



UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

FACULTY OF ECONOMIC AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Magister Commercii, in the Department of Management University of the
Western Cape**

Candidate Name:	Washed Hassiem	Student Number:	3611900
Programme:	MCOM (Management)	First Enrolment:	2020
Department:	EMS	Expected Completion:	2022
Supervisor:	Prof Philip Hirschsohn		
Co-Supervisor(s):	Not Applicable		
Title:	Entrepreneurial learning, experience, motivation and business innovation: Life stories of Western Cape SME owners		

Signature of Student:

Date: 5 December 2022

Table of Contents/	
Abstract	IV
Plagiarism Declaration	V
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Background to the Problem to be Investigated	6
1.2 Motivating Factors for Entrepreneurship	8
1.3 Aims and Objectives	8
1.4 Research Questions	10
Chapter 2: Literature Review	12
2.1 Entrepreneurial Learning	14
2.2 Personal Theory and Motivating Factors for Entrepreneurship	17
2.3 Active learning	18
2.4 Known Capabilities	21
2.5 Relationships and Networks	24
2.6 Situated Learning	26
2.7 Innovation and its relation to success as an entrepreneur	28
2.8 Situated Learning During the Covid-19 Crisis	28
2.9 The Importance of Learning for the Entrepreneur and the Organisation	29
Chapter 3: Research Design/Methodology	32
3.1 Study Design	32
3.2 Selection of Participating Small Business Owners	33
3.3 The Interviewing Process	35
3.4 Interview Transcription and Life Story Compilation	36
3.5 Cross-Case Analysis	40
3.6 Justification for the Chosen Qualitative Methods and Techniques	40
3.7 Ethical Considerations	41
Chapter 4: Findings	43
4.1 Life Story of Luke – Case 1	43
4.2 Life Story of Rushal – Case 2	55
4.3 Life story of Zahir – Case 3	66
4.4 Life Story of Rezah – Case 4	83
4.5 Life Story of Alecia – Case 5	99
4.6 Life story of Tasneem – Case 6	113
Chapter 5: Analysis	128
5.1 Personal Theory and Motivational Factors	129
5.1 Personal Theory and Motivational Factors	131

5.2 Lessons from their Entrepreneurial Parents	132
5.3 Lessons from their Employers	134
5.4 Resilience	135
5.5 Active Learning	136
5.6 Education	136
5.7 Known Capabilities	138
5.8 Relationships and Networks	139
5.9 Situated Learning	140
5.10 Situated Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic	141
5.11 Innovation during the Covid-19 Crisis	143
5.12 Support During the Covid-19 Pandemic	144
5.13 Learning from the Evidence/Findings	145
Chapter 6: Conclusion	147
Recommendations:	150
Implications for Theory and Practice	151
Limitations and future research	151
Bibliography	153



Abstract

Purpose: The South African economy is in desperate need of entrepreneurs to create job opportunities and boost economic growth. This thesis seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the entrepreneurship process, to understand why people become entrepreneurs, how they ventured into their existing businesses and the factors that affected their entrepreneurial learning and business growth.

Design/methodology/approach: A qualitative approach using the method of in-depth semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurs who have demonstrated entrepreneurial attainment in managing their business ventures for more than ten years. Life story interviews explored their experience during their careers and business ventures. Through the interpretation and analysis of their stories, noteworthy themes were identified to explain how the entrepreneurs made sense of their experiences, and exploited opportunities to further develop their businesses and their entrepreneurial capabilities. No software tools were used as the researcher listened to the interview recordings, and transcribed and organised each story in order to focus on how their entrepreneurial learning experiences impacted on the growth and development of their businesses.

Research limitations/implications: This exploratory study of six entrepreneurs from the retail and service sectors in a single community in Cape Town cannot be generalised to a population. However, the research offers empirical insights that may extend theoretical frameworks and help increase understanding of the entrepreneurship journey. A revised conceptual model of Entrepreneurial Learning was developed based on the findings in a developing country context.

Findings: The study identified the factors that ignited the drive towards self-employment, how entrepreneurs chose the sector of their businesses, and what motivated their decision. The support factors that enabled learning and development of their entrepreneurial abilities to persevere and grow their businesses were identified, what inspired innovation, and how their businesses evolved. Each life story also explores how the Covid-19 pandemic affected their business decisions and the lessons learned from these challenges.

Practical implications: In the South African economy, the survival rate of entrepreneurs is poor. This study identified several key factors that promote the growth, development and learning of entrepreneurs and their businesses. The entrepreneurial learning model developed from the findings would be beneficial in designing development programmes for aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners to assist with improving their chances of success.

Originality/value: Exploratory case study research using the life story approach of storytelling gives rich meaningful insight into the journey towards entrepreneurship and how entrepreneurs improved their business venture/s over time, and is very limited in the South African context. The lessons learned from their survival through the Covid-19 pandemic will be particularly valuable. A conceptual model of EL was developed

Keywords: Entrepreneur, situated learning, workplace learning, business growth, learning, skills, entrepreneurial learning, life story, management development

Plagiarism Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I know what plagiarism entails, namely to use another's work and to present it as my own without attributing the sources in the correct way. (Refer to University Calendar part 1 for definition)
2. I know that plagiarism is a punishable offence because it constitutes theft.
3. I understand the plagiarism policy of the University of the Western Cape.
4. I know what the consequences will be if there is any evidence of plagiarism in this report.
5. I declare that all work presented in this report is my own, and where I have made use of another author's work, I have attributed the source in the correct way.
6. I declare that the following work under title "*Entrepreneurial learning, experience, motivation and business innovation: Life stories of Western Cape SME owners*" is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or assessment in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Name: Washied Hassiem

Student number: 3611900



Signature:

A handwritten signature in brown ink, consisting of a large loop followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Date: 5 December 2022

Acknowledgements

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Nothing is complete without giving thanks to my Creator and Sustainer, as nothing is possible without His will and guidance. May His peace and blessing be bestowed upon us and our beloved Prophet Muhammad SAW.

I would like to express my gratitude to my mother Rugaya and my sister Aneesah, you are my motivation and strength, and your support keeps me going. I would also like to acknowledge my late father Mogamat Amien Hassiem, who passed in 2020 in the year I started my thesis. He always believed in me and supported my dreams and aspirations and saw this day coming before I even made the decision to take on this journey. I wish you could have been here to witness my graduation.

A special acknowledgement and thank you goes to my academic supervisor Professor Philip Hirschsohn, I will forever be grateful for your support and guidance on this journey. You were always available when I required assistance and have become a mentor and a man I highly respect and appreciate.

I would also like to thank my family and friends who supported me, especially Sharmila and Zaiyaan. You walked this journey with me and I can always depend on you to be there in my time of need and it means the world to me.

Thank you to UWC, the lecturers and staff, this is where my academic career started and I am proud to say that I acquired all my degrees through this amazing institution.

With love and gratitude, I thank you!

Washied Hassiem

Abbreviations

AI - Artificial Intelligence

EL - Entrepreneurial Learning

GDP - Growth Domestic Product

HEIs - Higher Education Institutions

SA - South Africa

SARS - South African Revenue Services

SEDA - Small Enterprise Development Agency

SLR - Systematic Literature Review

SME - Small and Medium Enterprises

SMMEs - Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises



Chapter 1: Introduction

Entrepreneurship is a creative and innovative approach to adding value to products, creating employment opportunities, increasing productivity, diversifying and strengthening markets, adding value to society, and predominantly, developing the economy (Guerrero, Rialp, and Urbano, 2008). Entrepreneurship can also be viewed as the deliberate action of an individual or group of people who initiate, actuate, and maintain business activity in order to produce wealth, distribute goods and/or services with a motive of wealth creation or some sort of benefit under social and/or political conditions (Krishna, 2013). Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) make up 90% of South African businesses and are responsible for over 50% of African Growth Domestic Product (GDP) and employment opportunities. They play a vital role in developing countries such as South Africa (SA) as they are able to create employment, increase the distribution of income, decrease poverty and advance export opportunities (Ramukumba, 2014). A recent report by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) estimates that micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in SA, employ 50-60% of the workforce and contribute 34% of GDP and constitute more than 90% of all formal business in the country, as reported by News24 (2022).

Many studies have been done in the field of entrepreneurial learning (EL) - Rae and Carswell, 2000; Deakins and Freel, 1998; Cope and Watts, 2000; Soetanto, 2016 - but some key questions remain unanswered. For instance, “how do people decide to become entrepreneurs?” and “how do they learn to develop their entrepreneurial ability?”. Given the urgent need to encourage entrepreneurship in a developing country context like SA, this study aims to develop a better understanding of the entrepreneurial process and understand how entrepreneurs learn and develop the ability to better manage their businesses in the Western Cape, particularly during the recent economic challenges caused by Covid-19.

Even though this concept has been studied for over two decades, researchers are still of the opinion that the EL literature is still underdeveloped and does not provide a deep understanding of the learning process (Markowska and Wiklund, 2020). Every entrepreneur has a different story and started somewhere in unique circumstances. Many entrepreneurs who are seen as the pioneers of our time have had humble beginnings. Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and even Jeff Bizos, who are now among the

wealthiest people in the world, and are founders of the biggest corporations and innovations of our time, all started their businesses in a garage. EL is an interesting topic and quite a few studies have been done internationally (Rae and Carswell, 2000; Rae, 2006, Cope, 2003, Markowska and Wiklund, 2020), however, the literature in the South African context is limited, even though the country has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world and needs to encourage entrepreneurship to create more jobs and grow the economy.

In SA, prior to Covid-19, small businesses contributed R2.3 trillion or 22% of the entire turnover of the formal business sector, which generated R10.5 trillion for the 2019 financial year (StatisticsSA, 2020). Clearly there is a big market and opportunity for entrepreneurs. Yet many talented people with brilliant ideas do not have the support or know-how to start in taking their ideas to market. While people have good ideas that could be lucrative, the lack of support, disadvantaged backgrounds, fear, and a constrained mindset may be limiting factors to their success. They may also lack the support, motivation or mentorship required to be bold enough to take the risk of starting a business. There are also many entrepreneurs who are afraid of making mistakes or do not know how to grow or develop their businesses. Yet Politis and Gabrielsson (2009) argue that failure is an interim phase in a continuing entrepreneurial process, which can result in enhanced self-awareness and a useful source of learning.

Wang and Chugh's (2014) systematic literature review (SLR) concluded that 'the literature is diverse, highly individualistic and fragmented, hindering the development of EL as a promising research area' (p.24). Their aim was to provide a foundation for future research to advance, while taking into account how individualistic and diverse it may be. They felt that there were too many different definitions of the EL concept, found gaps in the research and identified three pairs of learning types:

- (1) collective and individual learning, as there is a need to acquire skills and develop resources in order to exploit opportunities,
- (2) exploitative and exploratory learning, in order to understand how entrepreneurial opportunities are identified,
- (3) sensing and intuitive learning, to understand how these opportunities came to be.

EL studies take place in different contexts, different countries and with different firms, making it a broad research area, where it is difficult to apply a standard approach. Following Wang and Chugh (2014), these gaps will be explored in this thesis and discussed in the analysis section to improve our understanding of the entrepreneurial process and how EL takes place in SMEs.

Both Rae and Carswell (2001) and Cope (2003) conducted qualitative research to gain a deeper understanding of how entrepreneurs learn and develop their entrepreneurial ability and the same approach was conducted in this study. These studies have been accepted in the field of entrepreneurship and are highly cited by many scholars. However key questions to understand the research gaps identified by Wang and Chugh (2014) are included, as this thesis also seeks to answer these questions regarding these three learning types. Many articles were reviewed to comprehend the topic of EL, and what was interesting is that not many authors attempted to create conceptual models for their research. Nogueira's (2019) SLR of EL found that the concept was not clearly articulated. He proposed that EL be viewed as EL - behaviours, and should focus on organisations that are entrepreneurial by nature - i.e. collaborative, proactive and exploratory. He called for future researchers to specify what is entrepreneurial about the entrepreneur or organisation.

Many previous empirical studies focused on the entrepreneur (Minniti and Bygrave, 2001; Cope, 2003; Rae and Carswell, 2000; Politis, 2005 and Soetanto, 2017). The same approach was used in this study as the researcher is particularly interested in small enterprises, and how they learn and develop over time. This is particularly important in the South African context as entrepreneurship could help reduce our unemployment crisis. Our people need to learn to start somewhere and build over time, they need to learn how to become resilient (Fatoki, 2018), motivated and believe in themselves and their dreams.

The first conceptual model to stand out and used as a guide to deepen the researcher's understanding of EL as a topic was that of Rae and Carswell (2001). These authors are well-known as pioneers in the field; and have built on the subject for many years (Rae, 2000; Rae 2005; Rae 2006; Rae and Carswell 2000 and 2001). Being guided by their model allowed the researcher to define, understand and identify

concepts important to this research. However, the concept of how entrepreneurs learn and respond to critical events was not included in their model.

The Covid-19 pandemic is a flu epidemic that affected the entire world and had catastrophic consequences for businesses globally (WHO, 2019). It started in March 2020 and because of the fear of this virus spreading due to its high transmissibility, governments were faced with critical decisions and called for a lockdown in SA and many countries around the world. At the start of the pandemic, all businesses that were seen as non-essential had to close their doors for an undisclosed period of time. This uncertainty shook every economy and the results have been catastrophic (Tucker,2020). Lockdown restrictions were eased after three months in SA and most businesses were allowed to trade again.

While there were businesses that struggled because of restrictions and changes in their environment due to the pandemic, some saw opportunity and explored other ways of conducting their business, and/or ventured into new businesses. However, many businesses including large corporations struggled to survive the initial strain that the pandemic placed on every economy as more consumers started staying home (Tucker, 2020). It was therefore important to include the concept of situated learning in this study. As the World Bank reported, the Covid-19 recession will be the worst since World War II, and would cause more barriers to entrepreneurship (World Bank, 2020).

As the research continued, three conceptual models were identified in a tribute by Pittaway and Thorpe, (2012). Their model was developed using the work of a well-known author, Jason Cope (2003), who identified two key forms of learning: 1) reflective learning - learning by doing and 2) situated learning - learning through crisis. Their second model, based on Cope's (2005) study, was used as a guide to reflect on and further develop a model focused on small and micro-enterprises, which would be more suited to the context of a developing country like SA. Their third model was not used as it was too complex: furthermore, as this research is intended to assist entrepreneurs it would not be easy for them to comprehend. The second conceptual model also makes it easier to combine and relate to the model of Rae and Carswell (2001).

The purposes of this research is:

- (a) to identify the common factors that ignite the spark and motivate entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds to start and persevere in their business, and
- (b) to better understand how these business owners learn, develop their entrepreneurial abilities, and grow their SMEs.

With particular reference to addressing the challenges during the Covid-19 crisis, and following the sentiment of Rae and Carswell (2001), the research aims to increase our understanding of how people learn to act entrepreneurially, and how they respond when faced with a crisis (Cope, 2003).

Using the life story approach, and making sense of the stories that entrepreneurs share in their own words, allows the researcher to review and make sense of their learning processes. Learning in the entrepreneurship context has been found to be experiential in nature as many entrepreneurs tend to learn by doing (Deakins and Freel, 1998; Cope and Watts, 2000; Cope, 2003). The findings that emerge from the life story approach help the researcher to

- a) understand the respondent's discursive learning (Rae, 2000), and
- b) conceptualise what the entrepreneur learned, experienced and makes sense of

By sharing these stories with other people who may need to hear someone else's journey, this research also aims to give aspiring entrepreneurs hope, and motivate them towards taking the first step and believing in themselves and their ability to start and run a business. It is also particularly important to understand what small business owners experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic, the changes they implemented to their business operations and what they learned from it.

According to StatisticsSA (2020), a survey covering 2182 businesses in SA revealed that 90% of businesses' who completed the survey had lower than expected turnover and 36% revealed that they were laying off employees in the short term to cope with the affects that the Covid-19 pandemic had on their businesses. Critical events such as this pandemic are something that business owners were not prepared for and so much uncertainty, makes it difficult to make decisions.

1.1 Background to the Problem to be Investigated

The unemployment rate in SA at the time of this study was 46.6% and youth unemployment at a shocking 66.5% (StatisticsSA, 2022). With the fast growth in technology and the movement of corporates towards Artificial Intelligence (AI), this could result in more jobs being lost to automation. The Covid-19 pandemic has also caused many businesses to close down, thereby increasing the unemployment rate significantly. There may be less demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labour and the unemployment rate increase could be permanent unless many more people start new businesses and create more jobs. Most universities and colleges in SA offer entrepreneurship courses, yet so many graduates are unemployed and are not able to use the knowledge they gained to earn a living through entrepreneurship.

What does our education system lack and how can the curriculum be modified to develop entrepreneurial qualities in students?

What is of even more concern is that over 70% of small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) in SA fail within their first five to seven years of trading and scholars cannot come to a consensus as to why this is happening (Bushe, 2019). He concluded that SMMEs fail due to a number of factors including environmental adversity, enterprise ineffectiveness and incompetence on the part of the entrepreneur. This traces back to the individual entrepreneur who does not have the necessary skills, behavioural characteristics or aptitude that could result in the success of the business.

Entrepreneurs who have been involved in entrepreneurial ventures for over ten years were therefore selected as a sample for the study. Owners of start-ups have to take responsibility and empower themselves with the necessary skills by constantly learning and developing themselves and their business, if they hope to survive (Fatoki, 2014). Having resilience was found to have a positive impact on business success in SA (Fatoki, 2018) as well as having marketing skills (Cant, 2012), as the better performing SMEs favour the utilisation of strategic marketing planning and are more attentive to comprehensive situation analysis (Scheers and Makhitha, 2016).

An empirical study in Tanzania and Kenya conducted by Hunter and Lean (2018) explored the perceptions of entrepreneurial education and how it is taught in a developing country context. They found that while the knowledge of entrepreneurship

is important, it is equally important to develop an understanding of how the world works. Furthermore, learning tools should be action based and flexible to develop the skill of learning by doing, as this is what most entrepreneurs are required to do. Experience improves your emotional intelligence and one's interests and values that support the cognitive processes are required to develop an entrepreneurial mind-set, which is required to identify entrepreneurial opportunities. Thus, the value creation process can only happen when learning supports the individual and collective abilities to reconstruct the social context (Hunter and Lean, 2018). This finding is especially important for policy makers and higher education institutions (HEIs) to ensure that the curriculum adapts to the fast-changing world we find ourselves in. As there is an unemployment crisis in SA, the country needs education systems geared towards the development of entrepreneurs.

Through understanding how entrepreneurs learn and develop their abilities, this thesis can contribute to how HEIs can design courses that focus on developing entrepreneurial mindsets along with the ability to identify problems and solutions that can be turned into business opportunities. Policy makers could take this a step further by offering mentorship programmes to entrepreneurs and ensuring that they are supported as their business develops. The Covid-19 pandemic has also clarified the need for supporting businesses during a crisis. Financial support is not enough; mentorship and guidance with strategic planning is of utmost importance. This observation comes from the author's personal experience while managing a portfolio of over 1000 SMME's at a financial institution during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Community social services and the retail/trade industries each employ over three million people in SA and are the sectors that create the most jobs, entrepreneurs from these sectors were therefore selected (StatisticsSA, 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic affected businesses across the world resulting in major brands being forced to declare bankruptcy (Tucker, 2020). After the South African government eased lockdown restrictions after three months and allowed many industries to re-open, many entrepreneurs' have been forced to shut down which resulted in them laying off staff and making do with limited resources. This seems to have resulted in further job losses as the remaining resources adapt to the new ways of working. Consequently, the study will focus on understanding what changes entrepreneurs made to their business models in order to survive this critical event and how this influenced their future plans.

The problem may be that many entrepreneurs do not possess the necessary knowledge, skills and competence to successfully manage their business and lead their people. They may also lack the resilience to keep pursuing their goals or the funding required to keep their business afloat.

1.2 Motivating Factors for Entrepreneurship

When individuals know what is important to them and why it is important, it stimulates a personal motivation to work hard towards achieving goals. These values were found to have been formed early in the entrepreneurs' lives based on what they experienced growing up (Rae and Carswell, 2000). A study conducted in SA, found three key motivating factors emerging when studying black entrepreneurs.

- (1) Entrepreneurship was seen as an opportunity born out of struggle. This speaks to how growing up under difficult circumstances may affect the lives of individuals and inform how and why they become entrepreneurs.
- (2) Individual self-development, as circumstances such as disadvantaged backgrounds inspired the journey towards entrepreneurship.
- (3) Entrepreneurs can give back to communities by offering a service that may add value to society (Chinyamurindi, 2016).

1.3 Aims and Objectives

The aim of the research is to uncover what ignited the initial drive towards entrepreneurship and how entrepreneurs learn and develop their entrepreneurial abilities to improve, grow and sustain their business, particularly through a critical period, and understand the nature and relationship of EL. As a business banker managing a large portfolio of SMMEs this understanding is particularly important to the researcher, as developing countries such as SA are in desperate need of entrepreneurs to create employment opportunities.

As Man (2007) argues, the concept of EL must be understood to develop training programmes for entrepreneurs, and to improve entrepreneurial education. By using a qualitative research approach, the lived experiences of six entrepreneurs were studied

and interpreted to explore the concept of learning, following the approaches-used by Rae and Carswell (2000), Cope (2005) and Soetanto (2017). The lessons learned from these entrepreneurs and their learning journey will then be analysed and interpreted.

Their life story and journey on how they chose the sector of their business, what motivated their decision, and what type of support factors they felt helped them persevere and grow the business are all particularly important to understand. How they have adapted and what they learned from critical events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, will provide useful insights into what they experienced as entrepreneurs as well as individuals. Entrepreneurs tend to learn as they realise what their limitations are, and also by reacting to challenges that arise (Soetanto, 2017).

This thesis seeks to uncover insights into what decisions entrepreneurs were faced with, what changes were implemented in their businesses, and how differently they would confront such situations in the future, based on their experience. These insights may also be useful to the government, as there is a major focus on encouraging entrepreneurship as a means of creating employment, and understanding what support structures could work to empower and support entrepreneurs in SA. To explore the concept of learning, the objective was to obtain reflective accounts of how the participants felt they had changed, what they did differently as a result of their experiences, and what they would do differently, on reflection, if they were confronted with similar situations in the future.

It is therefore argued that entrepreneurs learn, grow and adapt when faced with critical events that may result in transformation and evolution of the business. In the process they are forced to think differently, make mistakes, and explore options they may have never considered before. The knowledge gained will also prepare them for critical events that may arise in the future and give them the confidence to thrive and think of ways to overcome such challenges which may even result in improving the firm's performance. Entrepreneurs learn from failure, almost as much and possibly more at times than they would through success. They acquire knowledge, learn from failures, update their knowledge base and through this learning, improve firm performance (Minniti and Bygrave, 2001).

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the main driving forces that ignited their decision to become an entrepreneur and embark on specific business venture/s?
2. What experience and lessons did they draw upon as they pursued this journey?
3. What factors kept them motivated on their entrepreneurial journey?
4. How did experiences, formal education and lessons influence the development of their entrepreneurial abilities as they pursued this journey?
5. How did their business develop resilience to survive during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Because the service and retail sectors have the potential to create more job opportunities than most other sectors, the sample was drawn from these sectors. Given the major challenges and the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on small businesses in SA, the research also aims to understand what innovative solutions were implemented by business owners to survive such a critical event.

Four males and two female entrepreneurs who have businesses in the retail and service sectors were selected. They grew up in low to middle income households, started selling products when they were at school, and received no financial support from government or outside investors for any of their business ventures before the Covid-19 pandemic. Four of the six only have matric and were selected to give aspiring entrepreneurs hope and encouragement to believe they can also achieve their goals if they work hard and remain resilient in their pursuit of their goals.

The thesis explores how perspectives vary and how concepts identified in the literature review apply across the sample. Another interesting factor identified is that four of the six entrepreneur's parents owned a business while they were growing up. This helps to understand their influence and contribution towards their development as entrepreneurs, in comparison with those who did not have parents who had a business. This important factor will be interpreted in the analysis section.

This thesis is structured in the following way:

Firstly, the literature review explores how the field of entrepreneurial learning (EL) has developed. I identify themes that emerge from EL, and how they affect business decisions when entrepreneurs face critical events.

Entrepreneurs in the retail and service sectors were selected and what made it interesting is that many of them had businesses in both sectors, some in other sectors as well, and were therefore compared across the sample and not separated into specific business categories.

The researcher followed a qualitative approach by doing life story interviews with six entrepreneurs to gain a deeper understanding of their entrepreneurial life journey, and how they learn and develop themselves and the business. This method was selected as it allows the entrepreneur to reflect on their life and share key life experiences. Each story was written up as a case and divided into concepts and headings, to make it easy for the reader and the researcher to identify commonalities and understand what key concepts enable entrepreneurs to develop the resilience they need to make a success of a business venture. The findings section shares their stories which include what ignited their decision to become entrepreneurs, how they chose their businesses, what their learning journey was like, and also how they responded during critical events, in particular Covid-19.

In Chapter 4 each life story is presented as a case study using concepts identified in the literature review as headings to facilitate cross-case analysis in Chapter 5 and make it easier for the reader to understand how the findings relate to the literature.

This thesis contributes to the body of knowledge on EL in a developing country context. The entrepreneurs in the study all grew up in low-income households and had to work hard and think out of the box to build capital, identify business opportunities, and develop resilience in order to make a success of various business ventures in the retail and service industries. Their interesting developmental journeys allowed the researcher to develop a conceptual model for EL.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

At the core of this study are the life journeys of six entrepreneurs and the main focus is on entrepreneurial learning (EL), which is critical to the success of their businesses. The reason for this is because the entrepreneurs who were interviewed, all fulfil the role of owner/manager of their companies. Most of the learning that takes place in their organisation, is a result of the decisions they make and how they learn and develop themselves for benefit and development of the business. The concepts identified within the context of EL, which are discussed below, are those factors that make up their EL journeys with the outcome being the survival, growth and sustainability of their business. The entrepreneur can be seen as the heart and brain of the enterprise as their personal growth and development plays a crucial role in its sustenance and survival.

Table 1. Levels of Organisational Learning

Lower level learning	Higher level learning
Single loop learning: solves a problem or reacts to a change in its environment without changing the underlying norms	Double loop learning: occurs when more radical solutions are required; an organisation modifies its underlying norms, rules, policies, objectives or procedures in response to external stimuli
Lower level learning: short term, superficial and temporary formations of associations	Higher level learning: responses to changes in the environment requiring a change in action
Adaptive learning: coping and dealing with the current environment in new and better ways (equates well with single loop learning)	Generative learning: moves beyond adaption, requiring individuals and organisation to develop new ways of looking at the world
Incremental learning: focusing knowledge on what is already known or being done	Transformational learning: knowledge that challenges the assumptions about what is known or being done
Implementing: doing things well; conforming, dependant and passive	Improving: doing things better; competing, independent and active

Source: Sadler-Smith et al. (2001)

Sadler-Smith, Spicer and Chaston (2001) compiled a simple and concise explanation of organisational learning, which can be applied to how entrepreneurs'/SME owners learn. Table 1 describes the different types of learning that take place in an organisation and focuses on two different qualitative concepts, namely, active orientation which include transformational, generative, higher level double loop learning; and passive orientation which includes incremental, adaptive, single loop lower-level learning. This is of particular importance in understanding how SME owners learn and what type of learning is important when responding to critical events such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table of definitions of key words used in this study:

Entrepreneurial Learning	How entrepreneurs learn and develop their capabilities
Entrepreneur	A person who sets up a business
Personal Theory	How people develop personal constructs about how the world works
Active Learning	Learning from various experiences
Known Capabilities	What businesses are capable of doing, knowledge gained from experience.
Network	The process of interacting with others to exchange information and develop professional or social constructs
Situated Learning	Learning from the experience of a critical event in business
Innovation	A new idea or implementation of a new idea in a business
Conceptual Model	Representation of a system. It consists of concepts used to help people know, understand, or simulate a subject the model represents

2.1 Entrepreneurial Learning

Rae (2005) describes EL as learning to identify and take action when opportunities arise, thus interacting in a social context to start, arrange and manage ventures. It is a lifelong exercise in which experience leads to wisdom (Politis,2005). Scarmozzino et al (2016) view EL as a knowledge acquiring process where experience is the primary form of learning. Man (2007) argues that EL should be looked at as a phenomenon which occurs because of an entrepreneur's internal characteristics, their experience as an entrepreneur as well as the external environment. In contrast, Rae (2006) defines EL as a dynamic process of reflection, awareness, application, and association that requires entrepreneurs to transform knowledge and experience into functional learning outcomes for the organisation. He also notes that exploring EL in small businesses primarily focuses on learning activities and the characteristics of the entrepreneur.

EL is also achieved by having conversations within social networks and personal engagements with learning programmes (Saunders et al., 2014). Their study found that SME owners and SMEs who were committed to learning were much more innovative and encouraged learning throughout the organisation. Effective leaders were found to be open-minded and leaned towards networking events and mentors to enhance their reflective learning to receive advice and feedback on the latest critical events. They also emphasise employee learning as a means of empowerment and a long-term investment for the future of the organisation (Saunders et al., 2014).

Rae and Carswell (2000) argued that by studying the processes through which entrepreneurs develop their behaviours, ways of working and attitudes, it is possible to understand how individuals learn to act entrepreneurially. They developed a conceptual model of EL and their empirical study suggested that skills and business practices are learned by collaborating with other practitioners and seeing how they manage their businesses. Entrepreneurs also learn by reading books, attending seminars, being mentored and through first-hand experiences such as experimenting, success and even failure.

Their important finding is that the ability of an entrepreneur to learn and use what they learn to make good business decisions, is essential to developing their entrepreneurial

capabilities (Rae and Carswell, 2001). New business ideas also emanate from life experience during work and even social interactions. This is achieved by the increased understanding of customer problems, the products and services that could solve these problems, and also their availability. This, in turn, allows entrepreneurs to identify feasible markets, compare competitive resources, and ultimately improve their competitive advantage in the marketplace (Shane, 2000; Politis, 2005).

It is also important for entrepreneurs to be able to create legacy businesses and the ability to recognise opportunities. The entrepreneur requires the ability to prepare their family to take over the business and pass on essential lessons learned. A study by Cruz et al (2012) found that opportunity identification and having the resilience to pursue those opportunities, is often passed on by the guidance and culture created by senior generations. However, the younger generation is required to have positive relationships with senior members and participate in the fundamental entrepreneurial processes.


An empirical study using the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) approach, found that EL shapes entrepreneurial intention by altering the subjective norm, attitude and belief that one is capable of becoming a successful entrepreneur (Wang et al., 2018). The journey towards entrepreneurship happens through learning from individual experiences, whether negative or positive (Chinyamurindi, 2016). However, one's attitude toward that experience is important for the growth of the entrepreneur. Warren (2004) found that EL is a complicated process which is linked to an approach of performing an action without previous thought or preparation to formal learning, such as courses or tertiary education, and has a significant reliance on EL, such as learning from experience and from other entrepreneurs. It was also found that entrepreneurs take a gradual approach to dealing with business roles such as information technology or marketing as they become critical to the survival of the business.

Deakins and Freel (1998) argued that the learning process in SMMEs is regularly unplanned, yet necessary for the organisation to evolve and grow. Entrepreneurs learn through experience when making decisions as critical events arise. This is where they learn to process information, strategise and make decisions that will either result in mistakes they can learn from, or decisions that are beneficial for the business. Lans

et al (2008) identified four factors as being critical in the EL process, namely: guidance and support, internal communication, task characteristics and external interaction. They found that various business opportunities stimulate a range of dynamics and opportunity for EL. These factors are influenced by the working environment, which is constructed and prescribed by the entrepreneur.

The learning process in SMEs is often unplanned, yet necessary for the organisation to evolve and grow. Diamanto Politis (2005) provided empirical support for the process of EL, and transforming prior experience into knowledge. The study revealed that an individual's preference to how they chose to allow experience to influence them, and the differences in their experience, determined how it was transferred into knowledge.

Man (2007) proposes a competency approach to EL which integrates three important factors to make it measurable and more observable. This includes, experience or knowledge along with learning related skills as inputs, learning behaviours as the process, and the entrepreneurs' capability in making decisions in a micro and macro environmental context as the output. He argues that a competent entrepreneur is one who has attributes such as

- 
- (a) being aware of learning opportunities,
- (b) being prepared to acquire knowledge, skills and experience to formulate strategies, and
- (c) the ability to take action to exploit these opportunities.

All of the above are qualities related to successful learning and would most likely result in a positive outcome.

Harrison and Leitch (2005) reviewed the evolution of the field of entrepreneurship as a context for the development of learning and identified that:

- 1) organisational learning is experiential
- 2) learning is an exercise that almost permanently changes the nature of behaviour
- 3) organisational learning can be viewed as individual learning happening in a social context and

4) learning is organised by existing routines, rules, practices and organisational procedures.

There is, however, an important distinction one has to make when it comes to EL. It is personal, while organisational learning is collective (Jones and Macpherson, 2006). With this viewpoint the entrepreneur normally takes the responsibility to learn and develop. However, for the organisation to learn and evolve, the entrepreneur must ensure that systems are put in place for knowledge transfer.

This research focuses on small and micro-enterprises where the entrepreneur is the one who identifies opportunities, drives the business, does the learning, places structures in place, and gains experience as the business develops. Therefore, the research focuses on the entrepreneur and how he or she learns and develops the business, rather than organisational learning. The literature seems to evolve beyond EL towards organisational learning, however in the context of small and micro enterprises, one could view the entrepreneur as the organisation.

Breslin (2015) argues that the most critical high-level heuristic for entrepreneurs is learning to evolve. Acquiring knowledge is simply not enough, as entrepreneurs must learn from the knowledge they acquire and evolve, and so should the business. It is important for entrepreneurs to hire the right people, assess their future potential, and decide how they will adjust and add value to the evolution of the business. The organisation's workforce brings new knowledge and more options for selection, thereby increasing the possibility of a successful strategy in the ever-changing business environment (Breslin, 2015). The question of how the entrepreneur addresses critical environmental changes is explored further under section 2.4.

2.2 Personal Theory and Motivating Factors for Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurs are individuals and their environment, background, values, motivations, and goals are what constitutes entrepreneurial behaviour and determines why they start certain businesses (Rae and Carswell, 2000). Consequently, this research explores how these factors inspired entrepreneurs who have emerged from previously disadvantaged circumstances, to embark on their entrepreneurial journey.

When individuals know what is important to them and why it is important, it stimulates a personal motivation to work hard towards achieving goals. These values are found

to have been formed early in the entrepreneurs' lives based on what they experienced growing up (Rae and Carswell, 2000). Chinyamurindi's (2016) study conducted in SA, found three key motivating factors emerging when studying black entrepreneurs:

(1) Entrepreneurship was seen as an opportunity born out of struggle. This speaks to how growing up under difficult circumstances may affect the lives of individuals and inform how and why they become entrepreneurs.

(2) Individual self-development, to move beyond circumstances such as disadvantaged backgrounds, inspired the journey towards entrepreneurship.

(3) Entrepreneurs can give back to communities by offering a service that may add value to society.

2.3 Active learning

Successful entrepreneurs are remarkable at learning and are able to learn from almost every experience. They realise and recognise that there is no end to learning, as it is a continuous process necessary to remain relevant in an ever-changing world. These entrepreneurs learn from their suppliers, consumers, customers, associates, employees, business owners and even competitors. However, most importantly, they learn by doing, which allows them to better understand what could work or what would not work in the business (Harrison and Leitch 2005).

An empirical study conducted with 291 entrepreneurs operating and running new start-ups found that individuals who preferred learning and exploration, were more likely to identify business opportunities (Politis and Gabrielsson, 2015). Their research also suggests that entrepreneurs gain valuable knowledge about viable markets, competitive resources, and relevant contacts during their career. Prior experience working for a company or as an entrepreneur improves their ability to recognise business opportunities and manage new businesses.

Entrepreneurs can learn from every experience in their lives as well as their business. Learning is constant in the life of an entrepreneur; however, to claim that one has learned means to change the nature of one's actions because of the newfound knowledge and understanding of what needs to change, in order to realise a different

or preferred outcome (Rae, 2000). Learning in SMEs ideally happens at two levels when everyone in the organisation (i) has a shared vision, and (ii) also has the opportunity to question assumptions and direction (Saunders et al., 2014).

Zhang et al (2006) define learning as an emergent, sense-making process in which people improve their capacity to behave differently as a result of knowing, doing, and understanding why. They also suggest that there are three ways in which organisations learn:

- 1) Adjusting existing practices based on correcting errors;
- 2) Redefining assumptions that guide action; and
- 3) Suggesting better problem-solving actions which show how the individual, organisation or group begin learning to learn.

Some of the best sources of learning for entrepreneurs consist of engaging with suppliers, colleagues, start-up programmes and customer feedback (Ekanem and Wyer 2007). To develop and sustain a successful business, owners are required to learn. It is therefore the business owner's responsibility to invest their time in acquiring knowledge through various learning sources (Unger et al., 2009), as learning is critical to entrepreneurial evolution (Smilor, 1997). The process of learning is very important for entrepreneurs to understand. What matters is how the entrepreneur acquires knowledge, how they process that knowledge and also what they learn from that information that helps them identify opportunities (Corbett, 2005).

Gabrielsson and Politis (2011) found that the biggest predictor of new business ideas is a learning mindset that supports exploration. Their findings have clarified the role of start-up experience as a source of learning and its effects on entrepreneurs' ability to successfully organize and manage new ventures. This could be due to the valuable lessons learned from making errors in the early life or start-up phase of the business (Petkova, 2009), and using these lessons to make better informed decisions.

Entrepreneurs are action oriented and much of their learning is through experience (Rae and Carswell, 2000). Entrepreneurs with start-up experience have an increased chance of successfully organising and managing ventures (Politis, 2008). According to Deakins et al (2000), the ability to impart knowledge is very important. It is not

enough for entrepreneurs to fully understand and process knowledge and information, as it should be done while working in challenging environments in order to reduce uncertainty and make better informed decisions. However, these decisions must be shared with staff, along with the understanding of the new processes and procedures in order for the organisation to benefit (Deakins et al., 2000). Organisations thus need to understand and implement learning processes that enable the transfer of knowledge from the individual to a collective level to enable the organisation to grow with a collective understanding of the way forward.

Pawlowsky (2001) describes the learning process as the creation or recognition of new knowledge, the dispersing of that knowledge, and integrating the knowledge into systems and processes that enhance the way in which they operate. SMEs may therefore collaborate in networks and engage with consultants from other organisations as well as accountants, lawyers and universities. Innovative organisations utilise these resources, knowledge and relationships to develop new processes and products and it was found to be positively related to business growth (Zhang et al., 2006).

The entrepreneur also requires a strong cognitive ability, and what Zhang et al. (2006) refer to as deliberate practice. In this form of continuous learning, entrepreneurs constantly observe performance and amend, experiment and react to new knowledge in order to improve firm performance. Hughes and O'Regan (2009) found that SMEs require a combination of implicit as well as tacit knowledge, although a creative combination of both is needed to make better informed decisions for the organisation. Aldrich and Yang (2014) argue that learning and acquiring new knowledge is not only necessary for nascent entrepreneurs wanting to organise their businesses but is also a lifelong process, thus making it difficult to create fixed processes.

A study done by Walsh and Cunningham (2016) explored EL from failure amongst entrepreneurs that started new businesses after a previous business had failed, in order to understand what they learned after the cycle was completed, and found three key sources of learning:

- (1) Internal attribution increases an emotional response as a result of failure, which activates a personal manifestation of learning.

- (2) External attribution causes a behavioural reaction from entrepreneurs which leads to learning about the business as well as networks and relationships.
- (3) Hybrid attribution allows entrepreneurs to reflect on the complicated nature of their failure and enables them to learn about business management.

The important takeaway from this research is that entrepreneurs had learned from their failures and still believed in themselves and their ability to be successful. They were able to reflect, learn from past actions and make better informed decisions in their new business.

Active learning plays an important role in what has been defined in the literature as double-loop or transformative learning. This involves the entrepreneur in redefining the organisation's strategies and processes to bring about changes as a result of their growth and development based on the knowledge they acquired through learning by doing, as well as learning from a crisis, which results in critical reflection (Cope, 2003).

Learning is part of the entrepreneurial process and anyone wanting to pursue entrepreneurship should have the mindset that learning is critical to the survival of their organisation. It is also important for them to share what they learned with their staff and implement routines in the business as well as a repository for their learnings so they can monitor the evolution of their business. To constantly innovate, entrepreneurs should create learning systems geared towards accumulating, integrating and utilising internal and external knowledge (Zhao et al., 2009). When a firm gains new knowledge, it has to be institutionalised into their systems and routines. This is how knowledge sharing benefits the firm at an organisational level (Jones et al., 2010).

2.4 Known Capabilities

It is important to understand that there is an essential difference between learning, which can be viewed as the development of knowledge, and knowledge itself, which can be defined as theoretical or practical understanding of a subject. Knowledge has been found to be a key contributor in gaining a competitive advantage (Hsu et al., 2007; Hughes and O'Regan, 2009). However, it is not simply about having knowledge;

it is being able to create or identify opportunity and act on it in an innovative way, by using knowledge to enhance production and not only profit (Unger et al., 2009).

Holcolm et al., (2009) defines acquiring knowledge as the process of extracting and constructing information and transferring it into processes that collect new knowledge. They also argue that knowledge is obtained in three ways, 1) through experience, 2) by observing the actions and outcomes of decisions made by others, and 3) by utilising papers, books, and sources of information such as podcasts, Google and online learning material.

If an organisation wishes to maintain a competitive advantage, they need to generate new knowledge quicker than their competitors (Putz et al., 2013). There is no specific definition for the term learning, however there are three factors one must understand when it comes to learning. In order to learn, one must acquire practical and theoretical knowledge. This knowledge has to be filtered and transferred via sharing of information in order for the organisation to develop and benefit from the knowledge it has acquired. Knowledge enables better decision making, change of behaviour and actions, which may lead to the acknowledgment that further learning is required (Rowley, 2000). The more efficient the entrepreneur is in acquiring knowledge, the more effective they become in accumulating and refining knowledge (Holcolm et al., 2009).

Knowledge has a multifaceted nature and defines values, cultures and systems that enhance organisational learning; however, this can only be achieved if it is understood and aligned to the vision of the organisation and its objectives (Rowley, 2000). Her study identified the following characteristics for knowledge that can lead to organisational effectiveness:

- (a) Organisational knowledge needs to be accurate and obtained from a reliable source
- (b) Information has to be current when required and discarded when outdated
- (c) information needs to be structured by grouping it into categories to make it easy to identify, and
- (d) systems need to be put in place to make it easy to retrieve necessary information when end users need to perform a specific task.

Unger et al (2011) conducted a meta-analytical review of 70 independent samples of human capital studies on entrepreneurship conducted over a period of thirty years. They found that it is best for entrepreneurs to invest in acquiring task-related knowledge, as it was proved to be more effective than previous experience.

Organisational knowledge is implanted in the networks and structures that are found within a firms' domain. When a firm gains new knowledge, it has to be institutionalised into their systems and routines. This is how knowledge sharing benefits the firm at an organisational level (Jones et al., 2010) as this adds to their known capabilities. Thus, when employees who worked in a specific industry start their own company in the same industry, their work experience lowers the chance of failure as they have been exposed to certain routines and systems (Yang and Aldrich 2011).

Jones et al. (2010) argues that SME owners need to acknowledge three critical parts to effectively utilise their known capabilities and organisational knowledge. They need to recognise that their employees have a strong influence on the organisations' ability to gather new data, recognise its value, and apply it by implementing new strategies. As knowledge is embedded within the organisation's relationships and structures, learning needs to be established in the systems and routines to increase the success rate. The third way in which organisations create environments for engagement in future planning is related to owner-managers' inclination to assign responsibilities and to embrace new available technology.

It is therefore important for entrepreneurs to understand and make conscious decisions on how knowledge is shared within the organisation and how critical it is for business evolution. Owner-managers should therefore seek to inspire involvement from all employees in the learning journey and integrate important learning processes that everyone may benefit from. Acquired knowledge could then be used to discuss ways of improving the organisation (Zang et al., 2006).

Ekanem and Wyer's (2007) study of entrepreneurs whose businesses failed with their first attempt, found that they learned from their mistakes and were more successful with the next venture due to understanding what went wrong the first time, and implementing better practices and routines to ensure that past mistakes were not repeated. Known capabilities is thus important for the organisation to grow and develop.

If the entrepreneur learns, but does not know how to direct the acquired knowledge to where it can be used to gain a competitive advantage and business growth, then the business will be unable to advance in today's highly competitive environment. It can therefore be argued that entrepreneurs should work on implementing structures and processes and share their vision and knowledge with their respective teams. This way everyone in the organisation may develop a shared vision, and understand how to gather new information, and what optimal processes to follow to save on time, resources and money. This is also how organisational knowledge leads to useful known capabilities, that can add value to organisation's value proposition and make them more competitive in the marketplace.

2.5 Relationships and Networks

Relationships and networks are of utmost importance to entrepreneurs, as people possess what can be referred to as human capital, which consists of experience, education, skills and knowledge. Human capital was found to improve the entrepreneurs' ability to discover and exploit business opportunities and assist in acquiring new skills and knowledge (Unger et al., 2011). Learning also occurs through social interactions within and outside of the organisation.

Networks play a significant role in the learning and development process for entrepreneurs. A study conducted by Soetanto (2017) found that when entrepreneurs are faced with external threats, they relied on their close networks for support, which included family and friends, long term business partners and trusted contacts. However, when faced with internal organisational issues, they invited new networks in to gain new knowledge and learn new skills. When it comes to solving personal problems, such as dealing with uncertainty, they tend to rely on both old and new networks for support. It is important to highlight that networks play a significant role when it comes to changing strategies, as entrepreneurs can make better informed decisions with the new knowledge they have gained (Soetanto, 2017).

Learning often takes place informally through coaching or mentoring in response to dealing with a critical event, as well as networking events such as seminars. There is much that entrepreneurs can learn from one another. Therefore, networking and spending time engaging in informal conversations with entrepreneurs should be

viewed as an investment (Saunders et al., 2014). It is important for entrepreneurs to be freed from many routine responsibilities and tasks as this allows them to search and engage in new networks. There is much to learn from stakeholders in business environments, and the more powerful a firm's network, the better their chances of increasing firm profitability (Hughes and O'Regan, 2009). When entrepreneurs engage in critical discussions and debates, both outside and inside the organisation, it helps them reflect and think strategically about the business (Jones et al., 2010).

In a longitudinal qualitative study conducted with restaurant owners, Markowska and Wiklund (2020) found that learning from others was their main source of learning. This type of engagement provides access to extensive information and resources (social capital), as well as learning to analyse, acquire and apply knowledge from external resources, which the authors refer to as a firm's absorptive capacity. Firms that focus on innovation are better at capitalising on external knowledge and relationships, producing new products and implementing new processes (Zhang et al., 2006).

The internet has become a powerful tool for those who seek knowledge as it is possible to search for any information using Google. There are also blogs, and online platforms such as podcasts, LinkedIn, Youtube, Facebook, Instagram and Ticktock are becoming platforms for knowledge sharing and a revenue stream for entrepreneurs as they grow their following. However, there are many people who prefer learning in a collective community space.

A study on how entrepreneurs learn by having conversations in online communities found that they normally engage in five distinctive EL conversations: 1) advice seeking, 2) call to share, 3) lessons learned, 4) reflection and 5) tips, tricks, and resources. Their findings also suggest that entrepreneurs in these online community engagement platforms learn by sharing and analysing experiences of critical events such as failures (Schou et al., 2022).

It is of utmost importance that entrepreneurs recognise the value of networks and networking. Networking events with other entrepreneurs, customers, and suppliers, be it online or in person, are great opportunities to learn and receive feedback (Saunders et al., 2014). Anecdotal evidence suggests that entrepreneurs need to accept that people can all learn from one another, grow together and all work together towards a common goal of developing the South African economy.

2.6 Situated Learning

Situated learning can also be referred to as learning from the experience of critical events which occur when entrepreneurs' least expect it. It can have a major impact on their business, and when entrepreneurs are faced with a crisis, it becomes a defining learning event (Deakins et al., 2000). It is important to recognise that the learning occurs in two ways: firstly, it is experiential (Cope and Watts, 2000). However, there is also the impact of strong emotions that the entrepreneur experienced and which emerge when they reflect on these incidents (Man, 2007, Lindh and Thorgren, 2016). The strong emotions can be the reason why these critical lessons are so hard to forget and why they often result in changes in the organisation. The Covid-19 pandemic is the biggest crisis humankind has faced in the 21st century and can consequently be seen as one of those events.

Entrepreneurs acquire the ability to learn through experience, and in the early stages of the EL literature critical learning events were seen as a unifying theme (Cope, 2005). While it may be an unplanned process, entrepreneurs learn from mistakes, experience, their networks, as well as outcomes from decisions made, which increases their ability to process information and adjust strategy. Change in SMEs often occurs when the organisation responds to critical events, and when acquiring knowledge that enables strategic development (Deakins and Freel, 1998). Entrepreneurs should accumulate knowledge from past experiences that is relevant to future business aspirations and should use that knowledge in their strategic planning to ensure that better decisions are made (Breslin, 2015). This knowledge can also be used to anticipate critical events and ensure that strategies are in place to respond and overcome these challenges.

Deakins et al (2000) further argue that using external directors (ED) is one of the methods whereby learning can be converted into organisational learning in small entrepreneurial firms. They serve as advisors to the entrepreneur, giving advice on strategic decisions, and may also assist with strategic planning. When the lockdown was declared, the government offered relief to businesses that were affected and required funding. However, there was no mention of advisors to assist small business owners in making more informed decisions on how best to use the funding and plan for the future, which Deakins et al (2000) argue is critical to effective decision making.

The use of mentors is another strong force to assist entrepreneurs grow and develop their entrepreneurial ability to better respond to critical events. According to Cope and Watts (2000), having long term mentoring programmes are crucial when it comes to supporting entrepreneurs through critical incidents. Mentors can help entrepreneurs to carefully consider what is happening, reflect on why the event is taking place, and decide on the best solution. They can also help increase entrepreneurs' ability to understand the critical event and the company's current position, and so prevent prolonged critical periods and steer the business clear from such incidents in the future. This allows the entrepreneur to engage in reflective learning.

Cope and Watts (2000) and Pittaway and Thorpe (2012) argued that when new entrepreneurs, without any prior experience, face critical events, they will learn and develop the ability to act and think like entrepreneurs. It is therefore argued that HEIs and mentorship programmes could offer action-based lessons that allow entrepreneurs to think through critical events, reflect on them, and come up with strategies for their businesses to survive such events, and develop new ways of working, which can lead to better ways to address entrepreneurial opportunities (Rae, 2000; Rae and Carswell, 2000, Cope, 2005; Pittaway and Thorpe, 2012). It is thus also important for entrepreneurs to have the ability to identify critical events.

A study by Lindh and Thorgren (2016) revealed that a group of participants who described the entrepreneurial process as an emotional rollercoaster, were able to identify and report thoughts, emotions and the relationship and behaviour between them. Thus, it is crucial for entrepreneurs to recognise a critical event in order to engage in the process of reflection so that they become aware of their emotions, thoughts, and actions related to the critical event. This increases their ability to harness emotional information and use it to think differently about their entrepreneurial strategies and improve their chances for success.

It is important for entrepreneurs to be encouraged to explore problems that are relevant to their business and the industry in which they find themselves (Pittaway et al. 2009). This could prepare entrepreneurs in two ways:

a) They are better prepared to face critical challenges.

b) They can make decisions that prevent these challenges from re-occurring by implementing routines and structures.

As it is critical to business survival, they should also consider finding a mentor or making use of the services of advisors or external directors to learn how to identify and overcome such critical events.

2.7 Innovation and its relation to success as an entrepreneur

Innovation requires the coordination of efforts to facilitate the conversion of old ideas to bring about novelty, solving problems in real time, and the linking of innovative ideas for future aspirations by encompassing past experiences (Bartel and Garud (2009).

The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on innovation for entrepreneurs is an important question given the fast response required by entrepreneurs when unforeseen lockdown was declared, and the restrictions governments enforced in countries around the world. The majority of business surveyed in SA reported an 85.4% decline in turnover (StatsSA, 2020).

Another potential contributing factor was the fear of contracting the Covid-19 virus, which may have led to the rapid change in consumer purchasing behaviour and also the demand for certain goods and services. This makes it more significant for businesses to depend on innovating their marketing strategies for business survival. Marketing innovation can also be viewed as a firm's capability to improve their performance (Naidoo, 2010). Businesses are required to innovate and adjust to the change in demand from their customers and deploy their resources for the survival of their existing businesses, diversify their offerings or start new businesses to ensure survival (Wang et al., 2020).

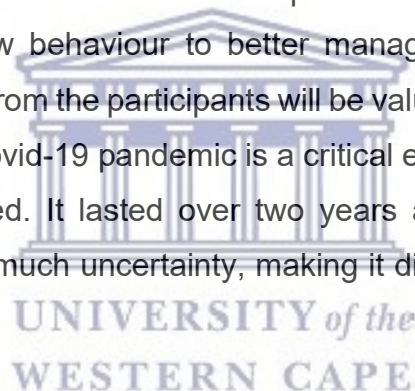
2.8 Situated Learning During the Covid-19 Crisis

There is a great need for the creation and retention of employment opportunities, and SMEs are responsible for creating a significant proportion of job opportunities. All entrepreneurs have a journey to share with aspiring entrepreneurs which may help prepare, educate and hopefully motivate them. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

was found to lead to uncertainty, which mainly results in business owners focusing on losses that they can afford, and their learning adapted to experimental behaviour (Haneberg, 2021). It is useful to understand how this pandemic affected small businesses and how entrepreneurs responded in order to ensure survival in times of uncertainty.

There are four main clusters that represent various behavioural responses from entrepreneurs: supporters, collaborators, victims and responders. SME managers either respond proactively or reactively during a crisis (Haneberg, 2020). Their findings provide empirical support for the significance of engaging in collaborative and interactive environments are conducive to inter-organisational learning. The Covid-19 pandemic has assisted growth-oriented organisations to construct and strengthen their operations and capabilities in order to survive the pandemic, which also allowed them to develop entrepreneurial resilience (Schepers et al., 2021).

The experience entrepreneurs obtain from the pandemic provide extremely useful lessons and encourage new behaviour to better manage critical events (Etemad, 2020). The lessons learned from the participants will be valuable in many ways to other entrepreneurs in SA. The Covid-19 pandemic is a critical event no entrepreneur could have imagined or anticipated. It lasted over two years and the various phases of lockdown brought about so much uncertainty, making it difficult to develop strategies and respond confidently.

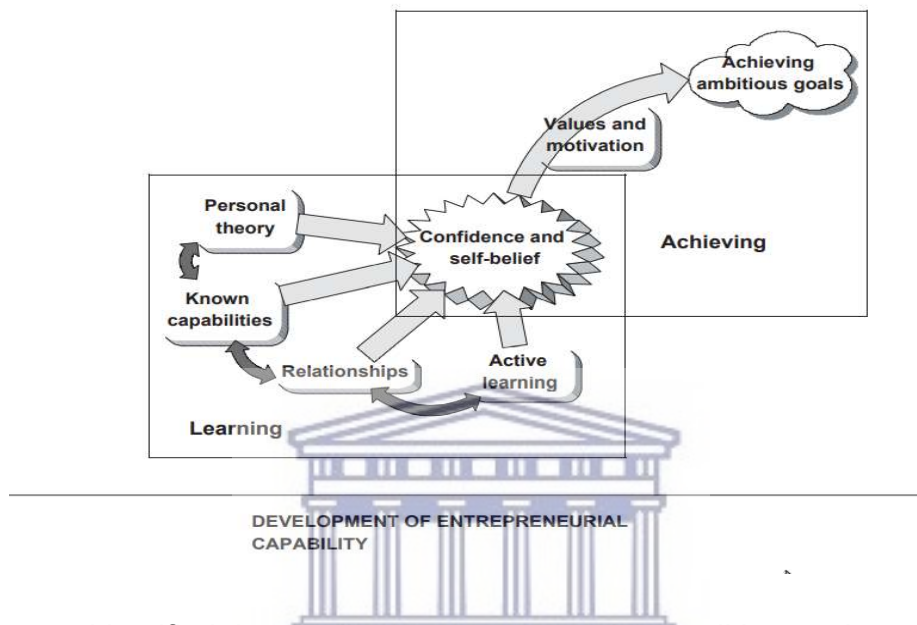


2.9 The Importance of Learning for the Entrepreneur and the Organisation

The process of learning to accomplish goals and learning from those accomplishments are crucial to entrepreneurial evolution (Deakins and Freel 1998). It is therefore important for governments, educational institutions, and policy makers to explore interventions that can lead to entrepreneurial evolution; instead of imposing what they think may be classified as solutions (Rae and Carswell 2000). They could explore how they can provide mentoring to an individual entrepreneur to aid them in learning from the entrepreneurship process (Deakins and Freel, 1998). Small businesses should be supported by mentoring programmes to help entrepreneurs through critical incidents (Cope and Watts, 2000).

A South African study by Hirschsohn (2008) found that SMEs mainly respond to growth aspirations and competitive forces when a need is identified that demonstrates an immediate return. They therefore fail to recognise the importance of continuous investment in skills development for businesses to survive in a competitive environment. There remains a need for government policy to stimulate the introduction of innovative solutions.

Figure 1. Rae and Carswell (2001) Model of Entrepreneurial Learning



The concepts identified in the literature expose the qualities and attributes that entrepreneurs require to become successful and develop the resilience required to remain motivated in their entrepreneurial journeys. Using the conceptual model of Rae and Carswell (2001) in Figure 1, the concepts were discussed above in detail and these are some of the important take aways from the literature.

Firstly, entrepreneurs need to set goals and understand why it is important for them to achieve those goals. They are then required to actively learn by acquiring knowledge relevant to their business needs and future ambitions and this is a continuous cycle in the ever-changing entrepreneurial environment. The next step is to ensure that the organisation has the best processes and structures in place to store this acquired knowledge, and share it with staff to develop its known capabilities that can create additional value for the organisation and its value proposition to customers in order to create a competitive advantage. It is important to note that this needs to be aligned to the vision and objectives of the organisation.

Relationships and networks play a huge role for entrepreneurs and their ability to build a successful organisation. There are great opportunities to learn, develop and receive feedback which plays a critical role in business success. Connections with, and feedback from suppliers, entrepreneurs and most importantly, from customers, help entrepreneurs identify opportunities for growth and development of their products, value proposition and future direction for the business.

Figure 2. Cope's Conceptual model (Phase 2) developed by Pittaway and Thorpe (2012)

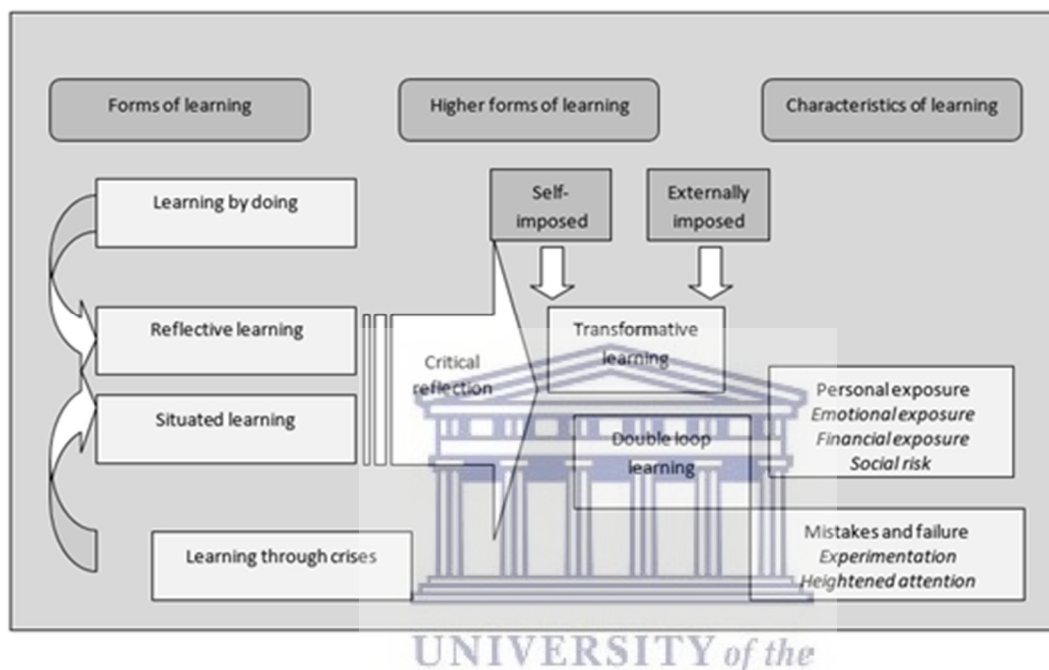


Figure 2 shows the significant importance for entrepreneurs to be open to learning from experiences, especially when it comes to critical events. We recently experienced the Covid-19 pandemic, and many businesses did not survive as they may not have participated in critical reflection, strategy creation and taking action. Critical events require a rapid response and the ability to innovate in order to survive times of uncertainty. Entrepreneurs need to become resilient in their efforts to sustain and grow their businesses and also be open to identify new opportunities. These key concepts identified in the literature were explored among the entrepreneurs to see what traits were common and how they grew and developed their ability and businesses.

The concepts identified in the literature play a huge role in the life of an entrepreneur, and EL is vital for the survival and growth of the business venture. Learning can take place in many forms and it is important that entrepreneurs recognise their importance

and place strategic intent to acquire the skills and develop the resilience to make a success of their business. Everyone has a different life journey, and life story interviews provide insight into what entrepreneurs in this study experienced in the various phases of their lives leading to their decision to become entrepreneurs and also how they learned and developed as entrepreneurs. This led to the development of a new conceptual model that will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 3: Research Design/Methodology

3.1 Study Design

This project seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the entrepreneurship process, to understand why people become entrepreneurs, how they ventured into their existing businesses and the factors that affected their EL and business growth in the retail and service industries with particular emphasis on ensuring business survival during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This exploratory study is based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with six entrepreneurs who have demonstrated entrepreneurial attainment in starting and running their business ventures for more than ten years. Life story interviews explored their experience during their careers and business ventures. Through interpretation and analysis of these interviews, noteworthy themes were identified to explore and explain how the respondents made sense of their experiences and developed their entrepreneurial capabilities. The nature of this type of study is to help us increase our understanding of a particular problem. The characteristics include using a smaller sample, which in this research consists of six cases, it has less structure and is flexible in nature to allow the entrepreneur to express themselves and reflect on their experiences. Entrepreneurial learning is an undefined phenomenon as entrepreneurs are different people with different beliefs and points of view. Their insights may also vary depending on where the entrepreneur finds themselves in their current state of mind and business position. The research design and conceptual model of the development of Entrepreneurial Capability by Rae and Carswell (2001) was used as an interview guide, along with the representation of Cope's (2003) work, using Pittaway and Thorpe's (2012) conceptual model of his work (Figure 2 above) to represent and explore how entrepreneurs respond during a crisis.

The interviews focused on what ignited the decision to become an entrepreneur, what factors kept them motivated, what support factors were required to keep them going, and how they learned and responded when faced with critical events, particularly during the Covid-19 crisis. As discussed extensively in the literature review, Rae and Carswell's (2001) conceptual model of EL was used as the bases of the interview guide as it has been demonstrated as empirically valuable and accepted in the field of EL (see Figure 1). This interpretivist approach enables the researcher to understand and interpret the experience of entrepreneurs and how they construct meaning in a subjective manner.

The life story method is particularly useful to explain how critical events affect EL, not only in a business context but also how life experience affects key decisions that set entrepreneurs on a reflective path to self-development, new business ventures, as well as ensuring business survival and business growth (Rae, 2005). Stories in this thesis are presented as cases and then compared with each other to explore the diverse EL process of these entrepreneurs, their interpretation of their social interactions and the decisions they made within their personal and business environments, and what they learned from their decisions and experiences.

3.2 Selection of Participating Small Business Owners

Convenience sampling was selected to identify participants for this study as the researcher has an extensive relationship network with business owners in the retail and service sectors in Cape Town. A sample of ten entrepreneurs was initially selected for semi structured in-depth life-story interviews which were to be used to write up individual case studies. However, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher was unable to continue studying full-time at the university and returned to work at his former employer, a major South African retail bank.

As a result, the sample reduced to six entrepreneurs from the researcher's personal community networks. Entrepreneurs were then contacted telephonically to participate in this study by sharing their entrepreneurial journey.

Three of the participants grew up in the same residential area as the researcher, two of them contacted a close business associate to ask if they would be interested in participating in the study and passed on their contact details. The sixth participant was

referred by a close friend. All participants were contacted by the researcher and asked if they would be interested in participating in the study. All agreed to do so.

The six entrepreneurs who have all managed successful small businesses in the retail and/or service sectors for over ten years were selected. Some form part of the researcher's social network and are considered to be entrepreneurs and not just business owners. This is demonstrated in the cases discussing their entrepreneurial journey in Chapter 4. Five out of the six entrepreneurs currently own and manage more than one business. All of them started selling products when they were in school due to economic circumstances. The entrepreneur who does not manage more than one business has an estate agency and has expanded her area of operation which encompasses three large suburbs in Cape Town - Mitchells Plain, Strandfontein and Grassy Park.

One acquired his father's business, and expanded by opening a wholesale business. Another acquired a real estate franchise. One purchased a battery shop, recently opened another, and has a bookkeeping business. The other three founded various new business ventures which include salons, manufacturing and wholesale supply of hair products, clothing stores, car sales, a restaurant and a company that does sandblasting and cleaning of ships. All these SMEs grew without support from the government or outside investors. All the entrepreneurs grew up in low to average-income households in Cape Town and had to work hard to achieve their goals. Two of the entrepreneurs acquired accounting degrees and one completed a short part-time entrepreneurship course in grade twelve, while the others only finished matric. These entrepreneurs' stories demonstrate how people can start and grow a profitable business.

As this is an exploratory study utilising a convenience sample of six entrepreneurs in the service and retail industries, the findings are not intended to be generalised to a population. However, the aim is to offer empirical insights that may extend conceptual frameworks and thereby help to increase understanding of the entrepreneurial phenomenon during a period of societal instability and uncertainty.

3.3 The Interviewing Process

When the research project began, the Covid-19 pandemic had resulted in SA being placed under lockdown. During this period the government put intervention measures in place to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and the number of people that could gather at a place, while being required to keep their social distance, as recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in the interest of containing the spread of the virus.

Subsequently, the wearing of masks and social distancing became a thing of the past and life went back to normal on 22 June 2022. As a result, interviews that were planned for 2021 could only be conducted in 2022 in order to have more engaging face-to-face conversations and for the entrepreneurs to reflect on the entire pandemic and how it affected their businesses.

As a result of the current Covid-19 pandemic, the participants were given the option of online interviews on a platform they are comfortable with, or face-to-face interviews, which all participants agreed to. Fortunately, by the time the face-to-face interviews were eventually conducted, the infection rate in SA was very low, and the government's prescribed Covid-19 safety protocols were easily adhered to. The participants were given the following options when interviews were conducted:

- All present use sanitiser to clean their hands
- Wear a face mask covering the nose and mouth
- Keep a distance of 1.5 metre minimum from one another
- No physical contact
- Temperature check

All the participants were not interested in the old protocols as the infection rate in SA was very low. We sat opposite one another at a safe distance, however there was no wearing of masks, temperature checks, or completion of the Covid-19 safety questionnaire. The participants shared their experiences and challenges, how they overcame these challenges, and what support factors they felt were critical to their business survival or business growth. All participants are owners and actively involved in SMMEs and have been in business for more than ten years.

The interview questions in Appendix 1 were structured to uncover deeper insight into an individuals' journey towards entrepreneurship, their motivation, goalsetting, important learning experiences, what was learned from these experiences, and how it was applied to change their business practices. Interviews were conducted and transcribed by listening and extracting the true meaning of the journey that the entrepreneurs shared through storytelling in order to identify gaps in individual cases and also review all the cases to see what interesting concepts emerge.

Entrepreneurs were asked to narrate their life story, which allowed them to share their most significant life experiences particularly when faced with a crisis, which becomes a defining learning event (Deakins et al.,2000). Each interview was recorded using the normal recorder on the researcher's phone, after the participants were fully briefed of the research purpose and had signed the consent form.

3.4 Interview Transcription and Life Story Compilation

The researcher listened to every interview with earphones and typed out each case on a Word document. This was a time consuming process, as the researcher could not type as fast as the flow of conversation. It therefore required stopping the recording, typing a few words on a word document, rewinding to make sure the context was understood and this was repeated this over and over again. This took hours to transcribe, however this method was selected to ensure the researcher captured the essence of what participants meant by what they said. The next step was to identify and extract common concepts identified, and compare it to the literature the researcher reviewed. After going through all the cases, the researcher organised the information into themes based on the literature review, to create a structured approach to fully understand the relevance of data collected and facilitate the analysis and comparison of the cases.

When presenting each life story, these common themes were used as headings to facilitate cross-case analysis and clarify for the researcher and the reader to better understand how the findings relate to the literature (Rae and Carswell, 2000). The next step was to write up the story as a case in a logical way to take the reader on a journey through the life of the entrepreneur. They were between the ages of 35 and 45 and are all coloured South Africans. The researcher captured the cases in the colloquial

manner in which they communicated, in order to maintain their character and allow the reader to connect.

Each story was then edited and organised to focus on the complexities of EL and how this influenced their personal and business growth and enabled them to cope, following the crisis resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. Many businesses were severely affected and many closed down globally. The researcher made sure that the participants selected for this study were entrepreneurs that were able to identify new business opportunities or innovate their existing businesses to ensure business survival and growth during the pandemic. This was done intentionally to understand how these entrepreneurs make decisions when faced with a crisis.

A timeline map was used during the interview to allow respondents to reflect on their learning events in greater detail, thus affording them the opportunity to structure their stories around significant events (Soetanto, 2017). The researcher identified key concepts in the literature and after transcribing and editing the cases, it became clear that these concepts were common and the cases were structured in the same format as the literature review to make it easier to identify commonalities and compare cases. This led to the development of a new conceptual model which is presented in Chapter 5.

Their stories were organised into learning themes which were identified and analysed to understand how meaning was constructed through experience, what processes were followed or put into practice, and what the outcomes were of their chosen actions (Rae, 2000). Interviews explored how entrepreneurs used their personal and business networks to learn how to cope and manage during a crisis. After the cases were written up, the researcher e-mailed it back to the participants for feedback to ensure the true essence was captured of what they meant by what they said, and to give them an opportunity to add value or advise what information should be removed. They were all contacted two weeks later and asked if they were happy with the content of the case and all gave consent for the information to be used. Summary table below provides overview of entrepreneurs, their years in business and types of businesses they are involved in.

Table 3. Summary Table of Entrepreneurs

Case	Name	Age	Gender	Education	Staff	Type of business	Parents as business owners	Years in business
A	Luke	38	Male	Matric	5	Retail store - Variety of products Retail - Car Sales Service - Sandblasting and painting of ships	Yes	10
B	Rushal	41	Male	Matric	25	Service – Hairdresser. Retail – Clothing. Manufacturing of hair products Wholesale of hair products	No	25
C	Zahir	36	Male	Accounting Degree	6	Retail store – Variety of products Wholesale – Variety of products	Yes	15
D	Rezah	36	Male	Matric	10	Restaurant Retail - Car Sales Service - Freight and Logistics	Yes	21
E	Alecia	41	Female	Matric	14	Service - Real Estate Agency	No	16
F	Tasneem	36	Female	Accounting Degree	5	Service - Accounting practice. Retail/Servicing of Batteries	Yes	11

The aim of the research was explained and all agreed to semi-structured interviews which lasted between one and a half and four hours. The focus was to determine how these entrepreneurs learned, developed and managed to sustain their businesses for over a decade and how they managed their businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic. Interviews were recorded using a cell phone application and notes were taken by the researcher to compliment the transcription.

The following steps were taken to strengthen the validity of the study:

- Questions were prepared and asked in a similar order
- The respondents were asked to provide examples after making their statements to clarify how their lived experience added value and enhanced their learning
- Typed transcripts were sent to respondents to comment and to ensure that the researcher truly captured the essence of what they meant by what they said

Key concepts were identified before identifying themes in each interview based on the understanding gained from the literature reviewed. Themes were created along with categories in the interview questionnaire to help group information. Subsequently, concepts were identified and the information gathered from the interviews were categorised within each case to make it easier to make sense of the information gathered and to write it up in a structured way across all cases.

This process helped to interpret the identified themes and correlations during cross-case analysis to increase the understanding of EL and interpret the findings. There were however additional themes that emerged such as Innovation during a crisis and Situated Learning as a result of the experience and stories of the entrepreneurs after all cases were transcribed.

While there was a structured format for the case studies based on the literature review, it evolved after the cases were written up and additional literature was reviewed to validate findings. Innovation as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic was a theme which was never identified in prior research as this type of critical event was never experienced in the modern world.

3.5 Cross-Case Analysis

Cross-case analysis is a research method that is used to facilitate the comparison of differences and commonalities in activities, processes and events, to analyse case studies (Dixon et al., 2007). The utilisation of cross case analysis is supported by (Myers, 2000). This was achieved by writing up each of the six cases separately, to identify commonalities and differences across all cases which allowed the researcher to further identify common themes and help the researcher group concepts, and possibly further develop a conceptual model better suited to the South African context. This may be used to help aspiring entrepreneurs gain confidence and understand what it takes to work towards their dream of starting a business and becoming a successful entrepreneur.

3.6 Justification for the Chosen Qualitative Methods and Techniques

The decision to adopt a qualitative approach for this study is to gain a deeper understanding and extract the true essence of the entrepreneurial journey, how entrepreneurs learn and develop their entrepreneurial abilities. In-depth semi-structured interviews, based on the models in Figure 1 and Figure 2 introduced in Chapter 2 ensured that entrepreneurs could freely share their experiences during their careers and business ventures, explored via storytelling. Through the interpretation and analysis of these narratives, noteworthy themes emerged which suggest how the respondents make sense of their experiences and develop their entrepreneurial capabilities in order to achieve their main goals. These themes are discussed in depth in Chapter 5.

A study conducted by Gartner and Birly (2002), found a qualitative approach to be the best approach to use when studying entrepreneurs, as it allows the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the life journey of the entrepreneur, consequently a similar approach was taken with this research in the South African context.

According to Rae and Carswell (2000) "Narrative research suggests that people structure their accounts of entrepreneurial learning through a series of five broad 'life stages' consisting of early life, early career, engaging and entering a venture, growing a venture, moving out and on from a venture" although the fifth stage may not be

applicable to all entrepreneurs (p.154). By interpreting and analysing these narratives, using Rae and Carswell's (2001), model, emergent themes identified to suggest how respondents utilise their experience and enhance their entrepreneurial abilities.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

As the participants in the study are owners of small businesses which are their legacy and livelihood. It is critical that their details be kept anonymous. When sharing their life story, they may have disclosed very personal information. Consequently, the researcher asked for consent to have the interview recorded. All information gathered including recordings of the interviews will be stored on a memory stick for safekeeping for five years until data may be deleted as per the POPI Act and UWC's requirements. The names of participants and their businesses will not be disclosed. All participants signed a consent form giving permission for the study to be conducted and received a draft of their case to ensure that the researcher captured the essence of what they meant. Subsequently a limited amount of information that they were uncomfortable with was removed.

As a result of the current pandemic, the participants were given the option of having online interviews on an online platform they are comfortable with, or face-to-face interviews. All participants agreed to face-to-face interviews and all prescribed Covid-19 safety protocols were adhered to. The interviews all took place at the business premises of these entrepreneurs. This was their request and was to the researcher's advantage as they were in a comfortable setting that could possibly trigger important memories and add valuable insights.

The intention of this study was discussed with the management team and Human Resources (HR) department of the researcher's employer which is a financial institution. It was decided that business customers that only bank with at this financial institution be excluded from the study. It was therefore disclosed to the participants which institution the researcher is employed at, and they were asked whether they bank at another banking institution, which they were not required to name, only confirm.

Data integrity and compliance with POPIA

All participants signed consent forms giving consent for interviews to be conducted and used for the purpose of research. The interviews with participants were recorded using the researcher's cellphone and recordings were transferred to a memory stick for safekeeping by the researcher. The recording was then deleted from the cellphone. Participants names were not mentioned during the interview and nobody other than the researcher listened to the recordings. The memory stick will be kept a safe place and all information will be deleted after 5 years as per university requirements.

The interview was then transcribed and typed out on a Word document and written up as a cases. The case was then sent to participants to confirm that the researcher understood what they meant by what was said. The approval was sought from the participants to ensure the data integrity was not compromised and that the researcher understood what had been communicated. Each interviewee was also asked to provide any additional insights that could be of value to the study.

All participants were informed of the researcher's intention and granted permission for the information to be shared. They were also given the option of choosing a name to be used as an alias and these names were then used in the study and added to the consent forms to ensure anonymity.

Prior to conducting the interviews, participants were also advised of the following:

- The nature and purpose/s of the research
- The identity and institutional association of the researcher and supervisor, and their contact details
- The fact that participation is voluntary
- The fact that participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves
- That responses would be used only for the purposes of the research
- That respondents would be granted anonymity
- The possible risks to which participants may be exposed and benefits they may receive as a result of their participation in the research

From the interpretation and analysis of these narratives, several significant themes emerged regarding how the respondents make sense of their experiences and developed their entrepreneurial capabilities. The cases are presented in Chapter 4 to help the reader understand the individual's entrepreneurial journey. The analysis section in Chapter 5 will identify common themes and cases will be compared and a conceptual model is then proposed based on the evidence presented. In particular, the study followed those who have managed to keep their businesses operational during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chapter 4: Findings

The life story interviews of six entrepreneurs are discussed in this Chapter and each interview is written up into separate cases to take the reader on a journey of how these entrepreneurs learned and developed their entrepreneurial abilities, the lessons they learned and how they developed in their lifetime. Their journey toward entrepreneurship started at different periods in their lives and after discussing each life story in detail, the analysis chapter will compare similarities and differences in their experiences, emphasising how this impacted their growth and development as entrepreneurs.

4.1 Life Story of Luke – Case 1

a. Overview of business activities

Luke has a very interesting journey that started when he was on high school selling speakers, which eventually led to him selling vehicles and then opening a business that sells blinds which he closed down after five years, not because it was not successful, but because he started at twenty-five years old and felt it was too stressful. He worked a full-time job and continued selling vehicles until he made the decision to resign and reopen the blinds store at a more affluent location. This was during the pandemic when so many businesses closed, yet Luke saw this opportunity to find the perfect store in the right mall and the business has been growing steadily.

He is prepared to give up the vehicle business as soon as the blinds business takes off and is able to expand to more locations. Luke has three main businesses, selling blinds is his core business which he refers to as “his baby”. He is also co-owner of a

business that does sandblasting and painting of ships, which is not doing as well since the Covid-19 pandemic. However, there is an opportunity for growth as the Chinese are developing infrastructure in SA and they acquired a small contract to start with. This will cover the investment of the set-up cost, and more opportunities may arise as they showcase their capability. He also offers home renovations as a service to his existing blinds shop customers only, as his experience helped him realise people like to window shop in malls.

b. Growing up

Luke's entrepreneurial journey started when he was in high school. He comes from a poor family that was classified as 'coloured' during the Apartheid era. However, his grandparents were better off financially, and he eventually moved in with them. His parents got divorced when he was only ten years old and in 1994 he was enrolled from grade four until grade seven at a primary school, that was previously exclusively for people classified as 'white'. This is the year SA became a democratic country and everyone had to adapt to the radical changes.

His main childhood development occurred at this school as "everyone looked at me differently, and treated me differently during the first year". However, by year two, this young boy adapted to his environment and soon everyone wanted to be his friend and he got to interact with people from different backgrounds which now allows him to engage, understand and adapt to any environment.

c. Education

After finishing matric, Luke went to college to study architecture but this only lasted two weeks before a job opportunity presented itself. A few years later he tried to further studies through his employer as his manager at the time encouraged it, but he only studied for two semesters. He does not even remember what he registered for because he chose something at random. However, when he was told the institution was not accredited and what he had selected to study was not acceptable, he dropped out and never went back.

When asked what he thought would be helpful to learn at school, he felt that his education did not play much of a role in his development as an entrepreneur. However,

he believes that understanding tax is the key thing that entrepreneurs need to learn and understand. He wished he understood tax sooner, because he had to learn the hard way through penalties from the South African Revenue Services (SARS). He also learned that he could not get a contract without a Value Added Tax (VAT) number. He basically learned as he went along, and realized that work alone does not allow you to comprehend how the tax system works. This is what people need to learn and he would have set up his businesses differently if he had more exposure.

d. Early career experience

While at high school, his aunt organised a part-time job for him to earn money during the December school holidays at a retail store called Jordan Shoes. His career aspiration of becoming an architect ended after two weeks when his mother made him aware of a job opportunity at a bank where she worked. He was nineteen at the time and she felt it was not necessary to study and left it to him to decide. He chose to work so he could earn money and ended up staying at that company for fifteen years.

His main learning experience from working at a financial institution was the importance of customer service. He did courses on customer service, understanding customer behavior, and how to sell. While working for the bank he opened a shop selling blinds when he was twenty-five years old. He was still selling cars on the side, and after a few years, he tested to see how much money he could make if he made the job his main focus while working as a mobile sales consultant. This resulted in a massive bonus, but there was no “side hustle” and did not provide the level of satisfaction he anticipated.

He worked as a business banker for the last five years of his career at the bank and this position enabled him to see what business would succeed in certain locations but not others. He managed a business banking portfolio at two different locations and saw how different businesses would perform in certain areas compared to others. This is when the realisation came that a business location is very important. He also learned about money, lending and how to leverage assets, and using the bank’s money to do business and not his own where possible. For example, he used a credit card to buy a vehicle and sell it quickly as the cost of lending funds short term was very little. Understanding the bank’s processes also helps with decision making in his business.

e. Starting his first business

Luke sold his first set of car speakers in grade eleven at high school, and that is when he experienced the feeling of making money, which was “different from being paid to clean the yard or doing chores”. His father gave him a vehicle for passing matric and since then, he has been buying and selling vehicles. It started with selling his car to upgrade and purchase the next one after making a profit. As he has a passion for vehicles, this was a way for him to upgrade to the next vehicle he has always wanted. The business has grown and he now purchases up to four vehicles at a time as he feels more than that will make it a full-time job. This is a good form of diversification as the income from this business occasionally is needed to cover the bills.

f. Entrepreneurial Learning

Luke learned that the customer base varies depending on the location, and they have different expectations. He had a day job when he opened the first blinds store and stress was hectic because he felt he did not have control, but his salary offered security. He still does most of the installations and quotes himself, but recognises that for the blinds business to grow, he needs to “free up time and get staff trained to his level to increase sales and perfect the installation quality” that his customers are accustomed to. He feels the “need to be present and train them for at least two to three years to get them to my level”.

When compared to the old blinds shop, many new strategies were implemented in the new store to serve his new customer base. His main role now is to be present and able to identify opportunities and solve problems - “to succeed you must be present to understand your business”. He sets performance targets and has a very committed manager and is considering making him a partner. In the first shop the turnaround time for quotes was two days and they used to call clients to quote. Currently, he takes measurements, sends it to the store manager to prepare, and the client receives a quote via email or message on the preferred online platform within fifteen minutes. This efficiency has increased sales even though the turnaround time for installation remains ten days.

He holds his suppliers accountable and demands that they honour the turnaround time commitment that he has promised his clients. Experience from the first blinds store made him aware that the first six months would require sacrifice. This store is the main focus and has the potential to exceed the profit made from selling vehicles. “Investing money into your business and being prepared to get lawyer calls is what you sometimes have to go through to come out on top”. He also partnered with John Dorries to offer a free breakfast for two with coffee if a customer buys three or more blinds to increase sales. He also partnered with Wingfield for the car business as they offer financing solutions to his customers.

g. Personal Theory and Motivational Factors

When he sold his first set of car speakers in grade eleven, he experienced the “feeling of making money, which was different from being paid to clean the yard or doing chores”. He then lit up saying “it’s a good feeling, it’s so rewarding to earn your own money and know you put in the effort to get that sale”.

Soon afterward, his grandmother took him to a ‘holistic fair’. He had some money saved up and decided to buy banana leaves and other random stuff to sell at home. Selling everything in a short period, helped him realise that there were items people wanted but did not know where to get them. By moving it closer to them would result in them paying a premium for safety and convenience which he believes is the key to his success.

The personal qualities required to grow as an entrepreneur are persistence and resilience:

- “You never give up and have to do the same thing over and over without losing energy, and you must believe it’s going to happen. Do not listen to the negative comments of others and keep pushing and you will always come out on top”.

These are also the qualities he looks out for in a new partner. He regards his main strength as the ability to close any deal when he speaks to a client, but not upskilling staff to his level is a weakness he is working on.

- “Because I started young, I feel like it made me mature before my time, it makes you take life and sales seriously in all factors of life”.

From an early age, being a team player helped him build relationships that last to this day. He considers himself to be a team player and is very versatile and able to bring people together.

- “My whole network can work with me but can’t work with each other, many of my friends wouldn’t be each other’s friend if it wasn’t for me”.

He is able to anticipate problems before they happen and has become more proactive. However, he is composed and will deal with matters month on month if and when intervention is required. If sales are down, he is more serious and will tell the manager not to make jokes when business is down. He schedules a half hour meeting every morning with store manager to plan the day. He believes in separating himself from business so when socializing he will relax and have fun and workers can engage him as a friend, at work however, “its business first and ensuring the business is running as it should, is not negotiable”.

h. Lessons from Entrepreneurial Parent and Grandparents

At the time when the Black Economic Empowerment Act (BEE) was introduced he was in grade eleven, and his father and uncle opened a blinds company which became very successful. “It was the first or second blinds company that was BEE compliant in South Africa”. Seeing how his father went from nothing to being well-off and buying property in Platterkloof, was the critical event that made him realise and believe that he could achieve anything - “if he can do it, then I can too”. His father never offered advice, but he was able to learn so much by observing his father.

When he moved in with his grandparents, they were retired and mainly focused on building his character, and had dreams of him finding a good job. Both of them had their own business: his white grandfather owned a Wimpy franchise prior to marrying his coloured grandmother who was a dressmaker. While he does not recall entrepreneurial conversations or lessons from them, he often helped his grandmother to make dresses from time to time for special customers. After his parent’s divorce, his mother had a boyfriend for around five years who contributed towards his primary school fees and taught him to play chess, which he is quite proud of, as he considers himself a very good chess player. He also believes that the game of chess helps him with making decisions and developing his business strategy.

i. Active Learning

At high school he posted his first advert to sell speakers in the classified section of a popular newspaper at the time; he looks back thinking it was normal for people to phone in and place ads. While he does not read or attend any seminars, all his learning is from experience and engaging within his social network. He regularly meets with friends to hang out but most importantly, discuss business opportunities as it is something that excites them.

He still goes out to take measurements and do installations, and has staff working in the shop who are responsible for making appointments and sending the quotes to customers. He is a perfectionist and believes most workers cannot work at his level. For example, a client's window was built skew and a staff member fitted the blind skew because the window was skew. "Staff do not always think for themselves". He recognises that this is a weakness and continuously tries to educate them and bring them to his level. To do so, he takes a staff member with to assist with installations and teaches them techniques he has learned to master over time.

He has learned that in business, you have to understand your clients and know who you are serving. The customer base at the new store is completely different from previous store even though it is located within close proximity. The main lesson from his previous employer was the importance of customer service. He therefore always takes ownership of all client complaints. He also does not tell people he is the owner when he does the installations, as people would treat him differently. He is good at selling and his experience allows him to close opportunities. As his chance of successfully closing a deal is 70% higher than that of his staff he still feels the need to go out and quote himself, but is working on upskilling them to his level.

One thing that stands out clearly is his resilience: "I failed a hundred times and just keep going". While selling cars requires less time, there is the risk of buying a bad car and if it breaks down you could lose money, and he admits to failing many times. With the blinds business there are many small wins and maybe some small failures, but he continues to observe and learn from his failures and successes. He constantly thinks of ways to improve and grow the business. When he is happy with an idea, he immediately incorporates it into the business and takes time to analyse and see if it

adds the value he had in mind. This is how he continuously and actively learns to develop the business.

j. Known Capabilities

He seems to think that experience is key to organisational knowledge. He started out selling speakers when he was still at school and continued to do so until his father bought him a vehicle after passing matric. That experience allowed him to see what vehicles were popular and what type of sound systems buyers were interested in. This led to him selling his car and using the funds to buy another car, and then another and that grew into a business he still runs today. When he started working he expanded the vehicle business. However, his experience made him realise that four vehicles should be his maximum as it provides flexibility, and allows him to focus on other business ventures and manage a full-time job. He said that having more than four vehicles would make it a full-time job.

He employed his mother to run the blinds business and he assisted with installations. The business was reasonably successful, but he decided to closed shop after five years with the intention of opening later in his life as he felt he was too young, it brought about too much stress, and consumed too much of his time. This experience allowed him to understand the market he was serving and he then decided that he required a better location to serve a more affluent market to provide better returns. This eventually led to his resignation seven years later.

While he could have resigned a lot sooner, he required a mental break between the first and second blinds stores. He admits that “being an entrepreneur is stressful” and that is why he took a break to work at his own pace. He continued selling blinds to retain his customers as he knew that when he opened a new store, the existing customer base would be able to cover his cost. He invested his entire pension to open the second blinds store and this was a “make or break decision” as he was “all in” with this investment. However, he knew he had the tools, network, customers and that he was capable of making it a success. The realisation that he is capable of making money effortlessly by flipping cars or selling something was a key contributing factor to resigning and becoming full-on self-employed.

Shop one offered aluminum windows but there was little demand, so it was not included in shop two. He did however add air conditioning and plumbing. He is thinking of launching these companies on their own as they are not aligned with blinds. Adding air conditioners to his list of products came about when a person paid for space in his shop and left after three months saying it was not feasible. Not wanting to change the shop set up led to him sourcing his own cheaper supplier and an installer who offered a quality guarantee. After a single conversation with a friend who does plumbing, he decided to register the company to supply taps which this friend would fit and honour the guarantee. As a man of action, he would implement something and test to see how successful he could make it, instead of wondering if it would work.

Luke's main customer base is mall traffic. This adds value as people want convenience and trust that the warranty offered will stand. He does not apply for tenders as he does not want business reliant on contracts. He had a few small companies as customers at the first blinds shop, but this was not a main focus for the business as mall traffic accounts for 80% of revenue. The competitive advantage for the store is the price, warranty and the fact that they are very reliable. He confidently said that other companies simply cannot compete with him. "Everything I sell in my store is supply and fit, with a 12-month warranty".

When asked about the processes he follows to capture lessons, he replied saying "I learn from my mistakes and make mental notes". The first shop was completely trial and error for the first year. He laughed saying he operated with a receipt book for the market he served and had mostly cash deals. With the new store he moved to pdf and formal systems for quotes and tax purposes. "The processes have changed about three to four times". Shop one did not utilise email as it was not popular at the time, however he had to evolve at shop two, given the client base and technological improvements. The new shop is now completely online, has a website, accounting package and is VAT registered. He understands the importance of a good team as they can "make or break your business". He therefore shares the vision and strategy with his manager and they meet for coffee most mornings for feedback and to plan the day.

k. Relationships and Networks

He believes that his experience at a previously “white” primary school was more developmental than high school as it helped him to understand people, our country and the various markets. He learned to speak to different people in different ways, “understanding their lingo helped me gain people’s trust and build strong relationships”. This advice also came from an uncle who lived in Australia; he also remains in contact with his primary school friends.

While many people close to him were against the business decision for the first store, his father helped with capital to open the first shop, but did not contribute to decision to sell blinds. There were challenges and “it was very stressful working with family and I will not do that again”. He allows family to sub-contract, as this leads to them taking responsibility, but will not employ them as they do not listen when you give them instructions. His father closed his blinds business many years ago and now sub-contracts for him when customers ask him to assist with home renovations.

He strongly believes in his network and everyone that works for him is either a friend or was referred by someone in his network. It is also important for him “to grow your own community and uplift people around you”, and he is more trusting of the people due to knowing their character. He also says that he would interview the person that refers someone and not the person he employs.

“Network plays a critical role in the success of any business”. He believes that one’s network is important and contributes to business growth as they support you. Many referrals and business come from his network which also brings other entrepreneurial opportunities. He would decide if it is worth adding the extra stress and how much time he would have to give up. He had many partnerships over the years and is open to learning. He has matured to the point where he is content with the blinds and vehicle businesses and adds “I had my twenties where I would work seven days a week and sacrifice anything and everything” but he now prefers family time and believes that presence is important.

A key takeaway from his previous employer is the way he treats his staff, and he also uses similar tactics he learned from previous manager. While he has had numerous partners and learned so much from them, some friendships were lost as not everyone

has the same work ethic. Some key lessons came from a partner who was five years younger than him. “This guy was so hungry for business; he wasn’t at my level but he had the ambition”. Back then he worked 7 days a week. He learned to be resilient, “even if fifty people don’t want it, the next one will, you have to keep pushing with the same energy, he taught me about myself and to be myself no matter where I am or who I am with”.

He does not bother with building relationships with suppliers as he believes that he is the customer and the customer is never wrong. He also acknowledges the importance of being present to understand the needs of the client and the business. As many customers do not really know what they want and ask for his opinion, he wears many hats and often takes the role of an interior decorator as this adds value. He also values his staff. The store manager has a company car, petrol card and is incentivised on the sale of every vehicle to show him appreciation. He recognises the importance of having committed staff and has had conversations of a potential partnership and is even considering giving him shares due to his loyalty and commitment to the business,

He has never attended a workshop or networking event; he believes in growing his business network through his network. His current friendship circle is his network and when they meet they would begin by having casual conversation for the first hour, and after that it is all business and discussing opportunities as “one out of ten options turns into business opportunity”. He may discuss raising capital, however, has never consulted someone outside of his network to help with business decisions. When he first started, he was alone and made his own decisions. His entrepreneurial network grew over time, they share strategies and tactics, learn from one another, and make money together. They also played a big role with his growth as an entrepreneur but not entirely responsible for his decisions.

I. Situated Learning

At one stage, Luke made a decision to stop his business activities, and focus on work only. He was rewarded with a huge bonus which he evaluated, and it was fairly close to the profit he was able to generate. The turning point for “full-on entrepreneurship” came three years before resigning. He was at a braai and he had made R100,000 in one day:

- “It made me anxious instead of happy and I shivered because I could not believe I made so much money and did not even know what to do with it”.

He realised that he could make more money than work could ever pay, but he was afraid to leave his job as he worked for fifteen years at the same company and was earning a fairly good salary.

He claims to have had more failures than successes and judges each of them critically. However, he is resilient and remains motivated to keep going as “I’m always reflecting on failures like every day, but need to keep pushing forward”.

One of his biggest failures in selling cars happened shortly after opening the blinds store and the loss was great and happened at such a bad time that he took a break from selling cars to focus on the blinds business. However, he started again after a few months with less risky vehicle models as this experience has taught him to evaluate his risk versus reward.



m. Situated Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic

One of the factors that contributed to his resignation was the Covid-19 pandemic. Being a front-line worker at a financial institution was risky and he was not going to risk his health when he heard about what was happening globally. He then went on to manage his brother’s business where he holds a 50% share. During this period, he realised this event would also create opportunity. At the time he did not realise how bad things would become. However, he saw the ideal opportunity to acquire a store in a mall that he had considered to be a key location for the blinds business for many years, however, the right size store was never available. During the pandemic there were many stores to choose from and he had found the perfect space to reopen his business.

Shortly after opening the store, the government implemented level four restrictions and business was down, which was what he anticipated, but the uncertainty of how long it would last was very stressful. He knew he would never get a shop at this mall if it were not for the pandemic, and if he did not make the sacrifice, this opportunity may never

come again. He also would not qualify for government funding as a business had to be two years old to qualify.

When managing his brother's shipping business, they struggled during the Covid-19 pandemic. Their strategy to overcome the pandemic was to venture further out and went looking for business that was out of their comfort zone, far to drive and brought about extra cost. However, this decision was necessary for the survival of the business. They lost key clients and maintaining a relationship was so important as one client carried them through the pandemic. That company eventually started doing its own sandblasting, but only after they knew that Luke's business could survive without them.

n. Conclusion

The confidence of knowing he is able to identify an opportunity and make a profit, comes from experience. His vision is to open three more branches of his blinds store at various locations in Cape Town. Money is a motivating factor, "I would work hard even if I hated a job. I do not have a passion for the product but I want to make my own money".

4.2 Life Story of Rushal – Case 2

a. Overview of business activities

Rushal's entrepreneurial journey started in grade eight selling cigarettes at school. After saving up some money, he bought a bulk pack of socks from a wholesaler in Cape Town and started selling socks in and around his community. As he started making more money and increasing his capital, he then expanded to selling pajamas and eventually ended up selling a variety of clothing which he still does today. He currently owns four salons, and has ventured into manufacturing of hair products and supplying salons in the low income market segment.

b. Growing up

Rushal comes from a family of five, he is the youngest of three children and was raised by both parents. His father is a school teacher and believes that education is the key

to success and tried to motivate him to see it that way. He says he was the naughty one amongst his siblings and had different interests to them as he was ten years younger. His parents were religious and very strict when it came to ethics and raised him to always do the right thing and be a good person, emphasizing the importance of attaining God's blessings. His parents were very supportive, mother was a housewife and took care of him growing up.

"We were ok; my father was a teacher and we were average, like many the other people in our area". The majority of his needs were met and he considered the community to be middle class. He believes that Apartheid has had a damaging impact generally, but he never experienced it. "I was born and raised in Mitchells Plain". His parents had left Bokaap when Mitchells Plain opened as they advertised homes with geysers. It was a luxury at the time and his mother wanted to move for that reason.

In the area where he grew up in Mitchells Plain, it was all about fashion. Unlike other areas nearby, it was not dangerous and was referred to as the "upper class of Mitchells Plain". There were some petty thieves but no gangsters and no big criminal activity, and people would mainly keep to themselves. While growing up there were drugs around, but he was never interested.

Shortly after passing matric, he got married and nine months later, he was blessed with his first child. Having the responsibility of looking after his own family made him realise that he had to make money in different ways in order to provide them with a better life. He then moved out of his parent's house at the age of 18 and lived in a separate entrance with his family and is proud to say "I was able to provide for them even though I was so young".

c. Education

Rushal never enjoyed school as he "was lazy, but knew that irrespective of my laziness, my father would never allow me to drop out". He failed in grade five and considered himself below average at the time. However, he still went on as he knew back then you were only allowed to fail once.

When he reached high school, he was enrolled at a technical school in Mitchells Plain. His father was a teacher at a technical school, and noticed how some children progressed having an opportunity to focus on technical skills. However, this was not

the case for him. In grade eight things got worse as he was not interested in learning technical skills - "I was very rebellious and just about made it through". His mother noticed this and decided to enroll him at the school closest to their home where she was able to keep an eye on him. He says that in his mind he was not rebellious - "I was just being me" - and thought he would fail, but to his surprise, he was transferred over to grade ten. However, "school just made me miserable and I didn't want to be in a place like that anymore".

This became the defining moment when he realized he did not want to waste his time and life on school. In grade ten he became more focused as he was able to choose his own subjects and this made life easier. He was not good at mathematics and knew that leaving out the numbers and doing subjects like history and geography would make his life easier. He has a good memory and could do "parrot fashion" learning on study subjects. This was the first year he received good results, and the pattern continued all the way to matric. Being able to choose his subjects empowered him to realise his capability and school finally became pleasant.

No teachers at school had an impact on his life. He was encouraged by his father, but was not academic and did not like reading at all. He passed matric, but never applied to university as he needed to earn money. "I left my family home when I got married and lived in separate entrance, I was independent from eighteen and looked after my own family".

He believes that the education system was of no benefit to him and had little impact on his growth. While he did business economics, he remembers it being too basic and not providing enough insight to understand business. We were only getting kids through school to finish matric but that's it".

He would like his children to go to university and acquire a degree for security in case a business venture does not work out, and then encourage entrepreneurship.

a. Early Career Experience

After writing his last matric exam he went to Promenade mall to make a lay-by at a retail shop. The manager was there and he asked if there were vacancies. The manager asked him if he could sell, and his reply was "I can sell ice to an Eskimo", the manager was so impressed with the interaction that he gave him the job on the spot.

He started the very next day and worked at the retail store in Promenade mall for ten years, even though he was making more money than his salary selling clothing on the side. He stayed because he had to ensure that his family had stability, and “a salary would make it easier to qualify for a home loan” so he could acquire his own property. When his wife fell pregnant with their second child, he knew his salary and clothing business were not enough and this is where the decision came to look for other business opportunities.

- “I knew my education could only take me to a certain level, but my skill exceeded my income. I made three to four times my salary with my clothing business”.

After three years, the age of twenty-two he became a store manager and had six staff members working under him. However, he felt that his “employer oppressed their staff” and he came to understand what environment would be better suited to him, and how to treat his staff to ensure they add value to his business.



b. Starting Their First Business

Rushal had wanted to earn money from a young age as his father only gave him an allowance to purchase clothing once or twice a year when he received a teacher’s birthday bonus, and sometimes for Eid. As a fashionable guy, he did not like the idea of having to wear the same clothes all the time. He started selling cigarettes in grade eight. In grade ten, he came across a small factory shop opposite the Castle in Cape Town that sold cartoon socks, which were popular at the time. As he had some capital saved up from selling cigarettes, he bought a wholesale pack of socks which led to a new business opportunity. The business soon took off, and every Friday; he would go to Cape Town to buy stock and go around on foot to sell socks to people in his area. He allowed them to pay the following week or even month-end, depending on when they got paid.

Making money was very exciting as he was able to go to a popular store called Jack Lemkus to purchase the shoes and clothes that he really wanted on lay-buy. He would go around door-to-door selling his products even when it rained. “I realised this is my skill and people would often tell me that when I went to their houses”. As his capital

grew, he increased his product range, starting with pajamas and later all kinds of popular clothing. As a result, “I always had money and was making more than most people that were working full time jobs”.

c. Entrepreneurial Learning

This entrepreneur does no business research, but he is open to opportunity and when he makes a decision, he goes with it. The decision to open the barber was so simple and just came to mind - “hair is hair and people will always have to cut it”. He never contemplates a decision for more than a month before taking action because time is money. He never even looked for specific locations as “people always came to me”. He is well known in the industry and supplies many of the salons in the Mitchells Plain area with hair products. As a result, business owners in his network would make him aware when there was a salon for sale, and this is how the business expanded.

He makes strategic decisions and changes to the business based on experience. He does not keep a written record of lessons learned, but says “I think about my business every day”. One important change he implemented was to ensure each store has a different name, look and feel. He compares this to a franchise, noting that if something goes wrong in one branch, it will affect all the branches. He also recognises that social media can damage his business and after a few bad experiences, this strategy was implemented to reduce the impact. He would then ensure that all branches are made aware of what happened to ensure it does not happen again. He claims to have a good memory and prefers to act fast when he makes decisions for the business.

d. Personal Theory and Motivational Factors

His main vision or driver towards his various business ventures was to make money and provide for his family. It started with cigarettes on school which led to selling socks and when that generated enough profit he started selling pajamas and then eventually clothing, which remains an income stream. He then ventured into a barber that led to a salon and when there was enough cash flow and opportunity came, he opened another and another. He has decided that four salons are the maximum as his focus moved towards manufacturing and wholesale of hair products.

He believes that your network is crucial to success and his relationship with suppliers and customers is built on honesty, being ethical, paying on time, and meeting customer expectations. This way of doing business has had a huge impact, and is how his network grew and why he gets referrals to business opportunities. He also believes that “failure is a good source of learning; I look at it as an opportunity to grow as its part of your journey so keep carrying on”.

e. Active Learning

Rushal had no role models growing up and there was no inspiration from others, just the determination to make money to provide for his family. The critical event that changed his mind-set was when the barber never showed up on the opening day of the barbershop. “That day I developed the resilience I needed” and also realised that “staff can make or break you”.

The salon industry is very personal and people build a relationship with their stylist. Therefore, when choosing staff, he ensures they are at an experienced age, where they have their own clientele to bring to the shop. New stylists will take long to build relationships. Over time he has also come to realise that they are not committed to the salon, so “treat them well or they will move along with their customers”.

He has had no support from others and is self-made. His initial capital was a R45000 loan from RCS. This allowed him to open the first salon and all growth after that came from hard work and his determination to expand. He never used a business plan and never even wrote anything down - “everything is in my head, I visualize in my mind and I act. Every business venture has been this way; after I finished school I told myself I’m done with pen and paper”.

Rushal thinks about business development every day, “I don’t read, all I do is think about my business and my experience”. He sets performance targets with incentives that change over time. Recently due to the Covid-19 pandemic, he offers his staff a high basic with low commission. It used to be low basic and higher commission but he realised that it is best the other way around. “I leave it in their hands but my turnover will affect their pay”.

He remains active in thinking about new ways to improve the manufacturing and supply of hair products, as this has become the main focus. He recently realised that

people are always on their phones and did research on how much time people actually spend on their phones. He recognised that he was not that good at social media and has since employed a professional to take pictures, manage his social media and ensure that a post goes out every day.

f. Known Capabilities

Rushal understands the market he serves and acknowledges that it is price driven. He therefore ensures that his products and services are affordable. His slogan is affordable, quality hair products and working within the client's budget. His salons are the cheapest as he supplies them with hair products, therefore his competition simply cannot compete. This is his biggest competitive advantage as he makes the product from raw materials.

- “It's impossible for them to compete, this is due to the network I built over time and key suppliers I got”.

His business is built on high volumes and low margins, as more customers lead to more money. Thus he keeps the salons full by having good affordable pricing. “When its priced low people will rather pay to have a stylist do their hair”.

Rushall does not want more than four salons as his focus has shifted to distribution of hair products which requires less staff. He is able to make more money with less effort through wholesaling and supplying salons and bulk customers. At this point, he has no interest in supplying retail stores. He employs managers in the salon's and his role now is to manage them. It took him five years before he was confident to let go and trust managers. This change came when he made a deal with the managers to ensure they benefit if the salons do well. They ensure that the business is managed to the best of their ability, as their performance bonus depends on it.

g. Relationships and Networks

Rushal believes that one's network is crucial to success and the relationships he has with suppliers and customers are built on honesty, being ethical, paying on time and meeting customer expectations. This way of doing business has had a huge impact

on his business, and is how his network grew and why he gets referrals to business opportunities.

- “I am pro-active so I think about strategies all the time - if this one leaves who do I replace that person with? I always know how the staff will move around so business is not impacted”.

Rushal has never attended a business event, networking event or a seminar in his life and does not feel the need. He does not have a mentor nor feel the need to have one. When he needs to think, he would run on the treadmill. He realised the importance of having good relationships with suppliers, when he started manufacturing hair products.

- “They always call me to update me on changes in development of formulas for manufacturing to make more for less”.

He regards the most important personal qualities that an entrepreneur needs to succeed as having the ability “to work hard, be resilient and most importantly, be honest”. His biggest strength is his ability to communicate, and he intends on learning Arabic as he believes it would help him negotiate better with suppliers in the countries he frequents. He also believes in separating his business from his personal identity. Since day one, he does not talk about the business at home with his family. After opening the manufacturing business, his spouse came to work with him. However, when they leave work, they do not discuss work.

He regards himself as a team player and has employed managers to run the salons. He has meetings with them once a month to discuss important matters. However, he does not want to be contacted until that meeting, they need to take ownership and make decisions. He firmly believes that the working environment should be a nice environment where people want to come to work and are happy.

Religion also plays an important role in his life and he always attends the same mosque. He refers to the culture as a brotherhood relationship where they empower one another. He helps other entrepreneurs where he can, and supplies them with very good products to sell. He does not formally mentor others, however when someone engages him about business, he will offer his advice and encourage them to look at the bigger picture.

h. Situated Learning

Rushal is grateful that he kept his social circle small while growing up because it kept him focused on what he wanted to achieve. His sister would sell his products at work, and he employed people to sell in the area, but they were older than him and would collect and keep the money. He then learned a key lesson, that he should not trust people too quickly, especially when they worked with his money. An entrepreneur he respected advised him not to sell on credit in Mitchells Plain. However, in his experience, his customer base always paid him. The losses were from the people that worked for him and kept the payments customers made for themselves.

The most impactful event as a child, was the amount of money he was able to make through selling:

- “I was making more than any child could have for pocket money, around R2000 a week. As a child that was a big amount, I realized this is what I want to do”.

Making money became a big driver and knowing his capability to generate more, just increased his motivation to keep going.

His sister's property faced a very popular road that a doctor had used as a surgery for many years. After the doctor left, his sister let the place and tenants left her with a huge water bill. He recognised that this place had potential and asked to rent it. He was unsure what to use the place for, until he met a barber in Promenade mall. This was in his eighth year of being employed at the same company, and he decided to open a barber shop. However, the barber messed him around and came and went as he pleased as soon as he had enough money. This was another key learning moment - “I realised staff can make or break you”.

He then fired the barber, found a female hair stylist and decided to open a hair salon instead. The hairstylist felt that she was the one making the salon a success and then negotiated a 50/50 partnership which he eventually agreed to. Pretty soon thereafter, she wanted him to cover the rent and maintain the 50/50 partnership. As he was still working full time, he agreed to this, but when she came back saying he must cover all expenses and agree to a 60/40 split, he said no. Shortly after that, she left without saying a word and took all his staff with her to a salon close by. “I got a call and someone asked me why the shop was closed”.

This was a big problem as he now had to find new staff which was no easy task. Another concern is that people build relationships with their hairstylist and prefer going to them which also resulted in him losing many customers. However, he remained resilient, telling himself:

- “I won’t give up the place that made money with my brain and I will get people to work for me, this time, salary workers and no partners”.

He then met a hair stylist who shared his vision to make this a beautiful salon unlike any other in Mitchells Plain, which would give him a competitive advantage and help him acquire more customers.

He made a loan of R45000 and quit his job to give the place a makeover and recalls that on the 1st of December 2010 at 8h00 the stylist never came to work, even though they had a conversation the day before. He spent all this money and two months renovating the shop and the stylist never showed. He took yet another blow, but he never considered giving up. He placed ads in the newspaper, but could not find the right people and after a few weeks, he got a call from a lady whose name sounded familiar. After asking a few questions, he realised this is someone well known in the industry with a good customer base and he offered her the job. She was the one he had been waiting for and business was soon up and running, even better than before, and she works for him to this very day.

He then decided to take on his main competitor, the one his staff had left him for. This salon had been trading for 30 years, and the stylist he employed was an ex-employee. He paid a sign writer in the area to make a sign for a special he wanted to promote to win over clients. The stylist he employed, had a good reputation and he knew it would attract people. It worked and foot flow increased significantly. The signs cost him only R150, and he could afford to put up signs all over Mitchells Plain. He realised his target market was price-conscious and made his prices so cheap that other salons could not compete. A year later they closed down and he purchased the salon, both are still open today.

When he took over the new salon, he gave it a major revamp and it soon became his top store. “People didn’t realise they were in Mitchells Plain when they walked into my salon”. His role model growing up was his store manager at the time he worked for the retail store, and became a partner in one of the salons. He was very impactful with

decisions made early on in the business. He had motor spare shops and was doing very well at the time.

- “The main lesson I learned from him is to work hard; he works extremely hard, he is money driven and will keep a shop open until 12 in the evening if he can”.

By increasing his trading hours and working hard he would be able to increase the business turnover and profitability.

i. Situated Learning During the Covid–19 Pandemic

When the government enforced lockdown, the salon business was severely impacted as the business had to close down for three months. Even after the business was allowed to trade again, many people remained health conscious and it took time before foot flow increased. He received no support from the government and no changes were implemented in the salons as the prices are already the lowest in the area. He kept all staff on and was able to keep all salons open, even though it is a close contact industry and this is still impacting the business. “Even the loyal customers stopped coming”, however, there has been improvement since lockdown restrictions were completely lifted in SA.

The idea to get into manufacturing came in the early stage of the pandemic before lockdown was declared in SA in March 2020. He was travelling abroad early in January 2020, and was of the last people to return to SA. He saw what was happening overseas and realized this is going to have a huge impact, and felt it time to get additional stream of income. While aboard he found a supplier of raw materials, and that is how the manufacturing and wholesaling of hair products started. He manufactures shampoo, conditioner and keratin based hair products for the low income market segment. The key lesson he learned from Covid-19: “don’t waste money, save your pennies and be prepared for any calamities”.

j. Conclusion

Rushal is most proud of the fact that he has built so many successful businesses and has very little debt. His advice for entrepreneurs “is to work hard and to sacrifice their time and focus on their goals, don’t give up, even if you fall, get up and keep going”.

4.3 Life story of Zahir – Case 3

a. Overview of Business Activities

In 2016 Zahir took over a retail store that his father established thirteen years ago. The store is located in a popular mall in the Northern suburbs selling plasticware, and many other products. He recently opened a wholesale business selling these products direct to the public and small businesses. There are plans to expand the business to include a delivery service and website that allows online purchasing. He employed a manager at the retail outlet and he is in charge of the warehouse.

The brand is becoming popular and he was even asked to be a sole distributor in Cape Town for a popular Johannesburg homeware range, consisting of stunning products like bread tins, canisters, and glassware. He is actively looking for a social media specialist, who will be stationed in the office to take pictures and manage the website. He has strong relationships with suppliers and is not ready to hand over responsibility, as he receives a special discount when he deals directly with the owners.

b. Growing up

Zahir comes from a family of five, consisting of him, a brother, sister and parents. He believes he was fortunate to grow up in a good safe community and while attending primary school he was dropped and collected by his mom every day. When attending high school, he would walk to school with his friends and kept the same social circle at university. He and these friends would often study together which was beneficial to their growth.

c. Education

His entrepreneurial journey started when he was only seven. His mom would pick him up after school and take him to the stationery business in Gatesville. She taught him how to make combination packs to sell and also how to ring up the till. This was as simple as adding a pencil and a ruler and “she would ask what did it add up to? and then instructed me to ring it up and make sure the till balanced”. He then laughs saying

- “my mind was equipped to do the math before the till was rung up, and that is how I got good at math. Without me realising at that point, my mom was teaching me something a teacher would not”

When he turned nine, his mom gave him the responsibility of managing the till and that was the defining moment when he realised how good he was with figures. He even got to sell the combination packs he made up which was exciting for him.

He attended Alexander Sinton High School and would often compete with his friends. “Whenever we wrote a test, everyone would be running to us to see what our results are and if I beat her (his friend), it was a big thing for us”. From a young age it was clear that Zahir was committed to achieving his goals. His grades were always good and when it was time to study, he would not allow friends to distract him unless they wanted to study together. This behaviour continued from primary school all the way to high school.

This competitive spirit inspired him to work hard and be amongst the top ten students in the Western Cape in matric, and being selected by a company called Deloitte and Touche for a full bursary and employment opportunity as an accountant after graduation. His father advised him not to take it saying “you don’t want to be obligated to graduate and work for the company, you want to be able to make a decision if you start up something on your own”. His father owned the business that he now runs at the time.

- “I knew I had the potential from working in the shop at seven with numbers, typing in figures on a calculator and cashing up on the till got me to a point where I wanted to study accounting”.

His father wanted him to become good at accounting to be able to understand the finance side of the business.

- “I said to myself that is a good reason for me to be great at accounting, to help my dad and at the same time to understand what is happening in his business.
- I wanted to become an accountant and I knew business is linked to accounting and that’s when I changed my modules on varsity to rather stream it on the business side and still graduate as an accountant but work around business modules and that’s what I done from second until my fourth year”.

That year his parents could no longer afford to pay his tuition, so he had to switch to part-time studies and went to seek employment.

d. Early Career Experience

Zahir's neighbour worked as an accountant and when she fell ill with cancer and could no longer work, she recommended him. He received a call on a Saturday evening for an interview and he was shocked, as he did not apply for the job. The man (Ridwaan) had an informal interview with him to assess how committed he was to growing and asked him if he was prepared to work from early in the morning until late in the evening. Zahir was smart enough to identify this opportunity.

- “I said if that's what it takes to get the knowledge of accounting that they don't teach you at university then surely I'm going to”.

Ridwaan, who he now regards as his second father and mentor told him to start the next morning. The next day he started at 8am and worked until 9pm with only a twenty-minute break to eat. Ridwaan told him that he would be paid according to how much work he finishes (value) and not per hour (time).

- “The pay I got equated to more than a salary, my eyes got big, the excitement kicked in as I realised this is the type of opportunities that are out there if you work for yourself...From that day I said I'm going to learn what it takes and what business is all about”.

He found full-time employment and continued to work for Ridwaan part-time. A year before starting at the accounting firm and during his final year at university his father started the business and invested all he could, but there were unforeseen issues so his father said he needed to learn more about the business. This taught him about sacrifice and resilience.

- “I knew that when I know what I want I'm going to push hard for it because I'm willing to walk out of movies and get out of bed at twelve the night to go do work when I knew it's worth the effort”.

He continued to work part-time after graduating and one evening he was asked to drop a client of the company at home. While driving and talking, she informed him that she is the financial director. When he mentioned that he had recently graduated, she asked

him to send his “C.V” to her. A month later he started a full-time job as a junior accountant reporting directly to her. The salary they offered him at the time was R10000. However, when working for Ridwaan, he could earn that salary in three days as he was paid for every set of financials he completed which made him understand the difference between working for a boss and working for himself.

e. Starting his Business

Zahir resigned from his permanent job as an accountant a year later, even though he had not yet decided what he was going to do. He took the time to think about various opportunities. He soon realised that his father had too much stock of plastic chairs and tables and started a hiring business. The business soon took off due to his genius business concept. He would hire out new tables and chairs and would ask for a refundable deposit. The day the products were collected he offered to sell the products at a low cost which was equal or slightly more than the deposit. He already made profit from renting it out, and the price was so good that 90% of the time people would end up buying the products they had rented.

He soon added crockery to the product line, included the service of cleaning, and also charged a delivery fee. The business had four revenue streams and he sold it after two and a half years to purchase his father’s business in 2015.

f. Entrepreneurial Learning

The more experienced he got, the faster he was able to complete financial statements and the more he could earn. He had learned so much that the new company were impressed as they could not understand how a fresh graduate knew as much as he did. He continued to work full-time for this company to acquire corporate experience and understand how they managed their business. As a result, he learned the difference between doing accounting and how to run a business using his knowledge of accounting. This was the experience he needed to make a success of the business he would one day start.

He used the profit he made to purchase his father’s business as he knew it had major potential but was run incorrectly. He then introduced strategic business methods and made it profitable within two months. Within two years he “could invest money to

revamp the store and it attracted new clients”. The store became more popular, and during the Covid-19 pandemic he purchased a warehouse.

What Zahir learned and admired most about his mom, was the fact that she was a “people’s person” and could close deals easily as people trusted her based on her personality. Thus, when she made a recommendation, people would not question it because they knew that she is a lady of her word.

- “My mom inculcated the honest way of doing business and my dad inculcated the straight and honest way of doing business. My dad would always want me to think big so if I’m looking at making R3 profit he would say you are only selling 10 and making R3, profit why not make R1 profit and you could sell 1000”.

This way of thinking led to his decision to purchase a large premises to open a wholesale business and incorporate these different business tactics into the business; he proudly says “everyone speaks good about the business”.

The year that Zahir first worked for his father, he was employed as a labourer and had to load customers’ vehicles with chairs and tables, and also assisted with deliveries. He realised that there was no structure in the business:

- “I think that’s why he never succeeded as it wasn’t well thought through. However, the ideas were brilliant but at times you do need financial backup so he had the biggest ideas in place, but due to financial restrictions, nothing could be implemented”.

After resigning from the accounting firm, he started the ‘hire or buy’ company. At the time the business did not have a name and he only hired chairs and tables on Gumtree. It took him eight months to save up R5000 to purchase crockery to add to his product range, and he then registered the company. He says after that “everything just happened for me, the business went from 0 to 100 in only three months, I started making money, I got to a point where I had 15-16 deliveries a day over a weekend”.

He captured the market with his competitive pricing and how he positioned this business. “After people hire it, they buy it” because I would sell it to them for so cheap”. The strategy was the refundable deposit and business psychology which he learned at varsity. “You don’t feel like you lost something after you depart with it”. Hiring out the at low prices attracted customers, and thereafter, he was making 100% profit. The

revenue streams were hiring, selling, delivery cost and washing and cleaning of the crockery.

He had two employees at the time, but he managed the business in every way, from taking customer calls, deliveries, quotes, and advertising. The business grew rapidly and he acquired plenty of stock to cater to any function. He also contracted with two companies that eventually bought over the business with all the stock.

He sold the business to purchase his father's business after his father was unable to find a buyer for six months and used the money from the sale of his business to purchase his father's business as he saw there were bigger opportunities.

- "I realised a business only grows with a person that has invested interest in a business, and no other person I pay a salary to will have the same invested interest".

He knew he could make a success of this business as he realised that he had the resilience and was prepared to do what needs to be done "if I put that extra effort, the reward is equal to my efforts".

The first thing Zahir did was to visit every takeaway business in the surrounding area. He offered to supply them with any goods they needed at the same price they were currently paying. This did not have the expected impact due to their loyalty to their suppliers. Two months passed and things did not go as expected. Zahir then went back to each business owner with a new strategy. He told them that seen that they were a walking distance from his shop, if they ever run out and require anything his business offered, they could send staff to collect it, and pay month end.

This strategy worked as every business owner ended up running short and sending staff to collect what they needed. After a year he changed the concept and negotiated new business terms along with revised pricing. Building rapport and relationships with business owners takes time, and he recognised the importance of establishing those relationships as these are repeat customers are in close proximity. Their loyalty did not only bring in their business, but word of mouth would encourage others as well.

g. Personal Theory and Motivational Factors

Zahir believes that having employment experience and a good mentor, changed him. Understanding why you are doing something, is what sets you up for success. This became a critical moment when he realised what he needed to do to become successful.

Ridwaan would often ask him “what is going to make you different in university? How are you going to stand out as the golden boy?” Ridwaan further added “instead of learning what the teachers are trying to teach you, teach the students what you know”. At the time, however, Zahir did not understand that is how he excelled in accounting.

- “The way I applied myself was different as I had experience of the working world. Going back made me hungry to learn and greedy to obtain the knowledge that I can implement in my life that will make the difference between you and I”.

The realisation of how acquired knowledge can be implemented in his father’s business as well as his own when the time came, gave him the motivation and energy he needed to work hard and become one of the top ten students in matric and being offered a full bursary by a big corporate firm.

Zahir has also learned to remain humble – “I know a number of business people that were mega wealthy and lost it all, because in their mind, wealth is what you can show others. Observing their mistakes, I’m not one to be driving the most expensive cars”. Rather, one should “stay humble and keep your feet on the ground, treating people fairly and equality is important”. Zahir is resilient and is prepared to make the necessary sacrifices:

- “I regard myself as a workaholic but only because I find so much enjoyment in my job and what I do. It had a huge impact on my marriage because I was driven and wanted to become successful; and did not acknowledge that I was married and couldn’t give enough time to my family”.

He acknowledges the need to find balance in his life.

- “I want to work hard because it’s my passion and what I love doing but I need to find a balance”.

He acknowledges that the more time he makes for the business, the more rewards there are. He has therefore employed more staff and is handing over some responsibility and is hopeful this will reduce the workload and free up some of his time.

He would then encourage people to find a career and experience life as an employee before going into business and to believe it is possible. “Take that bold step and have faith and courage and full determination that you can make it; don’t doubt yourself, only take in the good of what people have to say, make sure you are strong enough to keep your distance from those that are not happy for you, make things happen, it is possible”.

h. Lessons from Entrepreneurial Parents

Zahir was fortunate to be raised by parents who were both experienced entrepreneurs and who made sure that he understood what it meant to run a business from a young age. His parents made sure that he understood and lived up to being honest and trustworthy.

- “My dad would repeat over and over and emphasise it. Don’t tarnish your name. you can take forever long to create something, but mess it up once and that could ruin everything.”

His father made sure he understood that it can years to grow your business, but “one lie or one mistake can defame your name”. His mom made sure he always does straight and honest business – “You don’t shortchange anyone, and you create a name that is trusted by everyone”.

These important traits are how he managed to grow the business.

- “If I owe you a rand that rand will be due and payable to you some way or the other even if you tell me to keep it; it was not earned so I will not keep it”.

His parents also encouraged him to seek knowledge to make better-informed decisions. His parents were wealthy but lost everything when he was six years old, and would have lost their house as well if it was not in his grandmother’s name. Zahir felt burdened with his parent’s financial problems for most of his early life. He does not recall what their wealthy life was like due to him being so young, but he saw pictures

of holidays they went on and was told stories by his older siblings and family. This changed his perspective and became an inspiration “I want to at least work hard to have something to give my parents again one day and that was my inspiration”. He proudly says that

- “They had it all and lost everything and they are still the same people. They still kept their name strong and even though they had nothing, they still wanted to give us everything”.

His father had a property portfolio with plenty of properties, a development of his own, several businesses, and he lost it all. A friend of his father assisted his mom with opening a stationery shop twenty-eight years ago which she managed for six years, before passing it on to his eldest brother after finishing matric.

i. Active Learning

Zahir believes in reading, mentors and acquiring knowledge to grow –

- “I have a map of my vision but I don’t have an actual map. I have a vision in my head, I know how I’m going to do things and where I need to be, those ideas are in my head”.

He does his financials using Excel as that is how he was initially taught by Ridwaan and how he feels comfortable applying it to better manage his business. The other software tool he uses is Photoshop to create posts to advertise. He has been using it since day one and said “I’ll capture and turn a picture into proper art in ten minutes and it would be ready”. He traded an old computer while still on varsity for the full Photoshop version and still uses the same laptop and software in his business: “I know its outdated, but it works for my business”.

When making decisions, he firstly asks his creator for guidance to make the right decisions, and when his gut feels right he then discusses it with his parents, and he is ready to take action. He then shares his plan with his accountant, Ridwaan, who would always present him with worst-case scenarios for him to consider and prepare for. These various scenarios make him prepare and go prepared to show everything he has considered, and how what his strategy would be for any given scenario.

- “I will prepare everything perfectly and then Ridwaan would come up with a hundred things wrong with it to make me understand this is what you are still not prepared for”.

He also consults other businessmen in his network - “I also consult with a number of successful business people and I say successful because I want to understand how they got successful and I want to learn from these people and I don’t have a problem learning from a failing business person because I can learn from his failure as well.

The only other local business offering the same products is the Crazy store, which follows a similar business model. He recognised who his competition was, and made the effort to understand their business model

- “I learned from them, I walked in their store every day because I knew that their concept works and there was no other store that opened up that amount of branches in five years as them. The only way for me to understand is to see and read up the functionality of their business”.

He is proud of the fact that during the pandemic his business thrived while the Crazy store in the mall where his business is located, closed down. He says that he has learned from them and diversified his business. The main products are plastic ware, and he also sells toilet paper, homeware and glassware.

Zahir has learned that cash and quantity allows him to negotiate and get the best deals for his business. He negotiates to gain the best discount and then offers that discount to his consumers to let them reap the benefit. This concept has even brought in wholesalers as customers because cash flow is important to them. He always remembers his mother’s words “small sale, big business”. He only really understood what that meant when he became an entrepreneur. It is better to have smaller margins and repeat customers:

- “Imagine having five customers making R100 profit, now imagine having 10000 customers and making R10 profit. That is big business and that is what my mom instilled in me”.

The business started as a retail store selling bulk to a few customers. Since acquiring the warehouse, larger quantities can be purchased and stored. It also makes business simpler. Before Zahir would have to buy from the manufacturer and then drop it at the

customer. Having a warehouse allows the manufacturer to drop off goods and the client can then collect at the warehouse.

j. Known Capabilities

Zahir and his varsity friends discovered how to leverage one another's skills for the benefit of the team. They would allocate the person who best understood a subject and teach it to everyone. He was good at accounting and that became the subject he taught them, and the one he mastered through teaching them. One of another friend's father was a big businessman and he would teach them what his father taught him in business and that is how they all managed to succeed. The interesting thing about this is that "eight of those ten students became entrepreneurs". Another key lesson he learned from his mentor was that "it is good be the one to lead". He therefore seeks knowledge from successful businessmen.

He has structured his decision making in the following way. He would take time to strategise, ask God for guidance and when something feels right, he would then discuss it with his parents. His mind would then be made up, but he would also discuss his ideas with five other entrepreneurs that are close business associates and also friends. These are the people he considers to be his mentors and are all over twenty years his senior.

- "They have much respect for me but it was earned over the years. They recognise you as a guy that is hungry to learn and a guy who wants to make a difference in society, you want to grow bigger to create jobs for others and ideally that's what it's all about".

Zahir is not driven by money, but is committed to helping people put food on their table by selling his products. When someone purchases products to resell, he would sell it at a reduced price, whether they purchasing one or a hundred products. When the business does well –

- "I reward my staff and we all grow and benefit, that's why I have one of my staff for 11 years, and another for 7 years; they are loyal committed and happy staff and every morning they look forward to work".

They regard one another as family, and he is often invited to family events. His father was the wise one who instilled this in him and he always said

- “Your business is not about you, it’s a team effort. Don’t for one second think what you accomplished is because of you; it’s not just your hard work, it’s your staff that you train to work the way you want them to and that is why your business is successful, through their hard work”.

He still does all the back office activities such as stocktaking, deliveries, receiving and double checking to ensure everything balances. When making deliveries he does not tell people that he owns the shop. He therefore uses one of the following titles, the buyer or driver for a business. “When some people know they dealing with the owner, they find it easy to negotiate prices even though it was initially discussed”.

Zahir believes in seeking knowledge and reads all the time. He has shifted his focus to articles that focus on how to take your business to the next level, and lifestyle and decisions made by entrepreneurs as you can never know enough, and should always focus on improving. He no longer read books as he believes that time spent reading a book, could have been used to make money.

Zahir recognises that there is so much you can learn when you open to learning and developing yourself. He learned more working with the financial director at the corporate accounting firm in one year, than he possibly could at any other firm in ten years. He applied himself, working hard and absorbing every lesson he could, to best structure his business.

- “I worked under difficult circumstances with her and that taught me a lot, the more you do the more work they give you. Even if I had to stay behind an hour, the deadline was always met”

It was his duty to ensure the work they entrusted him with was complete and that he was capable of fulfilling his responsibility.

- “What is important to you and how it may benefit you in the future. I knew it’s about me understanding what their business is about so when I one day open my business, if ever I get to grow so big, I will have the knowledge and experience”.

k. Relationships and Networks

One of the most impactful mentors in Zahir's life is Ridwaan who would often say 'think of how you can be different, how are you going to be the golden boy'. He encouraged Zahir to work hard, graduate and told him that when he felt that feeling of accomplishment, he should use that positive mindset and energy to go out into the world and get what belongs to him.

- "Having him be so hard on me is something I can be grateful for".

Ridwaan still expects him to discuss every decision with him to ensure he makes the right decision. Having access to a network of business owners is not as easy in Zahir's opinion.

- "In most cases meeting a successful business person is usually when you have become successful as you are then recognised by certain people".

When his company grew and he started making big purchases, it created some attraction. "It becomes a magnet to people and I realised the quickest way for me to grow is to deal directly with business owners". Zahir therefore only purchases products from companies that can supply him, and this is how he grew his business network. It allows him to deal directly with the owners of the business and this way, they can compromise and negotiate mutually beneficial relationships. Building relationships with suppliers through personal interaction is crucial as suppliers want to deal with a supplier. When there is a product he knows will sell well in his business, he ensures that he can supply that supplier with something as it creates "a mutually beneficial relationship that lasts".

- "I listen to them and they say when they were my age it was all about them, but the nice thing about me is that I'm always making it about how I can help others and make opportunities available to others, and that is one of the core concepts of my business. Because I get things at such a good price, I hand it over to those households who don't have sufficient income to cover their household expenses".

He is proud of the fact that his business allows others to start businesses as well. "Some of the same people come in a few times a day to buy and sell and come back

to buy more after making profit”. Zahir attributes this business model to his success. There are many opportunities for people buying in big quantities, but he is there to help out smaller businesses.

I. Situated Learning

From a young age, Zahir realised that his family needed him, and that there was a way for him to add value to the family business “my dad needed a son to do the accounting side of his business, and I said to myself that is a good reason for me to be great at accounting to help my dad and at the same time I was helping myself to understand what is happening in his business”. This realisation of how he could contribute to the family set him on a path to excellence. With this mindset, he chose to absorb all the information he could at university and implement it in his father’s business. His development happened in time:

- “When I done the financials I could tell him daddy’s selling price is right but your profits are not going to work. The deficit will not allow you to survive another three months”.

He would advise his father “even though the financials are stipulating the business needs to go with that price let’s drop it by 40% before we forced to close the business”.

The interesting part of this story is that his father was given the following advice by his accountant: “if ever you want to start a business for your son, get him to study accounting because the most successful business people are accountants”. This same accountant, now assists with his books and has become a mentor and close family friend.

While working for his father as a student, Zahir earned only R1800, and therefore looked forward to the day he finished his studies to earn a professional accountant’s salary which he expected to be huge. However, when he acquired his first full-time job as a junior accountant, he earned only R10 000. The thought then crossed his mind “how many years is it going to take before I start earning that money”. As an accountant, he could do the necessary calculations that set him on his new path –

- I did the math and realised I could make more than R10000 per month, easily, if I apply myself and I made the decision I want to be an entrepreneur, because

I knew that the salary I earned would not be enough for the type of lifestyle I know I can live”.

Zahir resigned a year later and started his hire or buy business. At the time he was young and staying with his parents when his father decided it was time to sell the business. It was on the market for five months and there was no buyer so his father decided to reduce the price by 30% as the business would go bankrupt by the following month. Zahir decided to sell his business and purchase his father’s business for the full price as he saw the potential, and also did not want his father to lose the business. He did not have the full asking price, but he paid his father a lump sum and his father allowed him to pay off the difference.

After purchasing his father’s business that was running at a loss, he did not have a vision, but saw the potential and knew he was capable to make it a success. His resilience was self-evident:

- “I believe in my ability to work, I had a lot of faith in myself, I’m self-driven. I didn’t need someone to push me. I knew with the sacrifices I would see the reward”.

The strategy Zahir came up with was to get to a point where multiple companies could feed off one company. Even before purchasing his warehouse, he would assist people in the start-up phase of their business by supplying them with products at a competitive price that allowed them to make a profit to put food on their table. As he said

- “For me every deal that is a good deal and an honest deal will have blessings in it, helping the next person out like that every day is a blessing that I thrive on”.

Zahir has no recall or experience of Apartheid, however he recognises that his business may have been affected if we still living in those times.

m. Situated Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Zahir identified new opportunities as a result of the pandemic - “I am where I am because I’ve grown so much because of Covid”. He has a large database of suppliers and when personal protective equipment (PPE) products became compulsory for every business, it was very easy to source the products from the right suppliers to sell

it at the right price. Everyone needed hand sanitizer and face masks, etc., and his business had stock of everything. Recognising that the pandemic would be around for a while, Zahir purchased in bigger bulk than ever before and this is what made his business a household name. He also stocked up on toilet paper and this opened an opportunity for him to become a distributor of a very well-known brand.

“I had the foresight to know what would happen based on what was happening internationally” so he decided to stock up on toilet paper and other essential products. Fortunately, his eldest brother has a car dealership that was closed due to lockdown and his brother said he could use the space to keep as many products as he could fit in. After every business ran out of stock, people knew there was a small store in the Northern suburbs that would have stock. This is what exposed the business name with this big toilet paper brand.

He made new contacts and customers who he could expose to his other product line items and started supplying these companies with a huge variety of products such as masks, sanitizer, toilet paper, and hand wipes. “The pandemic made me a lot of money in a short space of time”. While the business was closed for two months he received government funding that covered 60% of employee salaries. However, due to him selling essential products he was issued with a permit to trade. He believes that what sets him apart from other entrepreneurs is that

- “I enjoy the interaction with people, especially the business owners and they are all older than me. I enjoy sitting and listening to them and that on its own is a strength when they talk about their life experience and I absorb that and try to implement what worked for them”.

He also believes in treating people fairly because he was an employee and knows what it is like to work for someone “when people don’t appreciate your efforts” and learned “to treat people from the sweeper all the way to the top equally”.

He is a team player as has been from his “days of varsity, I always enjoyed studying together and working together in a group, it enhances your understanding of how the next person thinks, we think differently and we need to learn to understand one another and be open to learning from others”.

He is proactive and does what feels right, but recognises that this is not always to his advantage. “I remember a situation where I lost over R50k for not listening to my mentor”. He believes procrastination is a weakness for an entrepreneur and if something feels right, then he should do it. “Even with my website, I was told to shop around and I thought one day, becomes two days, and phoning around is procrastination”. Instead he made one call, got a quote, accepted it, and it was a done deal.

n. Conclusion

Zahir finds it difficult to separate his personal identity from his business identity. “When you are at a point in life where you always discussing business”, his family would sometimes ask him to stop talking about business. “My business is my passion, my enjoyment, what I look forward to every single day only because the more effort I put in the more growth I see”.

Many of his siblings and family members are in business and regularly engage in business conversations. However, none of his friends from primary school, high school, or varsity have businesses. “The more I talk business the more they sometimes pull away”. Ironically many of them seem to be in financial difficulty. He believes customers are critical to his success:

- “There is no business without customers, customers are beyond your staff, and beyond your suppliers and any entrepreneur knows that”.

He is most proud of the fact that

- “my parents are proud of me which is the best feeling ever and they now have the opportunity to get back to their level after having nothing... My parents can experience my accomplishments and my achievements - for them to live though this experience with me is a proud feeling. The MB 30 (millionaire before 30) was also a big achievement for me and something to be proud of”.

Zahir would like all his children to graduate from university as he believes it is able to set you apart from those who did not get the opportunity. “Graduation day was a big memory and that is something I can use to motivate them to study, and use my other father’s (Ridwaan) advice and say, be different; be a golden boy or girl”.

4.4 Life Story of Rezah – Case 4

a. Overview of Business Activities

Rezah currently owns a restaurant, and a transport business consisting of a twenty-two-wheel truck. He also buys and sells vehicles, and does corporate branding and promotional items such as pens, nametags, and books, and also manufactures clothing with corporate branding.

b. Growing Up

Rezah was born in Mitchells Plain and lived in Rocklands for 5 years, before moving to Colorado Park in Cape Town. His mom still resides in the same house and he often visits her and the friends he grew up with. “I’m still in contact with many of my childhood friends. I like to inspire, assist and help them”. He assists his friends by encouraging them to embark on business ventures and even coach them on how to make the best of their business ventures. Rezah comes from a family, consisting of his parents, three boys and a girl. The older two dropped out of school to assist in the business in order to feed the family. He is proud of the fact that even though they left school at grade eight and nine respectively, his sister now lives in Europe and owns two laundromats in Cape Town and other successful businesses, and his brother owns a transport business.

His mother became an entrepreneur when she was thirty years old. She used to work at a pharmacy, but eventually got tired of the corporate environment and opened her first stall in Town Centre selling small gadgets and a variety of other products to provide for her family. He laughs saying “I was introduced to business since birth”. His father worked as a truck driver all his life and also has a business. In his spare time, he would buy and sell vehicles. This is where Rezah learned about cars and became very passionate about them as he would often help his father. He also learned to spray cars and work on them. All his aunts from his mother’s side are business owners. He also had an uncle from his father’s side who became a very successful businessman and was a huge role model to him in his early childhood.

c. Education

Rezah attended Highlands primary and a public high schools. He was inspired as his “business teacher in high school was very passionate about business and would do visioning exercises with us”. “Whenever I did this exercise, I always saw myself sitting behind a desk with a suit on”. While he never understood it at the time, now he realizes that he was destined to be an entrepreneur. In matric he did a small business management NQF 4 course and still finds that information useful and relevant to his businesses today. He follows the principles he learned then and this has helped with strategy creation, understanding the various demographics and being able to do market research.

He wanted to study Information Technology (IT) and registered at CTI Education Group, as he had ambitions of starting his own IT company. However, when his mom was advised the first year would cost almost R150000, unfortunately, he could not pursue that goal. He enjoyed reading while growing up and was always interested in motivational books and books such as ‘Rich Dad Poor Dad’ and ‘7 Habits of a successful person’ and other motivational books that provided useful information one could incorporate in one’s life. However, he does not have the time to read anymore as his businesses keep him busy. He has however purchased ‘the 5am club’ that he plans on reading.

His siblings have become successful entrepreneurs even though they dropped out of school in grades six and seven. The experience of assisting their mother in the business is how they developed their entrepreneurial ability. He therefore does not believe that formal education is a requirement for success, as “it is all about your mindset”.

d. Early Career Experience

He started working at Edgars part-time when he was in matric and was made permanent after he matriculated. After working at Edgars for a few years, he found employment at a company called MindfilSA, which was a United States company that had a contract with Delta Airlines. He was happy with the salary he was earning at the time and was promoted to training his peers. This was the position he enjoyed most, but unfortunately the company retrenched staff and he started looking for work elsewhere. He found employment doing technical support at Teleperformance for 3

months. This was a lower position and he was struggling. He then worked for MultiChoice for a year-and-a-half doing customer service and technical support, while doing business on the side for extra income.

“I was still buying and selling cars, and cellphones and laptops, anything I could get my hands on. Sometimes I would have to phone in to say I’ll be late or take time off knowing I’m going to sell a car and make R15000 or R20000”. When he informed his manager about his business activities, “she told me from the day I hired you, I already saw that about you, that drive, that you don’t belong here”. A few weeks later the manager called him in a meeting and cried when she told him “you don’t belong here, you need to go and do your own business”.

He then found a job at Stream Global Services at a warehouse when they took in three hundred people and within three months, he aced everything. “I was focused and driven to get to the next level”. He wanted to get promoted to management for leadership experience. Eventually, when his manager was assisting in another position he was given the responsibility of coaching a team of twenty people and doing their performance reviews. He had to listen to their calls and tell them where they going wrong and help them learn and develop. His manager was promoted and as it looked as if he would finally get promoted, the company lost the campaign and closed down.

He then started working at WNS and went back to an agent salary. This was a UK-based company and loading of his profile had to be done at the UK head office. After three months he was still unable to work. He accepted the lower agent salary because there was a performance bonus added, but they were not prepared to pay him the extra amount they initially agreed upon because he was not working. “I then told them the salary was not enough to feed my family and I resigned without even consulting my wife at the time, not even having a clue of what I was going to do”. He was fed up of starting over every time he moved to a different company and this became the critical event that inspired the journey towards full-time entrepreneurship.

Rezah’s fondest memory as an employee, was when he was awarded the responsibility for guiding and coaching the team. He was very passionate about helping other people reach their potential. “After only three months I was coaching people that were working eight years for the company”. When he learns and understand a product, he believes he has the ability to sell it to anyone. He develops

processes on how to make it more efficient by looking at it from every angle he could think of. He has a powerful and interesting entrepreneurial mindset that is able to comprehend the processes of any business and formulate strategies. Even more importantly, he has the characteristics of a leader who is able to guide and develop his staff.

e. Starting His First Business

Rezah helped his mom with her business and was paid R20 per week. This was not much, but it inspired his entrepreneurial development as he would think of ways of how he could make a profit so that he would have money for the weekend to go out with his friends or buy himself shoes and clothing. His mother sold a variety of items and he started doing the same. He took every opportunity available to purchase something at an affordable price and sell it to make a profit. He did so well that he purchased his first car when he was in grade nine which was the start of his vehicle sales business. He had a love for cars and “watching my father buy and sell cars made me realise that I could do the same”, and thus have the opportunity to drive any car he desired. All it required was to upgrade or buy a vehicle he was able to make more profit. He wanted too many cars, so he set goals –

- “I would like to drive that car by the end of the year and that kept motivating me to do better and to buy something and make a profit so I can move onto something better”.

He still does it to this day and said “I won’t stop”. Selling vehicles allows him to make a profit and also experience driving many of his dream cars.

f. Entrepreneurial Learning

Rezah was very good at learning from others and whenever he would take his car to be fixed, he would stay and watch them work. He learned many technical skills which came in handy when buying and selling cars. He also learned how they would quote their customers on parts and labour and this helped him understand how much fixing up a non-runner would cost. He would calculate the material price, labour price for his time, the parts markup, all separately and then work out how much it should be sold for.

The business that he is most proud of is his restaurant. He built the business from nothing and came up with every recipe himself, along with his kitchen crew. He has however reached the point where he stepped back and employed a manager. “I used to work as a waiter, or in the kitchen making burgers” but he was not setting enough time aside for marketing and other processes due to being too engrossed in the business. He currently oversees the manager to ensure he does what he is supposed to. His senior chef was placed in charge of the kitchen and it is his responsibility to ensure he has control of his area, which includes staffing issues. Rezah’s main focus is to bring more people to the restaurant.

He has learned a lot in his youth and studying business allowed him to choose the right location and understand demographics. He learned everything else through experience. However, he has always had a plan in his head for every business he ventured into, but none of these businesses went according to plan. “I had to adjust the business when things did not work out”. For example, when he opened the supermarket, it was not easy to compete with Shoprite and he had to reposition the business to gain market share. The only business that had a formal, well-thought out business plan was the restaurant. Rezah has always believed in his ability to make a success of any business, and this gives him the confidence to believe he can make it work. He also has the resilience to make the necessary sacrifices to ensure the success of the business venture.

g. Personal Theory and Motivational Factors

His parents eventually got divorced and it was not easy for a single mom to raise three children. All the children were then taught the business and had responsibilities. After school he had to assist by standing in Town Centre selling various items, checking stock and cashing up. He would then assist his mom with cooking supper, and after supper all the children and his mom would cut, clean and package tracksuits for the following day. “I had to grow up and be the man and I think this played a huge role growing up”. He worked for an entire week, including Saturdays for R20. At the time he thought that this was so little money, but he appreciated it as he understood the family situation.

“Today I realise that that R20 made me the person I am today”. He soon learned to turn that R20 into R200 before Saturday evening in order to enjoy his weekend. He

was able to purchase the sneakers he wanted, or save it to “purchase things such as cellphones to resell and buy a motorbike. I was continuously growing the little money I was earning”. He purchased his first car when he was in grade nine, and kept selling it to upgrade and buy another while still at school. “What motivated me was being able to do my own things”. He only received clothing once a year for Eid. He knew his mom did her best and that was all she could afford. This motivated him to make his own money to purchase what he wanted to suit his lifestyle and said he worked very hard for it.

The uncle who was his role model was a true entrepreneur. “He started out selling monkey nuts and ‘slangetjies’ with a wheelbarrow from house to house”. Eventually, after all the hard work, he owned twenty video stores nationwide. The stores were very well known, and allowed him to meet famous actors like Jean Claude Van Dam and Jackie Chan. He recalls seeing photos of his uncle with many celebrities and stars he looked up to as a child. “He was just that guy for me, my type of role model and I wanted to be like him”. On Eid he would give all the children of the family a R200 note which was a lot for a child. “I keep telling myself of how he started and how he got to where he was”. He also owned many properties all over South Africa including two small business centres. “I remember a conversation of him telling my mom I’m buying this commercial property and all I need to put in is a R1000 per month” which speaks to how good he was at making investment decisions.

The entrepreneurial journey of Rezah started when he was very young. His mother is an entrepreneur and he was actively involved in her business from the age of thirteen. What clearly stands out is his resilience.

- “I am someone that doesn’t give up. I try to wake up every day with a new energy I did not have yesterday; I have to push further than the position I was in yesterday. I need to do things differently to push toward to the next goal”

He is resilient and prepared to stay up for twenty-four hours and work seven days a week to create something that will benefit him in the long run. He is often asked by friends and family why he works so hard and their advice is to take time off from work to relax. However, he made a commitment to himself to push with every bit of energy he has while he is young, so he can enjoy the rewards of his efforts by the time he turns forty.

h. Lessons from Entrepreneurial Parents

Reza's mother inspired him from a young age. "The key lessons I learned from my mom is how to save and how to use your money to work for you. I think that is where the lesson came in with the R20 per week". His mother grew up in difficult circumstances and is very down to earth. Even though her businesses do well, she does not drive an expensive car, but enjoys traveling around the world. "She prefers investing and giving to charities and orphanages". When his mom asked him to assist with her books three years ago, he was "blown away to see how she manages her money". While she never advised him to buy and sell products, observing her was enough to understand how to money work for him. His father's car business inspired him, and he learned to spray paint and fix vehicles, hence how his business of selling vehicles started.

i. Active Learning

Rezah is not one to make use of planning or management tools. However, he often goes through the notes and reflects on what he learned during the entrepreneurship course when he was in grade twelve. "I regularly go over the notes to keep my knowledge of the processes fresh". He never had a business plan with any of his previous businesses, but he had one two years before he opened up the restaurant. "I revised the plan twice as I was looking for the perfect venue and I had to consider the demographics of the various areas". What he learned proved to be very useful and helped with his strategy to make a success of the business. This is the only course or formal education he had aside from reading motivational books.

As technology has advanced, he makes use of the internet to do research and better understand his business and the macro environment. "I do research all the time as I manage a variety of businesses". Everything else he learned from experience of managing many different businesses and he says he uses all the knowledge he gained over the years to make better informed decisions. He is proud of the fact that he started out with a R20 allowance and that is what set him up for success.

- "I had a wholesale business that I bought that was turning R100 000 per month, and when I sold it, it was turning over almost a million a month two years later".

His businesses were in different sectors and yet he managed to make a success of each one. It started with a Microbus, driving school children and employees. He built up capital and purchased a Toyota Siyaya taxi which he put on the taxi rank. He then built up cash to buy the supermarket, all while buying and selling cars. One of his secrets to identifying opportunities is something he learned from a teacher at school.

- “I am always doing visioning exercises to identify opportunities. One day I woke up and knew I had to find a supermarket and I started searching and found one in Mitchells Plain”.

Before purchasing the business, he went around to the competitors and evaluated their businesses to see how this business would compete. He noticed that the fridges of this business were empty, other stores were not selling ice cream or cartons of cigarettes, not even Coca Cola drinks, they only sold Jive soft drinks.

- “I saw this opportunity even though it was barely breaking even. I bought it for R150,000 and got in bread suppliers, got Coke onboard and Gatti’s ice cream and started wholesaling. I went to all the shops in the area to make them aware of the available products and offered good prices”.

Soon afterwards, the business started turning a profit. “I then bought a second Quantum and was looking to drive call centre agents, but that was difficult as the market was very competitive and people were dropping their prices very low to get the contracts”. He then put the second taxi on the rank a few months later. “I then purchased a car wash for R50,000 which is what the equipment was worth as the owners were eager to sell. I was still buying and selling cars at a bigger scale now that I had more funds available”. He now had the time, resources and capital to purchase accident-damaged vehicles.

Eventually, he sold the car wash and kept the taxis on the taxi rank, and bought a Toyota Dyna truck with the intention to resell. While searching for a buyer, Rezah decided to go around to furniture stores to find out if they were looking for someone to do their deliveries. He secured a contract with Eco Furniture, who were selling high-end furniture and he started doing deliveries for them in affluent arrears such as Tamboerskloof, Sea Point, Camps Bay, etc. Soon he was doing five to eight deliveries a day and he was driving the truck himself. He realised there was extra time in the day and advertised the service of removal and moving people from one house to the next.

These businesses were all doing well when he purchased his first property in Colorado Park, Mitchells Plain. The property had a separate entrance and double garage, which he converted into another separate entrance and the rent covered the bond installment. He received an offer for the delivery business and sold it to purchase a Toyota Avanza and started driving for Uber.

Rezah is an entrepreneur of note and is always looking for new opportunities to make money. He also does promotion items for companies including pens, nametags, lanyards, books, promotional materials with branding on etc. he makes “anything that can be printed on as well as making garments from scratch”.

He found the businesses that he wants to grow. “My ambition is to build the model, replicate and open more branches”. He wants to get the processes perfect in his restaurant and start replicating like a franchise. He recently purchased a fourteen-wheel truck on auction and ventured into a transport business, and wants to purchase another one as he already started acquiring contracts and worked out that “one truck can only do two trips a day. I am getting to know the port and learning to work out how to best plan routes to become more efficient”.

His father was a truck driver and he always thought about this as a business. He would search the best route and send the route to the driver to drive and monitor the distance and how long it takes at different times in the day. He has accumulated a wealth of knowledge through experience, and although he is new to the trucking business, the person who sub-contracts work to him, would call up to twelve to fifteen times a day for advice.

He is able to understand the processes of a business and make strategic decisions with ease. “I’m proactive and look at the long term to see how things could go wrong”. He is reactive when it comes to the day-to-day running of his businesses. After his kidnapping experience he prefers that people do not know that he is the owner “I don’t go around telling people this is my business, even if people ask for the owner, I will intro myself as the manager”.

The one thing that is clear is that Rezah is determined to make a success of every business he ventures into. “I use all my knowledge and experience from all the other businesses and bring it together”. He understands how to make his money work for him which is a lesson his mom taught him when he was very young, and is constantly

looking for new opportunities when he has accumulated capital. He also believes that he cannot fail, and gives his full commitment to making a success of every business venture.

j. Known Capabilities

When he was young and actively involved in his mother's business, he learned all about CMT (cut, make and trim). "I can make the t-shirt you have on, from cutting to putting it together". This experience helped him set up a business selling promotional material to corporate companies interested in having their branding on clothing, pens, books, etc. He contracts all the work out, but his understanding of quality fabrics, the processes, and cost involved in this business, is how he able to offer this service, while concurrently managing his other businesses. It was also a savings grace during the Covid-19 pandemic as he was able to sell masks when his business was not allowed to trade during lockdown.

Most of the key lessons he acquired was through experience. The business course he did when in grade twelve helped him understand basic business principles. This understanding and the belief that "I cannot fail" is what keeps him motivated to succeed. He has experience in a variety of diverse businesses and is able to manage them all. He buys and sells cars, has had taxis on a taxi rank and transported school children and employees. He has managed a car wash and transported furniture via a small truck and helped people transport their furniture when moving them to another house.

This experience helped him understand the importance of knowing the best route and best time of day to transport goods in order to be efficient and save on cost. He currently has a fourteen-wheel truck and is transporting goods on a much bigger scale. However, the experiences of all these different businesses assist him making better-informed decisions. "I use the experience I have of all the different businesses".

Rezah has managed a supermarket/wholesale business, which has allowed him to understand how buying in bulk can increase profitability and also the importance of having good relationships with suppliers. He also learned to keep innovating and thinking differently in order to make a business successful. He has purchased non-performing businesses in the past and learned how to make it profitable. When making

a decision to open a restaurant and hookah lounge, he was not even able to cook a meal. Yet, he created and selected every item on the menu along with his team.

k. Relationships and Networks

Rezah is very passionate about helping other people succeed; “I give my everything when I see the next person who wants to start a business”. Because he does not have a big social circle and network base, it took time before he purchased a truck and ventured into the transportation business.

- “I understand other people are not like me and withhold their intellectual property. I went from knowing nothing about the trucking business to knowing more than many people who have been in the trade for long”.

After a few months, “the person who is currently sub-contracting work out to me is learning so much from me. He calls me twelve to fifteen times every day for guidance but his been in the trade for ten years”.

He makes an example of someone who gives his driver off one week a month for working three weeks straight. Rezah suggested that he rather employ two drivers and let them each work two weeks and divide the month’s salary. This way he can increase his turnover by 25% for the same cost. The guy looked at him so surprised and said that he would never have thought of that.

Another example is when he was asked about a car wash idea. “I explained to him how to position himself in the market and today he washes up to fifteen trucks a day”. This man was amazed at Rezah’s ability to dissect a problem and come up with a solution so fast and he has developed a close relationship, which has opened the door for more opportunities, hence why he wants to purchase another truck.

He understands the importance of networking and said “I’m looking for networking events; I’m seeing many women in business networking events but not much else”. His networking consists of helping other entrepreneurs, but he does not have a mentor or someone he can learn from. He believes that there is lots of opportunity and that people should collaborate to make money together. When he received an order to print a hundred branded caps, he went to a supplier he regularly uses and she told him she cannot help him as she is too busy. He saw this as an opportunity as he is not busy all the time, and advised her to take on whatever extra work she gets and not

to say no when she reaches capacity. Instead, they could work together and share the profit.

I. Situated Learning

Rezah is always looking for new opportunities and it does not take long to make business decisions. “When I see an opportunity, I grab it with everything I got. I believe I cannot fail unless I set myself up for failure. There are times when I am so stressed or even feel like giving up, but when my tears dry up, I have new energy and come back with everything I have”.

This is why he is an entrepreneur, with resilience and the belief that he cannot fail, which keeps him focused on his goals and what it takes to achieve those goals. He is always looking at different ways to improve the business.

- “I will step back and look at the situation and walk around the situation ten times and I am able to see all the gaps.”

He then makes notes of the opportunities he identifies, analyses various processes and decide on the best approach. While he does not have a mentor, his spouse and family members are business owners and they engage and learn from one another. He also believes in his instinct when it comes to identifying business opportunities “I just know when I feel it in my gut”.

Rezah had various jobs, and he worked very hard and always gave his best. There were always employment opportunities but he believed that he was not progressing at the pace of his mental growth, and was capable of so much more. After resigning on the spot and making the decision that he was going to earn his own income, he went home and put his car, television and everything he had of value for sale, including his cellphone, in order to purchase a microbus and have money for fuel. He drove around to schools and asked parents if they needed transport for their children. He eventually got a contract driving school children, and another driving staff of corporate companies. This was how the first official business started.

To his surprise, it worked out and with this steady cash flow, he was able to look for more opportunities. After a few months, he was able to purchase a Toyota Siyaya super 16 taxi and went looking for a permit to drive on the taxi rank. He found one driving between Mitchells Plain and Cape Town. “That is where I started seeing real

money". He drove himself for the first two months to understand the business, but found that driving on a taxi rank in Mitchells Plain is not easy and comes with many challenges. He then employed someone to drive for him and later acquired another rank driving the Caravelle route in Mitchells Plain. After saving up some money, he purchased a car wash and a small supermarket in Mitchells Plain, while still occasionally buying and selling cars.

Everything was going well and his businesses were all doing well which made people jealous. Thinking back, he realised that it may have been the fact that his one taxi drove past both his businesses and said "I think people started noticing my movement". Gangsters in the area started threatening him to pay them protection money.

- "They would threaten me and my customers and would wave guns but I would not give in".

He would say to them "I will not give you anything, if you want anything from me, you have to take it from me". Rezah did not think they would come after him. However, he recalls that on a Monday morning in 2017 there was a knock on the door, and his wife at the time opened the door, let them in, and called him thinking they were his friends. With his one-week-old baby in his hands, he walked towards the people who came to visit to see who it was and that is when they attacked him with a fire extinguisher. He was helpless and had to protect his baby at all cost. "I couldn't even block as I had my baby in my arms and had to protect him"

After beating him, they took him out of his house and into their taxi. "They hit me, grabbed me, and choked me, and as they were driving away they said its only his wife and child at home". What really scared him is when the kidnappers said they were going back to empty the house, the safe, and take the four cars he had in the garage after they were done killing him. They choked him until he believed he was going to die. "I was praying thinking I was going to die. My hands were behind my back and this guy was choking me and I couldn't get loose and I almost gave up".

Luckily for him, the driver of the vehicle made a sharp turn and the man who was choking him from behind moved, and he somehow got loose and turned himself around. The man was still choking him and had him in grip, but this time he was facing the perpetrator and after a long struggle, he managed to break free and jumped out of

the vehicle while it was in motion. Fortunately for Rezah, there were witnesses, and the perpetrators then drove off in fear of being caught. After this traumatic experience “I moved immediately, sold everything and went underground and remained in hiding for two years”.

After a few years, he got divorced and lost everything in the process. He had to sell the house and moved back to the family home. There was not that much left from the sale of the property, but Rezah had worked on a plan to buy and sell cars to build the capital to open up the restaurant business.

m. Situated Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Three months after opening the restaurant and hookah lounge, the Covid-19 pandemic happened. The business was not on any delivery App and was closed for the first three months of lockdown. When his business was allowed to trade again, Rezah had to do all the deliveries himself and realised this was not going to work. “I kept thinking what can I do”. That is when he realised that he had suppliers and was able to source products at a good price. He started selling various flavours of hookah tobacco but it was not always easy and he experienced many challenges.

- “It was a very difficult time for me and I cried and told my wife I can’t do this anymore and I was ready to give up. I couldn’t handle the stress as there were times when I was short of rent and paying the staff and I had to make a plan and then I had to cover the hole I dug for myself”.

His mother had a Cut, Make and Trim (CMT) business when he was young, and he had learned all about it while working with her. During the pandemic, he used a network of machinists to start manufacturing masks with engravings and printing to sell to businesses. Soon he was selling a thousand masks per day. “I targeted companies and supplied to brokers who were selling loose masks”. He sold the masks in packs of one hundred and was outsourcing the work. He was familiar with quality material, how to print, and do embroidery.

- “Because I knew how it works it was easy for me to see the gap and make a business from it and this funded me to pay the rent and staff to keep the doors open”.

Rezah had to think differently and came up with a new strategy to get people back into the restaurant. People were afraid to come out and enjoy a meal at a restaurant out of fear of catching Covid-19. He was not clued up on social media and had to learn how to use it “to get more feet into the door”. He did not expect the pandemic to last as long as it did. People were afraid of being infected and he had to shift his focus to social media marketing. People were working from home and were stuck at home.

A year into the pandemic, he started offering specials and having comedy shows. He had international award-winning comedians such as Riaad Moosa, Daylin Oliver, and a few others perform at the restaurant, and the strategy worked. He now pays a social media company to do the marketing and promote various events, and now has an online presence, and utilises Facebook and Instagram to offer regular specials.

- “All these initiatives came as a result of the pandemic. There are still more avenues to explore, Covid has taught me so much”.

Rezah also realised the importance of cash flow during the Covid-19 pandemic. “Everything I did over the years was using my own money, I never applied for loans. The first time I borrowed money is after Covid to do over the kitchen and buy new equipment. It would take too long to save money and you lose out on the income the business could generate”.

While he borrowed money for the business, he now offers a breakfast menu which was made possible with the purchase of a new oven. The kitchen was also re-designed to make it more efficient for the food to be processed in a line so that a complete meal is produced quickly. While there is a cost to credit, the potential increase in revenue and speed of production adds value to the business. He could have achieved more and taken his business ventures further if he made use of debt in the past. However, he is proud of the fact that he achieved so much and had so many businesses that all started with a R20 weekly wage.

He has since employed an assistant to take care of his administration so he can go out and focus on growing the business. He recently started approaching companies to offer discount reward vouchers which they can purchase and offer as a reward to their staff. He has also approached Wikideals, Daddy deals and Crescent life. He laughs saying “before Covid I was only looking at walk-in business”. He is very proud

of the fact that all ten staff members remained loyal and committed throughout the pandemic.

- “I have a good team behind me and they work well, take instructions well and they have been with me from the beginning...I work with the motto if you keep me happy I will keep you happy”.

He paid his staff full salaries even when the business was not allowed to trade. He received government support of R50000 which is not much as there were expenses such as rent, salaries, electricity and water etc. They managed the pandemic well and there were no reported Covid-19 infections in the restaurant.

n. Conclusion

Rezah is most proud of what he achieved with the restaurant. He had to compete with established brand names and business owners that have been in the industry for over forty years. “The restaurant inspires me the most and I went through so much with Covid and to come back strong and the way I was able to turn things around and build a household brand where people can say I’m going here on a weekend”. People have good things to say about the restaurant and the food. He had never cooked in his life and he came up with all the recipes after acquiring the business premises. “It was all trial and error, there were more products on the menu that we removed because I could not get it the way I wanted it”. He tasted everything at least four times to ensure he got the taste he really wanted.

- “Coming up with recipes and being able to stand bold and say, you can go anywhere in the world and you would not find this kind of wings or mushroom source anywhere because this is our mushroom sauce”.

None of his business ventures were carefully planned aside from the restaurant. “I did my visioning and asked myself what I want to do next. I do a lot of hikes and outdoor activities alone where I can reflect in silence and envision possibilities and this is where I get my energy”.

When he makes a decision on what to do he is fully committed to achieving his goals. He teaches his children and tries to help them think like entrepreneurs. He spends time explaining to his children what he does and how he makes his decisions to help them better understand entrepreneurship. “When I see an opportunity I would explain

to them what I see”. He smiles as a proud father, saying “my daughter is ten and she already started her own business. She is picking up fast and is making books from scratch. She staples it together and makes fancy covers with different sections for notes and she is selling it at school for R10”.

He does not believe that you require a tertiary education to be successful, because “it is all about the mindset”. Both his siblings who left school at grade six and grade seven respectively, have built successful businesses. His other brother became head of IT for a company with a grade eight certificate. “People that have degrees would phone him for help and he could talk them through what they had to do”.

The most important quality to possess as an entrepreneur is resilience and the belief that you are capable and that you cannot fail. Rezah has ventured into so many businesses and made a success of all of them. Even after his kidnapping experience, he was planning his next business venture while he was in hiding. There will always be obstacles in life, but he clearly believes one has to make the necessary effort in order to achieve their goals.

4.5 Life Story of Alecia – Case 5

a. Overview of Business Activities

Alecia owns a real estate franchise which is part of a national business, consisting of sixty franchisees, ten of which are located in the Western Cape. She is also the only coloured female owner and most of the other offices are in more affluent areas. As the real estate business, depends on recruiting and training estate agents. She is proud of the fact that in the last fifteen years every agent that she employs started as an intern.

The main role of an agent is to market themselves to find sellers and buyers for properties. She provides them with a starter pack to ensure that they are professional and have what they need to become successful. While she previously employed as many as 23 agents at one time she currently has fourteen permanent staff members. When agents are new, their primary job is to secure appointments, and she or another

experienced agent will initially go with to their first interviews to mentor them. She also assists with listing, advertising and selling of the property.

b. Growing Up

Alecia grew up in Mitchells Plain and is the oldest of three girls who are seven and ten years younger than her. Her parents got divorced when she was fifteen and decided to stay with her mom, who was her role model growing up –

- “She was a very strong woman, she always worked, and she did well with the resources she had. She was independent and drove wherever she wanted to”.

Her mom raised her to believe that she should never be in a position where she feels trapped and dependent on a man. Her family:

- “Were very old school and maybe wanted me to get a job, or marry a rich man. I don’t think any family members thought a woman could achieve some of the things I have”.

Alecia does not see her parents as being entrepreneurial, although her mom sold Avro Schloan before she was born and she was told her mom did quite well. However, her dad “had an issue and she left it so I think she had potential”. Her mom later worked at Dairybelle and would sell bread and milk in the area they lived in to make extra money. She does not remember having a specific dream or career aspiration and could not recall any other role models while growing up.

c. Education

Alecia attended school outside of Mitchells Plain and believes it improved her perspective on life, and kept her away from many elements. She attended primary school in Athlone and a Catholic all-girls private high school. She started school young and was only sixteen in matric. Being the youngest in her matric class meant that she was exposed to older friends and this was to her benefit –

- “it gave me a kick start because I was young and very playful”.

In the first year of high school students were given textbooks, but the next year; students were expected to purchase new books. She learned how to sell her old textbooks to purchase new books the following year:

- “I had to learn to hustle very fast”.

She learned to do the same with her uniform, selling her blazer when it got small and adding money to purchase a new one. Alecia passed matric with an exemption and went on to study a three-year diploma in public management at PenTech, which was later renamed as The Cape Peninsula University of Technology. She was unsure of what to study and this was the only course available that she could register for. She was young and realised she would not get a good job at her age, and thought she might as well study and not waste time.

d. Early Career Experience

Not wanting to ask her parents for money, she decided to apply to job shadow at Edgars when she was in grade eleven. She was only fifteen when this opportunity presented itself. This was a strategic decision as she knew that if given the opportunity to show them her capability, they would offer her a job, and that is exactly what happened. Because of her grade, they expected her to be sixteen. She did this as she wanted to be independent and buy her own clothes. Even though she believed her parents were doing fairly well at the time, she would be wearing broken shoes and her school clothes were tight fitting as she was not the type to ask her parents - “I assumed that they would notice my clothes were small and thought maybe they didn’t have money to give”.

After her parents’ divorce, she moved to Lansdowne with her mother. She worked at Edgars for three years before resigning to work at a retail store named RJL Clothing in Parow, but this did not last long as it was too far to travel. She was very independent and this was no easy decision as she now had bills to pay. Pretty soon afterwards, Alecia was employed at Edcon in Cape Town where she opened accounts for new customers. She laughs saying –

- “I was only eighteen at the time, however I had the power to override the system if someone’s application was declined”.

After graduating from Pentech and wanting a new challenge, she went to an agency and was placed in the customer service department at Homechoice in Claremont, where she worked for three years. This is the time where she met the love of her life and her first child was born when she was twenty-three. They were not married at the time and she realised she needed to increase her income and so she started selling Avon for extra income. She often wondered when her “big break would come” as she always felt she was destined to achieve more.

- “I was too young to be promoted in the call centre as they wouldn’t take me serious; hence why I left”.

Alecia became tired of the call centre environment and believed that there was something better for her. She resigned when she found employment as a representative at a printing company. Sadly, she ended up earning less than her petrol money at the end of the first month and was really disappointed. While working at the printing company, she met someone that asked her if she had ever considered real estate. At the time she knew nothing about real estate but knowing that her current position would not sustain her and her daughter, made her decide to take the risk and resign.

She received R8000 from her pension fund from working at the call centre, and used the funds to settle her debts, and applied to become an estate agent. She used the remaining money to pay for her starter pack and cover her debts until she sold her first property. This took longer than expected and soon her funds were depleted. She had been independent her whole life and this was the first time she had to ask someone to assist her to pay her rent. This became a defining moment when she told herself “never again”.

Jason was the principal agent in Cape Town as the head office is in Pretoria. He was based the Ottery value centre at the time and was basically “going through the motions”. He did not have a plan for the business and Alecia was the one who created and implemented systems. “I was creating things we didn’t have”. Jason later saw the value she added to his business and offered her a fixed income of R2000 to come into office for a fixed period of the day. She was also the number one agent at the time,

and even though this income was very little, she was eager to learn. “I didn’t know it at the time but that was my training”. Once she had worked for this agency for three years she believed that she understood the property market and was able to achieve all her goals. At the time, she was the number one agent, and was eager to be on her own.

e. Starting Her First Business

How was it possible for someone so young, in such a competitive market, to purchase a franchise? She laughed saying “I was so blessed” as all the decisions she made had a domino effect, enabling her dreams to unfold. Her dream was to own the Mitchells Plain franchise as that is the market she wanted to serve. However, it was owned by Jason at the time. It went beyond making money, as she realised that this market did not understand the real costs of purchasing a property.

She bought her first house at twenty-three along with her partner which was no easy task. Fortunately for her, her dad was retrenched and gave her a R5000 which she claimed to be a salary and the bank approved their mortgage of R180,000 for a property in Bayview. After a year when this property increased in value, she accessed the equity and that financed her first franchise office in the Bluedowns/Eersteriver area. This did not go as expected and she eventually gave it back to the franchisor.

f. Entrepreneurial Learning

Alecia was hasty and excited to own her own real estate franchise. She bought the first available franchise in Bluedowns/Eersterivier area without doing her market research. Although she was doing extremely well working for Jason as an estate agent, she did not realise how different and difficult it would be to serve this new market. The business venture did not go as expected and she did not sell much due to not understanding the market at the time.

- “It was terrible! everyone was Afrikaans and I can’t speak Afrikaans, and they thought I was being disrespectful for not wanting to speak back in Afrikaans”

The problem was that at high school, she laughs “they taught us Afrikaans in English”. She later gave the franchise back and lost all the money she invested. She was the

youngest and only coloured franchisee when she bought in. South Africa became a democratic country in 1994, but change takes time –

- “it was known that white is better so it made you feel inferior”.

This made her feel like she had to act a certain way and talk with a certain accent to fit in. What she found strange is that back when she attended high school, all her teachers were white. She laughs –

- “it’s funny how we saw white outside of school and we never saw white at school, but outside was so different”.

Alecia proved that race is not a factor when you are determined to succeed and prepared to work hard toward achieving your goals. She soon outperformed everyone to become the number one franchise, and won many awards.

g. Personal Theory and Motivational Factors

Alecia’s mindset along with her business has evolved over the years and she reached the point where she wants to enjoy her life with the people she loves. She also realised that

- “Money is there to be made, my concept of money changed, from wanting to hold on to money. I was chasing my passion and that was having a successful business and being a successful agent.
- I want to work in my community where I can make a difference with people that have no clue, I’m not just making a comm (commission), I’m educating people and making a difference, its more rewarding”.

She enjoys a certain lifestyle, which she admits costs money, but working hard is how you earn certain luxuries. “If I want to go on holiday, I want to be able to” she laughs and adds, that she does not mean right away, but being able to save up to go to a place to wants to visit. “I also make sure I have everything I need in my house”. It is also important that her children are able to go to extra classes if need be, and are able to do what they enjoy, such as dance classes and sports etc.

The time she achieved the most, was when her kids were much younger and she says they do not even remember it.

- “I worked seven days a week, fourteen-hour days, and had a live-in nanny so I could be away a lot and work”.

She had a moment of realisation five years ago. Her children were growing up fast and she required boundaries with her business. She then made the decision to drop them at school, and fetch them herself. She also ensures that she is home for at least two dinners per week and does not work on Sundays. She understands what it meant to make this decision and can see it in her business performance. She used to be the top franchise nationally, but now she barely makes the top ten.

She said “the time I spend away from my business has a huge impact, but spending time with my family right now is what is important to me”, as her three daughters are all teenagers and they need their mom to be present. She even volunteers at the school they attend to make their experience at the school more enjoyable.

- “It affects my business, but now I’m a mother first and then a business owner”.

These days she is only able to spend three hours per day on the business working on strategies and marketing etc. “I’m not doing it blindly, I know the cost but they need me now, it’s their teenage years”. Her face lights up thinking of the amazing holidays she won back when she was on top - “I’ve seen so many places”. One of her proud moments was being nominated as the FNB and Nedbank property professional, where they would choose ten people out of all the agents in the country from all brands, and she made the final twice.

She says with confidence “I know I can get back there; I just don’t have the capacity as it will take from what I want to invest in my kids”. She is grateful for having the opportunity to start young and build her business to such a high calibre, that allows her to invest less time, but continues to do well. When asked if she would give control over to someone else to run the business for her, she replied

- “I don’t think anyone will look after your business the way you would, so I am a bit of a control freak. I prefer to be on top of things all the time”.

h. Active Learning

While at high school she recalls being chosen to attend the junior achievers bootcamp which ran over a few weeks. Students would be placed in groups of six from different schools and they were taught business principles. These students were handpicked and must have done well to be chosen to be part of the programme. They had to produce, package and label a product to sell. However, back then she says “I never thought I would own a business when I was at high school”. One quality she is proud of and recognises as a star trait, is her hunger to learn:

- “I am always excited to learn and still have that quality of how do I master my craft and what do I do next”.

She often read novels in her twenties which she refers to as “her best reads”. As she grew older and went through phases, she would read self-help books, motivational books and self-reflecting books on how to find yourself and become a better person. These books helped her learn valuable lessons in understanding herself and what she wanted for her life. It later progressed to videos and podcasts as times changed. By this time her life was very busy as she had three daughters by the age of 26, and this was her way of adding value when she drove out to see clients.

Two books had the biggest impact in her early twenties. One was called “Never give up” and it “shifted my mind to having the right attitude and mindset and pushing through no matter what”. The other was called “living above your feelings” which taught her the importance of doing what you have to do, despite how you may feel.

Although she became a franchisee when she was very young, the experience she gained as a result of her hunger to grow is what set her apart.

- “I knew exactly what do and how to do it. I was doing his UIF and his VAT and learning how this business operates”.
- “The hunger to learn and know more is possibly why I was rewarded with this opportunity”.

i. Known Capabilities

Alecia only did her first business plan after eight years, when it was required for her NQF 5 qualification. The advancement in technology changed the industry and there

are many more tools available now compared to when she started in 2002. All she received from the franchisor was a file which contained information about the business and a few templates on a CD - "it was very stone age". Everything she has learned was through her experience of working in the industry for three years.

She still uses some of the templates that she created while working for Jason. At the time this was an innovation that many agencies have now incorporated into their business model. Alecia admits to being very naive when she was young and made many mistakes due to not asking for help. She was a young female and got locked into long term contracts which cost her huge amounts of money. She laughs,

- "Sometimes they would sell me the world, then three months later I realised they ripped me off. I learned from my mistakes; luckily, they were not detrimental to the business".

She now does her research and would wait at least three days and acquire three quotes before making a decision when it came to long-term contracts. She admits to being very spontaneous early in her business and believed that if something could add value to the business, she would be ready to sign. She made an example of buying a Xerox printer without asking the price and would later find out that the model she chose was over two hundred thousand and then it required insurance and the cost would be much more than what she anticipated.

Alecia implemented routines in her business for all her agents to follow which took her time to set up. She worked as an agent and was the best agent at the agency she worked for, and therefore "I want to duplicate me because I want my clients to have my experience". She made a list of what questions to ask and what agents should take with them to client meetings "I captured all my mistakes to make sure they don't make the same mistakes I did". She ensured they understood how to take photos to increase your chance of a quick sale, how to build relationships with clients that would be long term, by taking a gift along, and even how often and how long after the sale to phone clients, to create a memorable experience. Many of her customers are from referrals of past clients.

- "I wanted happy clients, who are always diligently handled. My heart is really in being an estate agent, I don't enjoy the management side as much as I do working for my clients and helping my agents, I'm more comfortable there".

Even though Alecia is the owner of the franchise, “if I receive a call to my cell, I will do it”. She makes it her responsibility to take ownership and work as an agent mainly for past clients or referrals from past clients. This is part of her strategy to show her staff how to do business and make a customer experience meaningful. Not surprisingly, many of her agents have been with her for over ten years.

j. Relationships and Networks

While she never had a mentor after opening her business, Jason afforded her the opportunity to learn and develop all the skills she required to be successful in real estate. She also had the support of a best friend at the time who she met at Homechoice. She was managing an entire call centre and was doing exceptionally well.

- “She literally had a wealth of knowledge in corporate, she worked her way up, so if in doubt, I would call her. She sent me all the templates for the warnings and was key to ask for advice for staffing issues”.

Alternatively, she would learn from experience. The Regional manager who gave her the opportunity to buy into the franchise was her spiritual guide. He studied theology and helped her to identify shortfalls and change her mindset, decision-making, and perspectives on life and business. One of the skills she learned was to identify the right people to ask for advice, for certain key developmental areas which fast tracked her growth. After five years in business she eventually paid a business coach when she felt she had plateaued and wanted someone to hold her accountable as she was determined to “get to the next level”.

She believes that you can learn from people, and this could be “learning to do things like them, but also realising who you are, and how you would do something differently in your own businesses”. For example, Jason introduced her to real estate. She thought at the time, he was a good businessman, but he was money driven and a cut throat businessman. He had big dreams and would often say “I would rather drive a Ferrari and lose it than never experience driving one”. As a result, he took massive risks, whereas she has always been more conservative and takes calculated risks.

Alecia is a team player and was always happy to assist her peers back when she was an agent, and is always there to assist, guide and support her employees. She is proactive when it comes to legal matters, so she ensures her financials are done and that she has tax clearance and professional indemnity insurance. However, with the day to day running of the business she is more reactive. This is due to her experience and the fact that she has already put processes in place for the business to run efficiently. She meets with the franchisor and franchisees once every three months where the vision and strategies would be discussed and to keep up to date with legislative requirements.

However, she strongly believes that she built the company from nothing - “people know me more than they recognise the brand”. She does not network much with other franchisees or other estate agencies, although if she came across an opportunity in another area, she would refer it to the franchisee who covers that specific area, and they would do the same for her.

The most important relationship in her network is her attorney. She refers all her business to him and has been doing so for over a decade. When she initially bought the franchise, the franchisor cut the area Jason owned into two so she only got Mitchells Plain and the Strandfontein area. However, a few years later when the additional area in Grassy Park became available, the attorney helped her buy it. They are there to assist with anything property related, and the owner has become a personal friend.

Without them “I couldn’t have invested in the amount of properties I bought”. Although transfer duties are very expensive, knowing her capability gave the attorney peace of mind and she could buy properties and they would cover her until the property registered. She also refers to them as her “power partners”.

She believes in the importance of having a strong network within the ecosystem of your business. She has been working with the same bond originators for many years - “it’s nice to have that personal touch” as they also assist with training new agents to understand the financial implications of selling property, and to ensure that her agents are knowledgeable when engaging with customers. These networks ensure that every single customer has the same good experience.

She learns more from failures than successes, as those moments are hard to forget. Alecia also has also learned a lot from the failures of others. This is another reason why networks are important to her as they share valuable lessons so you do not have to make the same mistakes.

k. Situated Learning

The first real estate franchise Alecia purchased was not a success and she closed it and gave it back to the franchisor a few months later. Even though she suffered this loss, she saw it as a lesson she would not repeat again. She bought her second property at twenty-five, while working as an agent for Jason. It was a great opportunity as the seller was eager to sell below market value. In under a year, the property value had gone up by R300 000. Jason became frightened thinking of what could happen if all his agents left and decided to leave this franchise and buy into a different franchise model. This model was a 50/50 split in commission and in the other model agents would pay desk fees, but earn 90% of their commission. When she heard he was selling, she could not believe it “it was my dream, my dream, my dream! to own Mitchells Plain”.

He wanted to sell for over R200 000, but she was friends with a regional manager who advised her to wait. He eventually ended up giving the franchise back and she bought it for only R140 000 at the age of only twenty-six, and used the second property to access the funds to buy and carry this business for the next year. She then purchased a property in the Strandfontein area which faced a popular road called Spine Road and this became the new franchise office.

- “I realised that I had to lose and leave, and looking back, it seems like it all fell into place for me. I felt like the luckiest person on earth and called it undeserved favour”.

Being so young made it difficult initially as only two agents remained with her after Jason left, and they were both her friends. “I was so happy to turn 30 because I looked young and couldn’t wait to turn 30 as it seemed like you could do whatever you wanted to do”. She also felt that people would take her more seriously.

After only two years in real estate, she had achieved all her goals. She started out with no money and a child to support - “it was survival, there was no alternative, there was no thought that this was not going to work”. Back then

- “Real estate was for older people, wasn’t seen as a career, it was something you do when you retire. All you were required to do is intern for a year to get qualified”.

When the requirement for an NQF5 came in, along with RPL continuous learning, she had already been a principal agent for five years.

One of the many great qualities she has is her resilience. Since owning this franchise “I show up every single day, never spend a day in bed during the week ever, as if I’m answering to someone, and I’m always working hard”. She also understood that a business does not become successful overnight. “I would never have made it if I had to draw money. I had enough money to cover overheads for six months and was prepared not to draw a salary for a year”.

Being so young also made it difficult to manage people older than her. “I was playful and I would have to pretend to be this person and talk about KPI’s and how can I assist you”. She has matured over the years and is much more relaxed and composed. “I assist those who are serious about making money”. Many agents have additional streams of income and she does not feel like it is necessary for them to be based in an office. However, she strongly believes “If you don’t live it 100% you are setting yourself up for failure”.

Even though the business is commission based, there are costs associated with each agent. When choosing employees, she looks at their values and whether or not they are team players. One of the difficult decisions she faced as a business owner was having to fire a close friend. “He was using drugs and it spiraled up and I eventually had to fire him and as my friend, it was a terrible experience”. This is a decision she had to make to protect the reputation of her business due to all the complaints made against this person.

I. Situated Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Alecia's business was severely affected by the pandemic. The deeds office was closed for a few months, which meant that properties could not be registered and, as a result, agents could not be paid. Real estate businesses were not seen as essential, and had to close down for an undisclosed period of time. To make matters worse, Alecia went on holiday to Thailand and when the pandemic was declared, she was unable to leave the country for three months. Her husband was an essential worker and therefore had to take unpaid leave. "While we were there, business costs didn't stop, everything had to be paid". She laughed, saying "it was a miracle that we were able to sustain our household and the business with no income for six months".

She was quick to adapt to the changes the pandemic demanded and says it was due to her "hustle mentality, I had to make a plan" and she did. She received a call while in Thailand from a seller, at the time you had to be an essential worker to move around and fortunately, her sister was one. She sent her sister the offer to purchase, and called to explain how it had to be completed. Her sister got the seller to sign and sent the agreement back, and she was able to list and market the property with pictures sent by the seller. This is how she ended up selling two properties while being unable to leave another country.

Alecia admits that it took a while for the business to recover. When she arrived back in SA she relocated the main office as no staff were present, and created a small office space at home. This is how her business model changed and a new vision was born. She acquired software tools for all her staff to be able to operate from anywhere. She is now looking to set up little offices, or what she refers to as "satellite offices" at four different venues, that her agents can manage to create brand presence and help them network and expand their reach. Looking back at the pandemic and the way her business model had to adapt makes her wonder why she had never thought of implementing these changes before, as it is working much better than the previous model. This is her entrepreneurial attitude – she saw an opportunity and was fast to respond to the changes in the environment and adapted the business accordingly.

While in Thailand she applied for support from government to pay her staff a monthly stipend to help them survive, and she is currently paying off this interest-free loan. This

was the only support she received from government which she is grateful for. However, there was no mentorship or guidance on how to survive the pandemic.

I. Conclusion

Alecia believes that you have to love people and be service driven. When you are sincere and genuine, then you are able to build rapport and earn people's trust. You have to work hard, be resilient and your values are of utmost importance. She smiles when reminiscing on the days when she was in her prime and achieved all the goals she set for herself, saying "what you give is what you get, and I always wanted to be the best at what I do". She admits that it is difficult not being in the top spot, as she was the number one agent, and the number one franchisee year-on-year until she made the decision to put her family first.

Alecia is most proud of the fact that "I did not lose myself in the journey, not being big-headed about little achievements. I'm proud I could stay grounded". She looks forward to the day when she can share all her trophies, certificates and show her daughters the magazines she was in. "I've kept all the paper clippings, the write-ups as property professional. In the beginning there was a hype because I was young and coloured".

She believes that she is way too young to hand over the business, and has never even thought about employing someone to manage her business. "I must stay actively involved, I can't trust anyone else, and I'm too young to slow down". She does not feel the need to expand her area as it already large and believes that she is only achieving 10% of what the business is capable of. She trusts that her new strategy of setting up more satellite offices will enable the growth and expansion of the business.

4.6 Life story of Tasneem – Case 6

a. Overview of Business Activities

Tasneem currently owns two retail battery stores that specialize in fitting and supplying batteries for any type of vehicle. They stock forty variants and their main supplier is Willard. She also has a bookkeeping firm and currently has over fifty customers.

b. Growing Up

After Tasneem's parents got divorced when she was three years old, she would spend a week with her mother and the next week with her father who is a woodwork teacher. She refers to him as "the biggest hustler I know". He used to make wooden framed mirrors and sell them in Constantia. She wanted to be with him all the time - "From a young age I was following him everywhere. I'm the only girl and I was a daddy's girl and this became part of who I am".

She grew up between Wynberg and Pelican Heights. Her mother was better off but she preferred spending time with her father because she enjoyed the humble environment. At her mother's house, "there would be a cupboard full of luxuries". When she became a teenager she become more concerned for her father and wanted to look after him because he was alone. "I wanted to be around to make sure he was ok". She was down to earth and with her father, "there was no expectation to be someone that I'm not". Pelican Heights was a good area and people living there at the time were perceived as being well off. "All your friends lived in big houses and it was name brand everything". However, when she was with her father, they would eat what they had, even it was "Labamba beef on bread and maybe on a weekend we can have a KFC burger depending on how funds came in."

c. Education

Tasneem attended Timour Hall Primary school and Norman Henshilwood High School in Constantia. The motto at high school was "knowledge and integrity". "We had a principal that believed it's not about what you know, but who you become". They had strict rules such as no walking on the left side of the corridor; when speaking to someone, make sure to look them in the eye. These are qualities she believes are vital when growing up and she teaches her children that "It doesn't matter if you have a degree or a masters, if you don't have general courtesy". She was a socialite and never had one group of friends - "I was friends with everyone on high school especially".

She enjoyed having the opportunity to connect with a variety of people. Her son currently attends the same high school and "the culture is that it's cool to get good grades". The children would compete to see who gets the best grades in mathematics. She compared this to the culture at the school where her husband's child attends -

there “It’s cool to be disruptive”. She believes schooling is important for building a strong foundation and makes a big difference to who you become and how you treat people.

After she matriculated, she enrolled at the University of the Western Cape to study Accounting. However, she got involved with the wrong people, fell pregnant, and had to drop out in her first year to give birth at nineteen and raise her child. What she learned through tertiary education gave her a foundation, but did not help her as an entrepreneur. “I think the education system is geared to developing working-class people and not entrepreneurs”.

d. Career Experience

Tasneem wanted her independence and started working when she was fourteen years old at a hairdresser, washing hair in the afternoon after school. When she turned sixteen, she found a job in a retail clothing store until she finished matric. After having her child and dropping out in her first year of university, she went searching for a job in corporate. “I had to earn a living to support my child”. She started working at Netcash, and later moved to Drake-and-scully, a company specializing in facilities management for Sanlam, before finding full-time employment at Media24. They saw potential in her and the company offered to pay for her to continue her accounting degree at CPUT part-time.

As she was a single mother it was very challenging for her complete her studies. She also realised that she did not want to be “owned by the company” after finishing her degree so she dropped out after completing most of her modules. She then registered with UNISA which she paid for herself. She was good at tax and enjoyed her taxation modules and assisted her brother when he needed help with his tax return. He then referred more people to her and she decided to register as a tax practitioner with South African Institute for Tax Practitioners to do personal income tax returns. At the time she worked as a debtors clerk. She eventually moved to creditors clerk, and after graduating she became an assistant accountant for Leisure Books, which was part of the Media24 group.

The very first client that she assisted with bookkeeping, was the owner of a battery shop. At the time she had not yet acquired her qualification and was only doing general bookkeeping. He required assistance with his financials as he intended to sell the business. During this period, work had become very stressful. She had got married and had a few miscarriages, and her manager was not supportive:

- “I had a miscarriage the Sunday and my manager would tell me I have to be in on Monday as it was half-year end and I had to go to work”.

That was the moment she realised that the corporate environment was not for her:

- “The day I was in the lift with the CFO (Chief Finance Officer). I go to him all the time as he needs to sign off and commission documents for me. I greeted him in the lift, and he didn’t bother to greet back”.

She looked at him and it became clear that she

- “is a number on a spreadsheet they have to pay, I don’t want to be a small fish in a big pond. I could rather be a big fish in a small pond”.

Shortly afterwards, she resigned and bought the battery shop.

e. Starting Their First Business

Tasneem saw purchasing this battery shop as the solution and her way out of corporate. She went to her spouse and told him about this opportunity. Together they decided to purchase the battery shop and she went on to manage it full-time. She was desperate for a better environment and so excited for the opportunity she saw, that she neglected to seek advice. “I was young and naive. And only saw what they showing me and not what is actually happening”. They bought the business for R400 000 and she was only twenty-five years old. They were under the impression they had purchased a trademark and franchise as it came with no stock and R50,000 worth of equipment. They learned that the name and trademark was never registered and overpaid for a Willard distributor.

f. Entrepreneurial Learning

Tasneem’s entrepreneurial journey started when she was very young. She sold a variety of products from biscuits and chocolates and other random stuff in her youth,

then Avon, and Avro Schlain when she was older. Witnessing what her father went through brought about “a fear of not having”.

Her mother was never an entrepreneur but taught her the importance of working hard, giving that extra effort all the time in everything she does, and to being loyal to her business. “I do feel that these qualities are important for an entrepreneur but it’s not necessarily healthy. I find myself working as late as 4am when work needs to get done”. She is therefore not able to spend as much time with her children as she would want to.

After resigning from her job and purchasing the battery shop “The first 6 months was all downhill. I couldn’t afford to pay myself a salary, I was living hand to mouth and had cancelled all my policies to buy this shop and there was no income”. She also noticed that her staff was not ethical. She then fell pregnant and after having her baby, things had gone from bad to worse. Her staff was stealing and exchanging scrap batteries to trade with the guys from the delivery truck for different scrap batteries that they could use to claim new batteries from the manufacturer.

Tasneem was stressed out and worked on strategies to turn the business around. Just as things started improving, there was a burglary and they stole everything. There was nothing but a broken industrial charger left behind and they were already struggling financially. It was very difficult to get the business up and running as they were underinsured and only received R30,000. Business was really bad “I would get the cash for the day and use it to buy bread and milk”. It was a very stressful time and it placed an enormous strain on her marriage and eventually led to a divorce.

The business premises were owned by the person who sold them the business and she and her partner (husband at the time), were leasing the business premises. The business started showing improvement and turning a profit, and they invested in another battery shop also in Mitchells Plain. Seeing how they were progressing made the landlord jealous, and he decided he wanted the business back and decided to evict them. This was such a difficult time and they had to accept that they would lose everything. After all the hard work and persistence to make a success of the business, there was nothing they could do to save their business.

Fate had other plans, and one day somebody walked into the new battery store looking for the owner and when she introduced herself, he informed her his father owned a

battery shop two doors from where the branch was, and the shop had closed after he passed away. The landlord that evicted them then saw the opportunity and opened the battery shop. He then offered to sell the business premises. Tasneem could not afford to purchase the property and her spouse then purchased it. They acted fast and opened the store two doors away before getting evicted. Willard refused to supply her ex-landlord as they already had an established relationship. They continued to trade selling a German brand called Varta. Soon after, Willard purchased the company that sold Varta batteries and refused to supply them so the store eventually had to be closed.

Time passed and Tasneem remarried and so did her ex-husband. They eventually decided to each take a shop and because he owned the business premises, Tasneem had no choice but to accept the other business. This was very hard for her as she was the one that had made all the effort to make that business a success. "I eventually made peace with that" and she shifted her focus to applying her experience to grow the new branch. The business has since improved and she recently opened another branch in Grassy Park. "I know exactly what I went through with the previous store". She believes with all the sacrifices and hard times, she developed the resilience and patience to make this new branch successful.

- "I'm creating something for my children, I don't expect them to take over the business, but I want to know when I'm no longer there, that they have security".

As the price of property has increased tremendously, it will not be easy for her children to qualify for a home loan when they eventually decide to purchase a property. This additional stream of income can help them. "My son is fourteen, imagine what he will have to earn when he comes of age".

g. Personal Theory and Motivational Factors

At a young age, Tasneem was already independent and earning her own money. She wanted to achieve certain milestones and never hesitated to do what was necessary. "When I turned sixteen, I went to apply for my ID the next day" and "when I turned eighteen, the next month I applied to get my driving license". "I created that expectation of myself to myself". Her father made huge sacrifices to put his children through good schools. "When I was by my dad, we used to have a shortage of food and used to go

a whole week eating pilchards and baked beans”. Witnessing this made her develop “a fear of not having”. When she grew up and had her own household, she would “overcompensate, so I know there is food stored away. I think this is where the foundation of my entrepreneurial mindset came from”.

She is proud of the fact that, when she sets out goals, she will give her all to make it a reality. This quality was established at a young age.

- “I set out my goals, I told myself when I turn 18, I want to buy myself a car and when I turned 18, I already had a car”.

She would then set the next goal and work towards that. The advice she offers to people that want to achieve success is that “everything around you needs to tie up with your goals, you cannot have a dream without making the effort to make it possible”. She is most proud of her

- “growth and perseverance through all the hardships, and that I was able to achieve many of my goals. I’m proud to be able to make my dreams a reality one way or another”

and she has the resilience to keep pushing forward.

Another big inspiration growing up, was her uncle who also lived in Pelican Park. He was a construction worker and had the biggest house in the area. “He had a dungeon and a drive-in garage that went underground and the pool had a walk-in dressing room”. He used to sub-contract for big contractors and worked on the Canal Walk Shopping Centre and other big projects. He always encouraged her and her cousins to “look at the bigger picture, don’t look at how you are making money now, what is going to happen in the future” and this advice remained with her.

Her mother worked in corporate at Old Mutual and later moved to BP and managed the department that serviced the petrol stations. “She worked very hard to give us that luxury cupboard”. Often she came home when Tasneem was sleeping or would be on standby and work until 2am. Observing this behaviour encouraged her to work hard and make the necessary sacrifices required to become successful.

Because of her experience in corporate, Tasneem regards herself as “a very compassionate person towards my employees because I did not receive compassion

from my previous employers”. She believes that “if you have a family emergency you need to go home”. With all the difficulties she went through with her staff and the fact that they remained loyal and supportive made her realise that “when you look after people they look after you”. Her employees have therefore been with her for many years.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, business was slow and she could not afford to give her staff bonuses. However, she always finds ways to reward them, and on the anniversary of one of her employees “I booked him and his wife into a nice hotel in Caledon for two days and gave him extra time off to spend with his wife because I was not able to give him a bonus and that was my thank you to them”. Her experience in corporate left her with the feeling that “you are just a number and they will easily replace you”. This is not the experience she wants her staff members to ever experience.

h. Lessons from Entrepreneurial Parents

Her entrepreneurial journey was inspired by her father - “When I was 7 or 8 years old I started selling stuff”. Her dad would take her to buy frozen yogurt, biscuits, or cooking chocolate to melt, place in molds and make chocolate to sell. “When I was at school I sold whatever I could”. Her father used to collect money and make food hampers to sell at the end of the year and also bought and sold anything he could make a profit on.

Being a teacher and understanding the education system made him want his children to attend good model C schools and the school fees were very expensive. Tasneem says that she never understood at the time why he was always trying to sell something. However, upon reflecting she realised that he did this to afford the fees to put her and her siblings in good schools.

She enjoyed watching her father make the mirrors to sell. “I didn’t just go with my dad to sell the mirrors, I used to go with him after school to buy the material, I would sit and watch him cut the wood and cut the mirror and see what his doing, and I think that was fundamental and that is what taught me to do things right the first time”.

i. Active Learning

Tasneem was encouraged to read while growing up. “I used to go to the library every second week when I was young”. This was inspired by the model C high school she attended. “I still go out and seek knowledge”. She does not have the time for leisure reading anymore.

- “I read motivational books, and self-healing and self-development books and also articles. I have to read all the time as accounting practices change all the time and I need to keep up to speed”.

She completed most of her modules at UNISA but never graduated. Due to her experience, she approached the South African Institute for Business Accountants and they had a bridging course. “They would test your experience and knowledge and I went through that process to become a registered accountant. Previously I was doing bookkeeping and could not sign off financials”.

Tasneem has learned the importance of knowledge sharing.

- “I share all my experiences with my clients. The accounting practice started with me sitting and working on my bed, then the lounge. Then I put a desk in the lounge; eventually I created an office space and now I’m sitting with fifty-three retainer clients. I pride myself in using my experience to empower other people and help them through their business decisions”.

She asks them to share their dreams and ambitions and together they can work on a plan to ensure their business benefits them in their personal capacity as well.

She employs one junior assistant, and it was hard for her to let go of controlling everything. She recalls a story of one of her first clients who came to her with R900,000 of debt with the South African Revenue Services (SARS) because the previous accountant had associates doing the work and one of them submitted the tax return by only capturing inflows without outflows. She assisted with resubmitting all the company’s returns and eventually got SARS to lower the amount. However, due to this experience, she ensures that she double checks all the work herself before it is submitted to SARS, out of fear that it could happen to one of her clients. “I have made a decision to not exceed a hundred clients unless I onboard another accountant”. This

is the maximum amount of clients she is able to manage. The reason she chose not to become a chartered accountant is that is a stressful job and she wants to live a balanced life and have time for a run and also to spend more time with her children.

When the battery shop was in difficulty, “I realised that I could not be dependent on this shop for an income and had to reinvest the funds to grow the business”. She spent half her day focusing on her tax clients and the other half at the battery shop. “I would go in the morning to get stock, go to the shop to drop off the batteries, go to my tax clients and come home and continue working to make up a salary to survive”. This went on for months and Tasneem developed a high level of resilience. “I had to do this until it got to a point where I could place my weekly orders in order for batteries to be delivered...I tried to have at least one of each size”.

She got divorced as her husband was unable to sympathize or empathize with her and was not very supportive. Because they co-owned the business they maintained a good relationship for sake of the business and their children. When the business became profitable, they invested in another branch together, but after they both remarried, they decided to each take a business and end their partnership.

Tasneem has increased the marketing budget for the battery stores by utilising Google and Facebook ads, and by also handing out flyers at a nearby robot. This has increased business turnover and brought to light that there is another company with a similar name down the road offering similar services. She is faced with the decision of changing the name of the store as people may think they are one brand and go to their shop instead. “I therefore changed the name on the ads to Willard distributor, and that has changed the outcome”.

There have been many challenges and there have been times when she thought about selling the business, but when she thinks about everything she went through, it is hard to give it up.

- “This is my first baby and I’m therefore reluctant to let it go”.

For now, she is satisfied with the two stores and is focusing on growing the store in Grassy Park as the Mitchells Plain branch has become sustainable and profitable. She is thinking about changing the strategy for the business “my dream is to have a battery fitment shop that is completely dedicated to women”. She sees this as an opportunity

as many women do not like the environment as it is greasy and untidy and may feel overwhelmed and intimidated that someone is going to overcharge them. She would like to create a clean space with a coffee bar, television, and snack area where women can relax while work is done on their vehicles.

j. Known Capabilities

The battery shop is very basic and there is a clear process she created after discovering that some of her employees were stealing. Tasneem never had a business plan before purchasing the store and never bothered to create one until it was requested by Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), when she “applied for assistance with branding and marketing material”. They approved her request with a condition that she complete a six-month programme that included a mentor to guide and coach her.

- “When you study accounting, you are taught how to do accounting and legalities in tax but you not taught how to run a business”.

The mentor taught her how to develop a business plan, how to do costing, and the importance of marketing, and having a plan. SEDA saw potential in her and started sending work to her accounting firm. She currently assists informal traders with business registration, applying for funding, and guidance on how to do basic bookkeeping, and financial management.

Tasneem carries a book with her all the time to record important information, but; she admits that most of her knowledge and experience are stored in her head. When she learns important lessons from her business clients, she shares the information with her assistant in the accounting practice, in order for her to grow and develop from this knowledge. She also engages her staff to share her knowledge and experience noting that: “my assistant always takes notes and that is how she learns”.

The business only has one main competitor nearby that supplies and installs the full variety of available batteries. Her secondary competitors are shops that supply batteries as one of many other car products. The other advantage the business has over others are the prices. “We are cheaper than the spare shop but we also fit the battery you purchase and do the necessary tests”. With the accounting practice,

- “I pride myself on being different than any other accountant because I share all the knowledge I gain with all my clients”.

She believes many accountants submit tax returns without educating their clients. Whereas she takes the time to discuss with her clients and use her knowledge to guide them to make good informed decisions about their business. “I believe that it is my purpose to educate” and not many bookkeepers have that quality.

Tasneem only has one supplier and only supplies quality batteries.

- “I need to know that if one of my clients have a problem, they can come to me and I will sort it out”.

She tried other Chinese brands and build good relationships with their representatives, but the quality of their products was not up to her standard, and she stopped ordering from them. Hardship has taught her how to acquire and retain customers. Making that extra effort, and ensuring that every client has a good experience is what keeps her customers coming back and referring other people. This is how she manages her two battery shops as well as her accounting practice.

k. Relationships and Networks

Tasneem has a small social circle and her

- “clients are my network and my husband is an entrepreneur as well and we learn from one another...All of my clients are my inspiration, I learn so much from them”.

She shared some very interesting stories of how a few of her business customers grew small businesses into multi-million rand corporations. For example, one of her clients was renting a chair in a hairdresser and had high bills to pay. After working with her client for a year, the client was able to acquire a home loan and purchase her first property, a vehicle, and expand her business. “I would go in with a plan for her on how to better manage the business account, pay this salary to allow you to qualify for a bond”.

She is very loyal to her clients and if she requires anything, she would first approach her customer base for assistance in order to support them in return. “I like to support

my clients”. One client assisted with the shop fitting at both her battery shops and another assisted with her home renovations.

- “My biggest quality that led to my success is my compassion for my customer’s situation and going in with a mindset of, if this was my business, what would I do?”.

She would do research to increase her understanding of their businesses and ensure them that she is on their side. “I need to offer a service that only is uniquely me. I have customers phoning me that bought a battery from me many years ago and are still coming back”. If issues arise, she assists her clients to the best of her ability and will do more than what is expected. These qualities have kept every customer in her accounting practice loyal, and also how the business grew, “every client of mine was a referral client”.

Tasneem gave a few examples of how she builds such strong relationships with her clients. One client was approved for a tender and brought her the document to complete. This is not in her scope but she gladly assisted at no cost. Another client who owned a business that specialised with tours for Chinese tourists. When China was affected by the pandemic, there was no business and he soon lost everything. He kept applying and eventually won a tender for a mechanical shop servicing City of Cape Town fleet vehicles. “He was in Turkey and I told him to enjoy his holiday while I took care of everything for him to secure the tender and get the business ready”. His daughter-in-law called her one day in a panic when a vehicle pulled up, not knowing what to do as the system was not set up yet. “Because I understood the business I could tell her this is the process so she could calm down”. This client now regards her as family. Even when she goes on holiday, her clients would still call for assistance.

- “The problem I have is that I am not able to switch off or tell my clients not to phone me at certain times of the day... The advantage is that if I’m in difficulty, I can call them and ask them to pay me 6 months in advance and they would not hesitate to assist me”.

She finds it difficult to separate herself from the business because she is the accountant and does most of the work. She is very down to earth and would never tell people about her businesses in social settings until she is comfortable.

I. Situated Learning

After her business was broken into and everything was stolen, the insurance only paid out R30,000. The difficulty experienced since day one of this business led to marriage problems as her spouse blamed her for wanting to purchase the shop. “I was understanding as he had to see to the house and then one year I said to myself I can’t do this anymore”. She was living hand-to-mouth. She made a loan from a friend hoping it would improve the situation, as she desperately required more stock, for the business to succeed. She made an agreement to make a weekly payment until she was able to settle the capital amount.

- “That weekly payment crippled the business; and I couldn’t pay him, my rent, my staff... I took the last of my money and paid the rent and my staff and closed the doors and decided to take a moment to figure this out as it became too much”.

She realized that as an entrepreneur, these are the type of situations and lessons one could encounter on your entrepreneurial journey.

Tasneem spent the next few days with her father as he is her biggest supporter.

- “He asked me do you want to make this work? Is it in your heart that you want it to work or can you make it work because there is a difference”.
- “I said I have to and I will make it work”.

Her father then sold his car, for R12000, and he asked her to split the money with her two brothers and she could give him his share when she was back on her feet. One of her brothers insisted on his payout and she used the remaining R9000 to purchase stock and re-opened the shop. There are 40 different battery variants that the business has to stock and this capital injection did not solve all her problems, as it only put her in a position to trade. Even though she applied on behalf of her clients for government funding and understood the process, she did not receive any assistance from the government.

- “I drove to Bellville every single day. Whatever stock I sold, I would have to go buy replacements”.

It went on like this for a few months before her business turnover increased and she was in a position to wait for weekly deliveries from Willard. Having the resilience and drive to do whatever it took and persevering through this tough time is what helped to make the business successful. Since then Tasneem has managed to open another battery shop and her ex-husband also opened another. There are now a total of four battery shops between them.

I. Situated Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic affected the battery shop severely. While it is an essential service, people could not afford good quality batteries and would purchase the cheaper brands. The business barely broke even but managed to survive. However, Tasneem's accounting practice increased tremendously: "I opened my office during Covid". Many small businesses could not apply for government funding as their businesses were not structured well. This resulted in many business owners approaching her for assistance. She has so much empathy and even though her business was not doing well, she understood the hardships many small businesses were facing:

- "I took a stance of telling my clients who were in the hospitality or food industry, don't pay me because I know you can't afford it and I will still do the work for you. I built closer relationships with them and because of that, they didn't hesitate to refer people to me".

m. Conclusion

Tasneem regards herself as a team player and a problem solver. "I'm an optimistic person and always think of the best possible outcome". With her experience over the last few years, she believes in taking more calculated risks. She is very proactive with her clients and if she can identify long-term problems, she would offer advice and guidance to her clients. However, when it comes to her own business, she is prepared to take more risks and reactively deal with the situation as they arise. "It comes from having faith".

Her oldest son was part of her entire journey as he used to be with her in a car seat as she drove around to purchase batteries daily before business picked up. She encourages him to make his own decisions and is very supportive. “He is currently trading forex and I would give him tips but I would not push him to become an entrepreneur”. He got to see and experience what tough times are like for an entrepreneur, and also how business can improve if you make the necessary sacrifices. “I do steer them towards entrepreneurship, by letting them know there is no need to get stuck in a normal job, but they can do what they love as an entrepreneur...If he should say: I want to be a barber, I would say great, you can open a barber shop, you don’t have to cut people’s hair yourself”.

She believes that anyone who aspires to be an entrepreneur should work hard and believe that it is possible to achieve their goals It is important to find direction and make decisions that align with your objectives and future aspirations.

Chapter 5: Analysis

The aim of the research is to uncover what ignited the initial drive towards entrepreneurship and how entrepreneurs learn and develop their entrepreneurial abilities to improve, grow and sustain their business, particularly through a critical period, and understand the nature and relationship of EL. Both Rae and Carswell (2001) and Cope (2003) conducted qualitative research to gain a deeper understanding of how entrepreneurs learn and develop their entrepreneurial ability and the same approach was conducted in this study. The conceptual models developed by Rae and Carswell (2001) and Pittaway and Thorpe (2012) were used as a guide to gain a deeper understanding of the literature and identify key concepts to interpret how entrepreneurs learn and develop their entrepreneurial abilities, particularly through a critical event.

These concepts were used to organise and analyse the interview findings and concur that these concepts play a pivotal role in the process of EL. Further analysis of the findings led to the development of a new conceptual model of EL that extends the thoughts of these researchers and is presented in this chapter.

The six life stories of entrepreneurs presented in the previous chapter allowed the researcher to explore how they learned and developed their entrepreneurial capabilities. The key concepts identified in the literature review came out strongly during the interviews with all entrepreneurs, and the commonalities and differences between cases became evident. Key quotations were extracted from each of the cases and were incorporated into the analysis section to compare the information discussed in the cross-case analysis to make it easier for the reader to see the relevance of the concepts discussed.

5.1 Personal Theory and Motivational Factors

The factors that came out strongest when looking at the personal rationales and motivations of each entrepreneur are that they all came from low to middle-income households and viewed entrepreneurship as an opportunity born out of struggle, which enabled individual self-development, and allowed them to create job opportunities and add value to society. This is consistent with the research findings of Chinyamurindi (2016).

They all grew up under fairly challenging circumstances and their parents were not able to provide them with the branded items they desired. The following quotes strongly indicate how they longed for independence and started selling products when they attended school in order to make a profit and purchase clothing and other items they wanted or needed:

- “I had to learn to hustle very fast...I had to sell my blazer when it got small and add money to purchase a new one” (Alecia)
- “Witnessing my father struggle made me develop a fear of not having...I wanted my independence by earning my own money” (Tasneem)
- “I only got clothes once or twice per year” so he started selling various products to generate income to buy what he wanted (Rushal)

Table 5.1 below summarises the key form of learning of the entrepreneurs interviewed in this study during the different phases of their lives and how their learned as entrepreneurs.

Table 5.1: Key Forms of Learning for Entrepreneurs

Name	Early Life	Early Career	From Parents	Learning as an Entrepreneur
Luke	Started selling speakers while attending high school	Retail Corporate – finance Learned how to manage money and understand the importance of location and customer experience	Character Has the same businesses as his father used to have while growing up – car sales and blinds business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By doing - Experience - Observing father - Reflection - Social and business networks - From a crises
Rushal	Started selling cigarettes, then socks, then clothing at high school	Retail -sales -management Learned how to manage staff and treat customers	Character Patience – Father refused to allow him to drop out of school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By doing - Experience - Reflection - Business networks - From a crisis
Zahir	Started selling stationery in moms shop while attending primary school	Retail Corporate- Accounting firm Learned how to manage finances And accounting practices best for business	Character How to scale a business – recently opened a wholesale business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By doing - Education - Experience - Reflection - Directly from parents - Mentors - Business networks - From a crisis
Rezah	Started selling cars, cellphones and gadgets on high school	Retail Corporate – call centres Learned importance of customer experience and how to train staff	Character How to make money work for you (mom) Same business as father – car sales and ventured into logistics – father was a truck driver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By doing - Experience - Reflection - By observing parents - Visioning exercises - From a crisis
Alecia	Sold her books and clothes at school to purchase what she needed	Retail Corporate – call centres Real Estate Agency Learned about customer experience	Character Mother was not entrepreneurial but very hard working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By doing - Reading - Experience - Business networks - From a crisis
Tasneem	Sold biscuits, chocolates etc. on primary school	Retail Corporate – accounting firm Learned how to treat staff	Character Selling various items was encouraged by her father when she was young	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By doing - Education - Experience - Directly from father - Business networks - From a crisis

5.1 Personal Theory and Motivational Factors

The factors that came out strongest when looking at the personal rationales and motivations of each entrepreneur are that they all came from low to middle-income households and viewed entrepreneurship as an opportunity born out of struggle, which enabled individual self-development, and allowed them to create job opportunities and add value to society. This is consistent with the research findings of Chinyamurindi (2016).

They all grew up under fairly challenging circumstances and their parents were not able to provide them with the branded items they desired. The following quotes strongly indicate how they longed for independence and started selling products when they attended school in order to make a profit and purchase clothing and other items they wanted or needed:

- “I had to learn to hustle very fast...I had to sell my blazer when it got small and add money to purchase a new one” (Alecia)
- “Witnessing my father struggle made me develop a fear of not having...I wanted my independence by earning my own money” (Tasneem)
- “I only got clothes once or twice per year” so he started selling various products to generate income to buy what he wanted (Rushal)

They were all taught the importance of character, hard work, and honesty by their parents/guardians and these values were found to have been formed early in the entrepreneurs' lives based on what they experienced growing up (Rae and Carswell, 2000). These qualities seemed highly significant to all the entrepreneurs, and they felt strongly about earning their money in a righteous way:

- “for me every deal that is a good deal and an honest deal will have blessings in it; helping the next person out like that every day is a blessing that I thrive on” (Zahir)
- “work hard, be resilient and most importantly, be honest” (Rushal)

They all set goals and work hard to achieve these goals and are willing to work long hours as they knew their effort would determine the financial outcomes they desired.

- “I believe in my ability to work, I had a lot of faith in myself, I’m self-driven. I didn’t need someone to push me. I knew with the sacrifices I would see the reward” (Zahir)
- “I was chasing my passion and that was having a successful business and being a successful agent. I’m educating people and making a difference, it’s more rewarding” (Alecia)

Personal theory appears to be an important driver in the way these entrepreneurs engage in business activities, and is also a motivating factor that encourages them to work hard, and be resilient in order to achieve goals.

5.2 Lessons from their Entrepreneurial Parents

Four of the entrepreneurs learned valuable lessons from their parents who had a business. Some learned indirectly either (a) through witnessing their success (Luke), (b) from experience working in the business (Rezah and Zahir), or (c) by accompanying her father as he sold products (Tasneem). Zahir and Tasneem seemed to be the only two who believed that they learned directly from their parents, although Luke and Rezah ventured into the same businesses as their fathers.

- “If he can do it, then I can too” (Luke)
- “watching my father buy and sell cars made me realise that I could do the same” (Rezah)
- “The key lessons I learned from my mom is how to save and how to use your money to work for you. I think that is where the lesson came in with the R20 per week” (Rezah)

Zahir learned the importance of character from both parents, as well as recognising the contribution of staff and the mindset of scaling the business, which led to opening a wholesale business.

- “Your business is not about you, it’s a team effort. Don’t for one second think what you accomplished is because of you; it’s not just your hard work, it’s your staff that you train to work the way you want them to and that is why your business is successful, through their hard work” (quote by Zahir’s father)

Their advice and opinions matter to Zahir, which is why he learned so much from them. Tasneem learned to sell products from a young age with the support of her father.

The rest may not believe that their parents had direct influence on them, however the relationship they had with their parents growing up, determined the benefit they were able to extract. Similarly, Cruz et al (2012) found that opportunity identification and having the resilience to pursue those opportunities, is often passed on by the guidance and culture created by senior generations. However, the young generation are required to have positive relationships with senior members and participate in the fundamental entrepreneurial processes in order to reap the benefit.

Rushal may not have had entrepreneurial parents, but he worked hard, started selling at a young age and thus developed his entrepreneurial abilities through experience. Alecia was given a learning opportunity that helped her gain experience and understanding of the working environment, and put structures in place at the real estate firm where she worked, and continued to utilise these structures when she took over the firm. These examples also speak to how entrepreneurs learn from experience (Cope, 2003).

The parents of all entrepreneurs assisted with the development of their character and emphasised the importance of right and honest business. They all have their parents' work ethic and are determined to succeed. However, most of their parents did not directly contribute when it came to identifying business opportunities, or teach them how to make a success of the business. Zahir seems to be the exception as his parents always spoke to him about scaling the business and when the opportunity arose, he opened a wholesale business with the same products he sells in the retail store that he had purchased from his father.

Luke opened a blinds business and Rezah sells cars, which are the same businesses they saw their fathers making a success of. Even though they believed their parents did not play a key role in helping them to recognise opportunity, observing their success was enough for them to believe they could also make a success of their business ventures. This demonstrates the benefit of having entrepreneurial parents, who clearly had a positive effect on encouraging entrepreneurial behaviour.

5.3 Lessons from their Employers

A common factor among all entrepreneurs was their first job in retail. They learned the importance of customer service and how to sell. They also learned how to treat their staff as many of them had bad experiences at work and as a result, they endeavor to treat their staff well.

- “I did not receive compassion from my previous employers” (Tasneem)
- “My employer oppressed their staff” (Rushal)

They all agree that when you reward and treat your staff well, they will look after your business as:

- “They are loyal committed and happy staff and every morning they look forward to work” (Zahir)
- “I have a good team behind me, and they work well, take instructions well and they have been with me from the beginning. I work with the motto if you keep me happy I will keep you happy” (Rezah)

All six entrepreneurs had worked at a few companies before embarking on their entrepreneurial journey. They also learned that there was not always an opportunity to advance their careers and increase their income.

- “I was too young to be promoted in the call centre as they wouldn’t take me serious, hence why I left” (Alecia)
- “I then told them the salary was not enough to feed my family and I resigned without even consulting my wife at the time, not even having a clue of what I was going to do” (Rezah)
- “I knew that the salary I earned would not be enough for the type of lifestyle I know I can live” (Zahir)

Working for a company before starting a business appears to be advantageous, as these entrepreneurs learned valuable lessons they could implement in their own businesses.

- “The way I applied myself was different as I had experience of the working world (Zahir)

The lessons learned along the life journey of these entrepreneurs seem to coincide with their entrepreneurial development.

5.4 Resilience

The quality that came out strongest was resilience, as Fatoki (2018) also found in his study on the Success of South African SMEs. There is a strong positive relationship between entrepreneurial resilience and organisational success. They all have this attribute of recovering quickly from difficulties and believe that they have to keep moving forward as they are capable of achieving their goals. They never give up, even when faced with difficult circumstances. The entrepreneurial journey is not easy, it requires hard work, commitment, and dedication to achieve ambitious goals.

- “I failed a hundred times and just keep going... You never give up and have to do the same thing over and over without losing energy, and you must believe it’s going to happen. Do not listen to the negative comments of others and keep pushing and you will always come out on top” (Luke)
- “Failure is a good source of learning; I look at it as an opportunity to grow as it’s part of your journey so keep carrying on” (Rushal)
- “I knew that when I know what I want I’m going to push hard for it because I’m willing to walk out of movies and get out of bed at twelve in the night to go do work when I knew it’s worth the effort” (Zahir)
- “When I see an opportunity, I grab it with everything I got. I believe I cannot fail unless I set myself up for failure. There are times when I am so stressed or even feel like giving up, but when my tears dry up, I have new energy and come back with everything I have” (Rezah)
- “I show up every single day, never spend a day in bed during the week ever, as if I’m answering to someone, and I’m always working hard” (Alecia)
- “I’m proud of my growth and perseverance through all the hardships and that I was able to achieve many of my goals” (Tasneem)

As Wang et al. (2018) argued, their hard work, dedication and belief in their ability to achieve their goals, developed the resilience required to become successful entrepreneurs.

5.5 Active Learning

Most of the active learning that takes place in these SMEs is through the experience of the entrepreneur (Cope, 2003). They were all eager to learn when they were young, they reflect often, are conscious about the decisions they made to achieve desired outcomes, and are people of action (Rae and Carswell, 2001). They do not read often, as this takes up time that they could be using to increase their income; unless they believe it necessary to remain informed for their business.

- “I have to read all the time as accounting practices change all the time” (Tasneem)
- “I don’t read, all I do is think about my business and my experience” (Rushal)
- “I am always excited to learn and still have that quality ... how do I master my craft and what do I do next?” (Alecia)
- “I’m always reflecting on failures like every day, but need to keep pushing forward” (Luke)

Most of them do not write down plans or capture their learning. However, it is important to recognise that this changed when they realised they were experienced enough to make well-informed decisions for the business. They were able to identify opportunities, and their resilience and belief in their ability to make a success of the business ventures resulted in them achieving their goals.

It is also important to recognise that these entrepreneurs’ main source of learning was by taking action, which allowed them to better understand what could work or what would not work in the business, which Cope (2003) refers to as reflective learning. They also learn by interacting with suppliers, consumers, customers, associates, employees, business owners and even competitors (Harrison and Leitch 2005).

5.6 Education

All the entrepreneurs passed matric – which is the highest grade in high school, and most do not believe that their education helped them with their business decisions. However, there were other benefits:

- Rushal was not interested in school and believed that he did not extract any value. However, he started selling cigarettes which became the catalyst to his business ventures
- Luke benefitted through social interaction at primary school as he engaged and made friends with white children in the post-Apartheid era, and this enhanced his ability and made him confident to interact with people.
- Alecia attended school in more affluent areas and believes it kept her away from many bad elements in the area where she grew up.
- Tasneem attended a model C school - that receives government funding, but is also largely funded by school fees and offers better quality education and extra-mural programmes which she believes taught her key life lessons such as having integrity and working hard to achieve your goals
- Rezah did an entrepreneurship course in matric that he still finds useful and goes through his notes to make informed business decisions.

Unlike the others, Zahir had a mentor and was encouraged to seek knowledge that would benefit him and his family because it

- “is a good reason for me to be great at accounting, to help my dad and at the same time to understand what is happening in his business”

This realisation made him conscious and excited to learn and this led to him to benefit more from his schooling and tertiary education than the other entrepreneurs. His mentor also shared a valuable lesson:

- “Instead of learning what the teachers are trying to teach you, teach the students what you know”

The strategy of teaching others enabled Zahir to excel at university and learn valuable lessons that could be incorporated in his businesses.

Two entrepreneurs started selling products in primary school and the rest in high school, which showcases that entrepreneurial attributes can be developed at a young age. They became more confident in their ability to sell and make a profit, and developed the resilience (Fatoki, 2018) to keep going because of the belief that they can succeed. There is something to learn from every experience. It is therefore the

business owner's responsibility to invest their time in acquiring knowledge through various learning sources (Unger et al., 2009).

5.7 Known Capabilities

Most of their knowledge comes from experience, as Giebrielson (2019) found. They also believe in themselves and their ability to make decisions that are beneficial for the business, and if it does not go according to plan, this is seen as a lesson and not a failure. Interestingly they do not write down lessons, nor do they utilise planning or management tools, as they all believe that making mental notes is sufficient.

- “Everything is in my head - I visualise in my mind and I act. Every business venture has been this way. After I finished school, I told myself I'm done with pen and paper” (Rushal)
- “I have a map of my vision but I don't have an actual map. I have a vision in my head, I know how I'm going to do things and where I need to be, those ideas are in my head” (Zahir)
- “I use the experience I have of all the different businesses” (Rezah)
- “I learned from my mistakes; luckily they were not detrimental to the business” (Alecia)

While they do not see the need to take notes themselves, they want their employees to learn from them and take notes or remember what they are taught.

- “My assistant always takes notes and that is how she learns” (Tasneem)
- “I want them to duplicate me because I want my clients to have my experience. I captured all my mistakes to make sure they don't make the same mistakes I did” (Alecia)

They also learn from the actions of other entrepreneurs such as their parents, family members, mentors and business networks, as well as from online sources and developmental books (Holcolm et al., 2009).

- “He (uncle) started out selling monkey nuts and 'slangetjies' with a wheelbarrow from house to house. Eventually, after all the hard work, he owned twenty video stores nationwide” (Rezah)

- “I read motivational books, and self-healing and self-development books and also articles” (Tasneem)

Their experience and known capabilities allowed them to innovate their businesses, and act fast when they identified opportunities and started new businesses, which gave them a competitive advantage (Putz et al., 2013), and this helped them to not only survive and sustain their businesses, but also grow and identify new businesses opportunities.

5.8 Relationships and Networks

All the participants agreed on the importance of good relationships and networks. They realise that their network plays a huge role in their success, particularly relationships with suppliers and entrepreneurs in their social circle. These relationships are part of the reason they are able to remain competitive in the marketplace. They realise that their networks play a significant role when it comes to changing strategies, as they were able to make better informed decisions with the new knowledge they have gained to identify and exploit opportunities (Soetanto, 2017). They are able to learn, grow and develop themselves and the business through these interactions.

- “It’s impossible for them (competitors in the salon industry) to compete, this is due to the network I built over time and key suppliers I got” (Rushal)
- “I realised the quickest way for me to grow is to deal directly with business owners...It was very easy to source the products from the right suppliers to sell it at the right price” (Zahir)
- “Without them (law firm in her network), I couldn’t have invested in the amount of properties I bought” (Alecia)
- “I took a stance of telling my clients who were in the hospitality or food industry, don’t pay me because I know you can’t afford it and I will still do the work for you. I built closer relationships with them and because of that, they didn’t hesitate to refer people to me” (Tasneem)

They also learn from their parents, mentors, role models, suppliers, and entrepreneurs in their social circles and business networks. Many of the business innovations were inspired and made possible due to relationships with suppliers, social networks and

stakeholders in business environments as it increased their chances of firm profitability and success (Hughes and O'Regan, 2009).

- “It was very easy to source the products from the right suppliers to sell it at the right price. Everyone needed hand sanitizer and face masks”. Recognising that the pandemic would be around for a while, Zahir purchased in bigger bulk than ever before, built a stronger network and eventually opened a wholesale business during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- “I opened my office during Covid” (Tasneem). Many small businesses could not apply for government funding and signed up with her for assistance. Because she was so supportive, every new client was a referral from another client.

The relationships and networks these entrepreneurs developed over the years have played a critical role in opportunity recognition, as they had the networks required to act fast and start new businesses. Therefore, networking and spending time engaging in informal conversations with entrepreneurs should be viewed as an investment (Saunders et al., 2014).

5.9 Situated Learning

They have all encountered difficulties and made bad decisions. These lessons tend to remain with these entrepreneurs and this is how they learn from experience and also grow and develop, as Cope and Watts (2000) and Cope (2003) found. By reflecting on their business and past experiences they learn to make better-informed decisions to improve their business:

- “I learned from my mistakes, luckily they were not detrimental to the business” (Alecia)
- “Everything is in my head; I visualise in my mind and I act. Every business venture has been this way - after I finished school, I told myself I’m done with pen and paper” (Rushal)
- “I overpaid for the battery business, I was young and naïve and only saw what they showing me and not what is actually happening” (Tasneem)
- “I will step back and look at the situation and walk around the situation ten times and I am able to see all the gaps” (Rezah)

Many of their businesses reached a point where they were fairly static. They appeared to have reached a point of complacency before the pandemic and became more reactive to the needs of the business. Most entrepreneurs have more than one business, and are open to new business opportunities.

The common trait among these entrepreneurs is their resilient mindset, as they do not believe that failure is the end. Rather they accept it as a lesson and a contribution to their experience and keep persevering and looking at other ways to overcome the challenges they face, as found by Fatoki (2018).

- “The most important quality to possess as an entrepreneur is resilience and the belief that you are capable and that you cannot fail” (Rezah)
- “I failed a hundred times and just keep going” (Luke)

Their stories confirm that entrepreneurs need to believe in themselves and their business if they want to survive critical events. It is important to think innovatively and explore various opportunities. It may not be easy, but it is necessary if they want to survive, sustain and grow their businesses in times of uncertainty.

5.10 Situated Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic affected all businesses, but the entrepreneurial spirit of these entrepreneurs allowed them to see opportunities when faced with this crisis. They moved from static business environments to actively looking for new opportunities to sustain and grow their businesses. Entrepreneurs tend to learn as they realise what their limitations are, and also by reacting to challenges that arise (Soetanto, 2017). These entrepreneurs acquired knowledge by observing the way the pandemic affected people, watching the news and by engaging with other entrepreneurs. They were able to process that knowledge, learn from the information gained and identified opportunities (Corbett, 2005), which resulted in new business ventures and innovation in their existing businesses.

- “Because I knew how it works it was easy for me to see the gap and make a business from it and this funded me to pay the rent and staff to keep the doors open” (Rezah)
- “I opened my office during Covid” for her bookkeeping business (Tasneem)

- “I am where I am because I’ve grown so much because of Covid...I had the foresight to know what would happen based on what was happening internationally” (Zahir). He started selling toilet paper, masks, hand sanitizer and other essential products during the pandemic and increased buying power and new networks led to the opening of a new wholesale business, and a significant increase in turnover

All entrepreneurs responded with innovative ideas during Covid-19:

- a) Luke reopened a business he had closed 8 years ago
- b) Rushal started manufacturing hair products and supplying salons when he realised how badly the salon industry would be affected due to social distancing, lockdown restrictions and people’s fear of close contact.
- c) Zahir identified opportunities and purchased essential products in bulk and this promoted his store and allowed him to expand his network and build stronger relationships with suppliers. He became a distributor for a well-known toilet paper brand and opened a new store wholesaling the products he offers at his retail store.
- d) Rezah came up with new strategies to increase foot flow to his restaurant, sold masks and established a supply chain for corporate branded items. He purchased a truck and acquired contracts for his new logistics and freight business.
- e) Alecia changed her business structure from operating out of the premises to equipping her agents with the necessary tools to work remotely. She services a huge area and realised that if she set up small ‘satellite offices’ across her areas of operation, she could expose her brand and acquire more customers. She also set up an office at home to meet her clients and work in a separate working space.
- f) Tasneem’s bookkeeping business increased significantly, and she was able to open an additional battery shop. This was a result of SMMEs requiring the correct structure to qualify for government funding. The empathy she showed her clients allowed her to build strong and meaningful relationships with them, and in return, they referred friends and business owners from their network.

A key lesson they learned was the importance of marketing (Cant, 2012). Alecia came up with the idea of having small ‘satellite offices’ in various locations to create brand presence. Tasneem started using Google and Facebook paid ads, Zahir had his website upgraded and started advertising, Rezah and Rushal employed a social media consultant to keep their online marketing fresh and updated.

- “I now pay a social media company to do the marketing and promote various events” (Rezah)
- “I employed someone to do my social media” (Rushal)

What made it easy for these entrepreneurs to identify opportunities and make a success of it, was the fact that they all have start-up experience, which increased their chances of successfully organising and managing new ventures (Politis, 2008).

5.11 Innovation during the Covid-19 Crisis

Every entrepreneur in this study innovated in some way, and their businesses are better off as a result of strategies implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic. Gabrielsson and Politis (2011) found that the biggest predictor of new business ideas is a learning mindset that supports exploration. As such, their findings have clarified the importance of start-up experience as a source of learning and its effects on entrepreneurs’ ability to successfully organise and manage new ventures. Five of the six entrepreneurs opened new businesses, and the real estate agent franchise went from being situated in one office, to establishing satellite offices around her area of operation. All agents were equipped with tools to work remotely and the office was closed. They all learned the importance of advertising and having strong networks to ensure business survival and growth.

- “All these initiatives came as a result of the pandemic. There are still more avenues to explore, Covid has taught me so much” (Rezah)

The fact that all these entrepreneurs identified opportunities, opened new businesses and all innovated to survive the Covid-19 pandemic and came out more successful as a result of the pandemic, is indicative of the types of SME owners who can be described as entrepreneurial, as recommended by Nogueira (2019).

The research demonstrated support for Wang and Chugh’s (2014) viewpoint that entrepreneurs learn on their own through experience, and collectively from parents,

family, mentors, suppliers, customers and other business owners. Both exploitative and exploratory learning was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic when five of these entrepreneurs saw an opportunity and started a new business venture, and all 6 entrepreneurs innovated in their existing business as they adapted to their new environment. Sensing and intuitive learning took place when they ‘trusted their gut’ when making decisions about new business ventures, and innovations in the business, as suggested by the following statements:

- “I started manufacturing hair products” (Rushal)
- “I am where I am because I’ve grown so much because of Covid” (Zahir) – opened a wholesale business during the pandemic

What accompanied these decisions and enabled their ventures to become successful was the resilience of these entrepreneurs. No matter the circumstances, they believe in themselves and kept persevering.

- “If I put that extra effort, the reward is equal to my efforts” (Zahir)
- “It is all about the mindset” (Rezah)

These findings validate those of Fatoki (2018), that when entrepreneurs make a decision to start a business, their resilience is a powerful contributing factor to their success. The Covid-19 pandemic has assisted these growth-oriented entrepreneurs in SA to construct and strengthen their operations and capabilities in order to survive the pandemic (Schepers et al., 2021).

5.12 Support During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Only three of the entrepreneurs received financial support from the government which barely covered the salaries of their employees for a limited period. They had to find a way to cover all other business expenses even when the business was closed due to lockdown. Banks offered Covid-19 loans which came with lower interest rates to help businesses survive. However, there was no guidance or mentorship provided along with the finance to assist with strategy development during the pandemic.

- “It was a very difficult time for me and I cried and told my wife I can’t do this anymore and I was ready to give up. I couldn’t handle the stress as there were

times when I was short of rent and paying the staff and I had to make a plan and then I had to cover the hole I dug for myself” (Rezah)

During the Covid-19 crisis it could have been useful for entrepreneurs to be exposed to adaptable action-based learning programmes to broaden their way of thinking (Hunter and Lean, 2018). While they were able to survive and innovate to save their businesses, many small businesses in SA and the rest of the world closed down. The lack of support and guidance placed these entrepreneurs in very difficult situations. They were forced into critical reflection when they redefined the organisation’s strategies and processes and adapted their businesses as a result of the knowledge they acquired through learning by doing, as well as learning from this crisis (Cope, 2003).

5.13 Learning from the Evidence/Findings

The conceptual models in Figures 1 & 2 were used as a guide along with the literature and life story interviews with six South African entrepreneurs to develop the new model for EL in a developing country context.

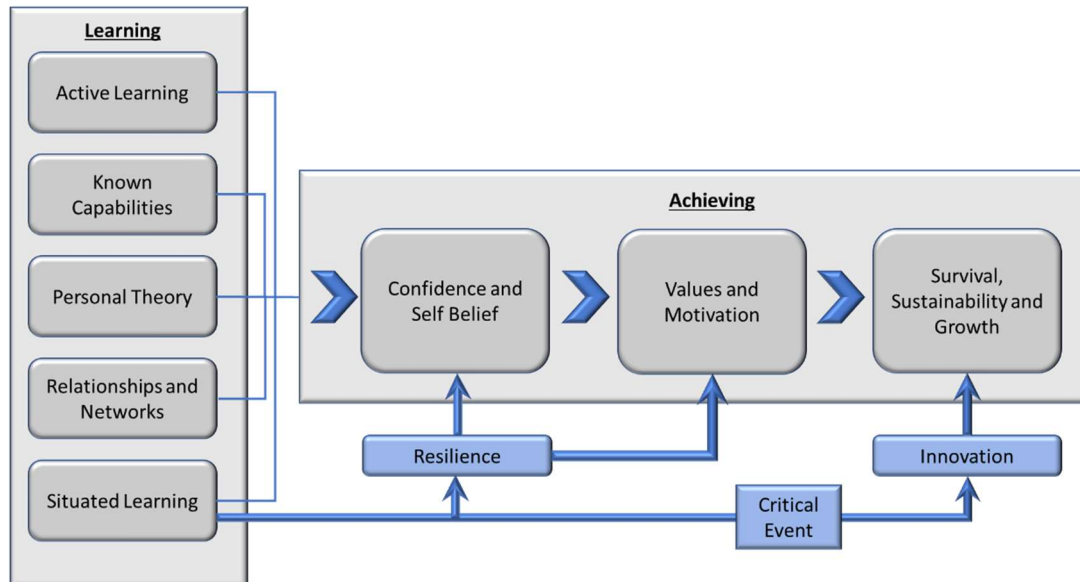
Figure 1 on page 29 describes the attributes required and the process of learning that leads to achieving ambitious goals. All of the learning concepts that they identified came out strongly in the life story interviews with the entrepreneurs who participated in this study, and they all achieved ambitious goals by managing entrepreneurial ventures over at least ten years, which is not easy to achieve in a developing country where the unemployment rate is high and the chances of success very low.

Figure 2 on page 30 is made up of key concepts identified by Jason Cope (2003-2005) and conceptualised by Pittaway and Thorpe (2012). It consists of reflective learning - which can be described as learning by doing, also described as an aspect of Active learning by Rae and Carswell (2001); and situated learning which can be described as learning from a crisis, which is a key aspect of this study as it took place during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The conceptual model of Entrepreneurial Learning in Figure 3 was developed from the life story findings presented in Chapter 4, and analysed in this chapter. The primary

purpose is to assist with the development of entrepreneurial programmes to support small businesses, particularly during a crisis.

Figure 3: Washied’s Conceptual Model of Entrepreneurial Learning



The key sources of learning on the left side of the conceptual model (see Figure 3) encapsulate the important elements of learning that are required to develop resilience and inspiration required to ensure business survival, sustainability and growth, as well as achieving ambitious goals. Critical events were also found to encourage innovation as it became a requirement to ensure survival of the main business.

The concepts identified in this study inter-connect with one another and the cases demonstrate that active learning and situated learning are critical for business survival, sustainability and innovation, as entrepreneurs are required to continuously learn and develop in order to sustain the business. This can be achieved by reflecting on their experiences, and learning from critical events, which inspired innovation in these cases.

Relationships, networks and known capabilities are important factors that contribute to entrepreneurs recognising opportunities and introducing business innovations, as demonstrated by the entrepreneurial responses to Covid-19 in this study. This is most effective when combined with personal theory, which speaks to goal setting, motivation and most importantly, developing the resilience to believe in yourself and your capability of making a success of the business.

The evidence suggests that individuals with these attributes will develop the confidence and self-belief that will inspire them and keep them motivated on their entrepreneurial journey. This may lead to survival, sustainability and eventually business growth and success. It is also important to recognise how critical events combined with critical reflection can lead to innovation. This analysis is what influenced the structure and reasoning behind the Conceptual Model in Figure 3 above, which depicts the connection between the various components of learning which result in multifaceted achievements.

This study thus contributes to the EL literature for the following reasons:

- (a) because of the distinctive context of entrepreneurs from a previously disadvantaged coloured community in a developing country context such as South Africa, where no previous life story studies of this social group were found in the literature;
- (b) by extending Rae and Carswell's (2001) model which to explicitly incorporate how critical societal events influence the learning of entrepreneurs; and
- (c) the conceptual framework incorporated aspects of studies by Cope (2003; 2005), Pittaway and Thorpe (2012), and Rae and Carswell (2001), as it explored the nature of EL, how entrepreneurs learn by doing, and how they learn to manage their SMME's through a crisis.
- d) the development of a conceptual model for Entrepreneurial learning

This enabled the researcher to explore the various key concepts of EL and to comprehend and interpret how entrepreneurs learn and how they develop their entrepreneurial abilities.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Due to the urgent need to encourage entrepreneurship, and based on how these six entrepreneurs managed to survive the tough economic climate in SA over the past decade, the conceptual model in Figure 3 was developed to better understand their

entrepreneurial experiences, and assist with developing skills programmes to support and encourage learning among existing and aspiring entrepreneurs.

The life stories revealed that entrepreneurs learn, grow and adapt when faced with critical events that may result in transformation, innovation, and evolution of their businesses. The cases strongly suggest that entrepreneurs can learn from failure and challenging situations, almost as much and possibly more at times than they would from success. They acquire knowledge, learn from failures, update their knowledge base and through this learning, are equipped to improve the firm performance (Minniti and Bygrave, 2001). EL is also achieved by having conversations within social networks and personal engagements with learning programmes (Saunders et al., 2014).

When a firm gains new knowledge, it has to be incorporated into their systems and routines in order for the knowledge to benefit the firm at an organisational level (Jones et al., 2010). It can therefore be argued that entrepreneurs should not only work on implementing new structures and processes, but should also share their vision and knowledge with their respective teams. In this way everyone in the business may develop a shared vision, and understand how to gather new information, and what optimal processes to follow in order to save on time, resources and money.

Deakins et al (2000) argued that the use of external directors is one of the methods whereby learning can take place and be converted into organisational learning in small entrepreneurial firms. A similar function can be performed by mentors who could be funded by Government agencies to assist entrepreneurs with the support needed to make well-informed decisions. Action learning workshops would be useful to facilitate the self-development of entrepreneurs.

Based on the experience of these entrepreneurs, the research indicates that during the Covid-19 pandemic government support should have been accompanied by mentorship or workshops to guide entrepreneurs in making well-informed decisions to ensure business survival. It would be advantageous to offer mentorship support along with, or without approved funding to support small business owners. The current crisis in SA is that even before Covid-19, over 70% of SMME's failed within five to seven years (Bushe, 2019). Support and networking programmes need to be made available to small business owners who start new ventures, and even those that want to develop

and grow their business. SA has an unemployment crisis and government support is urgently needed to encourage entrepreneurship to create employment opportunities, and also to help entrepreneurs grow and develop, to increase their chances of success.

This research has identified what type of support, from the government and entities such as banks and universities, would help entrepreneurs to manage these challenges. As SA is in desperate need of entrepreneurs to create employment opportunities, it is crucial for the government to develop and implement more effective policies and strategies to encourage entrepreneurship and help small businesses. As every action starts with an intention, it is important to increase the availability of entrepreneurship education at schools and tertiary institutions, as empirical research suggests that students enrolled in entrepreneurship courses have significantly increased drive and ambition to start a business (Zang et al., 2018).

Incubation programmes at tertiary institutions and interventions such as mentorship/support programmes could also help aspiring entrepreneurs learn and develop their entrepreneurial abilities. Learning programmes should enable learners to develop their knowledge of entrepreneurship alongside their understanding of the economy and the business world. Adaptable action-based learning programmes could broaden their way of thinking entrepreneurially (Hunter and Lean, 2018).

Policy makers also need to identify different solutions when conceptualising categories of SMEs to improve the way they support these businesses (Zhang et al., 2006). Support from banks and other lenders in the form of mentorship could accompany finance solutions to enable business owners to better manage funds and add value to their businesses, instead of another liability/expense when the funds are depleted.

In conclusion, the evidence from these six cases suggests that organisations such as Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), and even Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), could structure their courses to include action learning to give entrepreneurs and students the opportunity to experience how the real-world works, and also to equip them with the skills they need to become successful business owners. Mentorship programmes for entrepreneurs could offer action-based lessons that allow entrepreneurs to think through critical events, reflect on them, and come up

with strategies for their businesses to survive such critical events, develop new ways of working, and also lead to innovative ways to address entrepreneurial opportunities (Rae, 2000; Rae and Carswell, 2000, Cope, 2005; Pittaway and Thorpe, 2012) and the economic growth challenges that face the South African economy.

As a business banker who works extensively with SMEs, my intention is to share the findings and lessons learned from this research with existing and aspiring entrepreneurs who have ambitions of starting or growing their business, with the hope that it will inspire them to take that step towards shaping their new destiny.

Key Questions for Policy Makers:

1. What type of assistance can be provided to entrepreneurs to help them successfully overcome critical incidents they may face in their businesses?
2. How can advisers help entrepreneurs anticipate and prepare for critical incidents or episodes that may arise in the future? (Cope and Watts, 2000).
3. How can we structure our education systems to assist students in developing their entrepreneurial abilities?
4. How can this research and similar sources of information/learning material be made available for entrepreneurs to learn from?
5. How can the government create supportive environments where entrepreneurs can network, share knowledge and learn from one another?

Recommendations:

- Action-based entrepreneurial skills development workshops, accompanied by mentorship should be offered to aspiring entrepreneurs, and small business owners that focus on developing an entrepreneurial mindset along with the ability to identify problems and solutions that can be turned into business opportunities.
- Action-based courses should be designed and taught at HEIs to help students better understand the economy, the business world, the establishment of entrepreneurial enterprises, and expose them to thinking innovatively to overcome critical events and develop resilience.

- Policy makers could take this a step further by offering mentorship programmes to entrepreneurs and ensure that they are supported as their business develops.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has also clarified the need for supporting businesses during a crisis. Financial support is not enough, mentorship and guidance with strategic planning is of utmost importance.

Implications for Theory and Practice

This study identified some important empirically grounded contributions. First, prior research has iterated the importance of being prepared for critical events, and learning from such events (Cope, 2003). The Covid-19 pandemic is a critical event that brought about uncertainty and major changes in the environment for businesses, and entrepreneurs had to learn at a rapid pace and either implement new strategies or identify new business opportunities as business survival for SMMEs depend on this. Secondly, there was a need for support when it came to innovation and many businesses relied on their networks to respond to the changes in demands of consumers. During the Covid-19 crisis it could have been useful for entrepreneurs to be exposed to adaptable action-based learning programmes to broaden their way of thinking (Hunter and Lean, 2018), unfortunately the research sample did not have this exposure to support this claim, however the need was evident. The support from government, SEDA and HEIs in providing mentorship and actioned based learning programmes would be useful to study and the effect on business survival could be measured, in order to further develop offerings to improve the success rate of businesses in SA. Thirdly, Washied's conceptual model was developed that can be used for future research and aid the development of action based learning programmes for entrepreneurs.

Limitations and future research

The findings could not be tested on a bigger sample to generalise the results. The analysis was limited to six cases with entrepreneurs from a city in South Africa called Cape Town and can therefore not be generalised to a population. Future research could utilise the understanding of the Entrepreneurial learning concept and use Washied's model of Entrepreneurial learning to validate, and build on this very

important concept that seemed to have faded from literature in recent years. Many SMME's rely on the entrepreneur to identify business opportunities and make decisions for business growth and expansion. This makes it exceptionally important to study the entrepreneur and how they learn and grow along with the business. The author encourages the construction of new samples and for it to include more variables to test the model across various domains.



Bibliography

- Afshan, G., Shahid, S., & Tunio, M. N. (2021). Learning experiences of women entrepreneurs amidst COVID-19. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*.
- Aldrich, H. E., & Yang, T. (2014). How do entrepreneurs know what to do? Learning and organizing in new ventures. *Journal of Evolutionary Economics*, 24(1), 59-82.
- Argyris, C. (2002). Double-loop learning, teaching, and research. *Academy of management learning & education*, 1(2), 206-218.
- Bartel, C. A., & Garud, R. (2009). The role of narratives in sustaining organizational innovation. *Organization science*, 20(1), 107-117.
- Breslin, D. (2015). Learning to evolve: Developing a practice-based evolutionary language of entrepreneurial learning. In *Entrepreneurial Learning* (pp. 216-234). Routledge.
- Bushe, B. (2019). The causes and impact of business failure among small to micro and medium enterprises in South Africa. *Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review*, 7(1), 1-26.
- Cant, M. (2012). Challenges faced by SMEs in South Africa: Are marketing skills needed?. *International Business & Economics Research Journal (IBER)*, 11(10), 1107-1116.
- Chinyamurindi, W. T. (2016). A narrative investigation on the motivation to become an entrepreneur among a sample of black entrepreneurs in South Africa: Implications for entrepreneurship career development education. *Acta Commercii*, 16(1), 1-9.
- Cope, J. (2003). Entrepreneurial learning and critical reflection: Discontinuous events as triggers for 'higher-level' learning. *Management learning*, 34(4), 429-450.
- Cope, J. (2005). Researching entrepreneurship through phenomenological inquiry: Philosophical and methodological issues. *International small business journal*, 23(2), 163-189.
- Cope, J. (2005). Toward a dynamic learning perspective of entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship theory and practice*, 29(4), 373-397.
- Cope, J., & Watts, G. (2000). Learning by doing—an exploration of experience, critical incidents and reflection in entrepreneurial learning. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*.
- Cooper, A. C., Gimeno-Gascon, F. J., & Woo, C. Y. (1994). Initial human and financial capital as predictors of new venture performance. *Journal of business venturing*, 9(5), 371-395.
- Cooper, A. C., Gimeno-Gascon, F. J., & Woo, C. Y. (1994). Initial human and financial capital as predictors of new venture performance. *Journal of business venturing*, 9(5), 371-395.

- Corbett, A. C. (2005). Experiential learning within the process of opportunity identification and exploitation. *Entrepreneurship theory and practice*, 29(4), 473-491.
- Cruz, A. D., Hamilton, E., & Jack, S. L. (2012). Understanding entrepreneurial cultures in family businesses: A study of family entrepreneurial teams in Honduras. *Journal of Family Business Strategy*, 3(3), 147-161.
- Deakins, D., & Freel, M. (1998). Entrepreneurial learning and the growth process in SMEs. *The learning organization*.
- Deakins, D., O'Neill, E., & Mileham, P. (2000). Executive learning in entrepreneurial firms and the role of external directors. *Education+ Training*.
- Dixon, S. E., Meyer, K. E., & Day, M. (2007). Exploitation and exploration learning and the development of organizational capabilities: A cross-case analysis of the Russian oil industry. *Human relations*, 60(10), 1493-1523.
- Ekanem, I., & Wyer, P. (2007). A fresh start and the learning experience of ethnic minority entrepreneurs. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 31(2), 144-151.
- Esfandiari, K., Sharifi-Tehrani, M., Pratt, S., & Altinay, L. (2019). Understanding entrepreneurial intentions: A developed integrated structural model approach. *Journal of Business Research*, 94, 172-182.
- Etemad, H. (2020). Managing uncertain consequences of a global crisis: SMEs encountering adversities, losses, and new opportunities. *Journal of International Entrepreneurship*, 18(2), 125-144.
- Fatoki, O. (2014). The causes of the failure of new small and medium enterprises in South Africa. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(20), 922-922.
- Fatoki, O. (2018). The impact of entrepreneurial resilience on the success of small and medium enterprises in South Africa. *Sustainability*, 10(7), 2527.
- Frederick, S. (2005). Cognitive reflection and decision making. *Journal of Economic perspectives*, 19(4), 25-42.
- Gabrielsson, J., & Politis, D. (2011). Career motives and entrepreneurial decision-making: examining preferences for causal and effectual logics in the early stage of new ventures. *Small Business Economics*, 36(3), 281-298.
- Gartner, W. B., & Birley, S. (2002). Introduction to the special issue on qualitative methods in entrepreneurship research. *Journal of business venturing*, 17(5), 387-395.
- Global economic prospects A World Bank group flagship report” international bank for reconstruction and development The World Bank (2020) Accessed 11.09.22
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33748/9781464815539.pdf>
- Guerrero, M., Rialp, J., & Urbano, D. (2008). The impact of desirability and feasibility on entrepreneurial intentions: A structural equation model. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 4(1), 35-50.

Haneberg, D. H. (2020). Interorganizational learning between knowledge-based entrepreneurial ventures responding to COVID-19. *The Learning Organization*.

Haneberg, D. H. (2021). SME managers' learning from crisis and effectual behaviour. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*.

Harrison, R. T., & Leitch, C. M. (2005). Entrepreneurial learning: Researching the interface between learning and the entrepreneurial context. *Entrepreneurship theory and practice*, 29(4), 351-371.

Hirschsohn, P. (2008). Regulating the Animal Spirits' of Entrepreneurs? Skills Development in South African Small and Medium Enterprises. *International Small Business Journal*, 26(2), 181-206.

Holcomb, T. R., Ireland, R. D., Holmes Jr, R. M., & Hitt, M. A. (2009). Architecture of entrepreneurial learning: Exploring the link among heuristics, knowledge, and action. *Entrepreneurship theory and practice*, 33(1), 167-192.

Hsu, M. H., Ju, T. L., Yen, C. H., & Chang, C. M. (2007). Knowledge sharing behavior in virtual communities: The relationship between trust, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations. *International journal of human-computer studies*, 65(2), 153-169.

Hunter, L., & Lean, J. (2018). Entrepreneurial learning—a social context perspective: evidence from Kenya and Tanzania. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*.

Hughes, T., O'Regan, N., & Sims, M. A. (2009). The effectiveness of knowledge networks: an investigation of manufacturing SMEs. *Education+ Training*.

Jones, O., & Macpherson, A. (2006). Inter-organizational learning and strategic renewal in SMEs: extending the 4I framework. *Long Range Planning*, 39(2), 155-175.

Jones, O., Macpherson, A., & Thorpe, R. (2010). Learning in owner-managed small firms: Mediating artefacts and strategic space. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, 22(7-8), 649-673.

Krishna, S. M. (2013). Entrepreneurial motivation a case study of small scale entrepreneurs in Mekelle, Ethiopia. *Journal of Business Management & Social Sciences Research*, 2(1), 1-6.

Lans, T., Biemans, H., Verstegen, J., & Mulder, M. (2008). The influence of the work environment on entrepreneurial learning of small-business owners. *Management Learning*, 39(5), 597-613.

Lindh, I., & Thorgren, S. (2016). Critical event recognition: An extended view of reflective learning. *Management Learning*, 47(5), 525-542.

Macpherson, A., & Holt, R. (2007). Knowledge, learning and small firm growth: A systematic review of the evidence. *Research policy*, 36(2), 172-192.

Man, T. W. Y. (2007). Understanding entrepreneurial learning: A competency approach. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 8(3), 189-198.

Markowska, M., & Wiklund, J. (2020). Entrepreneurial learning under uncertainty: exploring the role of self-efficacy and perceived complexity. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 32(7-8), 606-628.

Minniti, M., & Bygrave, W. (2001). A dynamic model of entrepreneurial learning. *Entrepreneurship theory and practice*, 25(3), 5-16.

Martinez, M. A., Yang, T., & Aldrich, H. E. (2011). Entrepreneurship as an evolutionary process: Research progress and challenges. *Entrepreneurship Research Journal*, 1(1).

Myers, M. (2000). Qualitative research and the generalizability question: Standing firm with Proteus. *The qualitative report*, 4(3), 9.

Naidoo, V. (2010). Firm survival through a crisis: The influence of market orientation, marketing innovation and business strategy. *Industrial marketing management*, 39(8), 1311-1320.

Ngek, B. N. (2012). An exploratory study on entrepreneurial mindset in the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector: A South African perspective on fostering small and medium enterprise (SME) success. *African Journal of Business Management*, 6(9), 3364-3372.

news24. (2022, 05 23). news24. Retrieved 12 01, 2022, from news24:
<https://www.news24.com/fin24/partnercontent/the-essential-role-of-smes-in-the-economy-20220510>

Nogueira, T. F. (2019). Entrepreneurial learning: what do we mean by it?. *The Learning Organization*.

Pawlowsky, P. (2001). Management science and organizational learning. *The handbook of organizational learning and knowledge*, 61-88.

Petkova, A. P. (2009). A theory of entrepreneurial learning from performance errors. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 5(4), 345-367.

Pittaway, L., Missing, C., Hudson, N., & Maragh, D. (2009). Entrepreneurial learning through action: a case study of the Six-Squared program. *Action Learning: Research and Practice*, 6(3), 265-288.

Pittaway, L., & Thorpe, R. (2012). A framework for entrepreneurial learning: A tribute to Jason Cope. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 24(9-10), 837-859.

Politis, D. (2005). The process of entrepreneurial learning: A conceptual framework. *Entrepreneurship theory and practice*, 29(4), 399-424.

Politis, D. (2008). Does prior start-up experience matter for entrepreneurs' learning? A comparison between novice and habitual entrepreneurs. *Journal of small business and Enterprise Development*.

Politis, D., & Gabrielsson, J. (2005). Exploring the role of experience in the process of entrepreneurial learning. *Lund Institute of Economic Research: Working Paper Series*.

Politis, D., & Gabrielsson, J. (2009). Entrepreneurs' attitudes towards failure: An experiential learning approach. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*.

Politis, D., & Gabrielsson, J. (2015). Modes of learning and entrepreneurial knowledge. *International Journal of Innovation and Learning*, 18(1), 101-122.

Putz, D., Schilling, J., Kluge, A., & Stangenberg, C. (2013). Measuring organizational learning from errors: Development and validation of an integrated model and questionnaire. *Management learning*, 44(5), 511-536.

Rae, D. (2000). Understanding entrepreneurial learning: a question of how?. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*.

Rae, D. (2005). Entrepreneurial learning: a narrative-based conceptual model. *Journal of small business and enterprise development*.

Rae, D. (2006). Entrepreneurial learning: A conceptual framework for technology-based enterprise. *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management*, 18(1), 39-56.

Rae, D., & Carswell, M. (2000). Using a life-story approach in researching entrepreneurial learning: the development of a conceptual model and its implications in the design of learning experiences. *Education+ training*.

Rae, D., & Carswell, M. (2001). Towards a conceptual understanding of entrepreneurial learning. *Journal of small business and enterprise development*.

Ramukumba, T. (2014). Overcoming SMEs challenges through critical success factors: A case of SMEs in the Western Cape Province, South Africa. *Economic and business review*, 16(1), 19-38.

Rowley, J. (2000). From learning organisation to knowledge entrepreneur. *Journal of knowledge management*.

Sadler-Smith, E., Spicer, D. P., & Chaston, I. (2001). Learning orientations and growth in smaller firms. *Long range planning*, 34(2), 139-158.

Sanz-Velasco, S. A. (2006). Opportunity development as a learning process for entrepreneurs. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*.

Saunders, M. N., Gray, D. E., & Goregaokar, H. (2014). SME innovation and learning: the role of networks and crisis events. *European Journal of Training and Development*.

Scarmozzino, E., Corvello, V., & Grimaldi, M. (2017). Entrepreneurial learning through online social networking in high-tech startups. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*.

Schou, P. K., Bucher, E., & Waldkirch, M. (2022). Entrepreneurial learning in online communities. *Small Business Economics*, 58(4), 2087-2108.

Schepers, J., Vandekerckhof, P., & Dillen, Y. (2021). The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on growth-oriented SMEs: Building entrepreneurial resilience. *Sustainability*, 13(16), 9296.

Shane, S. (2000). Prior knowledge and the discovery of entrepreneurial opportunities. *Organization science*, 11(4), 448-469.

Smilor, R. W. (1997). Entrepreneurship: Reflections on a subversive activity. *Journal of Business venturing*, 12(5), 341-346.

StatisticsSA, 2019. StatisticsSA. [Online] Available at: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=12576> [Accessed 15 8 2020].

StatsSA, 2020. StatisticsSA. [Online] Available at:

<http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=13411#:~:text=According%20to%20Statistics%20South%20Africa,the%20first%20quarter%20of%202020.> [Accessed 10 08 2020].

StatisticsSA. "Three facts about small business sector in South Africa." Three facts about small business sector in South Africa, StatisticsSA, 17 December 2020, http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=13900&gclid=CjwKCAjwoduRBhA4EiwACL5RPwlf1gVcN7NpURtA1B9pvA-1SFbvbHknCeHkiH7qIP6veLuFgtvsBoCSpUQAvD_BwE. Accessed 20 March 2022.

Statssa. "COVID-19: Nine in ten businesses report reduced turnover." Statistics South Africa, 14 May 2020, <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=13313>. Accessed 31 July 2022.

Soetanto, D. (2017). Networks and entrepreneurial learning: coping with difficulties. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*.

Tucker H. Forbes; 2020. Coronavirus bankruptcy tracker: These major companies are failing amid the shutdown <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hanktucker/2020/05/03/coronavirus-bankruptcy-tracker-these-major-companies-are-failing-amid-the-shutdown/?sh=33f3101c3425>

Unger, J. M., Keith, N., Hilling, C., Gielnik, M. M., & Frese, M. (2009). Deliberate practice among South African small business owners: Relationships with education, cognitive ability, knowledge, and success. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 82(1), 21-44.

Unger, J. M., Rauch, A., Frese, M., & Rosenbusch, N. (2011). Human capital and entrepreneurial success: A meta-analytical review. *Journal of business venturing*, 26(3), 341-358.

van Scheers, L., & Makhitha, K. M. (2016). Are small and medium enterprises (SMEs) planning for strategic marketing in South Africa?. *Foundations of Management*, 8(1), 243-250.

Walsh, G. S., & Cunningham, J. A. (2017). Regenerative failure and attribution: Examining the underlying processes affecting entrepreneurial learning. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*.

Wang, C. L., & Chugh, H. (2014). Entrepreneurial learning: Past research and future challenges. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 16(1), 24-61.

Wang, Y., Hong, A., Li, X., & Gao, J. (2020). Marketing innovations during a global crisis: A study of China firms' response to COVID-19. *Journal of business research*, 116, 214-220.

Warren, L. (2004). A systemic approach to entrepreneurial learning: An exploration using storytelling. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science: The Official Journal of the International Federation for Systems Research*, 21(1), 3-16.

WHO <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Zhang, M., Macpherson, A., & Jones, O. (2006). Conceptualizing the learning process in SMEs: improving innovation through external orientation. *International Small Business Journal*, 24(3), 299-323.

Zhang, F., Wei, L., Sun, H., & Tung, L. C. (2018). How entrepreneurial learning impacts one's intention towards entrepreneurship: A planned behavior approach. *Chinese Management Studies*.

Zhao, Y., Li, Y., Lee, S. H., & Bo Chen, L. (2011). Entrepreneurial orientation, organizational learning, and performance: Evidence from China. *Entrepreneurship theory and practice*, 35(2), 293-317.

