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Strategies for Entrepreneurs with Disabilities to Sustain a Successful Small Business

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2017

Abstract

Strategies for Entrepreneurs with Disabilities to

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by

Terry L. Howard

MBA, University of Detroit Mercy, 2005

BS, University of Detroit Mercy, 2003

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2017

Abstract

In 2006, Congress appropriated $5 million to create a research-based policy and give technical assistance to agencies that achieved self-employment outcomes for entrepreneurs with disabilities (EWDs). A lack of information exists within the extant body of research on EWDs and the strategies they employ to develop successful businesses. The research design was a multiple case study format engaging 3 Michigan EWDs whose firms were profitable after at least 3 years of successful business operations. Tipu's conceptual framework of entrepreneurship was useful in understanding the basis for successful EWDs' strategies. Face-to-face interviews with EWDs and onsite observations of their business operations were the primary data collection methods used in the study. The data analysis procedure began with interview transcriptions and summaries of activities. Data coding led to the identification of recurring concepts and integration of topics from across sources to create a complete picture. The decision-making choices successful EWDs made depended on a solid product and market knowledge, the creation of financial and marketing relationships, and adherence to cost-based operational leadership. The findings may contribute to social change by empowering persons with disabilities to become entrepreneurs. Insights into the business strategies can lead to new programs that motivate individuals to become entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship benefits EWDs, their families, and their communities by facilitating independence and economic and social contributions.

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Dedication

This study is a tribute to people with disabilities who want to be successful entrepreneurs. A person with a disability has abilities and needs to focus on them. Although people with disabilities do things differently, they can develop and lead profitable businesses.

Acknowledgments

My decision to enroll at Walden University was due to my perception that it was a high-quality program that was universally accessible. I want to thank the disability services staff, the instructional faculty in my various courses, and the members of my doctoral study committee for helping me to be successful in my program. Two people that deserve recognition are the chair of my committee and my mentor. Both of these individuals believed in my abilities and encouraged me to strive for my dreams.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

A lack of information exists within the extant body of research on entrepreneurs with disabilities (EWDs) and the strategies they employ to develop successful businesses. This study included a comprehensive review of the literature on EWDs and a multiple case study of three Michigan businesses run by EWDs. The purpose of the research was to understand what strategies EWDs used in their attempts to construct viable and profitable business enterprises.

Background of the Problem

In 2006, Congress appropriated $5 million to create a research-based policy and give technical assistance to agencies that achieved self-employment outcomes for EWDs (U.S. Department of Labor [DOL], Office of Disability Employment Policy [ODEP], 2013). The ODEP initiated the Self-Employment Technical Assistance, Resources, & Training (START-UP) program in Alaska, Florida, and New York to test and evaluate new models of self-employment services to determine if replication could occur nationally. The models had a common goal of self-employment; however, they had different elements, such as partners, staff training, and direct service. The states had varying success in creating an infrastructure and capacity to meet the needs of EWDs (DOL, ODEP, 2013). Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that EWDs in the START-UP program have the same passion, desire for independence, and self-direction as people without disabilities.

Through self-employment, EWDs gain the opportunity to customize their work to their needs and thus achieve flexibility and accommodation, eliminating barriers to

employment. Although general employment assistance was available, little support existed for public programs to assist EWDs in self-employment (DOL, ODEP, 2013). Before START-UP, most programs did not promote self-employment. The Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) funded rehabilitation programs to prepare people with disabilities for employment. In 2012, self-employment accounted for 2.4% of the case closures (DOL, ODEP, 2013). It was in this context that there was a need for research to understand what strategies EWDs used in their attempts to construct viable and profitable business enterprises.

Problem Statement

In 2014, more than 15% of the U.S. workforce, or approximately 53 million people, had a disability (DOL, Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2015). In 2014, the unemployment rate was 11.7%, and the participation rate in the labor force was 19.8% among persons with disabilities (DOL, BLS, 2015). Entrepreneurship was becoming a nationwide strategy to transition individuals with disabilities from unemployment and underemployment to programs that lead to self-employment (DOL, ODEP, 2013). The general business problem was that the challenges faced by EWDs alter the business strategies EWDs required for achieving and sustaining profitability. The specific business problem was that some EWDs do not employ business strategies to achieve and sustain profitability in their organizations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies EWDs employ to achieve and sustain profitability. The population consisted of three EWD

Michigan businesses, which had profitable operations for at least 3 years. There was a unique opportunity for EWDs in Michigan because there was a goal by leaders to contract EWD owned organizations (Krepcio & Agrawal, 2013). Government programs, like the 8(a) Business Development Program and the Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB), assisted disadvantaged groups including EWDs (U.S. Small Business Administration [SBA], Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization [OSDBU], 2015). Michigan leaders were more precise than their counterparts in other states with a targeted goal to contract EWD owned organizations, providing a business advantage that was not present in other regions (Krepcio & Agrawal, 2013; SBA, 2015). EWD leaders can use the findings of this study to develop the strategies necessary for increasing their ability to achieve profitability in their enterprises, benefiting their employees, families, and communities. These leaders can create a social change from dependency to independence through successful self-employment.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative approach to researching EWDs provided an opportunity to identify and explore key themes and strategies EWDs use to achieve and sustain profitability. Dawson and Henley (2012) emphasized the need in the literature for in-depth qualitative research to clarify motivations and decision-making processes of entrepreneurs. Autio, Kenney, Mustar, Siegel, and Wright (2014) and Zahra, Wright, and Abdelgawad (2014) identified the need in the literature for the contextualization of entrepreneurship for persons with disabilities. Also, Pinho and Sampaio de Sá (2014) determined that both personal and environmental factors contributed to the creation and success of small businesses. The

enterprises in this study were in various sectors. Plano Clark et al. (2015) noted that quantitative measures might not consistently apply to all companies, making the approaches of quantitative and mixed methods less than optimal, given the presence of quantitative data in both. Furthermore, the purpose of this study was to explore the opinions of EWDs regarding the strategies that contributed to their success. While a mixed methods approach includes collection of insights, the method used in the completion of a research project must result in the best fit. Thus, my choice for this study was the qualitative methodology.

A multiple case study design was useful for identifying and exploring the specific themes and strategies that EWDs used to achieve and sustain profitability in their enterprises. A case study approach was appropriate in instances in which there was relatively little empirical evidence or prior theory development (Eisenhardt, 2014). Using a single case study rather than multiple cases did not result in sufficient breadth of knowledge to generate a good understanding of the EWDs' strategies, so I chose a multiple case study.

Before finalizing the choice, however, it was necessary to explore other potential research designs, thus ensuring the most efficient means for collecting the data (Lewis, 2015). Many different qualitative approaches exist. There were five frequently used qualitative designs: the case study, ethnography, phenomenology, the grounded research approach, and the narrative inquiry (Lewis, 2015). In grounded theory, the researcher sought to develop a theoretical framework (Cho & Lee, 2014). This design did not work to understand the EWDs' effective strategies. In an ethnographic design, the researcher

explored a given culture, typically through participation and from an anthropological perspective (Hammersley, 2013). Since this was not a participatory study, though it would be possible, given the personal perspectives focusing on business acumen as opposed to the EWD personally, this method seemed ineffective. Researchers in the social sciences use the narrative research design for individual stories (Paschen & Ison, 2014). In this study, the focus was on the practices implemented, negating the need for personal stories within the context of the research questions. In a phenomenological design, the researcher studied a given phenomenon, concentrating on the direct experience (Lewis, 2015; Smith, 2013). Given the possibility of different fields of industry, the different approaches, and the time constraints of the study, this design seemed inappropriate. The multiple case study design was suitable for this research study because it can yield an understanding of the strategies the EWDs use to achieve and sustain profitability.

Research Question

What strategies can EWDs employ to achieve and sustain profitability?

Interview Questions

Interview questions were the following:

1. What were the critical success factors that you used to develop your strategies?

2. What barriers did you encounter in implementing your strategic plans?

3. How did you address the obstacles to achieving profitability?

4. What concrete steps did you take to measure the effectiveness of your

strategies for achieving profitability?

5. What changes in plans occurred over the operating life of your business?

6. What additional information would you like to add beyond that asked in the previous questions?

By conducting this study, I expected to expand leaders' understanding of the program and support needs of EWDs by identifying the strategies and resources that led the participants to achieve and sustain business profitability.

Conceptual Framework

The literature contained research on both disability and entrepreneurship. Tipu (2016) developed a conceptual framework that provided a sound basis for this investigation, the model of necessity-driven entrepreneurship. Tipu compared the behaviors between necessity-driven entrepreneurs (NDEs) and opportunity-driven entrepreneurs (ODEs). Using a case study approach, Tipu identified differences in these two types of entrepreneurs during start-up phases of their companies and their overall perspectives toward their businesses. Tipu developed a framework based on how the two categories of entrepreneurs thought, or entrepreneurial cognition about the critical success factors of startup companies (i.e., planning, risk management, networking, financial management), which influenced what these individuals did to start their businesses or their entrepreneurial action. Tipu found that entrepreneurial cognition affected business activities in this framework. Tipu also defined ODEs as driven by the need for achievement, freedom, or independence, while NDEs were self-employed as a last resort to survive when different employment opportunities were not available to

them. Using a multiple case study approach of four entrepreneurs, two identified as

ODEs and two as NDEs, Tipu used a variety of surveys, interviews, and other data

collection on entrepreneurs whose businesses had survived for at least 3 years. Tipu

found that many of the behavioral patterns of NDEs and ODEs were similar, with none

preparing a business plan or going for external financing, and all having realistic

assessments of their personal skills and available resources. However, Tipu also found

that ODEs relied on availability heuristics during startup, relying heavily on readily

available information and conducting counterfactual thinking, and tried to learn from past

mistakes and failures. NDEs, in contrast, tended not to imagine anything except actual

outcomes and were more tightly bound to a realistic assessment of circumstances,

without imagining anything other than what was real. For NDEs, entrepreneurship was a

desperation move rather than a free choice, and this influenced their behaviors toward

their companies.

Figure 1 is based on motivational theories guiding entrepreneurial decisions. Tipu

(2016) focused primarily on the motivational differences between NDEs (i.e., those who

start businesses for lack of other employment opportunities) and ODEs (i.e., those who

start businesses because of seeing a potential opportunity in the marketplace). This study

focused on the strategies EWDs chose to guide their ventures to profitability. The

framework provided by Tipu guided the research process in this study. Depending on the

motivation for starting a business and the barriers encountered, EWDs developed unique

strategies for achieving profitability in their businesses.
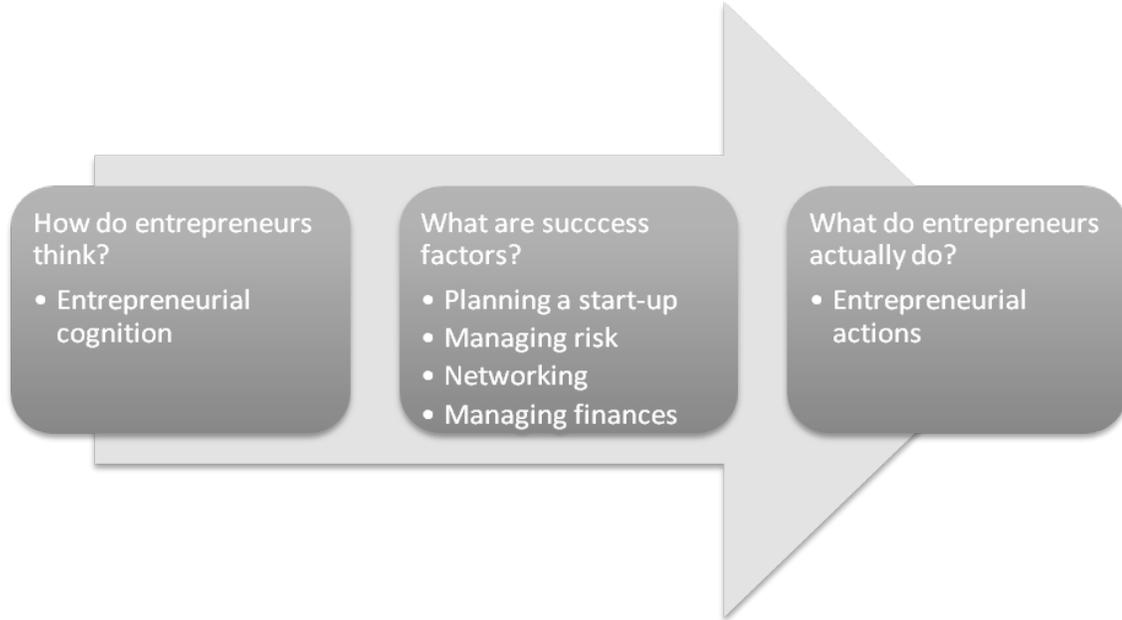
Figure 1. A conceptual framework for this study.

Operational Definitions

Person with a disability: The term means a person with a mental or physical impairment who was substantially limited in a major life activity, and had a record of impairment or was known to have an impairment (DOL, ODEP, 2015).

Entrepreneur: The term refers to an individual who recognizes an opportunity, launches and manages a small business, takes risks, and creates value (Hagel, 2016).

Self-determination: The term refers to the self-regulated ability of a person to achieve a personal goal regardless of the barriers encountered (Wehmeyer, 2015).

Self-employed: The term refers to an individual who owns and operates a small business on a full-time or part-time basis (Internal Revenue Service, 2015).

Social capital: The term refers to the networks that make resources such as money, information, ideas, and emotional support available to entrepreneurs (Heath & Reed, 2013).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

It was important to understand the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study to evaluate its validity. An assumption refers to that information that the researcher believes to be true but not confirmed (Rodgers, 2016). Without understanding the assumptions and explicitly stating them, the validity of the conclusions is impossible to verify. A limitation refers to those elements threatening the internal validity of the study that is outside the control of the researcher (Rodgers, 2016). By having the information on limitations, readers and reviewers can identify potential weaknesses of the study. The delimitations of this study refer to the boundaries of the research and its scope, which provides valuable information about its generalizability (Rodgers, 2016). This section details the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study.

Assumptions

An assumption in this study was that EWD participants in the local Michigan area were typical of other EWDs in this area. Following Tipu (2016), I assumed that an entrepreneur who had kept his or her business open for 3 years had built a successful business, and thus strategies used in that business can reflect strategies for success for other EWDs. A final assumption was that the success strategies of EWDs differed from strategies used by entrepreneurs without disabilities.

Limitations

The fundamental limitation of this study was the weakness due to the proposed

small sample size. The sample for this study was three EWD companies. The findings in

the study only applied to the enterprises in the study and were not representative of other

companies not in the study due to the nature of the disabilities of the three Michigan-

based EWDs, the location of the sample population within Michigan, and the type of

strategies identified. There were other strategies employed outside of the defined areas

that served to provide information about the success of the organization. Also, study

limitations occurred due to the selectivity of information that participants within the

sample population choose to provide. While I engaged in direct observation of the

companies to attempt to provide a holistic picture of the situation, there was no guarantee

that this approach provided all strategies used by the business. Some of those strategies

occurred behind the scenes or were not identifiable during the interview process.

Delimitations

Delimitations of a study reflected the boundaries imposed on it. Time constraints

prevented performing in-depth interviews on all EWDs in the geographic area. Specific

exclusions in this study were entrepreneurs without known disabilities and business

owners who were unwilling to participate in interviews and other research data collection

processes. Another delimitation of the survey was the exclusion of all individuals that

were not a part of the sample population, specifically those EWDs who were not at the

head of one of the three companies.

Significance of the Study

By understanding the strategies that EWDs used to achieve and sustain profitability in their enterprises, it may be possible to provide better assistance to EWDs as they develop their businesses. A gap existed between the current literature regarding the data associated with EWDs (DOL, ODEP, 2016) and the lack of information within the extant body of research on business strategies employed by EWDs (Heath & Reed, 2013; Katz, 2013; Parker Harris et al., 2013). This study was significant as it served to provide insight into this little-explored area of research. The studies that were available in this area predominantly explore either EWD practices in Alaska or those within low-income areas, as opposed to focusing on business strategies as a whole (Heath & Reed, 2013; Katz, 2013; Parker Harris et al., 2013). While pertinent to exploring the topic as a whole, the specificity of those areas of exploration failed to take into account EWDs generally. By studying the strategies of EWDs within the general population of a particular state, not only would the gap within the extant body of literature be reduced, leaving an exploration of the other regions, but it served to provide insight into the business strategies employed by EWDs. EWD leaders can use the findings of this study to develop the strategies necessary for increasing their ability to achieve profitability in their enterprises benefiting their employees, families, and communities. These leaders can create a social change from dependency to independence through successful self-employment.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

In this section, I provide a detailed examination of the literature relevant to this project. The first part provides the methodology used to conduct the study. The second part includes a thorough discussion of the conceptual framework chosen for this study, alternative structures employed in the literature, and a rationale for why the chosen framework was most appropriate for this study. Key concepts from the framework included entrepreneur characteristics, socioeconomic factors, and education and training factors. Within the literature review, separate sections examine each of the three categories. Where such research existed, assessment provided contrast or comparisons between EWDs and entrepreneurs without disabilities based on the evidence presented. The review has global significance by considering research on EWDs in countries other than the United States, offering alternative perspectives on the issue of EWDs. Finally, the literature review ends with a summary that encapsulates the overall concepts of this study.

Methodology of This Review

For this study, I searched online academic libraries to identify key papers and other resources. Search terms included words such as entrepreneur, entrepreneurship, traits of entrepreneurs, economic factors in entrepreneurship, education in entrepreneurs, training in entrepreneurs, challenges of entrepreneurs, and barriers to entrepreneurship. Further, the addition of the terms disabled and disabilities to each of the words in the previous list yielded additional reference sources.

The reference lists from those sources provided further research. Exclusion criteria included papers before 2013, with date exceptions made only for seminal works or critical articles that included related concepts. Primary sources, dating back to the 1980s and 1990s and cited in this study, were not directly included in this literature review except as a citation to identify the source of key concepts and for completeness of discussion. I identified 126 relevant articles, of which over 90% were peer-reviewed articles published since 2013.

Related Theories and Conceptual Models

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies EWDs employ to achieve and sustain profitability. Researchers utilized both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and a variety of related theories and conceptual models to investigate issues of EWDs. For example, Renko, Parker Harris, and Caldwell (2015) employed the use of the Cox proportional hazards model, first conceptualized in 1972, to determine whether EWDs were indeed different from other types of entrepreneurs, specifically regarding the variables of resources, social support, and degree of success in constructing their businesses. This kind of statistical model explored and identified the impact of several different variables on survival time. Of particular importance in this model was the result that EWDs were more likely than other types of entrepreneurs to start a business but less liable to be able to sustain it for extended periods. Renko et al. identified key variables, including the issue of start-up capital, as well as training or education tailored for the EWD. These results were similar to the key themes Parker Harris et al. (2013) discovered in their qualitative study. Renko et al. found that the most

important ideas arising out of their research were the need for education and information, access to funding and asset development, and support and networking.

Yamamoto and Alverson (2013) identified key factors using a hierarchical linear model (HLM) that predicted the success or failure of self-employment for those in vocational rehabilitation programs throughout the United States, covering over a million cases between 2003 and 2007. Using data from government vocational rehabilitation programs nationwide, Yamamoto and Alverson chose four key variables: gender, ethnicity (White vs. non-White), significant disability status (yes or no), and educational level (high school only vs. post-high school). Using the total cost of rehabilitation services and the average annual unemployment rate for each state, Yamamoto and Alverson added another variable: the monthly dollar amount of support to the business in the month the business failed. Yamamoto and Alverson found that ethnicity was the most important predictor of business success. Canedo, Stone, Black, and Lukaszewski (2014) also identified the relevance of ethnicity on entrepreneurship. Renko et al. (2015) found that the level of education and gender were important predictors. Yamamoto and Alverson suggested that self-employment was a complicated process of development that requires additional levels of support from agencies. The findings from the research by Yamamoto and Alverson were critical in supporting the use of gender-based and ethnicity-based entrepreneurship studies in this review where there was a lack of literature on EWDs.

Understanding the relationship between personal empowerment and entrepreneurship played a vital role with EWDs. Al-Dajani and Marlow used a

longitudinal study of 43 female entrepreneurs in Palestine who operated home-based

businesses providing high quality embroidered goods, interviewing them regularly over a

period of 10 years. Al-Dajani and Marlow constructed a theoretical framework that tied

disempowered and subjugated individuals—in this case, poor Palestinian women—with a

support structure for entrepreneurship that ultimately empowered them personally.

Similar to Renko et al. (2015), Al-Dajani and Marlow demonstrated the concept of

empowerment as a process and not a goal, and that it specifically was relevant to those

marginalized, socially excluded, discriminated against, or subject to social inequality. Al-

Dajani and Marlow identified key motivations for starting businesses, including

maintaining a cultural heritage of embroidery work, being aware of denigrated political

and social status, gaining access to more resources, improved welfare, economic

independence, and community organization and development. The resulting

empowerment included not only reduced poverty outcomes and establishing economic

status for women, but also non-economic issues, including learning accountability and

responsibility, greater insight, knowledge, and leadership, making decisions and having

choices, and creating self-identity (Al-Dajani, Carter, Shaw, & Marlow, 2015). These

results support the conclusion by Yamamoto and Alverson (2013) that self-employment

was a complicated process of development

Saunders, Gray, and Goregaokar (2014) supported the conclusion that both

personal and environmental factors contribute to entrepreneurial success. In particular,

Saunders et al. identified entrepreneurs of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), who

were in business at least 5 years, emphasizing the importance of both being adaptive

when business crises occur and having the commitment to continue learning about their businesses. Thus, Saunders et al. supported the importance of both environment and personal characteristics in business ownership. Additional support for personal factors came from Aguilar-Morales, Sandoval-Caraveo, Surdez-Pérez, and Gómez-Jiménez (2013), who identified specifically the entrepreneur's leadership style as being critical to business success.

Hopp and Sonderegger (2015) constructed a model of the process of establishing a start-up business, focusing on the pre-initiation elements that must take place after making the decision to start a company but before beginning the enterprise. These activities corresponded to the pre-launch phase identified by Canedo et al. (2014). In the 5-year longitudinal study, Hopp and Sonderegger focused on three elements of the process. The first component included the rate at which planning and startup activities occur. The second factor involved the concentration of those activities, i.e. how constant they occur or how irregularly they occur with lower measures indicating more dispersal of the activities over time. The third aspect included the timing of the actions or the degree to which the planning occurs earlier or later in the planning process. Hopp and Sonderegger hypothesized that getting main activities done quickly, doing them at a methodical pace that allows completion of one task before starting the next, and having a well-structured timeline were key factors to a successful startup. Contrary to their hypotheses, however, only placing the organizational activities late in the process correlated with success in the startup. Similar to Saunders et al. (2014) and Renko et al. (2015), Hopp and Sonderegger suggested that for the greatest success, entrepreneurs

should set their initial efforts on general developmental issues rather than specific

organizational tasks, leaving the regulatory issues for much later in the start-up process.

In a study of social entrepreneurship in India, Tasavori, Ghauri, and Zaefarian

(2016) determined that four factors contributed to the success of social enterprise as a

market entry tool. First, success included environmental factors such as the demand for

the given product or service and the expectations of those within the political arena.

Second, other factors included social responsibility, marketing strategies, specific

organizational characteristics, including targeted support from management, an

orientation of the network toward non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and adequate

financial assistance. Third, success included focused entrepreneurial discipline. Tasavori

et al. found that these factors were pivotal predictors of achievement, with available

funds and the appropriate implementation of social responsibility practices being the

most relevant fundamental issues. The main set of factors, however, was the

environmental set, with incentives and tax reductions being the most significant (Tasavori

et al., 2016). This framework had essential correlations to the factors that influence

success for EWDs as well. While the idea of social entrepreneurship is often related to

those who were young and idealistic, Tasavori et al. indicated that such visionaries were

not the only individuals who successfully can apply the principles of social

entrepreneurship. Factors included age and education levels that differ across all regions

of the globe (Guo, 2014; Jones-Smith, Gordon-Larsen, Siddiqui, & Popkin, 2012; Utomo,

2014). Also, while many social entrepreneurs have enough private funding to be able to

start their organizations, the amount of investment in such organizations was on the rise (Guo, 2014; Jones-Smith et al., 2012; Utomo, 2014).

Henman and Foster (2015), Quinn et al. (2012), and Sibanda (2015) summarized multiple models of issues facing EWDs. The three types of disability were the medical model (individual-specific impairments); the social model (societal-caused disabilities and the individual); and the Universalist approach (no difference between persons with and without disabilities). In summarizing the impact of disabilities related to EWDs, it became possible to identify lower employment and income levels for individuals with disabilities, disability-related costs, and disability income benefits (Henman & Foster, 2015; Quinn et al., 2012; Sibanda, 2015). The economic disparities for people with disabilities went beyond self-selection and ability. Workplace accommodations, on average, involved lower costs than projected. Despite these results, antidiscrimination laws in the United States did not increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Canedo, et al. (2014), who researched Hispanic entrepreneurs, used a model of entrepreneurship that consisted of three phases: pre-launch, launch, and post-launch (Canedo et al., 2014). Similar to Guo (2014), Jones-Smith et al. (2012), and Utomo (2014), the prelaunch phase identified by Canedo et al. included finding opportunities, evaluating them, collecting resources needed, and doing research. The launch phase involved setting up the legal entity, protecting intellectual property, and developing a business model. The post-launch phase included building a customer base, hiring key employees, negotiating, and improving product design. Canedo et al. found that in each of the three phases, there were three key sets of variables or factors of importance:

individual level variables, group level variables, and societal level variables, and these levels served as a means of exploring the relevance of ethnicity on entrepreneurship.

Barclay, Markel, and Yugo (2012) and Vornholt, Uitdewilligen, and Nijhuis (2013) provided insights into issues faced by individuals in the workplace. Barclay et al. defined an additional approach to investigating individuals with disabilities in the workplace, using virtue theory as an approach to understanding the problem of underemployment of people with disabilities. In this case, Barclay et al. described a high-quality organization as one that encourages integrity, compassion, and courage both for individuals and the enterprise as a whole. A worthy organization in this context was one that strives to deal with people with disabilities by doing more than simply following antidiscrimination laws (Barclay et al., 2012). The leaders embraced the talents of all its members, whether they have disabilities or not. Virtue theory supported the concept that individuals make decisions about work and behavior at work (Barclay et al., 2012). The framework developed by Barclay et al. addressed stigmatization towards persons with disabilities in traditional work. Vornholt et al. also investigated the acceptance of workers with disabilities in the workplace by other employees. Vornholt et al. used a framework in which the characteristics of the employee's colleagues and organizational culture affected their attitudes toward the employee. Such factors then resulted in acceptance or lack of acceptance of employees with disabilities and ultimately affected the workers' motivation, satisfaction, and quality of life (Vornholt et al., 2013). Although Renko et al. (2015) identified self-determination as an important factor in determining success, neither Barclay et al. nor Vornholt et al. discussed self-determination as it applies to EWDs.

Markman, Russo, Lumpkin, Jennings, and Mair (2016) offered a similar ethics-based approach to entrepreneurial studies. Markman et al. explored the potential use of entrepreneurship as a platform that would allow an organization to pursue multiple goals, including those within the realms of ethics and sustainability. Entities encounter a high level of difficulty in implementing practices that were as sustainable as possible (Markman et al., 2016). The problem was not the amount of focus on sustainability, but rather a lack of balance present between sustainable, ethical, and entrepreneurial practices (Markman et al., 2016). By working to implement and enforce the application of logical decision making within the organization and taking note of the environment of the body, it was possible to create a balanced environment. The entrepreneurial leader could be able to use social movements and practices as a means of jumpstarting the efforts in each of these three areas (Markman et al., 2016). The results supported the pre-launch phase of Canedo et al. (2014).

Defining Disability

Perhaps the first key to understanding disabilities in either employment or self-employment was to identify what disability means. Lederer, Loisel, Rivard, and Champagne (2014) conducted an in-depth analysis of the definitions of work ability and disability, asking questions regarding the conceptualization of work disability and the changes in definitions over time. Using 423 abstracts from leading databases, Lederer et al. screened and extracted definitions using a grounded theory approach, selecting 280 records for screening and using 115 publications that contained individual descriptions. Lederer et al. found no shared vision of the precise nature and dimensions of work

disability. Instead, Lederer et al. concluded that work disability was a relational concept with multiple dimensions that influence each other, and the definitions differed regarding the notion of work. Lederer et al. emphasized the importance of finding a shared definition and shared understanding among all stakeholders. This in-depth review of the literature demonstrated the complexity of the concept of disability and its individual, organizational, and societal dimensions. Yamamoto and Alverson (2013) found similar complexity.

Research Methodology

For qualitative studies, the most common approach to data collection is via surveys, interviews, or focus groups. Finger, Escorpizo, Bostan, and De Bie (2014) presented a validation of a new study based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) developed as an ICF-based instrument to capture work functioning. Their instrument, the Work Rehabilitation Questionnaire (WORQ), was a tool for patient reporting and included questions on work background and socio-demographics. WORQ demonstrated a high level of reliability and good internal consistency. Finger et al. found WORQ to be as reliable as an ICF-based questionnaire regarding the evaluation of work functioning and suggested that the WORQ could contribute to improving services that led to return-to-work or engagement in gainful employment. WORQ did not include the characteristics of the employee's colleagues and organizational culture identified by Vornholt et al. (2013)

Taking a different approach, bypassing the questionnaire as a data collection tool, Namey, Guest, McKenna, and Chen (2016) compared two different ways to performing

individual interviews and focus groups. Namey et al. sought to determine whether interviews or focus groups were more cost-effective regarding achieving thematic saturation sifting through the information collected from 40 in-depth interviews and 40 focus groups with 350 participants between the two. Namey et al. determined that eight in-depth interviews achieved 80% saturation, while 16 in-depth interviews received 90% saturation. Namey et al. compared the result to three focus groups reaching 80% saturation versus five panels for 90% saturation, concluding that focus groups were more efficient at comprehensively exploring the perspective of the participants than individual interviews. Similar to Finger et al. (2014), Namey et al. recommended using focus groups when exploring the participants' perspectives comprehensively, demonstrating that group processes could help people to explore and clarify their views.

Core Assumptions in Entrepreneurship Research

Scherdin and Zander (2014) identified the core assumptions implicit in current entrepreneurship research. Scherdin and Zander drew on literature from the field of neurophilosophy literature in the process of identifying core assumptions about an individual and engagement with the environment. The underlying assumptions appeared to be fundamental to entrepreneurship research:

- People made entrepreneurial decisions to discover, evaluate, and exploit new business opportunities based on their personal worldviews.

- In such entrepreneurial decisions, the relationship between the individual and changes in the environment was bi-directional.

Despite explicitly stating the assumptions, Scherdin and Zander (2014) were cautious about the relevance of presuming that these specific assumptions—or any other particular set of assumptions—applied to all entrepreneurial research. Scherdin and Zander argued that locking in research into any given set of assumptions improved the development of research theory, but also secured in the field a frozen mindset that ultimately proved more restrictive than helpful. In support of this research, Fadyl, McPherson, and Nicholls (2015) constructed a postmodern Foucault-based textual analysis of the rehabilitation policies in New Zealand to identify the attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. Fadyl et al. demonstrated that current social models of disability reserve the term *disability* for those with impairments, which tended to isolate those with such disabilities from people whom society otherwise marginalizes. Fadyl et al. identified that social isolation occurred because society values those individuals with limitations less than those without such challenges. Both Fadyl et al. and Scherdin demonstrated how assumptions affected the strategies of the EWDs.

Characteristics of Entrepreneurs

This section of the literature review highlights specific factors that contribute or influence entrepreneur success. Balcazar, Kuchak, Dimpfl, Sariepella, and Alvarado (2014) showed that entrepreneurship had a positive impact on new owners by empowering them and acting as a substitute for more traditional employment options. Blackburn, Hart, and Wainwright (2013) investigated the characteristics of SMEs and found that the age and size of the SME correlated more to success than specific

entrepreneur characteristics. In light of the correlation between success and entrepreneur characteristics, the personalities of entrepreneurs were a critical factor.

Antoncic, Kregar, Singh, and DeNoble (2015) and Rodríguez-Gutiérrez, Moreno, and Tejada (2015) investigated the characteristics of entrepreneurs. Antoncic et al. (2015) used the Big Five personality factors as their guide to study four groups of entrepreneurs: practicing, potential, maybe entrepreneurs, and non-entrepreneurs. The Big Five consist of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, generally referred to as the OCEAN factors. Antoncic et al. hypothesized that entrepreneurs tended to have high values in the O, C, E, and A factors, but tended to have low values in the N factor. Also, Antoncic et al. hypothesized that there were gender differences in entrepreneurs regarding both the level and moderation of the five factors. Similar to Yamamoto and Alverson (2013), Antoncic et al. found that the O factor included essential characteristics for practicing entrepreneurs that distinguished them from the other three groups. The C factor showed no significant differences among the four groups. Low levels of the E factor primarily identified non-entrepreneurs compared to the other three groups. In contrast, high levels of the A factor closely linked to non-entrepreneurs than to any of the other three groups. Men also scored lower in the C, E, and A factors than women. Overall, the C and N factors were not particularly significant for entrepreneurship, which was consistent with prior research showing that entrepreneurs tend not to engage in formal business planning activities. While this study was not conducted using EWDs, Antoncic et al. provided a useful comparative baseline

to understand if the Big Five characteristics of EWDs differ from those of entrepreneurs without disabilities.

With a more direct focus on the features unique to entrepreneurs, Rodríguez-Gutiérrez et al. (2015) investigated characteristics of entrepreneurs that made their start-up service businesses successful. The key factors identified as contributing to entrepreneurial success and competitiveness were the features of the individual, elements of the enterprise, and the managerial attributes of the business; all were significant in determining the business success (Rodríguez-Gutiérrez et al., 2015). Separate factors influencing competitiveness included the general business environment and factors relating to the entrepreneurial orientation of the company. While Rodríguez-Gutiérrez et al. did not investigate EWDs, they focused on entrepreneurs and provided further support for the concept that the personal characteristics of the entrepreneur were a significant factor in the success or failure of a start-up, supporting the research of Saunders et al. (2014) and Canedo et al. (2014).

Given the narrow scope of the studies conducted by Antoncic et al. (2015) and Rodríguez-Gutiérrez et al. (2015), the research conducted by Walter and Heinrichs (2015) provided a comprehensive meta-analysis of research conducted over 30 years that gave insight into entrepreneur characteristics. Walter and Heinrichs investigated the relationship between personal characteristics and entrepreneurial choices. The goal was to understand the evidence for six perspectives—trait, cognitive characteristics, affective characteristics, intentions, learning, and economic issues—and how the perspectives inform the choice of an individual to become an entrepreneur. Former studies primarily

focused on the trait and financial matters in the decision to start a company. Van

Gelderen, Kautonen, and Fink (2015) explored the idea that an entrepreneur is a person

who takes action in spite of uncertainty in the future and incomplete knowledge of the

present. It is for this reason that the emotions associated with entrepreneurial efforts

included a combination of the emotions, moods, and feelings of the entrepreneur and

other stakeholders in the new venture. Van Gelderen et al. noted that business owners

often treat their new enterprises as they would a child, exposing the entrepreneurs to

emotional grief reactions when there were failures. The emotional responses of the

business owner have the ability directly to influence some organizational issues,

including staff interactions and customer satisfaction, and not always in a positive

manner (Van Gelderen et al., 2015). While body language, tone, and expression of

entrepreneurs affected the success of receiving financing, the overall entrepreneur

preparedness was more important in having received a positive funding decision. In

situations where teams rather than individual entrepreneurs started ventures, the

emotional interplay of those people related to the success or failure of the venture.

In addition to the factors that inspired individuals to become entrepreneurs, other

factors existed that tended to prevent making decisions. One of those was the fear factor.

Cacciotti and Hayton (2015) reviewed the literature on how fear affects entrepreneurs in

the decision to start a new business. Cacciotti and Hayton considered fear from a

different perspective than the more common one of how fear of failure influences the

decision to start or not start a new business. However, another effect pertains to fear as a

function of individual personality rather than as a temporary barrier to initiation of an

enterprise. Cacciotti and Hayton identified a failing in current research, which primarily

focused on the fear of having a new business fail based on the personal and financial

costs of business failure. Morgan and Sisak (2016) investigated how fear affected

enterprise decisions, noting, in particular, the effects that fear have on different decisions.

Most researchers, according to Cacciotti and Hayton, assumed that fear of failure and

risk-taking were opposing forces and that risk-taking behavior in turn related with

positive inclinations to start new ventures. Overall, Cacciotti and Hayton concluded that

fear of failure was a barrier to entrepreneurship because of the preponderance of evidence

in the literature. Morgan and Sisak found that both the fear of loss and the aspirations for

success moderated the degree of investment into the new enterprise. Morgan and Sisak

found that fear reduced the level of investment in the company on the part of those with

low expectations. For those with high expectations for their businesses, however, Morgan

and Sisak found that fear of loss increased both their level of investment in the company

and the likelihood of success. Morgan and Sisak indicated that those entrepreneurs who

merely wanted to generate modest successes (such as replicating the wage at a regular

paid job) tended to have fears that corroded their motivations and reduced their

investments in their ventures. The characteristics that made an individual an

entrepreneurial candidate also made him or her vulnerable to emergencies and setbacks

(Antoncic et al., 2015; Cacciotti & Hayton, 2015; Rodríguez-Gutiérrez et al., 2015; Van

Gelderen et al., 2015; Walter & Heinrichs, 2015). For example, the short-term focus and

prevalence of family businesses often meant that start-up companies lacked the

preparation to deal with major emergencies such as disablement, death, prolonged

illnesses, natural disaster, and divorce (Bachev, 2014; Stahura, Henthorne, George, & Soraghan, 2012). Further, owners responsible for keeping their businesses afloat in times of turbulence, from personal issues to economic issues to weather-related concerns, were less likely to have a plan in place to be able to address such situations (Bachev, 2014; Stahura, et al., 2012). However, EWDs, who personally experienced such setbacks and overcame them, prepared for such emergencies in the future and had plans to recover from them, strengthening the business over time (Reddington & Fitzsimons, 2013).

Leadership

An entrepreneur's leadership style was a major factor in determining the success of the business (Aguilar-Morales et al., 2013). Using a case-study approach with four business people in Tabasco, Mexico, Aguilar-Morales et al. identified specific characteristics of self-confidence, forceful will, a task/results orientation, acceptance of risk, perseverance, and robust leadership as consistent across the participants. Leadership style varied from transformational leadership to transactional/transformational leadership. Aguilar-Morales et al. concluded that the most important determiner of leadership style in entrepreneurs was their personal characteristics, rather than experience in the business. Of the different leadership styles explored within the context of entrepreneurs, researchers found that transformational leadership was a highly desirable method of working with employees (Aguilar-Morales et al., 2013; Matzler, Bauer, & Mooradin, 2015). Using validated instruments, the Transformational Leadership Inventory, and Rosenberg's self-esteem scale, Matzler et al. found that positive self-esteem correlated to transformational leadership style, which in turn positively correlated to innovation

success. Negative self-esteem had a negative correlation to both transformational leadership and innovation success. It was not only the leadership style that must be in alignment for a business to take off but the other characteristics of the entrepreneur as well. Freeman and Siegfried (2015) identified factors that determined what it took to build a business from start-up to a significant business entity with 50 or more employees. Specifically, Freeman and Siegfried noted three personal characteristics of successful entrepreneurs: strategic thinking, coaching, and self-evaluation, while at the same time noting the significant leadership challenges associated with startups.

Entrepreneurs must not only have a strategic vision of their company, but they must also communicate that in a way that tells the stakeholders why they chose both their new enterprise and its purpose (Aguilar-Morales et al., 2013; Freeman & Siegfried, 2015; Matzler et al., 2015). Entrepreneurs also needed the appropriate amount of persistence to overcome startup barriers, while still recognizing when they were going off track (Aguilar-Morales et al., 2013; Freeman & Siegfried, 2015; Matzler et al., 2015). The entrepreneur must also transition from being the key player in the company to a major coach of employees (Aguilar-Morales et al., 2013; Freeman & Siegfried, 2015; Matzler et al., 2015). Finally, self-evaluation helped entrepreneurs to understand their limitations (Aguilar-Morales et al., 2013; Freeman & Siegfried, 2015; Matzler et al., 2015). For the current EWD study, it was possible to identify these characteristics and stages in the growth process of prosperous EWD startups and to compare how those growth processes differed from that defined by Freeman and Siegfried.

Motivation and Attitude

EWDs want to work. Saunders and Nedelec (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of the literature on the attitudes toward the work of employees with disabilities. Motivation to work was high, particularly in positions that balanced flexibility, challenge, and predictability and corresponded to the interests and abilities of the worker (Saunders & Nedelec, 2014). Essential to developing and sustaining this motivational attitude was the importance of positive attitudes from co-workers and employers, as well as a positive support network from vocational counselors and similar agency supports (Saunders & Nedelec, 2014). A worthy organization strives to deal with people with disabilities by doing more than simply following antidiscrimination laws (Barclay et al., 2012). However, the perceived barrier that work resulted in discontinuance of government benefits such as Social Security/disability payments offset the positive aspects of working. Further issues that affected motivation to work on the part of the EWDs were health-related issues, such as medication and side effects and emotional and physical demands. Saunders and Nedelec provided useful information for this project because the motivation to work was a large part of the determination to become an entrepreneur. Of crucial importance in this study were the common themes that support the fact that persons with disabilities see work as a part of life, a basis of identity, self-esteem, and financial assistance (Saunders & Nedelec, 2014). A person forms his or her identity through work. Saunders and Nedelec showed that work resulted in better management of illnesses. Finally, in support of the research by Vornholt et al. (2013), Saunders and Nedelec found that the social aspects of work were relevant to people with disabilities.

For individuals with intellectual disabilities, the challenge was different than for people with physical impairments, making it even more vital to identify workplace success strategies. Siperstein, Heyman, and Stokes (2014) investigated what strategies were most useful for individuals with intellectual disabilities, allowing for an illumination of the similarities and differences between those with intellectual and physical disabilities in the workplace. Siperstein et al. identified keys for successful employment, including youth, early work experiences, a greater ability to adapt to new circumstances, and a lack of either emotional or behavioral problem. Siperstein et al. noted the importance of young people with disabilities gaining early work experience and developing adaptive skills and appropriate behavioral and emotional skills. Notably, Siperstein et al. pointed out that sheltered work environments rarely led to employment in a more open workplace. Limited workplace options were available as with individuals with physical disabilities. Unlike people with physical impairments, the primary concern was not over benefits or a lack of desire for those options, but instead a lack of consideration regarding workplace conditions (Saunders & Nedelec, 2014; Siperstein et al., 2014).

Moran, Russinova, Yim, and Sprague (2014) illustrated the strength of the motivation to work. They studied the motivations of individuals with psychiatric disabilities to want to work as mental health peer workers. Using self-determination theory, Moran et al. investigated both internally and externally regulated motivations. Moran et al. found that the external motivations included professional goals and avoiding negative work experiences. Similar to Al-Dajani and Marlow (2013), the internal moti-vations included basic needs such as autonomy in finding employment that corresponded

to personal values, competence in using personal experience, and relatedness in having

the opportunity to connect with consumers (Moran et al., 2014). The results of this

paper, however, were not generalizable because the small sample size did not reflect

various ethnicities or education levels.

Ponzio, Brichetto, Zaratin, and Battaglia (2015) investigated attitudes toward

work of people with disabilities, both employed and unemployed to determine whether

these individuals want to find employment. Ponzio et al. explored what kinds of jobs they

prefer, and if employed, how they felt about being used within their given work

environment. Ponzio et al. found that unemployed people with disabilities wanted jobs

similar to those that people without disabilities had, were as likely to have prior job

experiences and had similar views on income needs, job security, and other job

characteristics. Ponzio et al. did not explore concerns associated with the loss of benefits

in these motivations. With a more severe disability, individual concerns increased about

benefits (Ponzio et al., 2015; Saunders & Nedelec, 2014; Siperstein et al., 2014).

Differences existed among people with different types of disability, showing that those

with chronic, degenerative disabilities were not in the fields or positions that they desired

(Ponzio et al., 2015). There was a lower willingness on the part of employers to hire

individuals with such conditions (Ponzio et al., 2015). Evidence collected indicated that

persons with disabilities want to work and were willing to consider various job

opportunities, but such opportunities do not always present themselves. Ponzio et al.

concluded that a complex array of barriers caused the low employment rate of people

with disabilities. Ponzio et al. did not investigate the lack of opportunities for flexible

self-employment for EWDs and did not look beyond a particular set of disabilities.

Self-Determination and Self-Efficacy

EWDs have a limited connection to the idea of becoming an entrepreneur. Nabi,

Walmsley, and Holden (2013) investigated factors that contribute to the determination to

become an entrepreneur. Nabi et al. used a sample of 15 alumni from a British university,

all of whom started their businesses before graduation. The results indicated a mixture of

push-pull factors that led to the determination as to whether or not to become an

entrepreneur, further strengthening the validity of Tipu's framework (Nabi et al., 2013;

Tipu, 2016). Three primary areas determined if a person would be likely to start their

own business: the personal characteristics of the individual, the level of environmental

support for the business idea, the context of the plan of activities, and the business idea

itself (Nabi et al., 2013). The second and third factors were one broad category within the

study reporting (Nabi et al., 2013). Most entrepreneurial education focused on those who

decided to start a business, but they concluded that the likelihood of the start-up

materializing required a more nuanced understanding of the different factors and

complexities involved in the transition from learning about business to starting one's own

(Nabi et al., 2013).

A similar qualitative study investigated the perceptions of workers with

disabilities on self-determination in a competitive (i.e., commercial rather than nonprofit)

work environment (Ellenkamp, Brouwers, Embregts, Joosen, & van Weeghel, 2015). To

accomplish this task, Ellenkamp et al. conducted a review of all relevant papers published

between 1993 and 2013, with the identified articles screened and validated by two different individuals. Following the completion of the screening process, Ellenkamp et al. reviewed 1,932 articles for relevance and quality, reducing them to 26. Ellenkamp et al. determined that a limited number of studies sought to address the environmentally related factors associated with the enhancement of competitiveness of the work environment for persons with disabilities (Ellenkamp et al., 2015). In spite of the lack of relevant data and the need to explore the topic in greater depth, there were still certain environmental factors that worked to contribute, at least in part, to increasing the competitiveness of the work environment for those diagnosed with a disability. Similar to the characteristics found by Barclay et al. (2012), the factors included the content of the job and its associated duties, the integration of individuals within the workplace environment, the organizational culture, the presence or absence of job coaches, and the decisions made by the employer concerning how to manage these employees (Ellenkamp et al., 2015).

Socioeconomic Factors in Entrepreneurship

Reddington and Fitzsimons (2013) interviewed EWDs in micro enterprises, organizations with fewer than ten workers and varying levels of wages. Reddington and Fitzsimons took a mixed-method approach rather than a strictly qualitative one as done in most other papers in this section. Reddington and Fitzsimons combined surveys and interviews with both entrepreneurs and bankers to determine accessibility to funding. Reddington and Fitzsimons found that one key to entrepreneurial success came from a combination of family support and individualized person-centered assistance. Socioeconomic factors included a variety of specific issues, including networks,

relationship-building, support from family, support from agencies, availability of capital,

and other barriers to EWDs. The need for support from peers, government agencies, and

banks or other sources of financing was one of the most fundamental issues for EWDs

(Reddington & Fitzsimons, 2013). Another key was that those with different types of

disabilities might need very different kinds of support systems, so it was vital to tailor

these systems to specific needs (Ponzio et al., 2015; Reddington & Fitzsimons, 2013;

Saunders & Nedelec, 2014; Siperstein et al., 2014). Further support for the importance of

socio-environmental factors came from Shogren (2013).

Shogren (2013) suggested that by understanding the individual, school, family,

social networks, community, and societal factors, there was the potential to influence

self-determination. Specific factors influenced each of the diversified framework

elements. For example, personal factors included age, race, disability type, and social

networks. Of these, Shogren asserted that the label on the disability was a factor that

influenced self-determination. At the mesosystem level, Shogren found that the

availability of community services affected self-determination. At the macro-system

level, cultural beliefs about disabilities shaped the experiences of EWDs and thus their

self-determination (Shogren, 2013; Solesvik, Westhead, & Matlay, 2014). Finally, the

chronosystem level reflected the reality that social mores and attitudes transform over

time and were not static. Shogren (2013) found significant gaps between existing

research and practice. A social-ecological perspective of self-determination improved the

connection for the person-environment interaction. Similar to Van Gelderen et al. (2015),

Shogren suggested the importance of building an interspersed system of support for self-

determination. With self-determination providing a motivation for entrepreneurship,
Shogren's work and insight into the social-ecological aspects of EWDs provided a firm
grounding in this area. Socio-environmental influences on entrepreneurship do not
necessarily follow clear trends. For example, Wingfield and Taylor (2016) conducted a
study to explore the impact of race, class, and gender on entrepreneurship to determine
whether the lack of attention to affirmative action efforts works to increase
entrepreneurship. A linear probability model allowed for the assessment of decisions. The
elimination of affirmative action led to a modest increase in self-employment among
women and minorities. Individuals who identified as a minority who went into business
for themselves were more likely to have a better grasp on the intersection of race, class,
and gender and the various roles that they play within the work environment (Wingfield
& Taylor, 2016). The results indicated that factors other than regulatory affirmative
action programs stimulate self-employment.

Relationship Building

An important key to establishing effective assistance to EWDs came from
creating a stable relationship between the businessperson and agencies designed to
support them and between the EWDs and other business owners (Balcazar et al., 2014).
Building relationships and networks were essential for entrepreneurial success. For
example, Stephens (2013) used a combination of surveys and interviews to investigate
the use of business associations in immigrants starting new enterprises. Stephens asked
each of the 10 participants to identify ten people who were part of their business network
and with whom the member regularly communicated about their business. Typically,

these systems consisted of two family members, three staff members, two customers, two

consultants, and one other entrepreneur. The networks provided access to business

events, advice, friendship, seminars, and training. The three key methods of building

these business systems included engaging with a community of people like them (i.e.,

immigrants of the same nationality), engagement with the general business community,

and professional advice from a government or local chambers of commerce. While this

study was not specifically about EWDs, immigrants working in a new and unfamiliar

business environment used similar strategies and thus provide insight into the challenges

experienced by EWDs in building their business networks.

Family Support

Aguilar-Morales et al. (2013) found that family values played an important part in

the success of the participant entrepreneurs. The businesspersons relied on the support of

their spouses or fathers (if unmarried), as well as on their love of their businesses and

having a certain attitude (Aguilar-Morales et al., 2013). In China, the term *guanxi* refers

to networks and social connections. Scott, Harrison, Hussain, and Millman (2014)

investigated how women used *guanxi* to acquire the knowledge to overcome barriers to

entrepreneurship in Ukraine. Scott et al. conducted in-depth interviews to examine how

the use of *guanxi* influenced the success of enterprise start-ups by women. In women-led

firms in Ukraine, crucial factors for success included family background, support from

parents and spouses, experience, training, education, and availability of financing. Scott

et al. suggested that these factors were not atypical for any nation in encouraging non-

traditional entrepreneurs. Of particular note in this study, however, was the importance of

having mentors available who assist the women entrepreneurs to develop business skills and offering key contacts and support to overcome barriers. In particular, Scott et al. investigated the effectiveness of entrepreneurship-specific education in preparing individuals for entrepreneurship, finding that such training, cultural factors, perceived desirability of entrepreneurship, and perceived feasibility of being an entrepreneur did not significantly correlate with increased intensity of intentions to become an entrepreneur. Scott et al. concluded that governments or organizations wishing to expand the creation of businesses must do more than just provide entrepreneurial education to underrepresented potential entrepreneurs. Scott et al. indicated that even though such education resulted in somewhat higher entrepreneurial intentions, the intensity of the entrepreneurial push was not significantly greater despite the specialized business training received. The results also guided programs seeking to increase the entrepreneurship of EWDs because increased education on business skills was not sufficient to generate more start-ups in this population.

Access to Funding

The availability of funds influenced the success or failure of brand-new enterprises. Bewaji, Yang, and Han (2015) probed whether minority entrepreneurs obtained institutional funding to establish their businesses to the same degree as non-minority entrepreneurs. In earlier research, Bewaji et al. found that minority entrepreneurs tended to be from lower- or middle-class family backgrounds were younger, more likely married, and often entrepreneurially experienced. Also, minority entrepreneurs managed to have college degrees with primary motivators of job

satisfaction and a desire for achievement. In spite of these factors, which indicated

inherent success, previous research found that minority entrepreneurs had a higher failure

rate than non-minority entrepreneurs. Bewaji et al. hypothesized that an older, educated

minority entrepreneur with prior experience in industry and entrepreneurship was more

likely to receive funding from known financial institutions compared to other minority

applicants. The youth had a marginally negatory impact on access to financing, but

education and antecedent experience in the industry were determining markers for

funding access (Bewaji et al., 2015). The primary constraints included minority status,

lack of industry experience, and lack of education, with minority status being the single

greatest factor. The constraints identified by Bewaji et al. supported the socioeconomic

factors found by Reddington and Fitzsimmons (2013).

   Weber and Ahmad (2014) and Koubâa (2014) investigated the role of

microfinance in entrepreneurial success, focusing on developing countries primarily.

Koubâa focused on informal funding (i.e., friends and family) and on microfinance

funding for start-ups to understand how human capital determines access to financing and

microfinance for entrepreneurs with limited access to other forms of investment. This

result was particularly relevant to disadvantaged entrepreneurs, including women in

particular, who often have much less access to formal funding options. Koubâa found that

determinants for receiving microloans included at least some level of education, some

degree of experience or age (older businesspeople preferred over younger ones), and

parental business experience. Informal financing was the only source for young

entrepreneurs, particularly if they had some initial capital of their own and some degree

of business experience. Another potential source of financing was micro-financing

operations. In developing countries, such funding routes usually bypass banking and

venture capital processes. Weber and Ahmad (2014) explored whether micro-financing

options resulted in the greater empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Pakistan.

Previous studies provided mixed results on this question. Weber and Ahmad sought to

determine if microfinance provided women in Pakistan with a mechanism to improve

their financial situation, despite the cultural barriers they face in starting a business.

Females in Pakistan have little access to bank financing and must depend on private

lenders or microfinance. In this respect, the women were similar to many (but not all)

EWDs in the United States. Weber and Ahmad studied whether micro financing

improved the group of women in Pakistan. Weber and Ahmad explored whether other

factors (marital status, age, rural vs. urban, etc.) affected the impact microfinance had on

the women's empowerment status, and how micro financing improved the situation if it

did. Weber and Ahmad found that those women who had more loan cycles in

microfinance indeed were better off than those who were only on their first investment

cycle. The fundamental difference appeared in later periods; the borrower could better

determine how to use the credit, and that was a vital sign of financial empowerment.

Furthermore, with reduced mobility restrictions—another indicator of empowerment—

those women with more investment cycles also had greater freedom of movement, thus

indicating greater empowerment. Ultimately, Weber and Ahmad concluded that micro

financing contributed significantly to financial empowerment, but not significantly to

social empowerment.

Fresh sources of funding affected the ability of EWDs to get needed resources for their enterprises. Crowdfunding was one of the innovations in financing start-up companies. Some entrepreneurs were highly resistant to taking advantage of this source of funding. Using impression management, Gleasure (2015) suggested that individuals present themselves in service to goals and encouragement of esteem from others. In doing interviews with participants, Gleasure found three principal themes developed. First, some entrepreneurs believed that crowdfunding offered little strategic value to their business because they ran business-to-business (B2B) businesses or felt they had a niche market. Second, some entrepreneurs expressed passive acceptance of crowdfunding but a refusal to take impelling steps to achieve such funding. A third theme was that some business owners said crowdfunding might be viable, but they lacked time and resources to explore this option. Underlying these issues were several fears, including a fear of projecting desperation instead of success; a fear of visibly failing; a fear of disclosing confidential information; and the perceived costs/benefits of switching to a crowdfunding model (Cacciotti & Hayton, 2015; Gleasure, 2015; Xu, Zheng, Xu, & Wang, 2016). For entrepreneurs such as EWDs, who experienced high barriers to receiving significant outside financing, the use of crowdfunding was an underutilized resource. While most of the research on crowdfunding focused on strategies for raising sufficient money to start a business or a project, Xu et al. explored the satisfaction of sponsors in crowdfunded financing of new enterprises to understand how best to maximize that satisfaction. Noting that most crowdfunding research focused on how to improve the amount of money achieved through this avenue, Xu et al. focused on what attributes of the startup

maximized the funders' satisfaction with their decision to give money to this

organization. Xu et al. found that keys to that satisfaction included timely delivery,

product quality, project novelty, sponsor participation, and entrepreneur activeness.

Agency Support

Agencies dealing with EWDs needed to be particularly sensitive to the unique

needs of EWDs in starting and sustaining their businesses (Balcazar et al., 2014). In

particular, creative implementation of educational and other entrepreneur training

programs substantially improved the prospects for such new business owners (Balcazar et

al., 2014). As one example, Parker Harris et al. (2013) conducted a qualitative study

designed to understand better, how social entrepreneurship compares with

entrepreneurship that is more commercial for EWDs. Parker Harris et al. used a

combination of focus groups of the entrepreneurs and stakeholder interviews of the main

government programs targeted for EWDs, identifying key barriers to entrepreneurship.

The barriers included lack of business knowledge and training, lack of organizational

support and advice beyond the first year, lack of information on how entrepreneurship

affects their disability benefits and policies, and, most importantly, a lack of access to

financing. These factors were essential elements in any investigation of EWDs. Because

this and other studies identified these key barriers, I intended to include these ideas in the

data collection process of the current study.

In a separate study, Heath, Ward, and Reed (2013) developed a slightly different

approach to assisting the individuals with disabilities with vocational issues using

customized employment (CE). Heath et al. assessed the effectiveness of the Start-Up

Alaska program with the goal of identifying policies and practices that were useful in establishing self-employment or entrepreneurial enterprises. Heath et al. found four key elements that most impacted success in this program: a dedicated self-employment facilitator, Discovery, access to a (virtual) business incubator, and help with developing a business plan. This guidance and support provided advice, practical business education and assistance, and feedback. Similar to the variables found by Renko et al. (2015), the Discovery aspect of the program offered the entrepreneurs a mechanism for identifying the participants' ideal interests, preferences, abilities, learning characteristics, and different aspects of a strength profile. A conclusion of Heath et al. was that assessment of the entrepreneurs' personal characteristics using Discovery related to success in building a business.

Like Renko et al. (2015), the inadequacy of agency support also appeared as a factor in research by Schafft (2014), who investigated programs designed to assist individuals with disabilities in the workplace. In particular, Schafft probed the effectiveness of these programs with those who have mental illnesses as opposed to other types of disabilities. Schafft found that because the job coaches focus on strengths and abilities rather than skills, they tend to ignore the fears and concerns of co-workers and employers for this particular group of individuals (Schafft, 2014). This approach often resulted in the job coaches stopping work with the employees after employment. Honeycutt, Thompkins, Bardos, and Stern (2015) noted that in many states individuals with disabilities have little access to programs designed to help them enter the workforce, and even when admitted into such programs, they rarely end up with a job. In the

Honeycutt et al. study, the most dynamic state, Alabama, only had jobs for 6.5% of youth with disabilities, while in Louisiana, the success rate was an abysmal 0.9%. Different types of employment assistance programs have different effectiveness. Luciano et al. (2014) found that agencies using Individual Placement and Support (IPS) programs, which focused on client choice, rapid placement, competitive employment (rather than sheltered workplaces), team approaches, benefits counseling, and continuing support for work had substantially higher success rates than traditional programs. Brown and Kessler's (2014) research further supported the Luciano et al. study. Brown and Kessler noted that individuals with significant intellectual disabilities were more successful when agencies used an IPS type of approach to place them in locations where they worked side-by-side with other workers than when isolated in sheltered workplaces. More support for this came from Del Valle et al. (2014), who found that those flourishing state agencies placing individuals with disabilities achieved success by emphasizing individual client needs and designing individualized services to meet those needs.

Gender Studies

While the EWDs were either male or female, some areas of the barriers encountered by EWDs were similar to the obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs. Thus, it was important to consider the research on gender studies of entrepreneurship as well as studies of individuals with disabilities. Bamiatzi, Jones, Mitchelmore, and Nikolopoulos (2015) and Smith (2014) investigated the role of gender in entrepreneurship and family business. Smith noted the expansion of the literature on the relationship between gender and entrepreneurship, finding that in the theories of entrepreneurship and business

ownership, entrepreneurship has dominance. Smith discovered that the male entrepreneur represented the point reference for the discussion on other forms of business ownership. The roles played by mothers, wives, and family thus were often unaddressed. Through the concept of matriarchy, Smith offered an understanding of how gendered relationships influenced entrepreneurial identities. Of particular note, Smith suggested the importance of avoiding common assumptions when concentrating on entrepreneurship as the primary variable. Smith identified the differences between theory and practice in understanding how gender issues impact business ownership and thus challenged the universality of traditional assumptions. Bamiatzi, Jones, Mitchelmore, and Nikolopoulos (2015) focused on studying the leadership qualities of female entrepreneurs in three areas of the United Kingdom. The researchers used a three-part survey that included personal profiles, an augmented version of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), and an adapted version of the Female Entrepreneur Competencies framework, which covered managerial and entrepreneurial skills. Bamiatzi et al. provided a robust model for how to investigate leadership in small start-up entrepreneurs. The theoretical framework is of particular application to the current project, with the references alone being valuable guides to developing a conceptual framework. Key factors considered by Bamiatzi et al. included communicating a vision to the team, team building, situational leadership styles, and transformational leadership characteristics. These same factors were of particular interest when investigating EWDs.

Bosse and Taylor (2012) took a different approach from that of Smith (2014) and Bamiatzi et al. (2015), exploring the issue of why women were less likely to become

entrepreneurs than men were. Studying women across the globe, Bosse and Taylor identified a complex mixture of characteristics that explained the gap in entrepreneurship. The single biggest factor was the differences in gender roles between men and women and the difficulties associated with the overcoming of the same (Bosse & Taylor, 2012). The second issue was what the researchers refer to as a secondary glass ceiling brought about by a decreased access to financial resources than that which is available to their male counterparts (Bosse & Taylor, 2012). Unemployment was a definitive indicator for business ownership, though more so for men than women (Bosse & Taylor, 2012). Education also increased entrepreneurship, primarily for males, with vocational training specifically decreasing entrepreneurship in women only (Bosse & Taylor, 2012). Greater household income increased business ownership also, but only for men (Bosse & Taylor, 2012). Instead, men have more vocational training that tended to increase business ownership, and women appeared to have less control over household income, also reducing their entrepreneurship and a decreased access to financial opportunities, decreasing their likelihood to become small business owners or entrepreneurs themselves (Bosse & Taylor, 2012). While apparently specific to gender differences, some of the similar factors came into play for EWDs, precisely the lack of control or access to household incomes, the lack of necessary vocational or industrial training, and possibly risk aversion deriving from their disabilities. Iakovleva, Solesvik, and Trifilova (2013) found similar results on women entrepreneurs in Russia and Ukraine.

Ethnicity Studies

Just as gender issues affected entrepreneurship, so do ethnicity issues. Again, it was worthwhile to investigate the literature on ethnicity studies to determine how relevant they were for EWDs. Canedo et al. (2014) conducted a study on the factors affecting Hispanic entrepreneurship. Canedo et al. discussed the practical and social implications of their work, noting that while Hispanics were more likely to create new enterprises than Anglos in the United States, they were also more liable to see those businesses fail due to specific obstacles Hispanic entrepreneurs faced. Yamamoto and Alverson (2013) found that ethnicity was the most important predictor of business success. Canedo et al. noted that Hispanics might not believe they have the skills and knowledge needed to start a business, gain funding for the firm, or ensure business success. Further, Canedo et al. noted distinct differences between Latino, Latina, and non-Latino entrepreneurs regarding the types of training administered, implying a significant gender-based factor as well as ethnic barriers. Critical to Hispanic success were the influence of family and the availability of funding for the new enterprise (Canedo et al., 2014).

Freeland and Keister (2016) investigated how race and ethnicity affected the persistence of new ventures after 2 years, exploring the African American population as opposed to the Hispanic population. Freeland and Keister hypothesized that African Americans have less access to formal credit sources than either White or Latino entrepreneurs and that they invested more of their personal funds in their ventures. Freeland and Keister found that African Americans indeed had only 20% of the

likelihood of getting credit from an outside source as Whites or Hispanics. The reasons

for this varied, according to Freeland and Keister, including the reduced social capital in

the high-poverty, racially segregated inner-city neighborhoods and the fact that African

Americans were only half as likely as Hispanics to be able to get funding from local area

firms. Also, while Hispanic suppliers were likely to offer credit to Hispanic

entrepreneurs, no such relationship existed for African American vendors and African

American-owned businesses. Overall, Freeland and Keister found that race and ethnicity

were not significant in the determination to create a new company. For start-ups that did

not achieve success after 2 years, African Americans were more likely to persist while

Hispanics were more likely to drop the business (Canedo et al., 2014; Freeland & Keister,

2016).

Ageism Studies

Another group of potential entrepreneurs who experience discrimination was that

of older entrepreneurs over the age of 50 who were starting new businesses. Kibler,

Wainwright, Kautonen, and Blackburn (2015) investigated the emergence of sources of

both social exclusion and social support during the development of firms started by these

old entrepreneurs. In particular, Kibler et al. probed the specific coping strategies

employed to manage their startups. Specific strategies included passive negotiation, real

negotiation, modification, and avoidance. Effectual negotiation involved directly

addressing the perceived discrimination by proving their capabilities. Passive negotiation

involved letting naysayers gradually change their attitude after seeing the success of the

older entrepreneur. Modification referred to focusing on positive experiences and

allowing negative ones to dissipate, keeping the focus on prevailing issues in the

business. Entrepreneurs who previously started other businesses commonly used this

strategy. Finally, avoidance referred to approaches by business owners removing

themselves and their businesses from negative support environments. Kibler et al.

provided insight on how a group experiencing marginalization and discrimination coped

with negativity and lack of support. Other researchers considered age-based issues in

entrepreneurs from the perspective of the theory of planned behavior (TPB). Sahut,

Gharbi, and Mili (2015) used TPB to discuss the impact of age on entrepreneurial

intentions, focusing on seniors. TPB centers on three key elements to define the intention

to perform a particular behavior—in this case, to start a company. The factors were the

person's attitude toward the behavior, the subjective norms for that behavior, and the

perceived behavioral control, including the feasibility of the action and the person's self-

efficacy to achieve control. Sahut et al. used these three factors to investigate the impact

of age on entrepreneurial intentions in older adults. While across all ages in their study,

all three of these factors were equally important in determining intention to start a

business. For senior entrepreneurs, the most critical factor was that of behavioral control

(i.e., perceived feasibility and self-efficacy). The other two factors in TPB were less

important for seniors than for different age groups. Sahut et al. suggested that integrating

seniors into social and economic activity required a particular focus to encourage a

complete view of entrepreneurship, thus reintegrate them, and reduce their sense of

marginalization and isolation.

Organizational Factors and Barriers

Political culture played a key role in entrepreneurial success as well as company culture. Rarick and Han (2015) used Hofstede's definition of national culture as a measure of social priorities. Hofstede's original theory of national culture presented six key dimensions of national culture (Rarick & Han, 2015). Power distance included the degree to which less powerful members expect and accept that the distribution of power was unequal in society. Individualism versus collectivism involved the extent to which individuals integrate into a collective society. Uncertainty avoidance included the extent to which society tolerates ambiguity. Masculinity versus femininity included the level of preference for masculine values of achievement, material rewards, and assertiveness. Rarick and Han investigated which cultural values influenced an entrepreneurial mindset. The cultural values identified in entrepreneurs included individualism, power distance, masculinity, and risk aversion. Using the Global Entrepreneurship and Development Index (GEDI), Rarick and Han then ranked countries on entrepreneurship. The GEDI included three essential components of high-quality business ownership: activity, attitude, and aspiration, determining that there was evidence of culture playing a role in the entrepreneurial success of a country. Countries that were high in individualism and low in power distance were successful in creating high impact businesses (Rarick & Han, 2015). This approach to viewing entrepreneurial research from micro and macro levels was interesting. Of particular interest was the point that people with disabilities have .unique cultural values, a conclusion arrived at by Tasavori et al. (2016), Rarick and Han identified a possible approach to understanding the cultural values and their influence on

the entrepreneurial activity of people with disabilities and in analyzing the traits of

EWDs.

Further barriers to success in business start-ups included institutional issues, such

as legal and accommodation problems; organizational barriers, such as practices that

marginalized with individuals' disabilities; and attitude problems with support personnel

(Kulkarni & Kote, 2014). Using agency staff as participants rather than entrepreneurs

helped to understand better the views and internal issues involved. While conducted in

India rather than the United States, U.S. barriers to entrepreneurship appear in many

issues. For example, Germir (2015) summarized the obstacles to EWDs in Turkey as

including the lack of access to start-up capital and fearing the loss of benefits and the

security of disability income. Furthermore, the barriers included the absence of relevant

knowledge and skills, the lack of confidence or limited aspirations, consumer

discrimination, and the lack of appropriate and sensitive support from advisors. Germir

also noted that individuals with various disabilities need widely different types of support

or assistance, making a one-size-fits-all policy inappropriate and ineffective.

Support within the workplace was an additional barrier to work satisfaction for

EWDs. Santuzzi and Waltz (2016) probed the reality of what workers with disabilities

face in the workplace, noting that the existing literature failed to address the effects of

having a disability on an individual in a work environment. A more comprehensive

picture of the disability identity within the workplace environment was necessary to

explore the experiences of physically challenged persons within the workplace

environment. The principal barriers to workplace success, and even whether or not the

individual claimed his or her disability, depended on a variety of factors that were present at organizational, interpersonal, societal, and intra-individual levels (Santuzzi & Waltz, 2016). The recommendations included increased training, centralized disability expertise, a higher standard of workplace accommodation, disclosure, and increased response to positions in the workplace (Santuzzi & Waltz, 2016; Vornholt et al., 2013). The suggestion for additional processes within the organization designed to mitigate any potential situations that arose was not out of line in light of the findings (Santuzzi & Waltz, 2016).

Jensen (2015) conducted surveys of entrepreneurs in North Dakota at start-up and again 5 years later to determine the types of challenges faced in building a small business. Not all the companies survived the full 5 years, and Jensen analyzed the data collected to determine characteristics that differed between those firms that survived and those that did not. Furthermore, Jensen identified differences in problems during the start-up period and 5 years of operation. Similar to Ponzio et al. (2015), Jensen did not explore concerns associated with the loss of benefits during the start-up period. Overall, Jensen found that regulations and taxes were more of an issue in later stages and less so in early stages. The biggest tax burden was in property taxes, especially for those with substantial growth. Key issues for survivor companies were licensing problems while start-ups faced more problems in financing. Jensen found that when the businesses struggled to find labor, they were less likely to survive 5 years. Jensen provided insights into the types of problems start-up entrepreneurs face, guiding interview questions.

Villanueva-Flores, Valle-Cabrera, and Bornay-Barrachina (2014) sought to help managers understand the role of policies and practices in discriminating against people with disabilities. The model linked inequity, discrimination, and dissatisfaction. Key drawbacks to this study conducted by Villanueva-Flores et al. was that they limited their research to one type of disability, and they did not address the relationship between the disability and perception of discrimination. If having a healthy support network aids entrepreneurship, it was reasonable to assume that a lack of support, particularly from coworkers and employers, negatively affected the work experience of individuals with disabilities. Vornholt et al. (2013) reviewed the literature to determine whether that assumption was valid. The lack of social acceptance was the reason employees with disabilities often leave an organization. Disability often results in being isolated socially. The review of the literature by Vornholt et al. focused on three essential themes: the antecedents of cognitive acceptance, stigmatization attitudes among colleagues, and attitudes and behaviors of employers on gaining acceptance in the workplace for employees with disabilities (Vornholt et al., 2013).

Coffey, Coufopoulos, and Kinghorn (2014) identified, measured, and explored employment barriers for visually impaired women in northwest England. Coffey et al. observed that the obstacles to work for people with disabilities were complex and did not necessarily align with policies intended to get people into work positions. Coffey et al. found the barriers for the visually impaired women in the study to include negative employer attitudes, limitations on mobility, lack of workplace accommodations, and the presence of additional health conditions. As suggested by Ellenkamp et al., 2015, Coffey

et al. offered solutions that included training, job flexibility, adaptive equipment, and specialized training to create opportunities for other work.

The gender of the co-workers affected the cognitive acceptance of the worker with disabilities. Vornholt et al. (2013) found that males were more likely to believe that those with an intellectual disability lack goals and do not make day-to-day decisions about their lives, resulting in men being more discriminatory than women were in general. Employees who had more background with or worked more often with individuals with disabilities tended to be less discriminatory than those who lacked those experiences. Vornholt et al. also found that the disability played a role in acceptance, with those with mood disorders gaining greater acceptance than those with schizophrenia. Vornholt et al. identified the performance level of the workers with disabilities as a contributing factor. The better performance gained greater acceptance and the degree to which tasks were interdependent. Regarding cognitive differences between novice and experienced entrepreneurs, Aarstad and Pettersen (2016) identified critical mindset differences between entrepreneurs with prior start-up experience and those without such background. The specific types of experiences focused on by Aarstad and Pettersen included key events such as financial risks, potential bankruptcies, role conflicts, and other mistakes, hypothesizing that having such experiences would alter responses to start-up challenges. Aarstad and Pettersen found that entrepreneurial experience significantly changed mindsets, behaviors, and strategies. Although the novice entrepreneurs reported meaningful learning that had not yet generally translated into practices within the company, they tended to spend too much time thinking about and considering options,

making them subject to decision paralysis. More experienced entrepreneurs had greater focus and were decisive in their decisions. Aarstad and Pettersen found that both types of start-ups faced limited access to outside resources, but novices lacked the networks and relationships that eased the way of more experienced business startups, even when the novices had significant experience within the industry. Aarstad and Petersen provided insights into the particular types of issues that new EWDs with little or no prior entrepreneurial background face and the areas that caused problems in sustaining their companies.

Vornholt et al. (2013) had a key finding on stigmatization, a biased perception that those with disabilities were only capable of low-level jobs. Resentment at the accommodations made for workers with disabilities also led to feelings of unfairness and reduced acceptance of individuals with disabilities (Vornholt et al., 2013). Furthermore, the workers with disabilities tended to perceive stigmatization where none existed. Regarding the characteristics of companies employing people with disabilities, the managers set the cultural tone of the workplace, and thus a greater openness to diversity leads to increased acceptance of the workers with disabilities (Vornholt et al., 2013). Despite that, many employers feared the cost of accommodations for individuals with disabilities, had concerns about job performance and resisted making the needed accommodations that would allow people with disabilities to be successful (Barclay et al., 2012; Vornholt et al., 2013).

Other Social and Physical Barriers to Entrepreneurship

Kramer, Roemer, Liljenquist, Shin, and Hart (2014) produced a key study on overcoming barriers to success in a project that taught teens with disabilities essential teamwork skills. The teens learned how to recognize and team up to overcome the obstacles to a variety of activities and goals. Kramer et al. noted the importance of drawing on relationships and teamwork to overcome those barriers. Mosakowski, Calic, and Earley (2013) investigated issues of cultural hurdles to entrepreneurial success for veterans with disabilities. Mosakowski et al. suggested that the participants who experienced the greatest cultural learning were those with a moderately distant cultural gap between them and the new environment, the presence of high culture, and an admired cultural context. The results were useful because they revealed the importance of networking and the limitations for people with disabilities.

Flynn, Hulbert-Williams, Bramwell, Stevens-Gill, and Hulbert-Williams (2015) investigated the differences in perception of individuals with disabilities compared to the attitudes of healthcare professionals, with a particular focus on nurses. Flynn et al. found that three ICF components (body functions, activities and participation, and environmental factors) were key concepts. Flynn et al. found that mental impairments were significant to the workers. These disabilities included issues of limited cognizance, ability to manage emotions, and difficulty doing daily living tasks. The situations created a higher stress environment for patients and nurses alike, one that increased the more severe the disability was due to the need to find alternative means of communication and the efforts that must be made to ensure that such individuals were able to understand their

situation (Flynn et al., 2015). As noted by Barclay et al. (2012), such issues lead to stigmatization towards persons with disabilities in traditional work.

As noted earlier, gender and ethnic studies were also relevant to identify barriers faced by EWDs. One study of African American entrepreneurs found, for example, that these individuals were more likely to be successful if they internally identified potential opportunities (Singh & Gibbs, 2013). Also, oddly, the availability of capital depressed the likelihood of enterprise creation. Both Freeland and Keister (2016) and Singh and Gibbs identified other key factors as educational attainment and market orientation, both of which correlated positively to business creation.

Education, Experience, and Training Factors in Entrepreneurship

Heath and Reed (2013) emphasized the importance of giving access to training to EWDs. Solutions such as establishing a web-based teleconferencing and training program to distant entrepreneurs in rural Alaska provided significantly greater support and greater success in starting and developing their businesses. The key element of this study was the importance of tailoring the training and education specifically to the needs of the entrepreneurs, in this case, using a particular web-based system to reach distant students, to provide the required background. For example, in a survey of Swedish entrepreneurs, Ulvenblad, Berggren, and Winborg (2013) found that those with experience with entrepreneurship education were more open and adaptive in their communication skills. Ulvenblad et al. also noted that those with experience in prior start-ups were more likely to have the other-centered focus. Ulvenblad et al. documented the importance of training to assist new entrepreneurs in their communication skills but also addresses the value of

prior business—preferably prior start-up—experience. Also, Ulvenblad et al. provided a unique perspective on the start-up experience, with emphasis on developed communication skills.

Individuals who suffer disabling injuries could have difficulty returning to the workforce. Inge, Cimera, Revell, Wehman, and Seward (2015) researched the outcomes of individuals who suffered disabling spinal cord injuries as they exited government-provided vocational rehabilitation programs. Inge et al. focused on the barriers such people experienced as they attempted to reenter the workforce. About half (52%) were able to re-enter the workforce when the vocational rehabilitation center staff closed their cases. Non-White participants, minorities, and women were all less likely to attain post-injury employment. Furthermore, the age of the person, the level of education, and the receipt of Medicaid all correlated with a less likelihood of achieving employment. Those individuals with prior work experience in management, sales, or office occupations were more likely to attain employment. Inge et al. analyzed longitudinal data for a 3-year period after gaining employment. The average number of hours worked was only 29 hours per week; half of the individuals reported only part-time jobs (i.e., less than 35 hours per week), with gross annual earnings averaging only $26,000, just above the federal poverty line for a family of four in one household. These earnings were for individuals that the vocational rehabilitation programs identified as being successful at returning to the workplace.

Education and training for workers with disabilities do little good if no one was aware that the programs exist. Kulkarni and Kote (2014) cited prior research that found

that employers claimed to be unaware of programs such as those run by service agencies designed to provide job training and counseling, with the result that employers were reluctant to hire individuals with disabilities. Kulkarni and Kote cited additional prior research indicating that, while businesses expressed general positive attitudes toward hiring people with disabilities when faced with a particular person with disabilities, they expressed highly negative feelings. Employers also noted that even when employed, the ratings for workers with disabilities showed warm or pleasant, but not competent or suitable for a job due to stereotypical thinking (Kulkarni & Kote, 2014). The providers typically fell into one or more of four broad categories (Kulkarni & Kote, 2014). The first two types included trainers and partners who assisted in hiring and integrating workers with disabilities. The second two groups included facilitators from nongovernmental organizations who provide needed services for individuals with disabilities such as housing and marketers who assist in sensitivity training. The lack of awareness on the part of employers regarding programs and services that might assist in hiring individuals with disabilities thus appeared to be a significant issue (Kulkarni & Kote, 2014; Santuzzi & Waltz, 2016).

All disabilities were different, and no one single policy can make adequate allowances for all variations associated with such a label. Some people argued that it was necessary to increase the overall accessibility and training of individuals with disabilities, treating each one as unique and working to compensate in the areas necessary to cope with said disability to increase overall functionality within society (Laudan & Loprest, 2012; Liebman, 2015; Penner, 2013). Such training programs were effective in the

mitigation of educational deficiencies for individuals with disabilities and other socially deprived populations (Laudan & Loprest, 2012; Liebman, 2015; Penner, 2013). For people with disabilities, education alone was not sufficient to improve the likelihood of successful integration within society and acceptance within the school structure (Laudan & Loprest, 2012; Liebman, 2015; Penner, 2013). Such a situation would decrease the probability of such individuals deciding to become entrepreneurs.

Additionally, the amount of business experience of entrepreneurs was critical. Shirokova, Tsukanova, and Bogatyreva (2015) explored the question of what factors influenced business performances, focusing on understanding the role of the team and the experience of students about the likelihood of such students becoming involved in entrepreneurial acts. Shirokova et al. found a positive impact of experience on the student's likelihood to engage in the practices of entrepreneurship as well as identifying the benefits of group impact. While the team's diversity had a positive impact on performance, the extent of continuing partnerships had a negative consequence. Aarstad and Pettersen (2016) found that the amount of experience that the entrepreneur had in the same industry was an important factor. Shirokova et al. indicated that the greater the promotion of university initiatives, the more likely the student was to utilize positive aspects associated with the advancement and use of human capital and social capital in his or her entrepreneurial endeavors. One assumption that Shirokova et al. made was that entrepreneurs with expertise had an advantage over novice entrepreneurs. When combined with self-reported entrepreneur histories, one can question the overall generalizability of the results.

Transition

This section included an overview of the background of the research problem, understanding what made EWDs successful in their attempts to construct viable and sustainable business enterprises. The purpose of this proposed study was to explore the strategies successful EWDs used to support and sustain their business profitability, with the goal of using the data collected to design programs and services that enhance the entrepreneurial skills of potential EWDs and thus ultimately increase their participation in the labor force. The study method was that of a qualitative multiple case study investigating the research question of what strategies individuals with disabilities have used to maintain a small business successfully. The research question identified for resolution within the study was *What strategies can EWDs employ to achieve and sustain profitability?* Five different interview questions asked of participants during the data collection process followed the statement of the research question. The conceptual framework for the study applied Tipu's (2016) framework, focused on the motivational differences between need-driven entrepreneurs and opportunity-driven entrepreneurs. The assumptions identified included the belief that those EWD participants in the Michigan area who participate in the study were similar to others in the region and that members provided accurate information. Also, the assumptions included that strategies implemented by EWDs had differences from those applied by business owners without disabilities and that a business operating for 3 years demonstrated a success classification. Limitations included the small sample size and variations in disability, while delimitations included sample size. I discussed the significance of the study, noting

that this study was critical, as it was possible to increase assistance to EWDs by identifying the strategies of successful EWDs in their endeavors. The literature review offered a thorough investigation of the contemporary research relating to this research project.

In Section 2, I restated the purpose of the study and explained the roles of the researcher, indicating the specific actions taken in the course of the investigation. Outlined were the details of the research method and design and the use of the qualitative multiple case studies, complete with justification for the utilization of the same, and the ethical considerations undertaken in the survey, followed by an exploration of the data collection instruments used within the project. The discussion included the data collection technique used, complete with the explanation of the data collection process along with the means of data organization on my computer, complete with the means of obfuscating participant identities, and the data analysis process, from transcription through codification, to thematic analysis. Finally, there was a discussion on the reliability of the study, indicating the use of member checking to provide the necessary validity to the study.

In Section 3, I present the findings, including the themes identified and the relationship to the conceptual framework and the existing literature. Also, there is a detailed discussion of the applicability of the findings to the strategies needed by successful EWDs to support and sustain their business profitability while identifying the implications for social change and making recommendations for action and future research.

Section 2: The Project

In the first component of this section, I discuss the role of the researcher, the participants, the research method and design, population and sampling, and ethical research. The second part includes a discussion of the data collection instruments and technique, data organization and analysis, and the study reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies EWDs employ to achieve and sustain profitability. The population consisted of three EWD Michigan businesses, which had profitable operations for at least 3 years. There was a unique opportunity for EWDs in Michigan because there was a goal by leaders to contract EWD owned organizations (Krepcio & Agrawal, 2013). Government programs, like the 8(a) Business Development Program and the SDVOSB, assisted disadvantaged groups including EWDs (SBA, OSDBU, 2015). Michigan leaders were more precise than their counterparts in other states with a targeted goal to contract EWD owned organizations, providing a business advantage that was not present in other regions (Krepcio & Agrawal, 2013; SBA, 2015). EWD leaders can use the findings of this study to develop the strategies necessary for increasing their ability to achieve profitability in their enterprises, benefiting their employees, families, and communities. These leaders can create a social change from dependency to independence through successful self-employment.

Role of the Researcher

The role of a researcher in a qualitative study is that of a reliable, vital instrument (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In particular, the researcher created a conversational partnership with participants and played an active role in making every participant an active and valued contributor to the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In the study, I interviewed members in person, using questions that elicited the broadest set of responses possible. There were no prior relationships with the participants or this particular area of research. As presented in the literature review, little research existed on the strategies EWDs used to build their businesses. Therefore, the use of an interview approach to elicit meaningful information and insights on business development was the most appropriate data collection method for this multiple case study.

Vollmer and Howard (2010) noted that the Belmont Report detailed the ethical considerations of the researcher. The details and practices for ethical research were outlined in the Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 1979). To ensure the preservation of the moral nature of the study, I adhered to all details and practices for ethical research. Furthermore, my ethical considerations ensured the fair treatment of participants and the elimination of bias.

The elaboration of a set of interview questions guided the discussions with members and mitigated biases (Blattman, Jamison, Koroknay-Palicz, Rodrigues, & Sheridan, 2016; Fusch & Ness, 2015). I was sensitive to the power dynamic established with the participants so that the dialogue was primarily one-way, from them to me, and guided by the interview questions as described by Blattman et al. and Fusch and Ness.

The interview questions did not lead the participants, allowing them to present answers in the words they chose. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) noted that in-depth discussions had the goal of discovering examples, experiences, and narratives about the participants' lived experiences. The rationale for using the interview was that it allowed a researcher to cover both the facts and the underlying considerations. Also, the interview process allowed participants to describe and identify the meaning associated with a given concept or course of action (Valenzuela & Shivastava, 2016).

In particular, the questions were open-ended rather than supplied with pre-determined categories as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2015), so that members could use their preferred responses. While the research process used general protocols, (See Appendices A, B. and C), flexibility in the interview process allowed the conversations to vary as needed to elicit meaningful experiences from the participants as recommended by Merriam and Tisdell. I did not have a personal relationship with any of the participants, beyond interacting with them as part of this study.

Participants

A case study approach limits the number of participants (Dasgupta, 2015; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Taylor, 2013; Wilson, 2016). The eligibility criteria for participants was businesses operated by EWDs who agreed to participate in the study. Since the goal of this study was to define effective company strategies, it was important that participants' companies operated long enough to develop such techniques. Following the research approaches of Dasgupta, Flyvbjerg, Taylor, and Wilson, the identification of members involved using a convenience approach via a local organization supporting individuals

with disabilities and other local business groups. I made personal contacts with potential

candidates to seek their participation in the interview process after having obtained their

publicly available membership information from the organization, going down the list

and calling the EWD listed in the membership information to request his or her

participation in the study. Participants did not receive any financial aid or other

incentives. There was appropriate care to ensure that the participants had the necessary

information to decide if they wanted to participate. Specific procedures assured members

of the protection of their privacy, identity, and similar ethical issues, described in more

detail in the Ethical Research section of this proposal and accord with the Belmont

Report requirements. To establish a working relationship with the participants, I

attempted to draw the EWD into conversations about his or her business, creating a

connection on a neutral topic and increasing the likelihood of the individual opening up

about his or her strategies before the completion of the 2 week observation period.

Research Method

Despite the emphasis on entrepreneurship, there was a lack of research on the

experiences of EWDs beyond the start-up phase. Dasgupta (2015), Flyvbjerg (2006),

Taylor (2013), and Wilson (2016) noted that the qualitative approach to studying

successful entrepreneurship provided an opportunity to allow critical success factors and

relevant strategies to emerge independently out of predefined policies and beliefs. The

qualitative method was better than the quantitative method or the mixed methods

approach as it enabled me to get to the underlying rationality behind the decisions made

by the EWD participants. A quantitative study would only serve to facilitate the

exploration of quantifiable data associated with the businesses, reducing the understanding of the stratagems and negating my ability to understand the rationale and purpose behind the strategies or the perspectives of the EWDs. Parker Harris et al. (2013) also used stakeholder interviews as part of their research study when they assessed the barriers to entrepreneurship for EWDs. Schneider et al. (2016) suggested that the use of stakeholder perspectives helped to gain greater study consistency across the group of participants.

Research Design

A multiple case study approach required doing an in-depth investigation of the participants' businesses (Dasgupta, 2015; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Taylor, 2013; Wilson, 2016). The research involved three case studies using a variety of data sources, including interviews of the EWDs, interviews with sources of funding, business financial information, interviews with agencies, business mentors, or advisors, and direct observation of how the company operates. By implementing various data collection techniques, I was able to develop a comprehensive understanding of the strategies used to achieve business profitability, while at the same time providing methodological triangulation for data analysis, ensuring saturation of information for each of the three different EWDs.

For the study, I considered different qualitative research designs, including narrative inquiry, phenomenological, ethnography, and case study identified by Dasgupta (2015), Flyvbjerg (2006), Taylor (2013), and Wilson (2016). A narrative inquiry did not fit the study. Such a design focused more on the life experiences of the EWDs as opposed

to the strategies employed, concentrating on the person rather than the business and increasing the scope of the study and reducing its effectiveness. A phenomenological study was not useful because the focus of this study was the strategies employed by EWDs and not the perceptions of EWDs regarding their personal experiences as discussed previously in the *Nature of the Study* section. The study was not one of an anthropological nature. This characteristic commonly occurred when adopting the ethnographical design in a qualitative study (Dasgupta, 2015; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Taylor, 2013; Wilson, 2016). The case study method, or in this case the multiple case study, enabled a researcher to explore the research question within the selected organizations, allowing for an understanding of the business operability and potential contributing success factors (Dasgupta, 2015; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Taylor, 2013; Wilson, 2016). As the purpose was to identify specific success strategies for individual companies, the responses of each participant regarding those successful strategies served to ensure saturation on that topic.

Researchers used qualitative multiple case studies for similar subjects. For example, Tipu (2016) used a multiple case study approach to identify the differences between entrepreneurs driven by the need to create work for themselves and those motivated by an opportunity perceived in the marketplace. Aarstad and Pettersen (2016) conducted a five-case study to identify factors that influenced how entrepreneurs sought resources to start their enterprises using semi-structured qualitative interviews as a key data collection strategy. Del Valle et al. (2014) used a multiple case study approach to identify success strategies in vocational rehabilitation agencies working with individuals

with disabilities. Lam and Law (2016) used a similar multiple case study research design to understand how crowdfunding increased renewable and sustainable energy products to achieve success and profitability while maintaining viable business practices. By implementing similar data collection techniques, I was able to provide for methodological triangulation to data analysis, ensuring saturation of information on each of the three different EWDs. Thus, given the similar research conducted herein, in type and style, the study design was likewise set.

Population and Sampling

The population for this study consisted of three EWD Michigan businesses, which had profitable operations for at least 3 years. Following the research suggestions of Dasgupta (2015), Flyvbjerg (2006), Taylor (2013) and Wilson (2016), the recruitment of participants involved using a convenience approach via a local organization supporting individuals with disabilities and other local business groups. I contacted potential candidates personally to request their participation in the interview process after having obtained their publicly available membership information from the organization, going down the list and calling the EWD listed in the membership information collected to request his or her participation in the study until three agree. The intent was to determine potential participants by recruiting through local business support groups. Using a partial snowball effect, participants helped in referring other potential members.

Ethical Research

Personal interviews demanded high attention to ethical considerations. There were standard ethical issues of encoding individual identities to keep them secure, using

pseudonyms to protect persons and organizations, ensuring that participants fully

understand the research process, and allowing members to depart the study at any time

with no consequences as defined by the Belmont Report (Vollmer & Howard, 2010).

There were no incentives offered to participants. It was important to monitor the study to

assure ethical compliance (Nelson, London, & Strobel, 2015). Data collected in this study

will stay in locked storage for 5 years to ensure members' privacy as recommended by

Griffith (2014). Following the completion of member checking, the elimination of the

name associated with each number in the notes occurred to maintain confidentiality.

Multiple researchers, however, noted that participants in a qualitative study conducted

with interviews require further ethical protection (Dasgupta, 2015; Flyvbjerg, 2006;

Taylor, 2013; Wilson, 2016). In particular, researchers in such studies showed respect to

members, honored all promises made to them, not pressured participants in any way, and

most of all, did no harm to the participants (O'Donnell, McAuliffe, & O'Donnovan,

2014; Redman-MacLaren et al., 2014). When a study involved human subjects, the

researcher sought approval of the Institutional Review Board (Tsan & Tsan, 2015). If an

individual asked to withdraw from the study, he or she was able to do so at any time by

providing notification by telephone or email. If the member requested a withdrawal, I

returned to the membership list and continued to contact individuals until another

accepted.

Data Collection Instruments

The primary data collection instrument in this project was the researcher, who

conducted all interviews and collected all data. The critical sources of data collection

were semi-structured interviews of both the three EWDs and the key individuals with knowledge of the business development process and direct observation of participant business operations. A semi-structured interview consisted of the participant and the researcher sitting down in a neutral location, such as a private room in a library, with the researcher asking the member questions and requesting clarification or elaboration as the answers called for it. Aarstad and Petterson (2016), Del Valle et al. (2014), Reddington and Fitzsimons (2013), and Tipu (2016), among others, showed semi-structured interviews to be appropriate sources of data for qualitative studies and particularly for multiple case studies. Parker Harris et al. (2013) used direct observations, which I utilized in the completion of this study. The EWDs assisted in developing a schedule that allowed for observation of the business and its workings for no less than 2 weeks, taking notes during that time.

Several researchers provided guidelines for the stages of conducting qualitative interview studies using one-on-one interviews (O'Donnell et al., 2014; Redman-MacLaren et al., 2014). Furthermore, the characteristics of a problem suitable for qualitative interviewing techniques included a search for nuance and subtlety, and finding a series of events over time (i.e., understanding how entrepreneurial strategies changed over time) (O'Donnell et al., 2014; Redman-MacLaren et al., 2014). Also, qualitative interviewing techniques generated fresh insights into the research question, explaining unexpected outcomes, and unearth layers of discovery (O'Donnell et al., 2014; Redman-MacLaren et al., 2014). I strived to achieve those exact results, making in-depth interviews a vital element in the research process.

The meetings consisted of a predefined interview protocol as recommended by O'Donnell et al. (2014) and Redman-MacLaren et al. (2014). The meetings stayed within a specific predefined duration as suggested by Dasgupta (2015), O'Donnell et al. (2014), Redman-MacLaren et al. (2015), and Taylor (2013) to avoid rambling and lack of focus in the discussion. As discussed in detail in the validity section, I used member checking to enhance the reliability and validity of the information collected from the participants. The interview protocol is in Appendix A. An interview protocol was useful in ensuring that the discussion stayed on track and the questions answered (O'Donnell et al., 2014; Redman-MacLaren et al., 2014).

Data Collection Technique

The multiple case study interviews followed the process outlined by experts within the field (Dasgupta, 2015; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Taylor, 2013; Wilson, 2016). First, I used adequate recording systems to capture the entire interview accurately and pre-design an interview protocol to follow to ensure addressing all aspects of the research question and ensuring the utilization of probing questions. Additional data came from interviews with families or caretakers of EWD members and direct observation of the three participant businesses to confirm success strategies. The observation schedule was set with each EWD and consisted of a minimum of 2 weeks of observations; taking notes throughout the observation process was the method of data recording used for this data collection technique.

The need for triangulation of data from multiple sources to ensure reliability and validity of data dictated the combination of in-depth interviews and direct observation

(Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). To accomplish this task, I synthesized the data collected during each data collection process. A key advantage gained from this approach was a holistic picture of each of the three organizations, in addition to comparing between the three, as applicable. Although time-consuming, the implementation of the various data collection techniques was useful in developing a comprehensive understanding of the strategies used to achieve business profitability, and in ensuring saturation of information on each of the three different EWDs.

EWDs and all other individuals interviewed in the study got answers to any questions they had and received informed consent and an explanation of the process before the study began. Section 1 included the interview questions that serve as the discussion guide. All interviews conducted with the participants were audio recorded with no one else hearing and transcribing that data, assigning a numerical value to each interview and tape. Transcriptions occurred within 72 hours of each meeting. Once transcribed, member checks occurred. In this process, the participant reviewed the transcribed interview in its analyzed form. As recommended in the research by Maroto and Pettinicchio (2014), Reilly (2013), Simpson and Quigley (2016), interviewees examined the information to confirm accuracy and verify that the underlying message that he or she was attempting to get across was still present within the interview text and analyzed data. I noted any qualifications or adjustments needed. Once the participants confirmed that the information was accurate, removal of the names from the records of the members occurred for confidentiality purposes, replacing them with pseudonyms.

Following the completion of member checking, the elimination of the name associated with each number in the notes occurred to maintain confidentiality. Until that point, I needed to keep the name associated with the number to complete the member check process. While this method worked to ensure freshness of information, it did have the drawback of being a slower process of data collection, listening to the tape multiple times to transcribe the interview. Direct observations occurred at predetermined days and times and with the agreement of the researcher and the participant. The views lasted for at least 2 weeks at each location, and setup based on the best schedule for the member, recording the implementation of strategies discussed, and those not mentioned, during the interview process.

Data Organization Techniques

The data organization included recording all conversations and saving them for long-term reference under lock and key for at least 5 years. I encoded the participants' identities in the transcription process to ensure confidentiality. Storage of the list of members and their encoded characteristics occurred separately under lock and key so that no one else knew the particular identities of interview participants.

It was important to maintain the detailed research logs, or notes of observation, as described in Merriam and Tisdell (2015) and Yin (2015). This approach included any notes taken during the interview process, all interview transcripts, and any member checking summaries returned by the participants, as well as details of how the data analysis occurred, per Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2012). The analysis and record-keeping

process described by O'Donnell et al. (2014) and Redman-MacLaren et al. (2014) served

as a guide to proper data organization and cataloging techniques.

Data Analysis

The analysis process used in this study followed the suggestions from Dasgupta

(2015), Taylor (2013), and Wilson (2016). This process involved the following key steps:

- Transcribing interviews from recordings and production of a summary of
  each.

- Defining and marking (i.e., coding) relevant events, examples, etc.

- Comparing the coding across multiple interviews and summarizing these
  excerpts.

- Multiple sorting of the passages to identify various versions and ideas.

- Integrating across all interviews the results to construct a complete picture.

Varaki, Floden, and Kalatehjafarabadi (2015) noted that a researcher's

understanding of a problem increases by the triangulation of multiple sources and

methods. The review of the interview transcripts, notes from observations, and other

relevant documents, resulted in the development of initial categories, themes, and

relationships. Through an iterative process, different levels of coding and analysis

occurred, leading to the identification of the main themes. The coding process was done

in Microsoft Word 2013 using highlighter colors, with the highlighted information then

transferred into Microsoft Excel 2013 based on theme present, convenience, and the

presence of the transcribed data within document files. A second review of the literature

was undertaken to determine whether any recently published literature, since the time of

the proposal, would be pertinent for inclusion. I related themes to research already

identified via highlight and transferred to the Excel document in a different column.

Maintaining consistency with the research question and the conceptual framework was

essential.

After undertaking these steps, I considered the data in determining the universals

of the various interviews and other collected data to present an overall set of conclusions.

Finally, where possible, these findings were tested and formulated into recommendations

that could act as guides to programs and services directed at the EWD population.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability represented the repeatability of the data gathered, i.e., whether

repeated data collection results in similar data as described by Bernard (2013). The

validity of a qualitative study described the trustworthiness and accuracy of the collected

data (Bernard, 2013). This study encompassed both validity and reliability.

Reliability

Reliability of the proposed qualitative study involved multiple ways. First,

triangulation using multiple sources of information assisted in identifying data that does

not repeat, or that differs from data given by other sources (Dasgupta, 2015; Flyvbjerg,

2006; Taylor, 2013; Wilson, 2016). Second, I asked a few questions in each interview—

in slightly different forms—twice in each interview, once close to the beginning and once

near the end. The consistency of responses to these questions with individual interviews

assisted in determining reliability as noted by Wilson (2015). Third, comparing responses

to the same question across multiple EWDs also provided some insight into overall

reliability. This third method was most likely to produce the greatest variation in the replies because not every EWD had similar experiences in starting and operating their businesses, particularly because the three EWDs potentially had companies operating in different industries. Keeping a research diary also contributed to the reliability of this study (Wilson, 2015). Also, the inclusion of member checking assured dependability as a means of confirming that the analyzed text was still in line with the underlying message that the participant was attempting to convey during the interview process (Maroto & Pettinicchio, 2014; Reilly, 2013; Simpson & Quigley 2016). Member checks were a process by which the researcher had the participant read over the text to ensure accuracy in presentation of information (Maroto & Pettinicchio, 2014; Reilly, 2013; Simpson & Quigley 2016).

Validity

Qualitative study validity linked to multiple methods of measuring factors of interest. The use of triangulation in research provided various perceptions of the factors of interest (Dasgupta, 2015; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Taylor, 2013; Wilson, 2016). These multiple sources of data included one-on-one interviews with EWDs, interviews with family or caretakers of the EWDs, and at least three direct business operation observations. By combining multiple sources of information, there was a more rounded and accurate picture of cases under investigation (Debnam, Pas, Bottiani, Cash, & Bradshaw, 2015). A fundamental limitation to the validity of this study was the degree of trust developed between researcher and the participants. As identified by Wilson (2015), trust was essential to eliciting valid data in the interviews and focus panels. As each case

presented within the multiple case studies was peculiar to a single organization, as given by the owner of the business, I met data saturation through each of the activities included within the context of the study itself.

Transition and Summary

This section included details regarding the proposed qualitative multiple case study of the strategies that EWDs utilize to grow and sustain profitability successfully. I identified a three-pronged approach for the study. First, the information included in-person, one-on-one semi-structured interviews of three EWDs who were successfully operating businesses. Second, the plan involved conducting interviews of individuals associated with these EWDs, including families, caretakers, mentors, and agency and other support staff. The third prong included the observations of the three EWD businesses directly. All research activities adhered to the ethical standards specified by the Belmont Report (Dasgupta, 2015; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Taylor, 2013; Wilson, 2016) and approved by the Walden IRB (04-27-170545745). The data collection and analysis resulted in common themes and categories that identify the strategies employed by the EWDs.

Section 3 includes the findings, including the themes identified and the relationship to the conceptual framework and the existing literature. There is a comprehensive discussion of the applicability of the results to the strategies needed by successful EWDs to support and sustain their business profitability. Also, the discussion includes the implications for social change and makes recommendations for action and future research. Finally, I reflect on the overall study and provide concluding remarks.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

 This section includes a presentation of the findings and connects these findings to professional practice. The first sub-section is the introduction, which includes information relating to the goal of the study. The second sub-section consists of the presentation of the findings. The third sub-section includes the application to professional practice and considers the research results relative to the current literature. The fourth sub-section contains a discussion of implications for social change. The fifth sub-section consists of recommendations for actions by the researcher, EWDS, and employers of those with disabilities. The sixth sub-section contains recommendations for further research. The seventh sub-section includes reflections of the researcher based on the research study process. The final sub-section is the conclusion.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies EWDs employ to achieve and sustain profitability. The participants in this study had confidence in self, determination, perseverance, leadership, and were results oriented. Within this study, participants enjoyed support from family and friends in the development of businesses, leading to an increased capacity to gather resources and resolve problems. Personal values, passion for the firm, and a positive attitude about abilities were essential for the success of the business, as well as the well-being of the participant. Therefore, there were different influences on the decision for the participant to establish a business. However, personal characteristics of these individuals varied due to their demographics, which also affected internal motivation. Tipu (2016) identified

differences in the behaviors between necessity-driven entrepreneurs and opportunity-driven entrepreneurs during the start-up phases of their companies and their overall perspectives toward their businesses. This study's results validated the differences between one participant motivated to become an entrepreneur due to prior experience with an employer and two members driven by necessity.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was: What strategies can EWDs employ to achieve and sustain profitability? To answer this question, participants responded to the following interview questions:

1. What were the critical success factors that you used to develop your strategies?

2. What barriers did you encounter in implementing your strategic plans?

3. How did you address the obstacles to achieving profitability?

4. What concrete steps did you take to measure the effectiveness of your strategies for achieving profitability?

5. What changes in plans occurred over the operating life of your business?

6. What additional information would you like to add beyond that asked in the previous questions?

In addition to the interviews, direct observation of the three participant businesses gave additional information on success strategies. This sub-section includes critical success factors, entrepreneur success factors, and managerial success factors to analyze the data about the research question.

Critical Success Factors

Different factors contributed to the successes of the companies in this study, leading to distinguishing characteristics of the EWDs. In fact, all participants displayed a passion for their business and dedication to their work. The EWDs' backgrounds and support systems, especially from their families, helped them become successful in their businesses. The EWDs participating in this study demonstrated high levels of knowledge and values.

Entrepreneur Success Factors

The following three tables show entrepreneurship success factors, with one table for each participant.

Table 1

Participant 1 – Entrepreneur Success Factors

Success Factor	Interview Information
Passion	The participant was passionate about concentrating on your personal abilities to be successful. "I never thought ever about: oh, that's right, I got to remember ... I'm handicapped or, I can't drive a car. I never thought of that." "As far as my disability in any way, I never even think about that." "I think the individual must know yourself. Know what you're capable of. Know what you want to do. Don't set your goals so high."
Dedication	"I kept both jobs for a while." "If you want to go into a business, be an employee, be the best you can be, and convince that employer that, yeah, you may have some kind of a disability, but it's not going to stop you or get in the way."
Values	"I have been always independent." "I just got very comfortable with my disability and getting around. Just going after what I needed, like in the way of that equipment that I knew I needed ... If I'd ever thought

(*table continued*)

	that I was going to go into a business, would I have taken some business classes in college? I don't know. I still say it goes back to my upbringing that you go after what you want, you make good financial decisions, you never live paycheck to paycheck, you put your money in the bank, if you can't afford something you don't buy it. I guess that all came from my folks. Not anything I would have learned in college. I already knew all this by the time I got to college." "If you're going to go into business, go into a business that you know something about. I don't see why anybody who feels that they are confident in themselves and competent in what they feel they know and can do, and the other thing is don't quit until you absolutely must have to quit." "Be reasonable, be sensible about the kind of business you think you want to go into." "There's a lot of things that you need to look at and think about and be aware of and use some common sense."
Support Systems	"They (support agency) go, "You can't do that?" No, I can't do that! Just some of the jobs that they thought were going to be my career. Was like, oh my God, this is just not going to work. I never, never took their help." "I don't think they (persons with disabilities) get the same opportunities when they're trying to find a job where they work for someone else. I will forever think that, yes, we are still discriminated against." "I had lots of cooperation from people that encouraged me and believed that I could do this." "One of the difficulties with people with disabilities is that they're taught a lot around dependence rather than independence and taking their own initiative." "I think they need go into what works for them. I don't think so much it's a training ... I don't think we should train people how to function as disabled people. I think we should, like anyone, teach them how to be a competent employee or a business owner. Forget the disability. Figure out how to get past it. There's no reason, other than the stigma that comes along that other people view you as handicapped. If you don't view you as handicapped that makes all the difference in the world." "Even though I was quite a success story..., I don't think they (support agency) were all that proud of me. I think they would have been a whole lot prouder if they had gotten me involved. I never asked them for help in starting my business, or setting up my store, or doing anything."

Background	"I was changing jobs. I needed new equipment, or just some equipment, I'm not sure at the time that I really was using much at the time. I was trying to get prepared for everything that would come along that I would need to keep me working, being gainfully employed out there in the workforce. I had a heck of a time. I could not find anyone who knew much of anything about the products that were out there that I knew I had seen." "Anyway, he (owner showing equipment) said to me, I should hire you. You should work for me. You know more about this machine than I do. I said, I do." "Here I am starting a brand new job and looking at another job."
Knowledge	"Yeah, he (owner of business) was a good mentor. That was funny too, because there were negative things about the way he ran a business that I would just shake my head at and say, I can't do this." "I worked hard. I started selling machines. I almost took over this whole business for him." "He goes, I think you should just take over the dealership, or taking over this company, be the representative for them ..." "I look back and go, I fell into this. I just fell into it."

Table 2

Participant 2 – Entrepreneur Success Factors

Success Factor	Interview Information
Passion	So me being so young brought into the industry at a young age, I was able to adapt to this industry and it was great for me." "But within my little world, I can manage 'cause I've been in it my whole life."
Dedication	"And I worked 20 years without vacation, 20 years without a day sick, without a vacation, 7 days a week, holidays. Just to make this thing work and I had no money."
Values	"Yeah, it is a comfort zone. I'm in my own little world."
Support Systems	"But the certifications, as far as I'm concerned, they're useless."
Background	"I don't have any family wealth." "...he (father) was able to bring me into work. Had me plan ..., start teaching me. That ... just came to me when they started explaining it to me. I got more interested on my own, so to speak." "I had no choice but to be in this line of work because of my disability." "I mean, come on, you can't just walk down the street and fill out an application and get a job. It wasn't that easy for me. I had to work, you know." "Well, I think my disability drove me to I had to work because I couldn't go down the street and just ... fill out an application and get a job. You know, I tried, couldn't do it. I went to a lot of places filling out apps ... You know, so you just get frustrated and I just kept plugging along at what I kinda knew." "So I just ended up staying in it and we had our own business ... After my father passed, then I opened my own little company up and I had some contacts and then it just kinda snowballed from that point."
Knowledge	"My training's all self taught. Everything that I know, it's hard to tell you what I know. You just know, when something happens, you pretty much have an idea what you need to do to make it happen, to get the job done."

Table 3

Participant 3 – Entrepreneur Success Factors

Success Factor	Interview Information
Passion	"That's how...brain is. All you have to do is just speak it and somehow ... can just picture it." "... important piece is the creating of opportunities for young people to use their talents and to be able to maximize them at their level."
Dedication	"Everybody has encouraged ... to keep going with talent."
Values	"And it's important to know that I think, as I said before, people have a myth just because you have a disability, you don't have dreams. So, to kind of break down a lot barriers that you have there, you have to understand and people have to understand. And those who are not dealing with individuals with a disability on a daily basis to know that their future can be as bright as anybody else as they say quote the norm. I haven't figured out what the norm is yet because we all have some issues."
Support Systems	"But, it was another micro enterprise program ... for people wanting to establish their own businesses ... Everyone had to complete a business plan, what their goals were, come up with some type of financing, so they were able to see their goal come to fruition." "... the only person who has really stuck with it to the point of really having it all...mapped out what would like to do next ... always coming up with new innovative ideas for things that would like to do." "I think a lot of the mentoring comes from (support agency staff member) because, actually, everything sort of took off." "... mom has been totally instrumental ..."
Background	"They (support agency) had a program where ... tap into abilities and stuff." "That's actually a supportive employment program. Skill-building."
Knowledge	"Yeah, because they saw...talent even in high school. A lot of the teachers saw 'it' factor ... and everything. "I mean, other people have talents, but there is something just I don't know extra special, extra perceptual ..." "They (customers) just gravitate towards the work, and when they come up to it, they just smile."

The themes found in this portion of the analysis included a passion for business, dedication to work, values driving behavior, support systems such as family members and service agencies, business background, and knowledge.

Of particular importance in this model was the result that EWDs were more likely to start a business but less liable to be able to sustain it for extended periods. Renko et al. (2015) identified key variables, including the issue of start-up capital, and training or education tailored for the EWD. For Participant 3, the training programs added support to developing the EWD's talent and future business. In all cases, the companies emerged from limited startup capital. Canedo et al. (2014) identified that the prelaunch phase included finding opportunities, evaluating them, collecting resources needed, and doing research. In all cases, similar prelaunch activities occurred. The launch phase involved setting up the legal entity, protecting intellectual property, and developing a business model. Participant 1 and 2 created legal entities while Participant 3 copyrighted materials. The post-launch phase included building a customer base, hiring key employees, negotiating, and improving product design. These activities required experience and knowledge. The lack of experience by Participants 2 and 3 was offset by the active involvement of mentors. The key factors identified as contributing to entrepreneurial success and competitiveness were the features of the individual, elements of the enterprise, and the managerial attributes of the business; all were significant in determining the business success (Rodríguez-Gutiérrez et al., 2015). Personal characteristics of the entrepreneur were an important factor in the success or failure of a start-up. All three participants displayed personal characteristics that contributed to their

successes. Aguilar-Morales et al. (2013) found that family values played an important part in the success of the participant entrepreneurs. Of particular note in this study, however, was the importance of all three participants having mentors available who assisted the EWDs to develop business skills and offering key contacts and support to overcome barriers. The barriers included lack of business knowledge and training, lack of organizational support and advice beyond the first year, lack of information on how entrepreneurship affected their disability benefits and policies, and, most importantly, a lack of access to financing.

Managerial Success Factors

The following three tables show the managerial success factors for each participant.

Table 4

Participant 1 – Managerial Success Factors

Success Factor	Interview Information
Product Knowledge	"... business that there was a need, an audience. Absolutely something that I felt I knew a lot about and that I was a good example for and that I think I came through, because of my (disability), I came across to people as someone who knew what she was talking about and that I wouldn't sell them something that I wouldn't use, and that I knew my product and stood behind my product because I knew how badly they needed it." "I think that was one of the other things that I was so fortunate in getting into this particular business, because I knew what I was getting into."
Market Knowledge	"I started showing it to people that I knew could use this equipment. He would also call me with leads and people that would be contacting him, which he loved because he was just not the best person for getting back with people. He needed somebody." "If that's what you really want to do, and I was already

(*table continued*)

	getting very good at this selling business, and making a lot of contacts, and knowing where to go and who to contact about different agencies, and letting them know that I am the person you might want to call (support agency), if you have people that want to see this particular type of equipment. I opened doors for them too." "Plus I was still getting calls from all over ... Now I've been in business for 20 years plus ... all kinds of organizations and individuals knew to call me. I had an 800 number. Didn't matter where I was, they knew how to get a hold of me."
Leadership	"He (person from whom business was bought) says, I have to give up the company that you and I have been representing. He (person from whom business was bought) said, you would have to start your own business." .... Again, I said, that's not what I went to school for. I was not prepared in the business field at all. I didn't feel like I had any business background to run or own or operate a business. When I worked for him I was getting a paycheck every two weeks, which most people are used to getting. That's how you work in America, you get a paycheck." "He (person from whom business was bought) said, here's what you got to do, you've got to get a DBA, get an accountant, get your ducks in order, get your tax ID and everything else that you need. He led me through, which was very, very good of him to do all that, and it was pretty simple. It's like putting one foot in front of the other." "What business plan? It was called get up every morning and do what needed to be done. I didn't have a business plan. I just did it." "No business plan, no. I was approached by a couple gentlemen that came into my store when I first opened from ... They tried to convince me that I needed them, and they were there for me, and I should sit down and consult with some of their members and go over how a business should be run and all of this." "If there were barriers I didn't see them. If people were putting up barriers I didn't pay any attention to them." "Persistence. I knew what I wanted." "It kept growing. It just kept growing." "Yeah, there went my business partner (husband dies). That was a blow. We had two gals that worked for us in the (first) store. One was basically an office manager who had been with us since almost the first couple of months we

	opened. When we got pretty well established with our new (second) store ... we sold the store ... to that office manager. Everything was going along peachy. Then my husband was diagnosed with cancer. Had my husband still been with me...things would have been very, very different because we would have just taken it (first store) back over and kept it going.
Financial Resources	"One thing I learned very early, or maybe back when I was a kid, when you want something you need to save for it." "You put money in the bank and you save because someday you're going to need it for something that you want. Anyways, when you have your own business, I believed that every cent should go back into the business." "I had my business checking account and paid for things like that, all of my equipment, out of my business account. Did that that way for almost 10 years..About eight years at this point that I would have been doing it this way, basically working out of my home. My office was in my home." "Like I said, I never talked to anybody at a bank, I never needed a loan or anything like that." "... with the old job ... I wouldn't have as much money today as I do. It would have been a go nowhere job."
Customer Relationships	"I knew the people who needed it and I knew when you need it you need it, and what it could do for you. The only stumbling block was, of course, the price. I couldn't do anything about that and I couldn't make any apology for that, it was what it was." "We were on the road a lot. We just kept going where people needed us to be." "Although a lot of the people who call me do not have any clue (about disability). It's impacted it in a positive way. I do get a lot of admiration, I guess, and respect. I don't know. I think people think (we) are honest people." "I opened my little store, I put all my equipment there ... Pretty much made myself available any time anybody wanted to come. I tried to do a nine to five type of thing, but then I would have people that would say, "Do you have evening hours? Can I come on Saturday? How about a Sunday?" I would be available. I wanted this to go so well." "Anyway, my name and phone number is on every machine I sold." "Speeches, I went whenever I was called. If a retirement home called, or an agency."

(table continued)

Operational Knowledge	"I ended up firing one person...She did not take very good messages, I would call people and I would look like I didn't know what I was talking about because the information I had gotten from her was incorrect ... The two gals that I mentioned earlier that stayed with me for a very, very long time, they were great." "... he (husband) was in the mini mart and convenient store business. He knew about setting up things, and how to merchandise things, and so he gave me a lot of good advice. He kept saying you got to add more merchandise. You have to have more things." "I found someplace about eight blocks from my house. The building itself at the time was three times the size of what I needed, but I thought, "It's so darn convenient and so close to my home." "The fact that people kept coming to my store, and calling me, and liking how I handled things. My profitability was obvious, the more I sold the more I could buy product, the more I could do. It was obvious. I didn't have to measure anything. I just had people coming."

Table 5

Participant 2 – Managerial Success Factors

Success Factor	Interview Information
Product Knowledge	"So that's how I got into this industry and then just stayed in tune to it and then just got to know a lot of people ... Back then, there wasn't a lot of competition."
Market Knowledge	"But after 20 years of being in business... time started to get more competition. Your bigger competitors came along." "So then I was like, what do I do now? So I thought, "Wow, I'll become a franchise of somebody. Work off somebody else's money." "So it's tough right now 'cause there's so many of these (competitors)." "I had no choice, I had to go with him (franchise) 'cause it was a money issue, you know what I mean?"
Leadership	"Every day's a barrier for me. Seriously." "My motto is to lay low, stay out of sight. That's been my way my whole life, stay out of sight. Stay in the back of the room where they can't see you." "I have no strategy, it's just you gotta work, work, and work and be on call, and try not to turn any ... 'cause it's gonna be

	stagnant probably for the next couple years for me in this line of work. So I'll just be hanging tough here, figure it out as I go." "I don't know if I would've done anything really different 'cause I enjoyed it, it took me where I'm at today. You know, if I went back 40 years when I first got started up, I probably would've took vacations, took weekends off, took holidays off so I could've been with my kids more. That's a long time to work, that's a long stretch. Not too many people can say they've done that, you know? But I had to 'cause I couldn't afford to hire people." "Oh, I think I'm a very good employer, I guess, to everybody."
Financial Relationships	"You can't get a loan from the banks ... I tried. I had the banks out ... And you'd be begging, they'd want print outs and this and that, and that and this. Your accounts, you know, they wanted everything but the sun. And being small, you just can't get it, otherwise you gotta put up collateral. Your first, last, middle born, your house. It's not that easy." "I have a line of credit now with the bank and the only reason why I have a line of credit ... It's funny, after all these years of being self employed, the more money you have, the more they're willing to give you without strings attached. So the more money you have, it's easier to get money. I've learned that over my time being in business." "And the banks see that and, boy, they were all over me, like glue. That's why they wrote me a note to buy this building with no questions asked. Gave me a line of credit, no questions asked." "So I still have both certifications, I gotta renew them next year and I may not even do that. Just a waste of time going through all the crap ... My disability seems to be a little bit different, I think, in a lot of different ways 'cause mine's a hidden disability. You look okay, you know, what's wrong with you?" "Those are all scams as far as I'm concerned. They don't have that. Government ain't got expedited needs unless there's a crisis ... They wanted all these print outs, who's your customers, how much you're doing with your customers, what type of work are you doing with your customers, how frequent is it. I mean, it just was an overkill. It was to a point where the paperwork alone scared you off even to fill it out and then it wouldn't have been that much money anyway."
Customer Relationships	"We just do it ourselves, if we need to go somewhere and see

	somebody 'cause the business just isn't there anymore like it was before in our world. So no thought to hire sales people." "I had the same staff for pretty much the 20 years. The same people, nobody really never left. The only problem I had was with the sales people. You know, they go out and they get some customers for you, they come back. In our line of work then, you take people out to lunch and wine and dine them."
Operational Knowledge	"There's not enough business out there for me to get my hands on and that's where I thought manipulating or using the disability might help me out, or using the veteran's status might help me, but that hasn't helped me at all. I mentioned that to you. Those are barriers, you know, for me and other small companies." "So we tried that and really didn't work, but that's what let me to become a ... (franchise) agent. It was easy, I knew what I was doing, I knew the industry. I had a base of accounts, they were willing to bring us on. I didn't have to come up with any documentation that I had schooling or a ton of money in the bank. I already had the ability and the people, the accounts, and they were looking to have representation here ..., so it was a nice fit." "Very lucky. Luck, luck's been on my side. That's all I can say. This industry is ... You know, you're up for ten years, you're down. It seems like you're back up and then you're back down and seems like we're in a down position right now because the economy's different now again." "So there's a report card on each company monthly and you have to maintain ... (position)." "I guess I'm pretty effective. I got the experience behind me."

Table 6

Participant 3 – Managerial Success Factors

Success Factor	Interview Information
Product Knowledge	"... most of work: freehand drawing." "And that was the first thing they helped me do, get (material) copyrighted." "And for the past three years has been successful in getting into those shows. They're juried art shows, so they've also been an asset ..." "... things that appeal to other age demographics."
Market Knowledge	"So, the strategy was to try to reach all the areas and then to try to create something that is going to be for all the areas." "... have a line of products out right now that we could actually just put in a store ... I mean, that's how big ... it keeps growing." "We always build on one foundation and then take it up to another level. And, getting a lot of public acclaim and public recognition for her stuff. So, we are in the process of taking it to the next level and the marketing that will come along with that."
Leadership	"And I think a lot of it, is like I said, me lacking experience with all this new technology." And I rely on (support agency) a lot ... I just recently got a smartphone. And I just recently, this weekend, went on and got that square thing that you can now start taking credit over the phone because that was also a barrier because you know when you go out in public a lot of people don't always have cash." "Sometimes I know that just because of who I am. And, I think sometimes that needs to be noted that they don't need to look at the disability, but they need to look at the person and look at the talent that is coming from that individual."
Financial Relationships	"Yeah, I think a lot of with finances and just really knowing the different venues to actually show stuff because a lot of it is just through (support agency) that we go through (support staff) like she would have different venues that we would go through. Just getting stuff out there. That's why really wanted to have a website." "... has a little business account, and gets a lot of family support. Basically, anything that ... needs, they try to sort of help her out the best they can. Because her whole family is really on a fixed income, but when it comes to ..., the sky is

(*table continued*)

	the limit...really has a lot of outside support too. Friends and stuff."
Customer Relationships	"We have yearly things that we go to." "... have certain products that are favorites, so we know they're going to sell. But, creativity is ongoing." "Basically or just people may see stuff and ask just word of mouth where did you get that from. But, the main thing is just the venues ..." "You have to sort of tap into places right now that's out there that sort of maybe center around what already have in product."
Operational Knowledge	"And it's like where all products and things needs its own room in the house. We're running out of space to house all the stuff to get prepared for all the different shows and all the products. I try to have stuff on hand when people want stuff ... It's so big." "We have actually talked about it. It is part of the business strategy. I do have some people but, it's high-end marketing. And high-end marketing also costs a lot of money, so the finances all kind of go hand in hand. The person who said that they were willing to help with the website should have all of funding come to fruition. You just keep putting it out there and things will come together. We haven't actually sat down and made a specific action plan. But, that should be the next step.

The themes in this portion of the analysis included product and market

knowledge, leadership, customer relations, and operational capability.

According to Saunders, Gray, and Goregoakar (2014), both personal and

environmental factors contributed to entrepreneurial success. Entrepreneurs also needed

the appropriate amount of persistence to overcome startup barriers, while still recognizing

when they were going off track (Aguilar-Morales et al., 2013; Freeman & Siegfried,

2015; Matzler et al., 2015). All three participants in this study overcame startup barriers

by being frugal in their spending and strategic in their development steps. The

entrepreneur must also transition from being the key player in the company to a major

coach of employees (Aguilar-Morales et al., 2013; Freeman & Siegfried, 2015; Matzler et al., 2015). Participants 1 and 2 had over 20 years each of managing successful businesses and leading dedicated employees. Finally, self-evaluation helped entrepreneurs to understand their limitations (Aguilar-Morales et al., 2013; Freeman & Siegfried, 2015; Matzler et al., 2015). All of the participants had a good understanding of their abilities. Tipu (2016) argued that ODEs responded to the need for achievement, freedom, or independence self-employed as a last resort to achieve personal survival when different employment opportunities were not available to them. NDEs and ODEs were similar, with none preparing a business plan, none going for external financing, and all having realistic assessments of their skills and available resources. These characteristics were right for all three participants in this study. Tipu (2016) focused primarily on the motivational differences between need-driven entrepreneurs (i.e., those who start businesses for lack of other employment opportunities) and opportunity-driven entrepreneurs (i.e., those who start businesses because of seeing a potential opportunity in the marketplace). Participants 2 and 3 were need-driven entrepreneurs.

Participants 1 and 2 did not find value in government and service agencies, including certification programs. Participant 3 was in business for 4 years and participated in a service agency program that centered on helping individuals with disabilities establish and build a business.

Applications to Professional Practice

My study applied to professional practice because it provided an understanding of the fundamental concepts leading to successful disability-owned businesses. For

example, employees were essential to a successful business, as noted by both Participant 1 and 2, taking note of the longevity of the persons working for them. However, diversification of products and services was also important, as stated by Participant 1 and 3 indicating the need for having a variety of goods to meet the current and changing needs of their customers. As with entrepreneurs without disabilities, entrepreneurs with disabilities focused on the same key concepts to establish a successful business. Ponzio et al. (2015) found that unemployed people with disabilities wanted jobs similar to those that people without disabilities had, were as likely to have prior job experiences and had similar views on income needs, job security, and other job characteristics. All three participants displayed these characteristics. Moreover, Aarstad and Pettersen (2016) found that both types of start-ups faced limited access to outside resources, but novices lacked the networks and relationships that eased the way of more experienced business startups, even when the novices had significant experience within the industry. Aarstad and Petersen provided insights into the particular types of issues that new EWDs with little or no prior entrepreneurial background face and the areas that caused problems in sustaining their companies. Ulvenblad et al. (2013) documented the importance of training to assist new entrepreneurs in their communication skills but also addressed the value of prior business—preferably prior start-up—experience. Participant 3 took advantage of training in establishing and building the business. Additionally, the amount of business experience of entrepreneurs was critical (Shirokova, Tsukanova, & Bogatyreva, 2015). Participant 1 had considerable business experience; however, Participants 2 and 3 had good mentors that overcame the lack of business experience.

Implications for Social Change

EWD leaders can use the findings of this study to develop the strategies necessary

for increasing their ability to achieve profitability in their enterprises benefiting their

employees, families, and communities. These leaders can create a social change from

dependency to independence through successful self-employment. Nabi et al. (2013)

found that three primary areas determined if a person would be likely to start their own

business: the personal characteristics of the individual, the level of environmental support

for the business idea, the context of the plan of activities, and the business idea itself.

Reddington and Fitzsimons (2013) found that one key to entrepreneurial success came

from a combination of family support and individualized person-centered assistance.

Socioeconomic factors included a variety of specific issues, including networks,

relationship-building, support from family, support from agencies, availability of capital,

and other barriers to EWDs. The success of Participant 3 directly was attributable to a

service organization focused on business development and family support. All

participants had strong family support and values. Shogren (2013) suggested the

importance of building an interspersed system of support for self-determination. With

self-determination providing a motivation for entrepreneurship, the three key methods of

building these business systems included engaging with a community of people like

them, engagement with the general business community, and professional advice from a

government or local chambers of commerce (Shogren, 2013). Participant 1 had unique

knowledge about the products because of being a user of the products sold to customers

with similar disabilities. Saunders and Nedelec (2014) provided useful information for

this project because the motivation to work was a large part of the determination to become an entrepreneur. All participants in this study were proud of their business successes. Of crucial importance in this study were the common themes that support the fact that persons with disabilities see work as a part of life, a basis of identity, self-esteem, and financial assistance (Saunders & Nedelec, 2014). A person formed his or her identity through work. Saunders and Nedelec showed that work resulted in better management of illnesses. Finally, in support of the literature, Saunders and Nedelec found that there were social aspects of work relevant to people with disabilities. Siperstein et al. (2014) noted the importance of young people with disabilities gaining early work experience and developing adaptive skills and appropriate behavioral and emotional skills. The EWDs in this study focused on their abilities and had a can-do attitude.

Recommendations for Action

Leaders of local and national governments and agencies should consider the specific needs for EWDs. The leaders of these organizations could form new policies and programs that encourage the development of entrepreneurs, such as offering vouchers for buildings with disability access, if needed. All participants developed slower because of running their businesses out of their home. If the entrepreneur needs specialized equipment, this could involve the same type of vouchers. Without question, the participants advocated for new financial programs to support EWDs in the launch phase of the business. Current programs were not working. Cacciotti and Hayton (2015) concluded that fear of failure was a barrier to entrepreneurship because of the

preponderance of evidence in the literature. While Participant 2 had a fear, he believed

that there was no other choice. Participant 1 noted the importance of family values in

offsetting the fear of failure. Morgan and Sisak (2016) found that both the fear of loss and

the aspirations for success moderated the degree of investment into the new enterprise.

Therefore, educational programs should be developed to assist these individuals in

establishing a successful organization, despite their unique needs. All participants

recognized a need to concentrate on their abilities, trusting that other people understood

the need to do things differently. Programs to build self development were important.

Freeman and Siegfried (2015) noted three personal characteristics of successful

entrepreneurs: strategic thinking, coaching, and self-evaluation, while at the same time

noting the significant leadership challenges associated with developing a business. The

same education programs could help with the development of these personal

characteristics. Canedo et al. (2014) noted that Hispanics did not believe they had the

skills and knowledge needed to start a business, gain funding for the firm, or ensure

business success. Further barriers to success in business start-ups included institutional

issues, such as legal and accommodation problems; organizational barriers, such as

practices that marginalized with individuals' disabilities; and attitude problems with

support personnel (Kulkarni & Kote, 2014). Therefore, community programs need to

focus on encouraging minority EWDs to launch their businesses and creating a can-do

attitude.

Recommendations for Further Research

Companies owned by individuals with disabilities ran in different ways, at times, as opposed to comparable companies belonging to people without disabilities, to accommodate the disability. Therefore, it would be beneficial to conduct future studies to understand time consumption of these different processes. For instance, it may be useful to determine if either company is earning a greater profit or incurring more expenses due to processes used. In this way, it may be possible for the relevant company to adopt or modify certain processes to maximize profitability.

The presented study had several limitations. Future researchers should consider these restrictions. This particular study used a small sample size. It would be beneficial for future researchers to conduct studies using larger sample sizes. Even if the future studies continue to be qualitative analyses, it is still possible to increase the sample size and still have a valid study. This particular study may only apply to the specific companies, as opposed to being generalizable. It may be beneficial for future studies to consider a wider range of studies, such as multiple geographic locations, which may increase the ability of other companies owned by individuals with disabilities to adopt similar strategies. The limitation of this study was due to the narrow results provided due to the interview questions and observations. It may be beneficial for future researchers to consider a wider range of interview questions, such as asking about broad processes.

Reflections

Like all researchers, I have personal biases, which lead to preconceived ideas and values. At the same time, I am also able to have changes of thought processes due to an

increase in knowledge. Within this section, there were discussions regarding the impact of personal bias, preconceived ideas, and preconceived values in the study. At the same time, there was a discussion regarding how my thought processes have changed as a result of the completion of this study.

Many individuals with disabilities, particularly visible disabilities, experienced some discrimination. In some cases, people deem these people as 'less than' or 'inferior' to their non-disabled counterparts for varying reasons. In other situations, these individuals are pitied or considered incapable, due to their disability status. For example, it is common for people to judge persons with disabilities as unintelligent, when, in fact, many individuals with disabilities are highly intelligent and, in some cases, are more intelligent than their non-disabled counterparts. Due to my nature, I tend to want to give more assistance to individuals with disabilities, not because these people are inferior or incapable, but because of a desire to be of assistance. However, many innovative individuals with disabilities tend to accommodate their disability, as well as maintain pace with their non-disabled counterparts. While these people displayed tenacity in the maintenance of a normal life that suits their unique needs, the innovations used for meeting a broad range of requirements are quite astounding, prompted even higher respect.

The experiences throughout the completion of this study gave a greater insight into the lives of those with disabilities, including a greater insight as to the needs of this population to conduct their assigned tasks at their places of employment, even if the location of work is their own business. Moreover, throughout the completion of this

study, I have become more knowledgeable about the innovations used to meet varying needs and the reasoning behind the adoption of these changes. This understanding is beneficial in future interactions with individuals with disabilities to understand individual needs, as well as most effective communications, particularly if working in a facility owned by an EWD.

Conclusion

This section specifically included the findings, as well as applied these findings to professional practice. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies EWDs employed to achieve and sustain profitability. Participants were confident, determined, results oriented, hard workers, and leaders. Within this study, participants enjoyed support from family and friends in the development of the business, leading to an increased capacity to gather resources and resolve problems. Knowledge, values, background, passion for the firm and a positive attitude were essential for the success of the business, as well as the well-being of the participant. Different factors contributed to the success of the company, leading to distinguishing characteristics of employers. The entrepreneur success factors resulted in themes of passion, dedication, values, support systems, background, and knowledge. The managerial success factors led to themes of product and market knowledge, financial resources, leadership, and operational capability. This study applied to professional practice because it gave an understanding of the fundamental concepts leading to successful businesses. For example, employees were essential to a successful business. However, diversification of products and services was also important. Therefore, as with entrepreneurs without

disabilities, entrepreneurs with disabilities must focus on the same key concepts to establish a successful business. However, they must also have the ability to accommodate their disability to the firm. The study revealed that a focus on abilities and an understanding that the person with the disability does things differently can lead to a profitable business.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

The multiple case study enables the researcher to explore the research question within various organizations, allowing for an understanding of the business operability and potential contributing success factors (Dasgupta, 2015; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Taylor, 2013; Wilson, 2016). As the purpose is to identify specific success strategies for individual companies, the responses of each participant regarding those strategies that have been successful will serve to ensure saturation on that topic. The introduction, the research questions, and the closing statements are important parts of the interview guide.

Introduction

The essential elements of the introduction include such items as a basic greeting, the purpose, details of the interview process, confidentiality, and the opportunity for questions. My draft introduction includes the essential elements.

- Arrange the setting.

- Record the meeting details: date, time, and place.

- Hello (interviewee name).

- My name is _____.

- Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. I would like to talk with you about your experiences in starting and growing your small business.

- Specifically, as part of my research study, I am seeking to understand what strategies can entrepreneurs with disabilities (EWDs) employ to achieve and sustain profitability?

- The interview should take about 60-90 minutes.

- I will be recording the interview so that I do not miss your comments. I will be taking some notes, but I know I cannot write fast enough to capture everything. Because we are recording, please be sure to speak up to avoid missing your comments.

- Your responses are confidential and are for the purpose of this research study only. The information that I include in my report will not identify you. Please know that you do not have to talk about something for which you are uncomfortable and can end the interview at any time.

- Do you have any questions about what I just covered?

- Are you willing to participate in this interview?

Research Questions

Many researchers have provided guidelines for the stages of conducting qualitative interview studies using one-on-one interviews. The qualities include a search for nuance and subtlety; finding a series of events over time (i.e., understanding how entrepreneurial strategies changed over time); generating fresh insights into the research question; explaining unexpected outcomes; and unearthing layers of discovery (O'Donnell, McAuliffe, & O'Donovan, 2014; Redman-MacLaren et al., 2014). I will strive to achieve those exact results, using the following research questions.

- What were the critical success factors that you used to develop your strategies?

- What were the critical success factors that you used to develop your strategies?

- What barriers did you encounter in implementing your strategic plans?

- How did you address the obstacles to achieving profitability?

- What concrete steps did you take to measure the effectiveness of your strategies for achieving profitability?

- What changes in plans occurred over the operating life of your business?

- What additional information would you like to add beyond that asked in the previous questions?

Closing

My closing comments will invite further comments from the interviewee. I will describe the next steps for the research study process, thanking the interviewee for participating in the study. The draft closing includes the essential elements.

- Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

- Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

- Is there anyone else with whom you want me to discuss the strategy that you employed to achieve and sustain profitability?

- If yes, please identify the individual and the strategy you want me to discuss. I will ask the individual to volunteer and will provide a Consent Form for Key Individual for signature. After the Consent Form for Key Individual is signed, I will arrange a time and place for conducting the interview. The discussion will take 30-60 minutes, during which time I will be taking notes.

- Once I transcribe the interview, I will ask you to review the information to confirm accuracy. The verification should take no less than two hours.

- I will be analyzing the information that you and others contributed. I will be developing a report and will be happy to give you a summary of the research results.

Thank you for your time.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Key Support Individual

The purpose of the study is to identify the strategies entrepreneurs with disabilities (EWDs) employ to achieve and sustain profitability.

Introduction

My draft introduction includes the essential elements.

- Record the meeting details: date, time, and place.

- Hello (interviewee name).

- My name is _____.

- Because of your involvement in strategy ___, I hope you are willing to discuss on a volunteer basis the development of the strategy. The interview should take about 30-60 minutes.

- I will be taking some notes. Please be sure to speak up to avoid missing your comments.

- Your responses are confidential and are for the purpose of this research study only. The information that I include in my report will not identify you. Please know that you do not have to talk about something for which you are uncomfortable and can end the interview at any time.

- Do you have any questions about what I just covered?

- Are you willing to participate in this interview?

Research Questions

Many researchers used guidelines for the stages of conducting qualitative

interview studies using one-on-one interviews. I will use the following research

questions:

- How did strategy _____ contribute to achieving profitability?

- What barriers occurred in implementing the strategy?

- What concrete steps did the leader(s) take to measure the effectiveness of

  the strategy for achieving profitability?

- What additional information would you like to add beyond that asked in

  the previous questions?

Closing

My closing comments will invite further comments from the interviewee. I will

describe the next steps for the research study process, thanking the interviewee for

participating in the study. The draft closing includes the essential elements.

- Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

- I will be analyzing the information that you and others contributed. I will

  be developing a report and will be giving EWD name _____ a summary of

  the research results.

Thank you for your time.

Appendix C: Observation Protocol

Background

      Business Name:
      Address:
      Phone:
      Website:
      Owner (s) Name(s)
      Years in Business
      Organization Type

      Business Focus
      Reason for Starting Business

      Current Performance of the Business
      Business Plan
      Strategic Plan
      Vision Statement
      Mission Statement

Resources

      Number of Employees:
      Number of Locations

      Number of Hours Worked Per Week by EWD
      Amount of Time Spent on:
            Sales/Customer Service
            Accounting/Finance
            Marketing
            Human Resources
            Operations Planning
            Strategy Development

      Scheduled Employee Evaluations
      Scheduled Employee Compensation
      How is Job Performance Measured?
      Organizational Chart
      Job Descriptions for All Positions
      Use of Contractors

      Who has Management Responsibility for:
            Operations

Production
Marketing
Planning and Tracking
Subcontracting
Bookkeeping/Financial Reports
Customer Satisfaction
Legal
Human Resources
Sales

Opportunities for Employees in:
Authority to Make Changes
Allocating Resources
Making Decisions
Planning

Employee Handbook

Marketing

Marketing Plan
Marketing Budget

Competition:
Who?
Benefits?

How is Your Business Unique?
Who are Your Customers?
What are Your Customer's Needs and Wants?
How do You Reach Your Customer?

What is Your Pricing Policy?

Public Relations Strategy?
Research and Development Program?
How do You Measure:
Advertising
Marketing Effectiveness
Strategy Effectiveness

Finance and
Accounting

Who does Your Bookkeeping?
Bookkeeping System?
How do You Track Labor and Material Costs?
Annual Budget?

What Financial Statements do You Use?

Has Overhead Increased/Decreased over the Last Year?

Pre-tax Profit over the Last Three Years?
Use of Financial Indicators
Financial Trends over Last Three Years

        Gross Profit Margins
        Operating Profit Margins
        Net Profit
        Cash Flow
        Total Assets
        Net Worth
        Short-term Debt
        Long-term Debt

Financial Plan for Future Growth
Financial Ratios/Data Tracked

Operations

Operations Manual
How Often Managers Meet to Discuss Business?
Making Decisions:

        Feeling
        Information/Analysis
        Experience
        Management Input

Capacity of Current Facilities and Personnel
How is the Business Running Compared to Last Year?

Documentation of Business Operations
How does the Management Team Resolve Problems?

What are the Product Lines and Services?
What is the Product Turn and at What Margin?
Inventory Control

What are the Key Performance Indicators?
Have the Performance Indicators Changed over the Last Three Years?
Measure Quality
Customer Satisfaction

Sales

Measurable Sales Goals
Meeting Sales Targets?
Process for Post-sale Follow-up

Sales Orders Per Month
Number of Salespeople Employed
Sales Trends in Business
Sales Trends in Industry

Distribution Methods/Channels Used

Market Share
Who is Market Leader?
How does Your Profit Margin Compare with Leader?
Current Annual Sales Increased/Decreased over Last Year?
Changes because of Changes in Sales