition (Project Management Institute, 2017). The project management process described by all participants is informal because some are seen in the formal framework described by the Project Management Institute.

Still, many of the sub-processes in the formal framework, like plan risk management, plan stakeholders, estimate activity duration, and control costs are not utilized by micro-business owners. Figures 16 through 20 show a visual representation of the tasks included in the phases of project management based on their experience. According to de Almeida Parizotto et al. (2020), informal processes apply in micro-businesses instead of using a project management approach. However, of the ten individuals currently operational, all used an informal project management framework to describe their operational activities. Informal framework description includes waiting for clients to initiate projects, little information gathering, and only five participants not scheduling all areas of the project. Of the five unsuccessful businesses, one recognized utilizing a project management framework in the individual discussion (P12U). At the same time, another considered their processes under a project management framework during the focus group but not during the individual interviews (P11U). The other three unsuccessful participants did not use a project management framework (P01U, P08U, P15U). However, before the interview, none of the participants were consciously aware of the framework employed, which is consistent with the literature (de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020).

Similar to the informal approach to processes by small businesses described by Bouwman et al. (2018), none of the participants used project management software. However, they used a project management approach in the day-to-day jobs and larger one-off projects when being done, as described below. In discussing the processes associated with project management, participants were told the five phases: initiation, planning, execution, monitoring and control, and closing (Bosslet et al., 2021). From an informal perspective (Sane, 2019), all but one participant could describe how each process applied to their day-to-day jobs (P01U). Supporting the theory of informal project management, P06O stated,

> When I initiate the project, the first part of initiation is pricing. I'll get a price from the plumber, the electrician, and myself. Once I get that, I send a quote to the owner of the business, saying this is the cost. If the owner says, 'ok, you've got that job,' then I say to the electrician, 'ok, this is what I need, and this is when you need to start.

Also, P06O said,

> Re planning, before the case arrives, we go in and layout the store, and then I'd say to the plumber, 'this is the nights we are working,' I'll be on-site to supervise them to show how we need the stuff done. Once that is done, I get the electrician and myself to lay out the refrigeration line, and once all that is done, I'll call the manufacturer and say I am ready for the case. They will ship the case, and I start putting the cases together.

Additionally, P07O quoted, "You meet the client, you discuss what you need to do, that's the initiation stage; you sit down you plan, that's the next stage; you would definitely go through all the stages in what I am doing, it is exactly that." And P09O further added,

Initiation. It's getting the job started. Planning, you are going in and planning, and

the first thing is making sure everything is safe for everybody. It is probably the

first thing you do. Then you try to get it lined up for each process that's coming

along, and you are organizing delivery. Every job that we do is different.

Execution, get there on time. Monitoring and control is one of my weaknesses.

Continuing the informal project management approach in the literature, P03O explained,

The planning stage is usually the inquiry stage where I am going through; I ask

them detailed questions about their event. Can I execute that job in the proper

timeframe? How much time do I need between jobs, like all the logistics,

planning, and timeframes that I need in order to make a proper event? Monitoring

and control, how I would interpret that is making sure our timeline is kept; if I

have to make adjustments for that, then I have to either edit the design or omit

certain things or run off into time that we didn't allocate for as long as it's

available.

Participant's approach to project management is considered informal because of a lack

of consistency across most participants and a lack of formal documentation (Agrawal & Chari,

2017; Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). Participants actions are inconsistent because some (P02O, P03O,

P05O, P06O, P11U, P11U) will engage in information gathering sometimes, some (P03O, P11U)

will monitor timelines sometimes and some (P06O, P09O, P11U, P14O) will create quality

control tasks. Documentation is done through a mobile device in the form of emails, contracts,

and invoices with no preplanning or consideration for documentation.

Furthermore, not all tasks, as defined by the Project Management Institute, are utilized by

micro-businesses (Project Management Institute, 2017). According to Pellerin and Perrier

(2018), in practice, project management is done by overlapping processes where necessary to accelerate meeting milestones. Similarly, in all cases with participants, processes overlapped. For example, initiation, planning, and execution are done simultaneously, while at other times, planning, execution, and monitoring and control are also carried out simultaneously, as shown in Figure 21. Confirming Pellerin and Perrier (2018), P14O said, "Depending on the site, depending on what's happening, depending on how many projects are on the go, initiation and planning and implementation might all be crunched together." The information collected shows that micro-businesses in Ontario utilize project management unintentionally and informally (Chrisman et al., 2016).

Theme 3: Referrals and Relationship Building as an Informal Strategy for Business Sustainability. The theme, referrals and relationship building as an informal strategy for business sustainability, was initially discovered through inductive analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This theme is relevant because of the impact on the business' success. An ideal execution process integrates intangible factors with activities to ensure success (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020). Thirteen participants mentioned the words referrals, relationships, word of mouth, or a phrase denoting referral as a marketing tool (P01U, P02O, P03O, P04O, P05O, P06O, P07O, P08U, P09O, P10O, P13O, P14O, P15U) which shows intangible factors mentioned by Kozyra and Radomska (2020). Further analysis showed seven participants intentionally had referral as their primary marketing strategy for acquiring new clients (P01U, P02O, P04O, P05O, P08U, P14O, P10O), while four used referrals unintentionally (P03O, P09O, P13O, P16O). Two participants did not have a referral system (P11U, P12U). According to Eggers et al. (2020), micro-business owners used an ad hoc decision-making approach, which is not good; however, the intentional and unintentional approach used by the participants above suggests both ad hoc

and deliberate methods were employed.

Phrases or words related to referrals or relationships were employed to discuss strategies for acquiring clients and ensuring continued business operations and profitability. However, only twice was the theme mentioned in a sentence with the word strategic (P02O, P14O), which suggests that strategy is an unintentional by-product of referral as a marketing strategy (Drouin et al., 2019). Based on Figure 12 below, referral as a marketing strategy is successfully used as an intentional and unintentional marketing tool more often than other uses (Katsikeas et al., 2017). P07O, without confirming Eggers et al. (2020) said,

I think most people feel more comfortable if you have a job that needs to get

done; you most likely will look for someone who has used one in the past. And

then that's where the referral comes; it carries a lot of weight.

In contrast to Eggers et al. (2020), two participants built a referral system in their processes to ensure the acquisition of new clients (P02O, P14O). P02O confirmed the formality of their process with,

I have a system in place that as soon as they are signed on, I am asking questions

along the lines of 'if you are happy with my services at the end of the day, is it ok

for me to ask you for a referral?' It needs to be a systematic way that when I am

doing my intake, I can include that in my questionnaire.

As shown in Figure 13, the reason for a referral or relationship-driven strategy ranged from the industry's dependence on a referral program to the need to increase the number of clients. P05O quoted,

Building relationships, it does matter because that's where I can say, I've seen it

help me the most in my business, it is having good relationships with people

because sometimes they will come through for me more or better or at a very tight

deadline."

And P14O "Having good strong relationships is profitable because it's in due time turns

projects which equal money." An informal referral strategy is understandable because many

entrepreneurs started their businesses part-time and from within an industry where participants

already worked (Bhuiyan & Ivlevs, 2018). A culture of informal learning was created, leading to

informal business practices such as the referral strategy (Brooks et al., 2020). Therefore, these

participants already had a developed network to use in acquiring clients. Confirming the

literature regarding informal methods of starting the business (Bhuiyan & Ivlevs, 2018), P08F

quotes, "For me, it was this idea of doing it part-time until I could hopefully grow to that

uncomfortable place where you are saying, can I now afford to do this and make that jump?" and

P14O "When we first started, I think for the first year and a half I was doing it part-time."

Theme 4: Informal Documentation Process. Another theme that emerged through

inductive analysis, was the lack of a formal documentation process, where information was

considered to be stored in *the head* because no information was formally organized and written

down for future learning. According to Grabowski and Stawasz (2017), micro-business owners

focus on current tasks without considering documentation and knowledge. When asked directly

about documentation processes, participants often answered that information was accessed

through mental recall. Confirming Grabowski and Stawasz's (2017) theory, of the fifteen

participants, nine mentioned keeping the information stored in memory (P01U, P02O, P03O,

P06O, P07O, P09O, P11U, P14O, P15U), while three noted no system for keeping track of

information (P08O, P10O, P12U). P06O confirmed the literature with, "To tell you the truth, it's

in my head. I keep a lot of things in my head," and P10O, "I don't really track any of that. If

someone would want to take over my business, they would have no clue at all." Further, P03O said that because of being a solopreneur, there was no point in writing down anything. The consensus on why documentation in a formal manner is not done is due to lack of time, as described in the theme of working in the business versus working on the business. Finally, P07O said, "There is not a lot of record keeping because essentially small business owners don't have the time and the mental dexterity, I find, to keep records."

However, a trend emerged in the data where documentation for the micro-business owner regarding business processes does not exist in the same way for larger corporations (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). Still, an informal one does exist. Confirming the literature, P03O said, "My formal answer is no; I don't have everything written down because everything I just told you comes from my mind and experience. I don't have a document that dictates the hard copy of the process step by step." Figure 14 shows the visualization of sources of documentation most used by micro-business owners. Following the trend of the informality of their operations, the main form of documentation for micro-businesses includes email, invoicing and accounting software, contracts and work orders, CRM software, and spreadsheets to keep track of clients and jobs to be executed (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). Further confirmation from P09O, "On my phone, anything that is discussed on a job that changes, anything like that, I just shoot an email, and I'll ask to put that in an email. I put it in an email, and they verify it. Or they put it in an email, and I verify it." The predominant tool used in documentation is the smartphone (P03O, P06O, P07O, P09O, P10O, P11U, P12U, P14O). Continuing the information on micro-business informality in the literature (Svatošová, 2018), P07O said, "Most of it is done on my phone. Sometimes on my notepad, depending on how big the job is." Additionally, as a documentation tool, taxes provide information on the company's health at the end of the year. Participants were asked how

profitability was determined; seven said taxes (P01U, P05O, P06O, P07O, P09O, P10O, P14O), and two performed checks throughout the year on average quarterly (P02O, P05O). P07O quote: "When I calculate how much I have left and how much I generated for the year, based on my taxes, that's when I look to see how profitable I was." Understanding the informality of documentation for micro-businesses is crucial because it adds to the knowledge that impacts the continuity and success of the business (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017).

Theme 5: The Importance of Business Knowledge despite the Lack of Formal Business Knowledge. The final theme, the importance of business knowledge despite the lack of formal business knowledge, emerged through deductive analysis because the literature believes the business is impacted by knowledge. The level of knowledge determines the business's probability of success or failure (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). As depicted in Figure 15, of the fifteen participants interviewed, eleven had no formal business management training (P03O, P04O, P06O, P07O, P08U, P09O, P10O, P11U, P13O, P14O, P15U) which confirms the literature which referenced micro-business owners' lack of knowledge when starting a business (Bhuiyan & Ivlevs, 2018). Of the eleven, two were trained in construction project management (P07O, P10O); one was trained as a corporate project manager (P13O). The literature states that entrepreneurs acquire knowledge through informal training (Alonso-Dos-Santos et al., 2021). Confirming the literature, of the participants lacking the required business knowledge, four believe in outsourcing or creating partnerships to acquire the knowledge (P01U, P05O, P13O, P14O), and four have resorted to various levels of self-taught and online training (P02O, P03O, P05O, P09O). Six participants did not try to gain knowledge because of a lack of time (P04O, P06O, P07O, P08U, P10O, P15U). One participant sought community training before starting the business (P11U). Figure 15 visually represents each participant's business training knowledge

base. Despite lacking formal business training, participants sometimes added the importance of business knowledge without being asked (P03O, P05O, P06O, P07O, P08U, P09O, P10O, P11U, P12U, P14O, P15U) as stated by Tan & Wenu (2019). Participants recognized the value of knowledge and ensured the business acquired basic knowledge but not on strategy formulation and execution (Hysa et al., 2017).

The lack of formal business knowledge or understanding of formal business terminology, caused participants to often use examples in discussing an idea. Despite the participants' lack of formal business knowledge, all participants believe that some business knowledge is essential to success, as Tan and Wenu (2019) stated. As mentioned in the literature, P08O says regarding the importance of knowledge,

I think knowledge is everything. Because I can be knowledgeable at electrical

work, I know my stuff inside out and how to wire just about everything. Great!

That means I can wire the house, but what else don't I know how to do? What

else is awkward for me, but my business needs it? You have to be able to look at

yourself and know what I am good at and what I am strong at because your

business will almost be a reflection of your health in different areas.

As reflected in the literature, all participants felt challenged by the lack of business knowledge and time to gain relevant knowledge. Due to the lack of knowledge and management skills, micro-businesses are hindered in the efficient use of competitive advantage (Brooks et al., 2020; Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017).

Representation and Visualization of the Data

The tables and figures below are listed based on grouping goals, strategy, and project management.
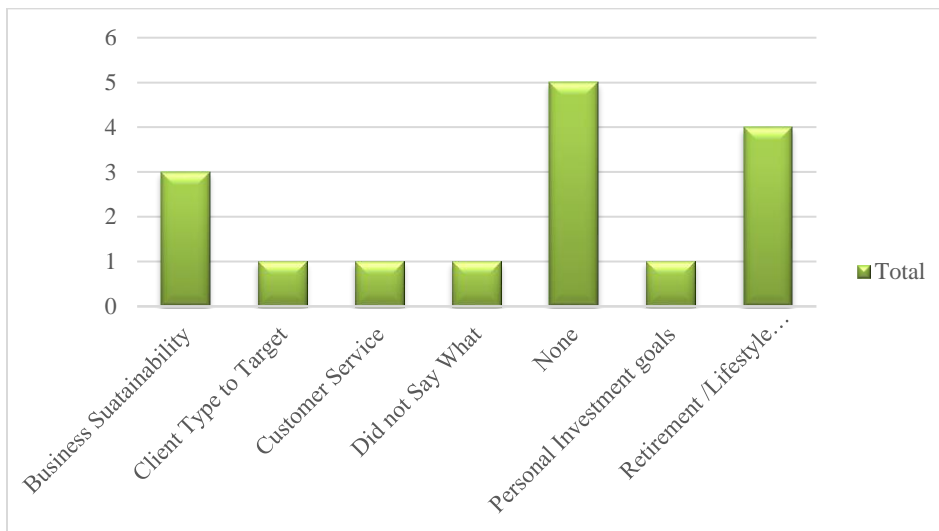
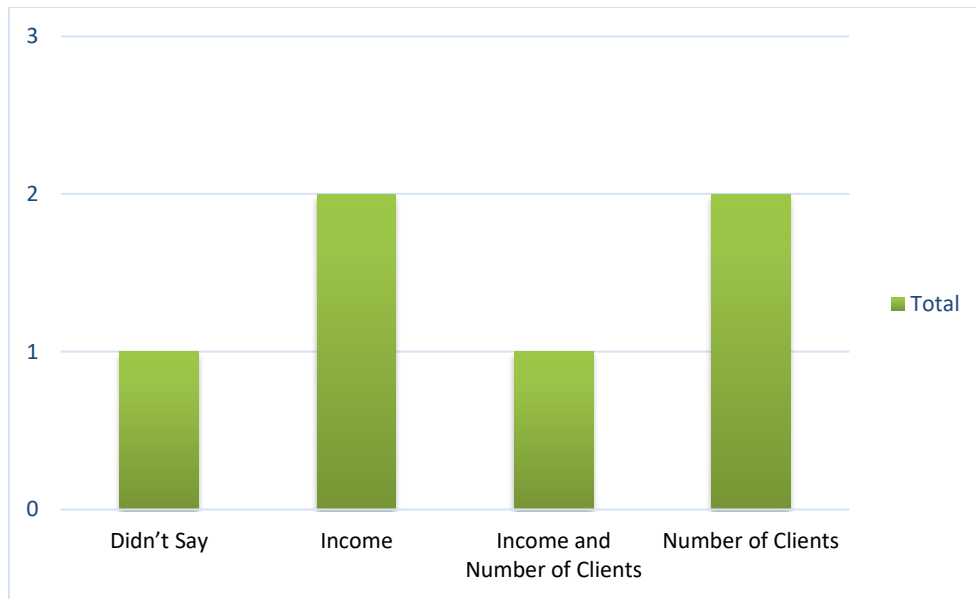*Figure 6. Participants with Goals*
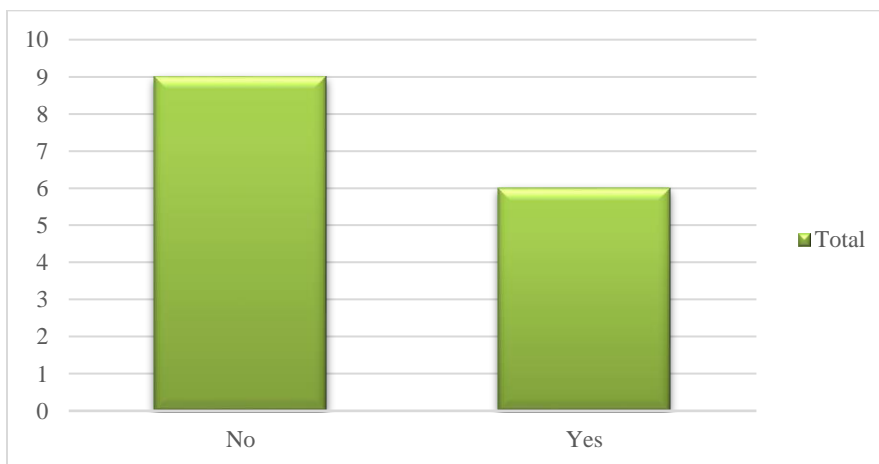
Figure 7. Participants with Defined Metrics
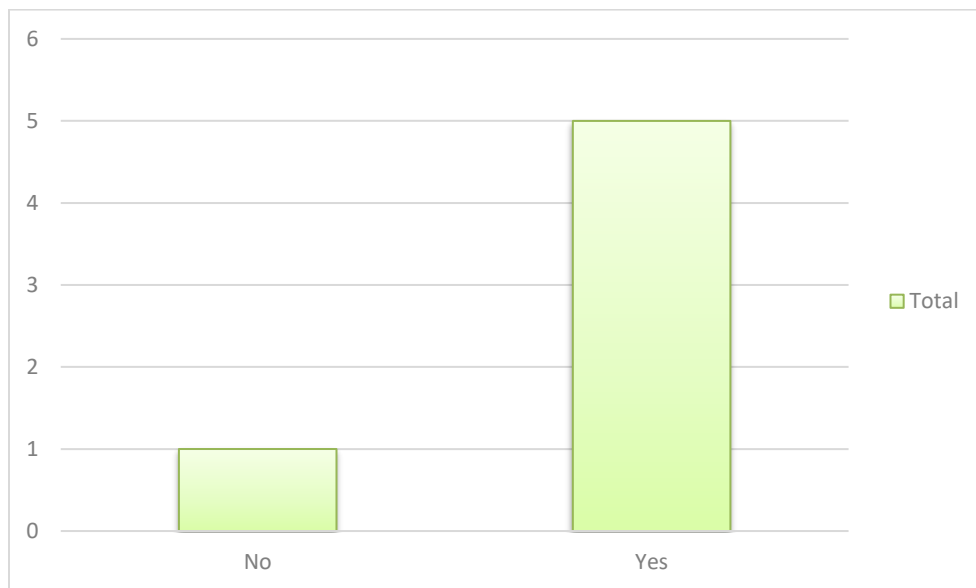
Figure 8. What are the Defined Metrics?

Figure 9. Are Metrics Tracked?
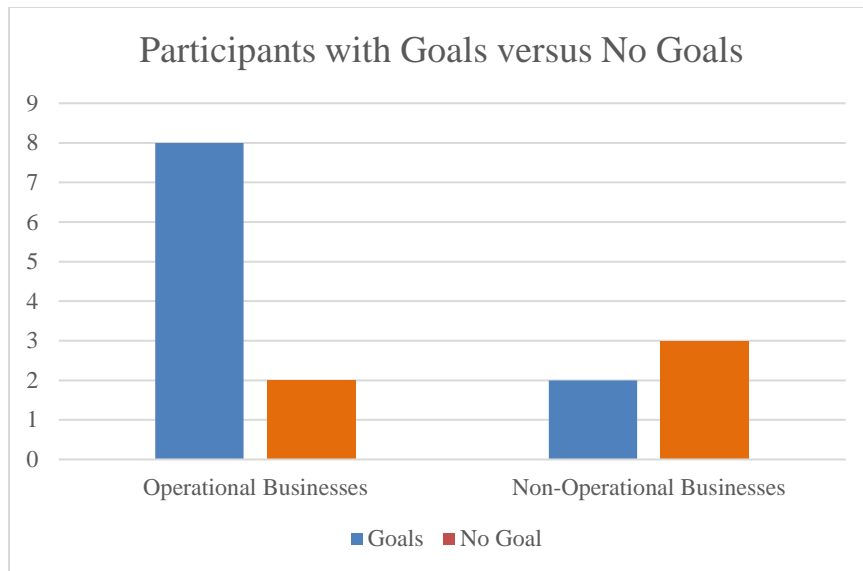
Figure 10. Comparison Chart of Participants with Goals versus No Goals
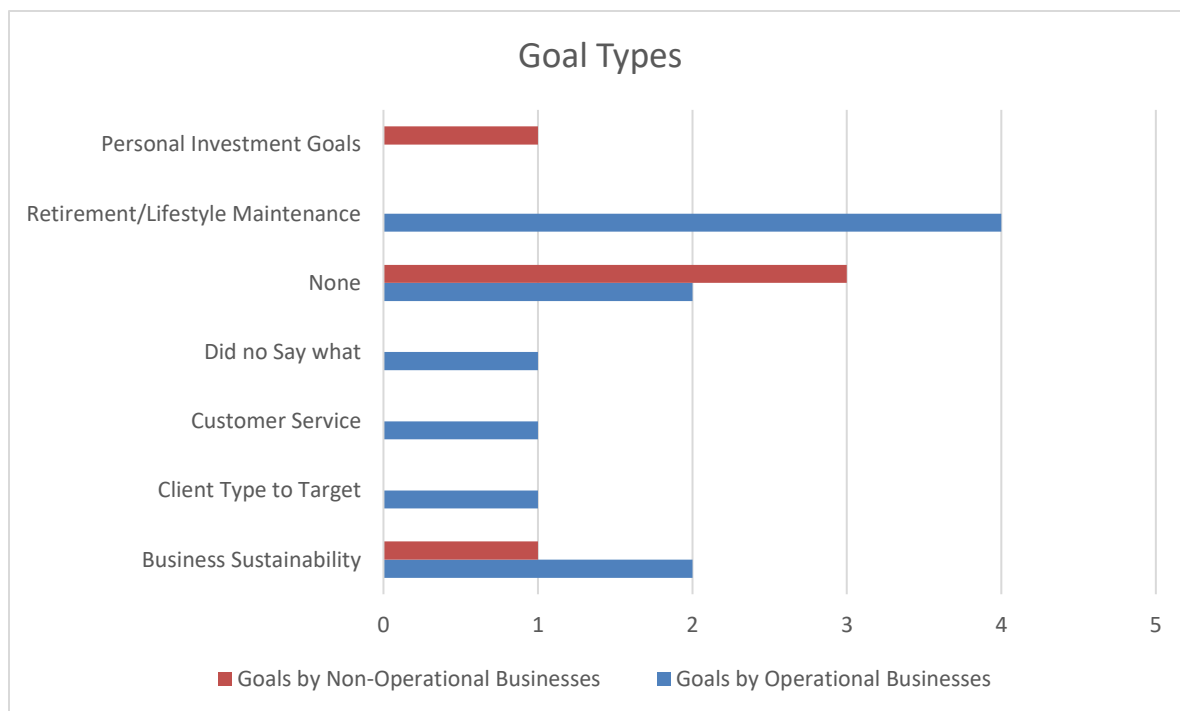
Figure 11. Comparison of Types of Goals Between Successful and Unsuccessful Micro-
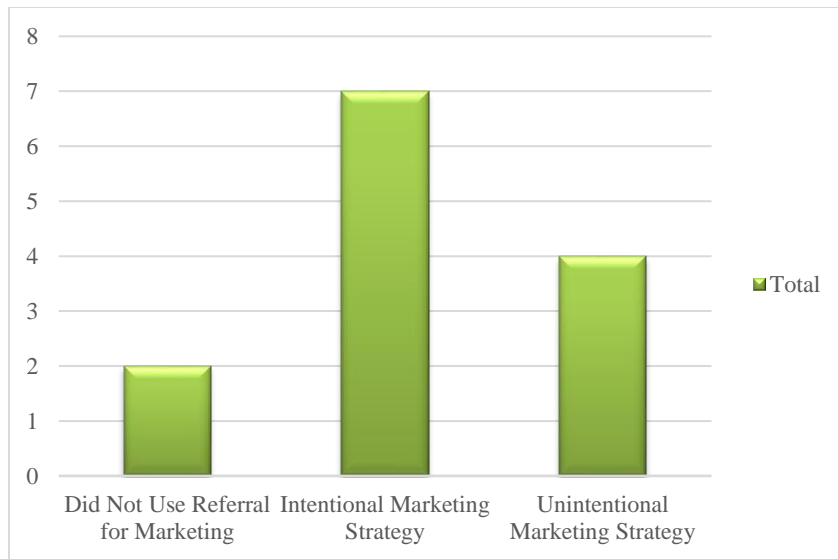
Businesses

Figure 12. Referral as an Intentional or Unintentional Marketing Strategy

Figure 13. Reasons for a Referral Marketing Strategy

Figure 14. Informal Sources of Documentation

Figure 15. Participants' Business Training Description

Table 2

Perception of Project Management in Mirco-Business

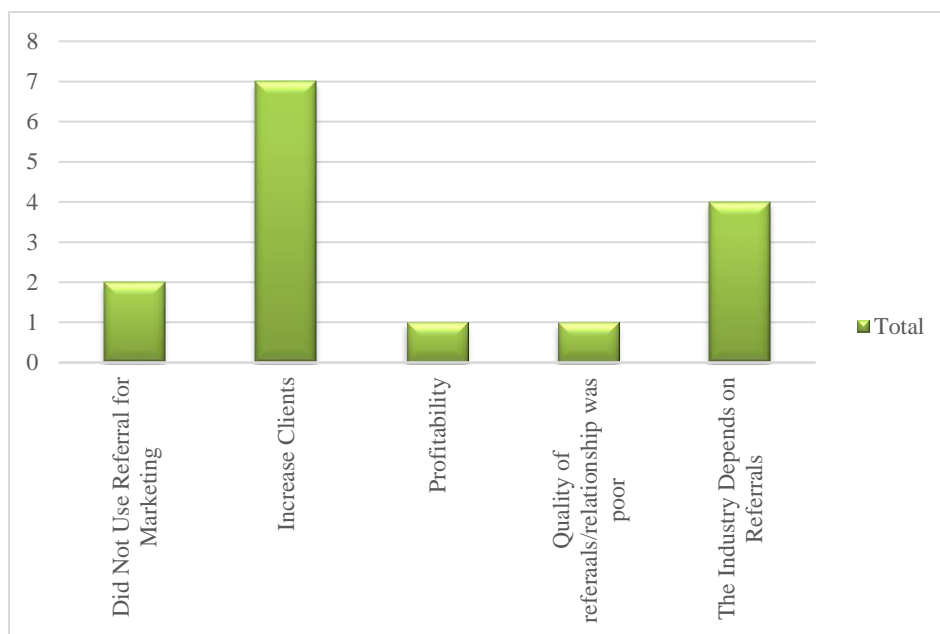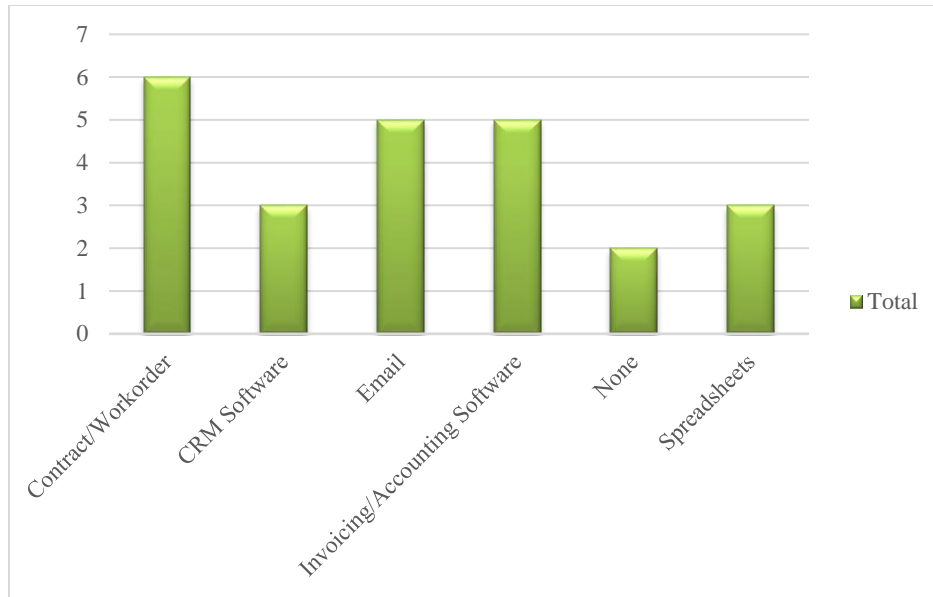| Participants	Perception Quotes
01U	"I think I am still exploring, and I don't think I have refined a strong strategic plan in a project sense."
02O	"So, I think of projects as it could be internal and external in terms of delivering your value to the market." And "I think I do all of them."
03O	"It is so funny; I do so many innate things that I don't even think about them as processes."
04O	"One example would be, which is very common, the marketing campaign; it has a definitive beginning and ending, very specific, it could be something as simple as an RSP campaign."
05O	"I will use weddings as an example; that is a project. It is a very high-intensity project, and it's just a matter of coordination and putting the right components together to fulfill the mission."
06O	"That's what I actually do. Pretty much that is what I do; I'm a project manager."
07O	"It's more difficult to do because, theoretically, it never truly applies on the job. Part of project management in that aspect is learning just by experiencing. You infuse the two models, and then you make it work for you."
08U	"I think I would benefit from the thinking and using it at different phases, whether initiating the business or trying to develop my program roster."

09O	"In terms of my work, I guess it's trying to get to the end the most efficient way possible. Organizing all of the trades coming in, scheduling them to come to do their work."
10O	"The project manager receives the contract and quotes and pricing. So basically, what the project manager does is budgets for all the materials, the labor costs, overages, stuff like that."
11U	"That's a great question because I really don't know how to define project management. I think I look at project management in the sense that I do it if I'm working for somebody, not necessarily working for myself."
12U	"When I see a job, I put a time span on it. So, project management, as you say it, plays a major role in most of what I did based on what you just said."
13O	"And then the business strategist will put a plan together on a process where we then execute."
14O	When I think of project management, I think of a big task that must be dealt with, like a project or a new job. Project management is really a methodology for a sequence of operations to achieve a particular objective, what the necessary steps are, or what deliverables need to be achieved or attained to be considered successful.
15U	You are working on a specific task that you project to have completed by a particular time or are looking for a certain result from that project that you are working on.
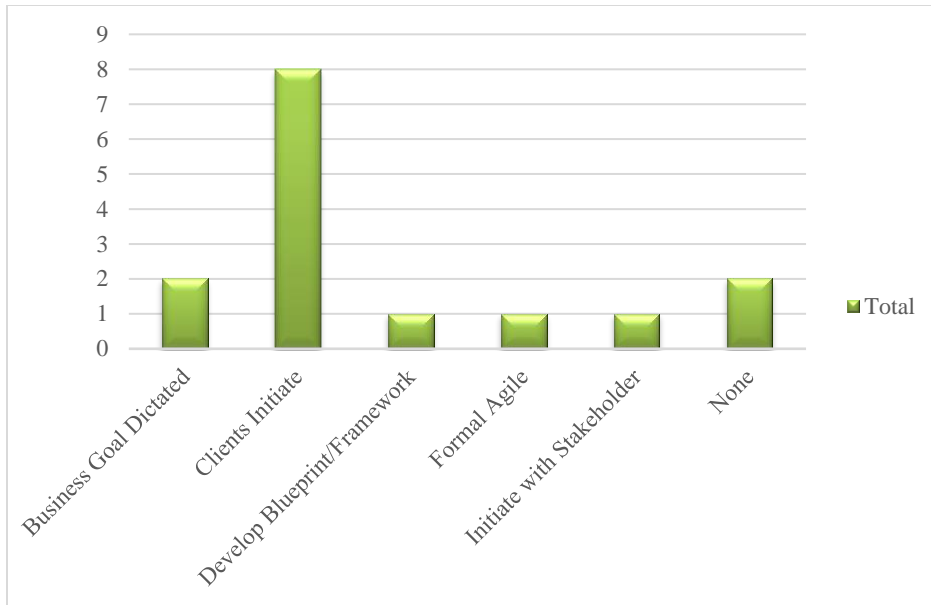
Figure 16. Initiation
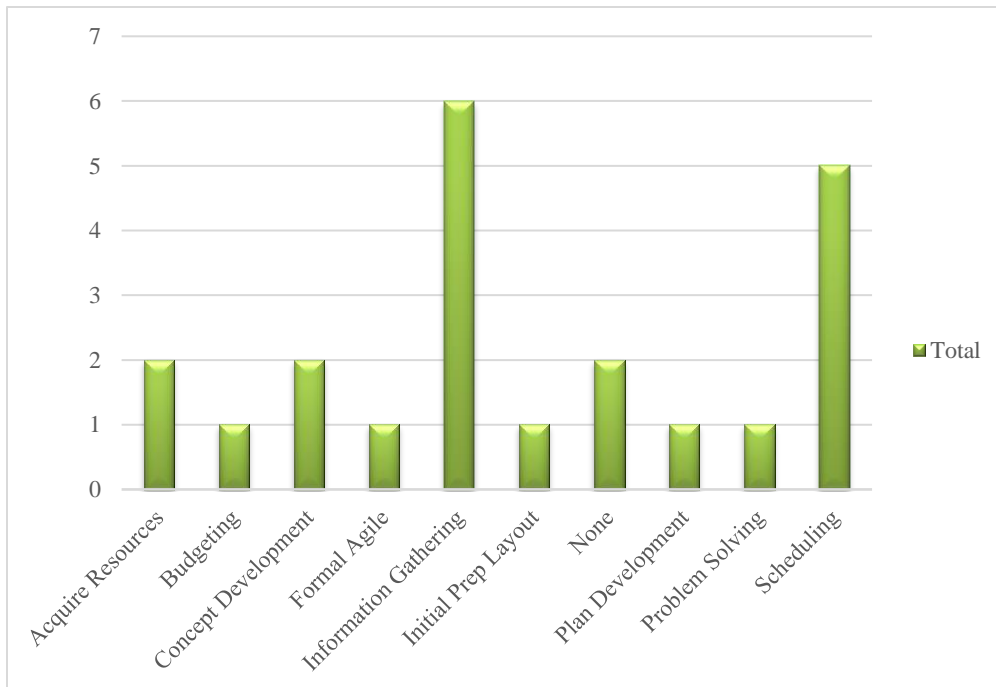
Figure 17. Planning
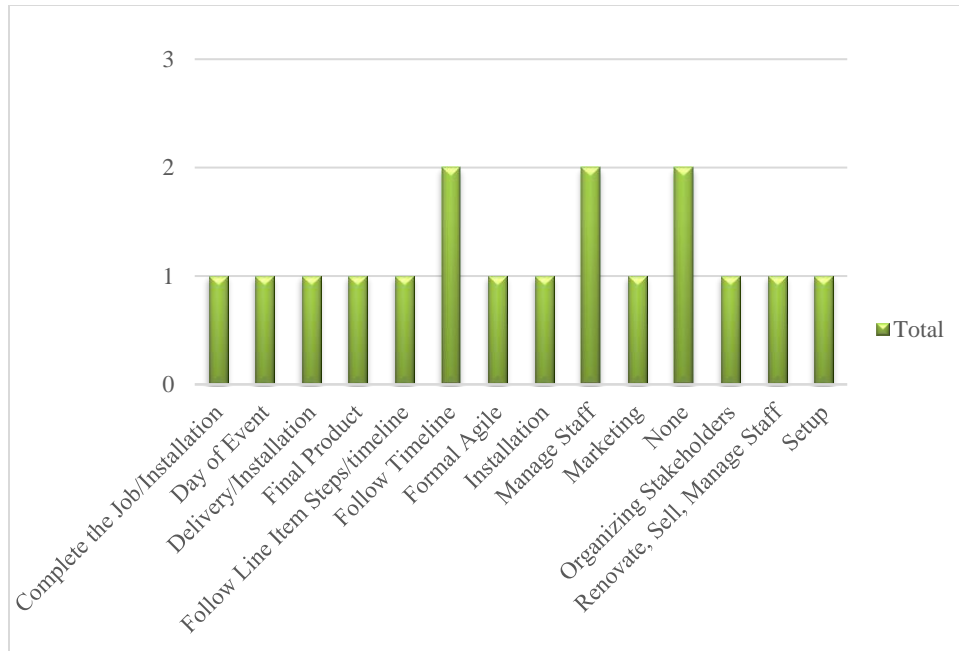
Figure 18. Execution
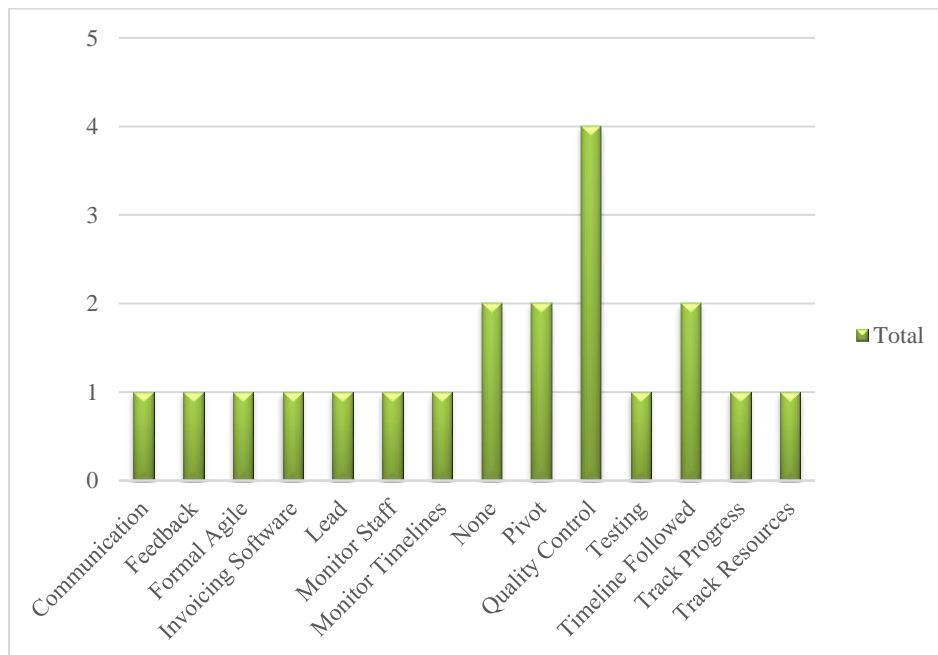
Figure 19. Monitoring and Control
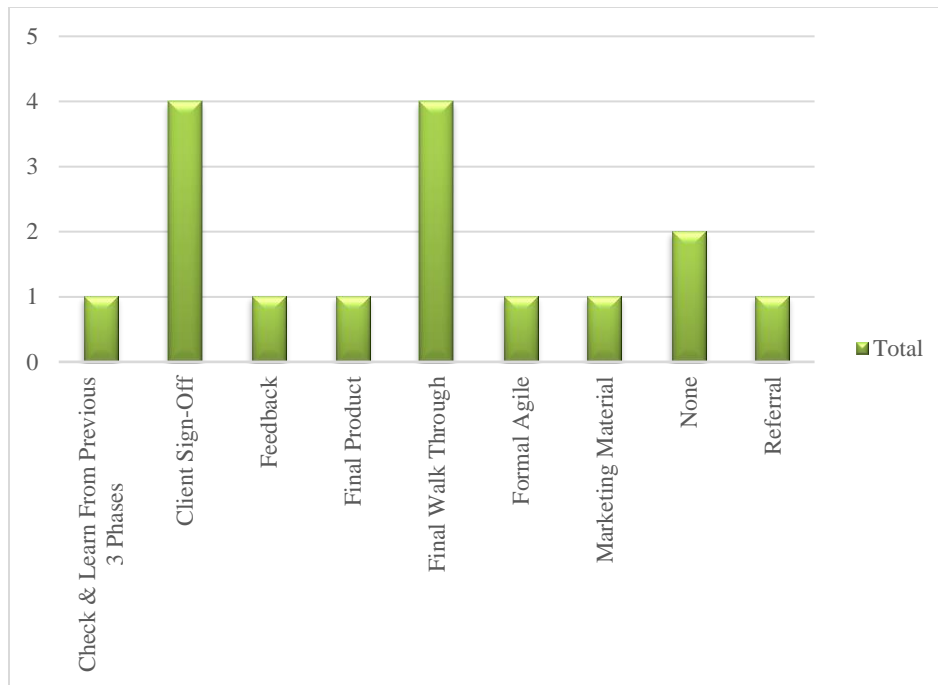
Figure 20. Closing

Table 3 emerged from the words and phrases most used by participants in discussing their

process when working on a revenue-generating job or a project for the business' sustainability.

The words and phrases are first charted in Figures 14 to 18, then compressed to develop Table 3.

Some words and phrases were pooled where meanings were similar. For example, track progress

and follow timelines were combined.

Table 3

Informal Project Management Phases

Initiation	Planning	Execution	Monitoring & Control	Closing
Clients Initiate	Information Gathering	Manage Staff	Quality Control	Client Sign-Off
Business Goal Dictated	Scheduling	Follow Timeline/Line Items	Timeline Followed	Final Walk Through
	Concept Development	Installation	Pivot	
	Acquire Resources			
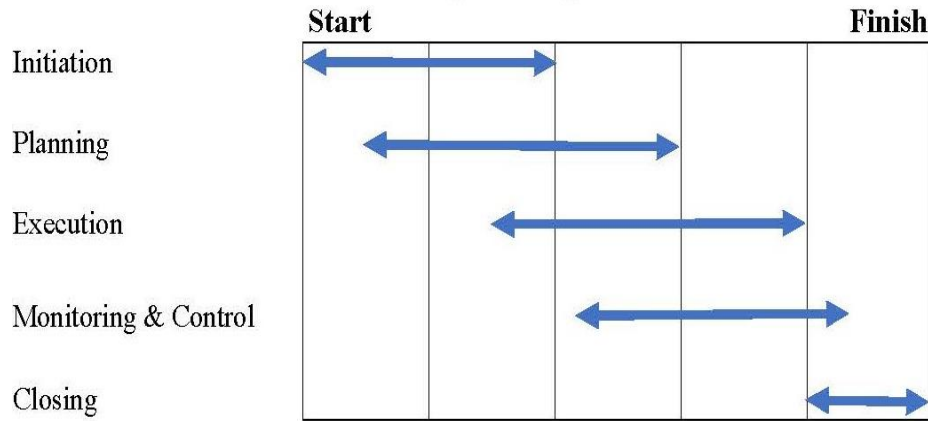
Figure 21. Informal Project Management Process Flow

Relationship of the Findings

As important as strategy relates to the survival of micro-businesses, little is known about strategy within micro-businesses (Harrington et al., 2020). Micro-businesses in Ontario operate in an informal nature and have rules that apply and work for them. These rules are inherently different but productive when implemented and followed. Micro-businesses in Ontario do not operate with strategic goals but have general and personal goals that are met through the business's success. For this reason, the problem statement and research questions will be answered with a view to goals as defined by micro-businesses.

The Research Questions. *RQ1.* What are the approaches micro-business owners use to achieve strategic goals? As mentioned in the conceptual framework section of the research proposal, a unique attribute of micro-businesses is their informal way of operating, which impacts how decisions are made (Bustami & Wong, 2020; Engström & McKelvie, 2017). This informality relates to the data showing a lack of defined strategic goals, the unintentional use of an informal project management approach, and referrals and relationship building as an informal strategy for business sustainability. As mentioned in the discovered themes and supported by

Albala et al. (2021), micro-business owners do not have defined strategic goals. Goals for micro-businesses are often based on or conceived through lifestyle requirements, which leads to entrepreneurs being busy working in the micro-business and not on the business. Working in the business is because of not placing the focus on the business but on meeting lifestyle goals. The approach to achieving lifestyle goals is a referral strategy to ensure new and consistent revenue-generating jobs. In executing revenue-generating jobs, an informal project management approach ensured clients were satisfied, which led to more referrals from satisfied clients.

RQ2. What are the differences between micro-businesses achieving strategic goals versus when those goals were not achieved? Based on the data collected, one difference when micro businesses achieved strategic goals versus when the goals were not achieved can be seen when examining Figures 8 and 9; sixty percent of unsuccessful micro-business owners had no goals, whereas eighty percent of successful micro-businesses owners had personal goals working towards, which would suggest having goals impact the achievement of goals as supported by Gagné (2018). According to Gagné (2018), goals create a motivating environment. A second area where successful micro-businesses differed from unsuccessful ones was the effective execution of a referral strategy. Excluding outliers, when the goals succeeded, the micro-business owner had a goal, often informal and in their head, to work towards. For example, successful entrepreneurs were working towards sustaining a lifestyle after retirement or wanted to ensure their clients had the highest level of service, consequently, ensuring services were good enough to gain more revenue-paying jobs and sustaining referrals by clients. By contrast, entrepreneurs of non-successful businesses relied on a budget for traditional marketing like paid social media marketing rather than designing a referral system. Achieving goals was also impacted by the industry in which micro-businesses operated; a high-demand industry impacted

success. Regarding referral, P07O said, "The field that I'm in, there is a high demand for it. Whether you are good at what you do or not good at what you do, you're still turning away jobs." Mintzberg (1978) believes business strategy is not straightforward; it is sometimes emergent, where it is realized but not planned as confirmed by the data.

RQ3. Given the understanding of these differences, for micro-businesses, what is the role of project management in the achievement of strategic goals and the minimization of potential business failure? According to de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020, project management benefits operation and growth activities, thus achieving strategic goals. However, in this study, a project management approach benefited operations primarily because of the monitoring and control phase. The monitoring and control phase was used to ensure the requirements were met because a happy client was needed to ensure new businesses. Therefore, using the project management approach allowed the micro-business owner to control the success of a project's planning and execution while monitoring and controlling the various elements and tasks to ensure the final result leads to new business. According to Bourgault and Niknazar (2017), the phases of project management can be used regardless of business size. As seen in the study, successful and unsuccessful micro-business owners utilize the informal use of project management who participated in the field study. The informal use of project management allowed participants to keep track of current jobs and the output quality (Abdilahi et al., 2020), which impacts new and future clients. New and future clients effectively ensure that the entrepreneurs' personal goals are met. Hence, project management is important but is done informally by micro-business owners, as Harrington et al. (2018) confirmed.

The Conceptual Framework. The main components of the research framework include owner-manager entrepreneurs, strategic goals, strategy execution, and goal achievement. Of the

skills mentioned in the conceptual framework of the research proposal, the competencies of micro-businesses are the same as those of the owner-manager entrepreneur because the business is focused on the creator's abilities (Engström & McKelvie, 2017). Similarly, in the field study data, entrepreneurs had technical competency and limited management skills in managing resources. Therefore, the theme here is working in the business versus working on the business, the importance of knowledge despite the lack of formal business knowledge. Micro-businesses in Ontario spend more time using their technical competencies to generate revenue to achieve their personal goals, which are met through the continued operation of the business, similar to the theory of Engström and McKelvie (2017). According to Grabowski and Stawasz (2017), in the research proposal, the level of knowledge of the micro-business owner determines the business's probability of success or failure. The demands of generating revenue, causes entrepreneurs to focus on acquiring revenue rather than on acquiring important information, therefore, working in the business and not on the business, which confirms the analysis of Grabowski and Stawasz (2017). Micro-businesses lack formal business knowledge, impacting their lack of work on the business. The importance of business knowledge forces them to acquire basic knowledge such as pricing, often learned over time on the job, as stated by Alonso-Dos-Santos et al. (2021) in discussion informal training.

The second component of the conceptual framework is strategic goals. Of the fifteen entrepreneurs interviewed, only three had any strategic goal (P11U, P13O, P14O), and only two had the goal written down (P11U, P13O). Seven participants had general goals (P02O, P03O, P05O, P06O, P07O, P09O, P10O, P12U), not strategic ones. According to Van den Steen (2018), as stated in the research proposal section, entrepreneurial competencies must be visible to achieve strategic goals and work in tandem with a strong execution strategy. Since there were no

formal strategic goals for the business, the relationship between this area of the conceptual framework and the data was based on micro-businesses having general goals but a strategy focused on client satisfaction and no formal execution strategy. Therefore, the theme here is the lack of defined strategic goals with a sub-theme of working in the business versus working on the business.

Participants know that working in the business is different from working on the business. The lack of strategy refers to firms not following a deliberate path but operating without a coherent decision-making approach (Eggers et al., 2020), as seen in the field study data. Similarly, limited time and much demand for their time, caused participants (P01U, P03O, P04O, P06O, P07O, P08U, P09O, P10O, P12U, P14O, P15U) to admit choosing not to spend the required time on creating strategic goals. These participants also decided not to spend the time to gain the necessary business education to work on the business in developing and executing strategic goals.

The relationship for strategy execution, the third component in the conceptual framework, fell to the unintentional use of an informal project management approach. The conceptual framework shows an informal approach to strategy execution. Harrington et al. (2018) state that micro-business owners take a disorganized perspective in the formulation and execution of strategy. As shown in the research proposal, processes in executing strategy by micro-businesses are often simplified into the following components: required tasks, actors, task assignment or delegation, sequence of actions, accountabilities, and deliverables (Chrisman et al., 2016). The field data shows that all participants take a disjointed approach to running the business. Participants were not aware of utilizing a project management approach until the question was directly posed to identify the type of process the participants used in their business

practices. Therefore, the realization was unintentional. The participant previously trained in project management could not say how projects are initiated. Participants often used terms like scheduling, installation, and acquiring resources when describing the management of revenue-generating jobs. Those terms are also in the task list of the formal project management approach (Project Management Institute, 2017). However, the task list discovered in the field study differs from those listed for informal processes in the conceptual framework. Despite the similarities to formal project management, the discovered list is not close to being exhausted. Additionally, micro-business owners carry out a different form of documentation; hence, the project management approach used by micro-businesses is considered informal (Agrawal & Chari, 2017; Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). The concept of informality is shown in the conceptual framework of the study.

Goal achievement was the final component in the conceptual framework. Decisions made regarding goals are based on the competencies of the owner-manager entrepreneur, which impacts goal achievement (Choi et al., 2019). Therefore, the themes that apply to goal achievement are referrals and relationship building as an informal strategy for business sustainability and the importance of business knowledge despite the lack of formal business knowledge. The referral system was the primary strategy for goal achievement because participants focused on a referral system to gain revenue-generating jobs and keep the business operational, thus achieving the lifestyle goal set. The competencies of the owner-manager entrepreneurs impacted the referral system, as the quality of their work affected their ability to gain new clients through referrals and maintain existing customers through relationships, as described by Choi et al. (2019),

Despite not having formal business knowledge, participants believed knowledge is vital to a successful business and often outsourced parts of the required skill, like accounting, to help track business progress. This belief is in the research, which states that entrepreneurial knowledge and skills are converted to economic growth and business success based on the decisions made regarding formal or informal execution processes (Behling & Lenzi, 2019; Salomaa & Seikkula-Leino, 2020). Regarding areas not outsourced, participants believe that a lack of knowledge creates a weakness and a cap on what can be achieved. For businesses that failed, business knowledge was nonexistent and not outsourced. Goal achievement is essential for a business to succeed. As shown in the visual representation and the discovered themes, four unsuccessful businesses had not achieved goals; however, three had no goal to achieve, which loosely relates to the concept that strategic goals drive behavior (Amankwah-Amoah & Wang, 2019; Srivastava & Sushil, 2017).

Anticipated Themes. Knowledge gap and strategic decision-making were expected themes. The knowledge gap as an anticipated theme spoke to the lack of formal business education, which limits the micro-business owners' ability to create strategic goals (Engström & McKelvie, 2017). Furthermore, this anticipated theme emphasized the need for knowledge to compete effectively (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). The field study data showed that most businesses exist to address lifestyle goals, such as retirement, without focusing on growth, which was discussed by Engström and McKelvie (2017). The discovered theme related to this anticipated theme was the importance of business knowledge despite the lack of formal business knowledge. This theme is like the initially anticipated theme in that the participants have no formal business training and are too busy working in the business to acquire the required business knowledge, as outlined by Sharafizad (2018). Like Sharafizad (2018), participants

believe business knowledge is vital to success and think that lacking such knowledge prevents them from making more money. P06O confirms the weakness in this area, "The cashflow sits out there a lot, and that needs to come in. When I need cashflow, I'll get some invoice out there, get some cashflow in, and then I'll continue again."

The literature on strategic decision-making emphasized the ability or inability of entrepreneurs to detect business requirements and then create solutions and execution methods for ensuring the requirements are met (Gopaul & Rampersad, 2020). This anticipated theme emphasized the lack of an organized approach by micro-business owners, confirmed in the field study (Johannesson et al., 2018). Similar to the literature in the research proposal, most participants, as discussed in the discovered theme and displayed in the visual representation, did not have a strategic goal; most participants spent little to no time looking at requirements for long-term planning for the business (Eggers et al., 2020). Participants often do not expect to gauge profitability until the year-end after the completion of taxes. Participants were working in the business, not on the business, as seen in the sub-theme, working in the business versus working on the business. Problems are solved when the issue develops, requiring no formal documentation as depicted in the discovered theme of the informal documentation process. When similar problems develop again, solutions may have to be reinvented (Johannesson et al., 2018). To confirm the theory by Johannesson et al. (2018), P14O said, "Because of how small we are, and I guess how limited our expertise is, we come across situations that we haven't come across yet in terms of my side."

An unanticipated theme was referral and relationship building as an informal strategy for business sustainability and its impact on micro-business success. This theme's impact on micro-business success was high, yet not highlighted in secondary research. However, given the

differences between small businesses and micro-businesses, this theme is understandable

because small businesses have growth strategies; however, the field data shows micro-businesses

do not because it was never mentioned in the interviews. Owners of micro-businesses often

started the businesses as part-time jobs, without business knowledge, and with little financial

resources, relying on technical knowledge and referrals in their circle (Bhuiyan & Ivlevs, 2018;

Engström & McKelvie, 2017). However, some industries depend on referrals and ways to create

systems that build the strategy into the business process, which was new information for the

researcher.

The Literature. The three main areas discussed in the literature review were micro-

business, business strategy, and project management. The literature review focused on small

businesses and showed the failure of small businesses to use a project management approach in

achieving strategic goals (Achtenhagen et al., 2017; de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). However,

the literature showed a gap where little is known about how micro-business owners approach and

execute strategy (Harrington et al., 2020).

A gap in the literature that this study seeks to address is that in discussing micro-business

findings, the literature research combines micro-businesses with small businesses in discussions

(Dineen et al., 2017)., This field study included interviewing only micro-business owners.

According to the literature review, micro-businesses operate informally, and business goals and

skills are usually the same as those of the business owner (Engström & McKelvie, 2017). Similar

to the data from the field study, all participants' capabilities were technical and directly related to

the client's requirements. The business had less than five employees by choice, as growth was

challenging because of an inability to gain and keep quality human resources. Contrary to the

literature, no participant mentioned business growth as a goal. When participants attempted to

grow the business (P06O, P07O, P09O, P10O, P11U, P14O), the resources utilized were not productive enough, or finding the right staff to grow was difficult. Regarding the advantage of being a micro-business, P09O quoted, "The big difference is we've got smaller, and we focus on one job. We used to get pulled and dragged between jobs and splitting up work crews to keep the customer happy." The human resource struggle found in the data is similar to the literature, which, according to de Almeida Parizotto et al. (2020), success is constrained by a lack of resources and qualified staff. Like the literature, participants started their business part-time depending on their current skill or passion (Engström & McKelvie, 2017). Further, a lack of formal business knowledge measures profitability in terms of how busy the business is and is confirmed through tax filing at the end of the year. P05O supports Chu & Luke, 2021, "I know I am profitable based on my taxes." Additionally, when asked about profitability, P09O noted, "At times, no, I think I am.." and P06O said, "I think I am. I keep going from job to job, so I don't know how profitable I am." Regarding profitability, the literature states that the survival of micro-businesses is often measured in terms of profitability (Chu & Luke, 2021).

The second area discussed was business strategy. The literature defines business strategy as a set of rules for decision-making to direct the business toward desired outcomes or a broad plan on how the business will operate (Ansoff et al., 2019; Porter, 1998). A gap to be addressed was how micro-business owners define and use strategic goals. Unlike the research in the literature, the findings show a different approach to business success because goals, such as lifestyle goals, are personal and not based on the formal definition of strategic goals as defined by Haverila and Haverila (2018) and relate to the business. Business strategy and the definition in the literature take a formal approach that should apply to all businesses regardless of size. However, according to Hyder and Lussier (2016), size has a vital role in strategy, and should be

considered. Micro-business owners in Ontario do not take a defined approach to strategy for all

areas of the business. Referrals as a strategic method were used to gain new clients while not

having written or oral strategic goals for the overall business. Therefore, decision-making was

not based on a defined business strategy, which contradicts the literature. According to the data,

two differences between micro-businesses are knowledge and documentation. The literature

believes entrepreneurial competencies transform knowledge into economic growth and business

success (Behling & Lenzi, 2019). However, as crucial as participants think knowledge is,

documentation, which impacts knowledge, is limited to an informal approach, not a strategically

informed one.

According to the literature, micro-business owners do not have a recorded strategic

document, whether the entrepreneur intentionally or unintentionally developed it (Svatošová,

2018). However, the data collected states that documentation is done informally through invoices

and emails and is considered documentation by the researcher because it is referenced for future

jobs and learning. Owners of micro-business owners believe business knowledge is essential but

do not have the time to acquire business training or document the processes as discussed in

discovered themes. The lack of formal business knowledge limits potential, but goals do not

include growth, so the business is still considered successful. The literature states that strategic

goals drive behavior (Srivastava & Sushil, 2017). However, based on the data, all goals drive

behavior, not just strategic goals. Micro-business owners believe that being busy increases

revenue, which will, in turn, lead to their definition of a successful business, in the sub-theme,

working in the business versus working on the business. Figure 10 shows that sixty percent of

micro-businesses that are not successful had no goals, while only twenty percent of successful

businesses had no goals. Additionally, no tracking metrics to ensure goals were met, as seen in

Figures 7 through 9. Contrast the field study data with the literature, which states that there should be objectives to measure and track performance to ensure meeting goals (Gamble et al., 2019). The field study data suggests that one factor of business success is having goals, any goal. The goals were directed by effectively bringing in clients, but not tracked.

The final area discussed in the literature was project management, which is essential to business success because of applying knowledge, skills, and techniques to project requirements (Brathwaite, 2018). A gap in the literature that this study seeks to address is the perspective of micro-businesses use of project management as a group, not as a subset of small businesses and within the Canadian business landscape. According to The Project Management Institute (2017), the initiation phase includes the identification of stakeholders; the planning phase includes cost estimates and budget determination; the execution phase includes acquiring resources, managing project work and quality, monitoring and control have command of product or service quality and schedule; and closing is the close project. Therefore, as discussed in the discovered themes and shown in the visual representation section, this field study shows that a project management approach is used in the day-to-day tasks of micro-businesses, which allows micro-business owners to adopt some of the tasks mentioned above by the Project Management Institute. The stakeholders in the initiation phase for micro-businesses include clients, suppliers, and contractors, and at the planning phase, costing is a task utilized by micro-businesses. The execution phase for micro businesses includes acquiring resources from suppliers and managing the job daily. Micro-business owners spend time ensuring the quality of their work is done correctly because of their interest in gaining referrals, which can be attributed to the monitoring and control phase. Additionally, communication and documentation within the project management process are essential and lead to further knowledge for the business (Ghilic-Micu et

al., 2016; Project Management Institute, 2017). Informal documentation in the form of invoicing software and work orders allows simple learning tasks to take place. Additionally, emails as a form of communication allow information to be stored and used for future learning. The data support the literature on micro-businesses' use of a project management approach to achieve strategic goals (Achtenhagen et al., 2017; de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020). Despite having personal goals instead of strategic goals, micro-business owners use a project management approach in their day-to-day revenue-generating jobs, directly tied to personal goals.

   The Problem. According to Brooks et al. (2020), a gap in the research literature persists for why micro-business entrepreneurs fail to link strategy execution to the achievement of strategic goals. Further, Řehoř and Vrchota (2016) defined project management as controlling the achievement of strategic goals to avoid business failure. Based on the definition of strategic goals in the literature, micro-businesses do not have strategic goals, so a link to strategy execution at the business level remains unsure, leaving successful goal achievement to be determined on a project-by-project basis. Goals for micro-business owners are personal, and the business is used to achieve personal goals. However, a circular argument for micro-businesses that primarily focus on personal goals should be considered. As the literature states, goals are necessary to make the business successful, even while the business is being used to achieve personal goals (Harrington et al., 2020). When asked if personal and business goals are separate or the same, P07O said, "Your career becomes so personal. Personal goals would bleed into your professional goals, your professional goals bleed into your personal goals, and vice versa." According to the discovered themes, setting and achieving strategic goals is not something the participants of this study are currently actively engaged in. Therefore, the lack of strategic goals for micro-businesses does not result in business failure. For individuals who have goals, the

goals were in their heads, with no documentation, and therefore not tracked. However, the type

of goal fueled their desire to have revenue-generating jobs and their belief that being busy

equates to being productive. In addition, the type of business industry impacted failure. Seventy

percent of the businesses currently operational are in industries where demand is higher than

supply, and referral is a crucial strategy in acquiring new business, contrary to the literature.

Bouwman et al. (2018) and Achtenhagen et al. (2017) stated that small businesses do not

have formal processes like project management to achieve strategic goals, resulting in potential

business failure. However, the data shows micro-business owners use an informal project

management approach, which is not often used in the business rather than on the business in the

achievement of goals. To confirm the informality defined by Bhuiyan and Ivlevs (2018), P14O

said, "I don't know how consciously beneficial they were considering they were not something

that I thought about on a regular ongoing basis." Additionally, when asked about their thoughts

on project management, three participants are trained project managers, but two did not actively

engage in project management processes (P07O, P10O, P13O). Further discussion on the lack of

project management in the business, P10O said, "My company right now, I am trying to utilize

it, but it's tough because I'm the one doing it; I'm the one doing the work." Project management

was informally utilized by eighty percent of participants, with each phase being described

similarly to those of the formal phases of project management as described by the Project

Management Institute. For example, the similarities in the planning phase described by the

participants and the Project Management Institute include information gathering, scheduling, and

concept development (Project Management Institute, 2017). On the other hand, micro-business

owners consider the acquisition of resources under planning, while consideration by the Project

Management Institute is at the execution phase (Project Management Institute, 2017). Quality

control falls under both execution and monitoring and control for both groups. Additionally, project management is informal for micro-businesses because of the lack of documentation used for learning (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). Table 2 shows the tasks in the various phases of project management as described by the micro-business owners.

Summary of the Findings.

Five themes and one sub-theme emerged in the field study data. Lack of defined strategic goals was the first theme (Carneiro et al., 2019), of which working in the business versus working on the business was a sub-theme (Brooks et al., 2020). The second theme was the unintentional use of an informal project management approach (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017; Harrington et al., 2018), and referrals and relationship building as an informal strategy for business sustainability was the third theme (Kozyra & Radomska, 2020). The informal documentation process was the fourth theme (Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017), and the final theme was the importance of business knowledge despite the lack of formal business knowledge (Ezennia & Mutambara, 2019; Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). Themes emerged through inductive and deductive analysis with the help of NVivo software (Creswell, 2014).

According to the data collected and analyzed, micro-businesses in Ontario have personal goals as opposed to strategic goals, which use an informal approach to project management in goal realization (Eggers et al., 2020). Also, a referral system is vital to the business's success in addition to the type of industry. The research questions addressed the project management's approach, differences, and importance in avoiding business failures. Strategic goals have different relevance to micro-business owners (Harrington et al., 2018). Their goals are based on personal requirements such as retirement and lifestyle sustainability despite understanding and recognizing the importance of business strategy. The approach used in achieving goals is using a

referral system (Choi et al., 2019). The difference in successfully achieving goals is having

goals. Project management is essential in monitoring and controlling the quality of client

requirements, which gives feedback on successful referrals from clients, which affects business

sustainability (Gamble et al., 2019).

Data added to the body of knowledge on how micro-businesses in Ontario use a project

management approach to achieve goals. In discussing the relationship between the findings, four

gaps in the literature were addressed: micro-business being looked at individually and not as a

subset of small businesses (Dineen et al., 2017; Harrington et al., 2020)., Micro-business owners

define and use strategic goals and project management (Engström & McKelvie, 2017), and why

micro-businesses fail. In conclusion, a formal project management approach is not employed at

the corporate level for achieving strategic goals but for day-to-day and direct revenue-generating

projects that positively impact achieving personal goals (Figueiredo et al., 2017).

Application to Professional Practice

With the study's findings, the researcher aims to enhance general business practices by

uncovering successful micro-business strategies. The areas used in the application to professional

practice emerged from themes and what worked for micro-businesses as described in interviews

by the researcher. The findings underscore crucial areas for improvement, offering micro-

business owners a roadmap to prioritize and focus on essential aspects for entrepreneurial

success (Svatošová, 2018). Particularly, the study supports adopting informal project

management approaches to boost customer retention, showcasing the importance of client

satisfaction during the monitoring and control phases (Bredillet et al., 2018; Harrington et al.,

2018). The results advocate aligning specific, measurable, relevant, and time-bound goals with

personal motivations to achieve goals, fostering increased productivity (Arregle et al., 2020;

Ledwith & Turner, 2018).

Additionally, the study addressed the adoption of informal documentation processes to streamline decision-making in micro-businesses with limited resources (Bentz & Gauzelin, 2017; Echeverría Lazcano et al., 2014). Addressing knowledge gaps is a critical factor for business growth, urging micro-business owners to acquire business knowledge for sustainable success (Engström & McKelvie, 2017). Potential application strategies to bridge knowledge and time constraints include knowledge acquisition through e-learning, outsourcing non-core activities, sharing experiences through networking, implementing an informal project management framework, and formalizing a referral strategy. These strategies collectively empower micro-business owners to improve their general business practices effectively.

Improving General Business Practice

In the study, the researcher discovered what strategies successful micro-business owners utilized and, therefore, should be effective in improving general business practices for others if used by other micro-businesses (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). Below, the general business practices discussed are customer retention, business growth, re-defined goal achievement, and decision-making. The discovered areas will allow micro-business owners to focus on the areas that are a priority and necessary for the entrepreneur to succeed (Arregle et al. (2018). The study's results should help improve how micro-business owners are taught about processes in operating their business and how those processes are viewed, which should differ from small businesses and allow a more successful outcome in revenue generation and growth (Engström & McKelvie, 2017). Integrating referral strategies into project management and onboarding processes emerged as a general business practice for sustaining and increasing customer bases (Quach, 2022). Simultaneously, the study highlighted the significance of business knowledge for growth,

shedding light on how entrepreneurs can leverage knowledge as an effective business practice (Grabowski and Stawasz (2017).

Customer Retention. A general business practice that improved through the study's findings is customer retention, which is vital to a business's success (Quach, 2022). Referrals and relationship building, as a strategy, improve the business by bringing in new clients, which results in increased revenue (Berman, 2016). The results from the study show that an informal project management approach will allow micro-business owners to improve business practices regarding customer retention (Bredillet et al., 2018; Samset & Volden, 2016). Improving business practices by retaining customers will happen when micro-business owners focus on providing high-quality products and services based on the requirements gathered in the initiation and planning phases, increasing the customer base. Business improvement includes consistently ensuring checks and balances in project management's monitoring and control phase to guarantee that goals set at the project initiation and planning phases are met. According to Quach (2022), customer loyalty depends on the situation, and customer action may change with poor service. Therefore, consistency in operations and quality is vital for the business owner to ensure customer retention, which can succeed through project management and embedding the referral strategy into project management and onboarding processes (Quach, 2022).

According to the study, micro-business owners inadvertently utilized an informal project management approach by focusing on each client's satisfaction at the monitoring and control, and closing phases. As a result, each revenue-paying job is a project. Client satisfaction leads to revenue generation, vital to the business's success (Berman, 2016). According to Ledwith and Turner (2018), projects are necessary to deliver products and services to clients, and project management practices that best fit the organization must be used. In this regard, micro-business

owners should utilize the informal project management method as much as productivity is increased. By matching processes informally to the organization's needs, micro-business owners can use project management to ensure clients are satisfied and create processes for client referral and retention (Ledwith & Turner, 2018). Therefore, the use of an informal project management approach, coupled with the referral strategy, should be applied by all micro-businesses to retain and increase customers, improving general business practices.

Business Growth. According to Grabowski and Stawasz (2017), the level of knowledge determines the business's probability of success or failure. Participants believed knowledge is essential to grow the business and provide work-life balance because business knowledge would allow them to delegate more or do more to grow the business strategically. The study's results can improve business practice by enabling entrepreneurs to find ways to grow their businesses through new knowledge. For micro-businesses, growth is important because it signifies increased revenue, profitability, economies of scale, and signifying value creation (Achtenhagen et al., 2017). Business knowledge brings growth through knowing what business practices to target and how to gather relevant resources to maintain or grow the business (Behling & Lenzi, 2019; Salomaa & Seikkula-Leino, 2020). Weaknesses seen in the current business' operational method, where the participants blame lack of knowledge, included revenue loss and goals not always achieved (Engström & McKelvie, 2017).

Re-Defined Goal Achievement. According to Arregle et al. (2018), unlike large firms, a small firm's direction depends on the owner's goals and objectives. Similarly, according to the study's findings, successful participants had goals that motivated them to succeed and depended on the owner's personal goals. The study's results can improve general business practices for micro-businesses by showing all micro-business owners that having goals that directly impact

the entrepreneur, whether personal or not, can be a focus for the business in goal achievement, instead of previously taught concept that goals must be strategic and directly linked to the company (Haverila & Haverila, 2018). Chih and Zwikael (2015) stated that successful goals must be specific to reduce ambiguity, be measurable, be relevant to the outcomes, and have a timeline.

Aligning with the goal success requirements by Chih and Zwikael (2015), the primary business goals in the study related to the lifestyles of micro-business owners, such as a comfortable retirement or maintaining a comfortable standard of living. The secondary business goal was satisfying clients based on the client's predefined project goals. Participants did not equate the success of project goals with the overall strategic success of the business; instead, project goals were associated with their ability to maintain their desired lifestyle and retirement plans. Additionally, timelines included retirement, monthly income, or the project's life, which can be measured based on the outcome and are relevant to their lifestyles. According to the study's findings, micro-business goals were successful because business owners felt their livelihood depended on success. The results also show that goal setting should be applied to other micro-businesses to improve general business practices in terms of productivity (Achtenhagen et al., 2017). Micro-business participants felt more work meant productivity; business owners worked as much as time permitted. Regardless of personal or strategic definition, a goal is a goal. Therefore, when the four steps are utilized, goal achievement should be reconsidered in the context of the goal setting and what is relevant (Arregle et al., 2020).

Decision-Making. Often, the owners of projects in small businesses do not have formal project management training with minimal time and resources for documentation (Echeverría Lazcano et al., 2014). Therefore, a fast and straightforward documenting method should be

employed to make decision-making possible and practical (Echeverría Lazcano et al., 2014). The discoveries from the study show that micro-businesses employ informal documentation, which is vital to sustaining the business processes and tasks to enable effective decision-making; hence, adopting informal documentation can improve business practices (Bentz & Gauzelin, 2017). Business practices will improve because documentation allows learning (Project Management Institute, 2021). Old, existing, or additional business knowledge will help improve the ability to make sound business decisions (Ledwith & Turner, 2018). Furthermore, the tasks that require time are not done because of a lack of time on the entrepreneur's part. Informal documentation will fix this issue by allowing the repetition of streamlined processes. Therefore, instead of having no documentation because of the complicated formality, informal documentation can increase the structure level, shorten the time needed to complete tasks, and improve decision-making.

Potential Application Strategies

The discovery of new data changes in the business environment and business evolution are consistent, and application strategies are essential to ensure business owners use all available data to succeed (Burgelman et al. (2018). For micro-businesses, application strategies must consider knowledge and time, as participants raised these as hindrances to improving business practices. Participants believed knowledge and administrative tasks such as documentation are essential but must choose between revenue-generating jobs and strategic tasks. The application strategies discussed below include acquiring knowledge in a small amount of time or in a way that minimizes the use of too much time away from direct revenue generation.

Knowledge Acquisition. An existing way to acquire knowledge quickly is through e-learning, such as audiobooks, audio training, or podcasts (Alam et al., 2016). P03O said, "If there

were a way to learn in a short time, then, yes, taking training courses would be done."

Recognizing the need for professional development and how busy professionals are, various on-the-go e-learning training tools, such as podcasts, have emerged (Pickus, 2022). Creating an environment and formats that allow deep learning to take place will also create a continuous learning environment, which can succeed through podcasts and other mediums tailored to individuals (Bartle et al., 2015). Furthermore, podcasts and audiobooks are convenient for micro-businesses while on the go. Another way for the business to acquire knowledge is by outsourcing human capital, which all participants mention and use in various forms. Examples of currently outsourced human capital are accountants and social media managers. Outsourcing includes the firm's non-core activities; therefore, trade secrets are not exchanged (Ahmad et al., 2017). Micro-business owners tend to start their businesses relying on their technical skills, and outsourcing as many management functions as possible does not negatively impact their competitive advantage (Engström & McKelvie, 2017). However, outsourcing, such as a strategy consultant, should be increased where necessary to maximize the business's revenue. Outsourcing is a value-creating activity and should, therefore, be employed as much as possible (Ahmad et al., 2017).

Another application strategy is sharing entrepreneurs' experiences and resources through partnerships or informal networking events (Ahmad et al., 2017). Participants in the focus group expressed learning much from other participants. Participants in the focus group also shared information and offered each other resources. Having group meetings or networking to share knowledge across and within industries is a strategy to be applied for knowledge gathering (Ahmad et al., 2017). Sharing experiences is essential because once entrepreneurs know that others have the problem, seeing the solution from similar businesses can be productive by

applying new knowledge (Durst & Edvardsson, 2017). A source of industry experience is from industry magazines.

Informal Project Management Framework. An application strategy is to develop an informal project management framework that aligns processes with organizational needs to ensure client satisfaction and create effective processes for client referral and retention (Ledwith & Turner, 2018). Participants mentioned that project management is not for them but for larger companies. By developing and promoting a simplified project management framework that can be adapted to micro-business needs, owners can see the applicability and simplified version of project management. Micro-business owners use their phones as the primary tool for communication and documentation due to simplification and ease of use, which translates to informal processes in project management (de Almeida Parizotto et al., 2020; Engström & McKelvie, 2017). Communication and documentation are key components of project management learning (Project Management Institute, 2021).

Additionally, software applications for mobile devices are currently available and can create opportunities for a simplified version of project management. By promoting the simplified version of project management applications, such as Monday.com, and educating micro-business owners on how their counterparts are already using said products, information learned in the study can be applied. Therefore, using processes that best fit the organization's size is necessary (Ledwith & Turner, 2018). An informal project management framework emerged in the study and can now be applied to general business practice.

Streamlined Referral Strategy. Berman (2016) stated that referral marketing involves motivating clients to function as promoters and influencers for the company in gaining new clients. Similarly, P02O said, "Implement a simple process where clients are asked before and at

the end of the job if they can do a referral and ask for names of potential clients to contact." The advantage of using current clients to advocate for the business includes clients staying longer with the company, thereby ensuring revenue for a longer period and a higher probability of success (Berman, 2016; Gao et al., 2018). According to Gao et al. (2018), the referral strategy is more targeted and, therefore, more successful than other marketing strategies. Participants said customers are more likely to use a business referred to them. Similar to P02O, Berman (2016) stated that in implementing this process, micro-business owners should identify current clients and engage them at the beginning and end of the project, meaning during planning and closing, ensuring the client is satisfied during the monitoring and control and closing phases. Messaging should be streamlined and included in other communication material, like email confirmation (Berman, 2016). In this regard, applying this strategy is simple and easy for time-constrained micro-businesses to implement.

Summary of Application to Professional Practice

The study contributed valuable insights to enhance general business practices for micro-businesses across pivotal areas, including customer retention, goal achievement, decision-making, and business growth. By identifying successful strategies, the study emphasized prioritizing specific areas crucial for entrepreneurial success, ultimately leading to improved operational processes, increased revenue generation, and sustained growth (Berman, 2016). Customer retention strategies, such as informal project management approaches and streamlined documentation, are essential for fostering long-term loyalty (Quach, 2022). The study also underscored the significance of setting specific, measurable, relevant, and time-bound goals to align business objectives with personal motivations, contributing to enhanced productivity (Chih & Zwikael, 2015). Additionally, knowledge acquisition emphasized addressing weaknesses, with

suggested strategies such as utilizing on-the-go training tools, outsourcing non-core activities, and sharing experiences through partnerships and networking events. The study's practical applications provide micro-business owners with actionable strategies tailored to their unique constraints and priorities, empowering them for sustained success in a competitive landscape.

Recommendations for Further Study

      Long-Term Impact of Referral Strategies. The findings lean toward implementing a formalized referral strategy for customer retention, which some research participants utilized. Although referral marketing is widely employed in the study, limited research remains for examining the impact of word-of-mouth on referral behavior from the perspective of the client and the potential for utilizing referral-based information to enhance the acquisition of new customers (Berman, 2016; Choi et al., 2019). Considering the impact of the referral strategy on micro-businesses in this study, the long-term implications of referral are worth further research (Berman, 2016). Further research could examine the long-term impact of such strategies on micro-businesses. Analyzing the effectiveness of referral programs over an extended period, understanding the factors influencing client support from the clients' and micro-business owners' perspectives, and exploring variations in success rates could provide insights into business sustainability (Al-edenat et al., 2020; Farha, 2016).

      This recommended area of research is crucial because it addresses gaps in existing research, emphasizes the client perspective in referral strategies, and explores the impact on customer retention and new clients (Berman, 2016; Choi et al., 2019). Exploring the client's perspective can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how word-of-mouth influences referral actions, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of customer promotion in the context of micro-businesses. Investigating how referral strategies can leverage customer

retention and attract new customers can provide a holistic view of the role of referrals in the overall sustainability strategy for micro-businesses. Long-term studies can reveal trends, challenges, and opportunities that may not be apparent in short-term analyses (Yin, 2014). The recommended research can guide micro-business owners in developing more effective and sustainable referral programs, ultimately contributing to the growth and success of their enterprises and industries.

Technology Adoption in Micro-Businesses. The study's findings highlighted the importance of informal project management and the use of mobile phones for communication and documentation in micro-businesses. The digital economy is a relatively new, multidisciplinary concept that includes impacts on business, information, and processes but has not yet been explored (Ma et al., 2022). Technology adoption is defined as decisions on hardware and software used in business, including the different types and levels (Macaulay et al., 2015). Decisions for technology adoption include use at the managerial, technical, or administrative level of the business as well as external and internal use (Macaulay et al., 2015). Further research could investigate how micro-business owners adopt and integrate technology into their operations. Understanding the specific technologies used, their impact on efficiency, and potential barriers to adoption would provide valuable insights for improving technology utilization in micro-business settings (Gomera & Oreku, 2016). Potential application strategies include using project management software applications, such as Monday.com, Wrike, email services as a documentation tool, and invoicing software applications, such as Square, to be used on phones and other computer devices tailored to micro-business needs. Technology research can include how micro-business owners adapt and integrate existing project management applications. Investigating the features and functionalities that align with micro-business

requirements and the challenges faced during implementation would inform the development of tools tailored to this business context, including project management (Gomera & Oreku, 2016).

Micro-businesses have a crucial economic role, contributing to employment and economic development (Ma et al., 2022). Understanding how these small enterprises adopt and use technology is essential for enhancing their efficiency and overall economic contribution. Research of technology adoption by micro-businesses contributes to a better understanding of how the digital economy affects these small enterprises, encompassing business operations, information management, and overall processes (Ma et al., 2022). Exploring these practices can show how micro-businesses effectively manage projects and communicate without formal structures, providing valuable insights for improving these processes and the impact on cost structures (Macaulay et al., 2015). Studying technology adoption in micro-businesses is essential for understanding their unique challenges, improving efficiency, and facilitating the development of tailored solutions that can contribute to the growth and sustainability of these small enterprises in the digital economy.

Impact of Knowledge Acquisition Strategies. Based on the study's results, the researcher recommended knowledge acquisition strategies, such as e-learning and outsourcing, based on participants' emphasis on the importance of knowledge and limited time. According to Alam et al. (2016), limited data exists on how e-learning should be optimized to be effective. However, knowledge can play a pivotal role in the operations and success of a business, positively impacting growth and increased revenue (Cerchione & Esposito, 2017). Business knowledge is the practical and theoretical information on business operations, a business's internal and external environment, and decision-making rules (Feng & Valero, 2020; Ismail et al., 2019). Further studies can show engagement and what incentives can make micro-business owners deviate from

their need to achieve their personal goals and spend time acquiring knowledge to improve the business further (Bressan et al., 2022). Also, research could explore the impact of these strategies on the overall knowledge base and competitiveness of micro-businesses (Bressan et al., 2022). Examining the effectiveness of different knowledge acquisition methods, their influence on decision-making, and their correlation with business growth would provide actionable insights for micro-business owners seeking to enhance their knowledge base.

The recommended area of research is vital because it addresses gaps in understanding how e-learning can optimize for micro-businesses. In addition, explores incentives for knowledge acquisition, examines the impact on the overall knowledge base and competitiveness, evaluates the effectiveness of different knowledge attainment approaches, and considers the impact on decision-making and business growth (Cerchione & Esposito, 2017). Understanding which methods yield the best results regarding knowledge retention and practical application can guide micro-business owners in making informed decisions about the most suitable strategies for their contexts. The findings from such research can offer actionable insights to micro-business owners seeking to enhance their knowledge capabilities, ultimately contributing to their long-term success and resilience in the business environment.

In summary, these suggested areas of further study build upon the current research discoveries by delving deeper into specific aspects of technology adoption, the long-term effects of referral strategies, and the impact of knowledge acquisition strategies. Each of these areas holds the potential to refine and expand the practical applications derived from the initial study, offering a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing micro-business success.

Reflections

In pursuing personal and professional growth, this field study has honed my research skills and expanded my qualitative perspectives within the entrepreneurial realm. My journey involved recognizing the need to merge project management with entrepreneurship, resulting in a deeper understanding of personal capabilities. Overcoming imposter syndrome and aligning qualifications with job requirements marked a transformative phase, reinforcing a sense of accomplishment. As a researcher, the study revealed a heightened awareness of biases, fostering growth in listening skills and refining interview techniques. The study's impact extended beyond personal development to professional insights, emphasizing the necessity of such research in business operations and influencing content enhancement for a publishing venture. My biblical perspective throughout the study highlighted the importance of defined strategic goals, the unintentional use of informal project management, referrals, relationship building, informal documentation processes, and the value of business knowledge, all within the context of biblical principles. Each aspect unfolded with relevant biblical parallels, underscoring the intricate connection between personal and professional growth and biblical insights.

Personal & Professional Growth

Prior to the field study, my research skills started to be honed. Recognizing the need and room to merge project management with the entrepreneurial field from a qualitative perspective was not initially seen. Recognizing my ability to dig deep was a part of the growth process. The requirement to discuss and debate the merits of sections or points included in the research and why the areas were important instilled a sense of accomplishment. I can now comfortably discuss micro-business in the scope of project management and operations processes and educate those around the researcher. Despite wanting to pursue a doctoral program for a long time and

finally being able to do so, I constantly had a sense of not belonging, imposter syndrome. Growth in this area is seeing and comparing the accomplishments with advertised jobs, allowing the researcher to recognize that I did and can. My qualifications align with many advertised jobs, equating to personal growth.

In terms of growth as a researcher, understanding personal bias and being able to listen more and talk less were personal and professional growth. Initial interviews within the field study were imperfect; I did not ask questions I should have and sometimes interjected where I should not. However, as the interviews continued, I listened for cues in completed interviews to see where the researcher went wrong and where improvements were necessary. Having worked as a micro-business owner or with other micro-business owners, I thought I understood the industry. The study revealed that my knowledge is minimal with room to grow, which I accomplished. I am better able to communicate with micro-entrepreneurs in any space.

Additional professional growth showed that this type of research is necessary for the business. The magazine, for which I am a publisher, will do more to add to the quality of articles published, offering more details to micro-entrepreneurs and subscribers in recognizing the unique characteristics of micro-business and how entrepreneurs can implement strategies to improve process flow and goal achievements. The magazine can be a vehicle in which the strategies discussed can relate to micro-businesses in Canada and other countries that subscribe. The interviews and articles will now include subject matters more related to areas where micro-business owners need to be more profitable and in words and lengths that will help them quickly grasp the required information.

Biblical Perspective

Whether one has a Christian worldview, the lenses one uses impact all aspects of one's life (Dahlvig & Longman, 2016). The lack of defined strategic goals is demonstrated in the Bible. According to Ingason et al. (2013), goal setting is the modern version of faith. Hebrews 11:6 KJV, faith is the substance or tangible of something hoped for, which can be translated into work being the substance of the future goals. Similarly, micro-entrepreneurs understand the importance of setting and working towards goals to be successful. According to the study, personal goals propel micro-business owners to work. Without an idea, an objective, and a goal, success is impossible (Ingason et al., 2013), and supported by Luke 14:31-33 KJV, which speaks of the king who goes to war with a smaller army than his opponent and sits down first to decide if success is possible and if not, comes up with an alternate plan.

The unintentional use of an informal project management approach aligns with a Christian worldview. According to Keller (2014), God worked and found joy in a well-done job. Keller (2014) referenced Genesis 1:31 KJV, where God said what He had done, stepped back, and validated His work. Similarly, micro-business owners use the validation of the clients to ensure the work is good, with project management being the tool used to ensure validation is possible. Further, project management is still progressing, and an informal process can be as effective as a by-the-book method (Ingason et al., 2013). Three critical aspects of project management that the participants implement are demonstrated in Matthew 25:1-46 KJV, which are project planning, project completion, and achieving requirements (Ingason et al., 2013). Matthew 25:1-46 spoke to the wise and foolish virgins who planned versus those who did not plan, the servants with the talent that invested versus a servant who did not. Matthew also speaks of the consequences of being irresponsible with managed resources.

Referrals and relationship building as an informal strategy for business sustainability also align with biblical principles. A story that depicts the importance of positive relationships to ensure success is that of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, and Moses. Jethro told Moses how to train and lean on other leaders to ensure his success as a leader for the people. The relationship between Moses and the other leaders is essential as their success will come from Moses' teaching and spiritual being (Exodus 18: 17-23 King James Version). According to Jakobsen and Storsletten (2015), we are constantly called to be in relationships with not just people but also ideas, information, and life. Even existence is created through involvement with distinct types of relationships (Jakobsen & Storsletten, 2015). Another Biblical relationship to the importance of relationship was in Genesis 2:18 KJV when God said of Adam that it is not suitable for man to be alone, and Eve was created as a result. Therefore, a natural occurrence is for micro-business owners to unintentionally develop relationships as one avenue to having a successful business.

Referral is a prominent theme throughout the New Testament, where Jesus sends out disciples to spread the Word about Jesus. A prominent biblical referral is the Great Commission in Matthew 27:19 KJV, where disciples are told to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This referral system allows Christians to refer non-Christians to Christ and, in turn, build the Kingdom of God, which can be correlated to the process of relationships within the business (Szromek, 2020).

The importance of documentation is in Habakkuk 2:2-3 KJV, which says to write the vision, which should be visible as it points to the future. Though informal, the documentation processes for micro-businesses can show using communication tools, such as emails and cell phones, in the form of documentation that creates knowledge to be visible for future productivity (Abdilahi et al., 2020) and shows in the operations of participants in the study. The importance

of business knowledge despite the lack of formal business knowledge is in Proverbs 23:12 KJV, which says regarding knowledge, embrace disciplined learning, and listen to reliable knowledge. Knowledge provides the ability to make good decisions that positively impact the business (Szromek, 2020). Despite lacking some business knowledge, participants agreed that knowledge would increase the potential success of the business.

Informality, a characteristic of micro-business, reflects a simplified version of Matthew 11:30 KJV to avoid the yoke or struggles that micro-businesses may encounter and may prevent them from succeeding. In Matthew 11:30 KJV, Jesus said His yoke was light and easy. Participants chose an informal approach that made the process easy for them in project management, business knowledge, and business strategy.

Summary of Reflections

In reflecting on personal and professional growth, I acknowledge the refinement of research skills and the unanticipated merging of project management with entrepreneurship. Overcoming imposter syndrome and recognizing that qualifications align with job requirements show significant personal achievements. The growth as a researcher includes a deeper understanding of biases, improved interview techniques, and a newfound appreciation for the issues in the micro-business industry. This knowledge not only enhances communication with entrepreneurs but also influences my role as a publisher, aiming to elevate the quality of articles for the magazine. The reflections incorporate a biblical perspective, comparing the study's findings and biblical teachings. The study's alignment with Bible verses underscores the interconnectedness of personal, professional, and spiritual dimensions. The reflections encapsulate a transformative journey, providing insights from the study and my improved understanding of individual and Biblical principles.

Summary of Section 3

The study included the challenges faced by micro-business owners in Ontario and aimed to understand the role of project management in achieving strategic goals. The research involved fifteen micro-business founders, five of whom had failed and ten who were operational. Data came from interviews, observations, and secondary research, employing a flexible design case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2014). Five themes emerged: lack of defined strategic goals, unintentional use of informal project management, referrals and relationships for business sustainability, informal documentation processes, and the importance of business knowledge despite the lack of formal business education.

The findings revealed that micro-businesses in Ontario primarily operate with personal goals, utilizing informal project management approaches and employing referrals for success. Gaps in the literature emphasized the need to view micro-businesses as a subset of small businesses and explore how micro-business owners define and use strategic goals and project management (Dineen et al., 2017; Sane, 2019). The application to professional practice emphasized insights for business improvement by micro-business owners and stakeholders in areas such as customer retention, goal achievement, decision-making, and growth. According to Yin (2014), applying the findings to professional practice is essential to show the transformative impacts of the research.

From the research study additional recommended areas for further research, including technology adoption, the long-term effects of referral strategies, and the impact of knowledge acquisition strategies. In reflecting on personal and professional growth, the researcher acknowledged refining research skills, overcoming imposter syndrome, and joining project

management with entrepreneurship. The study's alignment with biblical teachings highlighted the journey's personal, professional, and spiritual connection.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Studies show little data on micro-business in the literature (Dineen et al., 2017). Gaining access to micro-businesses is challenging; therefore, little is known except for the informal nature of their operations (Dineen et al., 2017). Using a flexible case study, fifteen participants participated through interviews, focus group interviews, focus groups, and secondary data through a literature review. This study occurs in three sections to help the reader see the progression of the study. Section one outlined the different research options, explaining why the flexible case study was the most appropriate option. Section one also included the literature review to show what little data existed and the need for the study. Section two, the project, laid out the organizational and data collection plan. Section three outlines the study's findings, recommendations for implementation, and recommendations for future studies.

The study included questions about the micro-business owners' use of a project management approach to achieve strategic goals. Interviews and a literature review helped to explore the problem statement and research questions. Five themes emerged in the study: lack of defined strategic goals, the unintentional use of an informal project management approach, referrals and relationship building as an informal strategy for business sustainability, the informal documentation process, and the importance of business knowledge despite the lack of formal business knowledge. The conclusion is that the lack of strategic goals does not negatively impact micro-businesses because owners have mostly personal goals, which motivate them to work toward success. According to Arregle et al. (2020), goals should be based on what is relevant to success. Further, micro-businesses operate differently from other business structures

(Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). The study shows that micro-businesses operate with informal processes and a project management approach. New and unexpected themes were the successful use of a referral system towards business sustainability and the informal documentation process that impacts their ability to use existing data to impact new business. Similar to the literature, micro-business owners understand the importance of knowledge and would welcome simple ways to gain business knowledge that does not take away time from their direct revenue-making projects (Brooks et al., 2020; Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017).

The study discovered practices that successful micro-businesses use. Micro-business owners and stakeholders can use this study to improve customer retention, business growth, and decision-making and redefine goal achievement. By focusing on those areas, micro-businesses can improve in these areas (Arregle et al., 2018). With micro-business owners utilizing mobile devices for documentation and a way to work on the go, and considering their limited time, technology-driven strategies are suggested to apply the study findings to applicable business practice. The potential application strategies include the following: use e-learning to gain relevant business knowledge; create and promote an informal project management framework to remove the stigma that project management is for large firms while showing the advantages to micro-businesses; and a streamlined referral strategy to increase and retain clients. Finally, for future studies to further understand different areas of micro-businesses, recommendations are to discover the long-term impacts of referral strategies, technology adoption in micro-businesses, and the impact of knowledge acquisition strategies.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. How do you define strategic goals?

2. What is your process for strategic planning?

3. Does your organization have a defined business strategy and strategic goals?

4. Describe some successes/failures of using strategic or business planning

5. Indicate some benefits from using strategic or business planning

6. Does your organization have defined metrics?

7. How do you define project management?

8. Do you need to, and if yes, how do you manage the following tasks:

    a. Project/Process Initiation

    b. Project/Process Planning

    c. Project/Process Execution

    d. Project/Process Monitoring and Control

    e. Project/Process Closing

9. Do you use project management software like Monday.com, Basecamp, Wrike, etc.?

10. Are you skilled enough to use project management processes and software?

11. Are you motivated to use project management (how)?

12. Describe some successes/failures of using project management.

13. Indicate some benefits from using project management.

14. What is your definition of a successful business?

15. How do you define profit?

16. Is your business profitable? How do you intend to be profitable?

17. How many consecutive years of profitability do you have?

Adapted and abridged from Olszak (2016)

18. What strategic planning occurs to facilitate the firm's initiatives?

Adapted and abridged from Gabler et al. (2017)

Appendix B: Consent Form
Consent

Title of the Project: How Project Management Impacts Micro-Businesses in Achieving Strategic Goals
Principal Investigator: Karen Lowe, Doctoral Candidate, School of Business, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be an entrepreneur who founded a small business in Ontario between 2013 and 2016, have less than five employees, was/are a decision-maker, and was responsible for the business' success. The business must be independently owned and operated; the business' goal is to make a profit and must be Canadian-owned. Your business may or may not be currently operational. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the research study is to understand why micro-businesses fail to use project management to achieve strategic goals and the effect this decision has on business failure.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
1. Participate in an online survey, accessible via an email link which will take no more than 15 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study include the ability to adopt any best practices or ideas identified in the study being used by other small businesses to improve their probability of success. Additionally, benefits from small business practices in decision-making regarding project management as an approach to achieving strategic goals.

Benefits to society include an understanding of the knowledge gap of owner-manager entrepreneurs within small businesses, with less than five employees, regarding the use of project management to increase success factors in the implementation of strategy. Provide knowledge that will allow increased success for small businesses, with less than five employees, leading to increase GDP and reduction in unemployment, thus positively impacting society.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The risks involved in this study include the possibility of psychological stress from being asked to recall and discuss the reason the business

failed (if your business is no longer operational). To reduce risk, I will monitor participants, discontinue if needed, and provide referral information for counseling services.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses to online surveys will be confidential.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and password-accessible cloud drive. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer and password-accessible cloud drive for five years and then deleted. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether 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.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser.— Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Karen Lowe. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Arnetra Arrington, at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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 IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix C: Recruitment Email and Flyer

Dear [Recipient],

As a graduate student in the School of Business at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand why micro-businesses fail to use project management to achieve strategic goals and the effect this decision has on business failure, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be an entrepreneur who founded a small business in Ontario between 2013 and 2016, have less than five employees, was/are a decision-maker, and was responsible for the business' success. The business must be independently owned and operated; the business' goal is to make a profit and must be Canadian-owned. Your business may or may not be currently operational. Participants, if willing, will be asked to be interviewed individually (1 hour) or as a member of a focus group (1 hour) and be in follow-up phone calls (20 minutes) to validate previously collected information. Participants for follow-up calls will be chosen at random to ensure the study is not biased. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at ███████████████ to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview or focus group. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

 Sincerely,

Karen Lowe
Doctoral Candidate
███████████████

Research Participants Needed

How Project Management Impacts Micro-Businesses in Achieving Strategic Goals.

- Be an entrepreneur who founded a small business in Ontario between 2013 and 2016.
- Have less than five employees.
- Was/are a decision-maker and responsible for the business' success.
- The business must be independently owned and operated.
- The business' goal is to make a profit and must be Canadian-owned.
- Your business may or may not be currently operational.
- If you answered yes to each of the questions listed above, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to understand why small businesses with less than 5 employees fail to use project management to achieve strategic goals and the effect this decision has on business failure.

2. Participants will be asked to take part in a Zoom or MS Teams recorded individual interview or focus group that will take no more than 1 hour,
3. Participate in a follow-up phone recorded interview to look at new themes and transcripts from the interviews, which will last less than 20 minutes. ***Not all participants will be asked to participate in the follow-up conversation.***
4. OPTIONALLY, provide archived financial and business plan documents to be used anonymously in our validation of data. ***Note: You may participate in the interview and choose not to share your documentation.***

Benefits include the ability to adopt any best practices or ideas identified in the study being used by other small businesses to improve their probability of success. Additionally, benefits from small business practices in decision-making regarding project management as an approach to achieving strategic goals.

If you would like to participate, please contact the researcher at the email address provided below.

A consent document will be given to you at the time of the interview or focus group.

Karen Lowe, a doctoral candidate in the School of Business at Liberty University, is conducting this study.
Please contact Karen Lowe at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or more information.

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