

**EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OF FAMILY BUSINESS OWNERS
AND ITS INFLUENCE ON BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY IN
MASVINGO PROVINCE OF ZIMBABWE**

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Declaration

This work or any part thereof has not been previously submitted in any form to the university or any other institution for the purpose of assessment or publication.

Except for the express acknowledgments and references cited in this thesis, I confirm that the intellectual content of the work is a result of my own efforts.

The Durban University of Technology certified ethical clearance of this study.

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Abstract

The survival of family-owned businesses beyond the first generation continues to be negatively affected by the death or incapacitation of their founding members. Despite the contribution of family-owned businesses, about 50% of the total global GDP (Rahman et al. 2017) statistics show that only 3% of these businesses survive past the third generation (Kilic and Folizoz 2020). The demise of the founders of the family businesses results in the businesses' collapse, often after ownership and management has been taken over by heirs, notwithstanding their experience gained from working with the founder members.

This qualitative study explored the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability. The study also analysed the kinds of knowledge gained and the support provided by other family members. An interpretive paradigm was adopted in which a multiple-site case study involving three settings: rural, growth points and urban areas in Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe was employed. Two-interview series, complimented by non-participatory observations and photo elicitations explored the family business owners who were extracted through purposive, convenience and snowball sampling designs. Data from 21 family business owners explored was transcribed and analysed manually through open coding.

The study drew on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory to illuminate the study, and explain the experiential learning of the family business owners. The study found that family business owners across the three research settings experientially learnt through participation in business activities subsequent to observation, and also through reflection. Findings revealed that experiential learning had a direct influence on business sustainability within a given generation. Contextual variations in learning processes emerged as family business owners in the rural setting encountered challenges around a lack of electricity and poor physical infrastructure, inhibiting their experiential learning through use of ICTs and the appropriate transportation of goods.

In addition, informed by conceptual frameworks (Grossman 1990; Mukeredzi and Manwa 2019) the study also discovered that family business owners acquired practical knowledge about the use of sophisticated technology, entrepreneurial skills and soft skills. While urban based family business owners were transparent regarding their employees' salaries, their counterparts in the rural setting did not pay their employees regular salaries.

Drawing on Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, this study also discovered that family business owners enjoyed support from family members in terms of teamwork and social support.

Collaboration was common in family-owned businesses in the rural setting, where close family ties seemed intact. However, emotional and informational support was received from other family members across all the three research contexts.

Notwithstanding the experiential learning and kinds of knowledge attained, including support from other family members, the experiential learning of the family business owners had no significant influence on the long-term business sustainability when ownership and control shifted from one generation to another. Business sustainability was enhanced within a given generation. It also emerged that family business owners operated without succession planning, a critical aspect for business sustainability across generations.

From this study, I argue that experiential learning of family business owners should be complemented with succession planning to enhance business sustainability across generations. The study suggests that family business owners should open up, discuss and develop succession plans that will enhance transition from one generation to the next. The study also suggests that family business owners should develop and implement remuneration policies that govern the salaries of the nuclear family members who work in the family businesses. With government support, family business owners in rural settings should consider the installation of solar systems to enhance the use of ICT.

Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my late parents, Jerina Moyo-Machida and Vandidrai Gwatiringa-Machida, who taught me to be myself and what I am today. I also dedicate this study to my wife, Alletta Mukashuri-Machida, who missed so much to gain so much. To my children, Abiola-Paidaishe, Mufaro-Vandidrai, Takudzwa-Stephen and Abigail-Paidamoyo, I say an academic precedent has been set.

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Abbreviations

- ANOVA - Analysis of Variance
- CB - SEM - Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modelling
- DUT - Durban University of Technology
- ELT - Experiential Learning Theory
- EU - European Union
- FB - Family Business
- FBO - Family Business Owner
- FOB - Family Owned Business
- GDP - Gross Domestic Product
- IREC - Institutional Research Ethics Committee
- MSMEs - Micro, Small to Medium Enterprises
- PES - Pako Educational Solutions
- SEM - Structural Equation Model
- SLT - Social Learning Theory
- SMEs - Small to Medium Enterprises
- SOPs - Standards Operating Procedures
- SPSS - Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
- UK - United Kingdom
- US - United States
- USA - United States of America

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CHAPTER ONE

SETTING THE SCENE

Introduction

The vibrant business environment of a country is hinged on the long-term sustainability of business organisations that are involved in either domestic or foreign trade. Such business entities include family-owned businesses where family members constitute the majority of the shareholders. From the pre-independence era to date, running a family-owned business in Zimbabwe has always been a source of pride for the few privileged business owners and their families, and a source of envy for the neighbourhood. The economic contribution of family business owners plays a significant role in improving the standard of living of different people residing in deep rural areas, growth points and urban areas. Zimbabwe attained political independence in 1980, and the family-owned businesses which existed during the pre-independence era remain one of the forms of businesses within the economic environment. However, the existence of family-owned businesses tends to be overshadowed by small-to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), of which the majority are family-owned businesses. According to Kazunga (2019), a survey that was carried out in 2012 by Finscope Micro indicates that Zimbabwe has 2.8 million SMEs contributing more than 60% to the gross domestic product (GDP). Family-owned businesses which are also part of the SMEs are considered to have a tremendous impact on the national and global economic field, contributing over 70% of the global GDP (Agamy 2014).

Regardless of this huge economic contribution to the global GDP, family-owned businesses remain constricted to the underground economy as these businesses are not easily identified in the total production data (Andersson, Johansson, Karlsson, Lodefalk and Poldahl 2018). Data and statistical figures of the contributions of the family-owned businesses in Zimbabwe were not available at the time of the study as these forms of enterprises were apparently classified as SMEs (Dumbu 2018). However, the concepts of *family-owned business* and *SME* are loosely used to mean the same venture in some of the surveyed literature. Based on their economic significance, the existence of family-owned businesses warrants more investigation in order to make it prominent in the body of literature. It is also noted that: There are considerable parts of the world where the role of family businesses is largely undocumented. Key regions such as Africa, the Middle East and large parts of Asia have long gone unstudied (Agamy 2014).

Despite being undocumented, the family business owners remain critical economic contributors globally, and to the Zimbabwean GDP, through employment creation and provision of retail services to their communities.

According to Rahman, Barroso and Sanguino (2017), over two-thirds of all worldwide businesses are owned, controlled and maintained by families and these account for about 50% of the total global GDP. However, the World Economic Forum's (2012) global reports and statistics show that only 30-33% of family-owned businesses remain operational past the first generation, while even fewer (10-16%) will still be in existence up to the third generation, and as few as 3% survive into further generations. In Canada and the United States of America (USA) approximately 90% of the businesses are claimed to be family-owned (Rahman et al. 2017), and their economic impact has been overwhelming. Such levels of economic contributions are a clear indication of the importance of the family business in any given economy. There is a need to understand and capitalise on the benefits associated with the operations of family businesses. In a study of family businesses in the European Union (EU) countries, Lewandowska and Handryś-Nowak (2012) noted that 70%-80% of the businesses in Europe are family-owned businesses employing 40%-50% of the labour force. This level of contribution is premised on the grounds that family businesses focus on retaining long-term sustainability and hence focus on stability, rather than on making short-term profits.

The positive impact of the family businesses cannot be overlooked in African economies. Venter and Farrington (2009) indicate that in South Africa, 80% of the SMEs are family-owned businesses contributing 60% to the GDP and employing 75% of the labour force. The positive contribution of the family businesses in South Africa may be due to massive retrenchments in the formal sector of the economy, as well as the positive effects of Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (Venter and Farrington 2009).

Notwithstanding this huge contribution reflected above, the life spans of these businesses have been reported as short. In a study carried out in South Africa on the leadership capabilities of first and second generation family business owners, Van der Westhuizen and Garnett (2014) have found that very few of these family-owned businesses continue to exist after the first generation due to succession failure. In the same vein, Fatoki (2014) notes that the failure rate of small-scale business entities in South Africa is between 70% and 80%, and that 80% of all new small businesses fail within their first 5 years of existence. This is supported by Sandada and Mangwandi (2015) who point out that the survival of family-owned businesses in Zimbabwe has always fluctuated. A number of family-owned businesses struggle for survival after the demise

of the founding members (Sikomwe, Mhonde, Mbetu, Mavhiki and Mapetere 2012). The exit from business operations by subsequent generations may result in a negative impact on a number of stakeholders. The loss of a stable income means that the livelihoods of family business owners and other family members is affected, with the net effect of a lowered standard of living. The non-sustainability of family businesses often becomes a serious problem when job creation is weakened, income growth is hampered and poverty reduction is compromised (Mazikana 2017; Malinga 2018). While the problem might originate from within the family business, ripple effects can derail the overall national economic development. When family-owned businesses fail to remain sustainable in the long run, the resultant effect on the retail trade chain will be a compromised national economic growth, loss of employment opportunities and a reduced GDP. Thus, against all of the above, questions regarding how family business owners experience learning and how that learning influences their business's sustainability have not been adequately answered.

While there has been no consensus on the definition and/or composition of a family-owned business (Abouzaid 2011), the general understanding is that family business owners are entrepreneurs whose composition and control have to be constituted by a majority of family members. According to Benavides-Velasco, Quintan-Garcia and Guzman-Parra (2011), some European family businesses include tight circles of immediate relatives whose connection is through blood or marriage. In the African context extended families are the foundation of kinship ties (Atsu 2016). In light of the views of Atsu (2016), family business owners in this study comprised of nuclear and extended family members. Given their social interactions in the family system, both nuclear and extended family members can have an impact on the operations of family-owned businesses, hence their inclusion in this study.

In most developing economies, successful SMEs are the primary engines of entrepreneurial skills development and poverty reduction (Van der Westhuizen and Garnett 2014). Zimbabwe is no exception. According to Sanderson (2014), the large informal sector in the Zimbabwean context plays a pivotal role as a 'shock absorber' for an economy gripped by a fairly lengthy period of sluggish economic activity and income growth. Given a somehow obscure classification of family businesses in Zimbabwe (Dumbu 2018), the informal sector seems to be dominated by SMEs composed of family business entities. A number of these family business owners entering the Zimbabwean informal sector may be victims of retrenchment from the formal sector from which they bring vast skills and business knowledge. A study by Ndiweni, Mashonganyika, Ncube and Dube (2014) which took place against the background of high

poverty levels indicates that the informal economy is a critical source of livelihoods in Zimbabwean urban areas. Ndiweni et al. (2014) note that small-scale businesses create employment opportunities for the unemployed and the retrenched, and the prices of their goods and services are affordable to the majority of low-income individuals.

While family-owned businesses are generally viewed as the oldest form of business organisation, with immense contribution to both the global and the national GDP, and enhancing quality of life, not much is known about how these business owners experience learning, and moreover whether or not their learning influences the sustainability of the businesses. It is against this background that the current study explored the experiential learning of family business owners and how it influenced business sustainability in Masvingo province in Zimbabwe.

This first chapter of the thesis introduces the study by providing a background to the research. After this introduction, the next section discusses the phenomenon of the family business, followed by the focus and purpose of the study which outlines the study parameters. This is followed by the personal context and motivation for the study, which is then followed by the rationale for carrying out the study. The background to the study is then discussed. Subsequently an outline of the key research question and the subsidiary questions is provided, followed by overviews of the theoretical framework, methodological approach and axiological assumptions. The chapter ends with an outline of the chapters of this thesis.

The Family Business

As indicated above, the concept of the ‘family business’ has apparently not been universally defined, with the possibility of two or more researchers working with different ‘constituencies’ of the ‘family’ when discussing family businesses. According to Rahman et al. (2017), a family-owned business is viewed as a commercial enterprise in which decision-making is influenced by multiple generations of a family, related by blood or marriage – who are closely identifiable with the firm through leadership or ownership. From the above definition, there is a need for a multi-generational dimension, family involvement and family influence for a business entity to be classified as a family business.

A family business may also be defined based on the criterion that at least 51% of its equity is owned by a single family, and at least 2 family members are actively involved as senior managers in the business (Rahman et al. 2017). Emphasis is placed on participation and involvement in the business entity and the sense of passion in the business (Laaksonen, Ainamo

and Karjalainen 2015) The views of Lewandowska and Handrys-Nowak (2012) concur with those of Rahman et al. (2017) as they suggest that the active involvement of family members in the day-to-day business matters is crucial for an entity to be considered as a family business. Given the composition of the family business, with owners who co-exist from one generation to the next, the assumption is that there will be perpetuity in the lifespan of the family business. Nonetheless, the demise of founding members through death or any other form of incapacitation often results in the ultimate folding up of the family business, despite the availability of other family members who may have understudied their predecessors.

It should be noted that different descriptors are used to refer to the family-owned business. Abouzaid (2011) points out that various terms such as ‘family business’, ‘family firm’, ‘family company’, ‘family-owned business’, ‘family-owned company’ and ‘family-controlled business’ can be used interchangeably. However, for the purpose of this study, the phrases ‘family-owned business’ (FOB) and family business (FB) are used interchangeably. The concept of the ‘family business’, as highlighted earlier, has been caught up in a classification challenge as no universal definition has been forthcoming. It is partly due to the meaning of the term ‘family’ (Rahman et al. 2017) that some studies are likely to include firms in their family firm sample that would not have been included in other studies’ samples, thereby accounting for the ambiguous findings.

A major challenge faced by researchers on family businesses has been the universal application of family firm definitions, on the basis of global and regional contexts, as well as the era when the study was carried out (Abouzaid 2011; Harms 2014). International views of a family-owned business vary significantly. Harms (2014) notes that individualistic tendencies and nuclear households are predominant in the Scandinavian and North-Western European countries, as opposed to the emphasis placed on the extended family in the African context. Given such characteristics, the family business structure and composition is dependent on a few close kinsmen while the African traditional family is grounded on an extended kinship network. It is founded on collective relationships. I regarded the rural context as a crucial research site from which data for the current study was also elicited to complement and provide for comparison with growth points and urban centres in terms of how they constituted the family within the family-owned businesses.

Moreover, business organisations occur in many different forms, such as according to their organisational structure, ownership, sector and scale of operation, among many other forms of distinction (Guskey and Yoon 2009; Rahman et al. 2017). Family-owned businesses may be multi-categorised as such businesses operate with different organisational structures. The

majority of family businesses seem to be small in size and they end up being classified as SMEs. Harms (2014) notes that empirical work on the family business is scant, to the extent that it has become synonymous with small-scale business enterprises. Irrespective of the category, family businesses can be classified as either small-scale or large-scale business ventures which are located in rural areas, growth points or in urban areas.

In this study, a multi-faceted perspective of the family business was adopted, as noted above, where such family-owned businesses were considered to embrace, *inter alia* the following features;

- Ownership of at least three nuclear or extended family members;
- At least one family member with managerial control of the business;
- Recognition of other supporting family members.

Thus, in this study, the nature of the family business was based on ownership and the involvement of family members in the business, either actively or passively. To clarify the dichotomy between the family system and the family business, Schwass (2013: 4) points out that:

... Individuals form a family, not by choice, but by automatic inclusion for life. In contrast, individuals are invited to join a business based on the principles of meritocracy, and they are given a contract... and a clearly defined job description outlining what the business expects from them.

In contrast to a non-family business, family members join the business by virtue of family ties and not business acumen. Observations from the Zimbabwean economic crisis show that opportunistic and survivalist entrepreneurs emerge without any prior business skills (Mazikana 2017). The economic meltdown, which is not the focus of this study, has provided opportunities where people have gotten into business for survival. The focus of this study was on the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability.

Schwass (2013) asserts that businesses are normally governed by rationality whereas families are governed by emotions. The family dynamics can play a pivotal role in the success or failure of a business enterprise. In a family, the composition, size, members' hopes, interests and aspirations often do not remain static. According to Abouzaid (2011), household dynamics in the form of the entry and exit of family members through birth, marriage, separation or death, offer both new possibilities and challenges to the existing social and economic order. Surveyed literature portrays the family and the business as overlapping communities (Hamilton 2011). This view can be the same in the Zimbabwean context, where in some cases the family resides at the

business premises, especially in rural areas and growth points. In such cases children often gain some knowledge on running a business through exposure and experience.

According to Kana (2013), a family business usually develops as a result of true entrepreneurship of the founding members, as owners tend to be self-driven, fearless, hands-on individuals who believe in themselves and what needs to be done. Irrespective of common business challenges faced by any other business, sustainability for most family businesses often becomes a disturbing issue as businesses shift from one generation to the next. Learning is often crucial for family business owners and other family members as this can result in a *learning culture* ideal for the sustenance of the family business. According to Blackwood (2014), a learning culture supports a community of learners, as a total organisation, where everyone teaches, everyone shares knowledge and everyone learns. This can be essential for the family business where the business system is not divorced from the family system.

Strong family relationships can be observed in the way that family business owners gain support from other family members (Ayranci 2010; Musa and Semasinghe 2014). Therefore interactions within the business system can be mirrored in the way that family business owners relate within the family system. Mohajan (2017) points out that when people participate in the day-to-day running of a business, they get embedded in communities of practice and therefore become engaged in the generative process of producing their own future. Learning becomes a collective effort (McLeod 2016). Mohajan (2017) further points out that participation in a culture of practice can, in the first instance, be observation from the boundary or legitimate peripheral participation. As learning and involvement in the organisational culture increases, the participant shifts from the role of observer to a fully functioning agent. Children and other family members may start off being mere observers before their total involvement in the running of the family business. Legitimate peripheral participation (Mohajan 2017) enables the child or other family members to progressively piece together the culture of the group and what it means to be a group member. To participate in a legitimately peripheral way entails family business members having broad access to arenas of mature practice in family business operations. It is only through this involvement that takeovers of control are possible from one generation to the next.

The next section addresses the focus and purpose of this study.

Focus and Purpose of the Study

The current study, which falls under the field of entrepreneurship education, targeted family business owners whose businesses were located in rural, growth points and in urban areas in one

province in Zimbabwe. The growth points, which are generally located in rural areas, were established by the government in an effort to develop rural areas and ‘stem’ rural-urban migration. Rural areas in this context are understood as constituting the traditional village style, sparsely populated, remote, communal lands previously called ‘tribal trust lands’ or ‘reserves’ before independence and are occupied by the black indigenous population (Mukeredzi and Manwa 2019). Remote denotes the physical road distance to the nearest urban centre where geographical distance imposes high restrictions. Given the general marginalisation, there are deficiencies and challenges associated with rural areas in education (Mukeredzi 2013) for instance, the inclusion of rural family-owned businesses in this study was a deliberate attempt to understand whether they experientially learnt and sustained the businesses like their counterparts in urban areas and at growth points.

The composition of family members was critical in this study in order to facilitate the identification of individuals deemed to have experienced experiential learning who could be explored. Thus, both nuclear and extended family members were investigated. The nuclear family was deemed to have provided an opportunity for children to learn through observation and imitation of how their parents engaged in day-to-day activities and managed the family businesses. It was these children and also their parents that the current study attempted to examine to determine whether any experiential learning took place. As learning is a reciprocal process (McLeod 2016), it was also critical to find out whether founding members, such as parents, could learn from their children and other family members. If learning took place, it became necessary to find out whether the learning influenced the sustainability of the family business. The extended family members included close, and in a few cases, distant relatives, involved in the running of the family business either as employees, part-owners, or as external advisers and sources of information.

The next section discusses my personal context as a researcher and the factors that motivated me to engage in this study.

Personal Context and Motivation for the Study

The drive for this research topic emanated from my observation that most family-owned businesses within my locality, and the province targeted in general, tended to struggle for survival beyond the second generation. This observation augmented the assertions by Sandada and Mangwandi (2015) that Zimbabwean family businesses tend to find it difficult to remain sustainable after the death of the founding members.

Specifically, the study was prompted by my desire as an economist-cum-educationist to understand two critical phenomena, namely experiential learning of family business owners and sustainability of family-owned businesses. I was born, brought up and attended primary school in a deep, remote rural area where we would buy all household necessities from local sole proprietors. It was from the way in which the local sole proprietors managed their businesses that I concluded that these were family-owned businesses where different family members were involved in the day-to-day running of the business affairs.

After secondary school education, I trained as a high school teacher, after which I worked in rural areas for more than ten years teaching commercial subjects. Again, as a high school teacher, all our grocery shopping was from the local family-owned businesses, many of which appeared to have been struggling for survival after the demise of the founding owners. The shops had limited stock and the shelves were always empty, and these entities would eventually fold up. I later left high school teaching for lectureship at the Zimbabwe Open University. As an Economics lecturer in university, my exposure to and interactions with mature, distance-learning students, some of whom were family business owners, further confirmed my observations about the failure of family businesses to transcend the first or second generation. Through research supervision during that period I realised that students' dissertations were mainly on SMEs, without any specific reference to family-owned businesses and their sustainability. All this kept me wondering about family-owned businesses and their sustainability, given their contribution to the national economy and the GDP.

After five years as a university lecturer I relocated to South Africa where I began working as a Mathematics and Economics educator, a position I held at the time of the study. Teaching Economics at high schools in different districts and provinces exposed me to the contemporary issues of South African businesses in general and family-owned businesses in particular, whose sustainability from one generation to the next was also always compromised. With approximately 80-90% of SMEs in South Africa being family-owned (Venter and Farrington 2009), these businesses have the potential to spearhead the national economic growth.

While working in South Africa, in 2015 I decided to venture into family-owned business operations and formally registered *Pako Educational Solutions (PES)* in accordance with the requirements of the Zimbabwean Companies' Act. PES is a family-owned business venture with three directors from a nuclear family, which provides educational resources mainly to rural schools. My involvement in this family business offered me first-hand information on the sustainability challenges faced by these entities. All of these experiences not only kept me in

close proximity to family-owned businesses and their sustainability, but also developed in me a passion and immediate drive to engage in a study focusing on family-owned businesses and their long-term sustainability. The rationale for this study is discussed in the next section.

Rationale for the Study

The phenomenon of experiential learning, in the context of entrepreneurship education, has not been dominant in recent research as scholars have focused on succession planning and its impact on business continuity (Benavides-Velasco et al. 2011). Given the significance and input of family businesses to the global GDP, as highlighted above, and to national economies such as in the Zimbabwean case, such forms of business organisations cannot be overlooked. Family businesses need to be cognisant of global developments as noted by Ristovska and Ristovska (2014: 206):

The global changes in the world, the changes in the political, economic and business activities as well as the development of technology, transport and communications, impose the need for enterprises to change their strategies in their struggle for survival and leave the borders of their own country.

Sharma and Dave (2013) point out that family-owned businesses are responsible for generating 75% of employment in India, as well as contributing 65% towards the Indian economy. Such contributions can be a result of long-term survival of family-owned businesses from one generation to the next. The study by Sharma and Dave (2013) investigated the impact of succession on the performance of small-scale family-owned businesses located in Chattisgarh, central India. The Chattisgarh study showed that family-owned businesses face three problems, namely ‘succession, succession and succession’ (Sharma and Dave 2013), an indication that succession planning is the major challenge faced by family-owned businesses in India. Musa and Semasinghe (2014) in Nigeria asserted that continuity is the major challenge faced by family-owned businesses due to lack of planning by the founding members, which gives rise to family businesses failing after the death of their founders. However, while these studies are in some way related to the current study, none of them focus directly on the experiential learning of the family business owners and how it influences business sustainability.

Most researches on family-owned businesses that have been carried out in the past few decades have helped in the clarification of the phenomenon of succession in a family-owned business and they provide a reference point for my study. In their analysis of past research work on the trends of family business literature, Benavides-Velasco et al. (2011) observed that family firm research

is still in its infancy, a situation which has apparently not yet improved as more research focuses on SMEs (Mashavira, Chipunza and Dzansi 2019). This calls for more studies in the field of entrepreneurship education. The literature on family businesses is seemingly not as voluminous as in other management areas. Benavides et al. (2011) further noted that general topics that have placed significant attention on family-controlled businesses to date include succession planning and corporate governance. This has left the field of experiential learning of family business owners apparently untapped, creating a gap for new researchers to investigate. Hence, the findings of this study will contribute to the body of literature.

In the Zimbabwean context, the business sector does not seem to have a classification for enterprises that fall under family-owned businesses. However, SMEs are documented and thrive under the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises that monitors and enhances their survival, as highlighted in Chapter Two of this thesis. In his discussion of the impact of SMEs on the Zimbabwean economy, Mazikana (2019) pointed out that SMEs have been in the spotlight and have dominated academic debates over the past decade. The data generated by Mazikana (2019) from managers and employees suggests that SMEs play a significant role in the economic progress of Zimbabwe. SMEs have been observed to have:

... The capacity to achieve economic growth faster in view of their high employment potential, small gestation period and relatively limited financial requirements
(Mazikana 2019: 4).

The above quotation apparently indicates that the limited restrictions on the formation and operations of family-owned businesses which are part of SMEs may enhance fast economic growth. In as much as family-owned businesses can be a significant component of SMEs, independent studies are essential to unpack the learning process of family business owners. This is a gap that makes the current study vital. This study on the experiential learning of family business owners and how learning influences business sustainability in the Zimbabwean context could therefore help inform the government's Ministry of Commerce and Industry and other stakeholders in their planning, discussions and decisions for the supporting of SMEs in general, and family-owned businesses in particular. The next section discusses the background to this study, thereby providing a platform on which the research is premised.

Background to the Study

The introductory section of this chapter has highlighted that the death of a founding member is

often followed by termination of the family business' operations after takeover by new management (Sikomwe et al. 2012). Sustainability challenges for family-owned businesses are observed globally, regionally and nationally. The current study shifted from succession planning and focused on experiential learning, an apparently untapped area that needed exploration. The economic importance of family-owned businesses cannot be overlooked. Non-continuity of any family business will have a negative ripple effect on any economy. In line with global and regional literature, past studies from the Zimbabwean context, for example those by Maunganidze (2008); Sandada and Mangwandi (2015), also indicate that lack of effective succession planning and lack of requisite skills or expertise (Chinomona 2013; Samaita 2018)) can impact negatively on small-scale family business sustainability.

The unstable economic environment, characterised by inconsistent government policies, divestment, unbridled inflation and high unemployment levels that has emerged in the Zimbabwean economy since the turn of the 21st century (Mazikana, 2017; Malinga 2018) has been indicative of an economy that is in a downturn, although in an era of economic development, as witnessed in some parts of the global village. According to the International Monetary Fund (2016), the Ivory Coast has been Africa's fastest-growing economy, with an expected growth rate of 8.5% in 2016. Some other fast-growing economies include Tanzania (6.9%), Senegal (6.6%) and Djibouti (6.5%), among many others. However, as of 2017 growth predictions, Ethiopia is the fastest-growing economy with a GDP growth forecast of 8.3% (International Monetary Fund 2017). Such levels of economic growth can be an aggregation of all economic activities, including the input of family businesses. On the contrary, Zimbabwe has de-industrialised to a level where the majority of her citizens thrive on informal trading, a sector dominated by family businesses. According to Mazikana (2017: 2):

Zimbabwe has suffered large-scale de-industrialisation since 1995 that has condemned the bulk of the population to a grinding subsistence life as communal and resettlement farmers, a sector where there is high poverty prevalence.

De-industrialisation is associated with low productivity, with companies downsizing and large-scale retrenchments taking place. Manyanhaire, Mhishi, Sivotwa and Sithole (2009) further note that growth points have become a refuge for victims of retrenchments and many seek business space to start their own ventures, particularly in the retail trade. While the study conducted by Manyanhaire et al. (2009) was limited to the Magunje growth point in the Mashonaland West province of Zimbabwe, this study focused on the experiential learning of family business owners

who faced sustainability challenges after the demise of the founding members in the Masvingo province. Given that literature abounds with external factors that have resulted in the termination of family businesses (Fatoki 2014; Van der Westhuizen and Garnett 2014), the focus of this study was to shift and understand the internal factors, the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners and how it influenced the sustainability of their business entities.

With regard to family involvement, the uniqueness of the family-owned business emanates from the involvement of family members (Ayranci 2010). The structure of a family-owned business may be such that the owners and other family members grow up in a business environment in which they are fully exposed and have hands-on experience with the operations of the business. Family members presumably acquire some practical business skills in a business environment in which they are born and within which they are nurtured (Ayranci 2010). Without any formal business educational environment, family business owners participate in a business environment in which knowledge is expected to be gained through experience. The daily business activities are expected to provide for skills and knowledge acquisition for family members involved in the family business. It was the involvement of both nuclear and extended family members that was critical in this study to understand their experiential learning process and how it influenced business sustainability.

In relation to experiential learning, various forms such as apprenticeships, clinical experiences, fellowships, practicum and internships (Moore 2010) have taken centre stage, particularly in the field of education. These types of experiential learning models provide opportunities for hands-on experience for a pre-determined duration, where a mentor might be required to assist in the practical learning process. The concept of experiential learning which has more bearing on the education sector is equally existent in the business sector. Kolb's (1984) view that experiential learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience can be applicable in entrepreneurship education. Experiential learning is generally understood as a meaning making process that takes place through direct experience. Unlike formal learning, experiential learning focuses on the learning process for the individual (Mukeredzi 2009). Hence, it requires no teacher and is mainly a knowledge construction process of the individual's experience. Reese (2011:1) highlights that:

Learning by doing means learning from experiences resulting directly from one's own actions, as contrasted with learning from watching others perform, reading others' instructions or descriptions, or by listening to others' instructions or lectures.

The experiences emanating from one's own actions are seemingly derived from workplace learning and Tynjala (2008) indicates five realms through which people experience workplace learning:

- Doing the job itself: People learn by doing. Family business owners are therefore expected to gain experience through their own involvement in the execution of different business tasks.
- Collegial co-operation and interaction: Tynjala (2008) points out that the quality of relationships between colleagues in an organisation manifests through respect, connectedness and commitment. These elements are crucial for the learning process to take place through exchange of ideas. Collective engagement with other stakeholders is the basis of workplace learning. It has to be established whether collegial cooperation and interaction play a significant role in the experiential learning process of family business owners.
- Working with clients: Building strong client relationships enhances the chances of experiencing workplace learning through effective communication, maintaining a positive attitude and having mutual trust.
- Tackling challenging and new tasks: The manner in which family business owners handle challenging situations within business organisations can have significant consequences on workplace learning.
- Reflecting on and evaluating one's work experiences: Tynjala (2008) notes that experiential learning occurs as people learn and re-learn through reflecting on and evaluating their work experiences.

Learning and working are interconnected (Cacciattolo 2015) and this may enable family business owners to acquire skills and knowledge that will enhance the business' sustainability. In the business context, practical involvement is critical as live experiences by family business owners may help create lasting memories. However, experience on its own does not constitute learning; it is reflection on the experience and the participation in activities that give rise to knowledge and skills acquisition. Thus, according to Tynjala (2008), experiential learning in the work environment is comparatively different from that acquired in a formal academic environment. Family business owners *learn by doing*, a concept first coined by Plato and then popularised by John Dewey as a philosophy of educational methodology and later applied to business learning by Kenneth Arrow in the 1960s in his design of endogenous growth theory (Tynjala 2008). The organisational structure of a family business creates room for children and

other family members to learn by doing, under the guidance of founding members.

Through doing, children are expected to learn new skills from their work, and so increase family business productivity (Syverson 2011). As family business owners get involved in their daily practical experiential engagements, these have to be investigated and understood in terms of how they influence the family business' sustainability, the kinds of knowledge and skills they gain and the nature of the support that they receive from family members in these processes. The learning process becomes meaningful and effective when family business owners learn how to run a business through experience. In this study, family business owners are viewed as operating in an environment where personal, entrepreneurial and social experiences take place. The individual learning process takes place in a business community with interconnections to the social community, in which the family business owners learn with and from one another (McLeod 2016).

The ability of a family business owner to network in the business sector provides the requisite exposure which is necessary to craft viable business strategies for business sustainability and survival. This has to be coupled with the desire to reflect on and relive the experiences (Kolb 1984) to enable the identification of one's strengths and weaknesses. It is anticipated that family business owners reflect on critical episodes that have occurred during the life cycle of their family business, as well as on current events, and learn from such reflection on those experiences, given that it is through reflection on experiences that learning occurs and not from the experience itself (Mukeredzi 2015).

Through such learning further errors may be minimised, consequently improving or upholding the good performance. Workplace engagements allow family business owners to be directly involved with the realities of the business transactions. This must be differentiated from a learner learning in the formal school scenario that only reads about, hears about, talks about, or writes about these realities and never actually encounters them as part of the learning process (Reese 2011). Retail family business owners are in daily contact with the practice and not the theories of their businesses. It's a daily practical learning process which should enable family business owners to develop the capacity to sustain the business in the unfortunate absence of the founding members.

The phenomenon of sustainability with reference to family-owned businesses is discussed in the next section.

Family Business Sustainability

Apparently, no clear-cut definition is available to help understand the concept of business sustainability. According to Stafford, Bhargava, Danes, Haynes and Brewton (2010), family firm sustainability is the outcome of multiple years of viability, where achievements are multiple and must be evaluated multi-dimensionally. In this regard, long-term business survival constitutes business sustainability. The current study viewed family business sustainability in line with the business' ability to survive beyond the first generation, a possibility that has already been observed globally. According to Colli and Rose (2008: 195):

Family firms have been crucial features of the business landscape for centuries and remain important today. They can be small, medium, or large and have appeared in all sectors and in all three industrial revolutions.

The work of Colli and Rose (2008) focuses on the global perspective where the growth of family businesses into large scale operations has been observed. In the Zimbabwean context most family firms operate as sole proprietorships and their existence as family businesses is not clearly known, and as such family business sustainability across generations has also not been established. In the US, Rahman et al. (2017) observe that family firms out-perform non-family firms due to the family business edge factors which include a long term-view, flexibility, succession prospects and family commitment. However, while it is not clear in Rahman et al.'s (2017) study how such factors contribute to business sustainability, the current study explores how the experiential learning of family business owners influences business sustainability.

The operations of family businesses dominated human survival well before the insurgence of modern business organisational structures (Chakrabarty 2009). The belief is that entrepreneurship may have originated with the family business structure. Business planning and coordinating business activities from the family setup could probably have made it easier and faster to establish a family business and serve a local community. O'Hara (2004) points out that family businesses were in existence before multinational corporations, before the industrial revolution, before the enlightenment of Greece and before the Empire of Rome. This portrays the family business as the oldest form of business organisation the world over.

Many of the world's oldest companies include family businesses which are still in operation. Some of the world's largest existing family-owned businesses include Wal-Mart in the US, the Samsung Group in Korea and the Tata Group in India (Chakrabarty 2009). The sustainability of family businesses is further highlighted by Schwass (2013: 3), who indicates that the success

stories of these firms can be inferred from two important lessons gained from global research:

- Each multi-generational family business develops its own particular history, which is made up of both gains and pains, but it is essentially based on a culture of resilience and the unshakeable commitment to succeed over the long term.
- Each family business is basically a story about people – entrepreneurs and their families whose personal values and visions leave an indelible imprint on the businesses that they have created and that subsequent generations continue to manage.

Based on the above quotation, Schwass (2013) points out that business sustainability is characterised by episodes of achievements (gains) and failures (pains). The survival of family-owned businesses from one generation to the next should therefore not be presumed to be an automatic successful process, but a long business journey filled with upheavals. The table below shows a few global examples of the oldest family-owned businesses that have managed to exist across generations.

Table 1.1: Examples of the World’s Oldest Family Businesses

Company	Year Founded	Current Generation (2020)	Industry	Location
William Clark & Sons	1739	9 th Generation	Linens manufacturing	UK
Boplaas	1743	9 th Generation	Agriculture	S. Africa
Creed Perfumes	1760	7 th Generation	Perfumes	France
Silca	1770	5 th Generation	Key cutting machines	Italy
Cadbury Schweppes	1783	5 th Generation	Drinks and confections	UK
Wilson Fuel	1788	8 th Generation	Fuel production	Canada
Brucedale Pty ltd	1802	6 th Generation	Farming	Australia

Source: O’Hara and Mandel (2002: 47)

These family business organisations survived beyond the first and subsequent generations and are still in operation. The survival of these family-owned businesses can be confirmation of the possibility of family businesses shifting from one generation to the next. The information in

Table 1.1 above suggests that even Zimbabwean family businesses probably have the potential to survive beyond the first generation. Failure to survive as expected can therefore not be taken as a norm, but a scenario which warrants investigation.

As highlighted above, generally retrenched employees start business ventures as financial capital is available from their retrenchment packages. A viable starting point is a small family business with the possibility and intention for growth. However, while most family businesses start on a very positive note, performance declines as new generations take over. Schwass (2013) asserts that family-owned businesses may collapse when a strong and successful leader becomes inactive and an ill-prepared next generation assumes control. As the family grows, the number of family beneficiaries increases exponentially and more financial demands are expected (Venter and Farrington 2009). Furthermore, Schwass (2013: 3) asserts that:

In essence, entrepreneurs and their families create wealth, but it is ironically also the families who are essentially the single biggest cause of failure of family businesses.

The argument raised by Schwass (2013) indicates that family business owners have the capacity to create wealth, but they equally consume their wealth as the number of beneficiaries also increases. Musa and Semasinghe (2014) note that the lack of proper succession planning by the founders is the backbone of this problem. Similar findings are also noted by Fatoki (2014) in South Africa, who highlights that the lack of or poor management of succession planning, estate and retirement planning in black-owned family businesses are hindrances to their sustainability. As most family business owners presumably learn from experience, and learn to run a business through experience, it was essential in this study to understand the issues relating to the nature of their experiential learning, the knowledge they gained and how the knowledge acquired influenced their family business' sustainability.

According to Mazikana (2017) and Ndiweni et al. (2014), SMEs have been adversely affected by the deterioration and collapse of the Zimbabwean economy, coupled with the dynamic changes in the political, legal, socio-cultural and technological spheres from 2006 to 2009. Table 1.2 below portrays a picture of the sustainability challenges beyond the first generation, as noted by Sikomwe et al. (2012). Though the businesses cited below are in the transport industry, the reference to them is significant to this study in that they all belong to family business owners. To subvert confidentiality, the names of the family-owned bus businesses are represented by codes.

Table 1.2: Bus Operators that Experienced Sustainability Challenges in Zimbabwe

Name of bus operator	Year of death of founder	Number of buses at time of death	Number of buses one year after death	Number of buses two years after death	Number of buses in 2009
Operator A	1988	62	60	55	0
Operator B	1985	16	16	13	0
Operator C	1998	6	5	5	2
Operator D	2000	9	8	6	2
Operator E	2001	12	10	8	1
Operator F	2004	10	7	4	1

Source: Adapted from Sikomwe et al. (2012: 231)

Table 1.2 shows six family-owned bus operators who faced sustainability challenges after the death of a founding member. It took only 21 years for Operator A to lose a total fleet of 88 buses, while Operator E lost 11 buses within a period of 11 years. Various reasons were identified as the causes of the collapse of these businesses in the bus transport industry. There were general economic problems, such as rising global competition, high taxation, and harsh economic and financial problems. Other family business-related challenges included:

... The complexities of family business dynamics such as ownership, succession, family harmony and solidarity (Sikomwe et al. 2012: 230).

Given the scenarios depicted in Table 1.2 above where family-owned businesses failed to remain in operation for at least two to three generations after the demise of the founder, investigating the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners and how it influenced business sustainability, what knowledge they gained and the support received from other family members was vital. According to Sikomwe et al. (2012), family relations tend to be tense, resulting in panic decision-making whenever the founding member passes on. This can be an indication of loose family ties that fail to bind the fabric of family-owned businesses.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

Many family-owned businesses fail to remain viable after the retirement or death of their founding owners (Sandada and Mangwandi 2015). Maunganidze (2008) asserts that family-owned businesses have become as mortal as their founders, suggesting that the death of founding members signifies the demise of the family business. Given the huge economic and social significance of family-owned businesses in any economy, contributing for example 60% to the South African GDP and employing 75% of the labour force in South Africa (Venter and Farrington 2009) and in Zimbabwe the 2.8 million SMEs contributing over 60% to the GDP (Kazunga 2019), the failure and subsequent closure of any family business often has negative effects on the economy. Previous studies carried out globally, regionally and in Zimbabwe have focused mainly on succession planning, creating a gap as not much is known about the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners, what they learn and how the learning influences the business' sustainability. The experiential learning experiences of the retail family business owners have apparently not been studied in depth, particularly in relation to theoretical analysis, and thus require a comprehensive investigation. Research in this area may inform the Zimbabwean Industry and Commerce sector in their discussions and decisions on how family-owned businesses can be supported.

The key question that this study sought to address was: How do family business owners experience learning and how does the learning influence the sustainability of their businesses? To achieve this aim three research questions were posed:

1. What is the nature of the experiential learning that family business owners go through and how does it influence business sustainability?
2. What kind of knowledge is gained experientially by family business owners?
3. What forms of support do family business owners gain from other family members?

Overview of the Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

This study was framed by Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory (ELT) which revolves around a four-stage cycle which purports that knowledge is created through a combination of grasping and transforming an experience. According to Kolb (1984), learning occurs as a new experience emerges, with the learner making a reflective observation about their experience. This was followed by the creation of theories (conceptualisation) to explain the observations, with the ultimate goal of problem solving, decision making (Schenck and Cruickshank 2015)

and finally experimentation. The reflective observation stage is pertinent in the experiential learning process of family business owners who have to recount and evaluate their business experience in order to learn and make worthwhile decisions.

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory was complemented by Bandura's (1977) social learning theory (SLT) which centres on learning taking place within the social context (McLeod 2016). The theory purports that learning occurs as individuals go through four mediational processes of attention, retention, reproduction and motivation that are discussed in detail in Chapter Three of this thesis. The ELT and SLT helped unpack and understand how experiential learning occurred, including how it influenced business sustainability, as well as the forms of support offered by other family members. However, Kolb's (1984) theory was not useful in understanding and explaining the kinds of knowledge gained by family business owners. Thus, conceptual frameworks from various authors such as Shulman (1987), Grossman (1990), Mackey (2011) and Nasser (2014) were drawn on to unpack and explain the kinds of knowledge gained through experiential learning.

An Overview of the Methodological Approach

My study which explored experiential learning of family business owners and how the learning influenced business sustainability was situated within the interpretive paradigm that adopted a multiple-site case study design. The multiple-site case study enabled replications and cross-case comparisons (Yin 2017). The qualitative approach was employed because of its ability to examine, in-depth, a case within its real-life context (Lawrence 2012; Creswell 2013). Purposive, convenience and snowball sampling techniques were employed to draw a sample from which data was generated using face-to-face interviews, photo elicitation and non-participant observations. The data generated was organised according to research the questions, coded, categorised and then clustered into themes that cut across all of the data sources to ensure presentation and detailed analysis of the data.

Axiological Assumptions

The fact that I was not related to any of the research participants and had no close interactions with them allayed any possible biases that I could have held prior to the study. However, I had some form of bias with regard to the continuity of family-owned businesses. Considering what I had learnt and witnessed about the management and demise of family-owned businesses, I had generally understood that business continuity would be hampered by infighting of the surviving

siblings or extended family members. Given this awareness, I brought certain biases to this study. Notwithstanding, I made concerted efforts to ensure objectivity, as such biases might have shaped my views and understanding of the data I generated and the manner in which I interpreted my experiences.

Given that I commenced the study with the perspective that family businesses did not survive beyond the second generation, this was apparently a significant belief that was taken for granted. However, I interrogated how the business owners engaged in experiential learning, what they learnt and how the learning influenced their business sustainability, as well as the nature of the support that family business owners received from other family members. Against this, I also explored the values of the participants which were analysed through the development of their businesses to determine how their experiences influenced their current position, current practices and reflections as family business owners. Having declared my axiological assumptions, in the next section I conclude the chapter and provide the thesis overview.

Definition of terms

- Family owned business

A family business is an enterprise owned or controlled by the family or selected family members, assuming that the company will be handed over to the next generation (Rosenberg, 2011). In this study, the concept ‘family owned business’ entails a business owned and controlled by at least three family members either from a nuclear or extended family. The terms ‘family business’ and ‘family owned business’ are used interchangeably in this study.

- Family business owner

Part owners to a family business are each referred to as a family business owner. Research participants in this study were sampled on the basis that they were actively involved in the day-to-day running of the business. No form of written agreement is required in the establishment of the majority of family businesses in the Zimbabwean context especially those that fall under the informal sector (Mashavira, Chipunza, Dzansi, 2019). Some degree of control in the day-to-day operations of the business and membership to the family are the two main characteristics that constituted family business ownership. Emphasis is on participation and involvement in business concerns.

- Nuclear family member

According to Bafiti, Givaudan, Poortinga and Konantambigi (2014) a nuclear family is defined as a social group characterised by a common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction and consisting of familial positions of parent, spouse and children. Most family owned businesses are constituted by nuclear family members. In this study, these members included a father and a mother or a single parent together with their children. The members made up a household, staying in most cases at the same residence. The idea and formation of a family owned business usually developed within a nuclear family.

- Extended family member

Bafiti et al. (2014) point out that an extended family is a constellation of nuclear families across more than two generations. Informed by Bafiti et al. (2014) this study considered an extended family as made up by nuclear families, originating from the same kinship and kept in touch due to geographical proximities. Members who constituted the extended family in this study included grandparents, uncles and their families, aunts and their families and the in-laws. The involvement of the family business owner's children, siblings, cousins, in-laws and many other forms of family relationships constituted an extended family owned business. Inclusion of extended family members has its own impacts on the operation of family owned businesses. According to Alsos, Carter and Ljunggren (2014) household dynamics in the form of entry and exit of family members through birth, marriage, separation or death offer both new possibilities and also challenges to the social order and economic order of a family owned business.

- Other family members

The concept 'other family members' as used in this study referred to both nuclear and extended family members with whom the family business owner interacted.

- Business sustainability

Consulted literature (Mahajan and Bose, 2018) asserts that business sustainability is explained in terms of the triple bottom line approach where it is all about appreciating the need for economic prosperity, social and environmental consciousness. This is a paradigm shift for family business owners from a short-term perspective to a long-term focus. This study views family business sustainability in accordance with the business' ability to be operational beyond the first generation.

- Experiential learning

Hyams-Ssekasi and Caldwell (2018) view experiential learning as a process through which experience shapes and drives organizational productivity through learning by doing. In this study experiential learning is considered as a workplace-based learning process whereby family business owners gain knowledge through their participation in the day-to-day business activities.

- Entrepreneur

An entrepreneur is an individual who detects creates business opportunities that he or she then exploits through small or medium sized firms, normally participating in funding the capital for that firm, carries out the role of arbitrator or simply sells the idea of the business project (Cuervo, Ribeiro and Roig, 2007). The entrepreneur takes calculated business risks in order to earn profit.

- Succession planning

According to Stenius (2016) succession planning is all about careful skill development, career planning and making sure that governance, communications and decision making all support the transition from one generation to the next. Consistent to this view, succession planning is considered as a deliberate effort taken by founding members to prepare heirs for leadership takeover in the family owned business.

- Generational transition

Family members who found and run a family business would in the long-run be expected to relinquish power, ownership and control of the family business to their children or other family members who would have been involved in the running of the business. Generational transition is a product of succession planning and not an abrupt event.

Conclusion and Overview of the Thesis

The thesis consists of nine chapters. The study explored the experiential learning that family business owners went through and how the learning influenced business sustainability. This first chapter introduced the study, arguing that family-owned businesses, notwithstanding their contribution to national economies and the GDP, failed to survive beyond the second generation. Pertinent issues such as the purpose and focus of the study, the rationale of the study, as well as the background covering the source and context of the problem of family business sustainability from one generation to the next were discussed. Overviews of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, the methodology, as well as the axiological assumptions were outlined. Chapter

Two reviews the relevant global, regional and national literature, which helps to further justify the study by identifying gaps in the existing research on the phenomenon and contextualises the study. The third chapter provides a detailed discussion of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks on which this study was grounded, as indicated in the overview above.

The research methodology is presented in Chapter Four where the philosophical underpinnings of the study, the research design and approach, sampling techniques, data generation and analysis procedures are discussed. Chapter Five discusses the research setting, and a description of the three research contexts from which the data was generated and analysed is provided. In Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, I present, interpret and analyse the data with respect to each of the three research questions. Chapter Nine provides the synthesis, discussion, and conclusions of the study, from which recommendations are drawn for consideration by key stakeholders.

The next chapter discusses the review of related literature on the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter one of this thesis introduced the study, highlighted the focus, and provided the background information and rationale that justified the study on the experiential learning of family business owners and how the learning influences business sustainability. The introductory chapter also discussed the research focus and questions, overviews of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, the methodological approach and the axiological assumptions. This second chapter critically analyses the literature from books and scholarly journal articles relevant to my study. According to Mudavanhu (2017), a literature review in research provides an understanding of the existing information, helps to identify areas of controversy or debates that are relevant to a particular topic, and where future research might best be directed. In this chapter, I illustrate what has been written on my topic, and also discuss those relevant topics that may have been discussed differently, thus contextualising my study and identifying the literature gap which my study will contribute to.

Ramdhani, Ramdhani and Amin (2014) also note that the goal of a literature review is to bring the reader or researcher up-to-date with the current literature on a topic. In this regard, I made a deliberate effort to ensure that the majority of the sources that I used in this chapter and in my study were current. However, I also had to draw on a few dated sources which had pertinent information, which I could not leave out.

According to Tanczer (2015), a literature review chapter may be organised in accordance with any of the three approaches, namely a chronological, contextual or conceptual approach. In this chapter I adopted the conceptual approach where I organised the literature review around my main research question: 'How do family business owners experience learning and how does the learning influence the sustainability of their businesses?' I adopted my three research questions as the key subheadings in the chapter. However, within these three sections, literature is discussed conceptually according to the contexts: global, regional and national, thereby adopting a 'funnel' approach.

After this introductory note, an overview is given of the literature that was reviewed for this study, highlighting the relevance of the sourced literature. Next is the review of literature on the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners and how it influences business

sustainability. This is followed by a review of the kinds of knowledge that family business owners gain experientially. The chapter proceeds to address the involvement and support of other family members, who include nuclear and extended family members. The chapter concludes with a summary that ties the literature review together.

An Overview of the Literature on the Experiential Learning of Family Business Owners and its Influence on Business Sustainability

In this chapter global, regional and national perspectives from literature relating to my three research questions on experiential learning of family business owners are critically reviewed. At the time of this study there was a dearth of regional and national literature on the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability. In addition to this paucity of research, surveyed literature also indicated that academic work on experiential learning has focused more on the field of education, with scant literature on family-owned businesses (Benavides-Velasco et al. 2011).

The dearth of regional and national literature targeting family business owners in the retail trade (Musa and Semasinghe 2014) has resulted in the inclusion of a number of relevant publications on sole proprietorships, small-scale family businesses, micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises and entrepreneurial learning in other sectors of economic activities across the region. Sole proprietorship firms are run by their founders, with complete control over all business activities; as such they are viewed as family firms by default (Andersson et al. 2018). According to Ndesaulwa and Kikula (2016), in the Malawian context one of the parameters on which the definition of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises is based is the size of the labour-force, where micro-enterprises have one to four employees, small enterprises have five to twenty employees and medium-sized enterprises have twenty-one to ninety-nine employees. These employment figures tend to match the number of people involved in the day-to-day running of family-owned businesses in the Zimbabwean context (Dumbu 2018).

As family business owners are faced with survival dilemmas (Levina 2017), they tend to be operational in other sectors and industries which may include primary production such as farming and mining, as well as in service industries, for example health and insurance. However, experiential learning is not a phenomenon that is confined to a specific industry; learning by doing occurs in the work place in every sector of the economy (Burns 2016). During my search for related literature, I observed that not much academic work had been conducted in Zimbabwe in relation to the experiential learning of family business owners. Experiential learning and its

influence on business sustainability could thus be considered a niche that had not previously and extensively been examined in family business research in Zimbabwe, which created a gap for my study.

The Zimbabwean informal sector is dominated by SMEs comprising of either family-owned or non-family-owned businesses. However, literature on family-owned SMEs is presumably subsumed and overlaps with that of non-family-owned SMEs (Mashavira et al. 2019). This apparently overshadowed the existence of family-owned businesses as independent business structures. It was to this gap that this study on experiential learning of family business owners contributed. A lack of clear classification of business organisations in extant literature in Zimbabwe remained an issue of concern.

Studies are not clear on whether the firms are large organizations or SMEs, or on whether they are family or non-family. They fall into the pervasive tendency of lumping together family businesses and small business, and then either use SME or family firm as a generic term (Mashavira et al. 2019: 1687).

Thus, related literature has not focused on the concepts of ‘experiential learning’ and ‘family-owned business’ but on studies relating to SMEs, business sustainability, entrepreneurship, knowledge transfer and on kinds of knowledge. Literature addressing these concepts was only considered in as much as the overall focus related to my research topic.

The next section addresses literature on the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability.

The Nature of Experiential Learning and Family Business Sustainability

Learning from past experience is viewed as central and critical to an organisation’s adaptation and survival (Burns 2016). This suggests that survival of a family business is presumably dependent on past experience. The role of experience in shaping and driving organisational productivity through on-the-job training or learning by doing cannot be overlooked (Hyams-Ssekasi and Caldwell 2018). The workplace may therefore be viewed as a centre for knowledge acquisition and skills development. Levitt, List and Syverson (2013) support this line of thought by pointing out that empirical evidence shows the importance of learning by doing in the workplace as output per worker increases over time. In light of the above, a review of the global literature related to the nature of experiential learning by family business owners and its influence on business sustainability is discussed first.

A study carried out by Fu and Si (2018) in China focused on the extent to which family ownership of second-generation returnees (from abroad) enhanced internal entrepreneurial activities. This investigation carried out in China was pertinent and relevant to my study as it brought in an exploration of family business owners who were presumed to have learnt how to run a business with an assurance of succession in the next generation. Data was generated from a stratified sample of 683, where questionnaires were distributed to participants in 12 provinces in East, Central and West China. The sample composition differed from my study where participants were from one province. However, the characteristics of the business units were similar as Fu and Si (2018) extracted participants where family firms had more than 50% of family-ownership, with more than one family member in management.

The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) employed by Fu and Si (2018) that involved hypothesis testing showed that the interactive factor of family-ownership, as well as generational involvement of second-generation returnees, enhanced corporate entrepreneurship. In addition to experiential learning through involvement in family firms, most Chinese prospective family business successors were accorded an opportunity to study business management abroad (Fu and Si 2018), hence their being referred to as second-generation returnees. According to a 2014 Hurun Survey, more than 80% of family business successors had gone abroad to acquire business management education and more than half of them returned to China (Fu and Si 2018). These returnees from abroad joined their Chinese family businesses to participate and apply their acquired formal knowledge.

The quantitative approach adopted in the Chinese study examined relationships between the statistical variables to evaluate and estimate values based on the data collected from the samples (Abdelkader and Mansouri 2019). My study was qualitative and the participants had similar characteristics of business ownership and at least three family members were owners. Furthermore, the Chinese context which is premised on a strong socialist background is different from Europe and the Zimbabwean context as:

Most family firms in China were founded after 1978 by the Chinese reform and policy of opening up, and at present, most of the family firms in China are in the process of evolving from the first generation to the second generation (Fu and Si 2018).

In contrast with the Chinese scenario, family businesses in Zimbabwe were in existence before 1978 (Kazunga 2019). The contextual difference created a gap, given that Zimbabwe is a country that never had a strong socialist system. A unique feature of Chinese family-owned

businesses is the tendency to have fewer choices for successors, given the 1979 – 2015 one-child-per-family policy (Fu and Si 2018). This is unlike family-owned businesses (FOBs) in Western countries as well as in Zimbabwe where no single heir is apparently guaranteed to take over family business ownership after the demise of a founding member. It can be concluded from this Chinese context that family-owned businesses have not gone through as many generations as may be the case in other contexts.

Western countries are not subjected to socialist policies, as is the case in China. As a result, family businesses in countries such as Canada may go through a number of generations, as is the case with Wilson Fuel that was founded in 1788 and is currently in its 8th generation of family ownership (Table 1.1).

In a related global study, Adoukonou (2019) explored the strategies employed by owners of small retail businesses in the District of Columbia in the United States to sustain their businesses for longer than five years. Adoukonou (2019) employed a multiple-site case study design where data was generated from five small retailers through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, observations, field notes and review of documents related to business sustainability. While the methodology employed by Adoukonou (2019) was similar to the one adopted in this study, the study was carried out in Columbia in a single urban context so the findings could have been biased towards the urban business environment. The contextual and sample size differences were apparent when considering the study by Fu and Si (2018) in China where 683 participants were drawn from 12 provinces. In my study, the inclusion of three different contexts: rural, growth points and urban areas, was in line with the notion of transferability of the research findings as informed by Creswell (2014) and is discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Unlike the ANOVA data analysis technique employed by Fu and Si (2018), the study by Adoukonou (2019) used NVivo software for qualitative data management and analysis as it can identify the redundancy and common patterns in data and can also analyse a significant amount of data in various formats. Though NVivo software is recommended for qualitative analysis (Woods, Paulus, Atkins and Macklin 2016), in this study I used the manual analysis approach which enabled me to get immersed in my data, thereby allowing me to understand the data better.

Research findings from Adoukonou's (2019) study showed that a rich socio-economic ecosystem is essential for a business' long-term sustainability and profitability. A firm's ecosystem entails an environment where the business owners cooperate and interact with the

business environment comprising of suppliers, lenders, customers and competitors (Adoukonou 2019). Surveyed literature (Bignotti and Roux 2020) also shows that business success is dependent on entrepreneurial experience where the ability to obtain financing, setting business plans and spin-off strategies are essential for business continuity and growth. It also emerged from the study carried out by Adoukonou (2019) that the determinants of a business' long-term survival include sustainability planning, operational efficiency and corporate social responsibility. These determinants provided critical insights for my study that focused on the experiential learning of family business owners and its influences on business sustainability. The study by Adoukonou (2019) addressed strategies for small business sustainability. This was relevant to my study considering that strategies could entail a learning process adopted over a long period of time and this could inform my study as it explored experiential learning and its influence on family business sustainability.

Diwas, Bradley and Gino (2013) carried out a study in the USA on how individuals learned from their own experience with both failure and success, and from the experience of others. It has to be highlighted that this study which was on medical surgeons was critical in portraying the significance of past experiences that family business owners were presumed to go through. However, the characteristics of the sample of participants differed from that of the study by Adoukonou (2019) whose focus was also on SMEs. The American researchers' focus seemed relevant to the current study where family business owners' past experiences and the experiences of their predecessors were critical for decision making.

Diwas et al.'s (2013) study was supported by the attribution theory, based on observation of 71 cardiothoracic surgeons who performed a total of 6 516 procedures on patients. Whilst the study was not on family business owners, it is important to note that the study focused on the nature of the learning process, which made it relevant to the current study. Diwas et al. (2013) investigated how individuals learned from past failure or success as an important predictor of future performance. This was a different perspective from Adoukonou's (2019) exploration, and was critical in this study which was premised on sustainability challenges after the demise of founding members. Lessons have to be drawn on how FBOs should learn from their own mistakes or successes, as noted by Diwas et al. (2013):

Through failure, an individual can learn what does not work and then develop and try a new approach to increase her likelihood of reaching a successful outcome in the future (Diwas et al. 2013: 2435).

It was therefore necessary to find out if family business owners in this study learnt from their own past experiences as well as the experiences of the generations before them. Diwas et al. (2013) highlighted the challenge of accurately estimating an individual worker's learning curve, since learning occurs over a long period of time, and researchers sometimes miss peak times in the learning process. However, the use of photo elicitation in the current study helped to capture critical events in the life of a family business, thereby eliciting crucial underlying information.

Observations by Diwas et al. (2013: 2435) were that:

... Individuals learn from the failures of others, but not from their own failures.

... Individuals learn more from their own successful experiences than they do from their own failure experiences.

The views of Diwas et al. (2013) implied that as family business owners went through their business operations they would focus more on activities that previously had positive results as opposed to those that had negative outcomes. This was in contrast to an earlier study by Madsen and Desai (2010) who demonstrated that learning from failure had stronger effects than learning from success. In a study carried out in the German school system, Straehler-Pohl and Paris (2014: 81) claimed that failure in school mathematics was an integral part of learning:

The value of the ones who fail is appropriated by the ones who pass as surplus-value.

Failure was therefore presumably believed to benefit learning, which could also be applicable in the family business context by stimulating a search for new business strategies, rather than dwelling on loss-leading measures. Critical in the above findings was that family business owners learned through reflection on past occurrences. FBOs, as individuals who collectively ran their businesses often learned through reflecting on their experiences and the experiences of their predecessors. However, it should be noted that the medical context in which Diwas et al. (2013) carried out their study was a sample of professional participants; quite distinct from the family business owners in the current context where there was involvement of nuclear and extended family members.

The study by Diwas et al. (2013) was distinct from Adoukonou's (2019) exploration cited above in that the latter explored survival strategies as opposed to learning from past failures and successes. Though the two US based studies were related to my study, they did not directly address the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners.

Also, from the global context, Cunningham, Seaman and Mcguire (2017) in Scotland studied the perceptions of knowledge sharing among small family firm leaders, focusing on how knowledge

was passed on between family business owners. This study provided critical insights on the experiential learning of FBOs that was explored in my study and provided a shift from the above studies originating from the US context. However, the Zimbabwean context in which my study was carried out provided room for comparison with the European context.

Cunningham et al. (2017) conducted a mixed-methods study where both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed. The quantitative approach entailed the use of covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB – SEM) to test stated hypotheses. This was complemented by qualitative data to triangulate the analysis. Quantitative survey data was collected using questionnaires from 110 participants. Though convenience and snowball sampling techniques are usually used in qualitative research, Cunningham et al. (2017) employed these techniques in their quantitative research, supposedly due to the hidden nature of the family business owners. The use of the quantitative CB – SEM as well as qualitative data to illustrate the meaning and implications of the CB – SEM findings distinguished the methodology of the current study from the other global studies discussed above. Contrary to this mixed approach, I adopted the qualitative approach which provided an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of the family business owners.

Cunningham et al. (2017: 161) assert that:

Participative and supportive leadership approaches... are viewed as antecedents to a perception of knowledge sharing culture.

Knowledge sharing is based on the notion of internal trust where information flows easily from one individual to another. The learning process of family business owners is therefore presumed to be dependent on close family relations. Unlike the other three global studies reviewed above which showed how FBOs engaged in the learning process (learner centred), Cunningham et al. (2017) revealed how leadership approaches helped in the learning of FBOs – what they termed ‘family-influenced guidance’ in the transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next. It was inferred from this review that leadership approaches have an impact on the learning process of FBOs and this was also examined in the current study. The study from the Scotland context by Cunningham et al. (2017) used both quantitative and qualitative approaches, which was a marked distinction from the other three studies cited above. However, the findings concurred with those of Adoukonou (2019) as they both suggested the significance of social learning, which is family-influenced guidance.

In another global investigation in North-West England, Hamilton (2011) studied how learning

took place in a family business. The study explored the nature and extent of entrepreneurial learning in the context of a family business. According to Hamilton (2011), entrepreneurial learning in family systems is viewed as the acquisition and development of the propensity, skills and abilities to found, join or to grow a business venture. This is linked to experiential learning, as viewed in my study, where the focus was on how family business owners learned experientially to ensure the perpetual growth of an existing business venture. Family business owners would need entrepreneurship skills in order to ensure business sustainability.

Hamilton (2011) adopted an interpretive, qualitative approach where a purposive sample was determined from two generations in a total of five families. A total of 16 individuals took part as participants in the study in which 12 in-depth individual and group interviews were conducted. The participants were drawn from a range of business sectors that included manufacturing, service and the retail trade. The study by Hamilton (2011) was pertinent to the current study as it informed the methodology that was adopted. Both studies were qualitative, using purposive sampling techniques and interviews for data generation. However, the current study included observation and photo elicitation interviews to ensure data triangulation, minimise bias and reduce method-boundedness that would result from a heavy reliance on a single research instrument.

The study by Hamilton (2011) was framed on the principles of the Situated Learning Theory as the major analytical lens. The proponents of Situated Learning Theory argue that students are more inclined to learn by actively participating in the learning experience in situated contexts (Sentance and Humphreys 2018). This entails a shift from individual learning to increased collaborative participation where learning is deemed to be a matter of creating meaning from the actual activities of daily living. Sentance and Humphrey (2018: 345) asserted that: “*Learning is embedded in activity, context and culture... within a community where experts and novices meet and where practice is modelled*”.

Therefore, *situating* learning refers to creating a physical and a social context in which participants will experience the complexity and ambiguity of learning in the real world. According to Sentance and Humphrey (2018), a community has the ability to change and reproduce itself, where new-comers become old-timers through what they call ‘continuity-displacement’. This perception is closely linked to the family business context where continuity may be necessitated by an amicable shift from one generation to the next. The theory on which Hamilton’s (2011) study was framed was Communities of Practice, which is linked to Experiential Learning Theory; the basis for the current study. Both theories on Communities of

Practice and Social Learning Theory consider experience as a product of practical involvement in a learning situation.

Hamilton (2011) noted that learning in the context of situativity actually takes place in a family business. Based on the participants' responses, Hamilton (2011) pointed out that family members in the second and further generations of the family businesses talked about their everyday childhood experiences of participation in the businesses. Given the learning-in-practice of these children, the effectiveness of their knowledge had to be tested in the context of business sustainability in the current study.

The research conducted by Hamilton (2011) captured the social complexity of intergenerational workplace learning in the context of family businesses using a qualitative research approach. Hamilton (2011) asserted that not much attention has been given to workplace learning in the family system, hence the call for a more fine-grained examination of learning in relation to entrepreneurial processes. This was aligned to the current study which focused on experiential learning of family business owners in selected sites in Zimbabwe. Hamilton's (2011) study differed from my research in that it focused on entrepreneurial learning, as opposed to my study which explored the experiential learning of family business owners. While a number of past studies have focused on entrepreneurial learning (Snyder and Wenger 2010), linking entrepreneurship and theories of education made this study unique. In as much as entrepreneurial learning and experiential learning is not necessarily viewed as one and the same concept, it should be noted that family business owners are also entrepreneurs.

The significance of entrepreneurial learning of family business owners and its link to experiential learning was outlined in the study by Hamilton (2011) above. In addition to the above global study Cherdchai's (2020) study in Thailand explored the role of entrepreneurial learning and its contribution to the multigenerational family business succession. My study focused on the experiential learning of family business owners – learning by doing, and the end result was presumably the acquisition of entrepreneurial knowledge. My study also focused on how this form of knowledge was derived, whilst Cherdchai (2020) addressed the 'what' question – on entrepreneurial activities.

Cherdchai (2020) adopted a qualitative study where research participants were identified and extracted through purposive and snowball sampling. My study adopted similar sampling techniques and therefore the procedures taken by Cherdchai (2020) provided important guidelines and insights. Data was generated from five family-owned businesses through semi-

structured, in-depth interviews with the incumbents (founding members), successors and family members. The methodology and characteristics of the participants resembled the current study, making the review critical for comparisons between the Thailand and Zimbabwean contexts. Unlike other global studies discussed in this thesis which highlighted how family business owners acquired knowledge through experiential learning Cherdchai (2020) focused on the learning process that led to the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. As indicated above, entrepreneurial learning and experiential learning are related but different learning processes. Research findings from Cherdchai's (2020) study revealed that knowledge was transferred from one generation to the next through learning by doing, in combination with past experience. This entailed learning from self and learning from others as observation of skilled personnel took place. This, according to Masinga (2012) entails learning through reflecting on past experiences. Findings from Cherdchai (2020) were clearly distinct from other global studies as his study encompassed the concept of 'learning by doing', and this phenomenon is closely linked to the phenomenon of experiential learning.

Literature from the global perspective has shown that the knowledge acquisition of family business owners occurs through practical involvement in entrepreneurial activities, as well as by being influenced by the leadership approaches of the founding members. Learning also occurs as family business owners reflect on past experience, their own failures and successes, as well as from the successes and failures of others. Cordial family relations have also been highlighted as having a positive role in facilitating knowledge transfer from one generation to another.

Except for one study reviewed in this study, all of the other global studies employed single methodological approaches with the qualitative approach being the most common. As explained in Chapter Four of this study, the reliance on the qualitative approach - a naturalistic approach - could be due to its ability to enable in-depth insights into the lived experiences of participants (Merriam and Tisdell 2016). However, the global perspective falls short of spatial comparisons as no literature consulted focused on rural areas, growth points and urban areas collectively. This made the current study which explored FBOs in three research contexts unique.

From the regional context Acquah (2012) in a quantitative study carried out in Ghana, studied social networking relationships as a form of learning and the resultant effects on performance of family-owned and non-family firms. Acquah (2012) employed questionnaires as the data collection tool and collected the data from 106 chief executive officers of family and non-family businesses. Despite the research methodology differences with my study, the focus on social

networking relationships brought in a possible form of learning in which family business owners could be subjected to networking relationships with government political leaders, government bureaucratic officials and community leaders, as this apparently enabled family business owners to acquire knowledge on legal operating procedures and customer tastes and expectations. These aspects which were important in ensuring business sustainability (Acquaah 2012) provided critical pointers for the current study.

Acquaah (2012) included both family and non-family firms for comparison purposes, while my current study addressed the experiential learning process of family business owners only, and compared the learning across the different research contexts explored; rural areas, growth points and urban areas. It emerged from Acquaah's (2012) study that the impact on the performance of the networking relationships developed with politicians, bureaucratic officials and community leaders was stronger for family firms than for non-family firms. The ability to perform better than they did previously could be indicative of knowledge acquisition by family business owners who remained together due to family ties. Further, the study by Acquaah (2012) also suggested that knowledge acquisition for family business owners emanated from customers, competitors, suppliers and government officials with whom they interacted. These key stakeholders of family-owned businesses aided in the learning process through interactions on various platforms. Learning from experience in this Ghanaian study was therefore not confined to colleagues or associates from the same workplace. Government acted as a watchdog against illegal operations such as overcharging and hoarding of commodities, while community expectations created a knowledge base upon which family business owners could reflect during future transactions and engagements. These insights pointed me to areas to look out for in this study. The findings from the Ghana based research suggested that:

Networking relationships with external stakeholders is profitable, but there may be considerable costs to be incurred in cultivating relationships with politicians so as to obtain access to resources, information and opportunities (Acquaah 2012: 1225).

It is inferred from the above quotation that networking relationships with politicians could result in considerable losses being suffered by FBOs. Business sustainability could therefore be dependent on the family firm's ability to circumvent risks from the business' external environment. It also emerged that the networking relationships with community leaders enhanced the provision of more sources of information, learning and knowledge that helped minimise threats of business collapse (Acquaah 2012). The nature of the learning that family business owners went through could be considered as social learning, resulting from the

continuous interaction with identified stakeholders, both internal and external.

Consulted literature from Ghana (Acquaah 2012) has shown that family business owners learned through engagement in social networking relationships, thereby increasing the performance of the family and non-family firms. Social networking relationships were observed to be an effective form of learning between family-owned firms and government political leaders, government bureaucratic officials and community leaders. The findings concurred with Adoukonou (2019) who opined that networking and cooperating with the external business environment is beneficial.

In addition to the regional study by Acquaah (2012) on the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners, Ungerer and Mienie (2018) explored the basic problem where family-owned businesses struggled to remain sustainable over multiple generations in South Africa. The two regional studies differed on methodological approaches as Ungerer and Mienie (2018) employed a qualitative approach, like in my study. The outstanding distinguishing feature from all of the other literature reviewed, that was evident in Ungerer and Mienie's (2018) study, was their presentation of a clearly outlined conceptual framework in the form of the Family Business Success Map (FBSM). The FBSM Conceptual Framework:

... Enables family business members, family business advisors, and family business managers to continuously benchmark their business practice in eight key family business practice areas to enhance the potential of a family business to be sustainable across multiple generations (Ungerer and Mienie 2018: 1).

In accordance with the governance structures and procedures that emerged from the study by Ungerer and Mienie (2018), the following practices were deemed critical for family business owners: succession planning, sound leadership, family harmony, strategic planning, cost management planning, financial planning and monitoring, entrepreneurial practice and communication. The FBSM Conceptual Framework was deemed essential, particularly in South Africa where the lack of family business sustainability across generations was evident (Venter, Van der Merwe and Farrington 2012). The above quotation suggested that access to and utilisation of the FBSM Conceptual Framework would enhance a family business' transition from one generation to the next.

The two-phased qualitative research approach adopted by Ungerer and Mienie (2018) first involved a literature review to obtain multiple perspectives about the best approaches and strategies implemented by successful and sustainable family businesses. The second phase was a

collection and analysis of primary data by interviewing seven family business experts. Phase one of the qualitative approach resulted in the development of a preliminary framework which was then validated in phase two. The sample characteristics in Ungerer and Mienie's (2018) study were different to all other reviewed literature as data was generated from family business experts and not the actual practicing family business owners. This distinction was essential for my study as it could provide room for comparison of the research findings from business experts against practicing non-expert family business owners. The South African study differed from the Ghanaian study by Acquah (2012) as its focus was on business sustainability rather than the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners. The study was linked to the second part of my first research question that explored the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability.

A study by Jadwat (2016) sought to explore the determinants of continuity and viability for a South African family-owned business through a case study which focused on a single family business that had existed through three successive generations. The type of business entity studied by Jadwat (2016) related to the current study whose focus was the experiential learning of family business owners and how it influenced business sustainability. Related issues of family business sustainability (continuity and viability) were considered. According to Jadwat (2016), continuity referred to the existence and transfer of ownership of the firm across generations while viability, in simple terms, referred to the family business' profitability. However, the current study addressed the Zimbabwean context where a multiple-site case study was adopted. Such variations could make the current study unique, without the chance of duplicating results that are already in the knowledge domain.

Jadwat's (2016) case study followed a mixed method design where both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were used to generate the data for the study. The family members active in the business, as well as the non-family members working for this firm were considered as the target population. The family business had close to 680 employees and convenience sampling was employed to come up with a suitable sample of 146 research participants. The participants had to have access to a computer as questionnaires were distributed via email. Part of the methodology employed was, however, different to the one I used in the current study which was entirely qualitative and questionnaires were not used for data generation. The non-probability sampling technique (convenience sampling) was the qualitative part of the mixed method used by Jadwat (2016).

The research findings by Jadwat (2016) indicated that family values of frugality, equality,

determination, honesty and diligent work ethics enhanced the continuity and viability of the family business entity. It was noted from Jadwat's (2016) position that family cohesion was critical in ensuring the continuity of a family business. These findings did not indicate whether any experiential learning of the family business owners had any effect on the continuity and viability of the family business. However, the aspects that promoted continuity and viability were pertinent to this study and were looked out for.

The regional perspective on the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners concurred that learning is a social phenomenon. The learning occurs through interaction and engagements with other knowledgeable people, either experienced founding members or family business advisors.

With regards to the national context, as indicated above, literature seemed to be limited in the Zimbabwean context with regard to the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners. Given this paucity of literature, I had to include literature on small scale businesses, where aspects such as survival challenges and lack of succession planning emerged. These concepts had relevance and significance to my study as family-owned businesses faced sustainability and succession planning challenges equally (Adoukonou 2019). Family business owners are entrepreneurs who take calculated risks in order to acquire profit. Literature on entrepreneurial learning was silent on whether the businesses under consideration were family-owned or non-family owned, and this prompted me to use my discretion and include such literature in my study on the pretext that the businesses studied could also have been family-owned businesses.

Chinomona (2013) carried out a study in Harare focusing on the effects of small business owners' expertise in employees' skills training and small businesses' performance. By highlighting the nature of the learning that improved the skills of small business owners, Chinomona's (2013) research provided critical insights for my study that explored the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners. Skills development was presumably derived from the small business owner's expertise, and in Chinomona's (2013) study this occurred when the founding family business owners transferred their knowledge to other family members and vice versa. The significance of knowledge acquisition and knowledge transfer was highlighted by Chinomona (2013: 1885) who asserted that:

The small business owners' expertise and their employees' skills constitute resources that when fully exploited can offer small businesses sustainable competitive edge

over rivalries, leading to improved small business owners' performance.

Based on the views of Chinomona (2013), it was critical for me to carry out the current study which investigated the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on family business sustainability, a phenomenon not yet explored in Zimbabwe at the time of my study. The quantitative study by Chinomona (2013) which had a sample of 221 small business employees postulated three hypotheses which were all supported by the empirical results. The composition of the research participants, where these participants were drawn from the employees, was in contrast with the literature from the global perspective. In other sources of related literature, participants were drawn from the family business owners themselves and not their employees. Chinomona (2013) revealed that the small business owners' expertise had a very strong influence on the employees' skills training. Knowledge transfer through employees' participation and observation of other skilled personnel was likely to have a significant role in enhancing business performance and ultimately business sustainability. The findings, however, also concurred with what emerged in the global perspectives.

In another study within the national perspective Muponda (2014) examined the success factors of small-firm clusters performing similar manufacturing activities in Harare. In contrast to the above study by Chinomona (2013) which focused on how experienced small business owners transferred their knowledge to employees, Muponda (2014) investigated the possible success factors for small firms in a cluster. Chinomona focused on employees whilst Muponda focused on employers. Muponda (2014) employed a quantitative research approach with two different samples. The first sample consisted of 248 owner-managers who were randomly selected. Though Muponda (2014) did not mention the term 'family-owned business' in his study, it could be inferred from concepts such as *owner-manager* that the small-firms (1 - 4 employees) under consideration were family-owned businesses. The second sample consisted of 40 owner-managers extracted from the first sample using the technique of link-tracing that resulted in a snowball effect. Questionnaires were used to collect data from both samples. The double-sample approach administered by Muponda (2014) was unique and different from that of Chinomona (2013), as well as my current study. In my case I decided to administer three different data generation tools to the same participants, without splitting them. Muponda (2014) employed a software tool for social network analysis (UCINET 6 for Windows) for the data analysis, with results showing that the small-firm cluster was a closely-knit social network of firms where tacit knowledge was acquired indirectly from the cluster environment. Tacit knowledge is knowledge that people possess from their personal experience and context, which is acquired through

indirect or implicit learning (Muponda 2014).

The tacit knowledge acquired by the small business owners resulted from the spatial proximity of the firms, as well as the human resources management systems employed by the firms. This was critical for my study and would inform on whether family business owners who worked in proximity with other family members would be able to gain tacit knowledge. The easy access and ability to copy any new product designs made by other small business owners in the cluster indicated that workplace collaboration, observation and imitation constituted the learning process. Muponda (2014) asserted that the small firms in the cluster produced and sold the same product to the same market and hence became an epistemic community where their communication was tagged in the same language, using common codes. The epistemic community notion was further supported by Sentance and Humphrey (2018) who consider such a business community as comprising of new-comers and old-timers whose collective efforts help in sustaining individual family-owned businesses. Networking relationships among various family business owners may have the potential to enhance the experiential learning of individual family business owners.

Furthermore, codified knowledge was generated and distributed among the small business owners in an informal way. According to Muponda (2014), codified knowledge is considered knowledge that is documented and acquired actively from inside or outside the parameters of the community to become the personal property of the individual owner. Codified knowledge could therefore not be shared within the small-firm cluster. In my study, family-owned businesses that integrated extended family members, in-laws and skilled personnel would have the potential to bring in people with codified knowledge for business sustainability.

The two national studies reviewed above informed my study with regard to the nature of the experiential learning that family business owners could gain. In another national study carried out in urban Masvingo, Basera (2014) investigated how loyalty programmes assisted in maximising customer retention in fast food retailers. According to Mandina and Karisambudzi (2016), customer retention entails the ways in which business organisations direct their efforts to existing customers in an attempt to continue doing business with them. The study therefore investigated the availability of customer retention loyalty programmes such as credit cards, discount programmes, frequent buyer programmes, 'buy two and get one free', as well as cash-backs as measures to enhance the sustainability of fast food retailers in urban Masvingo. The study fell into the same urban research context as the current study. However, the current research was distinct as it's focussed on the experiential learning of family business owners in

the rural areas, growth points and urban areas of Masvingo province.

Basera's (2014) case study, comprising of three related food retail outlets, adopted a descriptive research design. This was different from the current study which was qualitative. The target population comprised of all clients purchasing fast foods from Shop A, Shop B and Shop C, as well as the employees of the three business units. Quota sampling and convenience sampling were employed to come up with a sample of 120 participants. A number of variations existed between Basera's (2014) investigation and the current research. The concentration on three entirely urban retail shops and the use of questionnaires pointed to some dissimilarities between this study and my study. The SPSS package for data analysis was used in the study carried out by Basera (2014), which was different to the current study which adopted manual open coding.

Research findings from Basera's (2014) study showed that incentive-based customer loyalty programmes were not employed in the fast food retail sector in Masvingo. Non-monetary rewards and cash rebates which could enhance customer loyalty and subsequently business sustainability were not employed. This finding posed as the possible reason why family-owned businesses failed to successfully progress from one generation to the next. This could be verified in my study on the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability. The findings from Basera's (2014) were in contradiction of the assertions of Mandina and Karisambudzi (2016: 91), who point out that:

In order to form long-term relationships with customers, and reap the ensuing benefits of increased profitability, trust, loyalty, the program of relationship marketing calls for organizations to view their customers and other stakeholders as partners and invest in retention strategies.

Based on the recommendations of Basera (2014), there was concurrence with Mandina and Karisambudzi (2016) on the need for customer retention programmes as customers could be subjected to captive loyalty and conditionally subjected to buying the same product or buying from the same supplier. Such programmes could have lasting effects on the sustainability of family-owned businesses.

The national studies reviewed in my thesis addressed issues relating to both the experiential learning of family business owners and the factors that could enhance family business sustainability. It was presumed that learning in business organisations occurred through collaboration, observation and imitation. This was also in concurrence with the views from the regional and global perspectives. Nonetheless, none of the literature sources identified and

discussed above related to the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability. This study which explored the experiential learning of FBOs in selected rural areas, growth points and urban areas, took cognisance of the contextual gap.

The next section provides a review of related literature that relates to the kinds of knowledge gained by family business owners.

Kinds of Knowledge Gained by Family Business Owners

The preceding section focused on related literature where various scholars addressed the nature of experiential learning in the business context. According to Sadq (2019), knowledge entails one's capacity or condition of knowing something with familiarity, gained through experience or association. As family business owners associated with other family members and clients within the business context, and also performed different business activities, they experienced different kinds of knowledge which was likely to have influenced their business sustainability. According to Chirico (2008: 417) "*Individual knowledge becomes part of the collective wisdom of the firm ... once it is shared and transferred over time*". The various kinds of knowledge highlighted by different scholars are discussed below.

From the global context, family business survival is hinged on the availability of a competent human resource base, which Su and Carney (2013) refer to as intellectual capital. In a study carried out in the city of Wenzhou in China, Su and Carney (2013: 657) asserted that: "*Intellectual capital is a firm's knowledge and knowing capability that enriches and aggregates the firm's capacity for innovation and strategic differentiation*". This is supported by Deakins, Battisti and Bensemann (2016) who assert that entrepreneurial knowledge avails tactical and exploitative management skills. Organisational knowledge and knowing capacity were mirrored in the various forms of knowledge gained by the business owners and those in control of the organisation. This was in line with the current study which also tried to understand the kinds of knowledge gained by family business owners as they went through experiential learning. Su and Carney (2013) believed that China's economic growth was powered and facilitated by private entrepreneurship comprised of a large population of family firms. Various streams of research have shown that China's family-owned businesses have a unique social capital profile deriving from kinship relations (Su and Carney 2013). This provided an insight for my study that different kinds of knowledge are gained by family business owners as they observe, participate and interact with others in the workplace.

The cross-case study by Su and Carney (2013) had a sample of 15 family firms drawn using a snowball and opportunistic sampling method as participants were not easily identified. This was critical and informed my study about accessing participants who were not readily available, even though they were sources of research data. Semi-structured interviews were used for data generation using the local dialect, which were later translated into English. The research methodology employed was similar to the one adopted for my study where face-to-face interviews and photo elicitation interviews were employed. The study found out that the tacit knowledge that was possessed by family business owners developed as people worked together over long periods of time (Su and Carney 2013: 644).

Family firms are likely to excel at generating and utilizing tacit knowledge compared with other types of organizations.... as they are at an advantage of transferring that knowledge between family members from one generation to another.

Su and Carney (2013) asserted that tacit knowledge, also referred to as implicit or silent knowledge is gained from personal experience and may not be easy to express. For example, a family business owner who has learnt to smile when meeting a customer may not expressly have been taught how to smile. As a result of human experience and human senses, implicit knowledge gained by family business owners may be difficult to imitate or document through socialisation and may lead to sharing that knowledge from one person to the next. Interaction with customers, employees and other stakeholders is therefore critical in the acquisition of tacit knowledge which is critical in family-owned businesses for customer retention and business sustainability.

Oudah, Jabeen and Dixon (2018) in their study in the United Arab Emirates sought to identify and prioritise success factors that could lead to the sustainability of large- and medium-sized family businesses. In line with my study, this related to the kinds of knowledge that family business owners could gain in order to effectively manage their businesses. Unlike the other global study by Su and Carney (2013) cited above, the study by Oudah et al. (2018) resulted in the development of the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) Model from which the forms of knowledge could be derived, and these forms of knowledge informed my study. A total of 12 family businesses were randomly selected. From these family member managers were then interviewed and the AHP preference scale was completed. The random selection of research participants is a probabilistic sampling technique which this current study could not adopt, given the qualitative approach employed. Based on the AHP empirical study, the following sustainability factors emerged (Oudah et al. 2018):

- Succession planning: ability to plan ahead for the next generation to take over.
- Strategic planning: working towards the achievement of future goals.
- Corporate governance: proper strategic decision making.
- Leadership: collaborative efforts.
- Family values: loyalty, honesty and respect, hard work, social responsibility, accountability and transparency.
- Family capital: human, social and financial capital.
- Family firm advisors: use of outside advisors.

According to Oudah et al. (2018), these different sustainability factors could have the potential to enhance business longevity. However, for sustainability to be an achievable objective, Bakoglu and Yildirim (2016) argued that emphasis should be placed on the three components of sustainability: economic, ecological and social sustainability. In relation to my study, the sustainability factors highlighted above were considered as kinds of knowledge and competencies that family business owners also gained to ensure business sustainability as customer loyalty may be maintained (Kim 2011). The study by Oudah et al. (2018) managed to aggregate all of the major sustainability factors that contributed to a family business as a key factor of a family business' sustainability and long-term growth. Unlike other studies on business sustainability, the study presented a comparison between medium- and large-sized family businesses. This was different to the trend where scholars always focused on small-scale family businesses.

Hnatek (2015), in another global study in the Czech Republic, explored entrepreneurial thinking as a key factor of family business success. This was a complete shift from the study by Oudah et al. (2018) cited above where sustainability factors were framed as the guideline for family businesses to 'copy and paste' for long-term survival. In contrast, Hnatek (2015) viewed the success of family businesses as being the result of the entrepreneurs' mind-sets and essential entrepreneurial thinking. It was critical in this study to explore how the family business owners' mind-sets and entrepreneurial thinking translated into the kinds of knowledge gained for business sustainability.

The reviewed literature from Hnatek (2015) was presented in the form of a research paper that was a result of engagement with a variety of sources. This was in contrast with the other two global studies cited above where primary data was generated from research participants. Findings from the study by Hnatek (2015) showed that family business owners believed in their missions and values as entrepreneurs. The ability to work intuitively causes entrepreneurs to

become visionary game changers. The extraordinary ways of thinking exhibited by entrepreneurs are considered as entrepreneurial thinking or an entrepreneurial mind-set. This was further supported by Mwepu-Mbuya, Bounds, and Goldman, (2016) who opined that goal-setting family business owners have the potential to drive their businesses to greater heights. According to Hnatek (2015), entrepreneurial thinking resulted in the acquisition of competencies such as self-motivation, flexibility, adaptability, growth-orientation, innovation, creativity and assertiveness. The competencies highlighted above provided a guide in the current study to establish the kind of knowledge or skills gained by family business owners to enhance business sustainability.

The global perspective on the kinds of knowledge gained by family business owners has shown that scholars concur on family business sustainability upon acquisition of the necessary forms of knowledge to manage the family businesses. In support of this view, Hnatek (2015: 343) asserts that:

Family businesses are typical, environmental, and they have economic and social responsibility, which are the result of the long-termist focus and sustainability outlook.

It could therefore be inferred that as family business owners experientially learned, they acquired some form of knowledge, skills or competencies that could help in the sustenance of their family businesses.

Related literature focusing on family-owned businesses in the regional context was also consulted to understand the kinds of knowledge gained. Given that Indonesia is among the third world countries, being a developing economy, literature from this context was classified under the regional perspective in this thesis. Indarti and Kusuma (2016) in Indonesia studied the types of knowledge transferred by predecessors (parents) to successors (children) in family-owned business organisations. The study by Indarti and Kusuma (2016) addressed a research problem that was similar to mine; where I sought to determine the kinds of knowledge that family business owners gained through experiential learning.

The methodology employed by Indarti and Kusuma (2016) was also similar to mine; where a qualitative approach was adopted using a multiple-site case study design. This study was critical as it informed my study on the possible pitfalls when employing such methodology. Mitigation measures were therefore taken in advance. Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews from 13 family companies that were selected based on their capacity to answer the research questions. However, data analysis procedures were different as Indarti and Kusuma (2016) used content analysis to identify the patterns and themes in the data.

Research findings from the study carried out by Indarti and Kusuma (2016) showed that the founding members transferred four categories of knowledge to their children. These categories are highlighted in the table below.

Table 2.1: Key Knowledge Transferred to Successors from Predecessors

Transferred Knowledge	Description
a. Knowledge of the product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product composition • Quality standards • Process of product making
b. Knowledge of company management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial management • Employee management • Business risks • Company partners • Competitors and business environment • Trends and business cycles
c. Technical knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiating and making a deal • Consumer handling
d. Philosophical knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionalism: work ethics, discipline, commitment • Honesty • Religious values • Intuition (identifying threats and seizing business opportunities)

Source: Indarti and Kusuma (2016: 2)

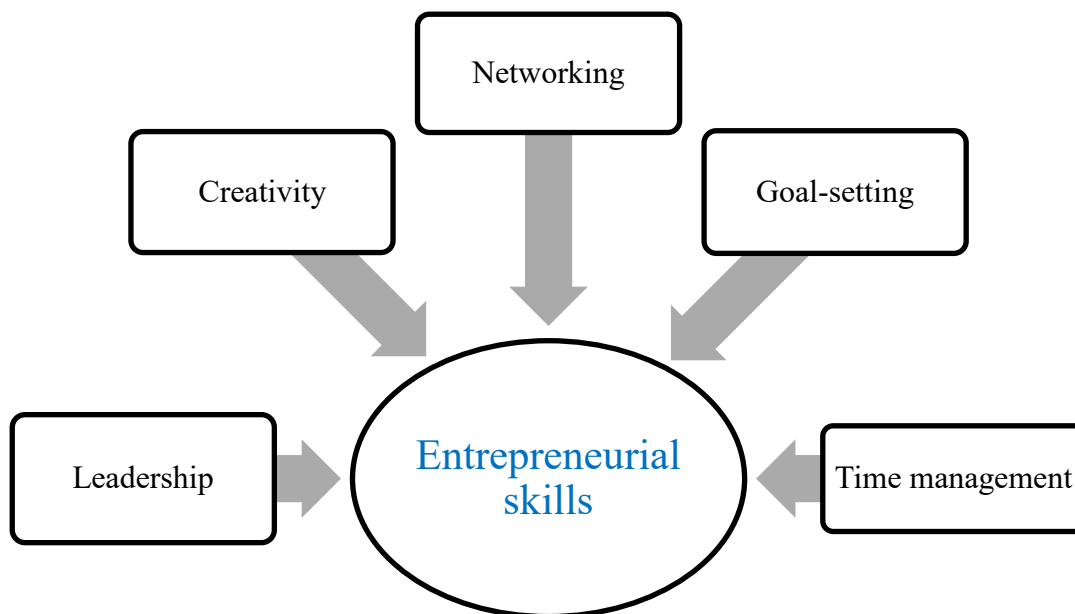
The research findings by Indarti and Kusuma (2016) concurred with the results of a study carried out by Kilic and Folizoz (2020) in Turkey, who asserted that the fluent relationship within family-owned businesses creates a willingness to transfer different types of knowledge from the predecessor to the successor. The findings therefore provided a framework of reference in my data analysis on the kinds of knowledge that family business owners could gain in the Zimbabwean context.

Further regional studies (Mwepu-Mbuya, Bounds and Goldman 2016) have shown that a lack of entrepreneurial and business skills hampers the growth and long-term survival of small- and medium-sized businesses. This emerged from a quantitative study carried out by Mwepu-Mbuya et al. (2016) in South Africa to determine how selected skills contributed towards the growth of

sustainability of small- and medium-sized businesses. The methodology employed in this study was different to the qualitative approach adopted by Indarti and Kusuma (2016) cited above. Mwepu-Mbuya et al. (2016) used factor analysis to address the responses gathered from a survey of 150 small- and medium-sized businesses in the Johannesburg Metropole. Though my research methodology was different from that of Mwepu-Mbuya et al. (2016), the two studies focussed on the kinds of knowledge that family business owners gained through workplace learning. This provided critical insights for my study. Data generated was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Again, the approach was different from my qualitative data analysis approach. This distinction provided a methodological gap that had to be addressed. Family cohesion provides an experiential learning environment that can be different from that in non-family businesses where employer-employee relations are not be as binding.

While researchers such as Sandada and Mangwandi (2015) argued that the lack of succession planning is the main reason for family business failure, Mwepu-Mbuya et al. (2016) asserted that South African entrepreneurs have very limited business skills. According to Mwepu-Mbuya et al. (2016), the following selected entrepreneurial skills in Figure 2.1 below are critical for business sustainability. The skills do not follow any particular order, but are viewed as necessary for the survival of a family business entity.

Figure 2.1: Mwepu-Mbuya et al. (2016) Selected Entrepreneurial Skills for Business Sustainability



Source: Researcher (2020)

According to Mwepu-Mbuya et al. (2016), leadership is a vital entrepreneurial skill that involves

setting direction, aligning people, motivating and inspiring others to achieve organisational goals. Such a skill is quite beneficial in a family-owned business where family members are not formally trained but are expected to be guided by founding members. A lack of good leadership skills may negatively affect family business sustainability.

Creativity and innovation improve the ability to spot the patterns and trends that set targets, turning ideas into opportunities for value creation (Mwepu-Mbuya et al. 2016). Innovative and creative family business owners have the potential to remain in business in the long-run as they display hard skills or solid factual knowledge (Slavković and Babić 2013). Through exploration of the different kinds of knowledge that family business owners may have gained experientially, the innovativeness of family business owners can be detected.

Networking entails the development of friendships and building strong, beneficial alliances and coalitions (Mwepu-Mbuya et al. 2016). Networking skills enhance knowledge sharing for family business owners, with the possibility of accessing and strengthening new markets, the acquisition of technology and information on business risks. Linked to networking skills is goal-setting, which is the ability of family business owners to set clear and attainable objectives, based on available personnel competencies. Unlike non-family business organisations, which may externally recruit people with the requisite skills, family business owners have to rely on the available human resources. According to Mwepu-Mbuya et al. (2016), time management, as an entrepreneurial skill, involves an attitude of personal commitment and a dramatic reordering of priorities and work practices. It was critical in the current study to find out whether family business owners possessed such skills to commit themselves within given time frames in order to ensure business sustainability.

While the selected skills above are important for business sustainability, Mwepu-Mbuya et al. (2016) suggested that the skills do not constitute the same level of priority, and skills such as leadership can be improved through business coaching and mentoring. This could be relevant to my study where parents and senior family members acted as mentors, addressing the shortcomings of the would-be-heirs. Mwepu-Mbuya et al. (2016) identified and selected five skills, and then investigated how these selected skills influenced business sustainability. The skills did not emerge from the responses of the participants. The present research sought to study the various kinds of knowledge and skills gained by family business owners in the retail sector.

The kinds of knowledge gained by family business owners that were noted by other scholars nationally are discussed below.

Johani and Bhebhe (2016) carried out an investigation in Zimbabwe on the kinds of workplace skills desired from newly-employed graduates by companies. Given that family business owners are involved with practical day-to-day activities in the workplace, acquisition of job-related skills is expected. It was against this background that the study by Johani and Bhebhe (2016) became relevant to my study as my second research question explored the kinds of knowledge or skills gained by family business owners. In this regard children may engage in family business activities without having acquired any practical skills from outside. Non-technical skills have been identified by other researchers (Jain 2009) as soft skills, core-skills, general skills or people skills, among many other terms used. In this study, the term 'soft skills' was used. Soft skills portray who the employee really is, and generally they embrace the employee's attitude, habits and how they interact and live with other people in a working environment (Jain 2009).

The study by Johani and Bhebhe (2016) was purely quantitative, with self-completing questionnaires as the data generation tool. This was in contrast to the current study which was qualitative and used face-to-face interviews, non-participant observation and photo elicitation for data generation. With a population of 60 managerial employees, a sample of 28 participants was obtained from 5 companies under the Industrial Development Corporation of Zimbabwe using the Raosoft Sample-size Calculator, an approach not applicable in this current qualitative study. Participants were presented with a list of desired *soft skills* that had been identified from earlier research to verify whether they existed among the newly-employed graduates. This approach was in contrast with studies reviewed from the regional context where new kinds of knowledge emerged from the data collection process of the study in question. The following skills were identified as the top ten soft skills emanating from their research: critical thinking, morality, teamwork, ethics, anger management, communication skills, integrity, reliability/trustworthiness, self-confidence and understanding the work culture (Johani and Bhebhe 2016). However, the consensus from the participants was that as employers, they felt that most graduate employees lacked the requisite soft skills. Previous studies (Mitchell, Skinner and White 2010; Robles 2012; Heckman and Kautz 2012), concurred that the absence of such skills from newly employed graduates could indicate that the skills emanated from the workplace. Such skills require workplace exposure as they are acquired through experiential learning. In a family business, soft skills such as adherence to business ethics, anger management and integrity are invaluable for business sustainability (Nasser 2014). Although the study by Johani and Bhebhe (2016) focused on five companies under the Industrial Development Corporation of Zimbabwe Limited Group (IDCZ), it was important in this study to

find out whether family business owners involved in the running of retail family businesses also acquired similar soft skills and how such skills could influence business sustainability.

In a study related to that of Johani and Bhebhe (2016), the concept of soft skills in the context of service delivery in the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe was also investigated by Wushe, Shenje and Ndlovu (2014). Their study sought to establish the knowledge levels of business soft skills and the extent to which these skills enhanced service delivery. Questionnaires were distributed to a sample of 150 permanent employees from selected hospitality companies. Using the SPSS version 20.0 for data analysis, it was revealed that soft skills such as interpersonal skills, communication skills, strong work ethics and teamwork skills were deficient. In as much as hard skills could be available within most employees, the soft skills shortage seemed to be a national challenge. Absence of these critical soft skills in family business owners could have negative impacts on the survival of such a business (Smith 2020) as business management becomes difficult. The findings from these two national studies on the kinds of skills acquired by family business owners were in variance with previous studies. According to Nasser (2014), such skills were presumably transferred from predecessors to successors.

The study carried out by Mashavira et al. (2019) was centred on the relationship between managerial interpersonal competencies (soft skills) and firm performance in family-owned SMEs and non-family-owned SMEs in Zimbabwe and South Africa. The study was distinct from the above national study by Johani and Bhebhe (2016) which focused on the Zimbabwean context only. Though it was a comparative study, the inclusion of the Zimbabwean context provided the necessary local perspective for my study with regard to the kinds of knowledge required and acquired. The study by Mashavira et al. (2019) adopted a descriptive quantitative approach which employed a comparative case study design, with a questionnaire as the data collection tool. This methodology, which was different to that adopted in my study, provided a methodological gap for me to employ a different approach to determine the kinds of knowledge/skills that would be gained by family business owners. Another distinction was that my study focused on family business owners in the retail sector, while Mashavira et al.'s (2019) research participants were drawn from family- and non-family-owned SMEs in the furniture manufacturing sector from two different countries. Although the researches were based in different economic sectors, the focuses on the impact of interpersonal competencies that were gained by family business owners were informative for my study.

Research findings from the study by Mashavira et al. (2019) indicated that the competencies displayed by the entrepreneurs could have occurred from past working experiences. This was a

critical insight for my study which sought to explore competencies as they emerged from one generation to the next. Skills and knowledge acquired by one generation would presumably be expected to be transferred to the next generation. Mashavira et al. (2019: 1694) suggested that:

Family members' contact with the business since childhood and kinship considerations were not a liability but rather gave family firms a comparative advantage.

It was against this background that my study explored the kinds of knowledge that family business owners would gain from their predecessors.

A review of global, regional and national literature on the kinds of knowledge acquired through experiential learning provided similar types of skills that emanated from informal learning. Sourced literature revealed that tacit knowledge and personal attributes such as determination, honesty and diligent work ethics were gained by family business owners. With regard to the current study, it was necessary to find out the extent to which tacit knowledge, resulting from experience, would assist family business owners to effectively run their businesses.

The next section addresses the support gained by family business owners from nuclear and extended family members.

Involvement of and Support from Other Family Members for Family Business Owners

The inputs of family members in the running of businesses cannot be overlooked. Maciel, Ramos, Aguila and Reyna (2015) assert that family involvement signifies one of the most influential factors in the complex management of family businesses, as it can go to the extent of threatening their survival. It was against this background that in a family business, the involvement and support from other family members had to be explored to find out how this could influence business sustainability. The concept of family involvement may relate to many organisational aspects, but in this study, it should be noted that the involvement of and support of other family members was viewed in the context of experiential learning and business sustainability.

As highlighted in Chapter One of this thesis, family involvement entails the participation of nuclear and/or extended family members in the family business. Powell and Eddleston (2017) carried out a quantitative study in the USA to explore whether being a family business had a positive indirect impact on entrepreneurial outcomes through family-to-business support. The

family-to-business concept represents a type of resource that family members can provide to entrepreneurs, irrespective of businesses being family businesses or not. This was in contrast with the current study where the investigation into the support from other family members was entirely centred on family business owners. The sample which consisted of family and non-family business owners had a total of 211 conveniently sampled founders of SMEs who completed questionnaires. Unlike my sample that had Black Africans only, as research participants, the sample extracted by Powell and Eddleston (2017) consisted of Whites, African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, plus a few other ethnic groups. Considering that the family system entailed cultural values, norms and ethics, different compositions of a study sample could lead to different findings in terms of family support. This meant that the research findings could have been oriented towards cultural norms and values, as opposed to my study whose data originated from three research contexts: rural areas, growth points and urban areas. Support from other family members was viewed from the involvement and presence of family employees. Whilst Powell and Eddleston (2017) made a distinction on the composition of family members in the family-owned business, my study embraced both nuclear and extended family members as simply *other family members*.

Results from the study by Powell and Eddleston (2017) were obtained through testing their hypotheses using the Structural Equation Model (SEM). It emerged from the study that entrepreneurs gained emotional and instrumental support from other family members who would express concern whenever the entrepreneur faced problems at work. The SEM analysis showed that family involvement in the firm was directly related to business performance and business success. Instrumental support entailed behaviours that included sharing of ideas about the business, as well as taking on household responsibilities that would take the entrepreneurs' time and attention away from the business. The emotional support gained by the entrepreneurs was more affective in nature. The strong association that existed among family members provided important insights for the current study with regards to the forms of support that family business owners would gain from other family members. It was apparent from this study that support was gained from nuclear family members with whom the entrepreneur interacted. The study was silent on the contributions of extended family members.

An exploratory study by Maciel et al. (2015) in Mexico focused on the influence of family relationships in family enterprises' succession processes. The study used a non-probabilistic sampling technique; the quota sample. This ensured the inclusion of four different states in Mexico, from which a total of eighty-five enterprises participated. A questionnaire, made up of

17 items organised into various thematic groups, was administered to both owner-managers and successors. The current study used a different methodology, with interviews, photo elicitation and observation as the data generation techniques.

The findings by Maciel et al. (2015) provided a good reference point for the current study. Whilst a family business is made up of two independent subsystems; the family and the business, the interaction between the subsystems leads to an overlap of each other, which represents the inter-organisational relationship (ibid). Family members have the capacity to impose their values, objectives, interests and logic, either directly or indirectly. However, commitment to the business by other family members presents an environment conducive for knowledge transfer from founding members to the new generation (Maciel et al. 2015: 245):

The quality of the relationship between the owner-manager and the successor would affect the degree to which the successor would be trained to take over the owner-manager's responsibilities. For the owner-manager, this means a willingness to take pride in and appreciate the successor's potential and achievements. For the successor, it means appreciating the accumulated wisdom of the owner-manager and his or her contributions to the business.

The authors' findings suggest that succession will go smoothly in those enterprises that exercise collaboration, willingness and teamwork among family members. The study of- and observations by- Maciel et al. (2015) provided a basis and reference point for the current study. The insights emanating from the assessment of family relationships could be significant for the current research, where involvement and support from other family members were explored in the context of business sustainability. It can be inferred from the study by Maciel et al. (2015) that collaborative skills, willingness and teamwork are skills, attributes and/or supports that emerge as family members engage and interact with each other at the workplace. This is in concurrence with Indarti and Kusuma (2016) who define these skills or attributes as philosophical knowledge.

From the regional arena, it appears the involvement and support of other family members is generally crucial for the survival of family businesses. Through activities of knowledge sharing and mentoring, founding members are in a position to create conditions for continuity in the event of their demise. However, existing global literature has shown that one of the challenges faced by family-owned businesses is the lack of collective and open deliberations on taking family businesses beyond existing generations.

A study carried out in Nigeria by Musa and Semasinghe (2014) has shown the absence of collective consultations between family business owners and other family members with regard to continuity when founding members retire or die. This raises questions as to whether family business owners recognise any contributions and support from other family members. Absence of such recognition can affect the 'familiness' in the family business. The study by Musa and Semasinghe (2014) was grounded on the argument that in Nigeria most small family businesses fail to continue after the retirement, incapacitation or death of the founders. This was in line with the research problem that was being explored in the current study. The focus of Musa and Semasinghe's (2014) study was to investigate the reason behind small business discontinuity after the first generation. The study addressed the impact of founding members who become dominant and influential in the business operations. This view relates to the form of support gained or lost by family business owners.

The qualitative study by Musa and Semasinghe (2014) was based on eight small family businesses in the Gombe Metropolis (Nigeria) which had ceased to exist after the death of their founders. Former employees of these businesses and children of the founders were the research participants, from whom the data was generated through interviews. Identification of the eight businesses was done through consultations with the Gombe Chamber of Commerce and a convenient sampling technique was employed. It should be noted that the participants in this study were drawn from non-operational business entities. This was unlike the current investigation where research participants were drawn from functional family businesses. Research carried out with participants from non-functional organisations can pose problems as soliciting data from people who are no longer attached to a former employer can be questionable and the data is therefore compromised.

Nonetheless, the findings of Musa and Semasinghe (2014) relating to the interaction between family business owners and other family members provided insights for the current research on the significance of other family members. The following observation emerged:

The lack of separation between the individual founders and organisational interests prevents the formation of partnerships with both relatives and non-relatives (Musa and Semasinghe 2014: 302).

The quotation suggests that founding members keep business interests to themselves. It was necessary for the current study to find out whether founding members opened up to other family members in order to receive the necessary support and vice versa. Musa and Semasinghe (2014)

observed that in Africa, family businesses in which members of the family share capital and managerial skills are a rare phenomenon. The second research question of the current study interrogated how involvement and support of other family members impacted on the sustainability of the family-owned businesses.

Musa and Semasinghe (2014) also noted that the choice of children or relatives as successors in small family businesses is often done too late, and in cases where very young children who might be at school or college are selected as successors, the future of the business becomes uncertain. Such successors have little or no contact with or knowledge of their family businesses; an indication that experiential learning may not have taken place. These observations provided insights for the current study as it was important to ascertain the influence of the experiential learning of family business owners on business sustainability. Dominance by founding members emerged as having negative impacts on the long-term sustainability of family-owned businesses. Apparently, no room or opportunities were given to would-be successors at an early stage.

The next regional study addressed the cultural norms, values and ethnicity as they related to entrepreneurship. This was in contrast to the other regional study by Musa and Semasinghe (2014) which focused more on the impact of dominant founding members.

Family firms tend to display norms and values that are commensurate with the ethnicity of family members. This was observed in the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria and West Africa who have been described as naturally enterprising and ingenious (Igwe, Newberry, Amoncar, White and Madichie 2018). A study carried out by Igwe et al. (2018) explored the links between the Igbo ethnic family, institutions and entrepreneurial behaviour. It emerged from that study that:

Igbo families provide an entrepreneurial leadership platform which influences youths through role models, providing mastery experiences and socialization (Igwe et al. 2018: 34).

The family system plays a significant role that resembles an informal apprenticeship system providing entrepreneurial learning that prepares the younger generation to accept business as a normal way of life (Igwe et al. 2018). From this study, learning occurs through primary socialisation thereby preparing family business owners to face and handle unforeseen business challenges. The study by Igwe et al. (2018) adopted an interpretive paradigm that enabled participants to voice out their perspectives as they narrated their experiences during individual and focus group interviews. Twenty-five business owners and twenty-five community leaders

constituted a sample of fifty participants drawn through a purposive sampling procedure. The methodology employed by Igwe et al. (2018) was similar to the one I adopted, except for the use of focus group discussions that they used for data generation. In this current study, photo elicitation, interviews and non-participatory observations were used to complement face-to-face interviews and triangulate data.

Atsu (2016) carried out an investigation in Nigeria focusing on the incessant collapse of family businesses after the demise of founding members. The mixed methods study explored the connection between culture and management transition planning in family-owned businesses. The specific research problem of this Nigerian study was similar to my study where the third research question explored the support offered by other family members. However, the study by Atsu (2016) used a mixed methodological approach where participants from ten family businesses were involved in the survey. According to Atsu (2016), the results of the qualitative part of the study, with the aid of NVivo 10 software, supported the findings of the quantitative analysis. The research findings revealed that:

Cultural beliefs and values, extended family system, tradition and legacy, and life styles of the family business owners and lifestyles of the family business owners had negative relationships with management transition planning (Atsu 2016: 172).

The unwillingness of founding family business leaders to relinquish control and ownership, in addition to the lack of adequate preparation for transition planning (Atsu 2016) was cited as the critical drawback for long term family business sustainability. This was different to the views from my study on the impact of other family members' involvement on succession planning. The two different contexts (Nigerian and Zimbabwean) helped to provide the necessary comparisons during the analysis of my research findings.

The three studies from the Nigerian context reviewed above reveal the lack of transition management as the major cause of the closure of family-owned businesses after the demise of the founding members. It also emerged that the family ties that exist in the family system fail to remain tight as the same members migrate to the family system, participate and engage in the family business.

Ferina, Khurotul and Sukowidyanti (2018) in Indonesia examined the influence as well as the role of family social support in the form of social capital, financial capital, human capital, physical capital and family cohesion on family businesses in the start-up phase. In contrast to the other regional studies cited above, Ferina et al. (2018) focused on family support gained by

emerging entrepreneurs during their formative years. This was also contrary to my study which involved fully established and operational family-owned businesses. Nonetheless, the perception that start-up businesses required family support was a critical insight and informed my study which explored the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability.

Ferina et al. (2018) adopted a quantitative approach in which data was drawn from 96 participants sampled from start-up businesses in the Malang area in Indonesia where an increasing appearance of start-up businesses was evident. Five hypotheses formulated from the components of the family social support were tested, focusing on social capital, financial capital, human capital, physical support and family cohesiveness. These forms of support are also in line with the views of Srinivas (2011) and Rosselli (2016) that social and emotional collaboration are critical for business survival. The components of the family social support presented above in hypothesis form were useful guides that informed my study as I explored how family business owners benefited from other family members. Based on Ferina et al.'s (2018) hypothesis test results, only the family cohesiveness variable (or family emotional support) had an impact on the start-up activities of young entrepreneurs in Malang, Indonesia. These research findings were in contrast to other surveyed literature where lack of capital and skilled manpower negatively affected family business sustainability (Adoukonou 2019).

Other related literature from the regional context contradicted the research findings from Ferina et al. (2018) as Ndala and Pelsler (2019) asserted that inadequate availability of debt financing, venture capital and qualified labour are impediments to SMEs' development as a solid customer base would not be created (Worku 2013). Given the small-scale operational levels of emerging family-owned businesses, family support in the form of capital injection could be necessary. Ndala and Pelsler (2019) undertook a quantitative study in Malawi examining the effectiveness of the entrepreneurship policy in promoting entrepreneurship education and training in small business development. While many policy issues were raised in this study, the aspects of social support offered by family members to small- and medium-sized enterprises were relevant and significant to my study.

A survey questionnaire was employed to collect data from the 50 participants purposively sampled from SMEs. This research instrument was not used in my study, given the philosophical orientation I adopted which guided the methodology to be employed, as indicated in Chapter Four of this thesis. Among other research findings, Ndala and Pelsler (2019) found that SMEs gained financial support from family members in the form of soft unsecured loans. Untied loans

aided business sustainability in the long-run as no expense item was incurred on the cost of the loans. It also emerged that family background (rated at 37%) and the impact of relatives (rated at 41%) influenced the development of entrepreneurship in Malawi. This suggested that support from other family members was viewed as necessary and critical in the Malawian perspective. This study guided mine and informed it with regard to the forms of support gained from other family members.

Five different studies from the regional context were reviewed, and four of the five concurred that family support was critical and necessary for the development and sustainability of small-scale family businesses. Among many other components of family support, financial, physical and human capital, and family emotional support played a significant role.

During my review of related literature, the dominance and influence of the founding members in the family businesses surfaced frequently in the global and regional contexts. The inclusion of the study by Maphosa (1999) in this thesis was critical as it highlighted the impacts of a dominant family business founder. The study by Maphosa (1999) differed from other reviewed literature as it put the founding member in the spotlight and explored how his/her influence affected other family members in the business system.

In a study of small-scale indigenous businesses carried out in Harare, Maphosa (1999) focused on factors that prevented a smooth shift from one generation to the next. Using a case study approach, Maphosa carried out an investigation of ten indigenous Zimbabwean SMEs over a period of two years. The study mixed up the phenomena of SMEs and family businesses in its discussion, a common practice by scholars where the two concepts are used interchangeably. Given their scale of operation, the majority of the family-owned businesses in Zimbabwe at the time of my study were generally viewed as SMEs. The current study focused on the family-owned business as a specific entity that could be operating on small-scale or large-scale basis. Maphosa (1999) used interviews and observation as data generation techniques on businesses that had been selected through purposive sampling. The businesses, which were all first generation entities, ranged from manufacturing and construction to consultancy, retail trade, book keeping, hair dressing salons, as well as panel beating ventures. Owner-managers and employees were the research participants. This was a multi-sectoral study which drew businesses from different sectors of the economy such as secondary and tertiary industries. Contrary to the above, the current study focused on family business owners in the retail trade only, which is a form of business in the tertiary sector. Concentration on only a single business sector was

appropriate for my multi-site case study where comparison with related business units was necessary. However, my study employed similar data generation methods and sampling techniques to those used by Maphosa (1999) and this provided a point of reference for the current study.

Findings by Maphosa (1999) showed that many organisations in the Zimbabwean context owed their existence to the individual efforts of founding members who devoted their time and financial resources, and endured psychological and social risks to bring the business to fruition.

... The problem is that ideas about doing business in Africa have been very much influenced by Western values which glorify individualism at the expense of collectivism (Maphosa 1999: 173).

This suggested that the family set up, which could translate to the family business structure, limited children from making critical decisions that opposed the ideas of their elders. According to Maphosa (1999) spouses, especially the wives of businessmen, often assumed little or no responsibility for meaningfully preparing themselves for the business takeover. This suggested that involvement and support of close nuclear family members in a family-owned business remained minimal. This was, however, contrary to Ayranci (2010) who argued that the involvement of spouses in family businesses manifested in many different ways. These included working for a small salary or none at all, and also influencing the decisions of a spouse with a view to generating family income.

Conclusion

Surveyed global, regional and national literature has shown that family business owners experience some form of learning as they perform their day-to-day business activities in their workplaces.

Global studies have focused on the learning process which family business owners go through as well as focusing on sustainability strategies that family business owners engage in. It has also been observed that the global studies mainly used the qualitative approach as their main approach which guided sampling, data generation and analysis. With regard to the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners, it has emerged that global studies concur that learning occurs through collaboration, observation and participation. It has also emerged from the global studies that sustainability strategies like strategic planning, operational efficiency, corporate social responsibility and networking should, where possible, be implemented by

family business owners as they enhance business longevity.

Regional studies relating to the nature of experiential learning focused on the sustainability of family-owned businesses. These studies employed different methodologies where either qualitative or quantitative approaches were used. It was interesting to note that the regional studies resulted in the development of conceptual frameworks that were presented as guidelines to enhance sustainability. In concurrence with the global perspective, it also emerged from the regional context that learning for family business owners occurred through cooperation and participation.

No uniformity was observed in the focus of the national studies in terms of the nature of the experiential learning and its influence on business sustainability as scholars explored different perspectives such as sustainability, entrepreneurship, succession planning and the learning processes of the family business owners. While studies have been carried out on succession planning in family businesses, the phenomenon of experiential learning in the field of entrepreneurship has apparently not been addressed. This may have emanated because of the dearth of literature on the experiential learning of family business owners nationally. However, it also emerged that learning occurred as people collaborated, participated and observed others during their day-to-day business activities.

Literature from the three research contexts that related to my second research question was also consulted. Studies from the global context used different methodologies as both the qualitative and quantitative approaches were used. However, the focus of these studies was on the success factors for business sustainability, as well as competencies in the form of soft skills. Related findings about the kinds of knowledge that emerged from the global context related to: self-motivation, flexibility, adaptability, growth orientation, innovation and creativity. Findings also showed that tacit knowledge was a critical type of knowledge gained by family business owners.

Regional and national studies employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches as they focused on the skills gained at the workplace. While skills and competencies from the regional and national contexts were similar to those identified in the global context, it also emerged that the four categories of knowledge identified above were to be taken cognisance of.

The relevant sources were consulted for my third research question which focused on the involvement of- and support from other family members for family business owners. The focus of these studies was on the identification of the necessary measures to be provided in support of family-owned businesses. It emerged from within the global context that collaboration,

teamwork, emotional and instrumental support were necessary measures to support family business owners.

The methodologies adopted for the studies from the regional context by different scholars were different and the findings indicated that founding members' dominance left many other family members in the business without much knowledge or skill to run the business in the event of the founding member becoming incapacitated.

The next chapter addresses the theoretical and conceptual frameworks on which this study was grounded.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Introduction

In Chapter Two I presented a review of the global, regional and national literature that was related to my three research questions. Contextual, conceptual and methodological gaps emerged from the literature review, which justified the need for this exploration of the experiential learning of family business owners and how it influenced business sustainability. To embark on this study, I needed theoretical and conceptual frameworks that would help me unpack, understand and explain my findings. This chapter addresses those theoretical and conceptual frameworks on which the study was grounded.

While Green (2014) suggests that a theoretical framework is used when research is underpinned by one theory, my three research questions called for a differing perspective, where each question needed a different framework. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory provided a strong lens to guide my study on the experiential learning of family business owners and how it influenced business sustainability. However, this theory could not help me address question three about the support that family business owners received from other family members. As such, I needed a complementary theory, and I found Albert Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory appropriate to help me understand and explain the findings addressing this question, given that Bandura (1977) views learning as taking place within a social context. Furthermore, I needed a framework to help me unpack and explain the kinds of knowledge that family business owners gained from experiential learning as Kolb's and Bandura's theories do not deal with kinds of knowledge. Consequently, I looked for conceptual frameworks that address domains of knowledge which would help understand data addressing question three.

Unlike Grounded Theory, a method that is not premised on a theoretical or conceptual framework (Green 2014), my qualitative study within a multiple-site case study design is grounded on theoretical and conceptual frameworks. This chapter therefore discusses these frameworks and commences with distinguishing between theoretical frameworks and conceptual frameworks. This is followed by a discussion of Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), covering the four cyclical stages through which a learner progresses. Following this, Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory (SLT) which emphasises observing and imitating the behaviour, attitudes and emotional reactions of others in order to learn is discussed. Finally, the conceptual frameworks by various scholars about the kinds of knowledge derived are discussed.

These scholars include Grossman (1990); Kelly (2006) and Syverson (2011).

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

According to Green (2014), a theoretical framework assists researchers to ensure that their studies are coherent; focusing their minds on what the research is trying to achieve. The frameworks used in my study guided data generation and analysis. Lederman and Lederman (2015) further note that a framework helps a researcher with the interpretation of findings and connects their project to that of other researchers. The theoretical frameworks therefore helped me to illustrate how my findings could be viewed against the lens of theory and conceptual frameworks.

According to Casanave and Li (2015: 107), a theoretical frame:

... Is a more or less abstract idea that encircles a study the way a frame encircles a picture and provides a space in which it is situated? It helps explain or justify why and how the study is being done, lets readers know what the study is and is not about and helps researchers support and interpret findings and connect them to other works and to larger ideas that are more general than the concrete particulars of a study.

Based on these ideas, it was critical for me to identify frameworks that would give me insights, broaden my understanding and help explain the experiential learning process of family business owners and how the learning influenced business sustainability. Additionally, the frameworks helped me understand the kinds of knowledge the family business owners experientially gained and the support that they received from family members.

Historical Development of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential learning was researched and documented by various scholars well before the publication of Kolb's theory on experiential learning (Yardley, Teunissen and Dorman, 2012a). Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory was developed from earlier works by scholars who included John Dewey, Kurt Lewin and Jean Piaget (Schenck and Cruickshank 2015), among many other researchers. These few are discussed below.

John Dewey (1859–1952)

The views of John Dewey contributed significantly to the emergence of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory following the publication of 'Experience and Education' in 1938 that offered a justification for learning by doing (Fenwick 2003). According to Yardley et al. (2012b), John

Dewey argued for a progressive approach which recognised the need for an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education, conceptualising experience as an organising focus for lifelong learning and development. The views were that learners gained applied knowledge at the expense of abstract knowledge through their active interaction and engagement with their surroundings. Learning was characterised by practical interactions and activities. The ideas of Dewey on the role of thinking and reflection in learning from experience (Yardley et al. 2012a) were a great inspiration to David Kolb.

The arguments presented by Dewey included the following: learners thrive in environments where they are allowed to experience and interact with curricula (Yardley et al. 2012a); learners have the ability to connect aspects of new experience to what is already known (Fenwick 2003); there is integration of the subject matter and the interests and experiences of the learner (Kolb 1984). In the business context, family business owners interact with suppliers and are exposed to marketing information and availability of commodities. Predecessors and other senior family members are presumed to be sources of information in a volatile and ever-changing business environment. Whatever business transactions and activities are encountered, they form a part of the learning experience. These views made John Dewey become considered as one of the powerful proponents of experiential education and they later became an inspiration for Kolb's ideas in his Experiential Learning Theory (Yardley et al. 2012a). The most essential concept that emerged from Dewey was experience, and he postulated that all genuine education came about through experience (Yardley et al. 2012b). In the context of this study, it had to be found out whether knowledge gained at a young age could be applicable later in the family business.

The contributions by Kurt Lewin to the body of educational knowledge were also an inspiration to David Kolb.

Kurt Lewin (1890–1947)

As a social psychologist, Kurt Lewin's greatest contribution was towards organisational behaviour (Yardley et al. 2012a) and the development of training groups (or team learning). Lewin's ideas on the inevitable conflict between the concrete experiences of trainees and the conceptual models of their teachers influenced the development of Kolb's Experiential Learning Model.

Next is a discussion of Jean Piaget's views related to the Experiential Learning Theory.

Jean Piaget (1896–1980)

Jean Piaget is considered the key proponent of cognitive learning after his pioneering work on the development of intelligence in children (Zhou and Brown 2015). Piaget's identification of the four stages of cognitive development in children and adolescents was a shift from behaviourism perception, as will be noted in the next subsection. The central focus of Jean Piaget's work was on the:

Cognitive development processes and the nature of intelligence, including how it develops, believing that cognitive processes were key to understanding quantitative and qualitative differences in intelligence (Yardley et al. 2012a: 104).

From his studies of the growth of knowledge from childhood to adolescence, Piaget concluded that intelligence was crafted qualitatively from experience through interactions with the environment (Kolb 1984). Zhou and Brown (2015) point out that Piaget believed that intelligence development was a lifelong process up to the formal operational thought, after which no new structures were needed. That is, a lifelong process of discovering knowledge, assimilation and the accommodation of learning from experience and knowledge. As some of these family business owners were growing up, especially those who grew up within a family business environment, they were exposed to many concrete business experiences that helped them to start making sense of their environment and the world around them (assimilation). As they were faced with other business situations that required problem solving, they started to apply their previous knowledge and connect it to new knowledge and formed connections to the new experience they were engaged in.

However, researchers now believe that children may be more competent than Piaget originally thought, especially in their practical knowledge (Zhou and Brown, 2015). Subsequent generations have the ability to take the business to higher levels than before as they are aware of current generational expectations among the clientele. Piaget's ideas culminated in the controversial belief that educational pedagogy could be matched to any stage of development and any content could be taught if structured accordingly (Kolb 1984). The next section discusses Kolb's (1984) ELT.

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (Kolb 1984)

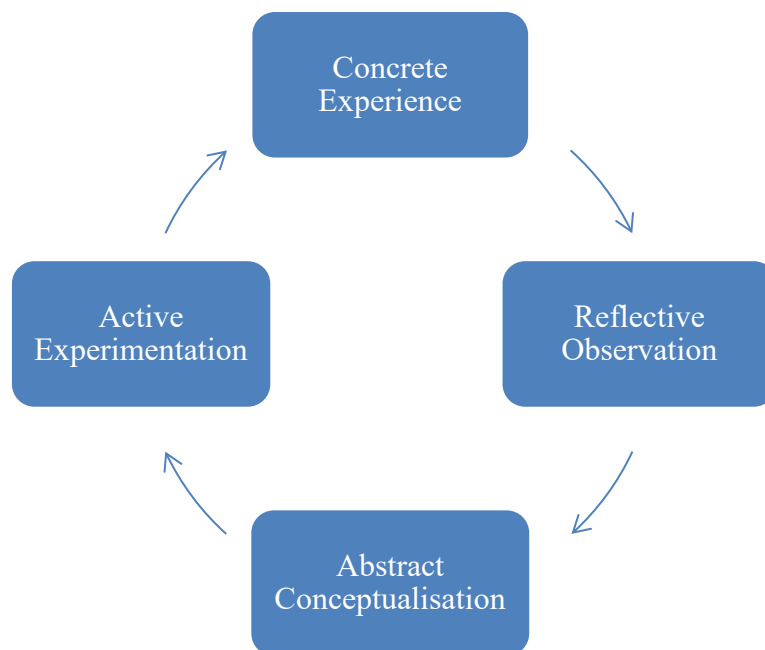
Fundamental work on experiential learning was published in 1984 by David, A. Kolb. Prior to 1984, Kolb himself and other scholars had collectively and individually embarked on work

linked to experiential learning (Yardley, Teunissen and Dornan 2012) and these ideas led to the development of a cyclical model of the experiential learning process which is attributed to Kolb.

The aim of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory was to develop, through a synthesis of the works of different foundational scholars, a theory that could explain and enlighten how experience was transformed into learning and reliable knowledge (Yardley et al. 2012). This informed my study that experience on its own, without reflection and some form of transformation, would not always be beneficial to family business owners as they moved from one generation to the next. The term *experiential learning* is usually associated with particular theories and practices based on reflection on concrete experience (Schenck and Cruickshank 2015), where learning is located in everyday workplace tasks and interactions. The reason the theory is called 'experiential' is because of its intellectual origins in the experiential works of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget; where Dewey's philosophical pragmatism, Lewin's social psychology, and Piaget's cognitive-developmental genetic epistemology form a unique perspective on learning and development (Kolb 1984).

Experiential Learning Theory views learning as an integral part of human existence that creates knowledge through the transformation of experience. The theory is represented by a four-stage learning cycle which may be viewed as the underpinning principles comprised of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation (Schenck and Cruickshank 2015), as indicated in the figure below.

Figure 3.1: Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle



Source: Schenck and Cruickshank (2015: 74)

According to Kolb (1984), a learner has to go through all four stages during the learning process to experience effective learning. These stages are discussed below.

Concrete experience

Kolb (1984) points out that when a new experience is encountered by a learner, this may include reinterpretation of an existing experience that is viewed differently. The concrete experience stage was described as the pragmatist stage by Honey and Mumford (1992) who developed their own learning style model based on Kolb's (1984) theory. This is the stage that provides the basis for the learning process. Sternberg and Zhang (2000: 3) further note that:

In grasping experience some of us perceive new information through experiencing the concrete, tangible, felt qualities of the world, relying on our senses and immersing ourselves in concrete reality.

In this regard, people learn through their own experiences (Muscat and Mollicone 2012). This perception can be critical in a family business context where family business owners are involved in daily practical activities such as breaking bulky orders, packing goods on shelves, and pricing commodities, among many other activities. The repetitive process done by family business owners can provide the basis for experiential learning.

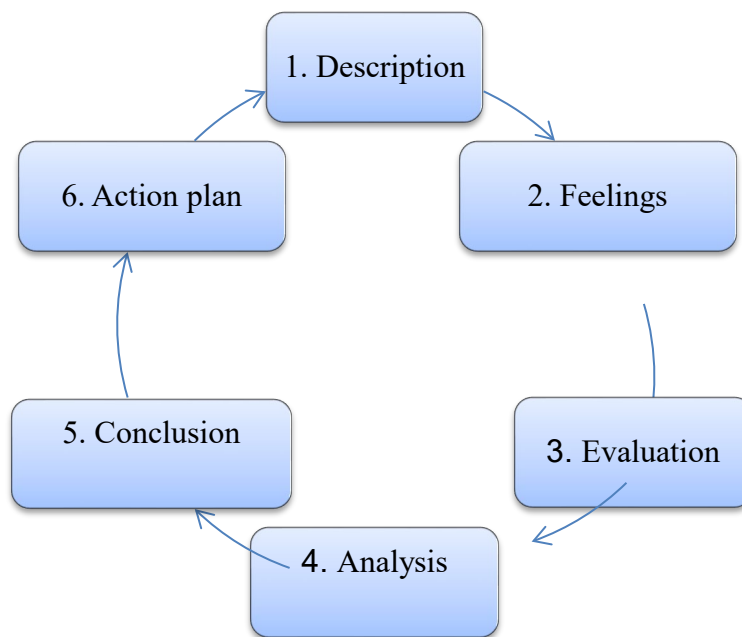
Reflective observation

After encountering a new experience, one has to think about and review what has been encountered. This is the reflector stage (Honey and Mumford 1992); reflecting on the experience and learning from it. The phrase *learning from experience* simply means learning from reflection on an experience (Akella 2010). According to Sharlanova (2004), reflection entails returning to the starting point of a task and reviewing what has been tried or done. Experiential learning entails learning by reflection on the experience. Family business owners replay what happened, what they have contributed in the action, what others have contributed, what they want, and what others want. Identifying all these aspects enables the business owner to discover how to address them. It is at this stage that the family business owner identifies what could have been done differently or what they can do differently in subsequent activities to avoid previous mistakes or to uphold good performance. For example, where customers complain about products without expiry dates, the family business owners are expected to reflect on such incidences and correct them going forward. A number of scholars developed reflective models which have a bearing on Kolb's (1984) second stage of the Experiential Learning Cycle, two of which are highlighted

below.

Further to the ideas of Kolb's (1984) theory is Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle, which is an extension of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, placing theory and practice in an iterative circle (Dye 2011). The model captures six stages of reflection, as shown below:

Figure 3.2: Gibbs' Reflective Cycle



Source: Dye (2011: 230).

Developed by Graham Gibbs, the reflective cycle is meant to provide structure to learning through reflection on experience, thereby encouraging people to think systematically (Dye 2011; Owen and Fletcher 2018). The first stage of description is a reflection on thinking clearly about what has happened. In the case of family business owners, in order to shift from a loss-making environment to a profit-making environment they need to reflect on what can have caused the losses in the first place.

Second is the stage on feelings, where an individual reflects on what he/she wants, and is feeling (emotions) or thinking during the occurrence of the event cited in the first stage. This is followed by an evaluation of the positives and negatives of the situation and what sense can be made of the situation, which leads to the analysis of the whole situation. In the reflective diagram, conclusion relates to questions regarding what else can be done and what needs to be done subsequently. This is followed by the action plan stage which is about testing possible solutions to improve the situation or deciding what actions to take, should the same situation resurface.

According to Owen and Fletcher (2018), the ELT is supported by model developed in 2001 by

Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper. Owen and Fletcher (2018) assert that the model entails understanding an event (what?); making sense of the implications (so what?) and identification of possible solutions (now what?). Such a progression enhances mutual understanding through alignment as it drives colleagues toward a shared solution. Problem solving is critical in business organisations. The views of Owen and Fletcher (2018) provided insights for my study as I had to find out whether family business owners took contingency measures in their business operations that would enhance business sustainability.

The third stage in the cycle is abstract conceptualisation.

Abstract conceptualisation

Kolb (1984) pointed out that reflection gives rise to a new idea or modification of an existing abstract concept. In this stage, also often referred to as the theorisation stage (Honey and Mumford 1992), an attempt to find answers and conclusions related to theories or some known concepts is made as learning ensues from reflecting on the experience. Consequently, learning involves more logic and ideas than feelings of understanding the problem (Sharlanova 2004). This may be matched to diversification in the business context where family business owners are expected to engage in activities that help to enhance business sustainability. The final stage is the trialling of the new idea.

Active experimentation

This is the stage where the learner will be testing or applying what has been learnt in new situations, resulting in new experiences (Kolb 1984). This is also often called the activist stage (Honey and Mumford 1992). In summary, Akella (2010: 102) notes that:

The student learner begins by having an experience (CE), s/he reflects on the experience from several perspectives (RO). Next, the student draws conclusions and relates them to theories and concepts (AC) that lead to experimentation.

The stage of active experimentation and the views of Akella (2010) can portray a business scenario where new products are introduced to the market. It can be pointed out that the learning cycle can be entered at any point, such as at stage three or stage four, but the sequence of the stages has to be followed (Akella 2010). However, learning occurs when all four stages have been experienced. Given that learners (in the context of family business owners) do not use the entire learning cycle equally, Kolb (1984) conceptualised four different learner groups or types of learners: accommodators, assimilators, convergers and divergers. Learners will always prefer

one of these styles above the others. According to Kolb (1984), learners are driven by different cognitive questions in their learning process.

Accommodators want to address the ‘what would happen if I did this?’ type of question (Kolb 1984). This is critical in the business context where family business owners are active participants who invest their capital with the intention of acquiring profit. Kolb (1984) indicates that assimilators are motivated to answer the question, ‘what is there to know?’ This may relate to the mentor-mentee relationship where children in the family-owned business look forward to their parents and expect to learn more. In this regard children respect the knowledge of their parents as founding entrepreneurs.

Convergers are driven by the motive to discover the relevancy or the ‘how?’ of a situation (Kolb 1984). Just like in the case of assimilators, Kolb’s theory may relate to family-owned businesses where children are inquisitive about the business operations; how to place an order, how to price commodities, how to operate the cash till machine, how this may help, and so on.

Divergers are motivated to find out the relevancy or the ‘why?’ of a situation (Kolb 1984). The business environment is not stable as economic variables such as inflation, interest rates and taxation, among many others, are always fluctuating. Kolb’s (1984) theory may have significance where children become inquisitive under harsh economic conditions.

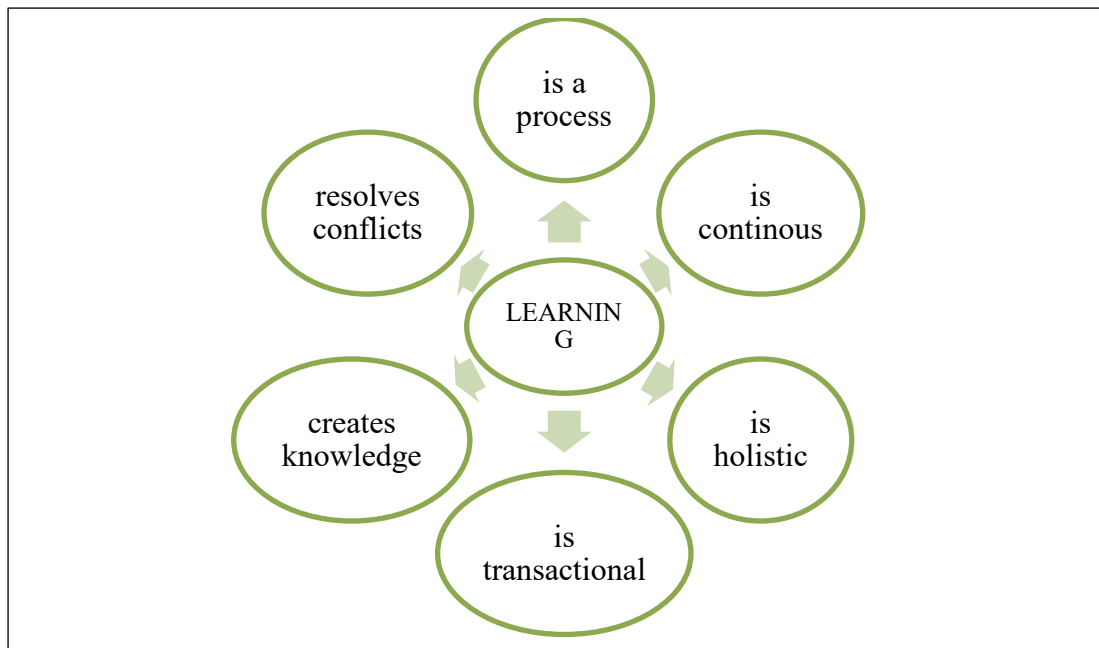
Kolb’s (1984) theory has critical implications for the nature of learning that is gone through by family business owners. It was important in this study to establish whether family business owners passed through Kolb’s experiential learning stages sequentially and fell within the learning styles propounded by Kolb (1984). Questions had to be raised as to whether business owners encountered new experiences, reflected on those experiences, drew conclusions and applied what they had learnt to help sustain their businesses.

The next section addresses Kolb’s (1984) principles or propositions as they relate to this study

Propositions of Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory and their application to the study

Kolb’s propositions are first outlined in my diagrammatic representation below.

Figure 3.3: Kolb's Propositions of the ELT



Source: Researcher (2021)

The Experiential Learning Theory is considered as a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. According to Kolb (1984: 20), experiential learning theory should be distinguished:

... From rationalist and other cognitive theories of learning that tend to give primary emphasis to acquisition, manipulation and recall of abstract symbols, and from behavioural learning theories that deny any role for consciousness and subjective experience in the learning process.

As informed by Sharlanova (2004), the Experiential Learning Theory provides a theoretical argument that enhances independent learning, work-based learning, learning by doing and problem-based learning. This argument from the ELT seems to have relevance to the family business owner whose capacity to run a business is not measured by his ability to narrate scientific methods and theoretical procedures in business management but through practical engagements on a daily basis. Family business owners are presumed to take entrepreneurial risks and engage in business investments without having attended any business school. As noted in the above quotation, family business owners may not be involved in theorising and recalling an abstract phenomenon. According to Yardley et al. (2012a), Kolb's (1984) theory endeavours to portray an integrative perspective on learning that captures experience, reflection, perception, cognition and behaviour in a holistic manner. The family business owner engages in reflection

on activities that might have or will be taking place in the business, and develops some understanding of such situations, which may bring about behaviour change. This clearly highlights how the experiential learning theory was developed from other previous theories and from where Kolb (1984) developed the following six propositions.

Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes

Kolb (1984) points out that ideas are not fixed and immutable, otherwise it would be possible to measure how much someone has acquired from learning by the number of fixed ideas that the person has accumulated. Ideas are formed and reformed through experience (Sternberg and Zhang 2000). This proposition suggests process which ostensibly relates to *knowledge* that is accumulated over a long period of time involving experiences and opportunities planned or unplanned that promote growth (Kolb 1984). In other words, experiential learning for these family business owners was a lengthy process which for some of them started when they were children helping their parents, the founders of those businesses. An effort was therefore made in this study to establish the nature of the experiential learning by family business owners.

Learning is a continuous process grounded in experience

Kolb (1984) points out that *knowledge* is perpetually derived from- and tested out in the experience of the learner, where learning is all about relearning. Learning is therefore an on-going life-long process which takes place when a learner reflects on experience. It is not entirely focused on the acquisition of new ideas, and should also entail the disposal of and/or modification of old ones (Sternberg and Zhang 2000). Family business owners who stuck to old trading procedures that were adopted and practiced by past generations would most likely find such procedures irrelevant in the ever-changing business environment.

Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world

The argument here is that experiential learning should be viewed as a central process of human adaptation to the social and physical environment. In the context of this study, learning should empower the family business owners effectively to be able to confront, control, manage, modify and eventually sustain the family businesses. The family business owners are expected to be relevant to the business environment, for the benefit of clients as well as for the sustenance of the businesses. *“When learning is conceived as a holistic adaptive process, it provides conceptual bridges across life situations such as school and work, portraying learning as a continuous, lifelong process”* (Kolb 1984: 33).

In order to survive and remain relevant to the market, family business owners would need to shift from selling what they produced to selling what the market demanded. Thus, there would be a need for family business owners' paradigm shift from supplier-oriented to customer-oriented approaches in marketing. Organisations that do not adapt to the business environment could find themselves out of business.

Learning involves transactions between the person and the environment

The perspective outlined here is that learning is not confined to books, teachers or the classroom. This could be linked to the family business owner who would interact with their context, the internal and external business environment: the employees; the customers; the community; suppliers; creditors; financial institutions and other key stakeholders. In taking a central role, the family business owner would understand the needs of their business context. Kolb's (1984) argument is that an individual is brought into the world through birth and it is within this world that the individual must function through transactions with other people. Every business organisation operates within micro- and macro-business environments where variables such as the economic, political, technological, social and cultural components must be addressed. As a family business owner, one could not afford to ignore variables such as inflation, interest rates and exchange rates.

Learning is a process of creating knowledge

Kolb (1984) points out that knowledge is the result of reflection on experience. Through engagement with stakeholders, such as serving customers or placing orders with suppliers, family business owners would subject themselves to situations where knowledge is constructed through reflection on such activities. Another purpose of this study was to establish the kinds of knowledge that family business owners acquired (created) through experiential learning.

The process of learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world

In the context of my study the family business owners and other family members were expected to resolve any conflicts, even those from differing views in order to ensure business sustainability. Conflicts are a natural and inevitable part of the family business (Nasser 2014). Given that two systems are interwoven in a family business, that is, the family system and the business system (Viriri and Muzividzi 2013), the occurrence of conflicts could be very high and would be quite damaging either to the business or to the family if not addressed, hence the need

to address them. However, according to Nasser (2014), the two greatest threats to the successful continuity of family businesses are conflict and lack of succession planning. The next section examines some of the shortcomings of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory.

Weaknesses of Kolb's Theory

Kolb's (1984) theory has had fundamental impacts on the field of experiential learning, triggering further research on the subject. According to Mughal and Zafar (2011), Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle is considered to be the most influential theoretical model in management education that illustrates the nature of learning from experience. Nonetheless, shortcomings have to be highlighted as they relate to this specific study. Wang (2015) argues that Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory focuses on individual learning, a process which is contrary to work place learning where teamwork is paramount. According to Yardley et al. (2012), different learning theories are linked to different philosophical views of the nature of knowledge. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory explains how individuals learn individual things in individual ways as they react to individual perceptions of experiences throughout their lives. Education, from that perspective, is a process of individual transformation, which means there can be no such thing as absolute knowledge divorced from the person who knows it.

However, notwithstanding this weakness, while experiential learning is at the individual level, and while family members of family-owned business work as a collective unit to ensure that would-be heirs understudy the current business leaders, it is the individual experiences that are being sought in this study. Wang (2015) further notes that Kolb's (1984) learning outcomes are not predicable, leading to possible negative experiences which may be emotional. In this study, even negative experiences of the family business owners would still provide some learning, given that it is reflection on negative experiences that brings about more learning than that acquired from positive experiences (Mukeredzi 2015).

According to Akella (2010), critics argue that Kolb's (1984) model provides a limited account of the factors which influence learning and therefore de-contextualises the learning process as it is assumed to ignore the psychodynamic, social and institutional aspects of learning such as an enabling school environment. Such an argument portrays a possible shift from the expected norms of family business owners whose interaction with and learning from various stakeholders needs to be understood.

Vince (1998: 309) believes that Experiential Learning Theory:

... Does not consider (a) the context of power relations such as gender, social status and cultural dominance, (b) the influence of power differentials on learning, (c) 'here and how' experience instead emphasizes the role of retrospective reflection, (d) the importance of 'unconscious' learning processes and defence mechanisms that may inhibit learning, and (e) higher meta-learning processes.

The existence of founding members and family hierarchical positions are indicative of cultural dominance and power differentials in family-owned businesses. Such an environment has the potential to brew discontent among family members in the family business, thereby negatively affecting business sustainability. Such cases may occur where there are gender inequalities, marriage breakdowns and combinations of extended and nuclear family members. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory is silent on the impact of different cultures on learning processes (Vince 1988). However, this study will seek to understand the learning experiences of family business owners in relation to culture and gender issues and it draws on Bandura's Social Learning Theory to understand these aspects.

However, notwithstanding the weaknesses highlighted above, the key research question of this study that relates to the nature of experiential learning would be adequately addressed and explained through Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory. In addition, as the theory could not help address questions relating to family support and the kind of knowledge acquired experientially, Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory and conceptual frameworks around domains of knowledge compliment Kolb's (1984) theory, given that the use of multi-theories enables the shortfalls of one to be covered by the strengths of the other and thus, this complementary aspect prevents theory-binding. It is against this background that the Social Learning Theory and conceptual frameworks around knowledge domains were brought into this study.

The next section discusses Albert Bandura's social learning theory.

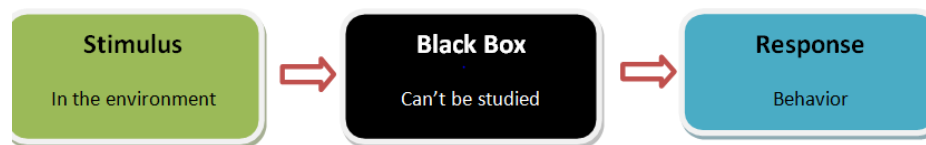
Historical Development of Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Bandura's Social Learning Theory is grounded on traditional learning theories (behaviourism) as well as cognitive learning theories (Piaget cited in Zhou and Brown [2015] above) among many other preliminary studies.

Behavioural Learning Theories

Behaviourism is a learning theory that only focuses on objectively observable behaviours and excludes any independent activities of the mind (McLeod 2016). The behaviourist model is depicted in the figure below.

Figure 3.4: Behaviourist Model



Source: McLeod (2016: 3).

The model indicates that people respond to behaviours that occur around them and then unconsciously react without any cognitive processes. In the context of this study, this relates to family business activities where what occurs in the business contexts, for instance where changes in the supply of goods (stimulus) may emanate from changes in the demand of such commodities. However, customers make rational buying decisions based on factors such as disposable income, tastes and preferences, substitutes and compliments. Based on market research, family business owners tend to order and sell what customers demand rather than what they want to sell. The black box represents the absence of cognition, a phenomenon that had to be interrogated in this study. In the business context, this could relate to a situation where family business owners would not question why customers order this commodity and not another one. However, as suppliers, they have to meet the demand. The two principal advocates of behaviourist approaches to learning are Watson and Skinner, whose work is briefly discussed below.

John Broadus Watson (1878 – 1958)

McLeod (2014) points out that behaviourism, as a science of observable behaviour, surfaced around 1913 through the work of Watson who proposed that the process of *classical conditioning* was able to explain all aspects of human psychology through patterns of stimulus and response. This could be a critical parameter that would be applicable to the operations of family business owners where one would need to be motivated to remain in business. Such motivation may be in the form of encouragement from family members. According to Watson (1924), the theory of classical conditioning involves learning a new behaviour through the process of association.

He famously noted that:

Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select – doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations and the race of his ancestors (Watson 1924: 104).

The above assertions by Watson were based on the view that behaviour changes had nothing to do with individual cognition, an argument which was later disputed. Influenced by the works of Ivan Pavlov, Watson argued that only behaviour that could be observed, recorded and measured was of real value when studying humans and animals (Rilling 2000). This was the notion that internal emotional and psychological conditions of people were not as strong as their external and outward behaviours in the learning process (McLeod 2016). This may relate to the business context where family business owners can be observed carrying out practical activities such as arranging goods on shelves, pricing commodities and serving customers at till points. The black box phenomenon became a reference point for emerging behaviourists. McLeod (2014: 1) further noted that in classical conditioning:

Watson denied completely the existence of the mind or consciousness. Watson believed that all individual differences in behaviour were due to different experiences of learning.

Applying his theory to child development, Watson believed that the environment was a critical factor in shaping behaviour over one's genetic makeup (Rilling 2000). Based on this argument, business owners could take advantage of customers who behave impulsively by making unplanned purchases and implement appropriate marketing strategies. Packaging, pricing systems and product designing could play crucial roles as they influence impulse buying. Though classical conditioning could have had limited applicability in the classroom in the context of this study, the association emanating from the interactions of family business owners and their customers could enhance the business sustainability.

Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1904 – 1990)

Expanding on Watson's basic stimulus-response model, Skinner developed a more comprehensive view of conditioning referred to as *operant conditioning*, a form of learning that employs rewards and punishment (Zhou and Brown 2015). Whilst early behaviourists such as

Watson focused on associative learning, Skinner was more concerned with how the consequences of people's actions influenced their behaviour based on Edward Thorndike's 1898 Law of Effect (McLeod 2016; 2018). McLeod (2007: 1) pointed out that:

Skinner believed that we do have such a thing as a mind, but that it is simply more productive to study observable behaviour rather than internal mental events. Skinner believed that the best way to understand behaviour is to look at the causes of an action and its consequences.

Based on positive reinforcements or punishment, behaviour can either be repeated or may be stopped outright. According to Zhou and Brown (2015), Skinner believed that people don't shape the world, but instead, the world shapes them. Behaviourism is primarily concerned with the observable and measureable aspects of human behaviour. Business owners do not have to supply what they want *people to buy*, instead, the business owners should supply what customers are searching for. By getting into the customers' position, understanding and supplying their needs, business owners would allow themselves to be shaped by the environment. The assertion being that the only behaviours worthy of study are those that can be directly observed and rewarding.

Cognitive Learning Theories

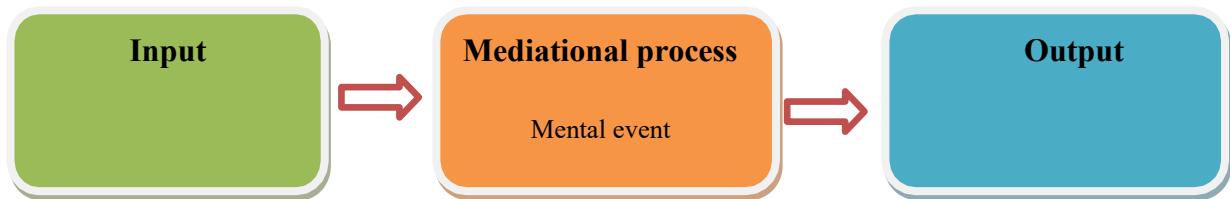
Whilst many cognitive theorists inspired Bandura, only two are addressed in this study leading to the discussion of Bandura's SLT. According to McLeod (2016), cognitive learning theories enunciated by scholars such as Tolman, Koffka, Lewin and Kohler emphasised the formation and modification of cognitive patterns that are representative of the environmental relationships. Cognitive approaches do not deny behaviourism as cognitive processes are seen in behaviourist learning (Kaya and Akdemir 2016), which is an indication that the theories are intertwined. Cognitive patterns may exist in those family businesses where owners prepare financial budgets, and income and expenditure statements, among many other financial reports.

Kurt Koffka (1886 - 1941)

Other scholars such as Max Wertheimer (1880 - 1943), Wolfgang Kohler (1887 - 1967) and Kurt Koffka co-founded and extended Gestalt psychology, which favoured a holistic approach to perception. According to Wong (2010: 863), Gestalt principles describe the various "... *Ways we tend to visually assemble individual objects into groups or unified wholes, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts*". This perception where people experience the world in meaningful wholes may relate to the business context where a collaborative effort and support is

critical within family-owned businesses. Contrary to the behaviourists, the black box does not exist for cognitive theorists. The figure below represents a model that relates to the way learning takes place in accordance with the cognitive learning theories.

Figure 3.5: Cognitive Model



Source: McLeod (2016: 3).

In the context of this study, the environment presents various business opportunities which may be taken advantage of by family business owners. Environmental factors such as drought, population growth, migration and many other factors may be sources for business penetration and growth. The ability to *dream*, to think, reflect, and come up with viable business plans can be considered as the mental event for business owners. Environmental factors may be mentally connected in order to come up with a visible and viable output, an important concept captured in Bandura's Social Learning Theory. The form of business that is finally taken up will be a result of cognitive processes that may entail long-term strategic and succession planning by founding members. Subsequent business owners will simply have to modify the ways of operation in order to sustain the businesses and remain relevant to the market. The four mediational processes which entail attention, retention, reproduction and motivation replacing the black box have been of great interest to Bandura, whose theory is discussed below.

Edward Chance Tolman (1886 - 1959)

Tolman rejected the Stimulus-response Theory as he believed that people acted on their beliefs, attitudes, and changing conditions as they strived towards goal achievement (Kaya and Akdemir 2016). Tolman's argument was that reinforcement was not a prerequisite for learning to take place. With some cue on the work of Hugh Blodgett written in 1929, Tolman developed the Theory of Latent Learning which is a form of learning that would only manifest at a later stage (McLeod 2018). Knowledge existence becomes noticeable when a person has an incentive to display it. The business context may contradict Tolman's rejection of the Stimulus-response Theory as entrepreneurs may be profit-oriented. Family business owners are driven by the motive earn profit, otherwise there is no need to get into business.

According to Kaya and Akdemir (2016: 14): “*Tolman claimed that learning was related to complex mental processes, not simple mechanic conditioning processes*”.

According to the Latent Learning Theory, individual differences that are shaped according to the qualities of the environment constitute the most important factors in the learning process.

Tolman’s Latent Learning Theory had a strong influence towards the development of Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, as he equally believed in the existence of mental processes rather than the black box concept. Unlike Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, Tolman’s Latent Learning Theory may not fully relate to the family business context given that it takes away the notion of external motivation. It was also during this time of Tolman’s ideas in the 1950s that Bandura was busy with his famous Bobo Doll Experiment. Zhou and Brown (2015: 19) highlight that during the 1950s:

There was a popular belief that learning was a result of reinforcement. In the Bobo Doll experiment, Bandura presented children with social models of new violent behaviour and non-violent behaviour towards the inflatable redounding Bobo Doll. The children who viewed the violent behaviour were in turn violent towards the doll; the control group was rarely violent towards the doll.

The Bobo Doll experiment resulted in Albert Bandura and his associates concluding that social modelling was an effective way of learning. Parents and business founders become critical models for their children and other family members. Equally, family business owners are viewed as important models for the future business heirs. Further studies led to the emergence of Bandura’s theory, initially referred to as the Observational Learning Theory, and later called the Social Learning Theory in 1977. The emergence of the Social Learning Theory became a viable model for understanding how learning was facilitated through observation and imitation of models. The next section addresses Bandura’s Social Learning Theory.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura 1977)

Unlike the individualised learning perspective proposed by Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, Bandura’s (1977) Social Learning Theory has an embracing element as it focuses on collectivism rather than individualism. The theory focuses on the learning that takes place within a social context where people learn with and from one another (McLeod 2016). This argument is directly linked to primary socialisation where children are nurtured into adulthood within the family and the community. Social Learning Theory is therefore closely connected to the socialisation process that takes place in family businesses. Children and other family members grow up observing the behaviours of their parents/founders as well as how businesses are run.

Family members are therefore a critical conduit in the learning process as they act as models.

Over and above the different forms of socialisation that take place within the family system, it also emerged from reviewed literature that family business owners gained support from other family members (Sundaramurthy 2008). Support rendered to family business owners could be in the form of informational, emotional, instrumental support and support in form of appraisal and encouragement.

Principles of Bandura's Social Learning Theory and its Application to the Study

McLeod (2016) asserts that the Social Learning Theory is often described as the *bridge* between behaviourism and cognitive approach since it focuses on how mental factors are involved in learning, a process in which family business owners engage. In contrast to behaviourists, Bandura (1977) views his theory as cognitive in which learning can occur without behaviour change. Bandura (1977) believes that human beings are active information processors who relate their behaviour to its consequences such that observational learning cannot occur without cognitive processes at work. This implies that mental factors mediate in the learning process to determine whether a new response is acquired. The general principles of the Social Learning Theory entail observation, imitation and modelling (Nabavi 2012). In family-owned businesses, observation and imitation apparently take place as knowledge transfer occurs from predecessors to successors. These models provide examples of behaviour for children to observe and imitate. Equally, family business owners will from a tender age observe entrepreneurs who surround them. As the child imitates, the people around will respond to the behaviour with either reinforcement or punishment (McLeod 2016). If the consequences are rewarding, the behaviour is likely to be repeated. Family business organisations operate in an environment where competitors, suppliers and global firms stand in as models or benchmarks and consequently, family business owners become models for their own children. Services that are below market standards are rejected by customers, thereby forcing business owners to strive for quality. Customers will punish family business owners by avoiding their goods and services while they will reward the same through purchases.

Bandura (1977) assumes that a person's on-going functioning is a product of continuous interaction between cognitive, behavioural and contextual factors. This implies that learning is dependent on environmental factors as well as an individual's own thoughts and self-beliefs. In support of Bandura's (1977) theory, Tynjala (2008) outlined key observations from workplace

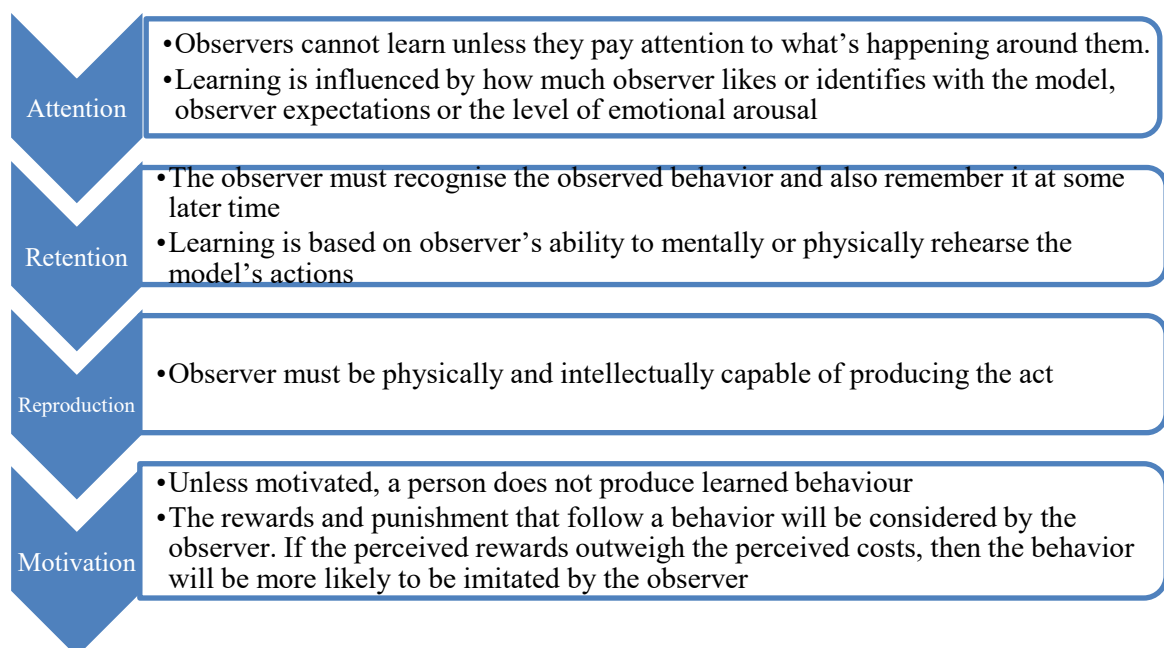
learning:

(1) Many activities at work require collaboration with other people, and each person's ability to function successfully depends on the performances of several individuals, (2) Learning is viewed as a process that takes place at different levels, from the levels of individuals and groups to the levels of communities and organizations, with network learning and regional learning included, (3) There are high chances of individual development, knowledge acquisition, cultural transformation and innovation (Tynjala 2008: 133).

The observations were relevant to my study where family business owners worked in collaboration with other family members who together constituted the family business. This was in line with the Experiential Learning Theory where organisational participants observe, reflect and apply acquired knowledge (Lave and Wenger 1991). These observations were critical in this study as it was necessary to establish whether such aspects of learning and interaction would take place within family businesses to ensure business sustainability.

McLeod (2016) points out that Bandura's social learning theory provides a more comprehensive explanation of human learning by recognising the role of four mediational processes that are highlighted in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.1: Bandura's Cognitive Processes



Source: Adapted from McLeod (2016)

Given the explanations of the cognitive processes in the above table, the possible application of these processes to the family business situation is briefly discussed below.

Attention

Prospective family business owners may not be as effective as founding members unless they actively participate in- and are attentive to various aspects of the business operations. Interest, enthusiasm and involvement is essential in family business enterprises, since business knowledge is brought about through experience (McLeod 2018).

Retention

Family business owners are expected to have under-studied their models – the founding members and retained the knowledge. Where a repeat of previous situations occurs, family business owners will recall the stored knowledge and apply it.

Reproduction/Initiation/Motor skills

The knowledge and skills acquired and retained by family members related to running a business, such as budgeting, expenditure and income analysis require the individual to be physically and intellectually capable of producing the act, in other words applying it.

Motivation

In a business situation, continuity is dependent on positive reinforcements in the form of business profits and family support. The principle of motivation cannot be overlooked when considering the sustainability of family business entities. Apart from human learning, the social learning principles and cognitive processes have been observed in animals such as monkeys (Griffin, Tebbich and Bugnyar 2017), as highlighted by the pictures below.

Figure 3.6: Social Learning Principles and Cognitive Processes Observed in Animals

 <p>This spider monkey learned to drink water from a plastic bottle by seeing the behavior modeled by a human. (credit: U.S. Air Force, Senior Airman Kasey Close)</p>	
<p>Source: Google search. www.monkey/imitation/images.com (2020)</p>	<p>Source: Google search. www.monkey/imitation/images.com (2020)</p>

The pictures show that each monkey went through observation and imitation and followed all of

Bandura's cognitive stages of attention, retention, reproduction and motivation. However, O'Fallon and Butterfield (2011: 380) assert that:

While we do not dispute the prevalence of the Monkey See, Monkey Do phenomenon, we believe that it may have been overemphasized in business ethics literature.

From the above quotation it could be noted that despite the impact of social influence through socialisation, there could be some other form of resistance to social influence. Family business owners would not necessarily accept and implement whatever they observed from their models, particularly as a result of changed times.

Weaknesses of Bandura's Theory

Although Bandura's theory can explain complex human behaviour, it cannot adequately account for how people develop a whole range of behaviours, including thoughts and feelings (McLeod 2016). In a family business situation, the fact that a child observed a successful business parent would not automatically mean that the child would achieve or acquire the same business status. Successful entrepreneurs would require extra skills over and above what could have been observed from their models (Nasser 2014). Nonetheless, in this study the inclusion of other family members in the family business and availability of competitors at the identified research sites widened the social setting in which children and other family members could observe and learn. The family business context was not a closed setting as various stakeholders were available to shape the behaviour of the family business owners.

Some criticisms of the Social Learning Theory have also arisen from its commitment to the environment as the chief influence on behaviour (McLeod 2016). In as much as environmental factors affect business operations, successful entrepreneurs have to circumvent negative environmental variables through the implementation of aggressive marketing and advertising strategies. Family business owners may have to stock their businesses with on-demand commodities.

The Social Learning Theory is not a full explanation for all behaviours (McLeod 2016). The absence of role models in one's life will not limit or prevent the emergence of unique behaviours. In a business situation, people do not simply imitate, they improve or modify the business conditions that they have inherited. Mentorship is therefore not a prerequisite for business survival. Bandura's (1977) and Kolb's (1984) learning theories would not help me to understand and unpack the kinds of knowledge gained by family business owners through the

experiential learning process. These theories had to be complimented by conceptual frameworks related to kinds of knowledge.

The next section discusses the conceptual frameworks that informed my study on the kinds of knowledge gained by family business owners.

Conceptual Frameworks

During my critical review of relevant literature in Chapter Two of this thesis, a number of concepts that were pertinent to this study emerged. A number of authors (for example Shulman 1987; Grossman 1990; Kelly 2006; Eraut 2007; Tynjala 2008; Syverson 2011) highlighted many different kinds of knowledge that were classified in accordance with the source of that particular form of knowledge. However, only four kinds of knowledge frequently surfaced during the literature review: practical knowledge; tacit knowledge; procedural knowledge and knowledge of managing conflicts. These four concepts are discussed in this section under the conceptual frameworks. According to Ravitch and Riggan (2017), a conceptual framework is a written representation of an expected relationship among variables that entail concepts and empirical findings from literature whose major purpose is to guide research. In this study, conceptual frameworks were generated out of many different sources or authors that discussed knowledge gained through experiential learning. The frameworks explained the key constructs and terms, introduced or clarified the domains of knowledge that family business owners gained through experience, connecting and situating aspects of my inquiry within particular frame in literature and research, on question of kinds of knowledge. Given that conceptual frameworks are ideas tendered by different scholars, it was not possible to come up with a single author who had addressed all of the concepts linked to my study, as such had to draw concepts from different authors. The dearth of literature on the kinds of knowledge in the field of entrepreneurship (Mashavira et al. 2019) led me to consult different authors including Shulman (1987); Grossman (1990); Kelly (2006); Cogill (2008), who are known for their domains of pedagogical knowledge that are related to the field of education. The extent to which these domains of knowledge relate to family business owners as entrepreneurs is also explored in this study.

Entrepreneurial Practical Knowledge

As family business owners engage in practical business activities, they in many cases end up acquiring practical knowledge. Shulman's (1987) framework of teacher knowledge outlined

seven categories that could have relevance to family business owners. These include: content knowledge; general pedagogical knowledge; pedagogical content knowledge; curriculum knowledge; knowledge of knowers; knowledge of educational contexts and knowledge of educational ends (Shulman 1987).

The ideas of Shulman's domains of knowledge were expounded by Grossman (1990); Cogill (2008); Mukeredzi and Manwa (2019) who included three knowledge domains that seemed relevant to entrepreneurial education. These are content knowledge, knowledge of learners (which can be seen as knowledge of customers), knowledge of educational contexts (seen as knowledge of the business environment) and general pedagogical knowledge - the 'how to' knowledge which is linked to the practical activities carried out by family business owners on a daily basis. While the type of learning that family business owners acquire is cited as informal, that is learning by doing (Syverson 2011), the '*how to*' knowledge (Mukeredzi 2015) is eventually acquired. Shulman (1987) defined content knowledge as the knowledge, the understanding or the skill that must be mastered for teaching, which learners must learn. This is viewed by Mukeredzi and Manwa (2019) as the critical facts and concepts in a subject and the relationships among them that have to be passed on to the next beneficiary. In this study where retail trade could be classified as the subject matter, investigations were made to determine whether family business owners acquired content knowledge through experiential learning. The next section addresses entrepreneurial tacit knowledge.

Entrepreneurial Tacit Knowledge

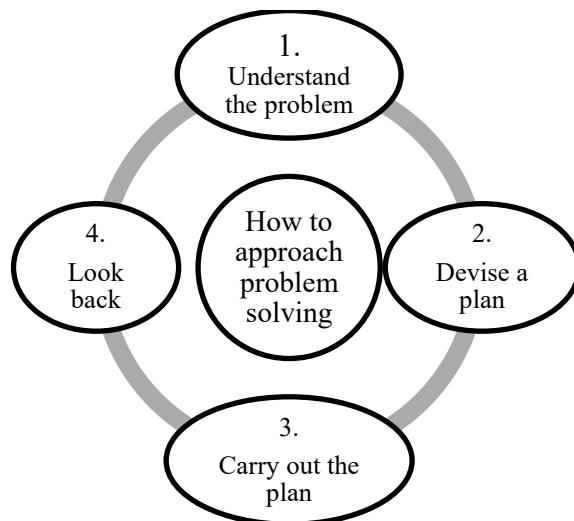
Though people learn from reflections on experience (Kolb 1984), Taylor (2007) points out that it is difficult for a person to articulate or describe the resulting knowledge acquired. However, Lombardi (2007) who explores what constitutes authentic learning, points out that researchers have noted that through workplace learning, people acquire '*portable skills*' that are not easily available to newcomers. Such skills include judgment, which is one's ability to differentiate between reliable and unreliable information. Patience is also viewed as the ability to take longer routes in order to attain desired outcomes. Given the harsh economic environment in Zimbabwe (Mazikana 2017) where there is a high shortage of consumer goods, corruption may be rampant if family business owners lose patience. Tacit knowledge includes synthetic ability (Lombardi 2007) which entails recognising relevant patterns in unfamiliar contexts. This may relate to the peaks and recessions that occur in an economy. Family business owners who are not flexible and cannot adjust to swings and downturns in the economy may fail to remain sustainable. Success is also

viewed as a collective achievement where family business owners have to collaborate and team-up in all of the operations.

The above skills could be critical in a family-owned business, just like in any other non-family-owned enterprise. Judgment and patience would be essential for family business owners when dealing with clients as wrong decisions could cost the business a viable market share. Business owners could reflect on the merits and demerits of all their business actions in order to take corrective measures at the earliest convenience and learn from their errors.

Problem-solving skills have also been identified as valuable to any business organisation. Polya (1985) notes that the problem-solving process involves four critical stages highlighted in my diagrammatic representation below.

Figure 3.7: Polya's (1985) Problem Solving Process



Source: Adapted from Polya (1985)

Family business owners would need to understand different business operations and their problems in order to mitigate challenges, and that would probably lead to business sustainability. For problems to be addressed, the business owner would need to understand them. Knowledge of the problem on its own would not be enough. Family business owners would need to devise mitigation plans as well as execute the plans and then reflect - look back on what they had done.

The kinds of knowledge gained through experiential learning have always triggered academic debates. Taylor (2007) illuminates the confusion in literature over the implicit - explicit dichotomy, where some researchers refer to the type of knowledge possessed, while others refer to the different learning processes of acquiring knowledge. However, in the business domain,

... Many management theorists view both tacit and explicit as elements or

dimensions of knowledge, rather than as mutually exclusive categories of knowledge (Taylor 2007: 64).

Given that this research sought to investigate the kinds of knowledge acquired by family business owners, an attempt was made to find out the extent to which these family business owners were aware of their management knowledge and skills resulting from their experiential learning. Martin and Hughes (2009) assert that performance in the formal learning institutions is measured and quantified by grades, while on the contrary, performance in the workplace is often nebulous, intangible and based on the perception of others (Taylor 2007) and manifests only in the performance of tasks and processes. Martin and Hughes (2009) developed key themes and competencies that relate to workplace learning. These competencies include:

Communication skills; self-confidence; customer relationship management; enthusiastic participation; industry and business knowledge; self-sufficiency; personal organization; professional networks and professional ethics (Martin and Hughes 2009: 38).

Family business owners, through their involvement in the workplace environment, would be able to create business opportunities for themselves to acquire such necessary competencies. Good communication skills, professional networks and professional ethics would enable family business owners to attract customers, thereby enhancing business sustainability. Attributes such as self-confidence, self-sufficiency and personal organisation would enhance perseverance on the part of family business owners during times of economic hardships. Family business owners would need to be confident in their business operations in order for them to remain in business.

In addition to the narrative of soft skills alluded to above, Mackey (2011) highlighted the need for a 'conscious business' that is premised on four key principles: higher purpose; stakeholder interdependence; conscious leadership; and a conscious culture. These qualities could emanate from family business owners with traits of empathy.

Over and above the profit motive, Mackey (2011: 83) pointed out that:

The single most important requirement for the creation of the highest levels of trust and purpose for any enterprise is to discover or re-discover the higher purpose of the enterprise.

From the above quotation enterprises would need to strive for the good; the true; the beautiful and the heroic (Mackey 2011). Empathic family business owners would go beyond the search for money/profit. Business sustainability would be dependent on higher business motives such as

family image and legacy. Leung, Mukerjee and Thurik (2020) further view emotional support as a critical element that binds members of the family business.

Entrepreneurial procedural knowledge is discussed in the next section.

Entrepreneurial Procedural Knowledge

Procedural knowledge is job-dependent in nature and it entails being aware of how to do something, the '*know how to do it knowledge*' (McCormick 1997; Mukeredzi 2015). In other words, this kind of knowledge refers to the skills and techniques that enable individuals to perform a similar task using different procedures. Tynjala (2008) argues that procedural knowledge tends to be more personal and tacit in nature, being constructed through engagement in practice. As family business owners engaged in their daily business activities, it became necessary in this study to investigate whether any form of procedural knowledge was be acquired.

Knowledge of Managing Conflicts

One other concept that emerged during the literature review in Chapter Two of this thesis was conflict within family business organisations. Conflicts are inevitable and are the greatest enemy of family businesses. According to Nasser (2014), conflict situations involve two or more people whose concerns are incompatible. Family business sustainability is dependent on the acquisition of knowledge and skills in managing conflicts that erupt in family-owned businesses. According to Gibbons (2018) social relations tend to be smoothed when conflicting parties know the expectations of others. Whenever, there is some misunderstanding in an organisation, family business owners are expected to identify situations where conflicting parties are in competition mode (McConnon and McConnon 2008). This is a situation where both parties are standing up for their individual rights - a win-win situation. Critical skills are therefore expected to resolve such conflicts for the good of the family-owned business.

Conflicting parties may be in collaboration mode where a common ground is sought. This is different from a compromising mode (McConnon and McConnon 2008) where concessions have to be exchanged between conflicting parties to enhance conflict resolution. Avoidance mode refers to a situation where conflicting parties decide to postpone an issue until a better time (Nasser 2014), as opposed to accommodation mode where self-sacrificing and selfless generosity are displayed. Knowledge of conflict-handling modes on the part of family business owners would help in managing misunderstandings that occurred within family-owned

businesses.

The essence of conflict therefore appears to be a contradiction, disagreement or incompatibility. Failure to resolve conflicts would lead to the systems within which they occurred being dysfunctional.

Conclusion

This chapter addressed Kolb's and Bandura's theories in accordance with the research questions of my study. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory fitted in this study as sourced literature. Diwas et al. (2013) indicate that family business owners learn through reflecting on past experience, which cannot be bypassed. Kolb's (1984) theory is framed on four stages through which a learner has to pass in order to experience learning. It was therefore necessary to establish whether family business owners in the Zimbabwean context reflected on their experiences and gained new knowledge.

As noted above, Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory is grounded on principles of observation, imitation and modelling. In order to be able to imitate, the learner should be able to go through cognitive processes that entail attention, retention, reproduction and motivation. In a family-owned business, family members would interact and learn from one another. Knowledge sharing would permit transferability of business control from one generation to the next.

Over and above the theories discussed above, conceptual frameworks were also discussed in this chapter which helped in understanding and explaining the findings related to the kinds of knowledge acquired by family business owners. The discussion on the conceptual frameworks brought in various scholars in an effort to address concepts that were linked to kinds of knowledge.

The next chapter focuses on the research methodology, which is the road map to the implementation of my research design and methods.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter Three addressed the theoretical frameworks on which this study was grounded, as well as the conceptual frameworks that would help me to understand and explain the kinds of knowledge gained by family business owners. In this chapter I describe the research methodology, explaining how I generated data to address the research question on how family business owners learned experientially and the influence of their learning on business sustainability. This key question is addressed through the following three subsidiary questions:

1. What is the nature of the experiential learning that family business owners go through and how does it influence business sustainability?
2. What kind of knowledge is gained experientially by family business owners?
3. What form of support do family business owners gain from other family members?

In this chapter I first discuss the philosophical and practical underpinnings of the study, followed by the research methodology. Subsequent to this, the research design and research approach are defined. The population and sampling procedures are then described. Thereafter, data generation procedures starting with piloting are described, followed by data analysis. The issues of rigour are addressed through four aspects of trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, followed by the ethical considerations taken throughout the study. The chapter ends with a conclusion which provides a summary of the aspects addressed in this chapter.

The next section discusses the philosophical assumptions that guided the methodology adopted for this study.

Philosophical and Practical Underpinnings of the Study

This section examines the research paradigm, followed by a discussion of the ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions.

Research Paradigms

A research paradigm is defined by Kamal (2019) as a worldview; a way of seeing the world.

This entails a set of common beliefs, values and agreements acceptable to a group of researchers. This world outlook, according to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017: 26) reflects:

The perspective, or thinking, or school of thought, or set of shared beliefs that inform the meaning or interpretation of research data. ... It is the conceptual lens through which the researcher examines the methodological aspects of their research project to determine the research methods that will be used and how the data will be analysed.

The views of Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) portray the significance of identifying a specific paradigm - a specific perspective or school of thought, to underpin the research processes when carrying out an investigation to guide choices and strategies for data generation and analysis. The paradigm thus guided me in choosing appropriate methods for fieldwork and how to interpret the experiential learning of family business owners in rural, growth point and urban areas. Thus, a paradigm has important implications relating to decisions made in the research process (Kamal 2019) which cannot be overlooked. There are three major paradigms, namely positivist, critical and interpretive paradigms. According to Makombe (2017: 3369), positivists believe that: “... *Strict adherence to methodological rules results in objective truth ... and that the truth is extrinsic and discoverable*”.

In this study I did not adopt a positivism paradigm as I had no intentions to forward hypotheses that would require experimentation for verification. Makombe (2017) further notes that the critical theory includes participatory inquiry, dealing with social justice issues. Though the participatory paradigm is gaining momentum in application, I did not consider it for this study as my inquiry focused on the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability and not on emancipatory, social justice issues. I thus adopted the interpretive paradigm for this study, which is discussed in detail below.

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) indicate that a paradigm provides pointers to four assumptions, namely: ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology. These four basic assumptions formed the structure for my enquiry on the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability. Given that the focus of my study was on the experiences of family business owners, I therefore adopted a subjective paradigmatic position that allowed me to derive meaning from the data by drawing on the highlighted assumptions. These assumptions are discussed in turn, in the next sub-sections.

Ontological Assumptions

Ontology refers to the nature of our beliefs about reality (Rehman and Alharthi 2016), the way the researcher defines the truth and reality (Antwi and Kasim 2015), or a response to the question: ‘what’s there that can be known?’ (Lincoln and Guba 2013), or what can be studied. Given the day-to-day activities of family business owners in their businesses, it was my ontological assumption that workplace learning was taking place and it was this learning through work that I wanted to understand. These ontological assumptions led me to investigating the nature of the experiential learning of the family business owners and how it influences business sustainability, the kinds of knowledge family business owners gained, and the different forms of support that were gained from other family members. According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017: 27), the ontology of a paradigm:

... Is concerned with the assumptions we make in order to believe that something makes sense or is real, or the very nature or essence of the social phenomenon we are investigating. ... These assumptions, concepts or propositions help to orientate your thinking about the research problem, its significance, and how you might approach it so as to contribute to its solution.

The views of Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) highlighted above consolidated my assumptions that some form of workplace learning could have been taking place, thereby necessitating this enquiry on the nature of the experiential learning undertaken by family business owners. Ontological assumptions relate to people’s views on whether social reality aspects are given (cause and effect), external, objectively real or whether they view knowledge as socially constructed, subjectively experienced and then expressed through language (Antwi and Kasim 2015). In this study, the ontological assumptions I had were subjective, socially constructed meanings, assuming that family business owners as human beings had their own thoughts, interpretations and meanings in relation to their experiential learning. Also, given that experiential learning is a human creation which is experientially based and socially constructed by actors or participants (with clients, employees, family members) in the research situation and the assumptions are therefore subjective (Mukeredzi 2009; Bignotti and Roux 2020), my study was automatically aligned to the social ontological outlook. Given the interpretive paradigm adopted for this study (as discussed below), a multiple-site case study was ideal as it enabled me to explore the family business owners’ opinions, feelings, subjective experiences and inner thoughts which could only be elicited through face-to-face interviews. It was also important in this study to consider how to generate data to answer the research questions – how I would

‘come to know’ about the experiential learning of the family business owners. This is discussed in the next section on epistemological assumptions.

Epistemological Assumptions

Epistemology is a description of how we get to know the truth and reality of something, how we come to know what we know (Kivunja and Kuyini 2017), and what counts as knowledge within the world (Cooksey and McDonald 2011). Epistemology is therefore concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding on how to generate data from available sources. It is the relationship between the knower (researcher) and the knowable (researched), the relationship of researcher to that which they are inquiring into (Mukeredzi 2009). In other words, epistemology, is the distance or relationship between the researcher and the researched with regard to data production. Constructionism and objectivism are the two epistemological positions, where constructionism holds that participants learn most effectively when actively doing things themselves (Makombe 2017), which was the case in this study where family business owners were learning experientially.

Objectivism as a theory claims that knowledge already exists and only waits to be discovered. Given the nature of my study, how family business owners were learning through experience was not known to me. I had no prior knowledge of how family business owners gained experiential knowledge so I used constructionism in this study as the epistemological stance. While from the positivist stance, knowledge is “out there,” where the researcher maintains some distance from the researched - there is a detached relationship. From the location of my research in the interpretive paradigm, reality was a human creation based on the experiences, perceptions, values and beliefs of the research participants, and there was interaction with the research participants in the process of knowledge/reality construction, the process of getting to know - the data generation process (Mukeredzi 2009). Thus, there was a close researcher/researched relationship. The distance was minimised through face-to-face interviews, and data generation observations. My roles as the major data generation instrument are discussed in the next section on axiological assumptions.

Axiological Assumptions

Axiology refers to the ethical considerations that are pertinent when engaging in a research process (Kivunja and Kuyini 2017); issues to do with good and bad behaviour. These issues have to do with human values and respect, participants’ rights, moral issues, fairness, and minimising risk or harm to participants. In all of my engagements with the research participants, every effort

was made to remain open-minded, bracketing my own preconceived notions and ideas and avoiding interference with their responses, rather taking them as they were and probing and following up, thereby creating an environment conducive for in-depth data generation. Though I occasionally became anxious and curious during data generation, I remained impartial during the interview sessions.

Axiological assumptions also relate to the values, biases and pre-conceived assumptions that a researcher holds prior to the commencement of the study (Mukeredzi 2009; Yin 2017). Considering the usual in-fights that could be observed between siblings as well as among relatives of a deceased family business owner, it was assumed that fights for inheritance were a drawback to the sustenance of family-owned businesses. Another axiological assumption that I held was that power transfer from one generation to the next could be hindered by poor estate management. However, during the face-to-face interviews I allowed the research participants to tell their own stories. Family business owners explained their own experiences and that provided unbiased research findings. The existence of research participants who were all unknown and unrelated to me in any way also helped in minimising possible biases in the data generation processes which are discussed in the next section.

Research Methodology

Methodology is the broad term that relates to the design, methods, approaches and procedures used in a study – the data production techniques (Rehman and Alharthi 2016). This entailed the plan of action or the strategy that I employed to generate data relating to my research questions. The phenomena of methodology and epistemology are interdependent in that methodology is a practical process (Mukeredzi 2009) which specifies how the researcher goes about studying what he believes can be known, while epistemology is the theory of knowing (Makombe 2017). On the one hand, the social constructionism epistemological stance that I adopted enabled me to understand and carefully take note of how participants were experiencing learning through their work during the data generation procedures. On the other hand, research methodology is the practice of getting to know - practical processes in the production of the research data. Methodology enabled me to answer questions on what I did, how I did it, when I did it, why I did it, with whom and so on, in the research process. The three data generation methods: individual face-to-face interviews, photo elicitation interviews and non-participatory observations which were employed enabled answering of the research questions.

Interpretive Paradigm

This study was situated within the interpretive paradigm, which is also considered as a naturalistic paradigm (Makombe 2017). An interpretive paradigm is a framework that enables the researcher to understand social life – the lived experiences, and describe how people construct social meaning (Yin 2017). Given the nature of my research questions cited above, I had to construct knowledge socially (collaboratively) with the sampled family business owners in the Masvingo province. I generated detailed contextual information with limited abstraction as the voices of the participants were privileged. The ontological position of the interpretive paradigm is relativism, which is the view that reality is subjective and differs from person-to-person (Scotland 2012; Makombe 2017). In this study the views, opinions and perceptions of family business owners situated within the rural areas, growth points and urban areas were not identical as experiential learning was individually experienced. Thus, a subjective rather than an objective stance with regard to participants' responses was sought.

The interpretive paradigm was relevant to my investigation, given that the ontological and epistemological assumptions were adopted where reality was subjective and from the perspective of the researched, with the researcher and researched distance kept to a minimum. The reality to be studied consisted of the family business owners' subjective experiences of experiential learning. The interpretive paradigm aims at explaining the subjective reasons, hopes, meanings and aspirations that lie behind social action (Rehman and Alharthi 2016). Makombe (2017) also points out that interpretivism aims to bring hidden social forces and structures to light. The interpretive paradigm was therefore appropriate in my enquiry of the experiential learning of family business owners. Cunningham et al. (2017: 165) assert that:

Small family businesses can often be hidden-by-choice, in that family aspects are not normally reported in national databases and small business owners themselves are often reported as sceptical toward the advances of academic inquiry.

The forces such as inheritance conflicts, family dynamics and power struggles within the family business that could thwart or promote business survival could therefore be understood. I therefore was able to explore the learning experiences of the family business owners through the interpretation of those experiences from their perspectives, which I generated through interaction with participants.

The next section discusses the research design that I adopted for this study.

Research Design

Once a research paradigm was identified, in this case the interpretive paradigm, the appropriate design and methodology chosen had to be aligned to the philosophical orientations. Particular paradigms are associated with certain designs and methodologies (Kivunja and Kuyini 2017). The objective is to choose a design that is aligned to the paradigm. A research design is the overall structure of an investigation that is conceived to obtain the answers to research questions (Edmonds and Kennedy 2017). This is seen as equivalent to an architect's blueprint (Loseke 2017). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) also note that a research design describes the procedures for conducting the study, such as when, from whom, and under what conditions the data will be obtainable. As informed by Makombe (2017), the choice of my research design was premised on four critical factors: the purpose of the research, the paradigm which was to be adopted, the context within which my research was carried out, and the data generation and analysis techniques. In this study I adopted a case study design as it would enable data generation to answer the research questions relating to the experiential learning experiences of family business owners in three different research contexts.

Case Study Design

With the interpretive paradigm in which the study was located, the most appropriate design that I adopted was a case study, as informed by Creswell (2014). In this study, a case of family business owners in selected districts in the Masvingo province which was explored. According to Yin (2017), a case study is a research design used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. Given that family-owned businesses are shrouded in secrecy (Nasser 2014), any other design would make it difficult for me uncover the business activities and experiential learning. Compared to other methods such as surveys, experiments and statistical modelling, the strength of the case study design is its ability to examine, in-depth, a *case* within its real-life context (Creswell 2014; Kivunja and Kuyini 2017). It is for this reason that a case study is sometimes referred to as a *naturalistic* design as opposed to an *experimental* design (Kamal 2019). The case study has the ability to address the *how and what* questions (Edmonds and Kennedy 2017), thereby making it appropriate for both my key question and the research questions raised for my study. In this study, my case was the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability. This was a multiple-site case study.

Multiple-site Case Study

Rather than concentrating on a single business unit, this particular study adopted a multiple-site case study design. Yin (2017) points out that a multiple-site case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon that exists in two or more real-world settings. In this study the phenomenon of non-sustainability of family-owned businesses existed in three sites; rural, growth points and urban areas, which gave me a total of nine different family-owned business units in three sites in which experiential learning was explored. This enabled me to replicate what was done in each case: I addressed the same interview questions and observed similar issues to ensure that the evidence coming from the three sites was strong and trustworthy.

This was in line with Creswell (2014) who asserts that a multiple-site case study allows for robustness of research and comparisons and identification of similarities and differences between sites. The three research contexts, namely the rural areas, growth points and the urban areas provided room for rich and unbiased data as research sites were identified in these contexts. Yin (2017) notes that through the use of a multiple-site case study, the researcher is able to analyse data within each situation (site) and also across different situations (sites). This was critical in my study as data from different family business owners, located at different sites, promoted robustness and rigour through data and contextual triangulation.

The Qualitative Research Approach

The main research approaches are quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. According to Creswell (2014), quantitative research is a systematic process of collecting and analysing numerical data in order to test a hypothesis, while qualitative methods allow a researcher to explore ideas and experiences in depth. Mixed methods, developed by Creswell (2007), combine both quantitative and qualitative approaches in addressing a research question.

Based on the interpretive paradigm adopted, this study employed a qualitative research approach. Adoukonou (2019) describes a qualitative orientation as a systematic and subjective approach used to describe the lived experiences (such as business growth and increased market share as well as negative episodes of a shrinking market, low income generation and business losses) and give them meaning, with the objective of exploring the depth, richness and complexity of the phenomenon and gaining insight. The approach enabled the gaining of in-depth insights into the lived experiential learning experiences of the family business owners and the complexities related to business sustainability and family support. Merriam and Tisdell

(2016) note that one of the salient characteristics of a qualitative study is that the instrument for data generation and data analysis is primarily the researcher who analyses the data inductively. Being the primary instrument related to the axiological assumptions discussed above which were dealt with during data generation and declared upfront in Chapter One of this thesis. Given the subjective nature of an experience and experiential learning, the qualitative approach was ideal as the learning experiences of the family business owners and their perceptions, opinions and aspirations could be revealed through direct interaction with them.

The choice of this approach was underpinned by the following three major considerations, among many other reasons. First, a qualitative approach emphasises data generation in natural settings (Yin 2017). In this study, I visited family business owners at their business premises where I interviewed them in their natural workplaces. However, three participants were interviewed after hours at their residences instead of their natural business settings. This was as per their requests since their work schedules would not allow them to accommodate me during working hours. These participants arranged and organised the interview venues at their residences, environments in which they were naturally free from any form of intimidation or anxiety.

Secondly, a qualitative approach is known for its ability to use multi-modal methods (Yin 2012; 2017) which cater for data triangulation. In this study I used three different data generation methods, namely face-to-face interviews, photo elicitation interviews and non-participatory observations. The third strength of qualitative research in understanding experiential learning of family business owners is related to its flexibility to follow unexpected ideas during research and explore processes effectively (Creswell 2014). This enabled me to make modifications to the structure of my data generation process. After each interview, I reflected on the steps carried out and made any necessary adjustments for the next interview. Such modifications included the order of my interview questions, the duration of the interview sessions, as well as the identification of sensitive questions which required rephrasing.

The interview questions for this study were open-ended and therefore appropriate for a qualitative approach. Given the open-ended questions that I used during interviews, there was no 'right' or 'wrong' answer, which made data collection a fairly easy process, thereby enabling an in-depth study. This also allowed research participants to act in their own capacity, thereby allowing for realistic ideas to be generated and turned into research data. The qualitative research approach which allowed the use of face-to-face interviews enabled me to understand the attitudes of the participants by reading their body language, voice tone and facial

expressions, and at the same time enabled me to clarify questions, probe and follow up to get richer data without compromising the interviewer-interviewee relationship. Unlike the quantitative research method, a qualitative research approach uses reasonably small sample sizes (Merriam and Tisdell 2016) as depth is more important than numbers. In this case where I used face-to-face interviews, photo elicitation interviews and observations as tools for data generation, I ended up with a substantial amount of data from each participant.

In adopting the qualitative approach for my study, I was also cognisant of its drawbacks. The acceptance of 'right' or 'wrong' answers for the open-ended questions meant that the onus was on me as the researcher to guard against the loss of critical data. Given that qualitative research is based on individual perspectives, which can always change, it would be difficult to replicate results that are found (Yin 2012; 2017) relating to family business owners. It is impossible to know if the findings generated through a qualitative research process would be applicable to the entire demographic setting. Creswell (2013; 2014) asserts that data generated is only reliable at the time it is generated. However, qualitative research results are essential for comparison purposes. Additionally, through thick descriptions, prolonged fieldwork, methodological and contextual triangulation and descriptions of research sites, the choice would be up to the reader to compare and assess if findings could be transferred to similar contexts. The population from which my research sample was drawn and the sampling techniques employed to extract the sample are addressed in the next section.

Research Population

A population is an accessible group of two or more people with one or more similar characteristics, who meet a well-defined set of eligibility criteria for the purpose of a research study from which a sample can be accurately identified (Yaya 2014). In this study, the population was made up of family business owners located in selected districts in the Masvingo province whose similar characteristics included operating as retail business owners and ownership and control by at least three family members. The family business owners, who constituted the population, were identified at rural business centres, growth points and in urban areas where many other family and non-family business owners were also operating. This population was appropriate for my study since my research focused on exploration of experiential learning of family business owners. It is from this population that I extracted a sample for analysis, and from which the results of my study would be derived.

The next section addresses the techniques that I employed to extract a sample for my study.

Sampling

Sampling was critical in this study as it was not practical to generate data from all elements of the population. According to Yin (2012; 2017), a sample is a subset of the population, from which data has to be generated with the hope that the data will adequately answer the research questions. Simply put, a sample is a group of participants that are extracted from a larger population for exploration (Creswell 2014). It is from the entire population that a sample has to be derived either by probability or non-probability techniques. Probability sampling refers to sampling methods in which all the members of the population have an equal chance to be part of the sample (Surbhi 2016). There is usually no bias towards any of the population elements as the selection process is randomised. In this study, the randomisation principle which is used in quantitative studies was not appropriate as only certain individuals considered knowledgeable of the family business had to be selected as participants.

Non-probability sampling is a method in which not all members of the population have an equal chance of participating in the study (Surbhi 2016). I therefore employed the non-probability sampling techniques discussed below, where each participant was chosen purposively to belong to the sample. According to Creswell (2014), a non-probability sampling technique allows the selection of a sample based on the subjective judgment of the researcher and the sampling procedures are much easier, quicker and cheaper when compared to random sampling. I chose non-probability sampling techniques given the paradigmatic design and approach orientations of my study which focused on experiences of family business owners from one generation to the next.

For the purpose of this study, my sample consisted of 27 participants. Although non-probability sampling designs are appropriate for qualitative approaches, these sampling techniques are criticised for non-randomness and for extracting samples that may not be representative of entire populations. Notwithstanding that weakness, the sample size was appropriate for my qualitative study which is known for working with small samples (Rafail 2017).

In this study, three different sampling techniques were employed that ensured identification of the appropriate contexts, family business units as well as family business owners. It was necessary to extract participants who would enable an in-depth understanding of the experiential learning of family business owners and how their learning influenced business sustainability, the

knowledge that the business owners gained, as well as the support that they received from other family members. The non-probability sampling techniques employed in this study were: convenience, purposive and snowball sampling methods. These are discussed in turn below.

Convenience Sampling

Convenience sampling was the first method that I used. Given that Masvingo province has seven administrative districts. I had to identify districts and business centres that were conveniently located for my study. Three districts were conveniently located and I recorded them in my diary before selecting business centres which were also conveniently located. During the data generation stage of my study, I was based in urban Masvingo and the convenience in this regard meant locations that were easily accessible from urban Masvingo. From each research context, I selected three family business owners who agreed to participate in the research and whose businesses satisfied the family business criteria.

Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where research participants for examination and analysis are selected based on some of these factors: accessibility, proximity, ease, speed and low cost (Rafail 2017). Two factors which were applicable for this study were accessibility to the participants and the ease with which data could be generated in relation to the acceptability and availability of the research participants. Convenience sampling is sometimes referred to as grab, opportunity sampling, accidental or haphazard sampling, as it selects whichever individuals are available, willing or are easy to reach (Kumar 2014). The business units in the rural areas and growth points were within a radius of approximately 150 kilometres from Masvingo town where I was based. After conveniently sampling the three districts and nine business centres, I had to employ the purposive sampling technique to extract the first nine family business owners.

Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling was the second method that I employed to select the nine family business owners, thereby excluding non-family businesses from the sample. According to Surbhi (2016), a purposive sample is a non-probability sample that is selected based on the desired characteristics of a population and the objective/s of the study. I drew the sample based on who I thought would be appropriate and knowledgeable for this study, thereby ensuring that the data generated would be adequate (Yin 2017). Purposive sampling is critical in defining criteria to select participants who meet the qualifications and requirements for the research topic as well as

possessing the knowledge, experiences and characteristics of the subject (Adoukonou 2019). At each business centre that had been conveniently located, I had to move from one shop to the next, talking to business owners as I tried to identify those who could fit the purpose of my study. After extracting a purposive sample of nine family business owners, three from each context, the purposive sampling design could not be applied to select the last two family members from each business unit as I did not know them. I therefore had to use snowballing using the first nine participants to access their family members to participate in the study.

Snowball Sampling

According to Naderifar, Goli and Ghaljale (2017), snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where research participants recruit other participants for a study. I used snowball sampling because there was no other suitable sampling technique to identify unknown family members. Except for the key family business owner identified through purposive sampling techniques, I had no access to the other family members in the business unit. Thus, following purposive sampling, I requested the nine purposively sampled family business owners to identify at least two other family members who could be available for research participation.

Naderifar, Goli and Ghaljale (2017) further note that snowball sampling is often used where the population under investigation is hidden or unknown; the hard to reach population, either due to low numbers of potential participants or the sensitivity of the topic. In this particular study, other family members who were involved in the business were unknown to me and could therefore only be extracted through snowball sampling. The first nine key family business owners provided details of family members in their respective family businesses whom I later consulted for inclusion as research participants. This enabled me to come up with participants whose existence and relevance I could not have known about. In the family business set up, it was only the founding member or main family business owner who could be approached and then asked to help identify the other family members involved in the operations of the business. In the event of two additional family members not being available, the business unit was considered inappropriate for inclusion in the sample. Thus, the inclusion and exclusion criteria involved the possibility of each family business unit to have two other family members active in the business available for participation in the study.

Nonetheless, using other participants to identify or 'recruit' more participants affects the researcher's ability to account for each of the participants (Kumar 2014). As a researcher, I could not account for possible biases from participants brought to me by other participants.

However, what was crucial in my qualitative research was the ability of those participants to provide trustworthy data as well as being information-rich (Yaya 2014). This was insured through probing and following up on questions during interviews with all of my research participants. From my three sampling techniques, I ended up with a total study sample of twenty-seven research participants as reflected in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Number of Research Participants per Context

Context	Rural Areas	Growth Points	Urban Areas	Total
Family business units	3	3	3	9
Participants per business unit	3	3	3	9
Total number of participants	9	9	9	27

Source: Researcher (2019)

The investigation was carried out in three different contexts - research sites as highlighted above and in nine different family business units. The research contexts – sites gave rise to the multiple-site case study design that was adopted for the study. As indicated in the table above, the sample had a grand total of twenty-seven participants, three from each business unit.

The next section explains how I gained access to the 27 research participants sampled for this study.

Gaining Access to the Research Participants

Getting approval from gatekeepers and consent from participants was not a once-off event as a total of six visits were made to get approval from the local municipalities. Three repeat visits were also made to family business owners who had not been available during the first visits. In order to embark on this study, I first received an Ethical Clearance Certificate from Durban University of Technology’s (DUT) Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) (Appendix 5) on 9 November 2018. This gave me a sense of confidence and feelings of excitement since the clearance came after a successful pilot study which I had conducted to test my instruments. With full approval from IREC I sought permission from gatekeepers, which was formally granted by the local authorities after knocking on one door after another many times. It seemed as if no one initially knew which office was appropriate to provide the information that I sought. Given that

the process of gaining access is unique to each researcher, it was critical to remain open and flexible, adopting the ‘*going with the flow*’ mentality (Peticca-Harris, de-Gama and Elias 2016). This called for my patience and tolerance as the would-be participants and gatekeepers only accepted my request for an initial meeting at their own convenience. Re-scheduling or postponement of previously accepted meetings was a common practice which Mukeredzi (2012) described as challenges of time constraints and problems of access in qualitative data production. Having acquired the IREC clearance certificate and the gatekeepers’ permission letters, I explained the study to the participants to allay the fears of those who were initially very sceptical. After identifying the key family business owner in each family business, I had to court and convince them of their value to my study in order to create a positive relationship. A total of four family business owners in the urban area had experiences of similar interactions with many other researchers, as highlighted by one participant:

To what extent do these researches help us my friend. Nearly every month different people visit us with questionnaires and requesting for our participation. When they are done, you never see or hear about them again. Surprisingly, nothing from these studies is helping to change our ailing economy (UB4).

Comments such as the one above made me understand what the participants expected from their involvement in research processes: feedback on the research findings and practical impacts on their businesses. This realisation made me understand that the research participants should not just be used as ‘tools’ to research ‘on’ which marginalises and undermines their vitality and uniqueness, contrary to the ideal of researching ‘for’ which is of critical importance (Mukeredzi 2021) for developing a beneficial and lasting relationship. However, prior knowledge of research activities by some urban family business owners made it easier for me to create a rapport with these would-be participants.

In rural areas it was not easy, as some family business owners felt that I was intruding on their privacy (Cunningham et al. 2017). The ‘why me?’ question was quite common whenever I approached a family business owner for consent to participate in this study. Nonetheless, consent was obtained after I explained the research process, highlighting the ethical considerations as well as indicating the availability of my supervisors and the university’s IREC who could be contacted if they suspected any unethical behaviour on my part as a researcher.

Pilot Study

After approval of my research proposal by the Durban University of Technology in 2018, I carried out a pilot study as a forerunner to the main data generation process. This small study was meant to test the appropriateness of my data generation tools, check time requirements, assess whether the data generated would answer the research questions and identify potential problem areas and deficiencies, as informed by (Yin 2017). These data generation tools included face-to-face interviews, non-participatory observation and photo elicitation interviews. Prior to the pilot study, I practised the interviewing process using mock interviews which were carried out with peers and my two supervisors, which enhanced auditability. The pilot study thus helped me to refine my interviewing skills, such as setting the tone through appropriate introductory remarks, probing and following up on questions, practicing restraint, reading body language, and accommodating questions from the interviewees.

The pilot study, as informed by Malmqvist, Hellberg, Mollas, Rose and Shevlin (2019), was to determine whether instruments could be rectified or modified to ensure eliciting meaningful responses and obtaining rich data. However, no adjustments were made to the research tools after my pilot study. Three family business owners from each research context participated during the pilot study. One family business owner was from the rural area, the second from a growth point and the third pilot study participant was from the urban area. These pilot study participants were not included in the main data generation of the study, but I transcribed the pilot study data and put it aside. It was only after the main fieldwork that I put this data together with the data from the main study and analysed all of the data together.

During the pilot study interview sessions, one participant requested to be interviewed in Shona – their home language. This gave me the foresight that similar requests were likely to be made during the main fieldwork. Thus, my interview questions needed to be translated into Shona. Though I am competent (speaking and writing) in the Shona language, as this is also my home language, I sought and acquired the services of a qualified language translator to translate the interview questions into Shona.

The next section addresses the data generation procedures that I followed in this study.

Data Generation

As informed by Creswell (2014), I carried out data generation in the participants' natural settings – at their specific business locations, where the participants experienced the phenomenon under

study - experiential learning of family business owners and how it influenced business sustainability. This enabled me to talk directly to the participants and see them behave and act within their natural settings, except for the three participants highlighted above where the face-to-face interviews were carried out at their residences.

Data Generation Procedures

Prior to the data generation process, I made a total of four preliminary visits to the business sites to explain the nature of my study and the process of data generation. I gave them the letter of information and I took them through it, explaining as necessary. Consent letters were then signed during each first visit to a participant and interview appointments were made. It was during these preliminary visits that I requested the participants' permission for audio recording of our discussions. I also assured participants that the audio recordings were entirely for academic purposes relating to my doctoral studies and would not be used for any other purpose. I also made it clear to them that the data generated through interviews, observations and photo elicitation interviews were also for academic purposes only, not for unauthorised disclosure. During this first visit, I met the nine participants in the urban area and nearby rural area. On my second outing, I managed to meet five participants in the deep rural areas, while four and three were met during the last two visits respectively.

Of the 27 participants I had initially sampled, a total of 8 participants: 3 from the rural areas, 2 from the growth points and another 3 from the urban area were no longer available at the time of the actual data generation for different reasons ranging from attending to urgent business commitments as well as family funeral excuses. With the total number of my participants reduced to 19, I needed to maintain an equal number of participants from each context to keep the balance. So I sampled another two participants, one from the rural area and another from the urban area to get a new total of 21 participants across the contexts and 7 from each context. With these 21 participants and not the 27 initially intended, at the end of the data generation I was convinced that I had generated adequate data to address my research questions. The data generation table below shows my data generation itinerary. As reflected in Table 4.2, field work occurred from 26 November 2018 to 13 February 2019.

Table 4.2: Involvement of Participants during the Data Generation Itinerary

Business Unit	Participant Code	Dates for face-to-face Interviews	Dates for Observations	Dates for Photo Elicitation Interviews
Urban A	UA1	15 December 2018	30 December 2018	29 January 2019
	UA2	24 December 2018		29 January 2019
	UA3	26 November 2018	15 January 2019	NA
Urban B	UB4	28 November 2018	16 December 2018	10 January 2019
	UB5	30 November 2018		10 January 2019
	UB6	30 November 2018		10 January 2019
Urban C	UC7	26 November 2018	17 December 2018	04 January 2019
Rural A	RA1	21 December 2018	28 December 2018	21 January 2019
	RA2	10 December 2018		
	RA3	10 December 2018	05 January 2019	21 January 2019
Rural B	RB4	29 November 2018	28 December 2019	30 January 2019
	RB5	29 November 2018		
Rural C	RC6	02 January 2019	25 January 2019	13 February 2019
	RC7	02 January 2019		13 February 2019
Growth Point A	GA1	02 January 2019	24 January 2019	13 February 2019
	GA2	02 January 2019		13 February 2019
Growth Point B	GB3	22 December 2018	06 January 2019	11 February 2019
	GB4	22 December 2018		11 February 2019
Growth Point C	GC5	10 December 2018	28 December 2018	4 February 2019
	GC6	10 December 2018		4 February 2019
	GC7	11 December 2018	16 January 2019	4 February 2019
9 Business Sites	21 Participants	21 Face-to-face Interviews	12 Observations	18 Photo elicitation interviews

Source: Researcher (2019)

The business units in all three research contexts were identified using codes A, B or C, to subvert anonymity for example, Urban A, Urban B and Urban C. The same labels were used for the

business units in the other two contexts: rural and growth points. All research participants were also identified with numbers one to seven, with two letters signifying the context, for example code RB5 represented participant number five in the rural context in the Business Unit coded B. The same codes were used in all of the data presentation and analysis chapters.

I started the data generation with face-to-face interviews. This was followed by non-participant observation and finally photo elicitation interviews. I started with face-to-face interviews as per Goldkuhl (2019) who asserts that interviewing involves a social interaction between the researcher and the informant, thereby creating a positive rapport between the two. Once a cordial relationship had been created it became easier to engage in non-participant observations. The observed would feel at ease if they have had previous interaction with the observer (Goldkuhl 2019).

It was also strategic to start with the face-to-face interviews so that I could distribute the disposable cameras in preparation for photo elicitation interviews, as will be discussed later. I aimed to collect these cameras during the observation sessions to get the photos processed.

The data generation process using the three research techniques is discussed below.

Face-to-face Interviews

The study adopted a two-series interview approach where I held two separate interviews with each participant. Adopting a two-series interview approach was informed by Yaya (2014) who recommend the use of more than a single interview for richer qualitative data. An interview schedule (Appendix 6) was employed to maintain a similar sequence across all participants and to keep me focused within the parameters of the study. Open-ended questions on the interview schedule elicited views and opinions (Hajimia 2014) of the experiential learning of family business owners and this enabled participants to describe their experiential learning experiences without any restrictions.

During the face-to-face interviews, I attentively listened to what the participants were saying, reading body language and showing them that I was listening, from my facial expressions and verbal sounds (Mmm hmm, nodding my head); and being able to repeat what they said word-for-word, starting with phrases such as, “What you’re saying is...”. This created an atmosphere conducive for the participants to engage with the process and with me as the researcher, which encouraged them to keep talking and offer more data. I probed and followed up on questions which enabled me to generate thick and rich descriptions of their experiences, feelings and

understandings, as informed by Loseke (2017). The face-to-face interview was also ideal as the participants provided historical information (Yin 2017) on their learning experiences from childhood. Interview one elicited data about their initial involvement in the family business, and the learning gained from the founding members, predecessors or other family members. The interview also sought data on the family business' sustainability issues.

According to Yaya (2014), the major disadvantage of the face-to-face interview method is insecurity on the part of respondents. Interviewees tend to feel intimidated and insecure which may inhibit production of rich data (Adoukonou 2019). However, in this study I made every effort to ensure that the participants felt comfortable and relaxed. I allowed the participants to adjust or reschedule the interview times in order to avoid interfering with their business programmes and putting them under pressure. Interviews were held in secluded offices where it was quiet and confidential, both at the business sites and at residences. Each interview session took approximately 45 to 60 minutes and they were all audio-recorded to ensure the fidelity of the information, thereby ensuring sincere data analysis.

Non-participant Observation

After conducting face-to-face interviews, I revisited each family business unit to carry out non-participant observations guided by a semi-structured observation checklist (Appendix 6). The data generation observations were not done on individual participants. It was a holistic observation process, checking on how the activities of the entire family-owned business unfolded on each particular day. As a result, a total of nine observations were supposed to be carried out. However, observations were repeated at three research sites with the intention of confirming the results and allaying fears of pretence and stage-managing on the part of the participants. In total, I made 12 observations, as indicated in Table 4.2 above. According to Assarroudi, Nabavi, Armat, Ebadi and Vaismorodi (2018), a non-participant observation is a data generation technique which involves observing the research participants without actively participating. During this study I visited each of the nine business sites and spent at least five hours observing how my participants interacted with one another as well as with customers during their daily business activities. This was in accordance with Goldkuhl (2019: 582) who asserts that: “*An observation study means that researchers perceive on-going processes in a natural setting ... not interfering with the humans that they observe*”.

Through observations I paid special attention on the communication taking place within the family-owned businesses. I also observed the activities that the participants and other family

members were engaged in, such as packing goods on shelves, pricing commodities, interaction with customers, as well as the procedures of opening and closing of the business premises.

The strength of the observation is that the researcher will not only hear what the participants are saying but has an opportunity to see, feel and smell as they interrelate with the participants (Assarroudi et al. 2018). The use of non-participant observation in this study provided an opportunity to get a more objective view of the activities in the family-owned businesses and relate it to the verbal descriptions of their experiential learning. This also enabled me to acquire data that the participants were probably unable to express verbally.

Since participants were knowledgeable about my presence during the observation sessions, there were chances that participants probably behaved differently, stage managing as informed by Creswell (2014). However, to address this challenge, I observed three of the business sites (Urban A, Rural A and Growth Point C) on two different occasions. It would have been difficult for participants to stage-manage for the second time as they were probably familiar with being observed.

Photo Elicitation

At the end of Interview One, I distributed a disposable camera to each of the business units. I identified one participant at each business unit and I requested him/her to take custody of the camera. I explained how to use the cameras to all of the participants and allowed them to practice with the one I had. Three participants at each site were to use the same camera, each taking not more than twelve photographs as they had thirty-six exposures. This gave all of the participants enough time to take photographs before I came back to collect the cameras for processing of the photographs. Some of the participants requested and I allowed them to use their own camera-enabled cellular phones instead of disposable cameras to take pictures. These photos were sent to me via WhatsApp. The participants were requested to take photographs that depicted episodes of their experiential learning, in particular photographs showing incidences where they learnt something, how they learnt it and what they learnt. I allowed them about two weeks to have taken the photographs and we agreed on a date for me to collect the cameras in preparation for the photo elicitation interviews.

Photo elicitation interviews (Interview Two) were then carried out as the last data generation technique. The time lapse between the observations and the photo elicitation interviews ranged from three weeks to one full month. Allowing a time lapse was deliberate and vital as it enabled me to check the internal consistency of their stories. The inclusion of photo elicitation as a third

data generation technique in this research was an attempt to capture useful information that the non-participant observations and the face-to-face interviews could have missed. The photographs in this study were only used as prompts in the interviews; as a result, they are not displayed in this thesis. Weber (2008: 44) also observed that:

... Images can be used to capture the ineffable... Some things just need to be shown, not merely stated. Images can help us access those elusive hard-to-put-into-words aspects of knowledge that might otherwise remain hidden or ignored if not prompted.

Concomitantly, in this study the photographs depicted the internal realities of the participants; what they probably were not able to put into words without the prompt of the photographs. Again, I was influenced by Weber (2008), who asserts that what photos show actually existed in front of the camera for at least the time the camera took to make the exposure. Thus, these photographs illustrated things as they really were and how they were experienced given that photographs are representations, not constructions of reality. They therefore depicted the experiential learning of family business participants as it was experienced.

Thus, photographs serve to jog memory, stimulate emotions, and help the interview process to proceed in a meaningful way and consequently produce in-depth data that addresses their experiential learning experiences. The prompts that came up with photo elicitation provided rich data for my research findings. As indicated in Table 4.1 above, 18 of the 21 participants took 12 photographs each depicting their experiential learning. To kick start the photo elicitation interviews, I requested that the participants select at least five photographs that most depicted their experiential learning and discuss those photographs one-by-one, highlighting how they experienced learning, what they learnt and how the learning influenced business sustainability, and the support that they received from family members.

Photo elicitation is a process where images are examined and discussed in an interview to promote the participant's involvement and ownership of the research process (Yin 2017). The process is also often known as photo interviewing or *photo-voice* when photographs serve as the basis of an in-depth interview process in a qualitative study which gives the participant a voice (Shell 2014). This was the case in these interviews where participants became more open than they had been during Interview One.

With the knowledge and approval of the participants, the photo elicitation interviews were also audio-recorded and these interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Recording the interviews helped me to concentrate more on the responses of the participants and be able to probe further,

but most of all, the recordings were vital in capturing the participants' responses accurately for retrieval during transcriptions. One major disadvantage of photo elicitation, as informed by Torre and Murphy (2015: 5) is that:

Participants will forget to take pictures at regular intervals and so will either return an incomplete roll or will simply take many pictures of the same subject on one day.

To overcome such data generation problems, I had to send reminders to the participants to take pictures as planned and again reminded them about the nature of the photographs that were expected. I also allowed participants to avail photos that had been taken in the past as long as the photos were in line with their experiential learning experiences.

Challenges Faced During Data Generation

The first challenge that I was confronted with related to accessing the research participants. Officials at rural district offices referred me from one person to the next, not knowing who was supposed to authorise my study. At one rural district authority I was referred to an official who was off-duty. When he came back three days later, he then referred me to the previous official whom he said was responsible for such approvals. This was a daunting and frustrating experience - being moved back and forth and my time was running out. Literature has shown that the process of gaining access has brought difficulties and uncertainties for most researchers, as informed by Peticca-Harris et al. (2016: 379) where the problem has been viewed metaphorically as walking a hallway with many doors:

Some of the doors are open; some are closed. Some of the closed doors open periodically in response to a variety of different actions; others will only open if you say or do the right things. Some of the doors lead to rich environments where there is much to be learned; other doors lead to vast empty rooms that contain little of interest to the researcher. Some of the doors may open but lead to spaces behind the doors that do not provide further access. Doors that open sometimes close, occasionally for no discernible reason. Conversely, a door that was closed may open just enough to allow one to get one's foot inside. Not all doors are completely open or shut.

The process I went through in the identification of family-owned businesses as well as the selection of participants is clearly reflected in the above quotation.

Growth points in the Masvingo province are located in different districts, which meant that I had to drive long distances to meet my participants located at different growth points. This resulted

in prolonged fieldwork and long-term engagements, as informed by Mukeredzi (2009). I also had not expected the fuel challenge. At the time of my fieldwork, Zimbabwe was faced with a severe fuel crisis. The national fuel shortage during my study period and the January 2019 national fuel demonstrations negatively affected my progress. The demonstrations which temporarily affected my fieldwork were, according to Mavhunga and Adebayo (2019), a result of a 130% increase in the price of fuel imposed by government as well as increasing levels of poverty, the poor state of the economy, and declining standards of living. In major towns such as Harare and Bulawayo the army and police had to be deployed as protesters were barricading roads with stones and burning tyres. This forced me to temporarily suspend and reschedule my appointments for data generation. These contextual problems resulted in further problems and Mukeredzi (2009: 100) pointed out:

Logistical challenges in qualitative fieldwork generally relate to gaining access, fears and frustrations from unanticipated problems, limited communication and other services.

The economic downturn affecting Zimbabwe (Mazikana 2017) during my fieldwork also made it difficult to make permanent appointments with the research participants. It was common practice for family business owners to reschedule appointments in order for them to attend to the ever-changing business environment such as rumours of availability of scarce commodities at wholesale shops. Continuous rescheduling of appointments resulted in eight of my participants failing to commit themselves to this study and I, as indicated above, replaced two of the eight participants to maintain a total of twenty-one participants (Table 4.1 above).

The next section discusses the process of data analysis that I undertook.

Data Analysis

Once data has been generated, it needs to be manipulated, organised and interpreted (Yin 2017) for the benefit of people who have not been involved in the data generation process. Qualitative Data analysis is viewed as a:

... Matter of managing analytical processes to transform data into information and information into knowledge and knowledge into wisdom. ... Involves collecting quality talk, observations, and /or documents, and being able to talk about the talk, make observations about the observations, and/or document the documents (Chenail 2012: 248).

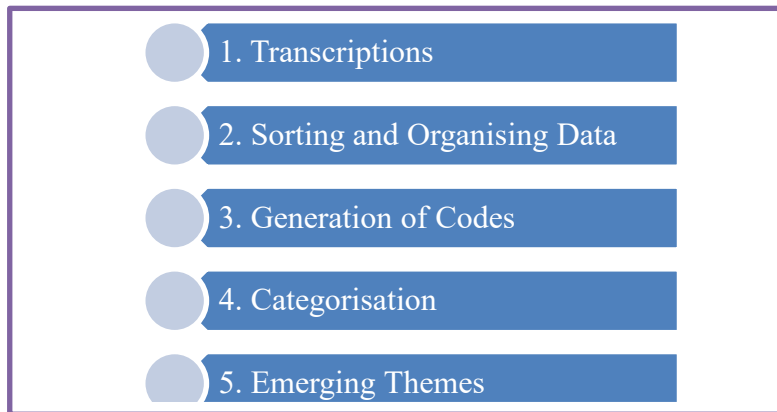
This entails having the data, and being able to manipulate and present it so that it is easily understood by people who were not part of the data generation process. Mukeredzi (2009: 105) further asserts that data analysis:

... Involves systematically examining and arranging field notes, interview scripts and all the materials gathered in the field, organizing and synthesizing them into manageable units.

In this study I employed two approaches to data analysis; in-field analysis and post-data generation analysis, as informed by Creswell (2014) and Yin (2017). In-field data analysis started immediately after interviewing the first participant and this continued throughout the data generation process, with each analysis acting as a guide to the next interview. When the data generation process was finally completed, I then started the post-data generation analysis process.

I adopted open coding, a manual approach to analysing the data. Open coding is an inductive, analytical and systematic process that involves sorting through data and clustering events and concepts according to their properties and dimensional range (Chenail 2012). While computer software packages such as NUD·IST Vivo (NVivo) were available for analysing the qualitative data, I decided to use the manual analysis approach for this particular investigation. The manual analysis was tedious, time consuming and at times frustrating with piles and piles of jottings and scribbled amendments. However, I wanted to immerse myself in my data and get to understand it better, so this process gave me comprehensive exposure to my data. Qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) is fast and reliable, with the capacity to condense large volumes of data into more manageable quantities (Bonello and Meehan 2019). I, however, decided to reserve the use of NVivo for future, small researches meant for publication after experiencing and learning the manual data analysis process. I followed five steps in analysing data as reflected in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1: Steps Followed in Data Analysis



Source: Researcher (2021)

Step One: Transcriptions

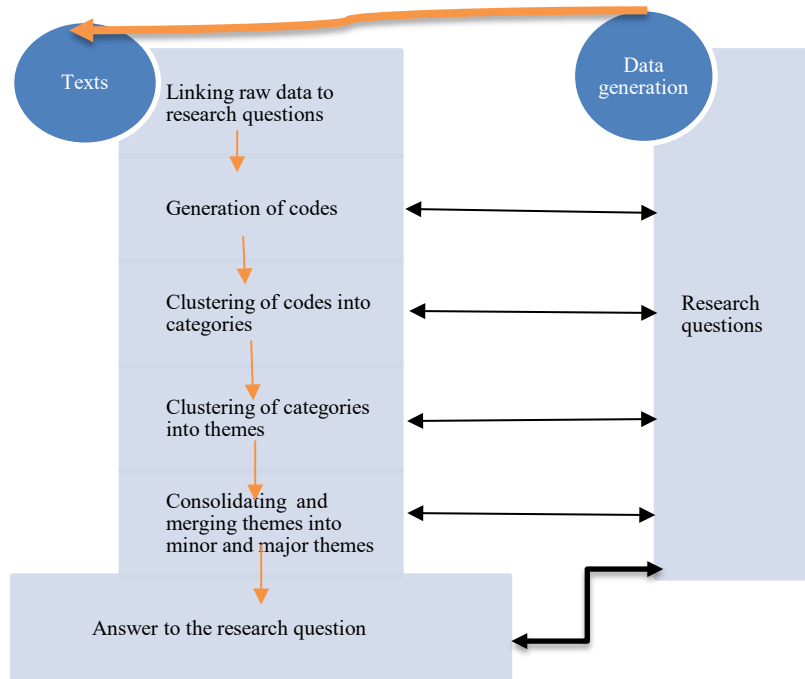
My first step during post-data analysis was data transcribing. I did my own transcriptions to avoid losing grip of the data that I had mustered during the generation processes. Transcribing enabled conversion of the audio recordings into a text-based format, which made my data easier to analyse and share. I had to listen to the audio tapes, create a text-based version of the audios and then read the transcriptions time and time again to understand what the data was saying to me and refine the transcriptions. Of the 21 research participants, 6 requested and were interviewed in Shona, following the Shona research schedule (Appendix 6). As this was also my home language, I transcribed, translating the Shona audios into English prose. Thereafter, I sought the services of a professional translator to double check the accuracy of my translations.

Step Two: Sorting and Organising the Data

The second stage involved reading through the text-based data to obtain a clear sense of the participants' responses. Having chunks of data from three data generation techniques: face-to-face interviews, non-participant observations and photo elicitation interviews; my first step was to link the raw data to each of my research questions. As informed by Glaser and Laudel (2013); Yin (2017) I had to identify, locate and structure my raw data. Knowing that my raw data had large amounts of unnecessary information that had been said by the research participants, I had to sieve through all of the irrelevant data without compromising the message from each participant. This was in accordance with the views of Glaser and Laudel (2013) that since the frames of relevance and the frames of reference of the research participants may be different from those of the researcher, irrelevant data may have been communicated. In order to structure my raw data, I had to detail and connect the link between the data and the research questions, as well as identify the link between the data items themselves. In the process of analysing the data I

was also guided by the diagrammatic representation modified from Glaser and Laudel (2013) shown below.

Figure 4.2: Summary of the Steps of the Data Analysis



Source: Adapted from Glaser and Laudel (2013)

During this stage, I focused more on the participants' experiences of learning and perceptions; what Mukeredzi (2009: 107) refers to as "getting into the world of participants". This enabled me to sort and organise my data as explained above, merging related responses from the face-to-face interviews with those from the photo elicitations, as well as my observations under the different research questions.

Step Three: Generation of Codes

The third step involved collating related data items that resulted in the formulation of codes. According to Glaser and Laudel (2013: np):

The core idea of coding is that texts containing the raw data are indexed. Codes - key words, phrases, mnemonics, or numbers - that signal the occurrence of specific information are assigned to segments of the text.

The manual data analysis approach entailed a time-consuming and repetitive process of reading through the data and transcriptions that resulted in the generation of codes. In the process of coding, I employed Nvivo codes, that is, using terms and concepts found in the textual unit to code the unit itself (Chenail 2012).

After completion of my transcriptions I had to search through and sort my data, for instance data of particular features. This provided me with a way of selecting sections of data for close analysis. Given that I had employed three data generation methods, I had to collate the responses that addressed the same issues and led to the same findings. I could easily identify the repeating codes that were related to a specific research question, such as the nature of the experiential learning of the family business owners. This was done in line with the views of Wiggins (2017), who asserts that when employing an open-coding approach, emerging codes have to be compared with previous codes and amended if necessary. As I read through the paragraphs of my transcripts, I had to interpret the data and decide whether there was any relevant information in the paragraph to warrant a code by asking myself 'what is this about?'. In this case, the code could be an existing one identified in paragraphs above or a new one. As informed by Glaser and Laudel (2013), the codes did not contain detailed information; they just indicated the kind of information that had been found in a segment of coded text. After I completed my coding, I consulted my supervisors and we discussed and analysed all of the codes, making corrections and adjustments where necessary until a final list of codes was adopted.

Step four: Categorisation

According to Glaser and Laudel (2013), the coded text has to be interpreted at some stage. This is what I did in the fourth step of the data analysis, which was faster than the third step as I was no longer using voluminous data. I had to compare my codes, generalising them and finding connections between the codes (Yin 2017). I reorganised and reformulated my codes and clustered the segments relating to a particular research question before I subsumed them under more general codes - the categories. Thus, at this stage I clustered the related codes into categories. Going back and forth was crucial as I had to compare and link codes with the categories of meaning that related to the research questions. The process of going through the codes, categories and transcriptions over and over again helped in the identification of data outliers, which were then integrated for detailed research findings.

Step five: Generating Themes

After the categorisation, I conducted an in-depth examination to determine similarities, differences and common themes and the meaning of the data. The repeat process in step four above resulted in the emergence of themes, which entailed the basis for data presentation and analysis. I reviewed all of the data, made sense of it and organised clustered related categories into themes that cut across all of the data sources. The themes were then linked and connected to

the research questions before final adoption for the descriptive data analysis. In line with the views of Creswell (2014), I gave more attention to the *meaning* that the participants provided about the problem under study and not the *meaning* that I brought to the research. I took all the necessary precautions to ensure that my ontological assumptions would not bring bias to my research findings. As informed by Cohen, Marrion and Morrison (2011) who recommend the involvement of independent judges, I sent the data set to my supervisor and co-supervisor to check for errors and omissions throughout the process of coding, categorisation and themes and confirmed my themes. I then went back and examined the data looking for verbatim quotes by the participants, ensuring appropriate representation of the different participants and different contexts to strengthen the report.

Limitation of the Study

In this study the findings could not be generalised given the paradigmatic, ontological, epistemological, and methodological orientations on which the study was based. As a qualitative enquiry, my findings were not focused on generalisability, reliability and validity, but rather on the issues of rigour and trustworthiness of the findings, as informed by Yaya (2014). However, given that my data originated from a multiple-site case study which increased robustness, coupled with the thick descriptions of the methodological processes, the data presentation and analysis and the research setting in Chapter Five, readers of my thesis will have to decide whether or not to transfer the findings to other similar contexts.

The research sample was drawn from different geographical locations; the deep rural areas and the urban areas where different economic variables had the potential to distort the research findings. The business environment and urban set up where financial institutions and industrial activities were available, coupled with accessibility to markets and the supply chain, could aid in the sustainability of family-owned businesses in this context. However, the inclusion of participants from growth points, a context viewed as the mid-point between the urban and the deep rural areas probably helped in reducing the economic disparities that had the potential to distort the research findings. Accessibility challenges for some of the rural based family-owned businesses created operational hardships as delivery of stock and marketing drives into deep rural areas was impossible. Most rural roads were simply inaccessible.

Furthermore, the unstable economic environment in Zimbabwe during the study period may have affected my research findings. Unprecedented company retrenchments, downsizing and

high unemployment levels that portrayed a recession (Malinga 2018) may have created attitudes and notions of despair among research participants as a result of economic ripple effects. Nonetheless, the availability of some research participants who were operating within the second and third generation of their family businesses kept the research focus intact.

Having highlighted the limitations of the study resulting from the data generation and analysis processes, the next section discusses the trustworthiness of the research findings.

Trustworthiness

As I carried out this study, I undertook all the necessary procedures that would ensure the trustworthiness of my research findings. Trustworthiness is defined as the degree of confidence in the research findings, the interpretation and the methods used to ensure the quality of the study (Polit and Beck 2014). According to Cohen et al. (2011), qualitative researchers are more geared towards trustworthiness, with more emphasis on the criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) which entail: credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability of the research findings.

In an effort to enhance the trustworthiness of my research findings, the following components of trustworthiness were given prominence throughout the research process: credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability. These are discussed in turn below.

Credibility of the Study Findings

The issue of credible study findings is pertinent in qualitative research. According to Leitz and Zayas (2010: 191), credibility:

... Refers to the degree to which a study's findings represent the meanings of the research participants.

This was enhanced by providing thick descriptions when presenting the data and findings. Credibility relates to the stakeholders' confidence in the truth of the findings (Connelly 2016), and the level of objectivity and impartiality of the research findings (Bradshaw, Atkinson and Doody 2017). In an effort to promote the credibility of my findings, I engaged with my participants in prolonged fieldwork for a period exceeding three months to avoid a rushed study. Biases were minimised in this study as non-participant observations were carried out; audio-recordings and probing during interviews were done to avoid misrepresentation of the research participants. The inclusion of three independent data generation sites, rural areas, growth points

and the urban areas, as well as employment of three separate data generation techniques, namely face-to-face interviews, non-participant observation and photo elicitation interviews enabled triangulation, with the possibility of giving credibility to my findings.

In addition, during residential doctoral cohort sessions at DUT, peer-debriefing and engagement with fellow doctoral students who examined and interrogated my work throughout all of the stages of the research, up to the findings and conclusions stage also promoted credibility. Lietz and Zayas (2010) foreground engaging in dialogue with peers as promoting reflexivity; a vital aspect of credibility. Moreover, constant dialogue with supervisors throughout the process also enhanced credibility.

Transferability of the Research Findings

The philosophical underpinnings on which my study was premised, that is the interpretive paradigm, a multiple-site case study design, a qualitative approach and non-probability sampling methods rendered my research findings non-generalizable. Transferability, which is synonymous with generalisability in quantitative research, demonstrates that findings in qualitative research may be applicable to other contexts (Yeasmin 2012). To comply with transferability, I had to provide information about the research settings and show the locations of my research participants. The sample of my study included family business owners found in rural areas, growth points as well as in urban areas. I identified and sampled family business owners who had similar characteristics, except for the contextual differences which are discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis. The thick descriptions of the research process provided in this chapter, including in presenting and analysing the data from these different contexts, as well as the thick descriptions of the research setting in Chapter Five enhanced the chances of transferability of my research findings and offered readers an opportunity to decide whether or not to apply my findings to similar contexts.

Confirmability of the Research Findings

According to Leitz and Zayas (2010), confirmability means the capability of other people to confirm or corroborate the research findings. During the data analysis stage, I interacted with other doctoral students during residential cohort sessions who had to critique, evaluate and confirm my research procedures, thereby promoting chances of the confirmability of my research findings. I also kept an audit trail of my research process documenting what occurred

throughout and reflecting on the process of data generation where I recorded the meetings with the participants, their reactions and decisions made.

Confirmability is also defined by Colorafi and Evans (2016) as the degree of neutrality in the research study's findings. This means that the research findings have to be based on the participants' responses and not any potential bias or personal motivations of a researcher. I had no influence in any of the sample units as I was not a family member of any of the family businesses under investigation. I also had no prior interactions with the research participants before the start of the research process. My data generation techniques involved a list of guiding questions in the form of a face-to-face interview schedule and a photo elicitation interview guide, including an observation checklist (Appendices 6). Drawing from Yin (2012) and Creswell (2014), the use of guiding questions tended to help in minimising researcher bias and the threat of research reactivity, as declared in Chapter One under my axiological assumptions.

Dependability of the Research Findings

A qualitative study can be said to be trustworthy if it is also dependable. Dependability is the extent to which the study can be repeated by other researchers with the findings remaining consistent (Connelly 2016). An effort was made in this study to ensure that data generation and data analysis were done as accurately as possible. I did my transcriptions immediately after data collection, whilst the events were still vivid within my memory. The participants aired their views and opinions freely as I allowed them to talk in their own voices and tongues, as informed by Singleton and Straits (2010). My data analysis was centred on the raw data recorded, observed and written to ensure that future researchers would probably obtain similar findings using the same data analysis procedure.

My Researcher's Diary (2018) captured a lot of pertinent information during the fieldwork as I kept a written account of the research process, including appointment dates and what transpired on each particular day; what Leitz and Zayas (2010) call an audit trail. As noted above, peer debriefing and assistance from supervisors helped in promoting dependability or auditability of my research findings. Leitz and Zayas (2010: 198) assert that:

Peer debriefing can help to promote reflexivity allowing researchers to become more sensitized to the effects of their socio-political position. It can also enhance the research process by generating new ideas and identifying potential pitfalls related to methodology.

The discussions that I held with fellow doctoral students during residential sessions helped in the

editing process of my thesis.

The next section discusses the ethical considerations that guided this study.

Ethical Considerations

The philosophical orientations discussed above suggest that the ethical principles of informed consent and minimising human harm apply to all research (Damsa and Ugelvik 2017). In a qualitative study such as this one, ethical considerations:

... Have a particular resonance due to the in-depth nature of the study process (Siti 2018: 30).

This study was based on the family business owners whose rights, needs, values and desires needed to be protected. I made every effort in this investigation to ensure that no violation or injury was inflicted on the research participants or any other stakeholders who had something to do with my study. The participants were not asked to perform any acts or make statements which could cause discomfort, compromise them, diminish self-esteem or cause them to experience embarrassment or regret. This was meant to protect their personal dignity.

Data generation commenced after the receipt of the Full Ethical Clearance Certificate from DUT's Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) (Appendix 5) on 9 November 2018. The clearance certificate was granted after the successful defence and presentation of my research proposal. Adherence to the IREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) was observed in all of my data generation processes. This was in line with Fleming (2018) who asserts that approval has to be granted first before data generation from human participants can be carried out. Following the ethical approval, I piloted instruments with strict compliance to ethical requirements.

The informant's rights, interests and wishes were considered first when choices were made regarding the audio recording sessions and reporting of data, as informed by Creswell (2014). Before people accepted and signed the consent forms as research participants, I gave them the information letter (Appendix 1) and took them through it, explaining the whole study verbally so that it could be clearly understood by these prospective informants. I also emphasised that participation was voluntary and that the participants could withdraw at any time or stage without giving reasons.

I treated all of the data generated with utmost confidentiality as no unauthorised people were

given access to my research data. Furthermore, I had to generate the data in a manner that ensured confidentiality of the data and the identity of the participants. The confidentiality of all of the research participants was preserved in this study by not revealing their real names during data generation, analysis and reporting of the study findings. Fleming (2018) further notes that confidentiality includes the avoidance of using self-identifying statements. As informed by Siti (2018), the research participants were referred to by their codes as indicated in Table 4.2 above.

The materials obtained such as the audio recordings, text-based data and photographs used during photo elicitation interviews will be stored under lock and key by my supervisors and ultimately disposed of through shredding in accordance with DUT's IREC SOPs. The data and information in electronic form is stored on encrypted devices and is password protected. All folders on my laptop, cell-phone and PC that contain my thesis documents are password protected and no other person has access to the password. The data was only shared with my supervisors.

In the event of any problems or enquiries, the participants were advised to contact my supervisors and the IREC Administrator, whose contact details were provided. In this regard, I did not deceive my research participants in any way.

The next section provides a summary of this research methodology chapter.

Conclusion

An outline of the research methodology was discussed in this chapter. Given that an interpretive paradigm was adopted, the design, approach and data generation tools that were employed were aligned to the paradigm. A multiple-site case study research design was adopted with three sites from which nine (three in each site) family business units were studied following a qualitative approach. Purposive and convenient sampling techniques, as well as snowballing were used to extract the required sample. In this study, three data generation techniques were employed namely: face-to-face interviews, non-participant observation and photo elicitation interviews. According to Mukeredzi (2009), the multi-mode approach to data generation that I employed in this study was in accordance with the qualitative tradition of triangulation, a critical feature of transferability of research findings (Creswell 2014).

An outline of the data analysis process which entailed five main steps: transcribing, sorting and organising data, generation of codes, categorisation and generation of themes was given in this chapter. Given the philosophical underpinnings of my study, the rigour throughout the research

process has been discussed in terms of trustworthiness since findings from a qualitative study cannot be generalised. The ethical considerations that I took note of throughout the process were also presented in this chapter.

Having provided an account of the research methodology, highlighting my research journey, the next chapter addresses the research sites from which data was generated and analysed and from which the participants were drawn.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH SETTINGS

Introduction

This study explored the experiential learning of family business owners and how it influenced business sustainability in Masvingo province in Zimbabwe. In the previous chapter, the research methodology was outlined, highlighting the philosophical underpinnings of the study, the research design, sampling techniques, pilot study, data generation and analysis, limitations of the study, trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations.

This chapter, Chapter Five, describes the research setting (also referred to as the research context) in which the data was generated and analysed. Providing a separate chapter for the research settings which includes participant profiles, instead of placing that information in the methodology chapter as is usually the case, was driven by two considerations. Firstly, the methodology chapter was already long with 38 pages, so adding another 15 pages was going to make the chapter far too long. Secondly, placing the research setting and profiles as a separate chapter allowed me enough space to provide sufficient detail about the settings and the participants drawn therefrom.

The terms ‘contexts’ and ‘settings’ are used interchangeably in this thesis and it was the three settings that formed the three research sites in this study. The data for this chapter was obtained from the research participants - the family business owners. The data also emerged from my personal observations and recordings in my researcher diary, as well as my own knowledge and prior experiences of family businesses in my rural home area.

The chapter commences with a brief outline of the population distribution in the targeted province, which covers the social and economic background of the market share of the family business owners. This is followed by a description of the three research settings: rural, growth points and urban areas, which covers a brief description of the characteristics of the target market, economic activity and demographic data of the research participants. A comparative analysis of the research settings is given and finally a conclusion which highlights the pertinent issues with regard to the research setting ties up the chapter.

The next section addresses the distribution of the population in Masvingo province, and highlights the market base for the family business owners.

Population Distribution in Masvingo Province

Zimbabwe is divided into ten administrative provinces (Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013: section 267) and Masvingo province, in which the research was carried out, is located in the southeast of the country. The province borders with the provinces of Manicaland, Midlands and Matabeleland South, stretching to the Beit Bridge border - which it shares with South Africa. The province of Masvingo has a total of seven administrative districts (Zimstat 2012 Population Census), as shown in the map in Figure 5.1 below. The province covers an area of 56 566 square kilometres, which is 14.48% of the total area of Zimbabwe (Wikipedia 2019).

Figure 5.1: Location of Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe and its Administrative Districts



Source: Google search www.masvingo.provincial.map (2019)

This is a relatively large province compared to other provinces in Zimbabwe; as such it provided an unlimited population of family business owners to sample participants from. The rural areas and some growth points around urban Masvingo do not have heavy industrial activities to provide major economic activity in the research contexts. Instead, the main economic activities in the rural areas and growth points are mainly informal, involving retail trade by small-scale firms. As indicated in Chapter Two of this thesis, family business owners constitute the majority of the traders in the retail sector (Mashavira et al. 2019). From the Zimstat (2012) Population

Census, the Zimbabwean population showed distribution aligned to land use, as shown in Table 5.1, below and this was also evident in Masvingo Province.

Table 5.1: Population Distribution in Masvingo Province

Land use in Masvingo Province	Population	Percentage of the Masvingo Population
Rural Areas	1 324 188	89,17%
Urban Areas	120 771	8,13%
Growth Points	40 131	2,70%
Total	1 485 090	100%

Source: Zimstat: (2012)

The above table indicates the number and percentage (of provincial population) of people in the three settings explored, namely rural, growth points and urban areas in Masvingo. The significance of the above information was to highlight possible market availability in each of the research settings where the family-owned businesses were located. These figures suggested that the family business owners who participated in this study were sampled from settings large enough for possible transferability of the results in Zimbabwe.

The rural setting is discussed in the following section.

The Rural Setting

The rural setting was best defined by identifying the general characteristics of such an area. The contextual nature of the rural areas presented a unique business environment for the family business owners that were based in these areas, given that some of the challenges that they faced were not experienced in the other two settings, namely the urban areas and the growth points.

The rural areas could be understood as those areas that were:

... Generally marked by poor geographical landscape with underdeveloped and/or poorly maintained gravel roads, and are severely constrained in terms of physical infrastructures. There is no electricity, telephone facilities or piped water. As a result, access to communication and information technology is non-existent (Mukeredzi 2009: 135).

These disadvantages in the rural areas could have economic impacts on the operations of the family business owners located in such areas and also on their experiential learning and business

sustainability. These, for example, could entail market accessibility and availability of customers with adequate disposable income. Living conditions, which could also present affordability challenges, were presumably affecting the sustainability of the family business owners in the rural setting. However, as Mukeredzi (2021) discovered, there was inherent value in rural communities which should be preserved, such as the provision of commodities for clients, the desire for learning and the contextual situation from which family business owners could learn.

The poor living standards of the people in the rural areas included harsh economic conditions that had a direct negative impact on the rural family business owners. Inadequate disposable income could negatively impact the volume of sales for family business owners in the rural setting, thereby affecting business sustainability. However, not all rural customers could be considered to be poor as some families had breadwinners in various sectors of the economy as unconfirmed statistics indicated that most rural families had close relatives in the diaspora supporting their families back home. In addition to the views of Mukeredzi (2009), notable constraints that seemed to affect the family business owners in the rural contexts *inter alia* included a limited access to finance, shortages of key utilities such as electricity, water and fuel, as well as limited availability of commodities in the source markets (Chirangande, Mugano, Chagwiza and Hungwe 2020). This was compounded by the poor state of the roads leading to the rural business centres, and fuel shortages would increase the delivery costs and hurdles faced by these rural family business owners. Given the views of Mukeredzi (2009) and Chirangande et al. (2020) on the rural context, in this study the rural setting was considered to be an area where economic activity was entirely composed of farming, disposable income was very low and living conditions such as modern housing, road networks, water and medical services were inadequate. Such challenges would presumably affect business sustainability.

The pictures below in Figure 5.2 portray the living conditions of most of the customers of the family business owners located in the rural setting.

Figure 5.2: Living Conditions in the Rural Setting



Source: Google search www.zimbabwe.rural.areas (2020)

Some of the transport challenges were raised during the face-to-face interviews, for example Participant RC7 pointed out that:

During rainy seasons, these roads are inaccessible to the extent that we use wheelbarrows to ferry our stock from the main road, five kilometres away (Interview 1).

The road network problems highlighted above were a common feature in the rural context. Rural areas have often been characterised as lean environments in which it is often difficult to carry out business since they are constrained by critical resource shortages and access to markets (Bika and Kalantaridis 2011). Given such physical business impediments, I had the view that the experiential learning of the family business owners in the rural setting could be different from that experienced by family business owners in the urban setting. However, in terms of communication, there had been a significant improvement in terms of networks in rural areas

due to the advent of the cell phone technology. Three mobile network operators: Econet, Netone and Telecel were easily accessible in all rural areas of Zimbabwe. Given that a customer base could easily be connected due to the availability of mobile networks, experiential learning and the business sustainability of the family business owners in the rural setting could be enhanced.

However, given the physical infrastructural limitations and inaccessibility to commodity sources which was characteristic of the rural context during this study, the experiential learning of the family business owners in the rural setting was affected. The rural business centres, in which most of the family-owned business units explored in this study were located, had a unique old model of building structures: the over-the-counter shop where a customer would ask for a commodity and the business owner would fetch it from the shelves. It was also a common feature that the family business owners and their families had accommodation at the back of the business premises, attached or detached. The resemblance of the rural homes was noticeable, with domesticated animals such as dogs, cats and goats present, and breeding of chickens and engagement in market gardening also within the business premises. The breeding and rearing of edible animals, as well as gardening probably contributed to business longevity as the family business owners had a subsistence base to lean on in times of economic hardships.

Given the poor infrastructural facilities, as well as the low standard of living of rural people cited above, it was necessary to include family business owners in the rural setting in this study in order to understand how they experienced learning under such conditions and how the learning affected the sustainability of their businesses. This enabled comparisons with the other contexts.

Demographic Data of the Family Business Owners in the Rural Areas

During the introductory part of the face-to-face interviews, family business owners responded to questions that elicited data pertaining to their demographic information (Appendix 6). Interesting responses emerged, for example:

I just decided to leave teaching and venture into business (UB1).

The family income from my father's teaching job was not enough. He had to find something to supplement and this business emerged (RA1).

It's a long story which you may not believe. I started off selling fuel on the black market and changing forex in the streets (RB1).

It could be noted from the three comments above that the major reason for venturing into family business was the need to generate adequate income for the livelihoods of the family members. It was therefore the profit motive which was more inspiring.

As discussed in the previous chapter, seven participants were extracted to participate in the study. Their demographic details are presented below and then discussed. Table 5.2 below reflects the demographic details of the research participants that were drawn from the rural context.

Table 5.2: Research Participants from the Rural Context

Participant	Relationship to founding member	Education level	Formal business management training	Number of years in business	Business generation
RA1	Eldest son	ZJC	None	58 years	2 nd generation
RA2	Daughter-in-law	Bachelor's degree - teacher	None	41 years	2 nd generation
RA3	Grandson	Bachelor's degree - teacher	Commerce degree	7 years	2 nd generation
RB4	Founder	O level	None	16 years	1 st generation
RB5	Spouse	O level	None	16 years	1 st generation
RC6	Grandson	Bachelor's degree - teacher	None	13 years	3 rd generation
RC7	Grandson	O level: truck driver	None	26 years	3 rd generation

Source: Researcher (2019)

From Table 5.2 above, in the rural context six of the seven participants got involved in the family business without any formal training on how to run a business. Given the level of their business performance, it was clear that running a family business did not require any formal business education background. In terms of their relationship to the founding member, the above table shows that all the family members were actually a part of the nuclear family that was bound by blood or marriage. It was also interesting to note that three of the family business owners had to leave the teaching profession to join the business sector. Given their educational background, I assumed that the teachers would find it easier to learn experientially during the running of their businesses. However, as noted above, their educational background seemed to

have had no impact as all of the other family business owners could pick up and master the techniques of business operations. This is discussed in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

Table 5.2 above shows that five out of the seven family business owners in the rural setting had passed the first generation stage of their businesses. This was a necessary indicator that business sustainability was possible given the right business atmosphere and commitment on the part of the family members. Given that the years in business ranged from seven to fifty-eight, these participants would have experienced some experiential learning within their family-owned businesses.

The preceding section discussed the rural setting, highlighting the physical characteristics of the context and how the experiential learning of the family business owners and the business sustainability were likely to be influenced. The demographic data of the research participants was also presented and discussed. The next section addresses the urban setting.

The Urban Setting

In this study, the rural and urban settings were considered as two research contexts located at extreme ends in terms of availability or non-availability of facilities and resources, and the marked differences in their physical infrastructure and economic activity.

At the time of this study, Zimbabwean urban areas were run by local authorities through the Urban Councils' Act, Chapter 29 Section 15. This meant that in urban areas, governance was under municipal or urban management which was responsible for the provision of:

Water supplies, sewage systems, roads and transport-related infrastructure, low cost housing and housing related infrastructure, street lights, health and educational and welfare services (Davison 2001: 141).

According to Davison (2001), the infrastructural facilities in the urban settings located family business owners in positions where they had to meet unique and diverse customer demands. The standard of living facilitated by the urban municipalities suggested that customers' demands and expectations were very different from those of the customers in the rural setting.

Of the three business sites sampled from the urban setting, one was located in the central business district (CBD) while the other two were in the high-density residential areas, commonly referred to as 'the locations'. Self-service was offered to customers as a means of trading as the

three business sites in the urban setting were all supermarkets as opposed to the over-the-counter shops in the rural context.

It was also observed at all of the urban business sites that neither the family business owners nor their employees were residing at the business premises. Only security guards on duty would be available on the premises for security reasons after the closure of the businesses.

The urban family business owners operated in areas where the road network facilitated easy accessibility to the market. Unlike the rural context, the urban areas represented the economic hub of the research area. The two major sectors of the economy: secondary and tertiary industries that employed the majority of the urban people marked a wide difference between the urban and the rural contexts. Such differences could have some implications on the nature of the experiential learning of the family business owners in these different research settings, as well as on the sustainability of their businesses.

The next section focuses on the demographic data of the family business owners located in the urban setting.

Demographic Data of the Family Business Owners in the Urban Areas

Just like in the rural context, seven participants were sampled out to participate in this study. The demographic details of those urban participants are reflected in Table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3: Research Participants from the Urban Context

Participant	Relationship to founding member	Education level	Formal business management training	Number of years in business	Business generation
UA1	Eldest son	Business Studies	Entrepreneurship	54 years	2 nd generation
UA2	Daughter-in-law	Bachelor's degree	Accounting	46 years	2 nd generation
UA3	Grand-daughter	Diploma in education	None	16 years	2 nd generation
UB4	Founder	Diploma in Education	Commerce education	22 years	1 st generation
UB5	Spouse	O level	None	22 years	1 st generation
UB6	Son	O level	None	11 years	1 st generation
UC7	Niece	O level:	None	17 years	1 st generation

Source: Researcher (2019)

All seven research participants from the urban area had more than ten years' experience running a family business, with approximately the same average of number of years in business as the other two research settings. However, only three of the seven participants had some background knowledge of entrepreneurship when they got involved in the retail trade. Unlike the rural setting, only four of the seven participants did not have entrepreneurial backgrounds but having been in business for more than ten years, they were likely to have become knowledgeable through experiential learning.

Table 5.3 above shows that all of the research participants were related to the founding member of the business, either biologically or by marriage. Like in the rural setting, while family members consisted mainly of the nuclear family, there were also members of the immediate extended family.

The educational background of the research participants in the urban area was fairly high as all of them had gone through O level studies and could all read and write. This would only be critical for business sustainability where formulation of viable strategic plans would require people who were literate and knowledgeable in terms of economic issues, otherwise it seemed that a formal educational background did not matter much in this study.

While four of the seven family-owned businesses were still in the first generation, it was interesting to note that all of the research participants had more than ten years' experience running family-owned businesses. Contrastingly, in the rural context one participant had been involved in the business for seven years. However, with these years of experience, one could assume that participants had experienced some learning and this could also indicate the potential of the family business owners to sustain their businesses.

In the urban setting that has been discussed in this section, a brief comparison with the rural setting was given, as well as the unique characteristics that were peculiar to the urban settings. The demographic data of the research participants in the urban setting has also been discussed. In terms of entrepreneurial education, three participants in the urban context had that exposure while in the rural context only one participant had that kind of background. The next section addresses the growth point setting.

The Growth Point Setting

As defined in Chapter One, growth points, which are also referred to as rural service centres, were post-independence economic hubs that were found in the rural areas of Zimbabwe.

According to Chifamba (2013), the concept of growth points was mooted by the Zimbabwean government in the 1980s as a means of controlling rural-to-urban migration and thereby decongesting the cities and towns. The government’s vision was to develop these rural service centres into towns with facilities such as clean tap water, sewerage systems, an electricity supply, banking services, fuel stations and light industries. A number of these centres had grown significantly by the time of this study and their economic activities could be classified as being the midpoint between rural business and urban business areas. The existence of light industries and other economic activities in which people could be employed created a research context that lay between the two extremes; the rural and urban settings. Figure 5.3 below shows some visuals from a few growth points in Masvingo province, highlighting the differences in economic activity with the rural setting.

Figure 5.3: State of the Growth Points in Masvingo Province



Source: Google search www.growth.point.in.zimbabwe (2020)

Two of the business sites explored in the growth points setting were over-the-counter shops while one was a supermarket. At these sites it was observed that the family business owners also resided at the business premises, although without enough space to rear animals, as was the case at sites in the rural setting. Electricity sources were available, as was the case in the urban setting. Whilst roads were accessible, the distances from the major urban areas were rather long. The next section presents and discusses the demographic data for the research participants in the growth point setting.

Demographic Data of the Family Business Owners in Growth Points

Just like in the other two settings, seven participants were sampled out for this study. Table 5.4 below shows the demographic information of the research participants in the growth point research setting.

Table 5.4: Research Participants from the Growth Point Setting

Participant	Relationship to founding member	Education level	Formal business management training	Number of years in business	Business generation
GA1	Founder	Bachelor of Arts	None	26 years	1 st generation
GA2	Spouse	Diploma in Education	None	26 years	1 st generation
GB3	Founder	Diploma in Nursing	None	31 years	1 st generation
GB4	Spouse	O level	None	31 years	1 st generation
GC5	Son	O level	None	34 years	2 nd generation
GC6	Daughter-in-law	O level	None	23 years	2 nd generation
GC7	Niece	Bachelor of Education	None	38 years	2 nd generation

Source: Researcher (2019)

Research participants from the growth point context had family business experience exceeding 20 years although none of them had initial entrepreneurial knowledge, unlike in the other two settings (rural and urban) where a few of the participants had this type of knowledge.

Experiential learning through engagement and commitment in various business activities could be the reason for such long periods in business. A period exceeding 20 years in business indicated the possibility of family business sustainability being achievable. It was apparently clear that these family business owners had experientially acquired knowledge on how to run a business for them to have remained in business for that long.

It was also interesting to note that all seven of the research participants from the growth point setting had no formal business management training despite having been in business for more than 20 years. As noted above, it could be asserted that the experiential learning of family business owners was not dependent on a formal educational background.

Having discussed the characteristics of the three research settings, the next section provides a brief comparison of the research settings.

Comparative Analysis of the Research Settings

In terms of infrastructural resources, the urban and rural contexts reflected opposite extremes with the rural family business owners trading under difficult circumstances. Nonetheless, the conditions in which the family business owners found themselves, irrespective of the research setting, created space for experiential learning and business opportunities that had to be taken advantage of to sustain their businesses.

Table 5.5 below is a comparative representation of the demographic data of all of the participants from the three different settings.

Table 5.5: Comparative Analysis of the Demographic Data from the Three Contexts

Context	Education level		Formal business training		Average number of years in business	Business generation
	<i>Form 4 or lower</i>	<i>Higher Education</i>	None	Yes	Average	
Rural	4	3	6	1	23	1 ST , 2 ND , 3 RD
Urban	3	4	4	3	27	1 ST , 2 ND
Growth Point	3	4	7	0	25	1 ST , 2 ND
TOTAL	10	11	17	4		

Source: Researcher (2019)

Table 5.5 shows the combined demographic data for all of the research participants (seven per setting) per given research setting. Ten participants out of twenty-one had an educational qualification not exceeding Form 4 (O level) and seventeen out of the twenty-one participants got involved in business activities without any prior knowledge of how to run a business. The data relating to their education levels as well as the availability of any formal business training did not vary much between contexts, suggesting that the family business owners may have started off with about the same level of business knowledge. This was critical during data

presentation and analysis as no marked differences between the research settings could have led to a distortion of the research findings.

Across all of the research contexts investigated, the participants differed in their number of years of involvement in the operations of their family business ventures. However, the average number of years' experience in business for all of the participants in the three research contexts ranged between twenty-three and twenty-seven. This equalised the research contexts in terms of the participants who were identified for this study. The experiential learning of the family business owners across all of the research settings was therefore explored in participants who had similar time periods of business exposure. This is further justified by the data from the table which shows that in each research context at least one family-owned business unit had survived past the first generation. The availability of family-owned businesses that had already moved from one generation to the next suggested that business sustainability was possible in such business enterprises.

One similarity across all of the research contexts was that the family business owners under consideration did not delegate managerial responsibility to independent professional managers. According to Nasser (2014), the Agency Theory relating to family-owned businesses indicates overlaps of the three family dimensions: family, ownership, and control. In situations where some family members do not have ownership of the business, and where the owners delegate control to professional managers, conflict of interest is most likely inevitable (Shanka and Thuo 2017). The founding members and the family heirs were responsible for the day-to-day running of the businesses. Business ownership and control was thus invested in such people for all of the research participants in this study.

A conclusion for this chapter is discussed next, which ties the issues highlighted above together.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the three research settings in which the study was carried out, namely rural areas, growth points and urban areas. Aspects discussed in this chapter included the population distribution in Masvingo province in the rural, growth point and urban settings, as well as the demographic data of the research participants in each setting. A brief comparison of the research settings was also provided.

Findings indicated that the research participants had roughly the same characteristics across the three research settings in terms of formal educational background, relationship to the founding member, business management training and their number of years in business.

Marked differences were observed between the research contexts in terms of infrastructural development, road accessibility, social amenities, the financial sector and the provision of public goods. The rural and urban settings were at opposite extremes, where the rural setting lagged behind in terms of the infrastructural and other facilities. Such a disparity provided differences in the experiential learning of the family business owners as well as in business sustainability.

The next chapter focuses on data presentation and analysis, responding to the research question on the nature of the experiential learning and its influence on business sustainability.

CHAPTER SIX

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The nature of experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability.

Introduction

This study explored the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on the sustainability of the businesses. Chapter Five discussed the research sites from where the data was generated and analysed. Chapter Six presents and analyses the data responding to my first research question on the nature of the experiential learning. Data for this question was generated through three techniques namely: individual face-to-face interviews (two-interview series), and photo elicitation complemented by non-participatory observations. As indicated in Chapter Four of this thesis, the photographs that were taken by the participants are only used as prompts to extract more in-depth data which may well not been verbalised and thus not accessed by the researcher during the face-to-face interviews. Justifying photographs as a research tool, Weber (2008:44) observed: “Images can be used to provoke and capture the ineffable....” To uphold the anonymity of the research participants, the photos were not uploaded in this thesis. Two approaches to data analysis: in-field analysis and post-data generation analysis were employed: inductive in-field analysis to identify patterns emerging in the data, and a deductive post-data generation analysis to develop themes. The key question that the study sought to address was “How do family business owners experience learning and how does the learning influence the sustainability of their businesses?” In order to address this question, the following three research questions had to be addressed:

1. What is the nature of experiential learning that family business owners go through and how does it influence business sustainability?
2. What kind of knowledge is gained experientially by family business owners?
3. What form of support do family business owners gain from other family members?

In this study each of the three research questions constitutes a chapter. The decision to separate chapters was driven by a need to present manageable-length chapters. Presenting data analysis in one chapter meant a tedious and lengthy chapter of more than 100 pages. In addition, one chapter might have given rise to limited discussion and elaboration on some findings.

In discussing the findings, I draw on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks discussed in Chapter Three, to help explain my findings and show how the findings could be viewed from the theory lens. Over and above the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, I also draw on surveyed literature discussed in Chapter Two in order to show how my findings relate to existing research. The study was grounded on Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory which shows that learning takes place through four cyclical stages which individuals go through: concrete experience; reflective observation; abstract conceptualisation; and active experimentation. The theory is complemented by Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory which helps to explain the learning that takes place within the social context where family business owners learn with and from one another through observation and imitation.

Two main themes which emerged from the data analysis: learning by doing (participatory) and learning through reflection frame this chapter. I organised the chapter into themes that cut across all data sources in addressing the research question. This is the first of the three data presentation and analysis chapters which addresses the question: *What is the nature of the experiential learning that family business owners go through and how does it influence business sustainability?*

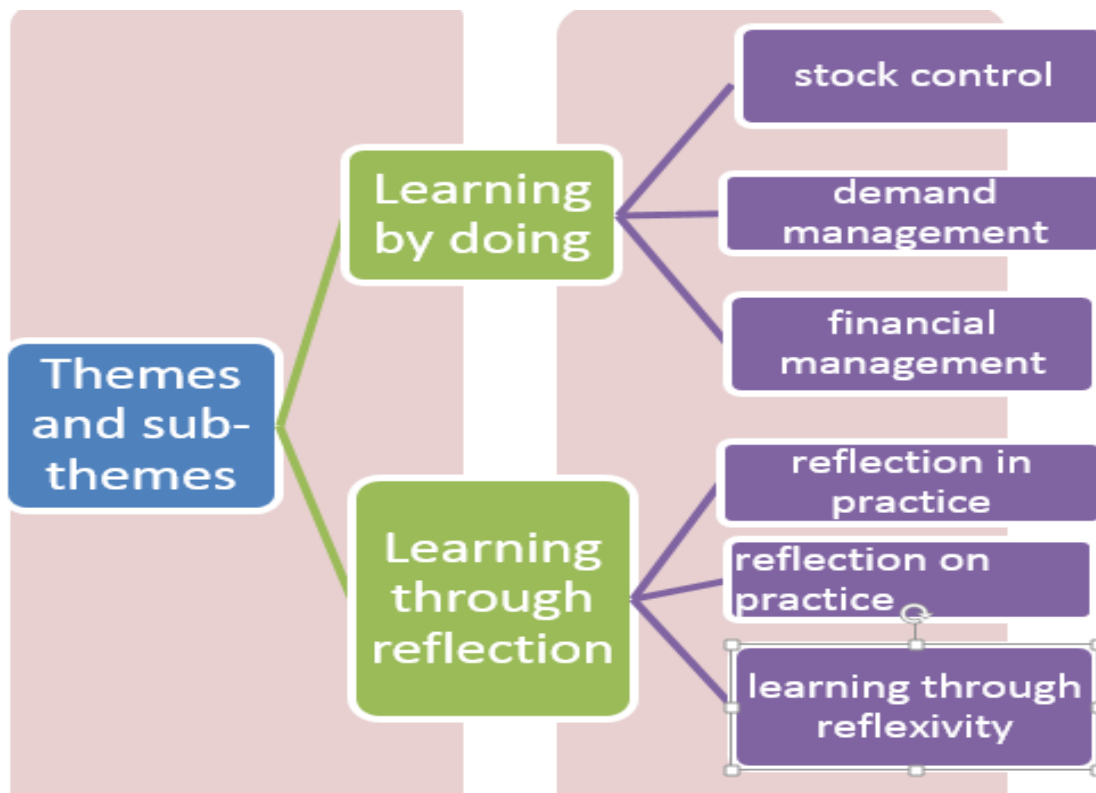
This chapter starts by giving an outline of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. This is followed by a discussion of learning by doing, a theme which relates to the practical involvement of family members in the day-to-day running of the family business. Next is a discussion of experiential learning through reflection. The chapter ends with a conclusion that captures key aspects addressed in this Chapter Six.

The next section provides an outline of the themes and sub-themes that emerged as participants responded to the first research question.

Themes and Sub-themes for Data Presentation

Data analysis broadly revealed that the nature of the experiential learning that family business owners experienced was through participation in the family business activities and through different forms of reflection. Participatory learning involved a member's physical effort in the day-to-day operations of a business such as operating the till-machine or preparation of cash budgets, while experiential learning through reflection entailed reflection in, reflection on and reflexion, all of which led to learning as discussed later. Figure 6.1 below shows these themes and their sub-themes.

Figure 6.1: Research Question One: Themes and Sub-themes



Source: Researcher (2021)

The Themes and sub-themes in Figure 6.1 above emerged in answer to the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability as discussed below.

Learning by Doing

In answering the first research question, responses from three data sources showed that family business owners learnt how to run a business by involving themselves in the actual daily business activities, that is learning by doing. Three sub-themes: stock control, demand management and financial management which emerged from this main theme were in line with the findings of Bignotti and Roux (2020) from a study in South Africa where they assert that business sustainability hinges on proper financial management among many other measures.

The three sub-themes are discussed in turn below.

Experiential Learning through Stock Control

Stock is referred to as goods or commodities or merchandise that is kept on the premises of a shop, storeroom or warehouse and available for sale or distribution (Riley 2018). In this study, stock refers to goods which are available in a business for sale. Stock control therefore entails the efforts that were taken by a family business owner to maintain appropriate stock levels that ensured business sustainability. Family business owners were involved in stock control in order to minimise the cost of holding stock while meeting customer demand. Too much stock could trigger business losses as overstocking could lead to some goods expiring, goods getting damaged or goods getting out of season while in the storeroom. From my data generation observations (28 December 2018), I noted that an effort was made by family business owners to ensure that certain items of stock were kept at reasonable levels. In most business units, I observed that additional stock was kept in store rooms or warehouses to ensure that immediate replenishments would be made for goods sold out.

The idea of maintaining optimal stock levels was reiterated by twelve participants across all research sites who included UA2, UB5, RA1, RB4, GA2 and GC5 just to mention a few. During face-to-face interviews Participant GA2 indicated how he was involved in the maintenance of optimal stock levels when he pointed out that:

When the business started I was very young and going to primary school. I grew up seeing and participating in most activities that were taking place in the business, like placing orders, packing goods on shelves and selling. We enjoyed standing behind counters re-stocking the shelves and selling to customers (Interview 1).

Stock control activities enabled learning by doing as the family business owner participated in the placement of orders as well as re-packing of goods on the shelves, and replenishing goods that would have been sold out. Cherdchai (2020) from consulted literature, noted that learning occurs as people engage in practical activities combined with past experience. In this regard, learning by doing was highlighted as having started from a very tender age where observation and direct participation in business activities were dominant. This is consistent with Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory where the family business owner grasped new experience through experiencing the concrete that is, the practical activities done in the shop. In this regard it can be concluded that some business owners experienced learning through observation and participation which sustained their businesses.

In response to the same question on the nature of experiential learning and childhood

experiences in the running of a family business, Participant RB4 echoed similar sentiments during their face-to-face interview:

From a very tender age I worked very hard as I was involved in buying fruits such as bananas, mangoes and oranges and then sell them door-to-door in my residential area. In order to ensure continuity of the business, new orders of fruits had to be made before current fruits were finished. In business, you do not have to wait for current stock to get finished in order to acquire new stock (Interview 1).

The above response showed that the family business owner learnt about stock control measures at a tender age as he participated in the buying and selling of fruits. The active participation resonated with Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory where a concrete learning experience is obtained. The stock control process of ensuring availability of additional stock before *stock-out* entailed reflective observation (Kolb's stage 2) where adjustments were then made to ensure business sustainability. The timing for new stock orders portrayed the ability to manage and control stock levels as a result of learning by doing. Values of hard work displayed by participant RB4 concurred with literature findings where Jadwat (2016) indicates that family values of determination and diligent work ethics play a critical role in the survival of family businesses. The family business owner managed to sustain his family business through the employment of stock control measures which appeared to be a critical learning process.

Experiential learning through stock control measures also emerged during photo elicitation interviews where Participant UA2, had this to say:

These photos show how we arrange and pack goods on the shelves in this supermarket. You can observe that related goods are packed together on the same shelf so that our customers identify related goods easily. Customers enjoy doing their shopping under one roof so we make it easy for them (Interview 2).

The strategic arrangement of commodities on shelves entailed learning by doing, in other words through participation, a critical component of experiential learning. Stock control measures indicated a learning process where family business owners displayed goods in such a way that related commodities would be found under one roof and in close proximity of each other. Placing related goods together seemed to have had a positive effect on customers as it drew their attention, which could lead to impulse buying. The findings related to assertions by Mandina and Karisambudzi (2016) that long-term relationships with the target customers and appropriate shelving may help increase sales and keep the business going. The ability of family business

owners to learn to create attractive shopping environments could be an indication of their capacity to lure customers and manage customer behaviour, which could sustain their businesses. Such activities involved planning, which was supported by Kolb's (1984) fourth stage of active experimentation, where an opportunity was provided to ensure business sustainability. Business strategies of attracting more customers and therefore enhancing family business continuity manifested through the ways in which stock was managed by the family business owner.

During photo elicitation interviews, Participant UA3 added that:

In this picture, you can see this employee in the aisles, between the shelves. This person is responsible for shelf management, carrying out duties such as repacking the shelves; sorting misplaced goods; as well as assisting customers in need. Goods have to be taken from the store-room to replace the ones that would have been bought. We do not have to wait until all goods are finished on the shelves to place an order (Interview 2).

The experiential learning process of family business owners also involved packing and re-arranging goods on the right shelves. It could be concluded from the above quotation that proper stock control measures could ensure customer retention and eventually business sustainability. This concurred with literature surveyed where Jadwat (2016) argued that the availability of stock on a continual basis constituted business sustainability. Stock control measures ensured uninterrupted availability of stock in family business units and this could capacitate family business owners with knowledge that kept them in business. Reflective observation (Kolb's, 1984) second stage, also manifested as the family business owners endeavoured to strike a balance between what they had to display on shelves and the demands of their customers.

Another form of participatory learning through stock control related to management of stock related challenges in their businesses. From the observations that I carried out (Researcher Diary: 28 December 2018) in RA1's business unit, rural sites faced a lot of logistical challenges to manage their stock levels. At some point, Participant RA1 faced challenges of stock delivery and ended up using an ox-drawn cart to ferry stock from a bus stop on the main road to a family business unit (Rural A), as the gravel road to the shop was inaccessible by motor vehicles. The family business owner did not just watch and feel bad about his situation, instead, consistent with Kolb's (1984) learning styles of assimilating (watching and thinking) and converging (doing and thinking), action was taken and improvised to ensure stock reached the shop

premises. The observation exposed peculiar challenges that were faced by family business owners in rural contexts that were not faced by their counterparts in urban areas and growth points. However, notwithstanding that such challenges provided space for experiential learning, they could threaten business sustainability. This was in line with literature reviewed where Adoukonou (2019) noted that small scale businesses in rural areas were extremely vulnerable to various challenges that could endanger their existence, such as inaccessibility and lack of financial support. These challenges negatively impacted on stock control measures as poor road networks delayed timely deliveries, especially during rainy seasons.

During data generation observation sessions (28 December 2018), I also noted that some family business units located in rural areas had a number of empty shelves in their business units. Different reasons were given by participants with regard to stocking, such as inadequate capital base, inability to stock perishables due to lack of electricity, as well as transportation problems. While issues of transport may have been a contributing factor to limited stock, for other business units, limited stock was caused by shortages of basic commodities in the country, as confirmed by Participant RB5 who responded during photo elicitation interviews saying:

On this photo, you can clearly see that we do not have enough goods to be fully packed on our shelves. We should be having cooking oil here, and then juice drinks on this part of the shelf. These products are currently in short supply in this country. Whenever we go to our suppliers in town to make orders, we find the scarce product finished. Once the products get to these wholesalers, people buy in bulk and hoard the goods making it difficult to have constant supply. This is the only option left for us, 'bulk buying and hoarding' (Interview 2).

Learning through implementation of appropriate stock control measures was negatively impacted by unavailability of certain basic commodities in the country that could lead to poor cash inflows and unpleasant relationships with customers albeit the business owners could also experience some learning therefrom. The above quotation indicates acquisition of a new concrete experience (a shift from Kolb's stage 4 to stage 1) by the family business owner as he was exposed to new business challenges which might not have been there previously. Consequently, customer loyalty could equally be lost leading to family business sustainability challenges. This concurred with literature sourced where Samaita (2018) pointed out that Zimbabwe was experiencing a wave of rising prices of basic goods and shortages of crucial commodities amid fears that it could plunge into an economic implosion. A decision from the above quotation to start bulk-buying and hoarding showed that family business owners reflected on past experience, thereby taking decisive

measures to ensure they remained in business.

Similar sentiments were also raised by Participant RA2 during photo elicitation interviews when she said that:

You see this picture; I deliberately took a snap of customers who were leaving this shop in disappointment after failing to get goods they normally get in here. Understocking is seriously affecting our operations as customers will never trust you again (Interview 2).

Further challenges of learning by doing through stock control measures were highlighted by Participant RA2 above. Such cases of stock-outs were costly for the family business owner based in the rural areas since the business lost income and customer loyalty. Loss of customer loyalty could have serious negative impacts on business survival, as reflected in surveyed literature (Kim 2011). As family business owners reflected on their predicaments, they began to conceptualise (Kolb's third stage) on new business ideas that had to be developed to ensure business sustainability. The experience of running shortages in the family business made family business owners understand that customer loyalty could be lost and difficult to regain.

In spite of the contextual limitations, eight of the twenty-one family business owners based in rural areas experientially learnt different survival strategies, as highlighted by Participant RC6 during face-to-face interviews:

In order to survive, we have gone to the extent of requesting our loyal customers to inform us the type of goods that we should order and stock for them. This strategy is working to our advantage (Interview 1).

From the above quotation the family business owner learnt 'demand-induced stocking' in order to enhance business sustainability. This aligned with the principles of Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) where learning is conceived as a long-term process in which in this case family business owners ended up having new knowledge on stock control measures through their experiences. The reliance on customers to place stock orders seemed to be beneficial to a number of rural family business units as more participants had similar comments. The strategy in which goods that were already in demand were ordered seemed to have been feasible since supply turned out to be demand driven. Given an economy in stagnation, with critical shortages of basic commodities (Smith 2020) family business owners in rural areas tended to source goods that had been requested by their customers. Innovative business measures employed by participant RC6 had the potential to sustain the operations of family-owned businesses.

Over and above ‘*demand-induced*’ stock control measures, some family business owners in rural areas experienced learning and implemented unique stock control strategies. During face-to-face interviews, Participant RC7 pointed out that:

... As a measure to ensure clearance of slow moving goods, we sometimes attach such commodities to fast-selling goods. For example customers in need of cooking oil may have to buy it together with some other product which may not be fast selling (Interview 1).

The process of implementing new stock control measures which they learnt to clear slow moving commodities entailed learning by doing which took the form of active experimentation (Kolb’s fourth stage). Selling commodities by attaching them to fast moving goods could have been a trial and error approach whose impacts could not easily be predicted. However, chances could be high that customers would bypass such suppliers and find other business units where they would not be forced to buy unplanned goods. In a situation where customers were asked to buy unplanned goods, this would mean that even struggling family businesses in rural areas would be able to survive as they relied on captive markets. However, this finding was in contrast with sourced literature where Basera (2014) established that customer retention measures were not practised by fast food retail shops in the Masvingo urban areas in Zimbabwe. This could be due to a difference between the two different research contexts and types of business. The market structure in the urban areas and growth points may not have opportunities to serve captive markets.

From my Researcher’s Diary (31 December 2018) I noted that some of the family business units in the rural areas did not have electricity. The rural electrification programme run by the Rural Electrification Authority (REA) had apparently failed to reach these communities as anticipated. Munyukwi (2017) asserts that the Zimbabwean government admitted that the rural electrification programme that was initiated in 2002 together with the Rural Electrification Fund (REF) was no longer on course due to deteriorating economic conditions. Consequently, stock control measures learnt and adopted by some of these family business owners were observed to be manual and most probably inaccurate as manual records tended to skip some purchases during peak hour selling seasons. Contrary, all growth points and urban areas in Zimbabwe had electricity facilities (Researcher’s Diary, December 2018). Such resources gave urban and growth point family business owners a competitive edge which boosted their business sustainability as compared to those in rural areas where lack of electrification presented a threat to business sustainability. All family business units sampled for this study that were located in

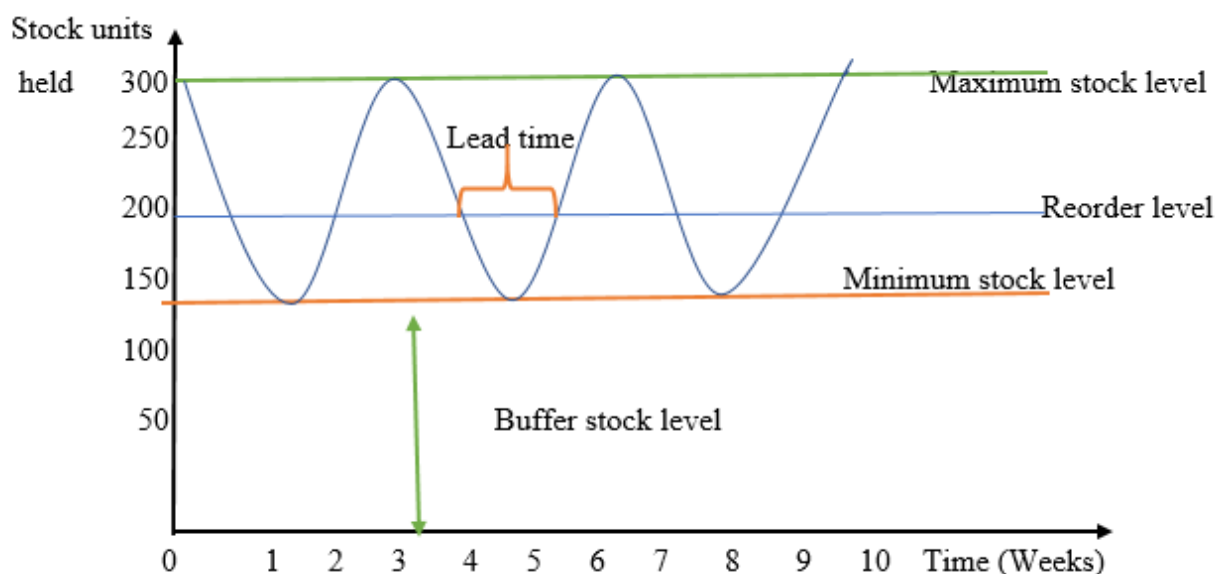
urban areas and at growth points were observed to have learnt to use information technology (IT) for stock control. The use of IT had seemingly improved the speed with which business transactions were carried out in these family-owned businesses.

The use of computers for stock control purposes was highlighted by Participant UC7 during photo elicitation interview:

Every day when I come to work, my job starts on this computer. It helps me to determine stock levels in this shop and therefore ensures real time orders which allow stock levels to remain at optimum levels. When goods are sold at the tills, they are automatically subtracted from the stock list and my computer records that. Accounting systems become easy as each transaction and its value are captured on this main server, giving the total sales for each day on all the tills (Interview 2).

Exposure to the use of computers enabled the family business owner to experientially learn how to apply computerised stock control measures that ensured continuous availability of goods in the business unit. A shift from manual stock control measures to the computerised system was in line with the Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) where new experiences were acquired through the involvement in *doing*. Though computerised stock control systems may run on similar principles to manual ones (Riley 2018) they are often more flexible and information retrieval will be easy, especially if the family business is dealing with a wide range of products. An example of a computerised stock control chart is shown in Figure 6.2 below.

Figure 6.2: Example of Stock Control Chart



Source: Adapted from Riley (2018)

Such a control chart could assist the family business owners to properly control stock levels in the business as the minimum level acted as a trigger for new orders to avoid stock outs. The maximum level also guarded against over-stocking which could result in high stock holding costs. The time-lag between placing an order for new stock and getting the delivery from the supplier was catered for by the buffer stock level. As family business owners experientially learnt through involvement in the stock management cycle of stock acquisition, stock control and stock re-order the process of learning through participation and learning through reflection and observation was enhanced.

From the discussion above, experiential learning of family business owners occurred as they managed stock levels and this was a daily occurrence where they engaged in activities, and reflected. The observational learning process of family business owners was commensurate with Bandura's (1977) SLT as successors observed how their predecessors transacted business operations. From tender ages, some family business owners indicated that they had participated in activities, assisting their parents in packing goods, delivery of orders and serving customers. Indarti and Kusuma (2016) from consulted literature consider knowledge of the product relating to quality and composition as crucial for business sustainability. In this study, family business owners had to stock commodities which would be marketable in terms of quality and composition. Whilst the importance of stock control has been highlighted across all research sites, there seemed to be more challenges faced by rural family business owners due to lack of electricity, physical infrastructural inaccessibility and the national shortages of basic commodities. Such logistical challenges were not experienced in the urban areas or growth points. The conditions encountered by family business owners in the rural setting have shown possibilities of these businesses failing to remain sustainable in the long run. The impact of national shortages was less felt in urban areas and growth points as the little that became available from wholesalers could easily be accessed by urban family businesses, compared to rural family business owners.

The next section discusses experiential learning of family business owners through demand management.

Experiential Learning through Demand Management

The process of managing demand as a form of learning by doing was one of the ways through which family business owners experienced learning. Demand management is defined as the supply chain management process in which the customers' preferences, expectations and

requirements are matched with the capabilities of the supply chain (Croxtton, Lambert, Garcia-Dastigue and Rogers 2002). In this study, it emerged that various activities that entailed demand management involved acquisition of information on the tastes and preferences of family business owners, capitalising on captive markets, making accurate order schedules, receiving advance payments, as well as quantity rationing.

Learning through demand management involved constant interaction with customers, as outlined by two participants during face-to-face interviews. Participants RA2 and RC7 based in the rural areas had similar views which were voiced by Participant RA2:

This business simply survives on the basis that we serve a small farming community with whom we have close contacts. As a result, we always interact with our customers who then inform us about goods we should bring whenever we go to town for orders. We know the preferences of most of our customers and as long as you supply goods in demand, the business will remain viable. (Interview 1).

With regard to learning by doing, the above quotation highlighted that, through continuous interaction with customers, family business owners learnt to focus on the supply of goods on demand. Demand was being managed through the creation of sustainable relationships with customers and that could probably ensure business sustainability. The ability of family business owners to learn some survival options was in line with reviewed literature where Ungerer and Mienie (2018) highlight the need for practices that enhance entrepreneurial skills. Interacting with customers where they indicated their own expectations created a lasting and necessary relationship between family business owners and their customers. This was also consistent with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning principles that learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world. It could be inferred from the above quotation that business sustainability could be dependent on close relationships between family business owners and their customers.

Moreover, the sentiments about customer relationships highlighted by RA2 were echoed by three other research participants based in rural areas where reliance on captive markets seemed crucial in demand management. Acquah (2012) from reviewed literature points out that networking relationships with key stakeholders such as customers cannot be overlooked. The position emanating from their responses suggested that business sustainability was dependent on demand availability, especially from customers who had no other suppliers to choose from. As family business owners managed to follow and satisfy the demands of their customers, business sustainability was probably guaranteed. There was also a theoretical fit between what the

participants said and Kolb's (1984) assertion that learning involved transactions between the person and the environment. In this case the customers were part of the context. Experiential learning occurred as family business owners interacted with their customers and got to understand their demands to ensure that the quantity and quality demanded matched the quantity and quality supplied. This was also consistent with Social Learning Theory where Skinner believed that people don't shape the world, but instead, the world shapes them (Zhou and Brown 2015). In this regard, family business owners would not be in a position to supply whatever commodities they wanted; it was the customer who demanded what they needed. Through management of demand from customers, family business owners experienced learning to secure the loyalty of captive markets.

During data generation observations (5 and 6 January 2019) in family businesses in Rural A and Growth Point B, stock order schedules were in use wherein Participant RA3, during photo elicitation interviews, explained that:

We noted that the sale of bread is very high during weekends, as such our orders for bread have to increase on Fridays in order to match weekend demand. We also have to ensure availability of complementary products such as milk, eggs and margarine. We normally follow this schedule on the picture here in order to meet demand (Interview 2).

Participant RA3 revealed some kind of practical activities that entailed learning by doing as he outlined preparation of order schedules that were meant to meet bread demand during weekends. The preparation of order schedules depicted a learning process in managing demand that could help in sustaining family-owned businesses. The ability to plan in advance in order to meet customer demand resonated well with one of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning principles which outlined that learning was a process of knowledge creation, as was the case in the preparation of the order schedules. The provision of accurate order schedules as a method of managing demand supported the findings by Ungerer and Mienie (2018) who indicate that cost management planning as an element of demand management can help sustain family-owned businesses. Involvement in the act of demand management on a daily basis thus constituted experiential learning for family business owners.

Furthermore, demand management was made easier where customers informed family business owners of the commodities they required. Given the critical shortage of some basic commodities in Zimbabwe at the time of this study, some family business owners pointed out that they visited

South Africa for orders. During these cross-border trips, some customers ended up requesting family business owners to bring specific goods. This made them learn the needs, tastes and preferences of some of their customers and measures to curb excess or unnecessary supply (Worku 2013) where goods would remain in the shops until their expiry date. Some participants at growth points as well as in the rural areas indicated that during festive seasons, they learnt unique strategies to manage excessive demand for scarce commodities. During face-to-face interviews, Participant GC5 pointed out that:

The idea is, always look for scarce commodities that are in demand. Stock must be customer driven not supplier driven. Pay attention to the customers' request, even if you had no plan to stock that commodity. The only way to sell a commodity is to sell a commodity that is required by a customer, we have to do some market research (Interview 1).

As family business owners managed customer demand, they experientially learnt to focus on customer tastes and preferences, supplying what customers requested. Participant GC5 experienced learning related to business ideas that could ensure implementation of effective demand management measures for business sustainability. This was in line with Kolb's (1984) abstract conceptualisation stage where efforts were made to address questions that could have emerged during the reflective observation stage. The view brought up by the participant was that business sustainability could be guaranteed if family businesses managed to focus on customer requests and stocked accordingly. The findings related to literature where Worku (2013: 74) pointed out that: "... *The ability to respond to queries from customers and the manner in which customers are treated are crucially important for viability in small businesses*".

Further to this, in an effort to manage demand for commodities such as bread, family business owners based in rural areas employed unique strategic measures, as noted below. During photo elicitation interviews, Participant RC6 highlighted that:

This photo was taken when customers were in a queue to receive their bread. This product has been scarce in November and beginning of December. Knowing that the commodity will be in high demand during Christmas time, we had to put a poster outside our shop asking those customers who would be interested in the product to have their names written down, pay for quantities required and then wait for 24 December to receive their bread. We had to make prior arrangements with bakeries and also pay them in advance (Interview 2).

Understanding and implementing advance payment in order to curtail excessive demand during the festive season were some of the critical measures employed by family business owners. From the above quotation, Participant RC6 indicated that advance orders were encouraged as a means to manage future bread demand levels. Learning involved an active form (Kolb's fourth stage) that attempted to avert shortages during the festive season. This suggested that family business owners based in some rural areas had their own unique challenges which they had to overcome in their own way in order to remain sustainable. These measures, from surveyed literature (Burns 2016), have been referred to as adaptation and survival strategies. From the data generation observations (28 December, 2018 and 5 January 2019), I noted that the demand for bread in the Zimbabwean economy was very high during the festive season. This could be because traditionally, bread was always seen as very important and special food item eaten at Christmas time. Past experiences of bread shortages forced family business owners to learn survival strategies that ensured effective demand management of bread. The management of demand by family business owners required situation-specific measures that would keep businesses afloat during harsh business environments.

Contrarily, some family business owners in urban areas employed different approaches to manage the excessive demand for bread. Participant UA2 explained during photo elicitation interviews that:

These customers you see on the picture are scrambling for bread. It was a day before Christmas and everybody was looking for bread. In order to manage demand in such situations, I learnt that we had to ration the quantities for each customer. We allowed a maximum of two loaves per customer on this particular day. However, on such occasions we face serious problems with street vendors who want to buy in bulk and sell the bread at a higher price outside. Because people would be in need of bread, they just buy from the street vendors (Interview 2).

The situation portrayed by the above quotation, where the business owner learnt to manage the high demand for bread through quantity rationing, relates to Kolb's (1984) principles of ELT which view learning as problem-based. The family business owner had to take initiatives to come up with solutions that addressed the challenges that were being confronted. Skirmishes which occurred in the business unit, where customers had to scramble for bread, could have been an indication of poor initial demand management strategies that could result in possible

breakages and theft. Demand management challenges were viewed by Adebajo (2009) as the result of inaccurate forecasting which could have a negative impact on supply chain efficiency. However, such business challenges provided a learning curve as the family business owner consciously engaged in reflective observation (Kolb's second stage), thereby coming up with mitigation measures. Despite the location of a family-owned business, learning by doing took place as family business owners ended up learning and employing their own demand management strategies. This supported surveyed literature where Le Clus (2011) argues that experiential learning has the potential to be shaped by workplace culture where the quality of learning relies on the nature of activities engaged in.

The discussion above illustrated that the management of demand required practical involvement and situation-specific strategies. Various measures such as advance payments for desired products as well as product rationing were a result of the experiential learning process that was reported throughout the three research settings. The way that demand was managed by the family business owners in the rural areas portrayed a strong and sustainable relationship between family business owners and their customers, as opposed to that in the urban markets.

The next section discusses the experiential learning gained through financial management.

Experiential Learning through Financial Management

The practical financial activities that family business owners were involved in on a daily basis enabled them to experientially learn over a long period of time. Laux (2013) views financial management as a process involving planning, organising, directing and controlling the financial activities, such as the procurement and utilisation of the funds of the enterprise. It was therefore a means of applying general management principles to the financial resources of the enterprise. Thus, activities such as saving money to build capital, keeping books of accounts on income and expenditure, managing bank loans and cash budgets were some of the engagements that emerged from the research participants. These activities emerged from family business owners located in all three research settings: rural areas, growth points and urban areas. Financial management, according to Prachi (2015), is also seen as including long-term investments, acquisition of capital for the business, as well as managing within budget the day-to-day operations of the family-owned business. The concept of financial management in this study was extended to all activities that involved generating and spending money for family business sustainability.

The experiential learning process for some family business owners in this study started as they carried out activities to raise capital. The initial capital, referred to as initial funding for

start-up firms by Honjo (2021) that was raised by the family business owners enabled investments such as the construction of business buildings, the purchase of assets like motor vehicles and equipment, as well as purchasing initial stock. Data generated from the face-to-face and photo elicitation interviews, as well as from the observations, showed that family business owners learnt through undertaking a lot of activities in order to come up with adequate initial capital for meaningful business investments. Participant UB4 narrated how he accumulated initial capital during the face-to-face interviews:

When I resigned from teaching I bought three cattle which I had to resell at an abattoir in this town. I was already having a dream to get into the business of buying and selling cattle. I learnt to travel long distances from district to district, village to village in search of subsistence farmers who would be willing to sell their cattle, so that I go and resell at a profit. About two years later, I realised that it was time to rent a shop in the suburbs and start selling meat from my own butchery, saving as much as possible until I had enough money to secure a piece of land from the local authority and built this complex you see today (Interview 1).

From the above narration, Participant UB4 experienced learning around running a business by getting involved in financial activities that helped him to raise and save money; enough capital to kick-start the operations of a formal business. Honjo (2021), from consulted literature from the Japanese context, found that start-up firms rely on limited sources of financing, thereby compromising the personal wealth of founders. However, the involvement of Participant UB4 in practical activities enhanced his chances of raising adequate initial capital. This concrete experience (Kolb's first stage) was gained by the family business owner through his active participation in all income generating activities. Thus, the family business owner got into this business through participatory activities as he involved himself in all of the necessary initial activities that led to the accumulation of adequate capital. The finding related to literature where Bignotti and Roux (2020) assert that business sustainability is dependent on entrepreneurial learning and experience which entails the capacity to raise adequate capital and setting worthwhile business plans, as was the case with Participant UB4. It could therefore be concluded from this finding that the experiential learning process for family business owners required critical financial planning, as well as implementation of the plans.

The pride that resulted from the successful raising of the initial money to start a business venture was seen on some inscriptions on the business buildings, as noted in my Researcher's Diary (26 December 2018). Most family business owners had motivational inscriptions on their shop

buildings, such as *Kufuma ishungu* (literally meaning: *wealth comes from determination*) and *Kumboedza* (literally meaning: *giving it a try*). Such inscriptions generally portrayed a learning process that they had experienced during the initial activities of raising and saving capital. The founder worked hard, knowing that that was the only source of family income. This concurred with Laaksonen et al. (2015) notion that great ventures are founded out of passion.

Additional learning experiences through activities that involved raising initial capital were raised by Participant GB3 during photo elicitation interviews:

Every day when I come to this business, the inscription on the building showing the name of my business is the picture I see first, it is an important symbol of identity. It reminds me of my financial commitments such as learning to save the little I had that led a strong capital base. It makes me reflect on all the activities that I did in order to raise enough money for the construction of this building. We always maintain the same budgetary control measures to avoid bankruptcy (Interview 2).

The above quotation showed that the activities through which the participant experientially learnt how to manage the finances helped in sustaining the business by avoiding bankruptcy. However, Pedro (2019) argues that trade credit insurance could be a major shield against bankruptcy. Based on experiences that yielded positive results, the participant highlighted the need to maintain the same financial control measures. The finding was aligned to the Behavioural Learning Theories on which Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory was grounded, where views that learning was a result of reinforcements seemed to hold true for some family business owners in this study.

Learning and implementation of financial management practices that produced positive results such as high profits instigated a repeat of the same strategies by the family business owners. This was also consistent with Skinner's operant conditioning, a situation where behaviour is modified through use of rewards and punishments. The motivation to maintain the same budgetary control measures by Participant GB3 also emerged in literature where Hamilton (2011) revealed the tendency of family business owners to remain in business by implementing profit making strategies. It therefore emerged from my study that personal motivation on the part of family business owners was critical for business longevity.

Contrary to the views from Participant GB3 above, my observations (25 January 2019) at one business site (Rural C) revealed sustainability challenges. I noted that the initial efforts put in by the founding members of a family business during capitalisation seemed difficult to sustain,

either by the founders themselves or by their heirs as sights of dilapidated buildings, obsolete machinery and car wrecks, all without maintenance or replacement, were a common sight at this business site. Schwass (2013) from consulted literature found out that business operations are characterised by periods of gains and pains, and as a result, family businesses tend to focus more on short term profit motives at the expense of maintaining capital assets. In this situation, poor financial management could have been the reason as budgeting and allocation of financial resources seemed to have been lacking. This was consistent with surveyed literature (Maphosa, 1999) which stated that financial mismanagement contributed more to the failure in transition from one generation to the next.

Further challenges of maintaining capital infrastructure were raised by two other participants in the rural context. During photo elicitation interviews, research Participant RA1 displayed photographs of non-functioning fixed assets that included a paraffin refrigerator, a broken solar panel, and a non-running Mazda B50, and had this to say:

When we started this business, we had the financial capacity from long-term personal savings to acquire fixed assets. But with time I realised that it was difficult to budget for purchases of more fixed assets or even to maintain the old assets which you see on this picture. Most of our income goes towards stock and operational expenses (Interview 2).

While family business owners experientially learnt through activities that involved raising initial capital, challenges emerged later with regard to maintaining capital flow. The situation where family business owners failed to maintain and/or repair their fixed assets on a continual basis was common in most family business units. Family business owners tended to focus more on operational and inventory expenses against the creation of fixed assets which could enhance sustainability. Literature Schwass (2013) indicates that family business owners can be wealth creators in the short run, but in the long run, they turn out to become wealth consumers. The experiential learning gained by family business owners regarding their inability to sustain capital flow was also a learning process which Cherdchai (2020) considered as critical knowledge to transfer from one generation to the next. This was also in support of the views of Diwas et al. (2013) who purport that learning occurs from the past failures of others. Despite having experientially learnt how to raise initial capital, it emerged from this study that family business owners could not sustain the operational costs of running their businesses.

In addition to acquisition of initial capital, it also emerged from this study that family business

owners experientially learnt through carrying out budgetary activities such as saving and re-investing in different business activities that resulted in sound financial management. Two family business owners expressed how modestly and informally their businesses had started, suggesting long-term financial management. Participants GB4 and RB5 had similar views about their humble beginnings. During face-to-face interviews, Participant RB5 had this to say:

At first we were selling green mealies by the roadside, then tomatoes and vegetables at the market place. We later moved to the sale of foreign currency on the black market. From all these activities, I learnt to save and we would save and budget the money until we decided to invest into this formal business (Interview 1).

Participant GB4 also added:

I learnt from doing many things. We started off selling dried fish from door-to-door, saving the little money that we received. Then we shifted to selling in a tuck-shop on a tight budget where we offered different stock items. Then when we had saved enough money we realised it was time to invest in this formal business (Interview 1)

From the two quotations above, budgetary measures emerged as critical experiential learning processes that family business owners went through. Ndala and Pelser (2019) found out that sound budgetary plans and adequate debt financing enhanced business sustainability. The ability to take budgetary initiatives was commensurate with Kolb's (1984) first stage on concrete experiences, where learning occurred as the family business owners involved themselves in the budgetary activities that resulted in adequate savings. From the Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), learning takes place through active participation, which was reflected in the above quotations. Preparation of budgets as an element of financial management was apparently a critical learning process for family business owners that may have enhanced business sustainability.

With respect to family business owners in urban areas that were operating large scale supermarkets, it was noted that they had more formal sources of capital as compared to their counterparts in the rural areas and growth points. This emerged from the face-to-face interviews as well as from the data generation observations.

Participant UA1, owning a family business in the urban area, pointed out that:

This business started in the 1950s as a small over-the-counter shop when my late father resigned from teaching. In order to for us to operate this supermarket in an urban area, we learnt that we needed more capital and the option was through bank loans. Though a lot of paper work was needed as well as collateral security, we discovered that it was worthwhile to have the loan otherwise we would never have reached this level of business operation. We now have to meet loan repayments on a monthly basis (Interview 1).

The experiential learning process that emerged from the above quotation involved activities relating to managing of bank loans as a key element of financial management. Acquisition of financial support in the form of bank loans enabled the urban family business owners to manage their businesses from a sound financial base. This concurred with the study by Acquaaah (2012) carried out in Ghana where he found out that networking relationships with external stakeholders such as banking institutions constitute a critical learning process that has the potential to enhance business sustainability. The views of Acquaaah (2012) are supported by Ngorora and Mago (2018) who call for government intervention measures to financially accommodate rural entrepreneurs who in most cases do not have collateral security. It therefore emerged from this study that financial support from banking institutions was necessary for the survival of family-owned businesses.

Evidence of experiential learning through implementation of financial discipline also emerged from a participant based at a growth point. Financial discipline, which entails investing and saving some income, is an indispensable condition which will avail funds to address unforeseen situations (Honjo 2021). The learning process that entailed budgetary activities was raised by Participant GA1 during face-to-face interviews, when he said:

I have realised that in business we need financial discipline. I used to spend money which we received in business without any planning but I later discovered, because of losses, that business money needs planning or budgeting, which I now practice on a daily basis (Interview 1).

The process of reflective observation (Kolb's [1984] second stage) highlighted in the quotation above showed that lack of financial management knowledge implementable through sound budgetary measures negatively impacted on the initial operations of Participant GA1's business. The quotation showed that when family business owners initially got into business, there were

some business conventions that they were not aware of. This complemented the ideas of Diwas et al. (2013) who pointed out that failure could be an important source of learning. With time and through learning and re-learning by doing discussed earlier, family business owners apparently learnt a lot of critical business procedures in financial management, such as budgeting. The budgetary skills experientially acquired by family business owners presented an effective financial planning and management process, thereby enhancing business sustainability.

Similar sentiments were echoed by Participant RA1 during the face-to-face interviews:

Every day, new expenses crop up in this business and learning takes place on a daily basis. If we don't monitor and control these expenses we may end up in serious financial problems. Through our involvement, one has to learn how to budget in order to cater for possible expenses, though we sometimes learn through trial and error (Interview 1).

The budgetary processes that were highlighted by Participant RA1 portrayed learning by doing, which enhanced financial management procedures. Experiential learning for the family business owner emerged as a continuous process which was acquired through participation. This was a direct fit in the Experiential Learning Theory (Bandura 1977) on which this study was grounded, where learning is considered as a continuous process that is dependent on experience. This further concurred with sourced literature where Ungerer and Mienie (2018), in a study carried out in South Africa, found out that consistent financial management has long lasting positive effects on the operations of family-owned businesses. From the above sentiments, what emerged from family business owners at growth points and in rural areas was that budgeting was a vital part of financial management which could minimise unplanned expenses, and this could ultimately contribute to business sustainability. Budgeting could be a critical measure in family-owned business as a mitigation strategy against unnecessary expenditure.

Face-to-face interviews also revealed that most of the family business owners located in the three research settings had no initial formal financial management training to help them run their businesses professionally. This was in line with the views of Sandada and Mangwandi (2015), who lament the absence of managerial skills with family business owners. However, through participatory and observational learning, family business owners engaged in processes that involved budgeting that helped to sustain their businesses.

However, their knowledge on the preparation of financial statements remained minimal and basic, with high chances of compromising the business growth and sustainability. This finding

concluded with sourced literature from Shamin and Yanping (2018: 381):

... Small firm owners often are not well equipped in efficient use of financial statements. Therefore, even reliable and timely prepared financial statements are not enough, when owners do not have the ability to use and interpret them accurately.

Ability to determine a business' financial statements could enhance business sustainability as appropriate financial management would guide decisions and corrective measures that were likely to be implemented in accordance with financial reports. Family business owners who had no background knowledge of financial management seemingly acquired the basic critical skills through experiential learning. Participant GA1 in a family business located at a growth point also highlighted how his involvement in business operations exposed him to learning in managing finances:

When I joined this business, I had no commercial background at all. At university I studied History and Home Languages, which had nothing to do with business management. Through my involvement in this business, I learnt how fellow businessmen would record their purchase and sales coming up with profit. This is how I learnt about preparation of books of accounts. I now consider myself semi-skilled in that regard since I can prepare the financial statements for this family business (Interview 1).

Learning that involved the recording of purchases and sales in the family business apparently opened opportunities for Participant GA1 to acquire financial management skills that kept his business afloat. Learning through networking was crucial in this instance. This was in support of literature where the views of Acquah (2012) on networking relationships seemed to hold for people without any business management background. The family business owner experienced learning around how to prepare books of accounts through observation and by doing the actual preparation of the books of accounts. According to Yamey (2012), these accounts record dealings of the firm with individuals where such measures may help to identify bad and doubtful debtors so that business owners can take measures for business sustainability. The ability to observe how business models – the fellow businessmen performed their duties was supported by Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory where influential people in society acted as models to be observed and imitated. From the above quotation, the implication was that one did not need to have a financial management background to become a successful entrepreneur, as learning took place through the support of business colleagues and other family members, and by observing and participating.

From the above discussion, it emerged that family business owners across all research contexts experienced learning by doing. Participants indicated that their learning was a result of observing others followed by participation in the various business activities. With regard to experiential learning through stock control, different approaches were adopted by the family business owners in urban areas and at growth points as opposed to those in the rural areas whose choices were limited. Research participants in the urban and growth point settings had electricity and related accessories which allowed them to use computerised stock control systems which were unavailable in the rural setting. These were fast and reliable approaches which made learning by doing simpler. In rural areas, lack of electrical and other necessary infrastructure (Ngorora and Mago 2018) resulted in the application of manual stock taking measures. Manual approaches were generally slow and therefore time consuming and there could be errors and omissions.

Experiential learning processes that entailed the management of bank loans could not be experienced by family business owners in the rural setting as collateral was not available for them to secure loans. This created a rift between the family business owners in the different research settings. However, it could not be confirmed in this study whether such differences implied that family businesses in urban areas would survive longer in comparison to their counterparts in the rural areas.

Learning processes that involved budgetary control measures were experienced by research participants in all three research settings. It could be concluded that learning by doing emerged in this study as a critical space for learning that enhanced family business sustainability. These findings had a bearing on the ELT and SLT on which this study was grounded. Experiential learning through stock control, demand management and financial management occurred among all of the research participants in this study. The findings also supported reviewed literature (McLeod, 2016 and Le Clus 2011) which indicated that observational and participatory learning were critical for family business owners. It could therefore be concluded that family business owners learned by doing, a process which entailed various activities.

The second theme that emerged from the responses on the nature of the experiential learning of the family business owners and its influence on business sustainability is discussed in the next section.

Experiential Learning through Reflection

Mukeredzi (2015) indicates that reflection is more than merely thinking about one's experiences. It is a *purposeful* act that begins with a problem context or episode, defines/redefines the problem,

seeks possible solutions, experiments with solutions, and finally evaluates the results. The ability to reflect on previous encounters such as misunderstandings with a customer, or advice from suppliers enabled family business owners to experientially learn as they could then handle future related situations. In order to reflect upon their experiences, the research participants indicated that doing the actual business activities was paramount. Learning and re-learning took place as family business owners reflected upon practice, reflected in practice and engaged in reflexivity. Experiential learning through reflection is discussed under three sub-themes: learning through reflection in practice, reflection on practice and learning through reflexion. These are addressed in turn below.

Experiential Learning through Reflection in Practice

According to Shutte (2018), reflection in practice is an intrinsic aspect of human practices seeking to evaluate performance according to a built-in standard that has been uncovered. In accordance with the Experiential Learning Theory, reflection in practice is therefore a situation whereby during concrete experience (Kolb 1984), immediate thinking is followed by immediate response, and action is taken to avert an unintended outcome or to promote a desired result. The cognitive processes of thinking and realising that action has to be taken constitute experiential learning. As noted above, experience on its own does not bring about learning for the family business owner, but reflective action on the experience gives rise to learning (Mukeredzi, 2019). This was noted by a number of participants, including Participant GA1 who, during face-to-face interviews indicated that:

On a daily basis, we observe and act on issues that take place to ensure that we do not lose customers. For example, when I see that a customer is struggling to find an item in this supermarket, say between the shelves, I just go and assist. Customers appreciate such assistance a lot (Interview 1).

Experiential learning through reflection in practice emerged where a family business owner took immediate action to address or avert the occurrence of an unexpected outcome. Taking immediate action while customers were still in the experience could be viewed as a critical stage of the learning process, initiated by reflection in practice. This relates to Kolb's (1984) second stage of reflective observation, where the learner intuitively reviews what has been encountered. In this case the business owner reflected during the experience. The action taken by the family business owner to assist a customer emanated from reflection in practice - reflective thinking which according to Mukeredzi (2019) promotes active learning, thereby encouraging individuals

to be responsible for their own learning. Taking immediate action for the benefit of customers creates a positive business image that may enhance business sustainability.

During data generation observations (15 and 16 December 2018) I noted that immediate response actions took place during the running of a family business, as observed in the following business units:

UB4: I observed family business owner taking immediate action to address a customer who was emotionally complaining about an employee who presumably was putting bones only in the two kilograms of meat being bought.

UA2: I also observed that after buying a tricycle, a customer was seen struggling to assemble it outside the shop (Do it yourself product). A shop assistant was instructed to go and assist the customer by Participant UA2.

The above observations illustrated how family business owners experientially learnt through reflection in practice whenever customers needed assistance. This was in tandem with Kolb's (1984) stage on concrete experiences followed by a reflective observation stage as Participant UA2 observed a customer struggling to fix a *do-it-yourself* product and immediately acted. This was consistent with literature where Le Clus (2011: 361) opined that: "*Informal learning draws attention to the learning that takes place in the spaces surrounding people, activities and events in the workplace*". Consequently, reflection in practice instigated immediate action by the family business owner during the experience. As customers get assisted in a shop, they find good reasons to frequent the same shop. Repeat purchases may lead to customer loyalty, which may help in the survival of family-owned businesses. This is consistent with Skinner's Operant Conditioning Theory (also referred to as instrumental conditioning) where the strength of one's behaviour is modified by reinforcement or punishment (McLeod 2016). From this study it could be inferred that customers generally required some form of mechanism that lured them towards a particular business unit in order to get them to frequent the same shop.

Similar sentiments in which reflection in practice was experienced by family business owners were raised during face-to-face interviews by Participant RA3:

Every time that I come to work, I have encountered different business requests from customers, they have different expectations and many unexpected complaints. I have to take immediate action in order to retain customers, otherwise they would migrate to our competitors (Interview 1).

Participant RA3 revealed how she experienced learning through reflection in practice as she highlighted situations where she took immediate action to address the concerns of customers. In accordance with the views of Mukeredzi (2019) on reflection in practice, Participant RA3 got involved in the learning encounter and took charge of her own learning. This was in line with Kolb's (1984) reflective observation stage which portrayed the emotional response of the individual participant. What emerged here was that family business owners would go through daily experiences from which experiential learning occurred as they reflected and acted immediately. Situations in which customers complained required immediate action in order to protect the image of the family business. This was also in concurrence with literature surveyed where Gibbs (1988) noted that:

"... It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience, it may quickly be forgotten or its learning potential lost. It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated. And it is generalisations which enable new situations to be tackled effectively" (Gibbs 1988: 14).

To remain sustainable family business owners had to reflect in practice and learn, then take immediate corrective measures where necessary to keep their customers. Learning emanated from reflection in practice as the family business owners learnt from their own interactions with customers and acted on their observations immediately to meet the intended goals.

Experience and reflection in practice have the capacity to change behaviour, through uncovering of values embedded in human beings (Shutte, 2018). This was noted by Participant UA2 whose business was located in the urban area, when she said:

Oooh yes, one has to reflect, and learn because at times you confront new or challenging situations, like when you got in here, you saw a customer who was shouting at the line manager after buying and collecting a malfunctioning electrical gadget. After seeing the unpleasant altercation, I had to intervene immediately.
(Interview 1).

Similar sentiments on reflection in practice were raised by Participant UA2. The ability to take immediate action that could avert tension and conflict portrayed reflective action. This was in line with Kolb's (1984) reflective observation stage where Participant UA2 had to shift from just watching the altercation and decided to take mitigating action. The family business owner reflected in practice about experience and quickly interacted with a customer who was emotional about issues to do with service delivery. Irrespective of the magnitude of the problem, the family

business owner had to show concern and give the necessary attention. Behavioural change occurred as the family business owner reflected, became sensitive and attentive to the customer's concerns, realised what had to be done, and took action. According to Cheng (2015) learning is a product of new experiences that may affect behaviour change. It seemed therefore that customers and many other stakeholders initiated and caused behavioural change in family business owners. This was in line with Kolb's (1984) learning principle that viewed learning as a holistic process of adaptation to the world through behaviour change. It could be concluded that as family business owners encountered new experiences, they reflected on the experience observed and then took immediate action to enhance business sustainability.

It can be concluded that experiential learning through reflection in practice occurred in all family business owners located in the three research settings. Immediate action that was being taken as a rectifying measure during business transactions was critical for the survival of the family-owned businesses. It also emerged that reflection in practice could lead to behavioural changes as family business owners would take immediate mitigation measures to address conflicts and other business situations. The responses relating to the nature of the experiential learning of the family business owners showed that the ability to reflect in practice by family business owners was essential and necessary for enhancing business sustainability.

The next section discusses experiential learning through reflection on practice.

Experiential Learning through Reflection on Practice

Reflection on practice is defined as reflection that emerges after an experience, so as to engage in a process of continuous learning (Muir and Beswick 2007). Experiential learning for family business owners commenced with being subjected to a business experience, followed by reflection on that experience. One had to be in a position to rewind and pick up on scenarios that transpired previously to determine what could be done in future to improve or uphold the performance. As reflection took place, family business owners tended to answer subconsciously to the reflective questions, such as those generated by Mukeredzi (2015) and indicated below: *"What happened? How did the act go? What did I experience? ... Why did things happen that way?"* (Mukeredzi 2015: 129). As the family business owner visualised and interrogated their past experiences, their thought-processes generated solutions as to how things could be done better in the future. This enhanced learning.

All of the participants drawn from the three research contexts indicated that they reflected on their past experiences in order to improve on how they ran their businesses. This was confirmed

during face-to-face interviews by Participant UA1, when he pointed out that:

Reflecting on past occurrences is natural because when you execute new business activities you tend to make blunders and you need to sit down as a family, reflect, learn and correct. That is what we do on a daily basis (Interview 1).

As family business owners got involved in the day-to-day running of their businesses, they regularly engaged themselves in collaborative reflection on previous interactions and transactions. It was therefore through reflection on experiences that learning took place (Masinga 2012), with them asking what could have been done differently and then adopting the corrective measures to improve the situation in the future, as well as by upholding the good performance of the family business to enhance business survival. This was in line with literature surveyed where Mukeredzi (2015: 129) pointed out that, “... *Learning is derived more from reflecting on the experience than from the experience itself....*” The learning process for family business owners did not end up with their submergence into a set of experiences. The interaction with customers and other stakeholders presented opportunities for reflection on practice to take place. It was from this reflection on experiences that experiential learning emanated for family business owners.

Experiential learning through reflection on practice may lead to strategic planning based on past experience. Strategic planning is a process of directing and making decisions on how to allocate the resources to pursue the strategy (Blatstein 2012). This process leads to a continuous process where learning and re-learning take place through such experiences. In response to interview questions on the nature of the experiential learning of family business owners, Participant GB4 based at a growth point mentioned that:

In most cases we reflect as a family on what would have happened during the day such as quantities of our sales and income received and the reasons thereof. This puts us in a position where we have to find the best way forward, enabling informed planning for future implementation (Interview 1).

From the response, experiential learning was experienced through reflection on experiences. Reflection on practice mentioned by Participant GB4 as a learning process led to decision making and strategy implementation. The ability of the participant to come up with informed planning decisions fitted well into Kolb's (1984) Stage 2- Stage 4 continuum where the experience was transformed into something meaningful and useful. As family business owners analysed daily summaries of their sales, they became aware and got into a position where they could interpret business trends. Such knowledge could enhance business sustainability as

strategy implementation was being done collaboratively.

Similar sentiments on reflection on experience leading to strategy formulation, followed by a learning process, were also raised by Participant UB5 who pointed out:

Yes we do reflect on a daily basis as a family. We have to think about what transpired during the day; like misunderstandings with our customers, what we learn from it and how we should avoid such things in the future. There is need for a plan of action that can be implemented to ensure that our business remains viable. We also reflect on positive developments that we need to maintain for the future (Interview 1).

Daily reflections, as cited by the participant, enabled the family business owners to learn and put immediate corrective measures in place for subsequent activities before issues degenerated into irredeemable business challenges. In this case, as Mukeredzi (2018) notes, they would have been answering the question ‘what could have been done differently?’ The finding entailed Kolb’s (1984) learning style of assimilation or learning by addition to existing knowledge that combined reflective observation and abstract conceptualisation. Family business owners continuously experienced learning from reflection on both the positive and negative experiences that they went through on a daily basis. Mukeredzi (2015) further noted that more learning through reflection occurred through reflecting on failed lessons than on successful ones. It also emerged that collaborative reflections were critical for family business owners who ended up formalising their experiences by holding briefing sessions occasionally. Collaboration reflection is more than simply meeting with others, but requires providing colleagues with the opportunity to examine, critique, and support one another in a safe and supportive environment. The ability to reflect on the past and then plan for the future has been referred to as diligent work ethic which enhances the continuity and viability of family-owned businesses (Jadwat, 2016). Reflection on experience has to be followed by strategic planning for the survival of the family-owned businesses.

In addition to the responses of Participant GB4 above, UA3 pointed out that:

Yes, we do reflect on and learn from previous experiences. As a collective team we always start our new day with briefings on what would have transpired on the previous day in order to update one another. This has helped a lot as family members and employees bring in important observations on which we deliberate and collectively agree on the way forward. Group discussions have always resulted in acceptable decisions (Interview 1).

From the above quotation, experiential learning through reflection on practice took place

through collaborative actions. Participant UA3 indicated that collaborative reflection sessions brought about collective learning and agreements, followed by acceptable decision making for future implementation. Such collaborations in decision making and strategy formulation were likely to have enhanced business sustainability as collaborative decisions promoted ownership. While collaborative reflections enabled experiential learning, this seemed to contradict Kolb's (1984) theory which focused on individual learning. As noted in Chapter Three of this thesis, Experiential Learning Theory is an individualistic learning process. However, learning through collaborative reflections was consistent with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory where family business owners had to learn with and from one another. The opportunity created by employees and management to deliberate on observations ensured capturing of critical issues as family members were involved in the day-to-day running of their business. Collaborative reflections that led to collective learning and decision making provided an environment in which family business owners came up with business sustainability strategies. The vital strength of collaborative reflection in this study was strengthening family ownership of and loyalty to the strategies and/or resolutions to enhance their successful delivery (Mukeredzi 2015).

Another form of learning through reflection on practice related to keeping hold of one's customers. Participant RB4 during photo elicitation interviews had this to say:

On this picture you can see some of our customers watching a Premier League soccer match. We use solar powered batteries for this television set since we do not have electricity here. Our customers used to complain a lot whenever the battery became flat. Some of these patrons would even leave our bottle store in protest. As a business we realised that, we ended up buying a diesel generator to supplement solar power in order to avoid losing customers to our competitors. The most important thing is to learn how to keep a tight grip on your customers (Interview 2)

From the participant's reflection on past experience, customer loyalty was being negatively affected by poor service delivery and where there is competition, customers easily switched to the better supplier. Viewed against the theory lens (Bandura 1977), the family business owner perceived rewards as outweighing the perceived costs. Loss of customers could easily result in reduced sales which could also negatively impact on family business sustainability. Sourced literature (Ngorora and Mago 2018) indicates that the unavailability of key resources in small-scale businesses in rural areas negatively affects the viability of such business ventures. From the Researcher's Diary (5 January 2019) two family business owners in rural areas had taken initiatives to counter electricity problems by installing solar power systems, and used fuel

generators as well as gas and paraffin refrigerators. As family business owners reflected on these experiences, they experientially gained some learning and came up with decisions to implement corrective and contingent measures to overcome contextual challenges.

In addition to carrying out business initiatives as a form of experiential learning process for family business owners, Participant GA1 explained how they reflected on and learnt from their own mistakes:

There are so many decisions that we make, only to find in the future that there is need for adjustments or modifications. You can see on this photo that a break-in was done into this shop through the ceiling. A few months back we had agreed not to seek services of night-guards since most shops around us are guarded by private securities. We wanted to take advantage of these guards. Surprisingly one day we found out that thieves came and stole from our shop only. We realised we had no one to ask. We just resolved as a family to hire services from a private security company (Interview 2).

The family business owner experientially learnt through reflections on practice as he took note of the family's past mistakes. Participant GA1 found that as a family they misjudged their decision not to engage the services of a private security firm. Madsen and Desai (2010) and Mukeredzi (2015) concur that learning from one's mistakes has stronger effects than learning from success. The finding supported the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) which purports that people responded to behaviours in line with their corrective practice.

As noted from the above discussion, family business owners across all research settings experientially learned through reflection on their experiences. Findings revealed that reflection on practice required further action which entailed coming up with strategic plans, as well as implementation of the desired plans, thereby improving the situation or upholding their good performance. The learning process entailed an assessment of past experiences, resulting in the selection of an appropriate course of action that was dependent on available resources. This made it possible for family business owners to handle the family-owned business in a manner that would enhance the sustainability of the business.

The next aspect of experiential learning through reflection involved learning through reflexivity.

Experiential Learning through Reflexivity

Responses from participants across all the research settings suggested that family business owners also experienced experiential learning through reflexivity that could have emanated from the view

of self-studying, self-introspection, and learning from looking ‘*inside one-self*’ (Mukeredzi 2019). Participants UA1, UC6 and RA3 had similar views to Participant RA1 who asserted that:

I have been in this business for more than thirty years now. Every day I always ponder and ask myself how best I can serve my customers, what I can do to improve. Whenever customers pass my business unit and buy in the next shop, I always ask myself, “but why” what did I do wrong (Interview 1).

The above quotation suggested that the family business owner experientially learnt through reflexivity as he undertook self-introspection on the behaviours of customers. The business owner had to intuitively re-play the action, think, reflect and learn from past encounters (Mukeredzi 2015). The cognitive processes that took place when family business owners reflected on experience related to Gibbs’ reflective cycle, as cited by Dye (2011).

Research Participant RA1 reflected on his own experiences and contributions to the experiences, and visualised what actually transpired in the past event or business scenario. Such reflexion on experiences triggered questions regarding how it happened, why it happened, what his contributions were, how he felt and what could have been done differently.

Reflexivity as a source of experiential learning may help in shaping one’s integrity, a concept that is dealt with in Chapter Seven. In addition to learning through reflexion, some family business owners tried to maintain a positive business image with the potential of attracting customers which would enhance business sustainability as sales would probably increase.

Furthermore, the unstable Zimbabwean business environment presented situations in which the nature of experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability could be viewed from individual perspectives. This was displayed by Participant UA2 during face-to-face interviews:

The current macro-economic environment in Zimbabwe is making it very difficult for us to come up with ethical decisions as we end up using unorthodox methods to ensure business sustainability. During the beginning of this month, we had serious disagreements as family members on decisions to buy fuel from the black market. The product is in critical shortage in the country but readily available on the black market. I was one of the family members who strongly rejected this idea but kept asking myself whether I was doing right. But as of now, our delivery vans are grounded and we are hiring trucks (which are getting fuel from the black market) to ferry our commodities

from Messina, South Africa (Interview 1).

Self-evaluation emerged as a critical phase in experiential learning through reflexivity where the family business owner made self-interrogation of why things happened the way they did and the part they played. The finding was consistent with Kolb's (1984) second stage of the Experiential Learning Theory where the participant reflected on what could have been done differently, as in the example of the fuel decision cited above. While buying fuel on the black market was illegal, most family business owners did it clandestinely, as observed and reflected in my Researcher's Diary (24 November 2018). Black markets surfaced whenever the official market had become dysfunctional (Smith 2020) and they provided whatever services or products that the official market had failed to supply (Thomas 2019). While experiential learning through reflexivity occurred as the family business owners reflected on what their own contributions were, including what could have been done wrong, the decisions of the family business owners as noted in the above quotation had negative impacts on business sustainability. Findings further indicated that as family business owners engaged in reflexion, their choices or decisions impacted on the operations of the family business.

However, experiential learning through reflexivity seemed to be compromised by cultural values and norms in most family businesses. Research participants across all the research contexts raised similar sentiments with regard to the impact of family hierarchical positions on the decision-making processes. Participant RB5 raised issues on the prevalence of founder dominance, which negatively affected free decision making:

As the business grows, I think the biggest challenge is on decision making. We sometimes agree, or should I say seem to have agreed on a particular course of action. I keep asking myself is this right but when it comes to implementation or consequences of that decision, some people do not want to own up. People start to act differently or avoid questioning one another. For example, in this company as a daughter-in-law, I find it difficult to question the options taken by my father-in-law but ask myself what should I do, what did I do wrong (Interview 1).

From the response above experiential learning through reflexivity was seemingly compromised by cultural values, practices and ties, where adults were accorded respect and could not be questioned. This finding supported surveyed literature where (Shamim and Yanping 2018) asserted that family hierarchical power could breed discontent in the family business that would compromise business sustainability. From the Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb 1984), the

process of learning required the resolution of conflicts whereby family members needed a platform in which individual contributions would be recognised, irrespective of family roles. It emerged from this study that the cultural values of the family system affected the personal judgements and views of individual family members in the business system.

The impact of family relationships as a deterrent to effective learning through reflexivity was also noted in my Researcher's Diary (10 December 2018), where a daughter-in-law was seen kneeling down according to cultural norms as she was talking to the father-in-law. The said daughter-in-law was the Human Resource Manager in the family business, but given that the daughter-in-law could not look in the face of the father-in-law, as per custom, it was difficult for the former to challenge the decisions of the latter. The impact of cultural values and norms in family businesses seemed to be very high as noted by Fang et al. (2012: 18) that: "*Family norms often start to bloom from the early-age education of children and develop through the daily interactions among family members*". As a result, the principles of the business system were superseded by family ties. The individual choices and inputs of some family members in the family-owned business were seemingly disregarded. It could be concluded that business sustainability could be dependent on cultural values and norms.

The above discussion has shown that experiential learning through reflexivity occurred within family-owned businesses. Research participants from different research contexts showed that they regularly subjected themselves to reflexion as part of their learning process. Key issues such decision making, alternative views and organisational hierarchy prompted reflexivity in family-owned businesses. Whilst this form of learning was experienced by all of the family business owners across the three research settings, it emerged that the dominance of founding and senior family members negatively affected the learning process of the upcoming family business owners, which could have been impacting negatively on business sustainability. Family business owners in the rural settings seemed to have been affected more, as cultural values and norms played a significant role in the rural communities. Findings also indicated that experiential learning through reflexivity was strongly compromised by economic instability in Zimbabwe during the period of this study, as family business owners' efforts to sustain their businesses were hindered by unstable economic variables such as the cash crisis, and shortages of basic commodities and fuel.

Entrepreneurial Knowledge Gained by Family Business Owners

Family business owners are self-driven entrepreneurs who according to Kana (2013) are hands-

on individuals who believe in themselves and are fearless. The responses of participants across all the three research contexts showed that running a family business required multiple skills and competencies that ensured execution of critical duties. The next section discusses the managerial knowledge gained by family business owners.

Managerial Knowledge Gained by Family Business Owners

The four basic management functions adopted from Henri Fayol's 1916 book are planning, organising; leading and controlling (Norman 2019). The ability by some family business owners to execute these management functions could be an indication of the significance of experiential learning as the majority had no formal training in business management when they started their businesses.

During face-to-face interviews Participant RA1 pointed out:

When my father passed on in 1993, I continued working for this company with my siblings. As the eldest son, I had to learn to plan and direct operations in this family business from a small-scale business until now as a private limited company. I just had to follow what my father was doing during his time. Without proper planning, this business could have collapsed after the death of the founding parent (Interview 1).

The above quotation suggested that Participant RA1 experientially gained managerial knowledge that had to do with organisational planning. In the absence of the founding member, Participant RA1 implemented what he had observed from the late parent. Business exposure and experience facilitated experiential learning for Participant RA1 to a level where he supposedly gained practical knowledge on the formulation and implementation of business strategic plans as well as directing business operations. The finding supported reviewed literature where Mwepu-Mbuya et al. (2016) argued that family business owners decided where to take a firm through application of leadership skills that ensured business survival. Such processes required knowledge of 'how to' plan for the survival of the family businesses. This was in line with the conceptual frameworks as highlighted by Lombardi (2007) that flexibility and innovativeness were critical for workplace learning. Participant RA1 experientially gained knowledge of planning and directing family business activities from small scale operations at the level of a formal private limited company. Despite having elementary education, it could be noted that some family business owners often experientially gained entrepreneurial knowledge related to organisational planning, thereby enhancing long term business survival.

The unstable Zimbabwean economic situation highlighted by Smith (2020) made business management very difficult for family business owners. However, in this study it emerged that some family business owners experientially acquired managerial knowledge under these harsh conditions. During face-to-face interviews, Participant GA2 pointed out:

Our business environment is very dynamic as we have realised, we experienced hyperinflation, critical commodity shortages and black markets, monetary reforms such as use of bearer cheques, bond notes, dollarisation and many other economic challenges. Many businesses closed shop but for us, survival required sound planning of physical and financial resources (Interview 1).

Similar views were highlighted by another Participant, RC7 during photo elicitation interviews who said:

I lost a lot of money in this business. This picture (pointing at a photo) shows notes of the currency which lost value whilst in my possession. When the economy was dollarised in 2009, I unwittingly got stuck with my cash and I still have the notes in my possession. However, this did not drive me out of business, because I realised that as a business we had to quickly reorganise our resources and plan for a breakthrough (Interview 2).

The two responses above apparently suggested that the family business owners experientially gained managerial knowledge on ‘how to’ plan and re-organise business resources in order to achieve organisational objectives. In spite of the difficult economic environment, the business’ survival was premised on foresight and adaptation (Deakins et al. 2016), which are critical components of planning and organising functions of business management. This agreed with literature where Norman (2019) pointed out that businesses have to identify, classify and assign activities for the achievement of organisational goals. Failure to quickly adapt to a changing business environment could lead to business losses as customers would switch to competitors or to the black market. This resonated well with the conceptual frameworks as alluded to by Lombardi (2007), where family business owners required judgemental skills in order to distinguish between reliable and unreliable information, thereby taking appropriate planning decisions. Knowledge on the execution of planning and organising business functions emerged as critical competencies for family business owners.

During data generation observations (5 January 2019) I noted that family business owners could not stick to a single schedule as they had to change plans and organise their business operations

on a daily basis. Interview appointments with Participant UA2 had to be postponed three times. At one time, the interview was cancelled whilst in progress and postponed as the participant had to rush for fuel (a national scarce commodity) which was being delivered at one of the filling stations in town. The participant argued that she could not be a victim of her own plans, and decided to reschedule the interview session. The unstable business environment in Zimbabwe (Smith 2020) led family business owners to experientially learn how to swiftly adapt and survive in ever-changing business situations. It couldn't be concluded from this observation that knowledge relating to planning and organising was dynamic as family business owners could reschedule and re-strategise, given non-routine and unpredictable business scenarios.

Furthermore, family business owners gained managerial knowledge that related to controlling organisational resources through strict financial measures. This was highlighted by two participants from the urban context, when Participant UA1 voiced that:

I think there are quite a number of things that I have personally gained like self-discipline with regards to how we spend money. Impulsive spending is not good at all. Business expenditure requires serious cash budgeting in order to ensure profitability (Interview 1).

And Participant UC7 had similar sentiments:

I have learnt that family members should not just take goods from the shop for personal use without paying otherwise we will go off-budget. If family members want something from the shop but do not have cash, they have to borrow and pay later (Interview 1).

The family business owners quoted above gained entrepreneurial knowledge on how to control financial resources through implementation of budgetary measures. Practical knowledge on how to prepare cash budgets enhanced profitability chances in the family business run by Participant UA1, which enhanced sustainability. This was supported by Participant UC7 who called for the need to stick to budget guidelines. This finding concurred with literature postulated by Ungerer and Mienie (2018) that the ability to manage and control cash-inflow and cash-outflow could be an entrepreneurial skill which most other individuals did not possess. Knowledge of cash budgeting, avoidance of impulse spending and adoption of profit generating measures which were all acquired through experiential learning could help in ensuring business survival. Such knowledge was highlighted in the conceptual frameworks (Mukeredzi and Manwa 2019) as the 'how to' knowledge where family business owners gained practical knowledge on cash

budgeting. One may conclude that family business owners often gained entrepreneurial knowledge as they went through positive and negative business experiences.

Managerial knowledge on how to control financial resources was also critical for Participant GA1 who pointed out:

From a young age I used to think that business people were stingy, when considering their general life-styles which was not flamboyant at all. Now I am in business and I understand that it's all about financial discipline. Unnecessary expenditure should be stopped and budgets should be adhered to. You cannot just take goods from the business for personal use (Interview 1).

With regard to the kinds of knowledge gained experientially, the response by Participant GA1 suggested that the family business owner had experientially acquired entrepreneurial knowledge on how to control expenditure through budgeting and minimising impulse buying. The new perception acquired by Participant GA1 as a result of his involvement in business activities was in line with the conceptual frameworks where Shulman (1987) referred to this knowledge as the wisdom of practice, and in this case GA1 demonstrated knowing what had to be done under given work circumstances. The change in the original perception about the behaviour of business people suggested an improvement in the participant's learning curve. This was also consistent with literature as Deakins et al. (2016) asserted that entrepreneurial knowledge incorporated that kind of behaviour which could be tactical and exploitative of wealth bearing opportunities.

Avoiding impulsive expenditure became critical for the family business owners as such behaviour minimised business losses. One could point out that experiential learning enhanced the shift in business perceptions and behaviour change, leading to proper managerial practices.

During data generation observation sessions (6 January 2019), I attended a stock-taking session for Participant GB3. Family members who had no formal training on business management displayed high levels of knowledge of accounting principles, as terminology such as *First in First out* (FIFO) and *Last in First out* (LIFO) were easily exchanged during the stock taking interaction. In order to ascertain the profitability or otherwise of a family business, there was a need to prepare final accounts. A view of their financial records suggested that these family business owners had gained knowledge with regard to the preparation of books of account. In line with the conceptual framework, Mukeredzi and Manwa (2019) view this content knowledge

as critical and vital for transferring to the next beneficiary. The mastery of knowledge in the form of stock valuation involving LIFO and FIFO, which could be considered as content knowledge, improved the managerial competencies of family business owners with the potential of sustaining their businesses. Task performance was consistent with surveyed literature where Su and Carney (2013) argued that intellectual capital would enable work place learning to occur irrespective of the complexity of the task. From the above observation, it could be noted that family business owners experientially gained practical knowledge on the application of stock valuation techniques such as LIFO and FIFO which were pertinent in the preparation of their final accounts.

In view of the above discussion, family business owners in all of the research contexts seemed to have gained entrepreneurial knowledge relating to planning, organising and controlling experientially, as espoused by Norman (2019). However, the level of organisational, planning and controlling measures taken was not the same in the over-the-counter shops located in the rural areas as those in the supermarkets located in the urban settings. This was an indication that despite gaining the same kind of knowledge, family business owners in different settings had different levels of exposure and consequently of learning. The kinds of knowledge relating to managerial functions were presumably gained by family business owners through their execution of tasks such as budgeting, preparation of final accounts, formulation of business plans and organising of business resources. All these practical skills were acquired at the workplace as most family business owners indicated that they had no prior business training. Knowledge gained on matters to do with the participants' responses from the different research contexts were centred on the need for financial discipline; a critical element of business sustainability.

The next section addresses the kind of knowledge gained relating to the conflict resolution in family-owned businesses.

Knowledge of Conflict Resolution Gained by Family Business Owners

Family business owners interacted with customers, employees, competitors and many other stakeholders on a daily basis. Through these interactions, they experientially gained entrepreneurial knowledge on how to manage conflicts as misunderstandings within social institutions could not be avoided.

The ability to experientially acquire strategies to resolve disputes that occurred between

employees and family business owners created a positive working environment, with the capacity to create employee satisfaction and consequently business sustainability. This was highlighted during the face-to-face interview with Participant GC6 who noted:

There are employees with serious complaints and who always appear to be very angry. I have learnt that they have to be addressed in private in a polite way so that they build confidence in us and this will also protect us from public embarrassment. We cannot argue with employees publicly, we have to critically think and act as a team (Interview 1).

Through experience of engaging and interacting with employees who usually lost their tempers, Participant GC6 experientially learnt to be composed in order to avoid confrontation in public. This kind of conflict resolution attribute presumably minimised embarrassment which could have been faced by the family business owner as well as protected the business' image. In concurrence with the conceptual frameworks, system dysfunctionality was averted as adversaries could find appropriate resolution measures initiated by the family business owner (Nasser 2014). Rather than seeking outside assistance, the entrepreneurial knowledge related to conflict resolution that was gained experientially by Participant GC6 would help in resolving misunderstandings with employees. The finding supported sourced literature where Oudah et al. (2018) asserted that sound leadership through collaborative efforts would cater for critical thinking and anger management. Noted from the above quotation was that family business owners experientially gained entrepreneurial knowledge which related to resolving misunderstandings with employees and this gave them the potential to successfully manage their businesses.

Dealing with a customer privately was also observed and noted in my Researcher's Diary (14 December 2018) when an angry customer in a queue for bread got so furious that he started shouting at employees whom he thought were not serving all customers fairly. A line manager through reflection-in-action had to take this customer out of the queue and address him privately. Dealing with irate customers privately destroyed mob-influence which could have led a small issue to degenerate into chaos. This was in line with sourced literature where Johani and Bhebhe (2016) identified morality and anger management as pertinent soft skills for the survival of a family-owned business. However, having adversaries trying to resolve the conflict on their own was in contradiction with conceptual frameworks where Nasser (2014) proposed the establishment of formal conflict resolution mechanisms which would provide unbiased conclusions. Nonetheless, acquisition of entrepreneurial knowledge which was gained relating to

anger management was critical for family business owners to resolve conflicts in their organisations and enhance business continuity.

The ability to handle misunderstandings within family-owned businesses could have been a result of experiences of past encounters which family business owners reflected on. This was highlighted by Participant UA2 during the face to face interviews:

I have been in this business for more than twenty years now and I have learnt that disciplinary measures at the workplace are handled professionally irrespective of one's closeness to the manager. Most of the people you see in this business are relatives and it's important to act professionally by following a code of conduct which guides us on the way we execute our duties, this has had a positive impact on our business (Interview 1).

Participant UA2 seemed to have learnt from experiences of past encounters and gained some form of knowledge relating to the way extended family members working in the family business should be handled. She pointed out the need for a professional approach, such as a code of conduct when dealing with many family members in the same family business. The above participant's response apparently showed that family business owners had acquired entrepreneurial knowledge relating to employment of extended family members. The use of a code of conduct to deal with delinquent behaviour was consistent with the conceptual framework highlighted by Nasser (2014) that conflict resolution instruments minimised divisions and fragmentation between family members. A code of conduct justifies any action taken by senior management without any bias. This is also in support of sourced literature where Worku (2013) noted that uniformity in addressing issues to do with employees is crucial as chances of favouritism are minimised. Learning from experience seemingly enabled family business owners to gain entrepreneurial knowledge relating to human resource management. However, this kind of knowledge could only be gained by family business owners having many employees: the ones in the urban and growth point settings who were running supermarkets.

Four participants, two from the urban setting and one from each of the other settings raised what seemed to be negative experiences relating to their involvement in family-owned businesses.

Participant UA3 summed it all up during face-to-face interviews when she said:

From my experience, it's not easy to work in a family business as we are sometimes requested to "understand" when our salaries are not paid for whatever reason. We do not have a workers' union in this family business since most of the employees are

close family members who cannot petition their family elders. Yes, we just accept these harsh conditions, and we have learnt to live with it (Interview 1).

The above quotation suggested that family business owners experientially gained personal attributes of loyalty which helped in minimising conflicts between family members in the family business. The expression “*we have learnt to live with it*” from Participant UA3 suggested that it was through experience that she had accepted her fate. While this finding was in support with the views of Oudah et al. (2018) that family loyalty helped in the survival of family-owned businesses, conceptual frameworks (Nasser, 2014) viewed remuneration levels of family members in the family business as possible sources of conflict, with the potential of negatively affecting business sustainability. The sensitivity of conflicts among close family members required managers with managerial knowledge to handle such disputes and avert dysfunctionality of the family businesses.

The above discussion on the kinds of knowledge gained by family business owners has shown that these entrepreneurs experientially acquired practical knowledge in the form of entrepreneurial knowledge relating to conflict resolution. This enabled family business owners to resolve conflicts with emotional employees or customers, in some cases through the implementation of a code of conduct. However, it emerged that family business owners in the rural setting who had few or at times no employees due to their small, over-the-counter shops could not acquire as much knowledge as their counterparts in the urban setting who were running supermarkets with many employees.

The knowledge of customer care gained is discussed in the next section.

Knowledge of Customer Care Gained by Family Business Owners

As discussed in the above sections of this chapter, it was noted that among many other methods, family business owners learnt experientially through processes that involved stock control and demand management. However, stock control and demand management were executed on the assumption that family business owners had experientially gained knowledge relating to customer care and consumer behaviour. Participant RB4 pointed out that:

We serve a rural subsistence farming community in this area. We used to stock agricultural related products such as mealie-meal and tinned beans in this shop but we have since stopped after seeing that we had no customers for such goods. We now supply commodities that are scarce and what our customer prefer in this community (Interview 1).

The sustainability of family-owned businesses was presumably enhanced through acquisition of knowledge relating to customer care. It could be noted from the above quotation that family business owners experientially gained knowledge that related to customer care, where customer tastes and preferences were considered as a priority. Family business owners therefore needed to know the products on demand. This supported literature surveyed (Indarti and Kusuma 2016) where customer service is viewed as knowledge of the product that entails product demand, composition, quality and the process of product making. Having knowledge of customer care is also consistent with conceptual frameworks where Participant RB4's knowledge of customers is considered as social or empirical knowledge by Mukeredzi and Manwa (2019) relating it to the educational context where the teacher has holistic knowledge of the learner and the community. The concept seems to fit well with entrepreneurial education. In their capacity as community members, family business owners acquired social knowledge of their customers as they knew the economic background, customers' tastes and preferences, as well as their expectations and demands. One could therefore conclude that business sustainability could be enhanced when family business owners had knowledge of what products to supply to a given target market. Family business owners across all research contexts portrayed having gained knowledge of consumer behaviour, considering their level of stocking during the festive season. This was picked up during photo elicitation interviews when Participant GC6 said:

We are having a truck here (pointing at a photo) offloading a lot of commodities that were meant for the festive season. We realised that this is the time when our business flourishes as customers demand higher quantities of commodities than what they normally consume during other periods of the year (Interview 2).

The kind of knowledge gained through experience relating to how consumers behaved during festive periods enabled appropriate strategic planning and decision making for Participant GC6 and other family members. Knowledge relating to consumer behaviour enabled family business owners to plan and organise for seasonal changes in demand. Such knowledge seemed to be critical for business sustainability as perennial stock availability would enhance customer loyalty. This finding was consistent with conceptual frameworks where Reece (2011) highlights the significance of the 'unit of knowing and doing'. In this regard, business decisions and implementation did not need procrastination. Having known about seasonal differences in terms of consumer demand, family business owners had to act accordingly. Knowledge of consumer behaviour gained by family business owners through experiential learning seemingly played a pivotal role in enhancing their entrepreneurial knowledge and business sustainability.

Two participants expressed the kinds of knowledge they had gained through experiential learning. During face to face interviews, Participant RA1 from the rural setting pointed out:

We always tell our workers and children that we have to avoid confrontations with our customers as they may end up switching to our competitors. Customers are the reason why we are in business, so we need to value their support (Interview 1).

And Participant UC7 had this to say:

We are in business because of customers. Once there is a misunderstanding, we try to be very polite and apologetic. The customers feel honoured when we respect them. (Interview 1).

With regard to the kinds of knowledge relating to how customers could be cared for, two soft (soft skills are discussed in detail in the next section) skills emerged from the two quotations above; appreciation (RA1) and politeness (UC7). It appeared that family business owners experientially gained the soft skills relating to appreciation and politeness, which presumably created a positive relationship between the family business owners and their customers. The ability to appreciate others was in concurrence with literature where Oudah et al. (2018) assert that business longevity is based on a number of success factors which include family values of honesty, respect and social responsibility. Such relationships have the potential to retain customers. The ability to value customers was consistent with conceptual frameworks (Martin and Hughes 2009) whose key themes and competencies relating to work place learning include customer relationship management (CRM). The concept of CRM entails the process of managing interactions with past, current and potential customers. However, the CRM technology would not be applicable for family business owners in the rural setting where sources of electricity were not readily available. One could point out that customer care was critical for business sustainability as customer retention could be enhanced.

In light of the discussion above, family business owners experientially acquired entrepreneurial knowledge related to business management principles, conflict resolution and customer care. Due to the small size of most family-owned businesses in the rural setting where the majority were over-the-counter shops, it emerged that these family business owners did not gain much in terms of knowledge relating to human resource management. This was different in the urban setting where family business owners were running supermarkets, thereby employing many people. Understanding customer expectations showed that family business owners across all research contexts had gained social or context knowledge (Mukeredzi and Manwa 2019). It

could be noted that the various kinds of knowledge gained were critical as their application enhanced business sustainability within a given generation.

Another domain of knowledge that was experientially gained which emerged from the findings related to soft skills, this is discussed in the following chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter focussed on the research findings that addressed the first research question on the nature of the experiential learning that family business owners went through and how it influenced business sustainability. The nature or the 'how' of experiential learning that emerged from the findings was discussed under two themes: participation and reflection. The two themes were discussed through six sub-themes: experiential learning through stock control, demand management, financial management, reflection in practice, reflection on practice and reflexivity. As family business owners participated in the day-to-day activities, they thus learnt how to run a business by actually running the business, and from or during these activities, they reflected and also reflexed.

Given that the family business owners were in the retail trade, stock control and demand management were the dominant forms of experiential learning through participatory activities which included placement of orders on time, breaking bulk, that is, large stock orders, packing goods on shelves, as well as demand management strategies such as taking advance payments, and product rationing. These participatory, reflective and reflexive activities enhanced business sustainability.

Family business owners across all three research settings also attained experiential learning through financial management activities. The nature of the experiential learning in this study emerged from various financial management activities such as sourcing capital, budgeting, preparation of financial statements, and management of bank loans in the case of urban family business owners. In support of reviewed literature (Prachi 2015; Cherdchai 2020) it emerged that these forms of experiential learning; stock control, demand management and financial management had a positive effect on business sustainability.

Family business owners experienced learning through reflection. The attainment of experience on its own emerged as inadequate for experiential learning; rather learning emanated from reflection on the experience. Experiential learning through reflection emerged as family business owners reflected in practice, reflected on the practice as well as through reflexivity. These forms

of reflection constituted some of the ways in which experiential learning of family business owners occurred. However, responses from research participants indicated that in spite of their self-introspection (reflexivity) as a learning process, cultural values and norms, as well as the economic environment prevalent in the Zimbabwean economy during the time of the study compromised business sustainability.

Finally, it suffices to mention that from the findings discussed in this chapter; this study adequately addressed the research question on the nature of the experiential learning. Family business owners experienced learning through participatory and observational activities, as well as through reflection.

The next chapter focuses on the on the kinds of knowledge that family business owners acquired through experiential learning.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Kinds of knowledge gained by family business owners through experiential learning

Introduction

Chapter Six presented and analysed data on the nature of the experiential learning that family business owners went through and how it influenced business sustainability. Findings revealed that family business owners experienced learning through participation and reflection. The experiential learning process seemingly had positive effects on family business sustainability. This chapter presents and analyses the data that answered the second research question on the kinds of knowledge that family business owners acquired through experiential learning. Data generated in response to this question through face-to-face interviews, non-participant observations and photo elicitation showed that family business owners acquired practical knowledge and soft skills during their daily business operations.

This chapter addresses the question: *What kind of knowledge is gained experientially by family business owners?* In discussing the findings related to this second research question, I draw mainly on conceptual frameworks which helped me to unpack and explain the kinds of knowledge gained by participants through experiential learning. Reference to literature is made to show the linkages, contradictions and similarities with existing research.

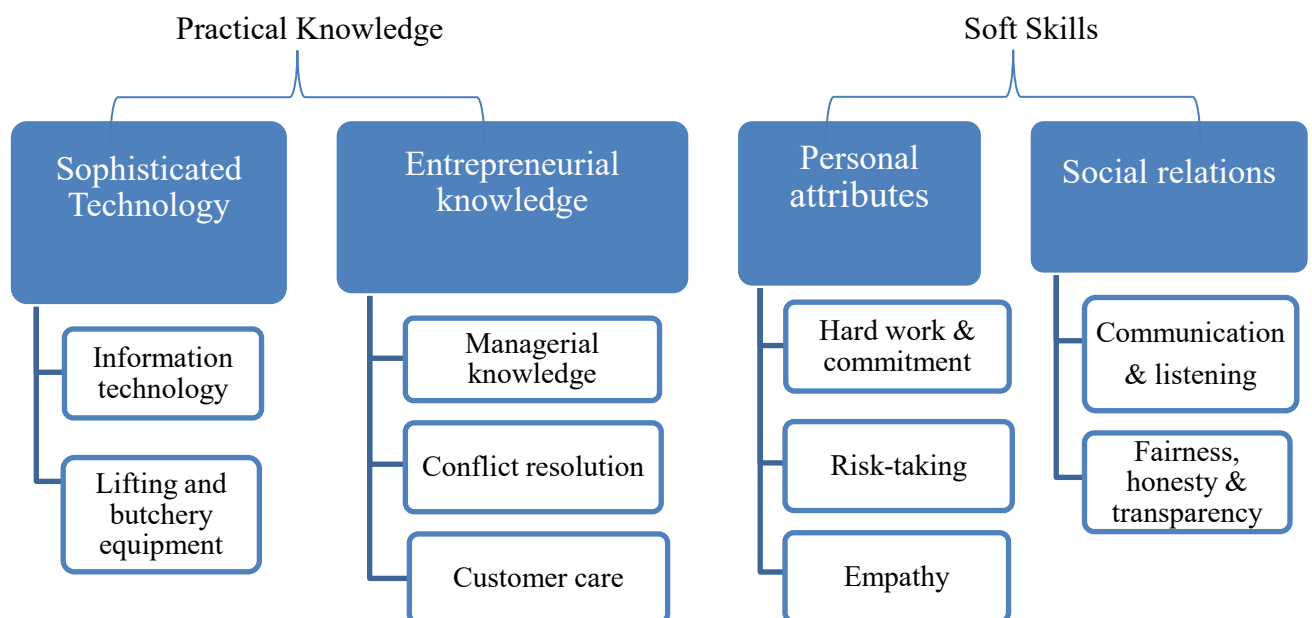
The chapter begins with a discussion of the two major themes under practical knowledge gained related to: use of sophisticated technology and entrepreneurial knowledge. These major themes are discussed through their sub-themes. This is followed by a discussion of soft skills, also under sub-themes. The themes and their subthemes are reflected in Figure 7.1. Terms such as procedural knowledge and ‘how-to’ knowledge are used interchangeably in discussing practical knowledge. The chapter ends with a conclusion which sums up the kinds of knowledge that family business owners learnt experientially.

The next section presents the themes that emerged in relation to the kinds of knowledge that participants gained.

Themes and Sub-themes for Data Presentation

The data revealed a distinction between practical knowledge and soft skills. Practical knowledge from the findings was the hard skills which were a result of practical involvement in the business activities, the ‘how to’ knowledge, while soft skills emerged as the competencies and attributes, the tacit knowledge and skills that were intuitively gained by family business owners. This was consistent with consulted literature where Slavković and Babić (2013) define hard skills as specific technical abilities or solid factual knowledge required to do a job, and these skills can be termed as “what you know”. In other words, they are the technical skills including programming, operating system skills, networks and communications, language skills, procedure skills, and others. Soft skills can be viewed as “how you use it” kind of knowledge which includes interpersonal, human, people or behavioural skills necessary for applying technical skills and knowledge in the workplace (Slavković and Babić 2013). These soft skills may be a new way to describe abilities or talents that an individual can bring to or gains at the workplace and they are often coined “micro social” skills (intrapersonal and interpersonal skills; personal and social skills; including cognitive skills).

Figure 7.1: Themes and sub-themes for kinds of knowledge



Source: Researcher (2021)

As illustrated in Figure 7.1 two themes, namely knowledge of information technology and

knowledge of lifting equipment and butchery machinery emerged from the data in relation to knowledge of using sophisticated technology, while managerial knowledge, conflict resolution and customer care emerged around entrepreneurial knowledge. These themes and their sub-themes are discussed in turn below.

Knowledge of Sophisticated Technology Experientially Gained by Family Business Owners

From the data, the experiential learning of family business owners involved the use of various devices including sophisticated technology and lifting and butchery machinery which resulted in the acquisition of practical knowledge. In this thesis, sophisticated technology refers to information and communications technology (ICT) comprising of computers, cash-till-machines, and printers, optical character readers (OCRs) on barcoded goods, CCTV cameras as well as lifting and butchery equipment. This is the technology which most family business owners got exposed to during their day-to-day business operations and consequently gained knowledge and skills of using such machinery.

Knowledge of Information Technology Gained through Experiential Learning

As noted in Chapter Five of this thesis, 17 out of 21 family business owners studied got into business without any business knowledge background. However, knowledge of ICT in modern business could not be overlooked. Computer knowledge has virtually become the most sought out critical skill in modern business life (Paquette and Baker 2019). Through experiential learning family business owners gained knowledge related to the use of computers during their day-to-day transactions. Three research participants from urban and growth point contexts indicated that they started off in their family businesses being illiterate about information technology. These views were raised by Participant GC6 during face-to-face interviews when he said:

When we started this business, I was computer illiterate to be honest. However, the demands of modern business led us to acquire and install a computer system where we can now log in all goods in the shop. I am now computer literate, though I never attended any computer-skills lessons (Interview 1).

Participant GC6 quoted above confirmed having experientially gained practical knowledge related to the use of computers; being able to capture and retrieve data without having had any

background knowledge on the use of computers. Acquisition of this form of practical knowledge supported surveyed literature where Indarti and Kusuma (2016) consider this as knowledge of the product (the computer in this case), its composition and importance and how to use it as critical for business sustainability. This was consistent with the conceptual frameworks where McCormick (1997) pointed out that people acquire the ‘how-to’ knowledge from activities that entail task performance. Knowledge of computers that was gained enabled the family business owner to perform data capturing and retrieval processes, thereby making room for fast and flexible computerised business management operations. From the above finding, it sufficed to conclude that family business owners experientially acquired computer knowledge as they could capture and retrieve data related to their stock.

Similar sentiments on experiential learning of knowledge on how to use cash till machines were raised by Participant UA2 during photo elicitation interviews when she said:

This picture (pointing to a photo) shows our cash till operators in action as they serve customers in these queues. You won't believe that none of these family members including myself joined this supermarket knowing how to operate a cash till machine, but now, we are all doing exceptionally well ... (Interview 2).

The above quotation suggested that practical knowledge on ‘how to’ operate the cash till machine was acquired by the family business owner who had no prior knowledge or any other formal exposure to the devices. The ability to operate sophisticated technology was supported by the conceptual frameworks where Tynjala’s (2008) views on procedural knowledge relate to ability and skills on operating a cash till machine. The participant highlighted the skill of operating cash till machines acquired as a form of practical knowledge. Family members who had no knowledge of how to operate cash till-machines gained practical knowledge which according to reviewed literature (Indarti and Kusuma 2016), is hands-on experience which in Kolb’s ELT represents the first stage of the experiential learning cycle. It could be concluded that the daily use of the cash till-machines enabled the family business owners to experientially learn and improve their practical skills and they became knowledgeable in this regard.

The acquisition of practical knowledge related to the use of computers was further supported by Participant UC7 during face-to-face interviews:

When I failed O-level, I was invited to come and work in this family business. I had no knowledge on how the computer keyboard is pressed. But it took me less than a year to become well versed in the use of computers in business. I can now capture all our business purchases and sales in this computer. This information will help us when preparing our financial statements (Interview 1).

In addition to the practical knowledge; the 'how-to' use a computer knowledge, the family business owner experientially acquired skills around computerised financial reporting. Participant UC7 acquired knowledge on the operation and use of a computer to handle specific business tasks, irrespective of her initial academic background. Such capabilities were consistent with the conceptual frameworks; Kelly's (2006) knowledge-in-practice. Though the kind of knowledge Kelly referred to focussed on teacher-education, there seemed to be no dividing line with entrepreneurship education. According to Kelly (2006: 510):

Knowing-in-practice is ... a constructive process from which those involved internalise their experience of participation. A dynamic process resulting from the collaborative actions of teachers and students together in the context of their own work.

Similarly, family business owners acquired knowledge-in-practice as they internalised their experience of interaction with customers using computers and cash-till machines. This was in line with reviewed literature where Hamilton's (2011) views on entrepreneurial learning point to the development of skills and abilities for business sustainability. Acquisition of practical skills, the 'know-how' or 'how-to' skills occurred irrespective of one's initial academic background.

The advent of the computer revolution has seen kinds of knowledge that are gained by family business owners emerging, in the form of online business transactions, e-banking, e-marketing as well as internet browsing. Such kinds of knowledge enabled some family business owners to acquire knowledge of locally unavailable stock from foreign countries, as indicated by Participant GB4 during face-to-face interviews:

Knowledge of the internet has helped us a lot in this business. Most of our stock in this shop are imports from different countries I have never been to. Continuous use of e-business enabled us to gain knowledge on online orders and payments, browsing the internet and sending emails. We then take advantage of international courier companies for the delivery of our stock (Interview 1).

Practical knowledge on ‘how to’ browse the internet and communicate using e-mails provided a competitive edge in the retail trade as family business owners learnt how to source commodities that were not readily available in local markets. In accordance with conceptual frameworks (Tynjala, 2008), Participant GB4 gained practical knowledge which involved procedures in the acquisition of goods through electronic business transactions. This enhanced business sustainability as family business owners resorted to cross-border trading, and sourcing goods that were not locally available without having to travel to those countries. This was also in line with surveyed literature, as noted by Ristovska and Ristovska (2014) that business operations need to change in accordance with global developments.

Globalisation seemingly opened up space for previously disadvantaged small-scale family-owned businesses to participate in international trade. In order to minimise expenses, family business owners gained knowledge of online transactions and all the procedures to be followed when transacting online orders and payments. Consequently, family business owners gained skills in Internet browsing which enhanced cross-border arm-chair trading.

Related views with regard to business exposure and online transactions were also raised by Participant RA2 during photo elicitation interviews, who said:

All these vehicles you see (pointing at a photo) belong to this business and they were sourced from outside the country through online transactions - the internet. None of us in this family business has ever been in Japan but exposure and networking with friends and other business partners helped us acquire the necessary information. Second hand vehicles from Japan and South Africa are reasonably cheap, all you need to know is the procedure to acquire and register them in Zimbabwe (Interview 2).

From the above quotation it was apparent that the kind of knowledge the family business owner gained was procedural knowledge, the ‘how to’ knowledge of performing online business transactions. Through their practical involvement, these family business owners also acquired knowledge related to importation procedures, as well as registration processes of foreign-sourced vehicles. Acquisition of second-hand vehicles helped small-scale family business owners who could not afford locally assembled new vehicles. This supported the views of Ristovska and Ristovska (2014: 208) who argued that: “... Globalization could lead to a rapid dissemination and diffusion of products, technology and knowledge in the world, regardless of the origin”. Thus, knowledge of information technology enhanced sourcing of assets from beyond the Zimbabwean borders. This enabled the family business owners to gain procedural knowledge on international trade. The finding was further aligned to the conceptual frameworks alluded to by

Tynjala (2008), that family business owners had to acquire knowledge on the procedures to be carried out in order to access imports for family business survival. It could be noted that family business owners gained practical knowledge related to procedures of online transactions, which played a critical role in the acquisition of business assets from foreign countries.

Another kind of knowledge gained related to the use of cell phones. Consistent with responses from two other participants across the three research contexts, Participant RC6 had this to say during face-to-face interviews:

In this business, we do not need a computer for communication purposes. With this phone and printer, we have learnt to make online business transactions placing orders and receiving feedback via emails. We then print received documents to have hard copies where necessary. This has reduced unnecessary transport costs to town (Interview 1).

Knowledge gained with respect to information technology significantly became handy for family business owners in rural areas as they gained knowledge on 'how to' use a cell phone to carry out online transactions, making huge financial savings. Stock orders and payment arrangements were done online through the Internet. For family business owners in the rural setting, this method was convenient, fast and cost saving. Drawing on conceptual frameworks Martin and Hughes (2009) indicated that workplace competencies such as internet browsing are paramount for business sustainability. This kind of knowledge on the use of the cell phone played a significant role to bridge the gap between the urban and rural contexts. One could conclude that the rural family business owners managed to acquire technological know-how around cell phone use which enhanced business sustainability.

Knowledge of information technology gained by urban family business owners also helped them to acquire, install and operate devices such as CCTV cameras and alarm systems in their shops. Participant UA1 highlighted the kind of knowledge gained during photo elicitation interviews when he said:

I am happy to have acquired knowledge on the use and operation of CCTV cameras. They capture and store all activities occurring in their area of focus for future retrieval. I had no knowledge of these devices until such a time when we started losing stock without any burglaries. With these cameras I am having a view of all activities taking place in the main shop whilst I am in this office (Interview 2).

Participant UA1 gained knowledge on the installation and operation of CCTV cameras which

helped family business owner to trace and identify possible suspects in the event of thefts. In addition, the availability of cameras assisted family business owners as monitoring and control mechanisms. With reference to literature surveyed, the finding was linked to Hnatek's (2015) assertions that the ability to be innovative and creative may set a platform for long term business survival. In accordance with the conceptual framework, Lombardi's (2007) views on synthetic ability applied to family business owners as they managed to integrate unfamiliar technology into their line of business operations. The knowledge of information technology that was gained relating to the installation and operation of internal cameras was critical in the management and sustainability of urban family business owners as shoplifting could be minimised.

ICT in the financial sector where convenient, fast and secure methods of online payments were developed enhanced experiential learning for family business owners as they were exposed to payment methods such as ecocash, telecash, one money and zip-it. Due to the Zimbabwean cash crisis which was prevalent during the time of this study, the three mobile network providers Econet, Telecel and Netone facilitated non-cash payment transfers for clients using these mobile network lines. This was highlighted by Participant RC7 who said:

Shortages of cash in the banks where we could not withdraw our money to buy stock nearly pushed us out of business. The introduction of non-cash payment methods such as ecocash, one money, Telecel and zip-it was a great relief for us. It was crucial for us to quickly adapt to new developments, otherwise once one lags behind, you remain behind forever (Interview 1).

From the above quotation, it could be noted that businesses which could have collapsed remained sustainable as the family business owners could make transactions using ICT introduced in the financial sector using a cell phone. The ability to experientially learn how to transact business payments using ecocash, one money, telecash and zip-it enhanced business sustainability as business activities went on despite the cash crisis in the Zimbabwean economy. The ability to switch to new ICT payment methods supports reviewed literature where Indarti and Kusuma (2016) consider knowledge of the company to involve the ability to understand business trends, business cycles and business risks. It could be noted that family business owners who could not learn and adopt new ICT developments were unable to sustain their businesses in the long run. The ability to adapt quickly to new monetary changes concurred with surveyed literature. This was in accordance with Mwepu-Mbuya et al.'s (2016) entrepreneurial skills for business sustainability relating to creativity. This implied the ability to spot patterns and trends within the business environment. Family business owners who could scan the business

environment often had the potential to remain viable under harsh economic conditions.

The above discussion on knowledge of information technology has shown that family business owners gained various kinds of practical knowledge through experiential learning. These kinds of knowledge have been collectively referred to as practical knowledge, procedural knowledge or the 'how to' knowledge. Acquisition of computer knowledge involved the ability to input data into the computer, retrieve data, as well as knowledge of the interpretation of computerised data such as the use of optical character readers (OCRs) on barcoded commodities. Experiential learning on the use of cash till machines provided the necessary knowledge relating to the 'how to knowledge' of operating cash till machines. Other kinds of knowledge gained included knowledge of online international transactions, use of non-cash payment transfers as well as Internet browsing using cell phones. From the above discussion, one could conclude that acquisition of knowledge of information technology by family business owners enhanced business sustainability as business transactions were conveniently done in a fast and secure business environment.

The next section discusses knowledge of sophisticated technology related to lifting equipment and butchery machinery.

Knowledge of Lifting Equipment and Butchery Machinery Gained Through Experiential Learning

The knowledge of lifting equipment was experientially gained by urban family business owners who used forklifts to ferry bulk commodities from offloading zones to warehouses, as well as when packing goods on shelves. This was brought up during photo elicitation interviews where Participant UA1 had this to say:

This picture (pointing at a photo) shows a forklift that we use when packing goods onto high shelf levels. The machine is also used to ferry bulky goods from the warehouse to the main show room where we break the bulk. The young man using the forklift is very skilled when it comes to operating and maintaining this machine, something he just learnt in this family business. Yes, I can also operate the forklift (Interview 2).

The above quotation suggested that the family business owner acquired practical knowledge, the 'how to' operate forklifts knowledge. Without any background knowledge on forklifts, the knowledge acquisition seemingly occurred through experiential learning. This was consistent with conceptual frameworks expounded by Syverson (2011) and Mukeredzi and Manwa (2019)

that as people engage in practical activities, they acquire the ‘how to’ knowledge. Apart from operating the machine, the family business member also mastered how to display goods on shelves using forklifts. This supported surveyed literature where Mashavira et al. (2019) assert that competencies displayed by family business owners originate from working experiences. As noted above, the family business owner gained the ‘how to’ knowledge of operating forklift machines which reduced manual effort when carrying bulk commodities. Sophisticated technology made business operations much easier, thereby motivating family business owners to remain in business.

The knowledge of sophisticated machinery that was also learnt experientially by the urban and growth points family business owners emerged during data generation observation (6 January 2019) where Participant UB6 exhibited skills in operating butchery equipment: *mincer trespade*, *meat saw* and a *biltong slicer*. Family business owners indicated that they started off without any knowledge on how to operate the butchery equipment. Use of the machines offered Participant UB6 practical knowledge related to ‘how to’ operate butchery equipment. This was consistent with the conceptual frameworks where Shulman (1987) indicates that pedagogical knowledge is the skill or understanding that has to be mastered. Though pedagogical knowledge relates to domains of teacher professional knowledge, family business owners gained this kind of knowledge as it related to operating tools and machinery through experiential learning. The finding was consistent with surveyed literature where Mashavira et al. (2019) highlighted that learning from experience exposes people to the complexity of the real world. It could be noted that the concept of pedagogical knowledge which was dominant in education also related to entrepreneurial education as family business owners gained knowledge through experiential learning.

From the data generated, use of sophisticated equipment was minimal in the rural context. Infrastructural challenges like unavailability of sources of electricity faced by rural family business owners inhibited the use of equipment such as forklifts and modern butchery devices, which consequently limited knowledge acquisition there-from. These challenges were also noted during literature review where Ngorora and Mago (2018) called for government intervention to ensure the survival of small-scale businesses in rural areas. Family business owners in the rural context continued to remain behind in terms of modernisation that involved gaining practical knowledge and skills related to sophisticated technology.

The above discussion showed that the kind of practical knowledge gained by urban and growth point family business owners during their day-to-day business operations involved the use of

different forms of machinery like forklifts and butchery equipment. This kind of knowledge was predominantly experientially acquired by urban family business owners running large scale supermarkets where bulk buying was common. The use of such sophisticated equipment continued to lag behind in the rural areas due to infrastructural problems as well as the lack of electricity, as alluded to above, which limited knowledge acquisition in this regard.

The following section addresses entrepreneurial knowledge that was gained by family business owners through experiential learning.

Soft Skills Experientially Gained by Family Business Owners

Soft skills entail “*personal transversal competencies such as social aptitudes, language and communication capability, friendliness and ability of working in team and other personality traits that characterise relationships between people*” (Cimatti, 2016: 97). In other words, these are the broad set of skills, knowledge, work habits and character traits believed to be critical for success in today’s world, particularly in personal and professional lives typifying social relationships in careers or workplaces which may not be gained through formal education. In Figure 7.1 above, two themes that emerged around this domain of knowledge were soft skills related to personal attributes, and soft skills related to social relations. According to Cimatti (2016), personal skills relate to cognitive skills whereas social skills refer to human relationships with others. This section discusses these two major themes through their sub-themes, starting with personal attributes.

Personal Attributes Gained Through the Experiential Learning of Family Business Owners

According to Sadq (2019), attributes originate in habits and are built on a daily basis. Family business owners therefore acquired these characteristics or qualities through experiential learning and re-learning. The soft skills that were acquired by family business owners through experiential learning related to personal attributes were: hard working and commitment, risk-taking, empathy, communication and listening, and fairness, honesty and transparency.

Attributes Related to Hard Work and Commitment

During face-to-face interviews Participant UB6 pointed out in relation to hard work and commitment:

My parents started off travelling to various rural areas to buy cattle for our butchery. I later joined during these monthly cattle purchases. The process was very exhaustive especially in remote inaccessible areas as we walked from village to village in search of subsistence farmers who would be willing to sell their cattle. It was a time-consuming venture; however, it was all about commitment that led us to this level (Interview 1).

The above quotation suggested that the involvement of Participant UB6 in the search for cattle for the butchery in remote rural areas emanated from commitment to the desire to open a family business. Given that desire to open a business, the family business owner worked hard (walking long distances), which gave rise to the development of a lot of commitment - a soft skill that was critical for business survival. Soft skills relating to attributes of dedication, commitment and hard work all emerged to have been gained by all of the family business owners through the experiences they went through. This was consistent with the conceptual frameworks where Lombardi (2007) asserts that the acquisition of portable skills such as determination and hard work are a result of workplace learning. Graduates from a college joining a new firm would not immediately be able to display such soft skills. According to consulted literature (Heckman and Kautz 2012), such attributes were not available in new entrants in the workplace. This pointed to the view that soft skills were gained during experiential learning. Given that many family business owners did not have external financial support (Sandada and Mangwandi 2015), they had to survive on hard work and total commitment.

The level of commitment in some family business owners was observed and noted in my Researcher's diary (10 January 2019). A visit to Participants UB4, UB5 and UB6 for photo elicitation interviews had to be carried out after 20:00 hours as no other time was available due to their tight daily work schedules. Such *after-hours* interview schedules were also set by three other participants from the growth point areas who could not easily find free time during the day.

The observations noted in my Researcher's diary also portrayed that family business owners were committed to their work and would not leave for any other activity.

The volatile economic atmosphere that characterised the business environment in Zimbabwe (Smith 2020) made operations for family business owners quite difficult, thereby giving rise to them gaining soft skills that were related to hard work. This was highlighted by Participant RC7

during face-to-face interviews when he said:

We are finding it very difficult to stock-up as commodities are not readily available from suppliers due to the national shortages. First, one has to spend a night on a fuel queue otherwise you would lose your position, then when you get the fuel, you have to drive in search of the scarce commodities. The danger is that the fuel may get finished before you get back home (Interview 1).

The comments raised by Participant RC7 were supported by Participant RB7, who had this to say:

From experience, it's not easy to run this business to be honest, especially during the festive period. It's been two days now without proper sleep. The 22nd of December was a public holiday and we did not close the bottle store the whole night. Whilst the bottle store was being run by the shop attendant, we were busy in the main retail shop, packing and pricing the new order that we had brought from Messina, South Africa. We wanted to ensure that by the time we reopened the following morning, customers would be able to do their Christmas shopping (Interview 1).

Responding to interview questions relating to the kinds of knowledge or skills that family business owners gained through experiential learning, Participants RC7 and RB7 expressed sentiments that suggested that the family business owners had gained soft skills relating to commitment and hard work. Staying the night in a fuel queue and then driving around in search of stock, in the case of RC7, was indicative of family business owners having gained personal attributes of dedication and hard work. Such past encounters reflected upon by Participant RC7 and RB7 were critical qualities of entrepreneurs which were in line with conceptual frameworks where Martin and Hughes (2009) assert that enthusiastic participation overrides performance barriers. The soft skills that entailed resilience, commitment and hard work that family business owners gained could not have been acquired in a formal learning environment, such as a classroom situation. One would not be taught how to become resilient, rather attainment of the soft skills required learning by doing. The findings supported reviewed literature where hard working is considered by Oudah et al. (2018) to be a result of human experience that may not be imitated. The business situation and the conditions thereof created an environment in which soft skills could be gained. This was also in agreement with yet more reviewed literature where Jadwat's (2016) findings suggested that determination and diligent work ethics enhance business sustainability. From my data generation observation cited above, as well as the views of RC7 and RB7, it could be argued that family business owners had gained soft skills relating to hard

work and commitment. From the above finding, family business owners had to endure hardship and be determined to ensure service delivery.

The above discussion on soft skills relating to hard work and commitment brought out a number of other underlying attributes and/or qualities that seemed to have been gained by family business owners. These included attributes such as perseverance, diligence, dedication and patience. The levels of endurance which these business owners went through suggested that business sustainability could be enhanced as experiential learning enabled acquisition of personal qualities such as those highlighted above, inclusive of hard work and commitment. Irrespective of the business context, from the participants' responses the different kinds of soft skills acquired by family business owners seemingly contributed to sustaining their family-owned businesses.

Attributes Related to Risk-Taking

With regards to attributes related to risk-taking, the investments that were made by family business owners such as the purchase of business premises, acquisition of fixed assets or accessing loans from banks constituted risk-taking that could have resulted in loss of initial capital in the long run. However, Macko and Tyszka (2009) warns that risk-taking does not entail getting into a business blindly and then expecting high returns, rather it involves considerable strategic planning that is premised on market and product research. Data generation observations on the physical settings of the family business units revealed huge investments that were undertaken by family business owners in the three research contexts. For all of the family business owners in the rural, urban and growth points, acquisition of fixed assets (the buildings) took the bulk of their financial resources, constituting some form of financial risk. When I asked the research participants how they had managed to invest in these capital assets, Participants RA2 and RC7 had similar comments to those of GC5 who said:

We had to accumulate a lot of money to be able to invest in this business. At first you would feel like you are throwing your life savings into a fast-flowing river. We just had to take chances (Interview 1).

These comments were in line with what I observed; the building structures used for the shops seemingly demanded a lot of money for construction. However, most of them appeared dilapidated, showing that no periodic repairs were being done.

Furthermore, Participant GC5 explained how they ventured into some other forms of risk-taking:

When I completed Form Four, my results were not good enough for further studies. I acquired a driver's licence and got into an arrangement with someone to drive his taxi for three years after which I would take ownership of the car. After the three years, I got the car, then sold it and I used the money to buy stock for retail business using my father's buildings which were lying idle. The taxi business was no longer viable. That was twenty years back, and I never thought the business would grow to this level (Interview 1).

The kind of attributes that emerged from the above quotation also related to risk-taking. Given the economic background and business experience of Participant GC5, the decision he took to venture into the retail trade was a result of behavioural change through experiential learning. In line with surveyed literature (Macko and Tyszka 2009) such decision making is characteristic of entrepreneurs who are risk takers since there is a strong link between the willingness to take calculated risks and personal satisfaction. Consulted literature (Cimatti, 2016) suggests that risk-taking behaviour becomes inevitable when the resources for survival become scarce. The insufficient income generated by the taxi business could not be sustainable, hence the decision by Participant GC5 to take a financial risk. Consistent with conceptual frameworks (Lombardi, 2007), it could be noted that the family business owner displayed synthetic ability where he could recognise favourable opportunities in the retail trade, thereby leaving the transport industry. This seemed to suggest that risk-taking was a prerequisite for entrepreneurship and therefore a critical attribute that had to be gained by family business owners.

Another kind of behaviour relating to risk-taking also emerged during photo elicitation interviews when Participant UB4 said:

When I started this business, I was a teacher, and this was my monthly income (pointing at an old payslip) from government. Having noticed the income that I was getting from this business and comparing it with my teaching salary, I just decided to resign from teaching. Yes, it was risky and still being in business is risky but I had to take a choice (Interview 2).

As family business owners were involved in experiential learning processes, they encountered situations that resulted in behavioural change. From the above quotation, it would be reasonable to believe that Participant UB4 reflected on past encounters, weighed in and compared the benefits between teaching and business and then made calculated risky decisions to move into a

family business. Bandura (1977) refers to this as perceptions of rewards outweighing the perceptions of costs. The ability to take calculated risks supported sourced literature in that: “... *There seems to be general agreement that risk bearing is a necessary ... prerequisite for being called an entrepreneur*” (Macko and Tyszka 2009: 470). Despite the uncertainties surrounding risk-taking, Macko and Tyszka (2009) argue that risk-taking precedes successful entrepreneurship. Risk-taking is therefore a critical attribute that has to be acquired by family business owners in order to enhance business sustainability. The finding that emerged from the responses by Participant UB4 relating to the kind of knowledge gained by family business owners concurred with the conceptual frameworks on which the study was grounded. Drawing from the conceptual frameworks, self-confidence, which was one of the themes and competencies developed by Martin and Hughes (2009), was critical for family business owners who were risk-takers. Without confidence in oneself, entrepreneurial capacity may be limited, thereby compromising chances of business sustainability. It sufficed to argue that risk-taking emanated from experiential learning since each business encounter provided unique experiences from which behavioural changes occurred.

What emerged from the above discussion was that the experiences encountered by family business owners led to behavioural changes relating to risk-taking. The attribute of risk-taking was experientially gained and according to literature surveyed (Macko and Tyszka 2009), this attribute could be interpreted through the actions taken by entrepreneurs. Family business owners across the three research settings displayed risk-taking behaviour during their business operations. By nature, entrepreneurship appears to be risk-taking.

Attributes Related to Empathy

Another sub-theme that emerged around personal attributes related to empathy. Three participants based in rural areas and one from the urban setting made references to this aspect. During face-to-face interviews, Participant RA1 pointed out that:

As we grew up, I used to see my father providing farming inputs such as seed and fertiliser to local poor subsistence farmers. Goods were sold to some customers on flexible credit conditions and customers were allowed to pay back after harvesting; those who could not find cash would bring in farm produce. The approach that was used by my father lured many customers and we have also employed similar strategies. This has created a strong relationship with our customers (Interview 1).

Participant RC7 also pointed out that:

We have been selling some of our goods on credit basis to our regular customers, writing off a lot of bad debts as some of these customers could not meet their debt obligations. We also provide food hand-outs at funerals that occur within the community that we save (Interview 1).

Participants had feelings of empathy towards some of their customers. From interacting with financially distressed customers, some family business owners developed empathetic feelings towards their regular customers. Provision of farming inputs to poor subsistence farmers (RA1) and providing material support at funerals (RC7) were a result of inner feelings towards others. Such empathetic feelings were in accordance with the conceptual frameworks where Mackey (2011) maintained that stakeholder interdependence and a conscious culture were paramount. People within the same community often had to depend on one another and be able to immediately notice and provide support when the next person was in distress. Empathising with key customers enabled family business owners to understand customer perspectives and backgrounds, thereby identifying ideal solutions to their challenges. Such customers often developed loyalty to those family businesses. The responses from Participants RA1 and RC7 concurred with literature presented by Venter and Farrington (2009) that unique attributes of family business owners such as altruism can enhance firm efficiency. Such views have been augmented by Fang et al. (2012); that altruism, which they called sympathy or benevolence, was an essential part of social instincts. The development of personal attributes relating to empathy which family business owners experientially gained, apart from creating customer loyalty, also improved the managerial skills of the family business owners. Further, responses on the kinds of knowledge gained by family business owners related to empathetic feelings were portrayed by Participant RB4 during photo elicitation interviews when he said:

There has been a serious water crisis in the nearby village. The business community at this business centre came together and decided to assist the community at its time of greatest need. As business owners, we agreed to contribute enough money for the drilling of a borehole without asking for contributions from the community members. I was the treasurer during the fundraising period and this is the picture (pointing at a photo) of the borehole that was finally drilled. Community members were in celebration mood as you can see on this picture (Interview 2).

The feelings for others at the time of their greatest need suggested in the response could have

been acquired experientially by Participant RB4. The unavailability of clean water indicated that community members were in a crisis that could have led to an outbreak of water-borne diseases. The experiences of encounters where community members were seen struggling for clean water could have induced behavioural change within family business owners, leading to the empathetic attribute that was consistent with the conceptual frameworks (Gibbons 2018) who point out that individuals act in accordance with the impressions that others form of them.

Given that family business owners operated in social environments, Gibbons (2018) opined that the social contexts dictated how people related to one another. The social attachments resulted in empathetic feelings, leading to the borehole construction. In line with literature reviewed (Oudah et al. 2018), the support given by Participant RB4 and other business owners to the community related to social responsibility, where the family business owners had an obligation to work and cooperate with community members for the benefit of society at large. In this regard, it could be possible that social responsibility could have emanated from feelings of empathy. Having experientially learnt empathy, family business owners created a positive image for their businesses as customer loyalty developed, which may have contributed to business sustainability.

In contrast to the rural setting, responses from participants located at growth points and in urban areas relating to the question on the kinds of knowledge gained by family business owners did not portray much about their experiential learning related to empathy. Participant UA3 pointed out:

We do not deal with the same customers on a daily basis. The many supermarkets in this town enable customers to move around comparing products and prices. As a result, we do not have specific customers whom we can directly assist. However, as Christians we have situations where we occasionally support disadvantaged members of society such as street kids and the terminally ill (Interview 1).

While family business owners in the urban setting could experientially gain soft skills relating to empathy, Participant UA3 portrayed a situation where non-availability of regular customers would probably minimise empathetic feelings. With further probing, Participant UA3 indicated that the family-owned business occasionally supported the needy. However, in line with conceptual frameworks, Gibbons (2018) purports that empathy manifests when someone is highly aware of the emotions of the people around him, irrespective of them knowing each other. A family business owner who sees a customer struggling to get a scarce commodity or a starving

street kid, as highlighted by Participant UA3, would feel their pain and would understand what others needed emotionally. The above quotation also supported surveyed literature where Indarti and Kusuma (2017) considered the existence of philosophical knowledge that is transferred by predecessors to successors. This kind of knowledge entails religious values, professionalism, honesty and intuition. Indarti and Kusuma (2017) assert that religious values become life principles that unfold as family business owners manage their businesses. Empathy becomes the heart of the Christian message.

From the discussion above, participants from the rural context seemed to have had more compassionate feelings towards their customers when compared to their counterparts in the urban and growth point research settings. This could have been because rural customers tended to remain within the same proximity to the business unit, becoming known and knowing their communities, while for urban customers, given the diverse residential locations, frequency to specific business units was likely not comparatively high.

The next section discusses the soft skills related to social relations.

Social Relations Gained Through Experiential Learning by Family Business Owners

Two sub-themes emerged from the soft skills related to social relations. This main theme is discussed under communication and listening, fairness, honesty and transparency.

Communication and Listening Skills

Family business owners interacted with different people: customers, employees, family members, as well as other business people and external stakeholders. During face-to-face interviews, Participant UA3 pointed out:

In this business, we have come to understand the need for proper communication between myself and customers as well as with my workmates. If a customer hears me shouting at a workmate that customer will not like to be served by me. I always show respect to the customers whom I serve, so that they feel free to come back next time (Interview 1).

From the above response, communication emerged as a soft skill experientially gained by family business owners. The response from Participant UA3 suggested that she acquired communication skills that entailed being respectful when interacting with colleagues and customers. Inappropriate communication could scare off customers, hence the need for effective

communication by family business owners. This finding was in line with conceptual frameworks where Martin and Hughes (2009) viewed communication skills as competencies that relate to workplace learning and that have to be cherished in the family set-up. Family business owners therefore needed to be courteous when communicating with customers. Family business owners needed to reflect on the impacts of past communication styles and adjust accordingly, in interaction with others. This concurred with literature as Mwepu-Mbuya et al. (2016) argue that networking skills build strong relationships, thereby strengthening new markets. The ability to network is dependent on the communication skills of the family business owners. The soft skills related to communication, which were also experientially gained by family business owners, were also raised by two research participants. During face-to-face interviews Participant RC6 pointed out:

I have communicated with many stakeholders in this business who include customers, suppliers, competitors and employees. One important thing that I have learnt is the ability to listen. Over the past years, we have lost a lot of business opportunities because we did not 'listen' to customer tastes and preferences. Our business was depending on what we wanted to supply. In business one has to listen and not just to 'hear' when others are speaking (Interview 1).

Explaining the kinds of knowledge that they experientially gained, family business owner Participant RC6 indicated that he had acquired listening skills which were critical for business sustainability. This was also complimented by Participant UB5 who had this to say:

If customers are not satisfied, we have learnt to listen and attend to their queries. Customers need to be listened to, we cannot impose things on them as they are free to make choices. Customers should have confidence in us in order to remain loyal to our business (Interview 1).

Experiential learning of family business owners resulted in the acquisition of soft skills related to listening. From the two quotations above (RC6 and UB5), listening skills emerged as vital in the communication process. Participant RC6 explained how listening skills could enhance business sustainability, while Participant UB5 brought in customer loyalty, presumably initiated by giving customers a listening ear. The finding also resonated well with conceptual frameworks (Nasser, 2014) in that effective two-way communication bound people's relations. Without good listening skills, two-way communication would not be possible. It could be acceptable to assume that customer loyalty was also dependent on the family business owner's listening skills and giving customers attention. Responses from Participants RC6 and UB5 were also consistent with

reviewed literature where Ungerer and Mienie (2018) in South Africa came up with governance structures and procedures for family business owners which entail entrepreneurial practice and some communication skills. Effective communication is a critical business practice, especially in family-owned businesses where communication and listening skills enhance business sustainability. From the quotations above, communication and listening skills were gained experientially and had the potential to induce customer loyalty and business sustainability.

In addition to communication and listening skills discussed above, some family business owners also highlighted other kinds of knowledge experientially gained, as indicated by Participant UB4 during face-to-face interviews when he said:

When we started this business, we were not holding any meetings where we could exchange ideas. As the founding member and family head, I would just instruct family members on whatever task I wanted them to do each day. With time, it became very difficult to run the business without formal meetings or briefing sessions. These have now helped in running this business successfully (Interview 1).

Views related to the above response also emerged during photo elicitation interviews with Participant UA3, who explained:

On this first picture (pointing to a set of photos), we have information that communicates our starting and closing times, emergency numbers as well as a warning that these premises are under surveillance camera. The second picture shows internal communication channels, indicating the daily duties for employees and the different lunch times (Interview 2).

The kinds of knowledge reflected in the responses indicated that family business owners experientially gained knowledge related to means and channels of communication within their business organisations. Participant UB4 suggested that he experientially gained knowledge on means of communication that involved the use of formal verbal and written channels. This kind of knowledge related to how family business owners relayed information amongst family members within the business organisation, such as by means of formal meetings and briefing sessions. Participant UA3 suggested that family business owners gained knowledge on how to disseminate information that would reach all people in the business organisation, such as using notice boards and information charts. Knowledge on the provision of notice boards and duty rosters may have emanated from communication challenges previously experienced, reflected upon and learnt from or simply as ways of improving business operations.

The responses from Participants UB4 and UA3 concurred with conceptual frameworks where Leib and Zehrer (2018) asserted that communication within family-owned businesses entails a discussion of ideas, where feedback is provided thereby enhancing inter-generational learning. Unlike the small-scale operations of family business owners located in the rural setting, urban-based family business owners in this study had more employees, where more formal channels of communication were required, as highlighted by Participant UB4. This was in line with literature surveyed where Murphy et al. (2017) argued that business success is dependent on internal communication channels that timeously respond to an increased volume of information. However, while family business owners in the rural setting could survive on informal and unwritten communication channels, large scale operators required more formal channels of communication which probably required the use of communication technology. From the findings, the kinds of soft skills relating to communication and listening were critical in family-owned businesses where experiential learning was workplace based.

Fairness, Honesty and Transparency Skills

With regard to soft skills around fairness, honesty and transparency, two participants had related views. For example, learning. Participant GC5 pointed out that:

Customers need to be correctly informed whenever there are misunderstandings. We are always honest with our customers, if we can't replace a faulty item, we do cash refunds. This has led to good relationships with our customers (Interview 1).

Participant RC7 also had this to say:

As a business, we have learnt to be fair and honest when interacting with our customers, they have to trust us. We can't lie to our customers about our business operations, if we do, the truth will always come out. (Probing: Lying like what?). Ooh yes, we can't tell customers that they should come, say on Monday to get goods which are not available today, when we have not made any orders with suppliers (Interview 1).

The responses from Participants GC5 and RC7 suggested that the family business owners experientially gained soft skills related to honesty and fairness. Such skills further enhanced positive social relations with customers, which was likely to promote a favourable business image and business sustainability. Replacing faulty items or giving cash refunds for faulty goods that could not be replaced (GC5) was indicative of family business owners who had gained soft skills, and business owners who were generally aware of the business impact of such actions.

Similarly, Participant RC7 indicated that lying to customers would not benefit their business in any way. The findings on these kinds of soft skills were consistent with conceptual frameworks, for example Worku (2013: 72) showed that:

... Service excellence often leads to a solid and sustainable customer base, and that dedication for rendering quality services is a requirement for sustained growth and development at the market place.

By being honest family business owners probably provided good service to their customers, thereby enhancing customer loyalty. Customer loyalty could therefore be presumed to be derived from excellent service delivery, with high chances of customer retention in a competitive environment. The findings above also supported surveyed literature (Indarti and Kusuma 2016) which indicated that honesty and trust are necessary skills that enhance family business survival. According to Participant RC7, honesty was not only about telling the truth, it was about own perceptions and acting truthfully. This was further supported by Oudah et al. (2018) who considered family values of honesty and respect as sustainability factors that were critical for family business owners. This implied that the soft skills of honesty and fairness played an important role in moulding the qualities of family business entrepreneurs, which had a positive influence on business sustainability.

During data generation observations (December 2018), it appeared that soft skills related to fairness and transparency had been gained by family business owners as I observed that family business owners in urban areas, such as UA1, UB4 and UC7, had clearly defined salary structures for family members involved in the business. These family business owners showed me pay-sheets for family members with different salary grades highlighted. Such remuneration policies could have been a result of fairness and transparency; soft skills which were gained through experiential learning. According to Johani and Bhebhe (2016), such soft skills often do not exist in newly qualified university graduates, and are only acquired through workplace learning. Clearly outlined remuneration procedures would probably allay fears of being cheated and therefore instil confidence in other family members.

Nonetheless, two family business owners in the rural setting expressed different sentiments with regard to soft skills relating to fairness, honesty and transparency during face-to-face interviews. Participant RB5 mentioned that:

We realised that it is difficult to separate the family from the business. This business is the only source of family income; for food, clothing, fees and many other expenses. We therefore cannot afford to have a consistent salary structure for all of us here. These other family members working in this business were raised up in this family and we are still looking after them until they become independent (Interview 1).

And Participant RC6 had this to say:

We don't receive salaries on a monthly basis from this business except once in a while when the old man (referring to founding member) sees that business profits allow for that. He uses his discretion (Interview 1).

While experiential learning of family business owners often resulted in them gaining soft skills related to fairness, honesty and transparency, the above quotations suggested that these soft skills were not applied when it came to salaries in family-owned businesses in rural settings. As alluded to in Chapter Five of this thesis, family-owned businesses in the rural setting operated on a small scale without many employees. As a result, financial matters were apparently not run on a professional basis. Financial management is one area where family business owners have often been found lacking. From the conceptual frameworks, Leib and Zehrer (2018: 77) point out that family business owners:

Suffer a number of disadvantages, including ... adoption of conservative philosophies in terms of sourcing financial and human capital, lack of professionalism, and ... rigidity.

The views of Participant RC6, where discretion was applied in terms of remuneration of family members, suggested a lack of soft skills of fairness and transparency, and therefore a lack of professionalism. However, this observation was not universal across all of the research settings. Lack of transparency with regard to remuneration in family-owned businesses was in line with surveyed literature. Visser and Chiloane-Tsoka (2014) indicate that salary differences in family-owned businesses are a sensitive issue and family members remain quiet, thereby brewing discontent in the family business. One could conclude that dominance of the family head (who could be the breadwinner in the family system) could be transferred to the business system, especially in small scale family-owned businesses.

From the above discussion on soft skills that were gained experientially by family business owners, it emerged that communication and listening skills were critical across all three research settings. These skills seemingly enhanced learning and re-learning in family-owned businesses

where the workplace was the basis of the learning. Skills relating to hard work, commitment and risk-taking also emerged as attributes of family business owners. The prevalence of empathetic feelings as a kind of soft skill emerged from participants in the rural setting but not from their urban and growth point counterparts. As noted in Chapter Five of this thesis, the rural population were still bound by cultural values where it was easy to feel for others. Soft skills related to fairness, honesty and transparency also emerged as kinds of knowledge gained by family business owners. However, the remuneration of family members involved in the family-owned businesses remained a thorny issue as they had no regular salary.

Conclusion

Chapter Seven focused on the kinds of practical knowledge and soft skills that family business owners acquired through experiential learning. As indicated in Chapter Five of this thesis, 17 out of 21 participants across all the three research contexts indicated that they had no formal education on how to run a business. Hence, any kind of knowledge or soft skill displayed by the research participants was gained through experiential learning. This was in support of surveyed literature where Cacciattolo (2015) pointed out that learning and working are interconnected. Through practical involvement in the day-to-day business operations, family business owners acquired the ‘how-to’ kind of knowledge through experiential learning. This kind of knowledge was related to operating sophisticated technology devices as well as executing basic managerial functions that involved planning, organising, leading and controlling. The kind of knowledge on ‘how-to’ operate ICT as well as forklifts and butchery equipment emerged in the growth point and urban settings where sources of electricity were available. Family-owned businesses in the deep rural areas lagged behind in terms of current technological developments due to absence of electrical power. This was consistent with literature as Mazikana (2017) lamented the unavailability and in some cases deterioration of infrastructural facilities as key drawbacks for business sustainability in the Zimbabwean economy. The soft skills that emerged in this study on the kinds of knowledge or skills gained by family business owners included:

- Hard work and commitment;
- Risk-taking;
- Empathy;
- Communication and listening; and
- Fairness, honesty and transparency.

While these soft skills were gained experientially by family business owners across all three

research settings, fairness, honesty and transparency were not in the rural context while empathy did not appear much in the urban and growth point settings. From the findings in this chapter, family business owners experientially gained practical knowledge and soft skills which probably enhanced the survival of their businesses.

The next chapter, Chapter Eight, presents the data analysis related to the forms of support family business owners gained from other family members. This is in response to the third and last research question.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Forms of support that family business owners received from other family members

Introduction

Chapter Seven presented the data analysis that addressed the kinds of knowledge that family business owners gained through experiential learning. Broadly, the family business owners gained practical knowledge, the ‘how to’ kind of knowledge, that was performance related, as well as soft skills. In this chapter, I present an analysis of the data relating to the forms of support that family business owners received from other family members. Research findings broadly revealed that family business owners benefitted from teamwork and social support from other family members. However, threats to support were also experienced by family business owners.

Data that addressed the forms of support was generated through face-to-face interviews, photo elicitation and non-participatory observations. The data analysis was informed by Bandura’s (1977) Social Learning Theory, whose key ideas revolve around learning within social contexts where most human behaviour is learned through observation, imitation and modelling the behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions of influential people around us. The Social Learning Theory entails both cognitive and environmental factors where the steps: attention, retention, reproduction and motivation are critical in the learning process. The discussion also draws on reviewed literature to illustrate how the findings relate to existing research.

In order to subvert anonymity, the names of the research participants, their family businesses, settings, and the photographs taken were not disclosed in this study. In addition, like in Chapters Six and Seven, codes such as UA1 (urban setting, business A, participant 1), GB4 (growth point setting, business B, participant 4) and RC7 (rural setting, business C, participant 7) were used during data presentation and analysis to represent participants, their businesses and settings. As highlighted in Chapter Four each research setting had three business sites and seven participants. In discussing the findings, this chapter commences by presenting the themes and sub-themes (Figure 8.1) that emerged from the data. The three main themes are then discussed through their sub-themes. The chapter conclusion ties up the findings.

Support Gained from Other Family Members: Themes and Sub-themes

Three main themes: teamwork, social support and threats to family support emerged from the participants' responses. Each of the themes: teamwork and social support is discussed through its sub-themes as shown in Figure 8.1 below. However, threats to support experienced by family business owners is discussed as a main theme. These themes addressed the research question: *What form of support do family business owners gain from other family members?*

Figure 8.1: Research Question Three: Themes and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-theme
1. Teamwork	Knowledge transfer; collaboration & threats to support
2. Social support	Emotional support & informational support
3. Threats to support	

Source: Researcher (2021)

The responses of the research participants suggested that family business owners received support from both nuclear and extended family members. The next section discusses teamwork.

Support through Teamwork

Considering the composition of the members who constituted a family business unit, as alluded to in Chapter One of this thesis, support through teamwork, which included collaboration offered by other family members, seemed to be crucial for business sustainability. Salas, Cooke and Rosen (2008) pointed out that in family businesses, teams are considered to be social entities composed of family members that have task interdependency, and shared and valued common objectives. As co-owners of a family business, they probably shared responsibilities and ideas,

and their individual commitments contributed towards the common goal. Two sub-themes emerged from teamwork: knowledge transfer and collaboration as forms of support.

Knowledge Transfer among Family Members in Family-owned Businesses

Teamwork as support in family-owned businesses resulted in sharing of ideas as well as acquisition of knowledge on how to run a sustainable business. According to Martinez, Galvan and Palacios (2013: 1222), knowledge transfer is defined as: “*A process of exchange of explicit or tacit knowledge between two agents during which one agent purposefully receives and uses the knowledge provided by another*”. This implies that knowledge transfer is a two-way process in which each recipient has the intention of applying the knowledge later for personal benefit. During face-to-face interviews, Participant RB4 pointed out that:

In this business, family members participate to have these goods on the shelves for sale. We have split responsibilities here, I am the one who normally goes to town for orders and delivery, while my wife and son break bulk and individually price the goods, my aunt and the other two shop assistants will be packing on shelves. We occasionally rotate these roles, which has made everyone to know how to perform these activities and other business tricks. This collective effort helps a lot, otherwise I could not manage on my own (Interview 1).

Participant RB4 highlighted the different activities carried out by family members that constituted teamwork. This related to what Scott and Paul (2012) in related literature describe as a schema that characterises processes enacted by entities working on different actions, to constitute wholes at diverse levels of organisations. Each of the team members played a significant role that contributed to the collective objective of having the goods displayed for sale. The finding was consistent with Bandura’s (1977) Social Learning Theory which focuses on ‘collectivity’ rather than individualism, where people learn with and from one another and in this case, worked with one another to achieve a common goal. The team members constituted a social context where family members observed and imitated the behaviours (Bandura 1977) of other family members performing different roles. The transfer and continuous application of practical business knowledge among team members that occurred over a long period of time apparently enhanced knowledge retention, which could then be transferred from one generation to the next. This was in line with consulted literature where Woodfield and Husted (2017: 57) contend that “*Transferring tacit, complex knowledge, or ‘family wisdom’, across the family business is essential for the survival and development of the firm to the benefit of future*

generations ". The business tricks implied by Participant RB4 could entail complex knowledge or family wisdom that was shared among family members (Woodfield and Husted 2017). From the participant's response, support from teaming up with other family members gave rise to acquisition of knowledge which could be transferred among family members and through generations.

The form of support through teamwork which resulted in the transfer of knowledge among family business owners also emerged during face-to-face interviews from two participants who had related views. Participant GB3 voiced that:

There is a lot of consultation which takes place in this family business. We consult and advise one another on issues relating to pricing of stock, recording of purchases and sales, and even packing goods on shelves. My sister-in-law, who is also working with us here is good when it comes to displaying stock in order to attract customers, we have learnt so much from her (Interview 1).

And Participant RC6 had this to say:

When I was growing up, I still remember my grandfather telling us (as small boys) that it was our duty to offload delivery van and carry goods to the storeroom. Girls would wake up early, sweep the business yard before business hours. Everyone had something to do. This is the culture we have adopted in this business, everyone has a role to play, from delivery of stock, pricing and labelling goods on shelves, and serving customers. You cannot distinguish between the owners and employees in this business; it's all collective effort (Interview 1).

The forms of support gained by family business owners that emerged from the above quotations included assistance in stock delivery, stock pricing, recording business transactions and packing goods on shelves. Participant GB3, with other family members in the business, both nuclear and extended, consulted and advised each other as a team. This enhanced learning through knowledge transfer. This form of support was further highlighted by Participant RC6 who teamed up with family members and employees, sharing and enabling knowledge transfer on how to price and individually label stock. From the responses, family business owners were seemingly able to open up, which facilitated information flow between the founders and other family members. The findings supported reviewed literature where Chinomona (2013) asserted that, as the business owner with his expertise teams up with the skilled employees, this constitutes a valuable organisational resource. Such interfaces, when fully tapped, would

enhance family business sustainability. This knowledge transfer apparently enabled Participant RC6's family business to survive up to the third generation, as indicated in Chapter Five of this thesis.

The finding that emerged from the responses of the two participants above was consistent with the theoretical framework where Bandura (1977) maintained that direct experience and observing the behaviour of others create new patterns of behaviour. That is, teamwork enabled knowledge transfer as interactions took place within the social context. The existence of the founding members as key models in the family-owned businesses played a pivotal role in knowledge transfer from the predecessors to the successors, as indicated by Participant RC6. Thus, the responses on the forms of support gained by family business owners suggested that the family team shared business ideas and advised one another, which enabled learning through knowledge transfer which was in line with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory.

Furthermore, support from both nuclear and extended family also fostered individual growth, as noted by Participant RA3 during a face-to-face interview session:

My parents make sure that whatever we do in this this business, it's all about collective effort. Before a day's work, we meet and discuss the daily routine. Duties entail supervising employees, replenishing sold out goods, breaking bulk from our storeroom and getting in touch with suppliers. We share ideas on everything we do, and this has helped me a lot in mastering how to run a family business (Interview 1).

Participant RA3 highlighted teamwork in the family business where the nuclear family members teamed up with employees in performing daily tasks. This resulted in knowledge sharing where Participant RA3 gained the 'how to' knowledge related to day-to-day business activities. Given the experience and exposure of some family members, it was possible for Participant RA3 to receive guidance on critical business skills. Family support in the form of sharing ideas and encouragement enabled individual empowerment, as noted by the family business owner. The empowerment gained by Participant RA3 through knowledge transfer supported surveyed literature in that individual knowledge is beneficial to the entire organisation (Chirico 2008). Knowledge transfer from teamwork was therefore critical for enhancing the day-to-day business operations. In other words, knowledge individually gained by Participant RA3 became beneficial to the entire team as business sustainability would benefit all. Parents made a deliberate effort to team up with children to ensure that they transferred knowledge on how to run the business. There was alignment with Bandura's (1977) cognitive processes where learning is influenced by how the observer views the model. According to Bandura (1977), such children go through a

mediational learning process which entails four stages: attention (where the observer - family business owner notices the behaviour); retention (where the observer remembers the behaviour); reproduction (where observer the family business owner imitates - performs the behaviour); and motivation (where the observer is encouraged because the perceived rewards are more than the perceived costs). Thus, teamwork as some form of support gained by the family business owners helped to empower a family member who had no background on how to run a family business.

Further, teamwork with extended family members also occurred in situations where expert advice seemingly contributed in sustaining the family-owned business. This was raised by Participant GB4 during face-to-face interviews:

When our business was on the verge of collapse, my sister-in-law, who is running her own successful business advised us to embark on importation of scarce commodities from beyond our borders. She highlighted all the procedures that we had to follow in cross border trading. She gave us the insight that we never had before (Interview 1).

Participant GB4 above explained how the family-owned business teamed up with an extended family member and came up with measures that helped to revive the business which was on the verge of collapse. Other family members advised and offered appropriate business survival strategies to family business owners. Provision of knowledge related to cross-border trading helped to resuscitate Participant GB4's business that was no longer profitable. What also emerged is the family business owner's openness to learning which enhances the learning process to be effective. This was apparently the case with GB4. This was also consistent with other literature, where Maciel et al. (2015) maintain that the influence of family members may be so strong, to the extent of being irresistible. Acceptance of advice from a family member was also in line with reinforcement principles propounded in the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977). In addition, teaming up with an extended family member already running her own business helped in sharing ideas and knowledge transfer. Thus, sharing ideas between family members was seemingly a necessity for family business owners, given that the majority of these entrepreneurs apparently ventured into business without any form of business background.

Furthermore, the significance of other family members with regard to knowledge sharing was also brought up by Participant GA2 during the face-to-face interviews:

I have learnt so much from the people I work with, who explained processes such as the recording of purchases and sales in order to prepare our income statement at the end of the financial year. We would sit down and are taken through each of the steps of income statement preparation (Interview 1).

Teamwork enabled on-the-job learning as Participant GA2 got explanations from other family members on how to capture business transactions for the purposes of preparing books of accounts. Such support was consistent with consulted literature where Blackwood (2014) highlighted the significance of a learning culture in family businesses where everyone teaches, learns and shares knowledge. Continuous interactions within family businesses seemingly had positive yields in terms of knowledge transfer. Interactions of this nature were aligned with the Social Learning Theory in which Bandura (1977) noted that the observers could only learn if they paid attention to what happened around them. Sitting together with team members and sharing ideas on the preparation of an income statement suggested that the observer paid attention. Further, given that GA2 testified that he gained some learning suggested his ability mentally or physically, to rehearse the actions of the models (Bandura 1977). Such support offered to GA2 enhanced acquisition of important financial management skills such as the preparation of final accounts.

Further, data on the forms of support gained by family business owners from other family members also revealed that teaming up with extended family members who had technical knowhow was critical for business sustainability. This was raised during face-to-face interviews by Participant UB5 who had this to say:

In this business, we had problems in having online business transactions as we were not well informed on the use of information technology. My cousin brother who is not even active in this business had to come and guide us in this area, helping us a lot as he explained how we should carry out online business transactions and e-commerce. This has had a tremendous improvement on our business operations (Interview 1).

Participant UB5 gained support related to carrying out online business transactions through teamwork with other family members who were not involved in the day-to-day running of the business. Such support from family members was inconsistent with surveyed literature as Musa and Semasinghe (2014) maintain that sharing of ideas in African family businesses is not a rare phenomenon. The extended family member supported the family business owner by providing

advice on the execution of online business transactions, enabling knowledge transfer on e-commerce and other online transactions. The finding from Participant UB5 aligned with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory where McLeod (2016) pointed out that knowledge acquisition occurs within a social context, as people learn with and from one another. Besides experiential learning, family business owners often had the opportunity to get explanations from external family members through teamwork. This was consistent with literature reviewed where Mads (2012) indicated that the total effect of family learning and success in whatever field originates in the immediate family, the extended family, and in interactions between these two family environments. Extended family members with expert knowledge seemed to play a significant role in providing expert advice to these family business owners.

The level of support through knowledge transfer also revealed a motivational impact for family business owners like Participant UC7 who, during face-to-face interviews pointed out that:

As a team we have worked hard creating adverts for most of our products which are mainly imports. At one time these adverts were aired on national television and also appeared in local newspapers. This was really inspiring. It was a learning experience for me as we worked as a team of sales managers from different branches of this family business to prepare the adverts (Interview 1).

The personal growth derived from working as a team of sales managers inspired and motivated Participant UC7 and resulted in the creation of adverts for goods in stock. In line with literature, knowledge was useful when shared and it gained value if it was exchanged (Martinez et al. 2013). However, hard work had a contributory effect on the creation of business adverts which probably promoted sales, thereby sustaining the business over the long run. Ideas on Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986) suggest that unless motivated, a learner may not produce learned behaviour. From the above finding, knowledge transfer among family members seemingly capacitated and empowered those who had no initial business managerial skills.

From the above discussion about forms of support gained from other family members, family business owners benefited by teaming up with both nuclear and extended family members where knowledge was transferred in sharing skills. While knowledge transfer occurred across all three research settings, within the urban setting teaming up with extended family members was minimal as compared to their counterparts in the rural and growth point settings. Teamwork occurred in these two settings, with either nuclear or extended family members as well as with employees. Sharing of ideas on pricing commodities, preparation of final accounts such as

income statements, breaking bulk stock and repackaging, packing and displaying goods on shelves enhanced knowledge transfer. While knowledge transfer was informal, in some instances the models (Bandura 1977) (predecessors) made deliberate efforts to transfer knowledge to the successors. Other family members turned out to be key sources of knowledge as they provided survival strategies and technical advice which inspired family business owners and helped stop their businesses from collapsing. From the findings, teamwork could be a critical approach through which family business owners gained support from other family members, resulting in knowledge transfer and probably business sustainability.

Collaboration of Family Members in Family-owned Businesses

According to Castaner and Oliveira (2020) collaboration occurs when two or more individuals work together through idea sharing and thinking, maximising the chances of success by administering an open, communicative and collaborative experience among all members of an organisation to achieve a common goal. The cultural norms of helping one another without expecting any form of payment seemed prevalent in the rural setting, as observed by Participant RB4 who had this to say:

During the construction of this shop building, the premises around here required a lot of cleaning. I must applaud how family members especially extended family members provided their assistance. Rather than paying people in monetary terms, we just invited other family members to come and help us to clear up the area as well as forming of the bricks (Interview 1).

The kind of support gained by family business owner Participant RB4 was critical as a lot of financial saving was made, given that no payments were given to those who assisted. The collaboration highlighted was in line with the theoretical framework where Bandura (1977) highlighted the importance of collective effort. Family business owners in the rural setting such as RB4 gained manual support with cost saving benefits from other family members. This was consistent with consulted literature where Maciel et al. (2015) indicated that when predecessors and successors exercise collaboration, teamwork and willingness, without giving up, generational transition will be enhanced. Collaborative efforts between family business owners and other family members fostered business development.

Collaborative efforts which resulted from family business owners teaming up with other family members and employees enhanced confidence, as noted by Participant RA3 during face-to-face interviews:

When I completed my university studies I just got involved in this family business. It has been easy for me to learn various tasks which include placing orders that are in line with customer demand. For every task that we perform, we work as a team with employees so that mistakes are quickly picked up and corrected. When I prepare final accounts for this business, input comes from members responsible for purchases and sales as well as from employees who would have done the final stock taking. No task is a result of individual effort. We work and enjoy our achievement as a team (Interview 1).

Hwang (2018) indicated that collaboration was one of the most effective contributors to good team performance. Support from other family members related to the provision of information on technical aspects such as placing demand-related stock orders, purchases and sales records, as well as opening and closing stock information. The family-owned business' final accounts such as income statements were therefore a product of collaborative efforts of team players. In such approaches, collaborators are challenged socially and emotionally in active engagement, as they converse with others, negotiate and re-negotiate, present and defend their ideas, listen to different perspectives, exchange views, and interrogate existing frameworks (Srinivas, 2011). The support provided offered Participant RA3 with confidence in the accounts as their preparation was as a result of collaborative efforts. Collaborative support from the family system was consistent with consulted literature where Alsos et al. (2014) maintain that there is a long-standing realisation that the family system and the business system are inextricably linked. Supportive family members in the family system would always extend their hand to assist the family business system. Cooperation between family members was also in line with the theoretical framework where Bandura's (1977) observational learning emanated from the existence of teamwork. From the above findings, collaboration in the family-owned businesses could simplify task performance, thereby motivating employees and family business owners. This was also consistent with Hwang (2018) who discovered that collaboration promoted employee motivation and productivity.

Confidence building resulting from collaborative efforts of members was also noted by three research participants across all of the research contexts during face-to-face interviews. For example, Participant GA1 pointed out:

We are getting a lot of support from our close relatives residing in this community who in most cases come to buy from this shop first before going to other shops as they consider it “their shop” just because it is owned by one from their own extended family. These family members keep on encouraging us to continue running the business despite the economic meltdown (Interview 1).

Family business owners gained support through the loyalty of their extended family members who chose to buy from “their shop”. This form of support coming from other family members seemed to be crucial in the harsh economic environment as the availability of customers enhanced business sustainability. From the above quotation, the family business owners got preferential treatment from extended family members who made their business the first port of call before visiting other shops. This was aligned to literature surveyed where Ferina et al. (2018) pointed out that family members, apart from contributing by providing sources of encouragement and affirmation, also enhanced the number of purchases. The emotional attachments in which other family members developed possessive feelings that the family business was ‘theirs’ (Chirico, 2008) brought in collective efforts from all family members to ensure business sustainability for the benefit of the family name and image. In support of Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, Tynjala (2008) asserts that workplace activities require collaboration and support from others, leading to high chances of cultural transformation and innovation. The encouragement from family members to ‘keep going’ and being innovative under difficult economic conditions helped to strengthen family ties. Thus, from the finding, the availability of supportive customers from extended family could apparently become a competitive edge and was a unique aspect of family-owned business which probably enhanced business continuity.

Collaboration also provided room for family business owners to share responsibilities, thereby lessening the burden on individual members. During face-to-face interviews Participant UA3 had this to say:

In this business, I have learnt that every member is supposed to have something to offer for the survival of the business. Different responsibilities such as delivery of stock; packaging and pricing; operating till machines as well as cleaning services require collective efforts. Our individual inputs constitute significantly towards the wellbeing of the entire organisation (Interview 1).

Collaboration among family business owners seemingly ensured division of labour among

family members through shared responsibilities in running the business. Such collaborative efforts enhanced business sustainability, given that individual burden was reduced. Execution of different roles agreed with consulted literature (Ndala and Pelser 2019) which suggests that task interdependence counts for collective gain and consequently family business sustainability. As family members performed coordinated individual tasks, the results of their performance became an achievement for all of the collaborators. From the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), people collectively learned by observing and working with models around them, thus the strength of a family business was usually an aggregation of the individual efforts of the family members. This type of collaboration, according to Rosselli (2016), falls within the social psychology of action which is defined as a process of negotiation and re-negotiation in the design of joint achievement of desired, shared workplace goals. Although the main idea of collaboration is the pooling together of strengths and individual techniques and actions, in this case it involved the whole context of the family-owned business. In this sense, it was not about circumstantial cooperation, but the promotion of joint effort, and participation of each member in order to achieve the desired family-owned business objective.

Another form of collaborative support emerged where close family members had the liberty to assist in the family businesses without prior invitation. This emerged during face-to-face interviews when Participant RB4 said:

Our relatives always support us without expecting any payment. During the last festive season, we had a lot of work to be done here. My uncle just sent his two daughters to come and help us manage the large numbers of customers. And this was not the first time (Interview 1).

Collaborative efforts by teaming up with extended family members reduced the burden on family business owners. Such support was in line literature where Powell and Eddleston (2017) argued that instrumental and technical support from other family members is critical for the family business owner who might be facing problems at the workplace. Supporting one another may not be an individual decision but rather an outcome of the family perspective. Such support gained from other family members is premised on continuous interaction between behavioural and contextual factors (Bandura, 1977) that take place as family members work collaboratively. Rosselli (2016) in surveyed literature further indicates that collaboration in businesses promotes key aspects of performance like labour productivity, financial performance, and quality of service. This seems to have been the case where strain, burden and overload were reduced on individual members in the family-owned businesses, probably boosting sales and enhancing their capability

and business sustainability. Thus, from the finding, collaborative support could help family businesses to remain competitive during the highly demanding periods and harsh economic environments.

Furthermore, collaboration of family members with division of labour was also viewed by two other participants as an effective way to run a family business. During face-to-face interviews Participant GC5 mentioned:

I have two wives and children who are involved in this business, so we share a lot of duties when it comes to sourcing of stock, pricing goods and shop keeping. At another business centre where we are having a groceries shop, two of my children are overseeing the activities there (Interview 1).

And Participant GA2 had this to say:

As a family we share responsibilities here. We do not outsource for services such as shop assistants as that may be expensive for our small business. By allocating different tasks which include shelf-management, stock control and serving customers to different family members one does not feel overburdened when running this business. The fact that we are running our business as a team makes everyone to be fully committed (Interview 1).

From the two responses above, one could conclude that sharing tasks and duties in running the family businesses reduced individual fatigue and promoted speedy accomplishment of business tasks. Surveyed literature (West 2012) indicates that collaboration enables organisations to speed up the development and delivery of products and services at minimal cost. The various forms of support from other family members which included stock pricing, shelf-management, stock control and serving customers seemed to be critical for family business sustainability, especially for small scale family businesses. Collaborative efforts and division of labour concurred with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory that a person's performance was dependent on the performance of other connected individuals. Collective efforts in family businesses seemingly enabled achievement of desired goals and probably enhanced business sustainability. According to Srinivas (2011) collaboration maximises the success of a business, given that a group has more power and impact than a single person because each member of the group is like another resource or tool that members can leverage to make better and smarter decisions. The commitment of family business owners and other family members to collaboration portrayed by the findings suggested that, as a strategy it was perceived as valuable to their family businesses.

During data generation observations, I noted a number of collaborative activities (Researcher's Diary 28 December 2018). At RA1's business unit, family members engaged in different tasks: receiving orders from delivery trucks; attaching price stickers to stock; and displaying advertisements at different strategic positions in the shop. At business unit GC5, family members were also working on different tasks: breaking cartons of goods into smaller units; putting prices on individual items; and packing goods on the shelves. Bandura (1977) indicated that if the perceived rewards outweighed the perceived costs, then a behaviour would be more likely to be carried out. Probably the family members (collaborators) realised the benefits of each family member working on different parts of the whole to get the job done, hence their engagement in different activities. Carrying out interdependent tasks that led to the achievement of a common goal was likely to have positive impacts on family business sustainability.

Literature surveyed (Srinivas 2011)) adds that working collaboratively promotes healthy employee relationships, working more efficiently and effectively, and healthy employee relationships lead to better business performance, overall productivity and business growth. In addition, additional literature (Maciel et al. 2015) points to the uniqueness of the family business as all members get involved in tasks that lead to a common objective. The family business collaborations with joint work and strong willingness to work as a family had high chances of smooth transition from one generation to the next (Maciel et al. 2015).

From the above findings, collaboration of family members, and interdependence among and support by other family members seemed to play a pivotal role in the survival of the family-owned businesses. The next section addresses the social support that family business owners gained from other family members.

Social Support Offered to Family Business Owners

Another form of support gained by family business owners from nuclear and extended family members was social support. Interactions with both nuclear and extended family members in this study offered opportunities to gain social support from the family members within and/or outside the family business unit. Different authors came up with different categories and/or names for social support, such as informational, emotional, instrumental, esteem, social network and appraisal support (Hsiu-Chi Ko, Li-Chi Wang, and Yi-Ting Xu 2013). Nonetheless, from the participants' responses two sub-themes emerged regarding the social support gained by family business owners, namely emotional and informational support. These are discussed in turn below.

Emotional Support Gained from Other Family Members

Emotional support is viewed as the capacity to show compassion and genuine concern for another person (Jones, S.M., Bodie and Hughes 2016). Other family members brought the notion of 'a shoulder to cry on' when family business owners experienced emotional pain. During photo elicitation interviews, Participant UA3 pointed out:

Yes, there is a lot of support that we get from close relatives. The support we gain in this company is indiscriminate in that the owners of this business and employees are just viewed as a family. On my wedding day, I was touched when the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of this company and his family attended the ceremony. This is the picture (pointing at a photo) that was taken when I was with my boss on the wedding day. The CEO is the eldest son and most revered individual in this big family business. Given that we are not from the same immediate family, but related on matrimonial lineage, it was a great honour for me. I have now noticed that he does this to every other family member (Interview 2).

The above quotation suggested that the CEO had genuine concern for the wellbeing of other family members, thereby providing emotional support. The presence of a CEO at an extended family member's wedding was viewed as a sign of great honour and respect. This form of social support raised the emotions of Participant UA3 and made her feel worthy and psychologically part-owner of the family business. Such emotional support raised motivation and commitment for organisational benefit. As informed by the conceptual frameworks (Martin and Hughes 2009), the participant became self-confident as she felt a sense of value to the organisation. The attitude of compassion, where the CEO was just 'wishing them well' is viewed by Jones et al. (2016) as an expression of the heart that says, 'You matter to me, and I want things to go well for you'. Feelings of social support within a family business seemed to have been so binding that business sustainability was likely to be enhanced in the spirit of 'familiness'.

Six participants across all of the research contexts had similar views with regards to how family business owners got support from other family members in times of bereavement. Participant RA2 summed it up during the face-to-face interviews when he explained social support, indicating:

Since most of the people in this family business (employees and co-owners) are related in one way or the other, there is a lot of support that we render to each other especially in times of bereavement. When one of us loses a close relative, a delegation will have to attend the memorial and funeral services in support of the family member (Interview 1).

The bereavement support which was gained from other family members provided strength and hope, as highlighted by Participant RA2. Bereaved family members received the necessary emotional support from other family members during their time of need. Surveyed literature (Jones et al. 2016) points out that research evidence shows how important positive emotions such as hope, happiness, pleasure, humour, pride and joy are a source of human strength. This is consistent with the conceptual frameworks where Leung et al. (2020) maintain that emotional support is critical for human relationships. As they managed their business ventures, family business owners went through various episodes where family support was the main source of strength. The value that family business owners in this study attached to the emotional support that they gained was apparently so strong that it probably motivated and kept them in business. Emotional support seemed to have the capacity to relieve work related stress, as indicated by Participant GA1 during the face-to-face interviews:

Running a business in an unstable macroeconomic environment is very stressful. Commodities are not easily available and working hours are very long. You sometimes feel like pulling out of the business. My elder brother has been very supportive, occasionally visiting and encouraging me to soldier on though he is not in business. He is the one who advised me to engage the services of a driver especially when travelling to South Africa for orders. This has been a great relief (Interview 1).

Emotional support around encouragement, motivation and calculated advice appeared to have given the family business owner more vision, strength and internal drive to keep on running the business against all possible odds. Such strength derived from the emotional support of other family members could help sustain the business. Literature reviewed was consistent with the finding as Ferina et al. (2018) assert that emotional support plays a critical role in the social context. Messages that portrayed that they would 'get through it' were apparently the most important messages that people expected to hear from other family members during periods of stress. The finding was also consistent with the Social Learning Theory, as Bandura (1971:2) pointed out that "... Emotional responses can be developed observationally by witnessing the

affective reactions of others undergoing painful or pleasurable experiences”. On witnessing the stressful situation that Participant GA1 was in, the elder brother intervened and provided the necessary emotional support, guidance and counselling. Participant GA1 felt that family ties remained strong between family business owners and other family members, thereby keeping companionship as a major form of emotional support where messages triggered hope and revival in the management of some family business units.

Furthermore, the positive impact of emotional support was also felt and voiced by Participant GB3 when he said:

Running a business is so stressful that at one point my wife went into depression after two major sudden losses in this business. The first incident was when there were some thunderstorms with heavy winds which blew off the roof of the shop. The next morning, we found everything soaked, we only retrieved tinned products. The second mishap was when the engine of our delivery van caught fire on its way from South Africa and the whole truck load was burnt to ashes. This resulted in two of our children who were at boarding school transferring to the local day school. However, we received emotional support from family members until I realised that at times we do not need financial support. We need strength (Interview 1).

Participant GB3 quoted above gained strength from the emotional support provided by other family members. Losing stock in two major incidents was devastating and deeply stressful, but he managed to keep moving forward because of the emotional support received. According to Bandura (1977), the family system provided the social context from which Participant GB3 gained enough emotional support, which he valued more than financial support. According to Powell and Eddleston (2017), having close associates is critical as entrepreneurs always need emotional support that is affective in nature. Given the strains of entrepreneurship, emotional support generated physical strength in the family business owners and provided a lifeline to the family-owned business.

From the above discussion, it appeared that emotional support gained in times of bereavement, during social functions and during work-related stress provided the strength that enabled family business owners to remain focussed. Social support related to emotions was gained by family business owners across all three research contexts. This form of support offered by both nuclear and extended family members was apparently critical for family business owners.

Next, is a discussion on the informational support gained by family business owners from other

family members.

Informational Support Gained from Other Family Members

In addition to the emotional support discussed above, the social support that emerged from this study also related to informational support. According to Leung et al. (2020), informational support is the provision of advice, suggestions, guidance or useful information that enables family business owners to solve business related problems. Given the harsh macro-economic environment witnessed in Zimbabwe at the time of the study, as highlighted by Mazikana (2017), access to information was a key factor for the survival of family businesses. This was alluded to by four participants during the face-to-face interviews. Participant RB5 pointed out:

We have a serious shortage of commodities in the country. This business could have collapsed long back had it not been for many of our relatives in the diaspora. Networking with our relatives made it possible to get valuable free, armchair information on where to source these goods which you see in this shop, most of which are imports and not locally available (Interview 1).

While informational support could have been obtained by consulting Cross-Border Traders' Associations, the Information Bureau or by visiting neighbouring countries, this form of support from other family members was cost effective. Networking with family members was therefore crucial for Participant RB5. Acquah (2012) argues that networking relationships increase the availability of sources of valuable information, with a high chance of reducing threats of business collapse. As family business owners networked with other family members based in the diaspora, they gained valuable information and ended up importing scarce commodities.

Informed by conceptual frameworks (Sundaramurthy 2008), trust between family members was central because their existence and the trust extended beyond mere economic rationale. Family business owners seemed to be appreciative and comfortable when they received advice or information from people closely related to them. Taking advantage of the information received and stocking their business with imports, the family business owners' businesses apparently remained sustainable under the harsh economic conditions.

Situations in which other family members supported the family business owners by providing important advice were also raised by Participant GB3, who said:

One thing that we normally ignore to do as family businesses is promotion of sales and advertising. Many of our relatives are knowledgeable about business

management though not part of this business, so we occasionally meet and share ideas on business management. My sister, who works in a large supermarket in one of these big cities, has always been helpful as she advises us on promotional and pricing strategies and stock valuation procedures. This has seen an increase in our sales (Interview 1).

Informal interactions with other family members also offered information that apparently promoted sales and enhanced stock pricing and valuation procedures. Informational support from other family members was also essential as one of the major challenges faced by family-owned businesses related to advertising and sales, which was generally viewed as emanating from a lack of managerial skills (Sikomwe et al. 2012). The significance of (role) models was related to Social Learning Theory (Bandura 1977), where complex behaviour change required skilled models. On this basis, family business owners benefitted from the supportive advice provided by other skilled family members (role models) who were not necessarily part of the particular family business. Informational support from other family members in the form of expert advice was apparently critical for family-owned businesses, since these businesses did not often employ skilled manpower, especially those in the rural settings.

Participant RB4 made related comments about other family members who provided valuable supportive expert advice. During face-to-face interviews, the participant pointed out:

As I indicated earlier on, when I raised a large sum of money from the Black-Market selling fuel, we got a lot of advice from my relatives, who encouraged us to start a formal business venture. My in-laws who are well versed in business issues set down with us and properly advised on the paperwork required by municipality, the by-laws regulating our operations, and how to invest the money that we had accumulated. That is how this family business started (Interview 1).

Drawing on the conceptual frameworks (Leung et al. 2020)), this form of informational support was vital as Participant RB4 subsequently formalised his business activities. Raising enough money as capital was apparently not enough without proper investment knowledge, as highlighted by Participant RB4. This finding was consistent with reviewed literature as Gibbons (2018) suggests that it is expected that people who have a close relationship with the emerging family business owner provide support as they have a better understanding and knowledge of when this support is needed. The close ties between family members in this study seemingly fostered the sharing of ideas and information, supporting the budding family business owner and

sustaining the emerging family business. What also emerged in this study was that capital without adequate business knowledge could result in failed business opportunities.

A number of participants whose business units were located in the urban area indicated that information sharing between family members within the same business unit was a common and effective form of support. Participant UB4's views below were shared by two other participants during the face-to-face interviews. The participant noted:

As a family business, members have acquired so much information from the formal and informal interactions that take place. It's so amazing how employees and family members pick up crucial information on social platforms that has helped to keep us on track. On a daily basis, we share important information that we pick from our different social platforms that has impacts on our survival as a business. Such information includes availability of fuel at filling stations, where to access scarce goods, cash limits on ATMs and even information about planned mass demonstrations and strikes. Without such information it is very difficult to be proactive in our Zimbabwean economy (Interview 1).

Participant UB4 also gained informational support related to diverse issues valuable for running their business. The items and aspects which were the basis of the informational support were topical challenges which were prevalent in the harsh Zimbabwean economic environment at the time of the study. Given the harsh economic environment in Zimbabwe (Mazikana 2017) where commodities such as fuel and hard currency (cash in banks) were scarce, access to information about those scarce resources provided a competitive edge for family business sustainability. Social support related to the free sharing of such pertinent information had the capacity to sustain family businesses as contingency measures had to be implemented on a daily basis to ensure business survival. Acquisition of market information related to surveyed literature where Macko and Tyszka (2009) argued that the availability of information on consumer trends and tastes, consumer preferences, and products and services that sell better help minimise market or systematic risk. Acceptance and implementation of the information emanating from the families' social platforms depended on mutual trust, as highlighted in the conceptual frameworks (Sundaramurthy 2008) cited above. The form of support from other family members relating to informational support was made possible by the advent of information technology and social media which had become a popular means of relaying information. This enabled easy and speedy access to social informational support by family business owners.

The above discussion has shown that social informational support from both nuclear and extended family members was more dominant in small scale family-owned businesses located in all of the research settings. In general, small scale family business owners in the rural areas lacked the requisite skills to run their businesses on professional grounds (Manyanhaire et al. 2009). Consequently, any form of external advice would be welcome to enhance business sustainability. All of the research participants showed that social informational support was vital, given the unstable Zimbabwean macro-economic environment where any form of information turned out to be a competitive advantage at the time of this study. The next section discusses the threats to support experienced by the family business owners. .

Threats to Support Experienced by Family Business Owners

With regard to the forms of support gained from other family members, seven participants across the three research settings raised concerns about threats that they experienced to their support. One major drawback to family business sustainability raised by these participants was in relation to the relationships between the family business owners and the other family members.

The narrative given by Participant GC5 below sheds light on how founder dominance was apparently a hindrance to possible support from other family members, and this probably gave rise to the demise of his father's business subsequent to his death. During the face-to-face interviews Participant GC5 raised the following views:

My father used to run his business with his six wives as shop assistants who had no say in the day to day operations of the business. He was responsible for everything critical that concerned the business, from making stock orders, pricing of stock and decision making. This was our dad's business from which we got enough for school fees, clothing and food. We did not see our future in this business and when he passed on, there was chaos that was linked to matrimonial lineage. Each of the wives grabbed the shop in which they were assistants, and when the stock got sold out, that signalled the end of my father's business (Interview 1).

Although family members were involved in this first generation family business, the finding showed that there was no effective collaboration in this business. The response above also implied that the polygamous nature of the family system and dominance of the founding member had a negative effect on business sustainability. A scenario where key decision making,

sourcing and pricing of stock were done by one person would probably be unsustainable. Despite having the six wives as shop assistantss, the family business seemed to have lacked an organisational culture that enhanced collaboration. Aneeza and Syeda (2016) concluded that polygamy not only affected the polygamous women, but also has adverse impacts on children's behaviour and interpersonal relations with immediate and step families, which could lead to animosity and discord in later life. This could have been the source of the problems in this family business. Concomitant to this, further surveyed literature (Chirico 2008) indicated that the absence of appropriate social relations and interactions, commitment, motivation and psychological ownership inhibited the development of a strong organisational culture of continous improvement. Family members in the first generation cited above apparently could not offer critical support or commitment, or become motivated as their sense of ownership did not exist - they just worked as shop assistants. The finding that emerged from Participant GC5 showed some inconsistencies with the Social Learning Theory (Bandura 1977) on which this research was grounded. It would appear that the shop assistants did not identify with their model and their expectations were probably not met, hence their level of emotional involvement was too low (Bandura 1977) to enable effective collaboration before or even after the depature of the founding family business owner. Also given the animosity highlighted by Aneeza and Syeda (2016) above, the lack of collaboration between family members and dominance by the founding member apparently had negative effects on family business sustainability.

In addition, other threats to support from other family members were raised by two participants, namely the employment of non-skilled family members. Participant RA2 had this to say during the face-to-face interviews:

When you run a family business with siblings being the co-owners, relatives of the extended family see job opportunities in the business. They see the business as a 'family' thing. Whenever a child fails Form Four, the parent will come and ask if their child could find 'something to do' in the business. We have compromised a lot, because once you accept one relative's child, the next close relative is looking up for the same favour. This has resulted in the employment of people who come with no business motivation, but just to while up time (Interview 1).

Participant GA1 had similar views as he had this to say:

You know what, running a family business has its own disadvantages. We do not consider expertise when employing a relative, it's just necessary. Even on business ownership, we became co-owners because we are members of the same family. This does not always go well with business growth and long-term survival (Interview 1).

The views of Participants RA2 and GA1 suggested pressure to employ unskilled extended family members without long term interest in the family business operations. This was cited as a critical drawback in the creation of successful teams. Literature reviewed (Osborne and Hammoud 2017) discovered that effective engagement at the workplace required members to be motivated, enthusiastic and cooperative with management and other members at the workplace, as the absence of such attributes could lead to sub-optimal performance. The responses from the two participants further indicated the extent to which some business owners initially became co-owners due to family membership or being brought by extended family members as relatives to be employed in spite of a lack of skills and/or motivation. Again, family business owners tended to live with dilemmas where they valued family ties at the expense of competency.

Notwithstanding this, Viriri and Muzividzi (2013: 186) in surveyed literature observed that: *“Family-owned businesses are immune and highly sceptical to employing non-relatives”*. Viririri and Muzividzi's sentiments seemed to be evident in these scenarios where the desire to maintain relations by employing family members threatened business sustainability, as family members were unlikely to perform at the expected levels. Rather than operating on professional grounds, family business owners apparently valued family ties more than business expectations in terms of recruitment of employees. This, according to literature consulted (Maunganidze 2008) was likely to have negative impacts on business sustainability as the transfer of leadership and control to the next generation would lack proper grounding. However, the views of Maunganidze (2008) and those of Participants RA2 and GA1 above seemed to be contrary to the theoretical framework (Bandura, 1977) where would-be heirs or successors, without any basic knowledge, would learn through observation by moving through the stages of attention, retention, reproduction and motivation, as explained above.

In the absence of motivation and views of time being wasted, observational learning would very likely not occur. According to Bandura (1977), unless motivated, an individual may not produce learned behaviour. Despite mixed views on the employment of unskilled family members, most family business owners who had no business background acquired the necessary knowledge through experiential learning, as illustrated in Chapter Six of this thesis. Nonetheless, inclusion and involvement of family members in running the family-owned businesses based on

improvement of family ties and relations would threaten support by other family members if such requests were ignored.

Supervision of teams of family members who switched roles from the family system to the business system also presented threats to support, as noted by Participant UA2 during the face-to-face interviews:

I joined this business through marriage and found out that the majority of employees in this business are very close relatives. Despite the fact that I have occupied a senior position in this family business for more than twenty years, many employees pose problems as they want to be respected and accorded their hierarchical positions in the family system. However, I have always asked individual employees to suggest solutions when they bring problems or complaints to my office. They now know that when coming to my office, they should bring a solution to their problems as a starting point (Interview 1).

Teaming up with extended family members apparently threatened support, particularly where members joined the family business through marriage. From the response above, extended family members apparently threatened support in family-owned businesses due to their family hierarchical positions and expectations. Martinez et al. (2013) found that knowledge is best transferred when family members trust and respect each other, and are committed to the family business. The situation where an elder brother with an influential role in the family system became a subordinate of the spouse of a younger brother in the business threatened family support, as noted by Participant UA2. The failure by family members to be supportive contradicted the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) which states that people within a social context learn from and with others. In this case, the behaviour of the family members who were uncooperative was inconsistent with the theory and had the potential to negatively affect business sustainability.

Other threats to support related to teamwork and collaborative efforts also emerged where a family member in a leadership position in the business occupied a lower position in the family hierarchy, as noted by Participant RA3 during the face-to-face interviews:

In this family business, my only challenge as human resource manager has been making decisions contrary to the views of senior family members. For example, my uncle (mother's brother) who is always insubordinate has this tendency of saying 'take it easy young boy'. Considering their hierarchical positions in the family, some family members

are not cooperative when they get orders from the young leadership (Interview 1).

As explained in the above quotation, threats to family support also emerged whenever the family system overshadowed the business system. Participant RA3 raised concerns that support from other family members tended to be compromised by the family's hierarchical positions. From literature surveyed (Ayranci 2010), a family-owned business is unique as it is made up of a majority of family members, where the family system has to be transferred to a business system. Whenever these two systems failed to merge smoothly, as was portrayed by the above quotation, support by family members was threatened and business sustainability consequently compromised. This was inconsistent with the Social Learning Theory (Bandura 1977) where people in higher hierarchical family positions were supposed to act as models and guide the younger generation. From the finding above, support in family-owned businesses was compromised whenever elder family members in the family system occupied lower positions in the family business system.

Another two participants raised related views about threats to support which seemingly affected knowledge transfer and collaboration. Participant RC6 voiced his concerns:

In these rural areas, we have a serious problem with some of our relatives in the extended family. They still have archaic beliefs that business success has to do with bad rituals. As we do well in this business, they think we prosper by causing harm to them. Whenever there is illness or death in the family, they suspect those in business. Some close relatives do not even want to be associated with family members who are in business (Interview 1).

Participant GB4 had this to say:

I have noticed that a number of our relatives are jealous of this business. I have heard a lot of bad talk that is done behind my back. There are some family members who think that success is for some special families, not for people who grew up struggling like in my case. As a result, they always give negative and unpleasant comments when this business is doing well. However, as a team we have now developed a very thick skin, we do not mind any back biting (Interview 1).

Participants RC6 and GB4 quoted above explained threats to support from other family members due to superstitious beliefs and jealousy. Traditional beliefs in relation to family-owned businesses were still dominant in some communities, especially in rural contexts as cited by participant RC6 above. Such sentiments could have negative impacts on family business owners

as their personal as well as business images could be damaged, to the detriment of business sustainability. In accordance with this Atsu (2016) cites cultural beliefs, especially from extended family members, as a serious impediment to family business growth. Social conflicts which emanate from superstitions transcended the family system to the family business system, consequently threatening extended family member support for family business owners. Aune and Comstock (2002) also found that relationships within the nuclear and extended families can incite intense and diverse jealousy which may vary from mild to destructive jealousy. They further revealed that loss of time spent with family members is the primary reason for the jealousy as this brings about unfounded suspicions due to lack of knowledge. These authors suggest some rational coping strategies such as talking with the family member, discussion with other family members, acceptance of the situation and maintaining silence, and increasing independence as some prominent responses to such situations, Participants RC6 and GB4 seemed to have adopted silence and increased independence.

From the discussion above, while family business owners gained support from other family members through teamwork and collaboration, seven participants across the three research settings indicated threats to support by some extended family members. The threats to support emanated from four issues: First, dominance by the founding members which hindered other family members from full participation in the business. Second, employment of extended family members without the requisite competency. Third, situations where family members became business owners either by marriage to younger siblings or younger siblings occupied managerial positions in the business where they had to lead older siblings. All of these threats to support also threatened business sustainability. These views supported consulted literature where Atsu (2016) opined that cultural expectations, beliefs and values, as well as an extended family system impacted negatively on the management of family-owned businesses. In spite of the threats to support raised by some of the participants, the contributions and support of other family members emerged as invaluable to business sustainability in family-owned businesses.

Conclusion

This chapter addressed the research findings that addressed the third research question about the forms of support that family business owners gained from other family members. The concept of 'other family members' in this study referred to both nuclear and extended family members who were not involved in the day-to-day activities of the family-owned businesses. The forms of support that emerged in this study were discussed under two themes; teamwork and social

support. It emerged that the majority of the family business owners benefited from sharing ideas within their teams, collaborating with family members and lessening individual burdens.

Participants also gained invaluable social support related to emotional and informational support from other family members. While knowledge transfer emerged in all three research settings, teamwork and collaboration were dominant in rural settings where family ties seemed to have been stronger.

However, notwithstanding this support, it also emerged that family business owners experienced threats to this support from other family members. Dominance by founding members, mainly in the rural areas because of the small scale of the operations there, employment of unskilled and uncommitted family members, cultural expectations, values and norms, the interconnectedness of the family system and the business system all threatened support and had far reaching effects on the sustainability of the family-owned businesses in rural areas.

Threats to social support from other family members that related to cultural expectations, values and norms were dominant within the extended and nuclear families in family businesses located in the rural and growth point settings. Family ties were still very strong in these research contexts and cultural values were strongly adhered to. Within the rural setting, it also emerged that extended family members were superstitious and jealous of the operations of the family business owners. This resulted in social conflict relating to jealousy, lack of trust and insecurity. The conflicting interests of the family system versus the business system emerged as affecting family business owners within the three research settings. Such conflicts included the motives for existence, where the family system focused on the development and support of the family members, while the business system was profit driven.

Notwithstanding that participants highlighted the efforts that they made to distinguish and separate the business system from the family system; it seemed that family business owners remained chained to cultural norms and values. However, irrespective of these threats to the support experienced by some family business owners, one could still conclude that the sustainability of family-owned businesses to a large extent depended on the teamwork and social support offered by both nuclear and extended family members.

The next and final chapter synthesises the findings, discusses the conclusions and contributions and draws lessons and implications emanating from the research findings.

CHAPTER NINE

DISCUSSION, SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This study on the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability was carried out as a result of personal observations and findings from other scholars that showed that the demise of founding members signalled the collapse of family-owned businesses. While a number of past studies focused on succession planning, entrepreneurship and corporate governance (Benavides-Velasco et al. 2011; Musa and Semasinghe 2014), the current study explored the experiential learning of the family business owners. Specifically, this study wanted to understand how family business owners experienced learning and the ways in which this experiential learning influenced their business sustainability. Thus, the study tried to establish whether any link existed between learning through experience and the sustenance and survival of family-owned businesses. The following three research questions were posed in an attempt to address the research problem:

1. What is the nature of experiential learning that family business owners go through and how does it influence business sustainability?
2. What kind of knowledge is gained experientially by family business owners?
3. What forms of support do family business owners gain from other family members?

Chapter Eight discussed the forms of support that family business owners received from both nuclear and extended family members. This concluding chapter, Chapter Nine, synthesises and discusses the findings, draws conclusions, highlights the contributions of this study and draws some lessons and implications from the findings.

The chapter begins by presenting the methodological reflections on the study, followed by a review of the study. Subsequent to this is a discussion of the research findings addressing each of the research questions, which is then followed by conclusions and the contributions of the study. Lessons and implications based on the study are discussed before recommendations for further research are finally given.

Methodological Reflections on the Study

The current study was situated within the interpretive or naturalistic paradigm in which I adopted a multi-site case study design where the study was conducted in three research settings. The

interpretive paradigm was effective in interpreting the social reality to understand the family business owners' experiential learning. In other words, this enabled exploring their learning within their contexts, given the naturalist stance of interpretive/qualitative orientations where phenomenon could be understood from the subjective experiences of the participants - the family business owners. This philosophical orientation was also effective in revealing the consciousness hidden within the 'business system' of the family-owned businesses where, according to Nasser (2014), owners were generally secretive in their business operations. Informed by Edmonds and Kennedy (2017), given the 'what and how' nature of my research questions, the qualitative approach within a multi-site case study design was appropriate and effective in addressing these questions.

While conducting research in three research settings: rural, growth points and urban areas, enhanced the robustness of the findings through replications and comparisons, this also presented challenges related to travelling costs which were worsened by severe fuel and cash shortages in the country at the time of the study. However, fuel could occasionally be accessed at some fuel filling stations which accepted the US dollar as the only form of payment. I had some foreign currency to buy fuel in bulk in order to conduct my research trips.

Generating data from the research participants was not an easy process at the beginning. During the period of this study, the Zimbabwean business environment was unstable and in an economic depression (Mazikana 2017). Given that family business owners adopted possible business survival strategies such as sourcing of fuel on the black market, hoarding of commodities and excessive price hiking, participants became suspicious of strangers whom they suspected were secretly investigating illegal business practices. There was fear among the family business owners of possible victimisation during my first visits to seek consent from possible participants. After detailed explanations of the purpose of the study the participants' fears were allayed. On reflection, the close and harmonious relationship between me as the researcher and the researched, which I established during my preliminary visits, allowed for generation of in-depth and up-to-date data.

In identifying the research participants, three non-probability sampling techniques were employed: convenience, purposive and snowballing. While non-probability sampling techniques were commensurate with the choice of qualitative research approach (Kamal 2019), their weakness in this study was that not all available elements of the population were accorded equal opportunities for inclusion in the sample. However, conveniently located participants who met

the criteria for purposive sampling that I adopted in the study were included in the research sample.

During the pilot study that I carried out, one participant requested to be interviewed in Shona, the local language, instead of English. I accepted the request and we proceeded with the interview session in Shona. Thus, in preparation for the main study, I had to look for a qualified language translator to translate the interview guides from English into Shona and then later all the responses given in Shona by participants from Shona back to English (Appendix 6). Seeking translation by a specialist in these two languages enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings.

As discussed in Chapter Four, three data generation instruments (Creswell 2014) were used: face-to-face interviews, non-participatory observations and photo elicitation interviews. Use of different research instruments for data generation was critical as this enabled data triangulation that would enhance the trustworthiness of the research findings. Unlike the observations and photo elicitation sessions which had no hiccups, face-to-face interviews presented some frustrations as interview sessions were occasionally re-scheduled, in some cases more than twice, because the participants had other urgent business issues to attend to. For example, Participant UA2 abruptly said during an interview session:

Sir, we have to stop this interview now, I have just received an 'sms' that diesel has been delivered at the filling station. I have to attend to that now. Let's postpone this. Call me tomorrow and I will see how we can reschedule this (Interview 1).

As some participants failed to honour their interview appointments, I ended up incurring additional travelling costs. While Malmqvist et al. (2019) propound the planning and provision of adequate time for field work, the concept of adequacy seemed to be relative in terms of data generation. What could be adequate in one study would be inadequate in another study. During my planning stages for interviews, I made available what I thought was reasonably enough time for the interview sessions, basing my estimations on the pilot study. Unfortunately, I overlooked the possibility of having the interviews failing to take place at the scheduled times. In this regard I should have allowed more flexibility in terms of time, rather than setting specific time slots for the interviews. Informed by Mukeredzi (2012), who points out that qualitative fieldwork is fraught with snags and surprises, the feelings of frustration, fear and anger that were associated with researching these participants were not allowed to stall the research process. Instead, I handled the various challenges with flexibility and patience, and used this as motivation to

continue. In this study such situations with participants not only enhanced my reflexivity and reflectivity but also helped me to develop patience.

The methodological choices that I made in this research were valuable to my study because they addressed the business owners' perceptions, views and opinions in sufficient detail. The multi-modal approach to data generation, with two series of interviews, observations and photo elicitation, helped to remove the distance between me as the researcher and the researched, promoted probing and re-probing and the clarification of questions and responses, and elicited rich data from the participants. The narrative nature of this qualitative study enabled an in-depth presentation and analysis of the data on the family business owners' experiential learning, how their learning influenced business sustainability, what they learnt and the support that they gained from other family members. In addition, the thick descriptions of the settings provided in Chapter Five also helped the reader to decide on the transferability of the findings.

The multiple-site case study design adopted for this study enabled investigation of the phenomenon within its real-life context (Kamal 2019), and that enabled replications which enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings. This also allowed me to identify and compare similarities and differences between sites, within sites and across sites.

Review of the Study

The family business has been referred to as the oldest form of enterprise across nations of the world (Sikomwe et al. 2012). These forms of business are quite common within the global perspective and emerge and then often disappear from the marketplace over time, raising observations that family-owned businesses collapse after the death of the founding members (Levina 2017). It was against this background that this study aimed to explore the experiential learning of family business owners and how it influenced business sustainability. This was premised on the assumption that business knowledge gained from past generations could enhance business sustainability across generations. This thesis was divided into nine chapters, which are summarised below.

Chapter One introduced this study on the experiential learning of family business owners, and covered the purpose and focus of the study, provided the personal context and motivation for the study, as well as the rationale for the study and the research questions. Consulted literature (Benavides-Velasco et al. 2011) indicated that past global studies on family-owned businesses generally focused on succession planning and corporate governance, and not on experiential

learning. This observation was also noted by Mashavira et al. (2019) who asserted that studies in the Zimbabwean context had focused more on SMEs, without specifically addressing the family-owned businesses. This scenario created contextual and conceptual gaps. A discussion of the background to the study, addressing the problem and its context, was also presented in Chapter One. The discussion on the background to the study revealed that the sustainability of family businesses from one generation to the next was not guaranteed. This tended to seriously compromise the economic benefits meant for accrual from the existence of family-owned businesses, reduced employment opportunities and income generation, increased the need for government social grants, and heightened lower levels of social ills, all of which had negative effects on the economy (Sikomwe et al. 2012; Malinga 2018).

Chapter Two reviewed the relevant literature on the experiential learning of family business owners and its influence on business sustainability, as well as the knowledge that business owners gained and the support offered by other family members. Literature indicated that a lack of succession planning contributed to the lack of continuity of family-owned businesses from one generation to the next (Mashavira et al. 2019). The influence of the experiential learning of family business owners on the business' sustainability for further generations was not dominant in the consulted literature, which created the research gap for this study. However, studies from the global and regional perspectives (Jadwat 2016; Hyams-Ssekasi and Caldwell 2018) showed that workplace experiences enabled family business owners to learn by doing. The dearth of literature relating to the experiential learning of family business owners within the Zimbabwean national perspective was evident (Mashavira et al. 2019). At the time of this study there was no national literature that had focussed on the experiential learning of family business owners, as attention had been placed on succession planning instead. Reviewed literature (Musa and Semasinghe 2014) also revealed that family business owners in the Nigerian context did not focus on preparing successors for the next generation, and this had a negative impact on family businesses' sustainability.

Surveyed literature from the Chinese context (Su and Carney 2013), from the South African context (Mwepu-Mbuya et al. 2016), and from the Zimbabwean context (Johani and Bhebhe 2016) concurred that family business owners gained soft skills in addition to hard skills in the workplace. Surveyed literature also indicated that family business owners gained various forms of support from other family members, including teamwork and emotional and instrumental support (Maciel et al. 2015).

Chapter Three covered the theoretical frameworks upon which this study was grounded. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, which is framed around four stages, namely; concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation, purports that knowledge is created through transformation of experience. The Experiential Learning Theory was complemented by Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory which embraces collectivism in the learning process which occurs within a social context. While Bandura's (1977) theory complimented Kolb's (1984) theory, these two theories would not have helped me to understand the kinds of knowledge that family business owners gained during their day-to-day business operations, or the kinds of support they received from other family members. As such I had to include conceptual frameworks to achieve this.

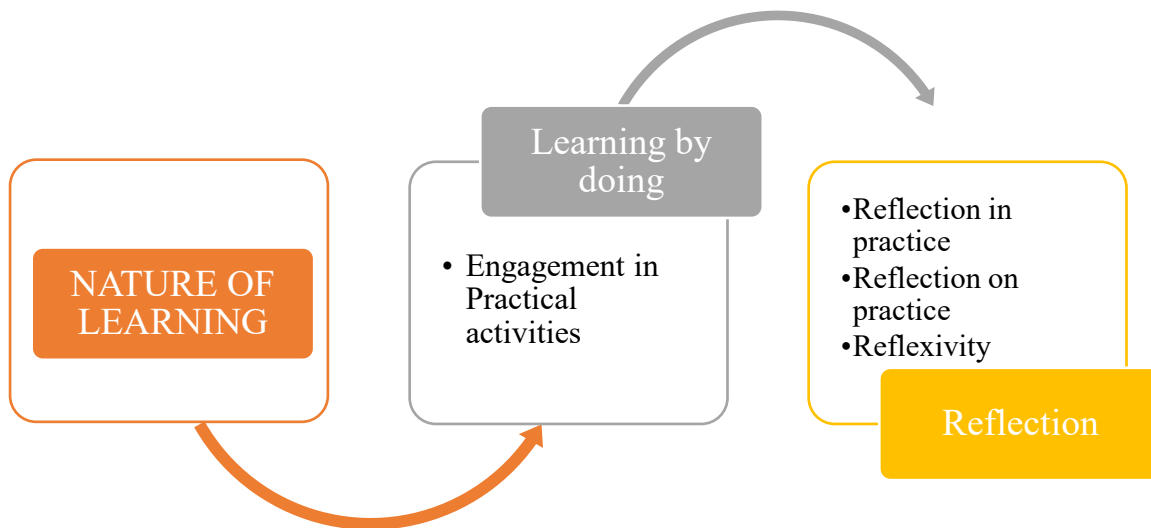
Chapter Four addressed the methodological approach and research design employed in this study, covering mainly the philosophical and practical underpinnings of the study, the population and sampling procedures, the data generation and analysis procedures, the limitations of the study, the issue of trustworthiness and lastly, the ethical considerations.

Chapter Five focused on the three research settings from which the data was generated and analysed. The chapter addressed the population distribution in the province and compared the research settings; highlighting how the settings promoted or inhibited experiential learning. The chapter also presented and discussed the biographical data of the participants. It emerged that the research participants had similar characteristics across all of the research settings. These included the fact that they had ventured into family business operations without any formal business backgrounds (17 out of 21); all 21 of the family business owners were in the retail trade operating as general dealers; and each of the family business units had at least 3 family members involved in the day-to-day business operations. Major differences between the research settings related to infrastructural facilities such as road networks, sources of electricity, water and reticulation services, as well as economic livelihoods. The rural and urban settings emerged as settings at the extreme ends from each other in terms of differences in facilities and provisions such as sources of electricity, water and sanitation facilities, road networks, and proximity to wholesalers (suppliers), while the growth point setting offered a mid-point between the two extreme settings.

Chapter Six presented and analysed the data responding to research question one on the *nature of the experiential learning and its influence on business sustainability*. Broadly, the family business owners experienced learning through participation (learning by doing) in the practical

business activities, and through different forms of reflection. The learning of family business owners is summarised in the diagrammatic representation in Figure 9.1 below.

Figure 9.1: Experiential Learning of Family Business Owners



Source: Researcher (2021)

Learning by doing entailed active participation in various practical business activities such as stock control, demand management and financial management. As informed by Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, reflection is critical in the learning process. In the above figure, participation and reflection were episodes that occurred either in sequence or in isolation.

Chapter Seven centred on the presentation and analysis of the data obtained from responses to the second research question on the *kinds of knowledge gained by family business owners*. This study revealed that family business owners experientially gained practical knowledge and soft skills. Findings further indicated that the acquisition of such knowledge and skills required no prior knowledge from formal learning.

The last chapter on data presentation and analysis, Chapter Eight, focused on the findings related to the *forms of support received by the family business owners from other family members*.

Teamwork and social support emerged as the major themes in answer to the question of support, where knowledge transfer, collaboration and emotional and informational support emerged as the forms of support gained from family members. The findings of this study which were presented in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight are synthesised in the next section.

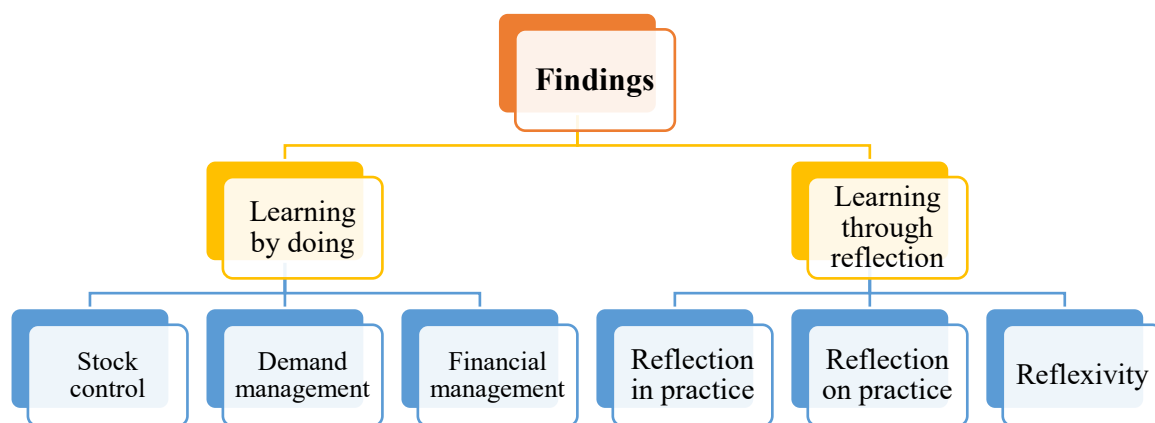
Discussion of the Findings

This section presents a discussion of the research findings according to the three research questions outlined above. The findings were derived from a total of 21 participants drawn from 9 family-owned businesses across 3 research contexts: rural areas, growth points and urban areas. Data was generated through a two-interview series, photo elicitation and non-participatory observations.

The Nature of the Experiential Learning of the Family Business Owners and How it Influenced Business Sustainability

In terms of the nature of the experiential learning of the family business owners and how it influenced business sustainability, as alluded to above the participants experienced learning through two major activities: learning by doing (participation) and learning through reflection. Six key findings emerged from these two major themes, namely: stock control, demand management, financial management, reflection in practice, reflection on practice, and reflexivity. These sub-themes are illustrated in Figure 9.2 and discussed in turn below.

Figure 9.2: The Nature of the Experiential Learning of the Family Business Owners



Source: Researcher (2021)

To begin with, with regard to learning by doing the family business owners experientially learnt through engagement in activities such as managing stock or inventory levels in their shops, maintaining optimal levels and minimising stock outs. They experienced the learning by doing

the work, as well as participation in the processes, for example by placing orders, packing goods on shelves or replenishing sold out commodities. This finding was consistent with surveyed literature where Cherdchai (2020) purports that learning occurs through involvement in practical activities, coupled with past experience. Jadwat (2016) further noted that uninterrupted availability of stock enhances family business continuity. However, such a situation would limit learning as no orders would need to be made and no shelves would need packing. Linking this to theory, active participation of the family business owners was in line with Kolb's (1984) first stage of concrete experience. Family business owners across all three research settings confirmed their involvement in day-to-day practical business activities, thus gaining the required concrete experience.

Family business owners in the rural setting, however, faced logistical challenges in the transportation of their stock from distant wholesalers, resulting in periods of stock out. Poor road networks and unavailability of fuel at times made it difficult for family business owners in the rural setting to have enough stock for packing on their business shelves. Due to their proximity to wholesale shops, family-owned businesses in the urban and growth point settings did not encounter transportation problems and got to enjoy high stock turnover and therefore more episodes of experiential learning than their rural counterparts. Nonetheless, active participation in day-to-day business operations could not guarantee the family businesses' sustainability from one generation to the next.

Second, experiential learning by the family business owners also occurred through management of customer demand. Interacting with customers and creating a relationship placed the family business owners in a better position to understand their customers' demands, tastes and preferences. Acquaaah (2012) asserts that networking relationships are the basis for business survival and therefore cannot be overlooked. Such relationships had the potential to create customer loyalty. There was a theoretical match with this finding as Kolb (1984) asserts that learning involves trade-offs between a person and their environment.

Networking relationships presumably enabled founding members to maintain and sustain customer loyalty during their own generation, a feat that the next generation probably found difficult to sustain. While family business owners in the rural settings, growth points and urban settings all learnt experientially through demand management, the contextual differences resulted in different management strategies and also different learning. For example, rurally based family business owners required advance payments from customers to address the issue of scarce goods while their urban counterparts used quantity rationing. Learning through the

management of demand enhanced the chances of business sustainability within a given generation as customers' needs could be met in the short term.

Third, it also emerged that family business owners learnt experientially through sound management of their financial resources. In performing day-to-day business activities the family business owners across all of the research settings were involved in learning by doing relating to activities such as maintaining records of income and expenditure transactions, cash budgeting and the preparation of financial accounts. Reflecting on past records in the preparation of financial accounts was commensurate with Kolb's (1984) second stage of reflective observation; reflecting more deeply on prior activities. Engaging in reflection while preparing financial accounts was probably due their desire to uphold the business' good performance or to improve poor performance in subsequent processes (Mukeredzi 2019).

Participating in income generating and expenditure processes was consistent with consulted literature where Bignotti and Roux (2020) argue that business sustainability is dependent on entrepreneurial experience and the capacity to generate adequate capital, cash budgeting and strategic planning. This appeared to have been the motive for such activities and processes in this study. The use ICT in the urban areas and growth point settings for recording business transactions, budgeting and financial accounts preparation put these family business owners at a competitive learning environment advantage when comparing them with the rurally based family business owners. Regardless of these differences between the settings, in the process acquisition of knowledge occurred through learning and re-learning of the same practical activities over a long period of time.

Fourth, the study also revealed that family business owners experienced learning through reflection in practice. Solent (2012) indicates that reflection in action describes interaction with a 'live' problem as it unfolds, when an individual's mind tends to think about what might happen as a result of a particular act, and this process of thinking involves analysing the situation before taking the necessary steps. In other words, this involves thinking about the act while it is happening, deciding how to act at the time and then acting immediately. Mukeredzi (2015) also adds that the capacity to reflect in action assumes that the problem-solver (business owner) has the capacity to bring to the surface their 'knowing in action'; that is the hidden or tacit that they will use to deal with the particular task or problem. The taking of immediate action during an experience being encountered offered a critical learning process, while at the same time it enabled immediate amelioration of an incident before it got out of hand. Linking this to theory, it

was the thinking and realisation that action had to be taken which constituted experiential learning for these family business owners (Kolb 1984).

In the case of family business owners, taking immediate action whenever something went wrong probably saved on costs and ensured business sustainability. Mukeredzi (2019) further asserts that reflective thinking promotes active learning, so in this case the family business owners became responsible for their own learning. Immediate action that was implemented for the benefit of customers would foster customer loyalty and thus enhance business sustainability within a specific generation.

Fifth, the findings indicated that family business owners learnt experientially through reflection on practice, subconsciously responding to the ‘What happened? How did it happen? What did I experience? How did I feel?’ type of questions developed by Mukeredzi (2015). Concomitant to this, Masinga (2012) asserts that learning results from an inquisitive mind enquiring about what can be done differently, how it can be done differently, and then adopting the corrective measures. Solent (2012) further suggests that reflection on action describes a process of reflection which takes place after an event, when a practitioner explicitly replays the event and evaluates the theories of action that they used to solve the problem.

In this situation, thinking about something that had happened also involved thinking about what they would do differently if it happened again. This way of thinking and reflecting on what could be done enabled the family business owners in the rural areas, growth points and urban areas to learn and come up with new sustainable business strategies to attract and retain customers. New information was gained or theoretical perspectives that informed the reflectors’ experiences were used to process their feelings and actions. According to Kolb (1984), this is the stage of abstract conceptualisation where a new idea or modification of an existing idea, an abstract concept (a person learning from experience), is concretised or dismissed. The person then concludes and learns from the experience. Mukeredzi (2019) adds that this type of reflection helps the individual to either figure out a different alternative for how they can tackle the situation better, or helps to maintain the practice to uphold their performance. Business sustainability could thus be enhanced when family business owners upheld good performance or prepared for improvement.

Sixth, the findings from this study also showed that family business owners across the three research contexts experientially learnt through reflexivity. As entrepreneurs, family business owners occasionally indulged in self-study, what Mukeredzi (2019) refers to as ‘looking inside

one-self'. In this regard, irrespective of the research setting the family business owners indicated that they had to consider how best they could serve their customers. There was thus a theoretical match with Kolb's (1984) second stage of his experiential learning cycle of reflective observation. As they experienced different business encounters, family business owners did 'self-checks' on what could be done best. Through self-introspection, they thought about and re-played their actions (Mukeredzi 2015). Reflexivity was thus a critical learning process that could enhance family business sustainability within a particular generation. As an internal intuitive process, its occurrence could not be assured from one generation to the next.

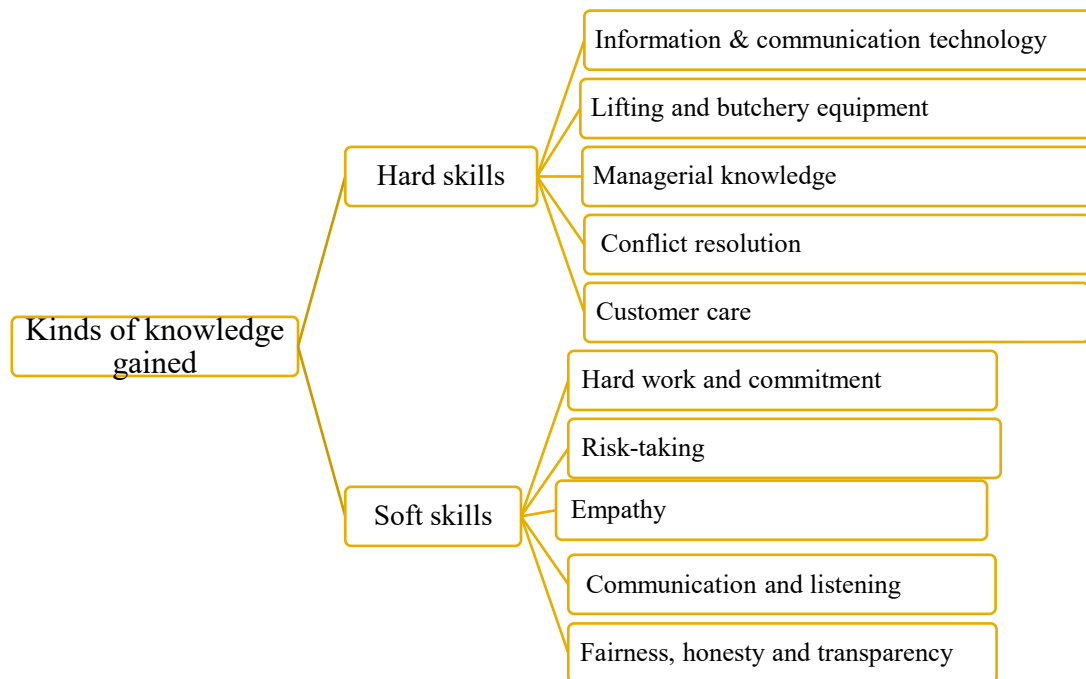
Therefore, with respect to the nature of the experiential learning of the family business owners and its influence on business sustainability; learning occurred in the workplace, by doing. Further, as family business owners participated in various day-to-day business activities, they reflected in or on their experiences, consequently transforming these experiences into knowledge.

The next section discusses the findings that addressed the question relating to the kinds of knowledge gained experientially by the family business owners.

Kinds of Knowledge Gained by Family Business Owners

With respect to the kinds of knowledge gained through experiential learning, the study established that family business owners gained practical knowledge (also referred to as hard skills) and soft skills. Ten related findings emerged from these two main themes on the kinds of knowledge. ICT, lifting and butchery equipment, managerial knowledge, conflict resolution and customer care emerged as the hard skills gained, while hard work and commitment, risk-taking, empathy, communication and listening, and fairness, honesty and transparency were the soft skills that were gained experientially. These findings are illustrated in Figure 9.3 and discussed in turn below.

Figure 9.3: Kinds of Knowledge Gained by Family Business Owners through Experience



Source: Researcher (2021)

With regard to knowledge of ICTs, the findings revealed that family business owners gained practical knowledge (hard skills) related to the use of technology. Without any prior technical know-how, family business owners ventured into business and managed to acquire knowledge on how to capture, interpret and retrieve data from computers, operate cash till machines, and install and operate CCTV cameras. Acquisition of this kind of knowledge, referred to by Mukeredzi (2019) as the ‘how to’ knowledge, was consistent with consulted literature and Indarti and Kusuma (2016) consider this knowledge as important for the survival of family businesses. Drawing from conceptual frameworks, McCormick (1997) points out that ‘how to’ knowledge is gained from activities that are task oriented. Thus, the daily use of ICT enabled family business owners to learn experientially and improve their practical skills which could help them sustain their businesses within their specific generations.

Nazrul (2016) emphasises that ICT makes a business more efficient, effective and able to respond promptly to customers' needs. He goes further to point out that entrepreneurs who have ICT literacy and employ it in their businesses find it an integral part of business management and that use of ICT is inevitable for the smooth running of businesses all over the world, irrespective of their size and complexity. From the finding above, it was evident that ICT was vital in these family-owned businesses.

However, family business owners in the rural setting did not gain much exposure to ICT relating to computerised processes, cash till machines and reading of barcoded products due to the unavailability of sources of electricity. While these other of technology were not available in the rural setting, the family business owners in this setting experienced learning related to the use of cellphones. Cellphones were critical for rurally based family business owners as they used this technology to place orders, telecommunicate and email suppliers. Nonetheless heavy reliance on manual business transactions remained, which most likely resulted in the business operations of the rurally based family owners being slow and at times inaccurate in comparison to their counterparts in the growth points and urban settings.

Concomitant to ICT, it emerged that family business owners located in growth points and urban settings experientially gained knowledge on how to operate sophisticated machinery, such as lifting equipment and butchery machinery. Without any background training the family business owners studied, located within growth points and urban areas, gained practical knowledge on how to operate forklifts to ferry bulk commodities as well as how to operate mincers, meat saws and biltong slicers in their butcheries. Syverson (2011), speaking of conceptual frameworks, finds that as people engage in practical activities it results in them gaining practical knowledge and skills. This suggests that gaining practical knowledge and soft skills may not necessarily require formal instruction. Mashavira et al. (2019) also assert that individual competencies originate from working experience.

Family business owners in the rural setting lagged behind with regard to gaining knowledge related to lifting equipment and butchery machinery as sources of electricity were not readily available, and this affected their experiential learning. Drawing on the theoretical framework (Bandura 1987), these family business owners who lacked background business knowledge seemingly learnt through observation and imitation. Bandura (1987) indicates that unless motivated, a person does not produce learnt behaviour. Given that these business owners gained practical knowledge and skills related to operating machines and using ICTs, this showed that they were motivated and may have perceived the rewards of their knowledge as outweighing the perceived costs. As such they imitated the behaviour.

Further, regarding managerial knowledge, this study discovered that family business owners experientially gained entrepreneurial knowledge relating to the four key managerial principles of planning, organising, leading and controlling (Norman 2019). Cases where family business owners managed to accumulate financial resources and capital and ventured into business and

progressed for at least ten years (indicated in Chapter Five of this thesis) were indicative of them having gained entrepreneurial knowledge and the ability to manage their businesses. Drawing from conceptual frameworks, Lombardi (2007) purports that business survival requires flexibility and innovativeness on the part of family business owners, and this seemed to have been the case with the business owners investigated. Mwepu-Mbuya et al. (2016) point out that appropriate leadership skills enhance a family business' sustainability, so based on this study's findings one could argue that elementary education was adequate for someone to venture into business; implying that there was no need for formal training to become a successful entrepreneur. However, whereas the majority of the entrepreneurs in this study gained their business management knowledge experientially by managing their businesses, Marcin (2016) advises that entrepreneurs with formal managerial knowledge and experience, whose employees also have business knowledge, achieve greater entrepreneurial success than those without.

Norman (2019) asserts that managerial functions entail planning, organising and controlling organisational resources, as well as leading the human resources in the business. Twenty of the twenty-one participants in this study had a minimum of ten years of service in the family business operation, and this length of operation could be an indication of their planning, organising, leading and controlling capabilities. There was also a conceptual match with Deakins et al. (2016), who point out that long term survival in business is premised on foresight and adaptation.

In relation to conflict resolution, this study found that family business owners experientially gained knowledge on how to resolve conflicts within their businesses. The experience of interacting with customers and employees where disputes and misunderstandings were inevitable enabled family business owners in growth points and urban settings to learn and adopt strategies and approaches to settle disputes. Oudah et al. (2018) indicate that leadership skills create room for collaborative efforts in organisations, thereby enhancing critical thinking and anger management. In large family-owned businesses such as supermarkets in the urban areas and growth points, use of policy documents such as a code of conduct was employed to manage the large numbers of employees. Family business owners in the rural setting could not gain much experience in conflict resolution as the small scale of their over-the-counter shops meant that they did not employ large enough numbers of employees for this to occur. Drawing on the conceptual frameworks, Nasser (2014) asserts that conflict resolution instruments in large scale family-owned businesses reduce the chances of discontent and fragmentation among family

members. The experiences of past encounters played a pivotal role in addressing misunderstandings and conflicts between family members and customers in this study.

Another kind of practical knowledge that emerged as having been gained by family business owners related to knowledge of customer care. The ability to address customer needs required social cohesion in order to gain a deeper understanding of such needs. This was common across all of the research settings. Mukeredzi and Manwa (2019), in relation to the conceptual frameworks used in this study, consider social or empirical knowledge as critical in the educational context. However, these concepts also fitted well in the business context where family business owners required social knowledge of their customers relating to economic backgrounds, customer preferences and expectations. Customer care often gave rise to the creation of customer loyalty, which the family business owners studied always strived to earn as it enhanced business sustainability.

This is consistent with reviewed literature where Oudah et al. (2018) point out that business longevity rests on honesty, respect, and social responsibility and also on customer loyalty, thus highlighting the importance of customer loyalty. As family business owners cared for their customers, business sustainability was enhanced through customer retention. However, the means and resources to retain customers could change from one generation to the next, just as customers themselves changed across different generations. McFarlane (2013) stresses that good customer service is important to any business because it retains customers and extracts more value from them. He goes on to say that retaining loyal customers is less expensive than getting new ones as it costs about five times more to attract new customers than to retain existing business. Satisfied customers generally become devoted buyers when the business (owner) is trustworthy and provides good service. Positive endorsements and good reviews following good customer care could help to strengthen and sustain these family-owned businesses studied. It was also generally understood that people often made purchasing decisions based on recommendations from family and friends.

As highlighted above, in addition to the hard skills – the practical knowledge that was gained, soft skills also emerged. These were hard work and commitment; risk-taking; empathy; communication and listening; and fairness, honesty and transparency. These soft skills were discussed under two main sub-themes of personal attributes and social relations. The study established that family business owners experientially attained soft skills around personal attributes like hard work and commitment. Such soft skills were critical for business sustainability as they required active practical involvement. Dean and East (2019) indicate that

soft skills are one of the diverse aspects of social behaviour vital for success in academia or commerce. Many of these soft skills are often not gained from studying, but rather through work experience. Drawing from the conceptual frameworks, Lombardi (2007) asserts that portable skills such as determination and hard work emanate from workplace learning over time and cannot be displayed by newly trained graduates fresh from college. Heckman and Kautz (2012) also agree with the conceptual frameworks used in this study when they assert that new entrants to the workplace environment may not possess key soft skills as they do not have sufficient work experience yet for them to have acquired these skills. This therefore implied that the strengths of the workforce necessary for the survival of the family businesses in the founding generation would not necessarily be available in the next generation as skills development was dependent on the tasks at hand and work experience.

Regarding risk-taking, findings from this study indicated that family business owners gained skills related to taking risks. Investing large sums of money in business ventures whose future could not be confirmed, and buying large quantities of stock which could fail to attract buyers were indicators of risk-taking. Given the harsh economic environment of the Zimbabwean economy during this study, family business owners across all three contexts were left with no option but to take risks. Cimatti (2016) asserts that the courage and confidence required to take business risks come to the fore when resources for survival become scarce. Thus, commodity scarcity could be the driving force behind business owners, forcing them beyond their comfort limits into risk taking. Looking at this in terms of the conceptual frameworks used in this study, risk taking was viewed as a consequence of self-confidence (Martin and Hughes 2009). As family business owners got into unpredictable business ventures, they remained confident of their business potential. Confidence relates to being certain about one's abilities, trusting people and having a positive belief in the future. It is related to self-esteem, self-efficacy and optimism, belief in positive achievements, persistence and self-awareness (Prince, Snowden and Mathews 2010). In other words, it is the ability to make judgements on how well or whether or not a person can do something. Confidence would thus be a key factor for family business owners as it would affect how they ran their businesses and eventually the sustainability of the businesses. Prince, Snowden and Mathews (2010) add that confidence is directly related to performance as confidence increases motivation, perceptions and thought processes. People with confidence are regarded as daring and able to try out new things and are open to learning, relish challenging tasks and risks, express themselves as individuals, can say they do not understand and ask for help, and they concentrate and are not defeated by a fear of failure (Mukeredzi and Nyachowe

2018). All these aspects were also critical for family business owners to enhance their business sustainability.

In addition, family business owners also gained attributes of empathy as part of their soft skills. Having inner feelings for others is consistent with reviewed literature that asserts that altruism or benevolence is an essential part of social instincts (Fang et al. 2012). It is human nature to feel for others and family business owners were not an exception. This was also consistent with the conceptual frameworks and Gibbons' (2018) views indicate that family business owners could be viewed as embedded within a social context if they became concerned with the impression that other people had of them. Further to this, empathy could bind people together, leading to customer loyalty which enhanced business sustainability. Empathetic feelings seemed to have been gained more by the family business owners located in the rural context where operations within captive markets resulted in feelings for others. In the growth points and urban contexts, the frequency of the same customers was not as much as that in rural areas so these business owners missed out on the closeness that existed between the business owners and customers within the rural setting.

Further, the study discovered that family business owners also gained soft skills related to communication and listening. The finding was consistent with the conceptual frameworks and the study by Martin and Hughes (2009), where they consider effective communication as a competency and skill that relates to the workplace environment, which has to be cherished for the survival of family-owned business. The finding was also in line with reviewed literature (Murphy et al. 2017) which shows internal communication channels that are fast and accurate as forms of transparency and good corporate governance. Communication is the lifeline of family-owned businesses and experiential learning on this aspect may be dependent on the interactions in the nature of their operations.

Concomitant to communication was listening; another soft skill gained by family business owners. Zenger and Folkman (2016) note that listening involves more than being quiet, making facial expressions and verbal sounds. Rather, good listening also involves periodically asking questions that promote discovery and insight. Questioning, gently challenges old assumptions constructively. Thus, sitting silently and nodding is not accurate evidence that one is listening. Asking constructive questions illustrates that you are not only hearing, but also understand what is being spoken about, and need additional information. Good listening is thus a two-way dialogue; 'speaker versus hearer' interaction. It appears that this was the kind of listening that family business owners gained and practiced across all of the research settings. Entrepreneurship entails

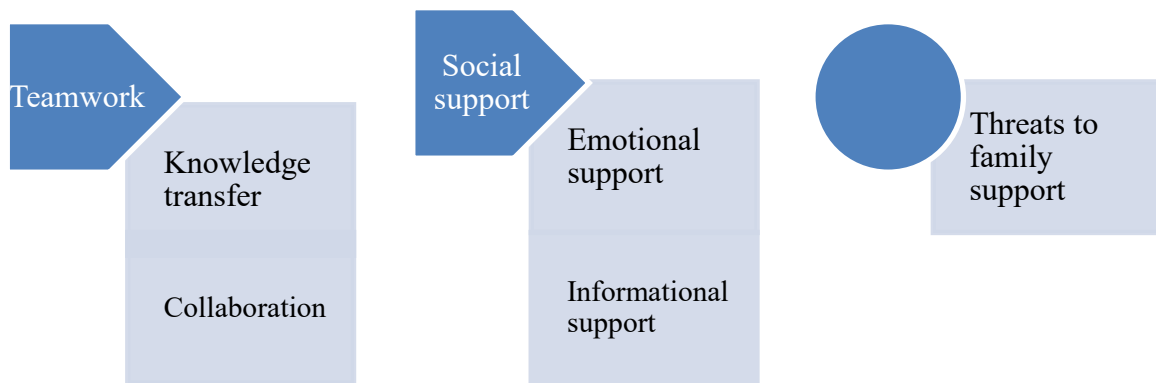
the ability to communicate and network with customers and suppliers, plus any other stakeholders. This was what all of the research participants indicated as they responded to the question on the kinds of knowledge gained from their experience.

Other soft skill attributes which emerged in this study that family business owners gained related to the social relations of fairness, honesty and transparency. However, the attribute of transparency was not universal across all of the research settings. Family business owners in the rural setting were not transparent on issues relating to remuneration within their businesses where their family members did not receive a regular salary. Due to the small, over-the-counter nature of the family-owned businesses in the rural setting studied, they had few or no employees, thus took advantage of available nuclear family members to whom they would give pittances as allowances. Drawing from conceptual frameworks, Leib and Zehrer (2018) point out that some family business owners adopt rigid and conservative philosophies in terms of financial management. The lack of transparency in the remuneration practices of the rurally based family business owners that emerged in this study was consistent with surveyed literature. Visser and Chiloane-Tsoka (2014) concur with Murphy et al. (2017) that salary discrepancies in family-owned business are a sensitive issue that family members endure silently. Of note, customer retention and consequently business sustainability within a given generation would be enhanced by qualities of fairness, honesty and transparency on the part of the family business owners. Having discussed the kinds of knowledge gained by family business owners, the next section covers the findings related to the support received by family business owners from other family members.

Support Gained from Other Family Members

Findings revealed that the forms of support that family business owners received from other family members revolved around teamwork and social support. Through teamwork, knowledge transfer and collaboration emerged. Social support promoted emotional and informational support. The two major themes are discussed under their sub-themes. Another theme that also emerged related to threats to family business owners' support. These five research findings and the themes that they emerged from are illustrated in Figure 9.4 and discussed in turn below.

Figure 9.4: Findings relating to Forms of Family Support



Source: Researcher (2021)

First, family business owners received support from other family members as they interacted in teams. Information was transferred through sharing ideas which were crucial for the inexperienced business owners. Drawing from Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, learning is a collective rather than an individual process. In this case, as the family business owners worked with their relatives as a team, the inexperienced family business owners paid attention to what was happening around them, and this seemingly emotionally stirred their emotional growth, given their desire to ensure their business' sustainability. Through the process, knowledge was transferred and learnt. The concept of knowledge transfer also emerged in consulted literature where Woodfield and Husted (2017) viewed it as family wisdom which was essential for long-term family business survival. In each family business which mirrored the family system, primary socialisation in accordance with the Social Learning Theory enabled parents to share ideas with their children and other family members. This form of support was therefore available in all of the family-owned businesses irrespective of the research setting. The ability of team members to open up seemingly facilitated information flow between predecessors and would be successors.

Second, concomitant to knowledge transfer was collaboration, another form of support enjoyed by family business owners from other family members. It emerged that family business owners were supported by other family members through collaboration. Collaborative efforts which emanated from family business owners teaming up with other family members was crucial for sharing responsibilities and developing their confidence, Preparation of final accounts reported in this study, was one area where collaborative efforts resulted in financial statements whose

development required inputs from other family members involved in the different business sections and activities such as purchasing, pricing and the recording of sales. Srinivas (2011) views collaborators as socially and emotionally involved in active engagement, negotiating and re-negotiating with others to come up with fine-tuned ideas. The process of collaboration relates to the Social Learning Theory (Bandura 1977) where observational learning emanates from the existence of team work. In this study I found that collaborative efforts as a form of support were dominant in rurally based family-owned businesses. This seemed to have been due to the close family ties that both nuclear and extended family members maintained. It also appeared as if they perceived rewards as outweighing the costs and this was likely to have given rise to behaviour change (Bandura 1977). Rosselli (2016) views collaboration as demanding the pooling together of strengths and individual techniques, skills and actions to accomplish a task.

Third, in relation to social support, this study revealed that family business owners benefitted from emotional support offered by other family members. This form of social support emerged where family members visited and consoled the family business owners in times of bereavement, work related stress and any other of life's mishaps. Social support also emerged as having been offered during happy moments such as weddings. Social Learning Theory (Bandura 1977) asserts that emotions are aroused as people witness behaviour when others are undergoing either painful or pleasurable experiences. Ferina et al. (2018) discovered that solidarity, motivation and encouragement are crucial during moments of pain or joy. Family business owners across all of the research contexts gained emotional support from other family members. This could have been due to the principle of '*Ubuntu*' where absence at a relative's funeral or wedding would not augur well in the community. What Ferina et al. (2018) indicate occurred in this study was that family business owners experienced various forms of impediments and recovered from them because of the emotional support provided by their relatives. Participants talked about family funerals, business losses due to natural hazards and work-induced stress, and in all of these situations emotional support was rendered to them. These family business owners needed this close emotional support from their relatives as entrepreneurship was a stressful and painful venture, given the economic climate in Zimbabwe (Powell and Eddleston 2017). Social support in the form of emotional support provided the family business owners with the strength and motivation to persevere and sustain their businesses.

Fourth, social support also emerged through informational support. The study discovered that the family business owners benefitted from this form of support from other family members in both the nuclear and extended family. Informational support received by the business owners was in

the form of expert advice or information related to sources of scarce commodities. This form of support was critical and benefited all of the family business owners across the three research settings. As indicated by Acquah (2012), networking relationships enhance the availability of more sources of valuable information, thereby reducing threats of business collapse. At the time of this study, as alluded to earlier, retail commodities were scarce in Zimbabwe, banks did not have cash, and fuel was not available. Thus, information on the sources of these commodities was vital. Drawing from Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, complex behaviour changes require skilled and experienced models who can provide expert supportive and informative advice. Social support related to free sharing of valuable information apparently enhanced family business sustainability as contingency measures could be implemented as and when necessary.

With regard to threats to family support, research findings revealed that threats had serious negative impacts on the survival of family-owned businesses. Polygamous family-owned businesses, employment of unskilled family members, superstitious beliefs, jealousy, and founder dominance in the family businesses all emerged as threats to family business support in this study. Aneza and Syeda (2016) cautioned that animosity in extended families could impact negatively on family-owned business. This was worsened in cases where feuding extended family members still had children working in the family business. Without motivation, learnt behaviour change would not necessarily occur, as per the Social Learning Theory (Bandura 1977), so it was important for the family business owners to make every effort to resolve and mitigate conflict within the family so that threats could be resolved or avoided. Continued good relations between family members were vital for family business support and sustainability when they were engaged in the same family business. Atsu (2016) reported that cultural values, norms and beliefs were serious impediments to family business support and ultimately business sustainability. This was found to be the case in this study as family hierarchical positions affected business management in situations where supervisors were younger and thus more junior members in the family.

What thus emerged from the above discussion on support from other family members was that family business owners could gain support through teamwork in the form of knowledge transfer and collaboration. They also gained social support which manifested as emotional and informational support. These forms of support could play an important role in providing strength, hope, advice and the transfer of valuable information among family members. Notwithstanding the threats to support mentioned, such forms (teamwork and social support)

of support could enhance family business sustainability.

Having discussed the findings addressing the three research questions, in the next section I conclude my study, highlighting some of the contributions of the study.

Conclusions and Contributions of the study

The focus of the study was to explore the experiential learning of family business owners. The motive behind this was to understand experiential learning and issues surrounding the sustainability of family-owned businesses, given that the death of the founding members generally signalled the end of the family business. The intention was to establish how the family business owners experienced learning and how the knowledge gained contributed to the survival of businesses. During this study, I kept on asking one question:

Why do children and other family members born and raised in family-owned businesses fail to sustain the projects (businesses) when the founding members pass on?

The participants sampled in this study generated rich data and some insights that I presented in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. The conclusions and contributions of this study are underpinned by five critical points related to: theory, the nature of the experiential learning, family relationships, business settings, and support offered by other family members.

First, the study adopted Kolb's (1984) ELT as the main lens on which it was grounded. ELT consists of four stages which entail concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. These were effective in the analysis and explanation of the findings. While ELT has been used to understand learning in educational settings (Jenkins 2017; Seaman 2017; Morris 2020), I argue that ELT is equally effective in understanding learning in the business - retail trade. Three critical reflection processes emerged in this study in relation to the experiential learning process of family business owners, namely reflection in practice, reflection on practice and reflexivity. The undesirable situations or incidences in which family business owners took immediate action were indicative of their ability to reflect in practice or in action. This was complemented by the family business owners' capacity to reflect on practice, as well as conduct self-introspection (reflexivity). I can therefore conclude that family business owners learn through active participation in and reflection on and in business practices.

Kolb's ELT was complemented with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory and conceptual frameworks to help unpack and explain the kinds of knowledge gained and the forms of support that family business owners received from other family members. Rich data was elicited to answer the research questions and I therefore conclude that a triple framework of Kolb and Bandura's theories and conceptual frameworks offers a powerful frame to understand and explain the experiential learning of family business owners, what they learn and the support they gain from other family members.

Second, this study concludes that family business owners learn experientially as they run their businesses. Family business owners in this study experienced learning by observing their (role) models and imitating them, in other words learning by doing or participating in the execution of practical business activities. They also experienced learning through different forms of reflection. This research discovered that formal education is not a pre-requisite for running a successful business; but openness to experiential learning by the family business owners is. Family business owners acquire entrepreneurship knowledge through their personal involvement in business activities in which they can observe, participate and reflect. Most family business owners who got into family businesses without any skill or knowledge ended up having been empowered through teamwork: knowledge transfer and collaboration with other skilled family members. Knowledge of how to operate various sophisticated information and communication technologies enhanced speedy processing of family-owned business transactions. In other words, I can safely say that family business owners learn how to run a business by running a business.

Third, the study found that family business owners lacked strategic planning skills as they displayed reactive tendencies rather than being proactive in their business operations. While these shortcomings could be attributed to the national unstable business environment in which these family business owners were operating at the time of the study, the consequences had negative impacts on business sustainability.

Concomitant to this, the study also concluded that the existence of a family business did not shield it from interference by the family system. Family business owners maintained their statuses as family members and were occasionally subjected to interference by other family members. Extended family members in this study often pleaded with family business owners to have their children or other relatives employed, which in most cases compromised the appointment of skilled personnel. Findings from this study complimented the views of Musa and Semasinghe (2014) that family business owners tend to employ unskilled manpower, including nuclear family members who take up management positions by virtue of business ownership.

This is given that nuclear and extended family members are generally bound and related by totem, blood or marriage.

The findings from this study supported surveyed literature (Abouzaid 2011; Nasser 2014) where assertions were that disputes, discontent and disengagements in the family system had spill over effects into the business system. While conflicts were inevitable in family-owned businesses, the research also found that family business viability hinged on lasting relationships between family business owners and their target customers. Business is all about having loyal customers, and the ability to create and maintain customer loyalty enhances business sustainability.

Fourth, while the family-owned businesses in the urban and growth point settings were well positioned in terms of infrastructural and other facilities, the study found that the rural and urban business settings existed with extreme differences with regard to the provision of infrastructural facilities such as sources of electricity, telecommunication, infrastructure and road networks. Rural settings in Zimbabwe are known to be marginalised (Mukeredzi 2013; 2015) and I can conclude that family business owners in the rural areas continue to lag behind and struggle due to their geographical locations. The contextual variations in this study provided a marked distinction between family business owners in rural areas and their urban counterparts in urban areas with regard to service provision and chances of business survival.

Fifth, while the family business owners may experience threats to support, the support received socially and through teamwork with other family members in both nuclear and extended family far outweighs the threats. The significance of emotional support and the provision of counselling and expert advice to family business owners by other family members in times of distress cannot be overlooked. Another broad observation that emerged related to business sustainability, where the study found that the survival of family-owned businesses was generally limited to within specific generations and did not occur across or over several generations. Family-owned business' viability in one generation thus does not guarantee family business sustainability in the next generations.

The next section addresses the implications based on the study.

Lessons and Implications Based on the Study

The lessons from and implications of the findings of my study discussed below, if considered, may inform policy discussions and decisions of the Zimbabwean Commerce and Industry sector

to develop support programmes for family business owners that may enhance the sustainability of their businesses.

Of the 21 research participants in this study, none talked about clear succession plans. This is a critical and sensitive issue which was absent in all of the family-owned businesses studied irrespective of the setting in which they were located. Family business owners should open up, discuss and develop succession plans. For the benefit of the family, the economy and the business, power transfer to the next generation should be debated and planned for before the retirement of a founding member or a key leader. Feelings of entitlement by both founders and other family members should be suppressed. Succession planning will enhance business sustainability from one generation to the next as successors will be mentally prepared for the takeover.

Business sustainability emerged in this study as a phenomenon that existed within a specific family business generation. The inability of family-owned businesses to live beyond the second or third generation was noted as a cause for concern. The survival and long-term sustainability of family-owned businesses in Zimbabwe will require the implementation of robust strategies. Given the current economic crisis, Zimbabwe needs more job creators in the form of entrepreneurship than job seekers. Entrepreneurship should be the driving force of the country's economy, anchored on the formalisation of viable informal sector businesses.

The study also found that small-scale family business owners did not have clearly spelt out remuneration policies that governed the payment of salaries to nuclear and/or other family members who assisted in the family business operations. It is therefore suggested that contracts, job descriptions and routine procedures be formalised and documented to minimise the discontent of employees in the long run.

The study found that the power and control of family-owned businesses remained with the founding members. The survival and long-term sustainability of a family-owned business was found to be dependent on the collective efforts of all of the identifiable part-owners of the business, but often power and control remained in the hands of the founding member. Education programmes, especially in the rural context, may help in professionalising family business operations. The use of flyers from the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, as well as the employment of 'youth promoters' of entrepreneurship may go a long way in the Zimbabwean context to educate the family business owners. This may also play a significant role in re-

building the economy after the Covid-19 pandemic. Founder dominance needs to be minimised at all costs as it inhibits family business sustainability from one generation to the next.

The study revealed that family business owners in the rural setting were lagging behind in terms of ICT. Use of computers, cash till machines, lifting machines and butchery equipment was minimal. The benefits of running a family business that is anchored on ICT in a global market cannot be overlooked. In mitigation of the challenges relating to sources of electrical power, family business owners need to consider the installation of solar power. Government support and encouragement may be critical in this regard. Government support may be in the form of import tax exemption for solar panels, accessories and other electric power related gadgets for a specified period of time.

The study also discovered that 17 out of 21 research participants did not even possess elementary knowledge of business management. This study recommends exposure to basic principles of entrepreneurship, with specific attention paid to family-owned business, starting in primary school. This may help early school dropouts, should they choose entrepreneurship as an option. The study also noted a lack of clarity on the concept of family businesses among scholars, in published articles as well as in the print and electronic media. Misconceptions of the phenomenon apparently resulted in the business activities carried out by individual family members being portrayed and classified as family-owned businesses. Examples of such misconceptions include the classification of some family income generating projects, vendors, flea markets and sole proprietorship as family-owned businesses, without considering business ownership and control. The study therefore recommends that educators take note of such misconceptions and help provide an accurate understanding of this phenomenon at an early age. Basic knowledge of the structure and organisation of family businesses will probably motivate prospective family business owners to invest their future in such businesses.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study was carried out at a time when the Zimbabwean economy was in distress, a period of economic stagnation where businesses inclusive of family-owned businesses faced numerous challenges. First, the scarcity of commodities for stocking, unavailability of fuel and the cash crisis affected the normal operations of family business owners. This was evident where fuel had to be obtained on the black market, and in some instances the business owners had to sleep in a queue for fuel. The scarce commodities were often obtained from neighbouring countries. Given

the harsh business environment which prevailed in the country at the time, participants were subjected to high levels of stress. Related studies may need to be carried out in a stable economic environment in order to draw the perceptions and experiences of family business owners operating in a viable business environment.

Second, this study focused on family-owned businesses at different levels of operation, that is: first, second and third generation businesses. No data was generated from people who had left family business operations. Further studies may need to focus on family business owners who have transcended the third generation in operation or who have left family business operations. Researching such business organisations may provide insights on what needs to be done for family business sustainability through generations.

Third, employment and remuneration policies, especially in rurally based family-owned business lacked transparency. Children and other family members were not remunerated as they were simply considered as beneficiaries of the family business. Further research needs to be undertaken to identify the economic value of mature, employable children and other family members to come up with fair and transparent remuneration policies.

Fourth, the study focused on family business owners in the retail sector. Further and more comprehensive research could be carried out in other sectors of the economy such as primary production and service industries where family business owners are engaged, to provide insights and fill possible gaps left by this study.

Finally, a few questions remain unanswered relating to family-owned businesses and business sustainability across generations. Further studies may address issues relating to the leadership styles of family business owners, the impact of polygamy on business sustainability, as well the influence of the family system on the business system.

As I conclude my arduous research journey, I wish to point out that this study also noted that there was a mismatch between the thinking and expectations of parents running family-owned businesses and the thinking and expectations of their children and other family members, which could contribute to a lack of business sustainability.

This was summed up in the comments by Participant UB6:

I was born when this business was already in existence, being run by my parents. This has been the source of our food, clothing and school fees and many other necessities. I am the eldest son in this family and my parents have high hopes that I remain in this business forever. I did Civil Engineering at university; my future is not in entrepreneurship relating to retail trade. I have bigger dreams.

Thus, the misalignment and mismatches in the thinking and expectations of business founders (parents) and would-be successors in one generation may still be prevalent in subsequent generations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Information Letter for the Participants



Title of the Research Study

Experiential Learning of Family Business Owners and How it Influences Business Sustainability in Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe.

Principal Investigator/ Researcher: Simbarashe Machida.

Supervisors: Professor Tabitha Mukeredzi and Professor Stephen Mago.

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiential learning that is undertaken by family business owners in the retail sector and how this influences business sustainability. This is premised on the observation that most family-owned businesses do not survive for a long period after the retirement or incapacitation or death of their founding members. The study will come up with recommendations for local government authorities, the Ministry of Small to Medium Enterprises, as well as the Ministry of International Trade and Regional Integration that may help enhance the sustainability of family-owned businesses.

You have been identified to participate in this study because you are one of the family members who are involved directly or indirectly in the running of a family business.

Outline of the Procedure

Your participation will take the form of two face-to-face interviews, taking photographs which will be used for the second interview, as well as observations which will be done by the researcher. If you are willing to be part of this research, your participation will be voluntary and

you will be free to withdraw at any time. A date will be set for an observation that will be done by the researcher at your business site.

The first interview, which comes before the observation session, will be based on the following aspects (i) how and when you learnt about the existence and got involved in the current family business; (ii) the knowledge you acquired from predecessors and how that knowledge benefits the family business; (iii) the activities that you do that you learn from; (iv) the things that you learn from your involvement in the business; and (v) your personal opinions on the existence and survival of family businesses in Masvingo Province. On the day of this interview a disposable camera will be left with one of the participants in your family business so that you can take photographs which the second interview will be based on. The researcher will collect the camera for processing of the photographs on the day of the observation.

The observation will focus on issues relating to (i) communication and interaction with customers; (ii) engagement with any employees; (iii) managing stock levels in the shop (shelf-packing); (iv) how customers are served; (v) as well as other related aspects that may be deemed necessary to observe. With your permission, the researcher will make hand-written notes during the observation process.

The second interview will be done after the observation and will focus on the photographs that you have taken. You will be requested to take photographs that relate to your learning, how you learn from working in the business, what you learn and how other family members support the running of the business.

The interviews and observation will take about 90 minutes each.

Risks and Discomforts for the Participant

The hand-written notes, recordings and photographs will only be taken and used when permission has been granted by you. Personal information relating to you and your family business will only be used in coded form for anonymity purposes. You will therefore not experience any risks or discomforts in this study.

Benefits to the Participants and the Researcher

The study will help to publicise the operations of family-owned businesses in general and have them recognised for support programmes by the government, which may help to sustain these businesses.

As for the researcher, the information obtained will be published in accredited journals and the researcher will learn a lot through engagement in this study.

Reasons why Participants may be Withdrawn from the Study

You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time, without harm. Unforeseen or unfortunate situations may also lead to your withdrawal from the study.

Remuneration

No remuneration will be given to research participants in this study.

Costs of the Study

You are not expected to pay anything towards this study. The researcher will meet all of his travelling and subsistence expenses.

Confidentiality

- All data will be processed in a computerised system with passwords to ensure that no unauthorised people have access to this information.
- All written data and recordings will be kept for five years and thereafter destroyed in accordance with DUT regulations.
- Codes will be used to ensure that you remain anonymous.
- Photographs will only be taken to act as prompts during the second interview. Unless sanctioned by you, no photographs will be publicised.
- You will also keep a copy of this letter for reference purposes.

Research related Injury

There will be no research related injuries to yourself as a result of the study.

Persons to Contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries

Supervisor: Prof. Tabitha Mukeredzi (0762995974) email: TabithaM@dut.ac.za

Co-supervisor: Prof. Stephen Mago (071 859 5887) email: StephenM@dut.ac.za

Researcher's Cell: +27 72 122 1550. Email: simbamachida@gmail.com

The Institutional Research Ethics Administrator on 0313732375

Appendix 2: Consent Letter for the Participants



Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study – Research Ethics Clearance Number:
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Information Letter for Participants) regarding the study: Appendix 1.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be processed anonymously into a study report.
- In view of the research requirements, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage and without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and of my own free will declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.
- I have agreed to have the interview tape recorded and to take photographs depicting my professional learning activities.
- I have agreed to the use of a code name and for my photographs to be blurred if used in the study.

----- ----- ----- -----
 Full Name of Date Time Signature/Right Thumbprint

Participant

I herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

.....
 Full Name of Date Signature

Researcher

.....
 Full Name of Witness Date Signature

(If applicable)

Appendix 3: Request for Permission from Gatekeepers



MASVINGO MUNICIPALITY
CITY OF MASVINGO
P O BOX 17
MASVINGO

10 July 2018

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH.

My name is Simbarashe Machida, a student at Durban University of Technology, School of Education and I am currently pursuing doctoral research on the experiential learning of family business owners and how this learning influences business sustainability.

I am hereby seeking your permission to conduct research in Masvingo Province.

I have provided you with a copy of my proposal which includes copies of the data collection tools and consent and/or assent forms to be used in the research process, as well as a copy of the approval letter which I received from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC).

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on any of the following contact details: Cell- +263773198038; +26377521572; OR +27721221550

Email: simbamachida@gmail.com

Yours Sincerely

Mr Simbarashe Machida
Durban University of Technology

TO BE COMPLETED BY AN OFFICIAL FROM MASVINGO MUNICIPALITY

I hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this letter and the nature of the research. The municipality will assist the researcher.

.....

Official

.....

Date

.....

Signature

Appendix 4: Permission Letters from Gatekeepers

Permission Letter from City Of Masvingo



Permission Letter from Chivi Rural District Council

PG 2a



LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES: PERMISSION LETTER

.....RURAL or URBAN AUTHORITY

BUSINESS UNIT
MASVINGO

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO ACCESS INFORMATION ON THE LOCATION OF BUSINESSES WITHIN YOUR JURISDICTION.

My name is Simbarashe Machida, a student At Durban University of Technology, School of Education and I am currently pursuing doctoral research on Experiential Learning of family business owners and how this learning influences business sustainability. I humbly request you to provide me with information as to where I can locate the business units within your jurisdiction.

The investigation is premised on the observation that most family owned businesses in Masvingo Province do not survive for a long period after the retirement or incapacitation of founding members. I have attached an information letter which explains all the research procedures. You may contact me or my supervisors for clarity or additional comments during participation and at any time even after the study is complete.

Supervisors

Dr Tabitha Grace Mukeredzi Email: TabithaM@dut.ac.za Cell: +27 76 299 5974	Prof. Stephen Mago Email: StephenM@dut.ac.za Cell: +27 71 859 5887
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Adult, Community and Post-Graduate Education Unit
Durban University of Technology Indumiso/Midlands Campus
15 JF Sithole Road, Impali 3201, Pietermaritzburg, Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa

I thank you in advance for your assistance.

Yours Sincerely

Simbarashe Machida

Mr Simbarashe Machida (+27 72 122 1550) email: simbamachida@gmail.com

TO BE COMPLETED BY OFFICIAL FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY

I Naibe Archibald S hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this letter and nature of the research. The local authority will assist the researcher.

Naibe Archibald S
Official

25/10/18
Date

[Signature]
Signature

HUMAN RESOURCES & ADMIN OFFICER
CHIVI RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL

Form PG 2a - 2018

30

2018-10-25
Updated 11/08/2016
P BAG 527, CHIVI
TEL (0337) 285 1237-9

Appendix 5: Ethics Clearance Certificate

1. Provisional Approval from Institutional Research Ethics Committee



Institutional Research Ethics Committee
Research and Postgraduate Support Directorate
2nd Floor, Serengeti Court
Gate 1, Steve Biko Campus
Durban University of Technology

P.O. Box 1334, Durban, South Africa, 4001

Tel: 031 373 2275
Email: ivachad@vut.ac.za
http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional_research_ethics
www.dut.ac.za

18 October 2018

Mr S Machida
461 Mosamo Street
Retswalele
Kimberley

Dear Mr Machida

Experiential learning of family business owners and how it influences business sustainability in Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe

I am pleased to inform you that **PROVISIONAL APPROVAL** has been granted to your proposal subject to:

- Piloting of the data collection tool. Please note that should there be any changes to the data collection tool, in a letter signed by the researcher and supervisor, list the changes to the documents and submit to IREC with the final data collection tool. Even when there are no changes to the data collection tool, IREC has to be notified.
- Obtaining and submitting the necessary gatekeeper permission/s to Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC).

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS NOT A FINAL APPROVAL LETTER. KINDLY SUBMIT THE ABOVE MENTIONED DOCUMENTS WITHIN THREE MONTHS TO THE IREC OFFICE. DATA COLLECTION CAN ONLY COMMENCE WHEN IREC ISSUES FULL APPROVAL

The Proposal has been allocated the following Ethical Clearance number **IREC 166/18**. Please use this number in all communication with this office.

Approval has been granted for a period of two years, before the expiry of which you are required to apply for safety monitoring and annual recertification. Please use the Safety Monitoring and Annual Recertification Report form which can be found in the Standard Operating Procedures [SOP's] of the IREC. This form must be submitted to the IREC at least 3 months before the ethics approval for the study expires.

Yours Sincerely

Professor J.K. Adam
Chairperson: IREC



2018 -10- 18

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
P.O. BOX 1334 DURBAN 4003 SOUTH AFRICA

2. Full Approval from Institutional Research Ethics Committee



9 November 2018

Mr S Machida
461 Mosamo Street
Retowelele
Kimberley

Dear Mr Machida

Experiential learning of family business owners and how it influences business sustainability in Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe

The Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your final data collection tool for review.

We are pleased to inform you that the data collection tool has been approved. Kindly ensure that participants used for the pilot study are not part of the main study.

In addition, the IREC acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letters.

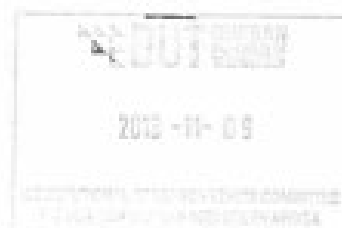
Please note that **FULL APPROVAL** is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the IREC according to the IREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's).

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the IREC as outlined in the IREC SOP's.

Yours Sincerely,

Professor J K Adam
Chairperson: IREC



Appendix 6: Data Generation Questions

A. Questions for The First Interview (English version)

Research Question One:

What is the nature of the experiential learning that family business owners go through and how does it influence business sustainability?

- 1.
- 1.1. Tell me how this business started, the birth of the business?
- 1.2. What are your childhood experiences in the running of a family business?
- 1.3. How did you become involved in this business?
- 1.4. Is there any learning/knowledge that you are acquiring in this business?
- 1.5. Do you sometimes reflect on your experiences or developments that take place as you run the business?
- 1.6. Are there some decisions which you sometimes make, only to find in the future that there is a need for adjustments or modifications?
- 1.7. How does the knowledge you got or you are currently getting help in sustaining the business?
- 1.8. How do you see the future existence of family businesses in Masvingo Province?

Research Question Two:

What kind of knowledge is gained experientially by family business owners?

- 2.
- 2.1. What kind of things did you learn about running a business from your predecessors?
- 2.2. What interpersonal skills do you think you acquired through running of a family business?
- 2.3. What kind of things do you learn from (a) other family members? (b) other family owned businesses
- 2.4. How do you handle misunderstandings with your customers?

Research Question Three:

What form of support do family business owners gain from other family members?

- 3.
- 3.1. What form of support do you gain from family members in this business?
- 3.2. How do family relations affect the running of this business?
- 3.3. To what extent do founding members open up in order for you to learn much about running a family business?
- 3.4. How do you handle family conflicts that are related to business operations?
- 3.5. Does this business have a clear succession plan, where grooming of future leaders is in place?

Conclusion: Is there anything you want to add or ask me?

Thank you so much for participating in this first interview session. We are now left with two meeting sessions, the observation and the second and final interview.

First Interview Questions Translated Into Shona

Research Question One: What is the nature of the experiential learning that family business owners go through and how does it influence business sustainability?

1. Interview Questions in Shona

- 1.1. Mungandiudzawo here kuti bhizimusi renyu iri rakambotanga sei?
- 1.2. Makadzidzei kubva paudiki hwenyu maererano nekufambiswa kwebhizimusi remhuri?
- 1.3. Imi pachenyu makapindawo sei mubhizimusi rino?
- 1.4. Pane zvamunodzidzawo here kubva pakuita mubhizimusi rino zvine chekuita nekufambiswa kwemabhizimusi?
- 1.5. Munombocherekedzawo here pane zvamunenge makaita kana kusangana nazvo kumashure zvingakubetserai kufambisa bhizimusi renyu?
- 1.6. Pane madanho amunombotora here mozoona kumberi uko kuti hazvinyatsoita?
- 1.7. Zvamunodzidza mubhizimusi rino munooona zvichibatsira here kuti bhizimusi renyu iri rirambe richirarama?
- 1.8. Munooona here mabhizimusi edzimhuri aya achirarama kwenguva refu mudunhu rino reMasvingo?

Research Question Two: What kind of knowledge is gained experientially by family business owners?

2. Interview Questions in Shona

- 2.1. Ndezvipi zvakadzidza kubva kune vakatanga bhizimusi rino zvinechekuita nekufambiswa kwemabhizimusi?
- 2.2. Unyanzwi hupi hwekunzwisana/kuwirirana nevamwe vanhu hwamunofunga kuti makawana mukutungamirira bhizimusi remhuri?
- 2.3. Ndezvipiwo zvamunodzidza kubva (a) kune vehukama vari muno mubhizimusi (b) nekune mamwewo mabhizimusi edzimhuri?
- 2.4. Munogadzirisawo sei pamunenge muchitadza kuwirirana/kunzwisana nevatengi venyu?

Research Question Three: What form of support do family business owners gain from other family members?

3. Interview Questions in Shona

- 3.1. Nderupi rubatsiro rwamunowana kubva kune vehukama vari muno mubhizimusi?
- 3.2. Hukama hungava nechekuita here mukufambiswa kwebhizimusi?
- 3.3. Vakatanga bhizimusi rino vakasunungukawo zvakadii kukubatsirai kudzidza?
- 3.4. Semhuri, munogadzirisa sei kukonana kwenyu mubhizimusi?
- 3.5. Bhizimusi iri rine hwaro/urongwa hwakajeka here hwakanangana nekudzidzisa kana kusimudzira vangazoritungamirira mushure menyu?

Conclusion: Pane zvimwewo zvamungada kuwedzera here kana kundibvunza?

Ndinokutendai chose nemhinduro dzamapa muchikamu chino chekutanga. Tichasangana zvakare muzvikamu zviviri zvasara.

B. Observation Check List

A semi-structured observation is going to be applied where the researcher may capture issues which crop up in addition to the aspects specified on this check list.

Focus area	Aspects to be observed	Comments
Organisational set up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Management structure and decision makers• Separation of roles; Relationships & Status	
Physical setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Programme settings• Material resources in the business e.g. appropriate use of forklifts, trolleys, till machines	
Behaviours of research participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rapport between family members and customers• Any other events actually taking place	
Interactional settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Verbal and non-verbal	
Communication channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Availability of organisational rules• Are the rules informative?• Information posters e.g. opening times, duty rosters• Prompt meetings - information sharing	

C. Questions for The Second Interview: Photo Elicitation

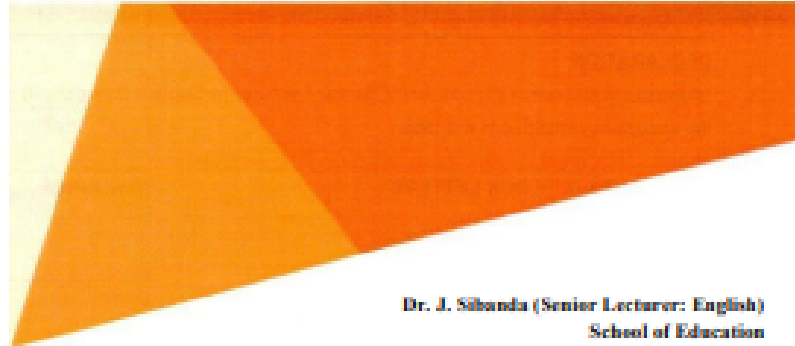
1. Select any eight photographs from the twelve that you took.
2. Why did you select these eight, leaving out those four photographs?
3. Tell me how each photograph explains your learning and involvement in the running of this business.

Thank you so much for participating in this second and final interview session. I may have to make a follow up on issues emanating from this observation.

Interview Questions in Shona

1. Sarudzai mifananidzo misere kubva pagumi nemiviri yamakatora iyi.
2. Sei mada kutora iyi misere muchisiya imwe mina iyo?
3. Nditsanangureiwo kubva pamumwe neumwe yemifananidzo yamatora iyi zvamunodzidza uye mashandiro enyu mubhizimusi rino.

Appendix 7: Translation Letter



Dr. J. Sibanda (Senior Lecturer: English)
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19 January 2019

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby confirm that I have made translation for interview data generated in Shona to English for Mr Machida. I have satisfied myself that the English documents are true, correct and complete translations of the interviewee's responses. I further confirm that I am competent in both Shona and English to render and certify such translation.

Sincerely

29.01.2019

SIGNATURE

DATE

Appendix 8: Letter of Editing



Pauline Fogg
54 Grundel Road
Carrington Heights
Durban
4001
074 782 5234

17 March 2021

Letter of Editing

This report serves to state that the thesis submitted by Simbarashe Machida titled 'Experiential Learning of Family Business Owners and how it Influences Business Sustainability in Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe' has been edited.

The thesis was edited for errors in syntax, grammar, punctuation and the in-text referencing system used.

The edit will be regarded as complete once the necessary changes have been effected and all of the comments addressed.

Thank-you for your business.

Pauline Fogg
Emerald Editing Services