

# Community Resilience *for* Small Businesses

10.03.2025

# AGENDA

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SUMMARY

## Introduction

# 1



# MEET THE TEAM



**Josh Bahk**

Junior, CS  
Rancho Cucamonga, CA



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Senior, CS  
Nairobi, Kenya



**Maimuna Muntaha**

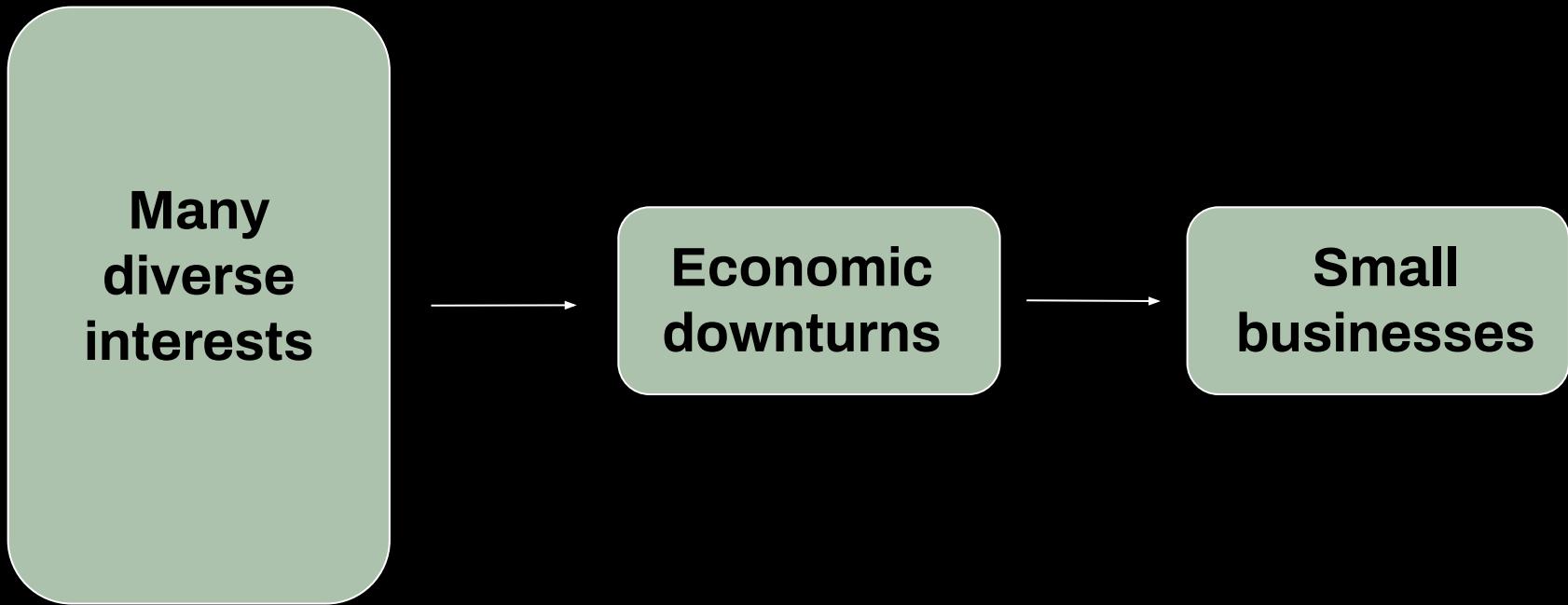
Senior, SymSys  
NYC, New York



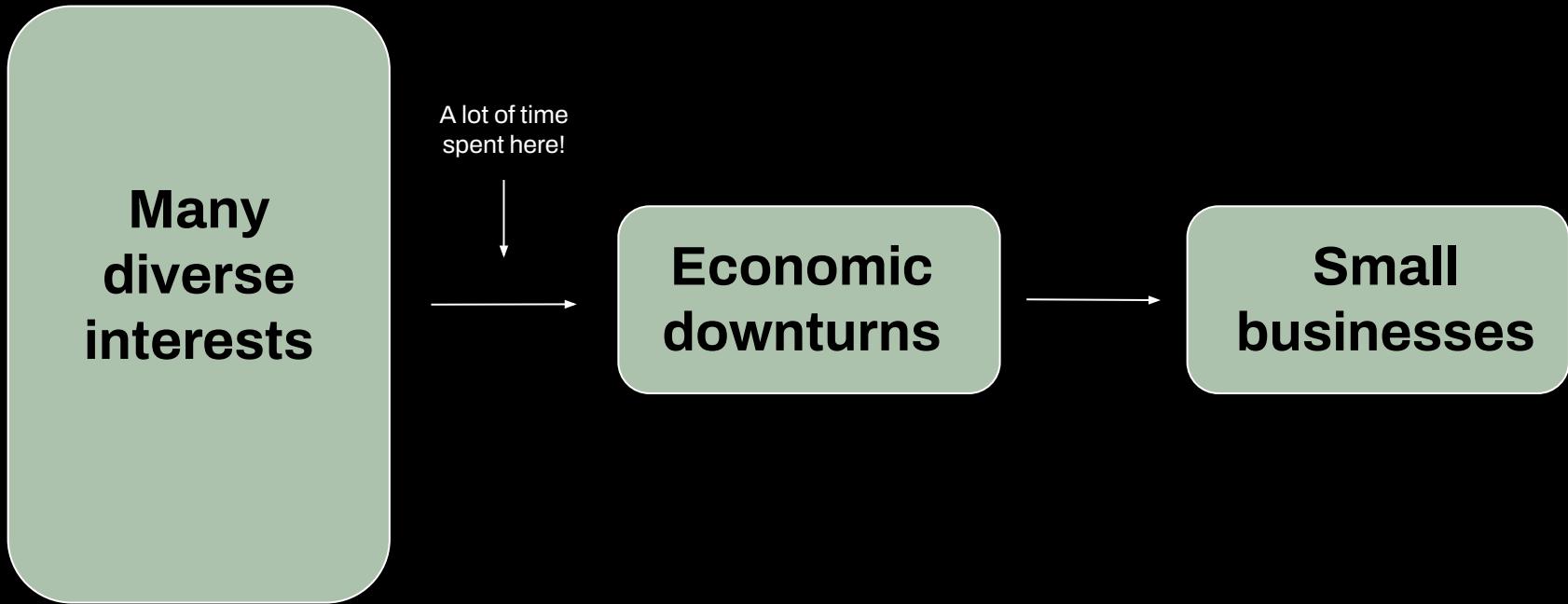
**Sunny Sun**

Junior, SymSys  
Irvine, CA

# OUR DOMAIN EVOLUTION



# OUR DOMAIN EVOLUTION



# A PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW



“Mike”  
Researcher from  
New York

## OUR DOMAIN

# Small Business Resilience

## Needfinding Methodology

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# PARTICIPANT SELECTION

**OUTSIDE  
OF  
STANFORD**

**SMALL  
BUSINESS  
FOCUS**

**RANGE OF  
BACKGROU  
NDS**

# LOCATION



Uni Ave



Town & Country

# APPROACH



gettyimages®

Credit: Andersen Ross

# INTERVIEWEES



“Mark”  
Manager of boba  
shop



“Helen”  
Manager at  
Italian restaurant  
for 22 years



“Amy”  
Owner of  
bookstore



“Taryn”  
Owner of salon

# EXTREME USER: A SPECTRUM

**Resilience / Establishment in the Community**



Brand new small business  
(hair salon)

Open for 90 years,  
staple in the community  
(book store)

# BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE...



“Beatrice”  
Customer



“Jessie”  
Customer

# GUIDING QUESTIONS

“What’s your community and support system like as a business owner? ”

“How do you learn about information relevant to you as a small business owner?”

“Tell us about a challenge/crisis you have faced this past year/month”

“How is business now compared to last year? If there are any changes, do you think there’s a particular reason why?”

## Interview Results

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“Mark”  
Manager at Bubble Tea Shop

*“I sometimes look for videos on  
how to manage so that I can  
improve”*



“Helen”  
Manager at Italian  
restaurant for 22 years

*“This was a favorite of the regulars,  
but the regulars are getting older,  
the younger kids aren’t coming to  
us anymore. We don’t have  
cocktails or a bar, they’re going to  
NOLA”*



“Amy”  
Owner of bookstore

*“We started in the middle of the Great Depression... very little money, very few resources, little materials you could get a hold of.”*

*“All the chains came in and killed all the little stores... we’re fortunate in having a really loyal following.”*



“Taryn”  
Owner of salon

*“My family drives 30 minutes all  
the way from San Jose to support  
the salon”*

*“I wish more people know about  
this salon”*



“Beatrice”  
Customer, grandma of 2

*“Big stores are probably 90% [of what I buy from]”*

*“I try to avoid the chain [restaurants] almost all the time”*



“Jessie”  
Customer, High School Student

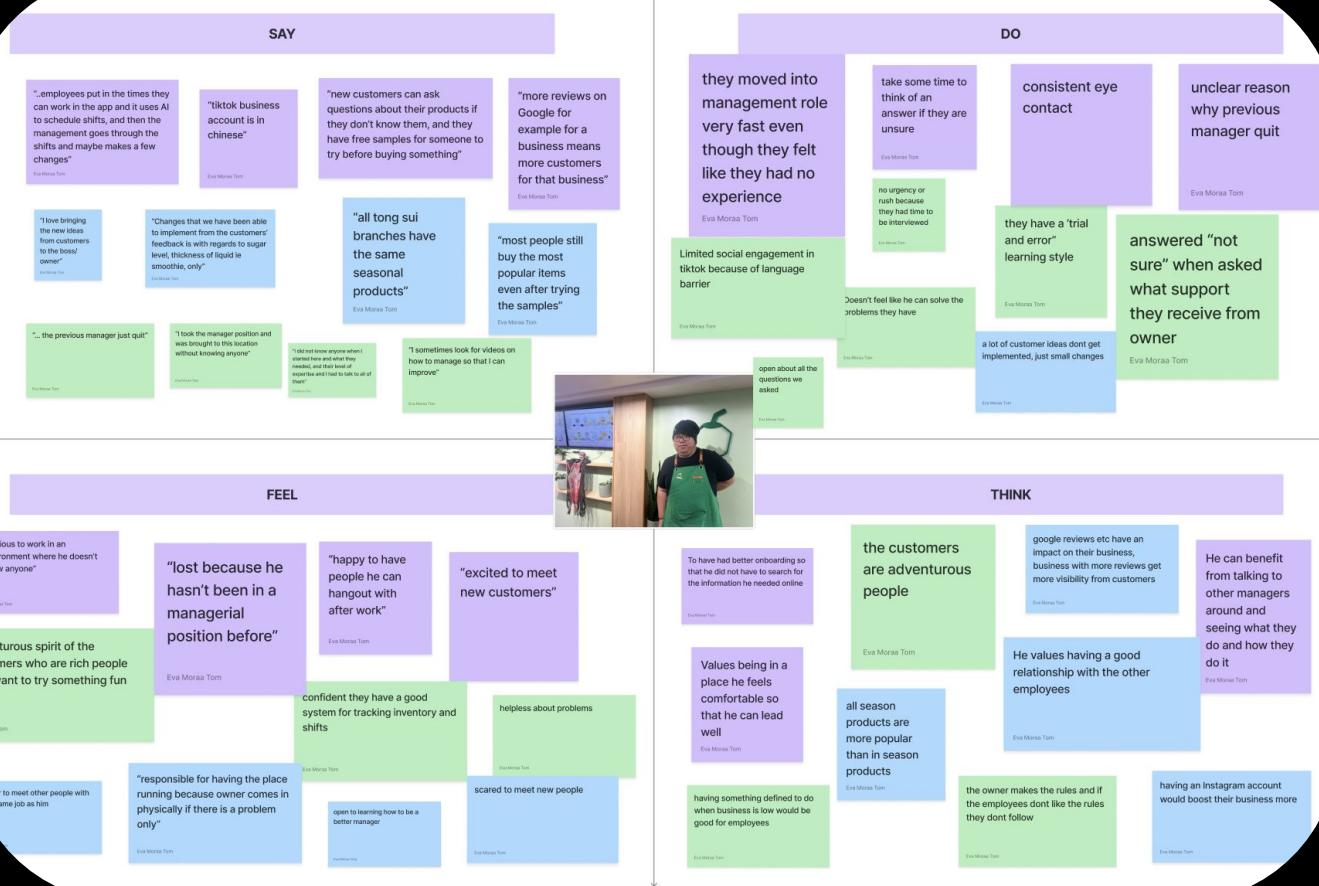
*“I try not to go name brands, but if I know that a brand has good basics, I’ll probably gravitate towards that.”*

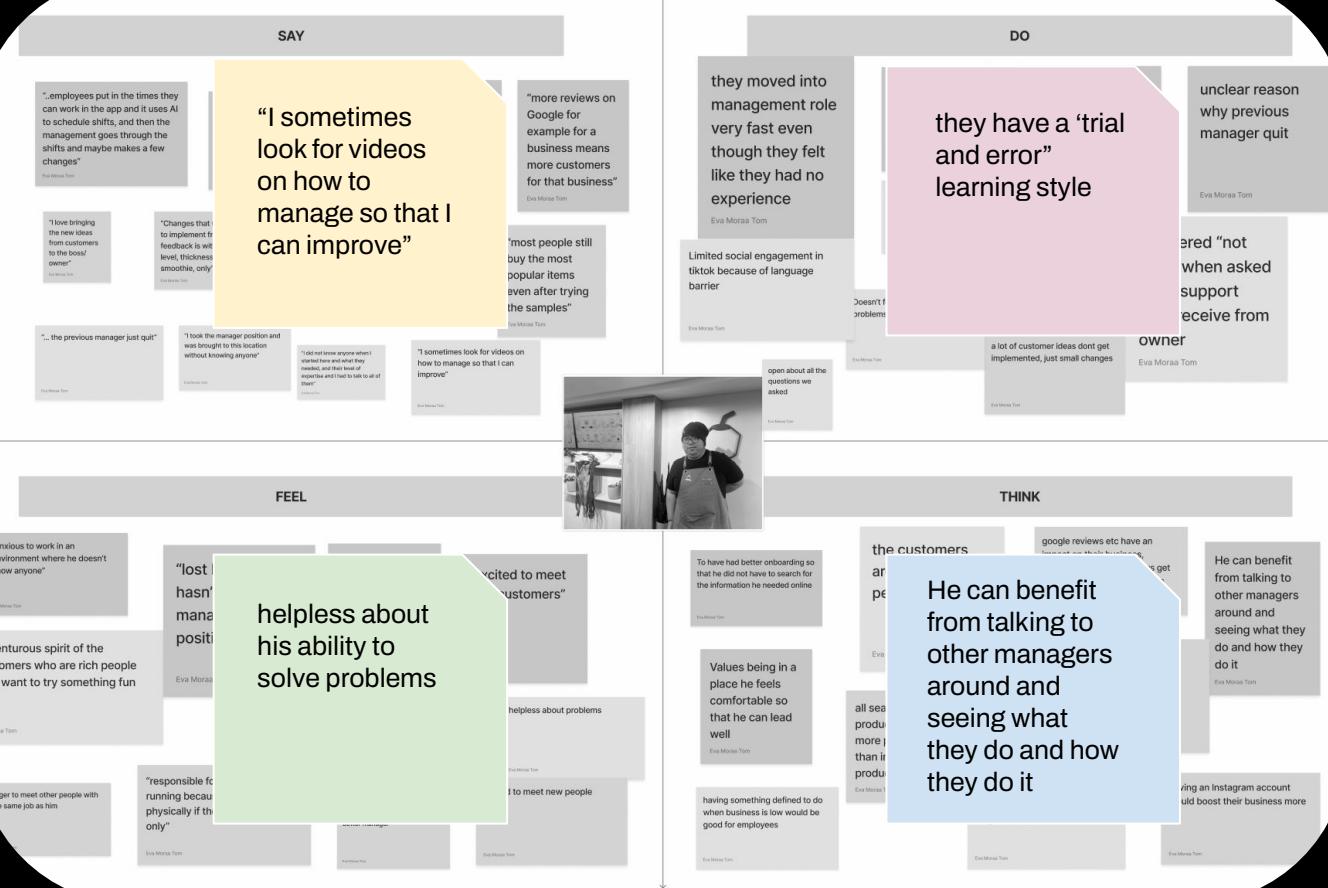
*“[When buying], I ask my friends’ opinions and I do my own research”*

Analysis

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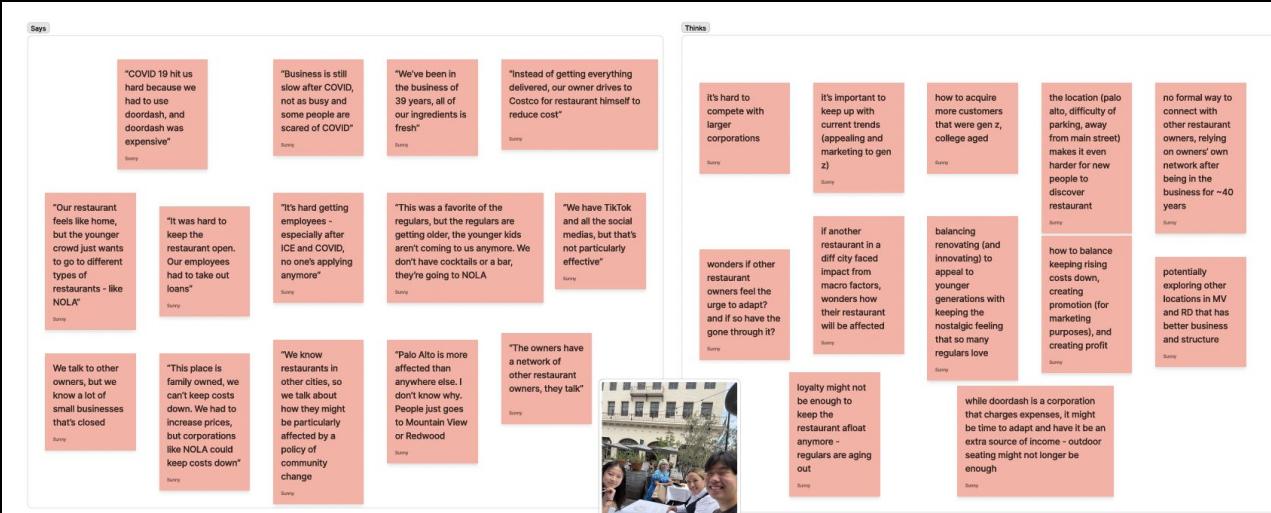


→ Managers find it frustrating that despite stepping up quickly into management, they often feel unsure about support and their ability to find solutions, leaving them to constantly use trial and error method.

# Insights

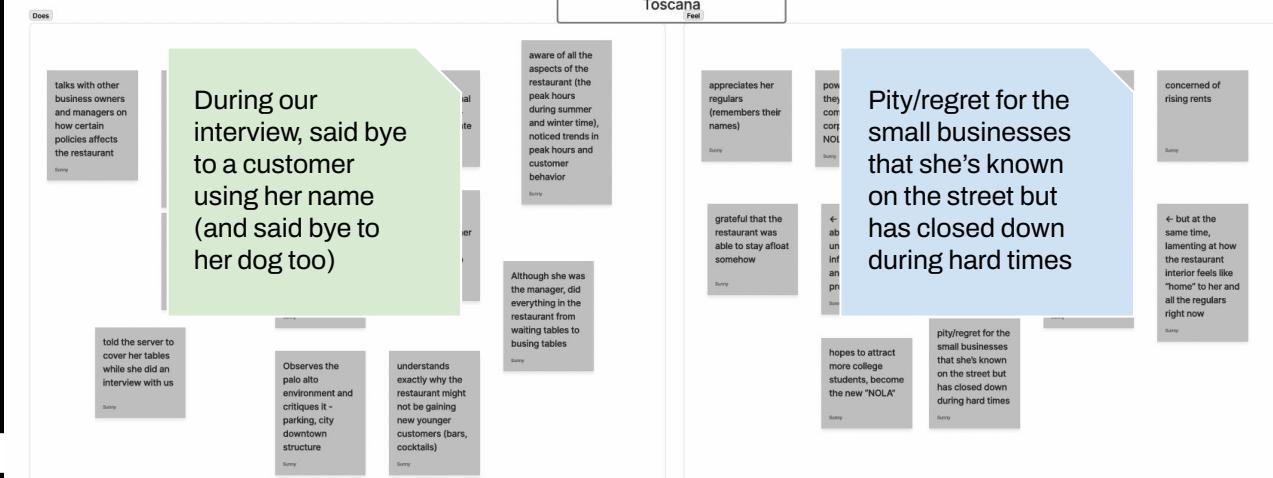
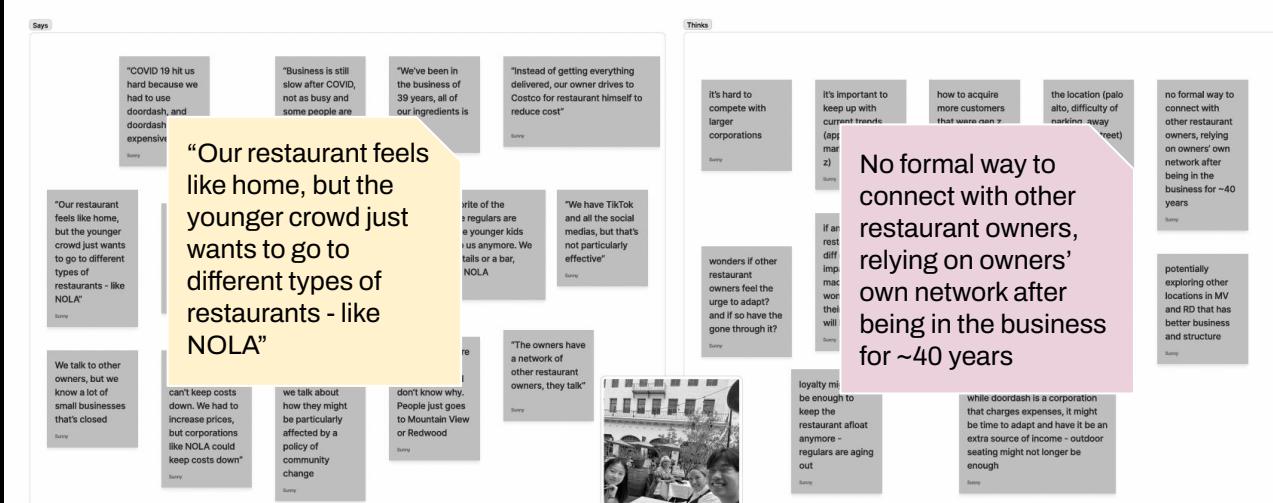
→ Managers need to feel supported when facing challenges instead of facing them on their own

# Needs



Helen: Manager of Osteria  
Toscana





- For small businesses, not only is having a loyal customer base important, but so is adapting to appeal to the younger generation
- There is no formal way to engage with other small restaurant owners unless relying upon decades of network.

## Insights

- Small business owners need a way to find effective marketing strategies and increase customer acquisition
- Small business owners need a way to communicate with other business owners and form networks

## Needs

## SAY

## DO

"She said she was quite busy before starting the interview and only wanted to spend 6 minutes of her time, but later let us extend the interview length."

"She went straight back to work planning for the anniversary of the book store celebration."

"She attempted to hire employees, but had significant difficulty finding people who had passed her test which included questions like where to locate or to name a book by a specific author."

"She does a lot of the work herself. She had one other employee in the store, but she was clearly running the business and she was at the cash register."

"She gave me a 5% discount when I bought a book after the interview."

"She purchases book collections, including rare books and signed books, from Stanford professors"

"She buys and sells regular books, used books, and unique books you can't find anywhere else."

"She focuses less on marketing and more on the community of regulars who frequent her store."

"Her store has stayed open when many surrounding and similar bookstores have had to close down."

"She has worked in the store and been in the business her entire life."

"She avoids putting her book catalog on the internet because she does not want to pay someone to sit in front of a computer."



**"My father started this store in 1935"**

**"I've been in this business since I was born"**

**"Started in the middle of the Great Depression"**

**"World War II came... military students would sell the textbooks that had been the staple of his business to Stanford students"**

**"(everybody) came in wanting things like how to fix their plumbing or how to build a garage in the backyard"**

**"The whole computer transformation for the area... they no longer wanted books"**

**"Amazon came in... chain stores came in and killed all the little stores"**

**"Rents here are very high"**

**"We try and be as unique as we can"**

**"I don't have to pay somebody thousands of dollars to sit in front of a computer screen"**

**"Getting knowledgeable staff is one of the hardest things"**

**"They need to understand that if you buy from somebody who has bad customer employees... you are contributing to the abuse of staff"**

**"One of the saddest things is that most of the businesses now are run by corporations"**

**"Not all that long ago, I knew the name of every owner of every building on my street"**

**"Now, you can't even belong to a local theater association or teenagers... they have to get corporate headquarter's permission"**

**"You no longer have the ability to form community among the people who run the businesses"**

**"She appears to view computers as largely negative for her business, and was unable to answer my questions about how an app she mentioned that seemed to indicate she didn't believe an app would really fix any of her problems."**

**"She thinks today's youth are significantly less-informed about books and book organization."**

**"She believes the increasing corporatization of the world around her is negative"**

**"She believes that individuals are responsible for the decisions they make and their consequences, even if their decision is indirect"**

**"She thinks it was easier in the past for small businesses to advertise, like by putting up posters in front of a local theater company's window"**

**"She believes that shopping on Amazon means supporting a mistreatment of employees and environmental degradation"**

**"She thinks people often misunderstand the difference between personal responsibility and convenience"**

**"She thinks books have a place online, but can be found on the internet, especially those that have not been digitized—there is valuable information there"**

**"She does not seem particularly familiar with computers and modern software, nor does she want to be"**

**"She believes the book business has gotten harder in recent years than in the past, but she does not view challenges as unique, as the business began in the Great Depression and flourished"**

**"She thinks paper books are better than digital books"**

## THINK

## FEEL

"She feels frustrated by the increased corporatization of downtown Palo Alto, which makes it harder for her to connect with other owners."

"She is grateful for the community for sticking by her book shop, like Stanford professors who continue to buy and sell books to the shop"

"She dislikes and is aversive to new technologies because of what they did to her business, through Amazon or larger book store chains"

"She feels disdain for people who are utterly unaware of the consequences of buying at places like Amazon"

"She felt hesitant at the start of the interview, but grew more comfortable as it went on. She seemed worried we were going in with an overly techy solve-all-your-problems-with-one-app angle"

"She felt levelheaded through crises and optimistic that her business would make it through by carving out new niches"

"She felt annoyed at the difficulty of finding new employees who were knowledgeable about books"

"She felt skeptical that any app could solve her store's problems"

"She felt disgusted by the mistreatment of workers and environmental degradation caused by Amazon"

"She felt excited about the 90th anniversary party coming up for the bookstore"

## SAY

## DO



Amy: book store owner

**She does a lot of the work herself, relying less on employees**

"She said she was quite busy before starting the interview and only wanted to speak for 6 minutes of her time, but later let us extend the interview length."

"She went straight back to work planning for the anniversary of the book store celebration."

"She gave me a 5% discount when I bought a book after the interview."

"She purchases books, including rare books and signed books, from Stanford professors."

"Her store has stayed open when many surrounding and similar bookstores have had to close down."

"She has worked in the store and been in the business her entire life."

"She wants to support small business owners, but has had more difficulty in recent years with corporatism."

"She avoids putting her book catalog on the internet because she does not want to pay someone to sit in front of a computer."

**She's annoyed at how hard it is to find knowledgeable employees these days**

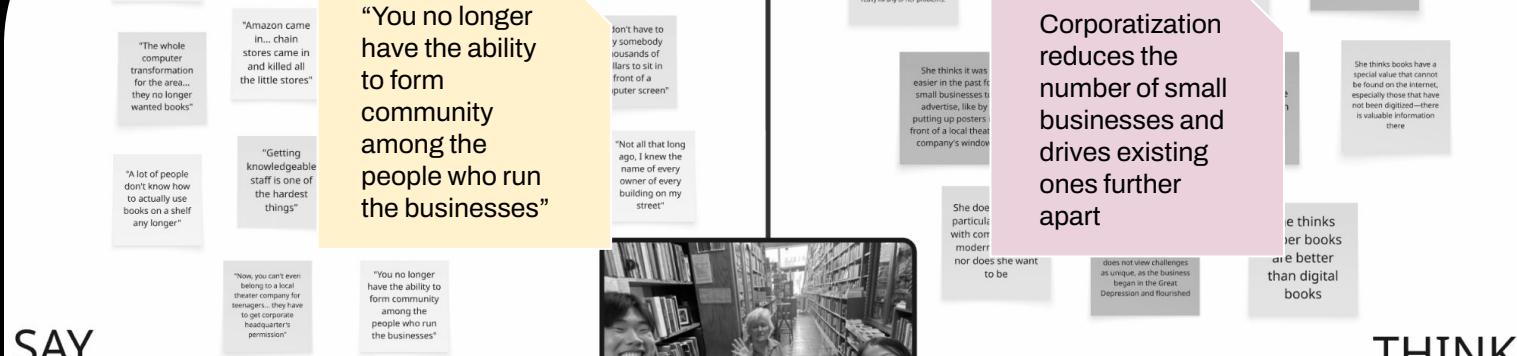
"She felt hesitant at the start of the interview, but grew more comfortable as it went on. She seemed worried we were going in with an overly techy solve-all-your-problems-with-one-app angle."

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## FEEL

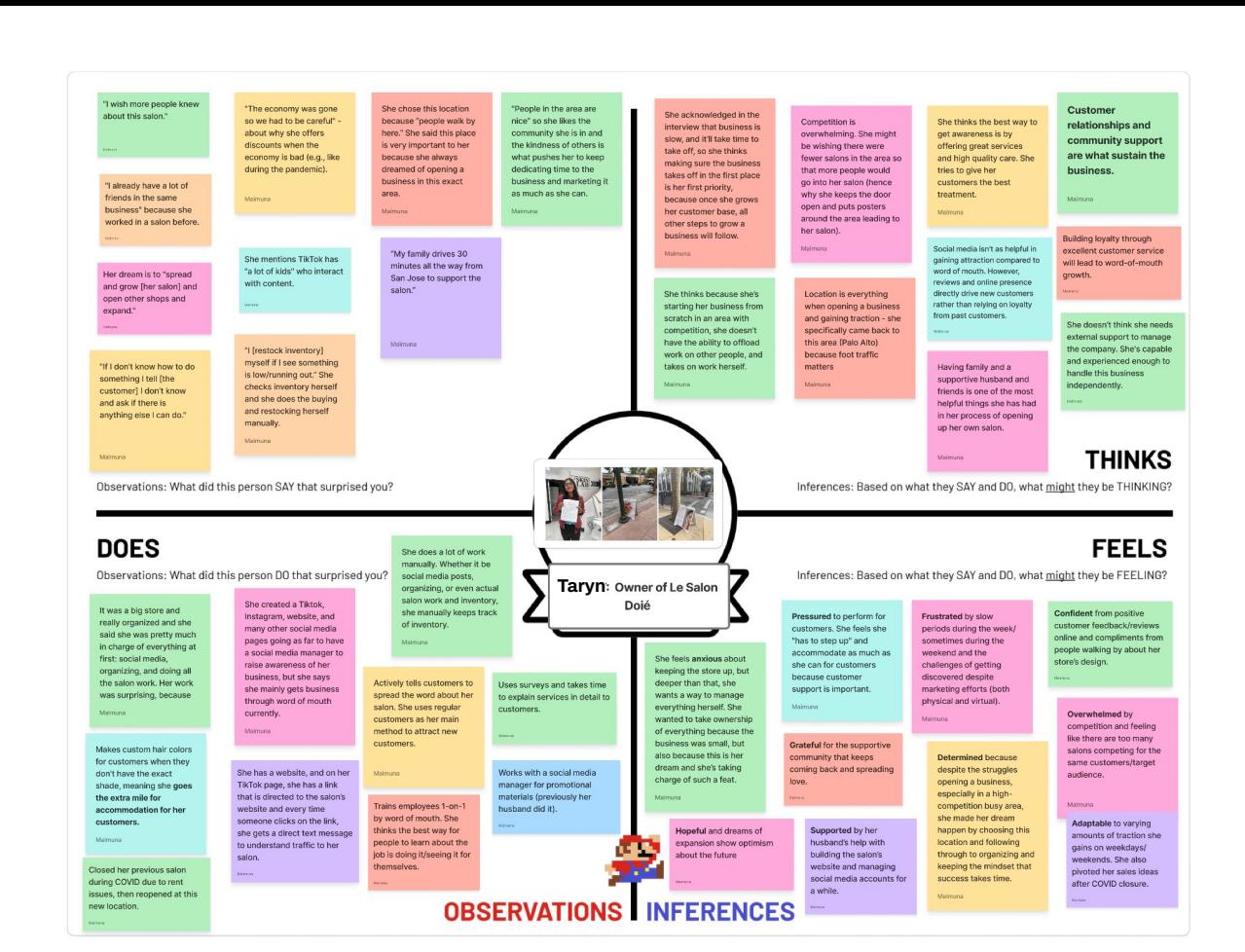


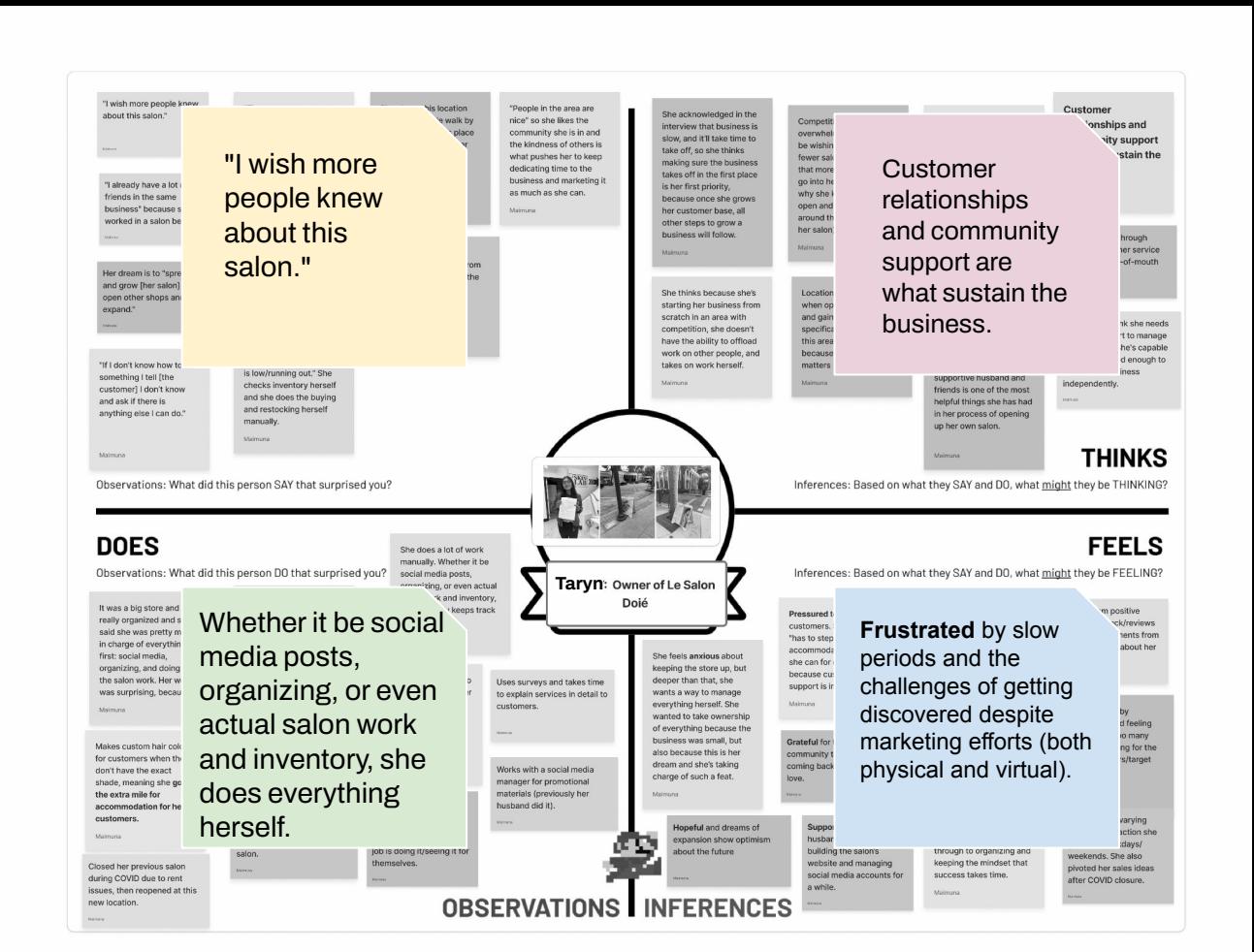
→ Small businesses have evolved over time, from being a community to now being isolated, combating the threats of corporations alone

→ Small businesses need a way to band together to mitigate risks, like economic downturn and developing corporations

# Insights

# Needs





- Even with marketing and utilizing social networks (both in-person and virtual), targeting specific audiences in an area isn't easy for small businesses.
- Currently, there are so many businesses offering the same services, that people go to the ones they've already been to making it harder for newer businesses to gain traction.

## Insights

- Small businesses need a way to reach out to people in the area and expand their networks even more.

## Needs

## SAY

## DO

"I do shop here, but I feel like I go to... big stores"

"[For restaurants], I care more about that experience.... The chef isn't at 20 different places."

"I wouldn't take the risk, I don't think, without somebody recommending"

"I wish there were more smaller stores that I go to, but being here, it's easier [to go to big stores]"

"Returnability [is important] if I have a problem with it"

"[Small businesses] usually don't have points because they can't... they can't make those offers that make it easier for me to shop there"

"I can count on the big stores"

"A small store... they're helpful and you can talk to somebody"

"I went to the same hairdresser for 35 years"



She wants to shop at small businesses more, but ends up going to larger businesses most of the time

She prefers shopping at small businesses over large businesses on principle, all things being equal

For groceries, she trusts large businesses more to have higher quality produce, specifically Whole Foods

She decides to go to new businesses usually because of word of mouth (friends/family telling her something is good)

She tends to go to large businesses because of reasons: convenience, consistency, rewards programs, returnability, credibility, etc.

For restaurants, she prefers small businesses for the experience

She used to require more specific friend/reviews before going to some place when she had less money, but now that she is more financially stable, she is more okay with taking risks

## THINK

## FEEL

She occasionally does research online about places, but isn't as much of a fan compared to her kids, who are more adept at deciphering reviews

She feels unhappy that any small businesses have closed down in favor of large ones in recent years

She is skeptical of online reviews, but relies on them occasionally

She feels welcomed when employees are knowledgeable and you can talk to them about items

She feels passionate about the environment, but it is not a major factor in purchasing decisions (other than choosing in-person vs. online)

She is worried about getting low quality produce

She feels a little ashamed of mostly shopping at big businesses

She feels proud of being a regular at a small bookstore

She shops mostly (90%) at big stores

During COVID, she barely shopped, having her husband get groceries

She occasionally googles reviews for businesses

She eats mostly at small restaurants and not chains

She stayed with the same hair dresser for 35 years

She used to read books to find good restaurants in the area

She goes shopping in-person most of the time

She asks friends for advice before choosing businesses to frequent

She is a regular at Books, Inc. a small bookstore

She is happy when she can eat at small restaurants as opposed to chains

She feels saddened that local small pharmacies shut down in favor of big chains

## SAY

## DO

"I do shop here, but I feel like I go to... big stores"

"[For restaurants], I care more about that experience.... The chef isn't at 20 different places."

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She shops mostly (90%) at big stores

During COVID, she barely shopped, having her husband get groceries

She occasionally googles reviews for businesses

She eats mostly at small restaurants and

She goes shopping in-

**She frequents small businesses for restaurants, but never for groceries**

read books to find good restaurants in the area

BOOKS, MUSIC & small bookstore

"I wish there were more smaller stores that I go to, but being here, it's easier"

"Returnability [is important] if I have a

"I can count on the big stores"

"A small store... they're helpful and you can talk to somebody"

**"[Small businesses] usually don't have points... they can't make offers that make it easier for me to shop there."**

I work to the same hairdresser for 35 years"



She wants to shop at small businesses more, but ends up going to larger businesses most of the time

She is not a fan of large fast food chains, since you can get that anywhere

She prefers shopping at small businesses over large businesses on principle, all things

She tends to go to large businesses for a range of reasons: convenience, consistency, reliability.

**She wants to shop at small businesses more, but ends up going to big businesses mostly**

places, but isn't as much of a fan compared to her kids, who are more adept at deciphering reviews

She prefers shopping at small businesses over large ones because it's better for the environment and she trusts being able to see things before buying them

For restaurants, she prefers small businesses for the experience

She used to require more time to go to different places when she had less money, but now that she is more financially stable, she is more okay with taking risks

## THINK

## FEEL

She feels unhappy that any small businesses have closed down in favor of large ones in recent years

She is happy when she can eat at small restaurants as opposed to chains

**She is unhappy that small businesses have closed down, but prefers other factors to determine her shopping habits.**

She feels welcomed when employees are knowledgeable and you can talk to them about items

She is worried about losing

She is concerned that she won't be able to return items that she purchases

She feels proud of being a regular at a small bookstore

She feels saddened that local small pharmacies shut down in favor of big chains

- On principle, customers want to support small businesses, but in practice, they tend to look at other factors like convenience and trust.
- Customers have different preferences for large/small businesses depending on the good/service offered

## Insights

- Customers need greater convenience and trust to frequent small businesses more often
- Customers have complex needs depending on the type of small business—a one-size-fits-all won't be ideal

## Needs

# Tensions, Contradictions, Surprises

## Tensions

- Many small businesses' networks are created from informal connections, usually after decades of experience, but this disadvantages newer businesses as there is no formal network
- Different preferences for small businesses/big box depending on sector
- Managers still feeling like a beginner and having to google videos on how to manage.

## Contradictions

- Within the category of food, one customer prefer grocery shopping at big businesses, but supports small restaurants.
- Favourite part of the manager's day is getting recs from customers to pass on to owner, but none have ever been implemented.

## Surprises

- The community and downtown was no longer what it once was, with much less sense of community.
- Large corporations can keep their prices down, amongst economic downturn and inflationary periods, while small businesses struggle.
- Reliance on AI to make the shift schedule for Boba shop.

## Summary

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# WHAT WE LEARNED

Small business owners often have trouble staying in touch with others

Marketing to new customers can be a challenge

Consumers often desire supporting small businesses, but shop differently

Small businesses usually rely on regulars to spur business

Social media marketing is frequently attempted, but not very successful

Starting a small business can be incredibly difficult without regulars to depend on

# WHAT'S NEXT?

**Interview new extremes:** a former business owner whose store closed down

**Synthesize** the data from business owners and business customers

**Develop** POVs, HMW statements and create experience prototypes

**Use** what we learned to hone in on a potential solution



**SUPPORT  
LOCAL  
BUSINESS**

**THANK  
YOU**

## Appendix

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