



***An exploration into the personal and professional impact of the  
Bachelor of Applied Management on a small business owner***

***by***  
**Kylie Ellis**

***Qualification:*** Master of Professional Practice

Research Project Submitted for the Requirements for the Degree of  
**Master of Professional Practice**

***Capable NZ, College of Work-Based Learning  
Otago Polytechnic***

***Date of Submission:*** 6 October 2021

***Facilitator:*** Dr Glenys Forsyth  
***Academic Mentor:*** Dr Glenys Forsyth

## Table of Contents

Author Attestation .....	3
Executive Summary .....	4
Glossary .....	7
Chapter One: Introduction .....	8
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	13
Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Method .....	21
Chapter Four: Research Findings .....	36
Theme: Self-Care .....	37
Theme: Reflection .....	42
Theme: Success .....	45
Theme: Transition .....	50
Theme: Amplified Leadership Capabilities .....	53
Chapter Five: Discussion .....	58
Chapter Six: Recommendations and Conclusion .....	65
References .....	69
Figures List .....	73

## **Author Attestation**

***Name of student:*** Kylie Ellis

***Qualification:*** Master of Professional Practice

***Title of project:*** *An exploration into the personal and professional impact of the Bachelor of Applied Management on a small business owner*

***Date of Submission:*** 6 October 2021

***Facilitator:*** Dr Glenys Forsyth

***Academic Mentor:*** Dr Glenys Forsyth

### ***Attestation of Authorship***

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), or material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of an institution of higher learning.

## Executive Summary

This practitioner thesis explores the impact of gaining the Bachelor of Applied Management of Capable NZ graduates who are small business owners.

The focus of my research is to explore the experience of our small business owner graduates and acquire deeper knowledge around the application of learnings from their course of study into their businesses and personal lives. Graduates anecdotally report the process as transformational by enhancing their personal and professional selves. The impact of the learning process will vary among learners, so gaining an insight into these variables will benefit both CNZ and future learners. On completion of the project, I will:

- have a greater understanding of how small business owners (SBOs) who are graduates of the BApptMgt have applied their learnings from the degree to their business
- have explored the impact on business performance of these learnings
- have investigated what professional capabilities have been developed in SBOs – what do they do differently now?
- have a greater understanding of the key success factors in the BApptMgt, ILP process
- have explored the role of reflection in management learning

Methodology / Methods: My research methodology applied a qualitative approach utilising Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), and my data collection utilised semi-structured interviews undertaken either face to face or via phone. Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim then analysed for emerging themes.

Findings: Key themes

Five themes emerged from the data. First, the participants discussed various impacts from undertaking their study, which strengthened their personal and professional selves. The themes identified challenges small business owners face, such as feeling isolated within their workplace and the impact of workplace stressors on their mental health and well-being. Second, reflective practice was identified as the tool to analyse, evaluate and lay to rest experiences of significant impact. The value of that exercise was classified as “strengthening their mental health”, and the tools they gained were described as having the ability to “self-counsel” to manage their well-being. In addition, sustaining self and business was a sub-theme that emerged from the participants recognizing that a more holistic approach to business was required for long term business viability. The participants

discussed prioritising self-care practices to benefit their well-being and their employees, enabling them to sustain the “whole business”. Finally, as a result of their study, small business owners identified an amplification of their leadership capability, which enabled them to increase their effectiveness, thus, increasing the efficiency of their business.

Significance of findings:

The findings help us understand why small business owners must apply self-care practices within small businesses and effective strategies to enable this process. Current literature cites compounding mental health issues in business "Many business owners are reluctant to talk about mental health as they need to be perceived as having everything under control" (Baker, 2019,p. 4). As a result, showing vulnerability is still not the norm in NZ small businesses. Business health is no longer just a financial position; it encompasses all aspects of the business operation. The work of Weir (2019) and McAlpine (2018) outlined the considerable impacts of burnout and how debilitating mental health recovery can be on the individual and their small business.

The findings from this research have implications for the facilitators of this programme. The findings provide examples of the impact of the learner/facilitator relationship and the value our small business owners gain from working with someone independent from their business. The findings also offer value to a wider sector within the business community and Otago Polytechnic to better understand the impact of education and how it can sustain the longevity of small businesses.

My professional aim in completing the MProfPrac is to develop my understanding of the impact of undertaking the Bachelor of Applied Management (BAppMgt) for small business owners and the impact on small businesses. I wish to be considered an expert resource in this area; undertaking this research will deepen my understanding of the impact of gaining a qualification for small business owners. As a result of this project, I have gained greater clarity of my role as a dual-professional and identified the changes that have occurred within my professional practice. This understanding and the findings from my research will enable me to impact my community of practice positively.

In addition, I will add valuable research evidence supporting the efficacy of the independent learning pathway (ILP) through Capable NZ and Otago Polytechnic.

My academic mentor provided supervision of the project.

A literature review supported the learning and academic validity of my research findings.

Otago Polytechnic Ethics Committee reviewed and approved the Ethics application.

**Academic Mentor and Facilitator: Dr Glenys Forsyth**

## Glossary

**Within this thesis, I have woven my professional practice impact learning into the thesis to demonstrate research process and professional practice impacts.**

### Key



The koru, a sign of growth, within my thesis it indicates the growth and transformation of my dual professional practice



The book symbol indicates critical learning that I identify within my professional practice and my development as a researcher



The lightbulb symbol indicates a reflection on my professional practise impact

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

My practitioner thesis will review my professional practice framework as a small business owner and a learning facilitator within Capable NZ (CNZ). I have been a learning facilitator and assessor with CNZ for approximately nine years. My work is concentrated within undergraduate programmes, predominantly the Bachelor of Applied Management (BAppMgt), Bachelor of Information Technology, and the NZ Diploma in Business Studies. My professional aim was to enhance my understanding of the impact of the BAppMgt on small business owners and their business performance. In addition, I hope to become considered an expert resource within this field as I become research engaged within my community of practice.

I undertook the BAppMgt in 2011 and found the learning process transformational as a business leader and manager. I found the impact of the learning process to be empowering; it provided me with academic credibility, increased confidence in my abilities and developed new skills in academic reasoning and thinking. However, I am aware that the impact of the learning process will vary among learners, so gaining an insight into these variables will benefit CNZ as the tertiary provider in achieving its strategic goal of providing an exceptional learning experience.

CNZ was established to meet the needs of adult learners within workplaces, who would generally not leave a role/position to study full-time, but whose experience and learning could be credentialled. Facilitation is the primary method of working with learners. To successfully engage the learner, I guide them through a reflective process to gain insight into their perceptions, challenge their assumptions, and attain a deeper understanding of their skills, capabilities, and competencies derived from work and life experiences. As a Learning Facilitator, I have learned that different learners require different approaches, discussions, strategies, and skills. The programme of study applies a work-based learning philosophy, the benefit to the learner is increased confidence in their work knowledge by gaining academic credibility at a degree level and validation of their skills which can lessen their self-imposed "imposter syndrome". Ker and Carpenter (2018) suggest that facilitation is defined as "a professional activity rather than a set of technical skills"(p.30). The process of facilitation is "complex, multifaceted, and learner-centred" (Ker & Carpenter, 2018, p.30).

### **Academic Background:**

CNZ has experienced significant growth over the last ten years. A typical CNZ learner does not meet the profile of an average tertiary student. According to data from the Organisation for Economic co-operation and development (EAG, 2020), in NZ, 65.9% of young adults are expected to enter tertiary education before they reach twenty-five years of age. There are various reasons for young adults to



undertake tertiary studies, such as acquiring a range of advanced-level skills and knowledge to contribute to society (OECD, 2020) as their life experiences are minimal and they are not yet well-established in a career. CNZ learners are considered mature with an average age of forty-five years, diverse in experience, well-established careers, and maybe preparing to change roles (career-up) or future-proofing skills. The purpose of achieving a degree differs for everyone. However, a typical aspiration for small business owners is to improve business performance and build confidence to develop academic knowledge vs their technical capability.

The Otago Polytechnic Independent Learning Pathway (ILP) approach is unique in New Zealand by credentialing full degrees via ILP (Ker, 2018). CNZ is meeting the need of a diverse sector of current and future learners. Our learners benefit from an ILP, which provides significant personal and professional development. Ker (2017) describes ILP as a way of identifying skills and knowledge against a graduate profile instead of being assessed against learning outcomes of individual courses. There is an enrichment of the professional self when learners use their workplace as the learning environment. CNZ provides a rich educational experience for a diverse sector of learners.

In my previous qualifications BAppMgt and Graduate Diploma of Tertiary Education (GDTE), I identified central themes of relationships, specialised knowledge, communication and connecting with people, influencing my personal and professional life. These themes have significantly impacted my development as a Learning Facilitator within CNZ. I will reflect on the change in my professional practice, review how my skills and capabilities align with my early learnings, and describe my dual professions as a Learning Facilitator and small business owner.

### **Business Background:**

I have been a small business owner for twenty years. I moved into small business ownership in 2001 when my husband's new business, was in financial crisis, and there were only two options – sink or swim. We had to decide whether to buy out a business partner or shut the business down altogether as the business was nearly insolvent. This introduction to small business ownership was chaotic and terrifying, with the added burden of attempting to manage what appeared to be insurmountable debt. It was a baptism by fire, and the learning was steep and considerable.

During the initial years of business ownership, I developed resilience and awareness of the significant accountability required of a business owner. I gained a range of skills, knowledge and abilities acquired through business experience that could never be replicated within a taught management or business degree. I was also eager to build stakeholder relationships to manage my business, especially in its start-up phase. My business became my classroom. I undertook daily lessons in humility,

strategic planning, business principles, negotiation, active listening, and being wholehearted in my interactions with staff and customers. I have transferred this knowledge to my role as a Learning Facilitator, understanding the need to develop a strong foundation of trust with learners. I create honest and open interactions with learners by building trust, making it easier for the learner to share some of their most intimate, challenging and confronting moments in life.

I attribute the refinement of my interpersonal and cognitive capability to my seventeen years as a Musculoskeletal Therapist, Personal Trainer, and Business Owner. In all these roles, I learned that the initial exchange when meeting someone sets the tone for the relationship and affects their level of comfort and trust. As a therapist, clients had to divulge what they believed to be the cause of their pain, which was often emotional rather than physical. Reading a person and a situation are the two skills I use daily. I understand these skills are about rapidly assessing a situation, identifying needs and gauging an appropriate response.

Having a clear sense of self and what I offer in a situation or how I can help someone assists with the first step in connection and building trust. Reflecting, I developed a broad range of communication skills; empathy, open-mindedness, feedback, compassion, respect and clarity. The lessons gained from working with people have been plentiful. These experiences have become life skills that have formed the foundation for my facilitation practice and guided my interactions within a professional or personal context. For example, as a business owner, I learned that business was about creating value and changing the perceptions of my team from being task-focused to people-centric; these lessons were directly transferrable to my practice as a learner-centred facilitator.

Completing a BAppMgt through CNZ enabled me to enhance my professional capabilities and develop my strategic thinking. I critically analysed my leadership, business knowledge, technical skills, and ability to create authentic and long-term business relationships. Critical reflection facilitated the process of placing professional boundaries within my practice by developing my practice framework. However, achieving a degree also presented me with additional career options. Gaining a degree allowed me to remove the limitations I had created due to my lack of higher education, ultimately creating a new career path. Post-completion, I joined the CNZ assessment team as a subject matter expert.

By observing my fellow assessors during learner assessments, the most powerful lesson was watching them connect with the learner on a deep level. I learned that identifying with something meaningful and building relatability and trust were vital factors of learner transformation during the assessment process (Smith, 2019). Relationships accelerate when trust or shared expertise is present. After a

year of assessing, I progressed into facilitation. My desire to expand my professional skills and support business development provided the energy required in my role as a Learning Facilitator within CNZ.

Dual Practitioner:

Being learner-centred is a primary aim in CNZ and fits well with my customer-centric philosophy. According to Raelin (2006), facilitators encourage questioning values and assumptions and, most importantly, “how to look at things differently” (p.9). Therefore, it was beneficial unpacking how I developed my relationship capabilities to understand why I am effective when working with people. As a result, I created a personal philosophy of placing the customer first. As I began working as a new facilitator, I approached my work with passion and enthusiasm and transferred my technical and management expertise into my teaching practice. However, after some time, I felt limited in my knowledge. Therefore, I enrolled in the GDTE to increase my knowledge of adult learning theory and better understand my role in learning.

In my review of learning (ROL) I discussed providing a challenging environment to assist the learner in engaging deeply in the reflection process. This example enabled me to illuminate significant professional practice lessons. Zull (2002) describes overlaying the brain against Kolb’s model of reflection to demonstrate the reflection cycle as a continuous loop. The reflection cycle states that if the experience has happened beforehand, it is difficult to make meaning unless it engages our emotions. Zull (2002) also suggests that “reflection is a search for connections”, which made me pause and consider my role in the process as the learner engages in deeper learning and my emotional connection to my learning (p.169).

As both a facilitator and a learner, the continual loops and emotional connections in the reflection cycle have provided me with an understanding of my work-based learning concepts. I have discovered that a mirrored process needed to happen. From my research, the interviews provide valuable information about what has been learned, which I interpret and then shift back to new learners. Thus, I have been undertaking an ongoing cycle of transferring my learning to enhance professional practice.

My Professional Practice Approach:

As a dual practitioner, I have helped many small business owners complete their BAppMgt. My starting point for this project has been wondering if my experience has been the same as others. What has been the effect of completing the degree on business performance and professional development? How have the learnings from the degree been applied personally and professionally? As previously indicated, the ILP is unique to Otago Polytechnic Ltd and is believed to be the only

institution worldwide credentialing full degrees (Ker, 2018). Therefore, substantiating and articulating the impact of this innovative educational pathway is essential for the ongoing credibility of CNZ.

There has been no research conducted in this area to date, especially concerning small businesses, and it is this gap that I wish to fill. I aim to investigate the application of the learnings of small business owners gained from completing the BAppMgt. Such as, what have been the impacts on small businesses by having owners undertake the BAppMgt through CNZ? I also hope to support the claim that graduates of our BAppMgt degree via ILP experience benefit personally and professionally.

**Research Focus:** An exploration into the personal and professional impact of gaining the Bachelor of Applied Management on small business owners

**On completion of the project, I will:**

- have a greater understanding of how small business owners (SBOs) who are graduates of the BAppMgt have applied their learnings from the degree to their business
- have explored the impact on business performance of these learnings
- have investigated what professional capabilities have been developed in SBOs – what do they do differently now?
- have a greater understanding of the critical success factors in the BAppMgt, ILP process
- have explored the role of reflection in management learning

**Main outputs from my study**

- Report on research findings and presentation to the CNZ team
- Present results at Professional practice symposium 2021

In this chapter, I have explored my motivations for this project. I have explained the background of my dual professions and reviewed how I have developed personally and professionally. Finally, identifying an opportunity to explore the impacts of studying for our small business owner graduates.

The next chapter will overview the literature, which offers a rich understanding of some of the challenges small business owners face within NZ. The literature review will provide the theoretical and broader practice context.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The previous chapter described my experience working as a small business owner and my current role as a learning facilitator. My encounter as a small business owner who gained the BAppMgt led to a realisation that I should explore the experiences of other small business owners who have completed the BAppMgt. The impacts of earning a degree via ILP are not widely understood, particularly as it relates to the small business context. In this chapter, I will review the literature related to my area of practice inquiry. I begin with an overview of small businesses within NZ, identify challenges currently encountered by small businesses, training options for small businesses, recommendations for management development training and CNZ and work-based learning.

### **Introduction: Small Business NZ**

Ministry of Business and Innovation (MBIE, 2019) categorises small businesses as those with less than 20 employees. They see small businesses as an essential part of the New Zealand economy. Within New Zealand (NZ), 97% of businesses fall in the small business category (MBIE, 2019)

- 401,000 (70.5%) have no employees
- 101,000 (19%) have 1-5 employees
- 40,000 (7.5%) have 6-19 employees
- 10,000 (2%) have 20-49 employees
- 5,000 (1%) have 50 or more employees

A small business enterprise can be in every industry and have varying operating models. For example, small businesses can range from transporting goods around the regions to a start-up business that produces online gaming software operating in a global market. New Zealand's small businesses provide the goods and services that keep our communities thriving by employing people and supporting the broader NZ economy and society (MBIE, 2017). Statistics from the Small Business Council of NZ indicate that approximately 61,000 small businesses started up and approximately 60,000 closed in 2018. This suggests that small business owners (SBOs) face distinctive challenges, regardless of the economy's buoyancy. In addition, a changing business landscape, where consumer demands constantly evolve, can make it challenging to stay relevant.

Today's business owner needs to know how to deal with multiple elements of business management, ranging from financial management, retirement/exit planning, managing skills shortages, and develop

sales and marketing campaigns, to name but a few (Business Mentors NZ, 2017). Business Mentors NZ compiled a report to collect current and relevant data from business mentors and business owners:

According to the data, the challenges facing SBOs are:

- 80% of respondents surveyed reported feeling at some stage isolated within their business
- 65% of respondents noted financial issues with the businesses they were supporting
- 83% of respondents reported that businesses they mentored were not equipped to deal with all aspects of running a business independently
- Over 168,000 SBO's are concerned they will not be in a position to retire

Furthermore, an alarming occurrence identified both domestically and globally is the increasing prevalence of small business owner stress, often brought on by a lack of work/life balance. Dorey (2017) refers to business owners' escalating issues, which leave them overwhelmed due to being pulled in multiple directions. Some of the significant issues identified by business owners are a lack of time with family, a struggle to leave the business for any length of time, and a desire to write a business plan and hire more staff but too busy (Dorey, 2017).

In fact, the escalation of stress factors is so significant that experts are now identifying them as impacting people's emotional health and wellbeing. Within the literature, I encountered a new phenomenon characterised as attention deficit trait (ADT) (Hallowell, 2005). Considering the factors stressing business owners such as lack of time with family and the constant feeling of being too busy, I found the reference to ADT as being highly relevant. Upon further research this led me to think that ADT provides the correlation, explaining how business owners have allowed themselves to stay connected to the business, by not switching off devices and allowing themselves to be constantly available via technology. Hallowell (2005) relates environmental factors (technology) to the concept of a modern-day traffic jam and a consequence of modern life. Likewise, McLennon (2011), depicts ADT as being derived entirely from the environment. The term "amygdala hijack" was first presented by Daniel Goleman (1996) to illustrate the effect of ADT. Goleman (1996) defines ADT by describing the brain like a series of circuit boards being over taken, obstructing rational thought. In other words, the more business owners stay connected and can work from anywhere, the greater the impact on wellbeing and cognitive implications. The implications may present as a diminished ability to solve problems and creativity due to the brain having to process high amounts of data that it cannot cope with. A small business owner's consequence may be the inability to manage difficult situations rationally. This, in turn, negatively impacts the wellbeing and thus the sustainability of their business.

This leads to the question, what are the broader implications for a business owner working with an unbalanced workload? Bob Weir is an NZ author and now an ex-business executive who suffered mental health decline due to excessive work pressures. Weir identifies factors such as excessive stress, toxic work environment, long hours, poor sleep, and uncertainty, all issues that can severely impact mental health and wellbeing if left unchecked (Weir, 2019, as cited in NZB, Oct 2019). Weir details his four-year recovery from mental health impacts in his book "Why businesses fail". Weir's work acknowledges the vast challenges for small business owners as support structures are limited, along with considerable family and financial pressures.

Fernet et al., (2016) and Godin et al., (2017), discuss how small businesses are impacted due to excessive work demands. In their study, Godin et al. (2017) identify the difficulties small business owners face working with small teams of one to four employees. According to Godin et al. (2017), this group of small business owners are stressed, report having heavy workloads, and have difficulty combining work and family life, thus providing the link between work-related stress and excessive workloads. In their analysis of health and wellbeing, Godin et al. (2017) found that the respondents confirmed a near-constant connection to the workplace. The findings of this study revealed that 36% of respondents regarded their work as harming their health which can cause stress, overall fatigue, and sleep disorders. Godin et al. (2017) conclude that owners are in a critical stage of business development after the business launch. When human resources and administrative tasks increase, it adds additional pressure on the small business owner. The findings of Fernet et al., (2016) propose the feeling of loneliness within a small business can significantly contribute to occupational burnout, dependent on the entrepreneurial orientation of the SBO. Fernet et al., (2016) revealed the indirect effect of loneliness was stronger and more significant for SBOs when entrepreneurial orientation is low.

Additionally, the results reveal working excessive hours, high workloads, and work pressure as pre-indicators of burnout. Both studies highlight the impact of excessive work stressors on psychological health, the viability of the business, and sustaining the business owner. The studies identify maintaining these workloads as unsustainable and could lead to long-term personal effects such as reduced productivity, anxiety, depression, or, more commonly, burnout.

Herbert Freudenberger, an American psychologist, first used the term burnout, which was generally associated with people working in the human services industry like nurses, social workers and healthcare professionals, to describe the effects of "high stress and high ideals" (NCBI, June 2020). However, while the concept originated in the seventies, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has only recently included burnout in its International Classification of Diseases, where it is described as

"a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed" (WHO, 2019).

Three dimensions characterise burnout:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
- increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's career; and
- reduced professional efficacy.

Burnout effects can be labelled as diminished personal and professional effectiveness creating feelings of shame and embarrassment. Recent evidence (Moss, 2021) suggests the language around burnout focuses on individuals; however, McAlpine (2021) indicates it is an organisational problem that requires organisation-level solutions. Gray (2021) recently interviewed NZ author and leadership coach Suzi McAlpine. In her latest book, "Beyond burnout" (2021), McAlpine identifies overwork, lack of control and a sense of isolation as major causes of burnout. In her analysis of burnout, McAlpine cites statistics affecting Australasian businesses; one, in particular, revealed that over half of the survey respondents indicated they felt exhausted within their work, with these numbers escalating over the NZ COVID-19 lockdown period in April 2020 (cited in NZBM, p19). The concerning aspect is the issue of cognitive, emotional and physical dysfunction. McAlpine suggests that if the business owner is the one with burnout, the effect can flow onto other employees due to the business owner's influence. Likewise, Moss (2021) supports the opinion that owners within the business need to model a healthy approach to work habits and support mental wellness practices. McAlpine (2021) notes that the stigma associated with mental health may still prevent open and honest admission from the affected individuals.

The literature provides an opportunity to review current challenges small business owners face in NZ, which led me to consider a broader context of global small business (Godin et al., 2017). Whilst research is limited regarding SBO's, challenges include business management and managing business owners' health and wellbeing (Godin et al., 2017). Furthermore, feeling isolated or incapable of managing compounding issues can drive small business owners to seek various external help. Godin et al., (2017) proposed that multiple factors are at play in the start-up years. They range from increasing brand awareness, growing revenue, growing customer relationships and, most importantly, developing a new team into a high-performing one. These factors require time and energy, which often affect the health and vitality of an SBO. The literature in this review captured legitimate and



significant wellbeing and operational issues faced by an SBO. To grow and develop within the business, the owner may consider additional training options to strengthen knowledge and wellbeing.

For example, I suffered from burnout as a young business owner. My experience was like a slow-burning dilemma that was incredibly difficult to avoid, especially for a young, ambitious business owner. Finally, I recognised I required a new set of skills. As the business grew, my skillset had to evolve, and small business owners transitioned from working in the business to growing the business. The needs change from technical to operational and strategic. The transformation requires a higher level of thinking and critical evaluation to enable innovative and entrepreneurial activity.

### **Training for small business**

I have identified the challenges facing an SBO, so what training options might be considered viable for small business owners? As indicated, many SBO's do not have the skills to run a business independently (Business Mentors, 2017). The skills and knowledge required are vast as the owner generally oversees many business operations, such as sales and marketing, human resources, IT-related tasks, health and safety, and a strategic focus on growth and profitability. An SBO might consider using a business mentor, or a business coach or working with organisations with a regional presence, like the Chamber of Commerce or the NZ Employment Association. Subsidiary businesses support NZ business training and development through these organisations, e.g., the Regional Business Partner network and the NZ Institute of Management. Some training courses offer specific skill-based training, such as essentials for managing staff, accounting for non-accountants and the leadership Academy.

However, data from Small Business Council NZ (MBIE, 2018) identified that SBOs generally operate on trust, and their learning is gained through experience rather than formal business training. The risks for small business owners are that their current skill sets are intricately linked to how their business operates today, which may not be enough to meet their future business needs. The requirement to change occurs rapidly due to global impacts, climate change, advancements in IT and social and demographic changes. One way to address this is through further education; however, I wanted to investigate if all education options will meet an SBO's requirements.

Dawe et al., (2007) identified strategies to increase the uptake of small business owners in further education. First, the authors suggest that the learning content focuses on specific business needs; secondly, small business owners learn through doing. The last point identifies the value of learning from current issues in the workplace and learning from other businesspeople. However, the report also indicated a gap within the evidence, specifically the lack of research on training providers that

could meet the above recommendations. Despite identifying specific training requirements, Dawe et al. (2017) still argue that not all businesses require external training. For example, technical, financial, and legal advice in certain businesses will meet the business owner's needs instead of furthering education needs. On the other hand, not all small businesses want to grow; many small business owners opt into business ownership for lifestyle reasons. However, it is valuable to consider what may be barriers to entry from other study options.

### **Management development within a small business**

Regarding factors influencing engagement with management development, Massey et al.'s (2005, cited in Deakin, 2012) work suggest the low uptake of formal management training is due to a reliance on incidental or informal managerial learning processes. Fuller-Love (2006, as cited in Deakins, 2012) believes that improving management knowledge and the skills of SBOs will contribute to the survival and growth of a small business. In fact, according to Walker et al. (2007), "poor managerial competence is linked to small business failure" (p. 2). While the benefits of management training are considerable, it is commonly associated with university courses, which may not be the right environment for SBO. The work of Tell and Gabrielson (2013) argues that there needs to be a change from a traditional classroom setting, claiming that educators should join small business owners "in their world" (p. 143). The authors discuss the benefits to small business owners who can "learn best by reflecting on their everyday experience solving problems and interacting with stakeholders and learning by making mistakes" (p, 143).

Furthermore, Tell and Gabrielson (2013) suggest that management development is a particular type of workplace learning. Therefore, strengthening the claim that workplace learning may entice a SBO to undertake further management study. Specifically, if relevant to their business.

The work of Dawe et al. (2017) concurs with the findings from Small Council NZ (MBIE, 2018); both claim that the lack of formal education may have a detrimental effect on current business models meeting future consumer demands. Dawe et al. (2017) identified themes for SBOs when considering education options. First, the content needs to solve real business issues; second, it needs to be a flexible study option that does not impact work commitments. The literature identifies reasons to engage with education as increased professional skills and management and leadership knowledge. Fuller and Love (2006) noted that improving management knowledge can enhance business performance or strengthen specific skillsets. Another option becoming popular for SBOs is the BAppMgt delivered by CNZ at Otago Polytechnic.

## **Work-based learning at Capable NZ**

CNZ delivers programmes applying the pedagogy of work-based learning (WBL). Lester and Costley (2010) describe WBL as "all and any learning situated in the workplace or arises directly out of workplace concerns" (p. 2). The first qualification offered was the BAppMgt; this remains the most popular programme for small business owners. An SBO is attracted to the independent learning pathway (ILP) approach because they desire to maintain work and study concurrently.

A typical small business owner has diverse business experience and may be preparing to make a career change or require validation of their skills and knowledge. Nevertheless, the purpose of achieving a qualification differs for everyone; for example, they may be motivated to be the first in the family to earn an undergraduate degree or desire to role model specific behaviour for their children. However, general objectives for small business owners are improving business performance, building confidence to carry on and further enhancing their professional knowledge and skills vs their technical competence. I believe this is a critical stage for SBO's. The transition from technical competence into a business owner challenged my thinking and made me consider how SBO's can apply that learning.

WBL provides the link between long-term, high-level thinking skills, injecting a direct benefit to the growth of organisations (Garnett, 2016). Equally, Lester and Costely (2010) suggest that their definition of work-based learning implies "all and any learning that is situated in the workplace or arises directly out of workplace concerns" (p. 2). However, much of this learning is not recognised as formal learning, but it is in work and for work. The learning from workplace experiences can be depicted as employees' professional development, increasing business performance, and implementing business change processes requiring critical thinking, negotiating, and solution-seeking, all responding to specific work-related issues.

The theoretical concepts of WBL underpin many of the programmes within CNZ. According to Tell and Gabrielson (2013), a WBL approach suits the ideal learning requirements for small business owners. For small business owners who do not have an undergraduate degree, the pedagogy of WBL aligns with their professional development needs. Dawe et al. (2007) supported this view. They write that it enables them to build these high-level skills by applying their lived work experiences and critically analysing their business knowledge. As already indicated, this is a powerful method to engage the learner in the process, as it is more meaningful to their business.

Costley (2010) suggests that a learned experience ultimately nurtures creativity and innovation and develops the learner's business intelligence. I am curious to discover if there has been a development

of high-level thinking skills for graduates of the BAppMgt and the impacts of critically evaluating and analysing their work and life experiences.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the theoretical and practice basis of management training within a small business. The literature identified multiple stressors for small business owners who require vast technical skills and business knowledge. Considering these factors, SBOs require additional support from external organisations providing ongoing professional development training. However, how this impacts small business owners' ongoing business development is not known.

The context of this work supports the requirement for additional research evidence, capturing the efficacy of a non-traditional learning pathway for SBOs. There is an opportunity to provide evidence in my practice area and the prospect of assisting future small business owners considering tertiary education.

## Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Method

The previous chapter explored the practice context of SBO. The literature review identified a gap where evidence is limited of the efficacy of the ILP and the impacts of gaining the BAppMgt on small businesses. In this chapter, I describe my methodology and the methods I used to undertake this work-based project to align with my professional development. I applied a qualitative approach utilising Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), and my data collection utilised semi-structured interviews.

### Professional Practice Impact



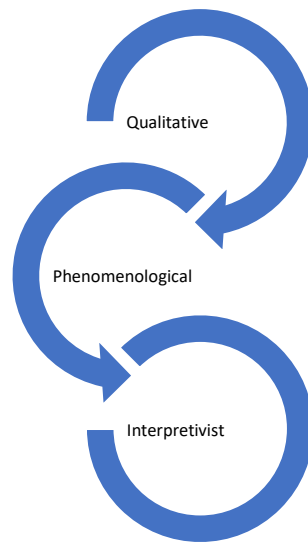
The early phase of my research was dedicated to increasing my knowledge of the research process and gaining a deeper understanding of becoming an insider researcher (Baumgartner et al., 2006; Costley et al., 2010; Hussey et al., 1997; Smith et al., 2016).

Saunders et al. (2015) stated the importance of clearly defined research questions. Conversely, Costley et al., (2010) suggest the project must add value to my work situation and educational value when determining the research project.

### Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach to obtain insights into the learning gained from graduates of the Bachelor of Applied Management, completed through CNZ, who were/are small business owners. Saunders et al., (2015) describe the research process as being "similar to a journey" (p.163); this made sense when defining the methodology best fitting my research approach.

A qualitative approach allowed me to discover participant insights by being inclusive and inquiring. Killam (2013) describes qualitative research as looking for descriptions in words, pictures, and issues people value. The following section describes my methodological approach.



*Figure 1. Methodology: Emerging Research Approach  
Created by the author*

An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) allowed me to explore the participants' experiences during the BAppMgt. Furthermore, I had to consider my strengths. My theoretical orientation is an interpretive approach. However, the concept of IPA was new. It required comprehending the underpinning theory and how to carry out an IPA research project. I applied the work of Smith et al., (2012), which was significant for me as a novice researcher as it provided a framework for first-time researchers. Consequently, the language and descriptions were relevant and aligned with the qualitative research tools I selected to gather my data.

### **What is IPA?**

According to Smith et al., (2012), IPA is considered a relatively new approach to qualitative inquiry and originated in psychology but is emerging in human, social and health sciences. The work of Smith et al., proposes that "IPA investigates how people make sense of their life experiences" (p. 1). Although phenomenology signifies a participant exploring their experience on their terms, Smith et al., (2012) illustrate the experience as a "complex concept" (p. 1). However, Smith et al., (2012) urge the novice researcher to establish how a lived experience can be significant for people. The change of perception of the experience was described as occurring when something meaningful has happened in our lives. The authors explain that when participants engage with a significant life event, they begin to reflect on what happened, and the "aim of IPA research is to engage with these reflections" (p.3). My

research role entailed observing and listening to describe the participant's experience, thus, trying to make sense of how the participant reacted to the whole experience.

Costley et al., (2010) describe the IPA approach as putting aside existing preconceptions and theories to understand individuals' perceptions. Costley et al., (2010) point out that a phenomenological approach is powerful for understanding subjective experience and gaining insight into people's motivation and actions. Smith et al. warn that a critical factor for IPA is that interpretations "must be grounded in the meeting of researcher and text" (p. 36). The value of IPA studies is delivering a detailed analysis of lived experiences unique to a specific group (Smith et al., 2012).

### **Integrating IPA into my project:**

The work of Smith et al., (2012) was a critical tool as it identified steps and a process for me as a novice researcher. I found the analysis framework helpful when determining the analysis process. However, the authors advise that the steps are not as relevant as the researcher gains confidence.

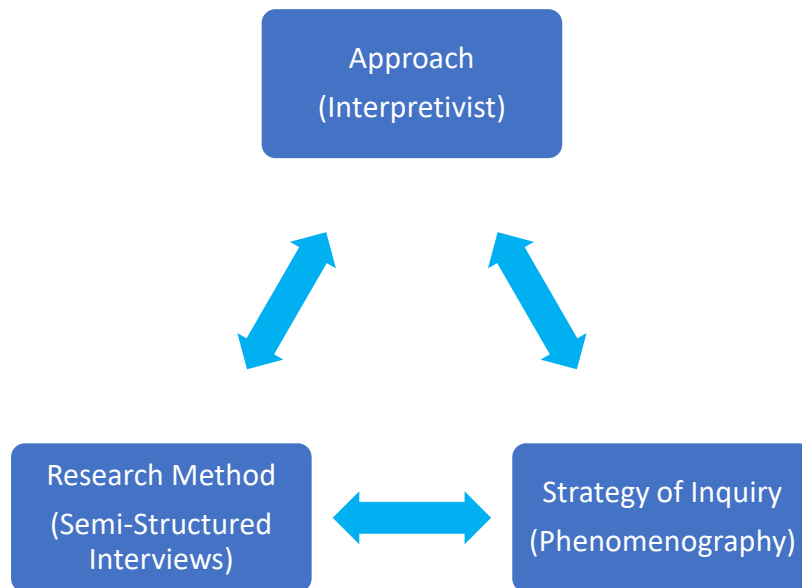
Furthermore, the authors challenged my thinking and introduced multiple concepts through the analysis process discussed in the final chapter. I discovered there would be an iterative process when analysing the data, which would involve flexible thinking. I learnt the notion of flexible thinking due to the process of reduction and expansion within my data analysis and the information I was capturing.

### **Interpretivism**

According to Dudovskiy (2016), interpretivism, also known as interpretivist, involves researchers interpreting elements of the study; thus, interpretivism integrates human interest into a study. Therefore, Dudovskiy (2016) proposes that "interpretive researchers assume that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments" (p.53). Dudovisky (2016) and Smith et al., (2012) describe interpretivism as requiring a real-life approach to data collection, such as interviews and observations. So, what does that mean for me as a researcher?

My approach required clarity so I could differentiate between approach and method. The approach provided the rationale for one method over another. The rationale for qualitative methods was derived from my research focus of exploring the impacts on business owners of gaining the BAppMgt and generating research evidence to relate professional or personal effects to small businesses. The interviews allowed SBO's to offer their insights. The work of Costley et al., (2010) points out that "work-based research will generally be better aligned within an interpretive paradigm" (p. 166). The authors explain that work-based learning is by design concerned with knowledge constructed by the researcher. They refer to the different roles, the institution as knowledge validator and insider-

researcher constructs knowledge from the research approach, all vital components of work-based learning.



*Figure 2. Framework for a qualitative research design  
Created by the author*

Working within an interpretive methodology allowed me to describe, analyse and understand others' experiences regarding their study. Considering my research outputs, this approach will capture the participant's voice, adding research evidence for small businesses. Next, I will review my data collection and analysis process.

### **Research Method**

Applying an IPA approach to explore and investigate the participant experience established that I would use semi-structured interviews for data collection. The interviews allowed for a more immersive experience than a questionnaire with limited researcher interaction. In addition, semi-structured interviews would enable the participants to lead the conversation and identify impactful outcomes from achieving the qualification.

IPA requires rich data. Smith et al., (2012) explain rich data as allowing participants to convey their stories and speak freely and reflectively. In addition, the authors indicated that in-depth semi-structured interviews utilise a smaller sample group because the focus is gaining quality detailed accounts of human experiences; therefore, IPA studies benefit from a "concentrated focus on a smaller number of cases" (p. 51).



Furthermore, I could observe participants and include probing questions during the interviews. I immersed myself in the data collection phase, allowing the analysis process to begin during the interview stage.

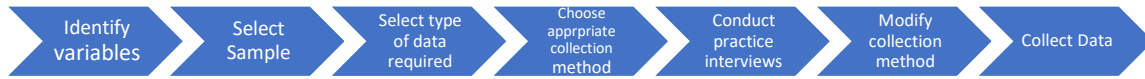


Figure 3. Overview of the data collection process  
Created by the author

### Inclusion Criteria

To be eligible, participants must have completed the Bachelor of Applied Management and were/are small business owners. The rationale for requiring graduates and not current learners is that I wanted to establish the impacts of completing the degree on how they operate their business; those currently studying could not reflect on the entire experience. I selected small business owners because there was limited research on this topic, especially in NZ, and my own experience of being an SBO

### Participant Recruitment

The Capable NZ postgraduate administrator acted as a gatekeeper to remain independent from the participant selection process. The gatekeeper invited the Bachelor of Applied Management program facilitators to request names of graduates eligible to participate in the study. The facilitators contacted possible participants inquiring if they may be interested, and gained permission to pass their details onto the gatekeeper. When the gatekeeper received a potential participant, they checked the learner information to ensure they had passed their assessment and completed the BAppMgt qualification. I received the names of possible participants once the screening was complete. This process also ensured potential participants were not feeling coerced into the study upholding the notion that participation was voluntary.

Nine people responded, all met the criteria and were selected.



*Surprisingly, most participants felt grateful to accept an opportunity to share their experience at the invite stage. This response surprised me. Reflecting, I believe it was a method for the participant to pay back to a process they considered life-changing.*

## **Preparation and Planning**

I have learned that significant preparation was imperative before meeting with the participants. The process of interviewing and questioning required me to research interview techniques and practise the interview process. The structure and format of the interview questions focused on the application of learning gained by doing the degree. I had to be careful not to lead the participants into preconceived notions that "things were better" for them and the business. I kept my line of questioning broad as I did not want to assume that change had occurred for the participants.

## **Creating a set of questions**

Developing the right balance of questions was critical. Smith et al., (2012) highlight the necessity to choose open rather than closed questions to reduce the risk of making assumptions about experience or leading a participant towards the desired answer. Furthermore, Stokes and Wall (2014) have argued a need for "fixed questions interspersed with open-ended questions that allow the researcher to gain specific data" (p. 147). As noted by Stokes and Wall (2014), this approach requires flexibility in the questioning approach from the researcher. Additionally, Smith et al., (2012) suggest a schedule of "approximately six to ten open questions, with possible prompts" (p.60). Using open-ended questions enabled me to create a set of questions that felt more like prompts for leading a discussion and eliciting authentic, reliable and trustworthy information. I had simple rules to follow to obtain the best data possible.

- 1. Ensure questions were open and expansive to help the participant feel comfortable to talk at length on the topic.*
- 2. Input from me to be minimal, and use prompts to encourage deeper assessment or move into the following discussion topic.*

## **Research Questions**

The questions prompted participants to discuss their experiences and often drew significant reflections reviewing their learner journey and subsequent learning. After the practice and the first interviews, I kept the questions broad because it allowed participants to divulge what they deemed essential. This process made me understand that the questions were strategically prepared as my data collection tool. In a broader sense, careful preparation allowed for deviations during the interviews. IPA analysis requires quality-rich data, which will depend on my ability to engage with the participant and probe where needed. Smith et al., (2016) describe the research questions as comparable to "virtual maps" (p.59). The maps can be called upon if anything gets complex or off

course. Being prepared ensures the researcher remains engaged, actively listening, and flexible with their approach. Copy of questions (Appendix 7).

### **Preparation: Practice Interviews**



I learned the value and impact of interviewing. The semi-structured approach was selected to obtain reliable and trustworthy information; however, I realised this significantly relied on my interviewing skills. Understanding the effect of my interviewing technique on data quality was one of the most significant learnings within my project. I discovered what is required to conduct a good interview through practice interviews and how a poorly performed interview impacts data quality.

I was fortunate to work with a colleague with extensive interview experience. We spoke at length about effective techniques, the purpose of the interview, and obtaining quality data. The material I read varied. I began reviewing narrative inquiry (Reissman, 2008), psychological flexibility (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010), and articles citing multiple interviewing techniques like enhanced cognitive interviewing and investigative interviewing (Dando et al., 2011); all were beneficial.

During the practice phase, I set up two interviews with two of my BAppMgt graduates. The review sessions were invaluable as I critiqued my technique and implemented changes in the following practice interview. In addition, these sessions allowed me to alter the flow and number of questions and practice staying silent in a pause.

### **My observations:**

- Flexible questioning means being ready to alter my questions or skip a question if they spoke at length on the first topic. The three subsequent questions may have been answered; go with it and move forward to the last few questions.
- Be patient, do not fill the silence with prompts too quickly.
- Understand my impulses to respond, and keep my thoughts to myself.



Interestingly, I underestimated my strength in this area. There were many techniques I was utilizing and developing new skills. Drawing on the theory of Johari Window (1955), I was reducing my blind spot as my colleague identified the skills I was applying; I was not cognisant of what I was employing. For example, I outlined my process, which began with introductions. I us the first couple of minutes to offer some detail about the interview process. I told my colleague I generally informed the participant that I did not classify myself as a typical academic. I identify as a small business owner; my academic role is integrated and enriches my business identity. He queried why I

did that. I explained that I genuinely look to connect with a common element when I first meet people. Customers, colleagues, or my learners appreciate a point of common interest, or in this case, I was seeking to connect with the participants as a fellow business owner. This connection would assure them that I understand the obligations and nuances of business ownership.

He advised me I was subtly building rapport and trust. He explained that the success of an interview depends on the strength of developing an instant connection or relatability. He also acknowledged that my initial chat was vital as it is advisable not to get into business too quickly. Instead, I allowed the participant to ease into the interview and become comfortable talking. Smith et al., (2016) identify that building rapport and ensuring the participant is comfortable are essential for obtaining quality data.

### **New learning: Using silence as an interviewing technique**

Dando et al., (2011) reported that research interviewers need to suppress "common interactional habits" cited in Smith et al. (2012, p.67). It took a lot of practice and self-control to get comfortable sitting in silence during the interview. As explained by Kaplan (2019), I had to allow for deliberate periods of silence to elicit considered and accurate insights from the participant. Doing this would enable the participants to reflect on their answers and build trust in my interviewing method.

Similarly, Koudenberg et al. (2011) suggest it only takes four seconds before the silence becomes uncomfortable. These studies identified the benefits of creating a space, inviting a response, and arousing interest in discussing the research topic. Overall, sound evidence identifies factors to create an ideal interview environment. Developing the ability to allow a flow of conversation will enable the participants to offer a rich and meaningful reflection on the learning process.

### **The Research Project**

**Data Collection Methods:** Participant Interviews/Transcribing/Colour Coding/Mind Maps/Thematic Analysis

#### **Participant Interviews**

The interviews were semi-structured. I was guided by broad statements that allowed the participant to offer their insights and understanding. I planned for the interviews to be approximately 60 minutes in total. All interviews were recorded twice, one recording on my phone and the second recording device on my laptop as a backup recording. Sharing information about the research and informed consent occurred before the commencement of the interview. (Appendix Four)

## **My observations from the interviews**

The research topic provoked a sense of responsibility for most participants; they shared with me gratitude for the opportunity to illustrate their learning journey. In addition, the process elicited a perception of responsibility, explained by participant A as a need to "protect the pathway for future learners". Most participants came with no time constraints. There were no time restrictions from me, which greatly affected the ease and flow of conversation. The participants respected the process by being present, honest, and forthcoming with their answers.

Face-to-face meetings felt effortless as the flow of conversation was more natural and organic. It was easier for me to watch body language and listen to dialogue cues; this allowed for more comfortable pauses, allowing the participant more time to consider their answers. I was highly engaged by listening, and being patient to enable the participant to reflect deeply. I observed that the extended pauses did provide additional information. I may have to adapt my approach when interviewing participants online or in a phone interview. Generally, I followed the same process to build rapport and set the scene, but I was more conscious of listening to verbal queues and managing pauses in the conversation. I also observed that the interview came to a natural conclusion around the 50–60-minute point. This was because the participant predominantly spoke and seemed more tired as we concluded the interview.

I observed how participants engaged and the cues that allowed the conversation to follow areas not initially scripted that could add to the findings. A noteworthy observation was that participants connected with me instantly as a business owner, and there was a genuine connection from our shared business ownership experience. This mutual association accelerated a level of trust with the participant by sharing a genuine understanding of business ownership's complexities and obligations. I heard this again when I initially transcribed the interviews and relistened to them, checking for accuracy and authentication. Again, confirming what we had discussed during the interviews was validating.

An exciting occurrence emerged at the end of the interviews. Once the participants had finished the formal interview, many were quite willing to stay and talk business after we formally signed off. After the first meeting, I realised they were still digesting the questions. What emerged from the wrap-up conversation were significant statements about the entire impact. Many participants commented on the immense value of the research interview. Unfortunately, due to work commitments, most of the participants had not taken the time to reflect on the ongoing impacts of their study or how their life had transformed. The decision to inquire into '**anything more**' became essential as I often gained a deeper insight into their original answers. Some participants acknowledged the interview's benefits

as similar to a professional supervision session. Due to the immense value of the final observations, I adjusted my questioning technique to prolong the recording as long as possible to capture those last comments.

During the interview, exploring aspects of interest to the research was opportunistic, eliciting information that added to the narrative. I was now immersed in the data as I analysed the interviews while still interviewing. I learnt that I was a vital part of the interview process; this required a constant evaluation of my approach, consideration of questions, and observing the participants' reactions to questions and emotional responses.

Each interview provided valuable information that I carried forward into the next session. For example, when a participant made a casual reference to the benefit of having someone to talk with, i.e., their facilitator, instead of allowing them to gloss over that statement, I gently interjected to ask, "tell me more about that". The risk of losing that insight was too significant; asking while they were in the moment allowed me to understand the benefits, impacts, and why they deemed this necessary.

### **Transcript Analysis**

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by me. Analysing the transcripts included listening, reading and identifying key topics. I scanned and listened to each transcript several times. I observed that I started hearing common statements, and most participants were deeply reflective during the interviews.

### **Stages of Thematic Analysis**

**Data Immersion:** I commenced extensive reading to guide me through the analysis process, determined to extract rich and meaningful data. Seale's (2018) research methodology had a chapter dedicated to finding themes in qualitative data. Seale's review on data analysis was complemented by Smith et al., (2012) study on IPA. Together, these studies suggested following a development process to generate coded themes and then describing them in their reports, indicating that researchers could enhance and demonstrate their findings' quality, validity, and reliability. Next, outlining the stages of thematic analysis enabled me to identify my inductive line of inquiry, aligning with my research focus of exploring and investigating the learner experience. In the final stage, themes are empirically suggested from the data (Seale, 2018).

Early immersion in the data had the added benefit of making the analysis more manageable and reducing the risk of forgetting some details. For example, to capture significant meanings, words or phrases, I kept notes within the comment section or made links to other participants' statements. This process allowed me to pick up the consistency of ideas, frequently used words or similar experiences.

Finally, once the transcripts were completed and reviewed, I had to present the data in a format displaying patterns and categorising the more prominent themes.

The mind maps, illustrated in figure 5, were to draw together the emergent themes and produce a structure that allowed me to identify the most critical aspects of the participant account. In the final stage of bringing everything together, organising themes in multiple ways allowed me to push my analysis to a higher level of understanding. Refer to appendix 5 for a legible landscape version.

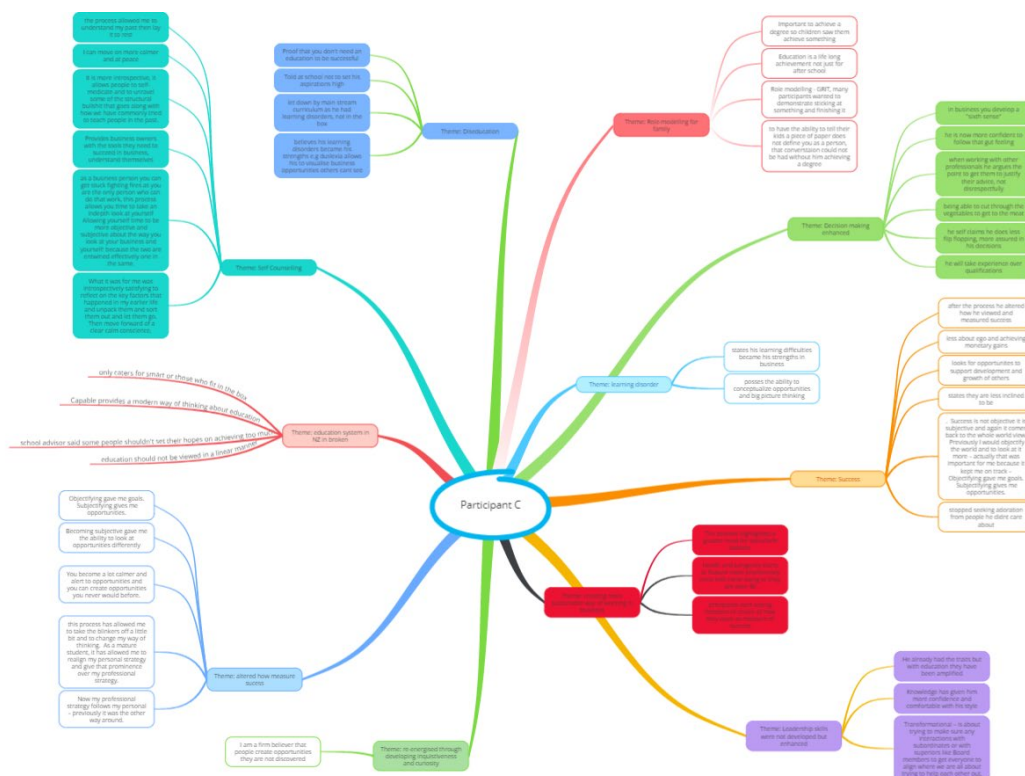


Figure 4. Screenshot of Participant mind map  
Created by the author

**Open coding:** Seale (2018) used the term open codes for data analysis, describing "chunks of data that capture something of a literal essence of the data" (p. 433). Open codes allowed me to review what was significant to the focus of my research and what were irrelevant parts of the conversation. In addition, the coding allowed me to capture relevant statements and label them as a category. Finally, I had to extract and add into a tool for analysis – I noted there was repetition that I could filter into a more relevant category later. I highlighted words and frequent statements in my notetaking when I was transcribing. I began identifying patterns and categories by capturing ideas in the comments section. Categories emerged from each participant.

Interestingly, Smith et al., (2012) highlighted an important fact: analysis is collaborative; the end product is both participant and analyst output. This insight reinforced a previous account that interpretations must be "grounded in the meeting of researcher and text" (p.36).

### **Colour coding and Mind Maps:**

Once the broad categories were extracted from each transcript, I presented the data for deeper analysis. I used colour coding and notes to produce the mind maps, identifying multiple themes from the interviews. Each category identified overlapping themes during the analysis. I selected the process of colour coding within the transcripts and mind maps as it allowed me to identify patterns and select passages of interest, particularly when I was reading them for the first time. This view is supported by Mammen (2018), who stated that mind mapping is a valuable method to track data and identify patterns and relationships between data sets in qualitative data analysis.

As a novice researcher, I required a tool that allowed a simple way to group themes, change colour codes and review similar categories for conceptual grouping. However, the early development stages needed much analysing and reviewing; the visual nature of the maps allowed for uncomplicated peer review and information sharing. Mammen (2018) also states the benefits of mind-maps to engage with the content in a highly organised manner; visually transparent may benefit novice and expert researchers.

I created a new mind-map for each participant to look for consistent statements or similar experiences, colour coding was essential when adding individual nodes (nodes are the single cells that contain information). Each map was unique to each participant; however, as the maps developed, consistent colours appeared. In addition, each node had box branches attached with supporting statements, quotes or my notes of what I observed. Capturing the notes was an effective way of gathering evidence or information to support my findings. Identifying links to other participants was also valuable, connecting my findings to comparative statements.

**Analyse:** This stage required revising and analysing of all the information loaded into the maps. I checked that the information was clear, concise and accurate. I reviewed the structure, links and altered headings and questioned if the maps were logical, orderly and consistent.

**Revise:** The maps were grouped, categorised and condensed, resulting in the emergence of five strong themes emerged. Further revision of content, links, and formatting to produce a final mind map captured the themes and supporting evidence. In addition, links to relationships and corresponding experiences were added, substantially enhancing the visual impact of the map. Refer to figure 6 below.





### **Impact on professional practice:**

Regular meetings with my mentor allowed for a revision of content and structure; post-meeting, I had clarity and a sense of the chapter content. Our meetings had multiple purposes, guiding my research process as a novice researcher and identifying significant professional impacts as I develop my research competence.

It required deep analyses of whether my findings were research outputs or reflections on my professional practice. There was a point in time I needed to step away from the data to recharge and gain some perspective.

Then, finally, it was time to go back and finish my thematic analysis and finalise the content of the mind maps.

Returning to the themes reignited my creative thinking. I reviewed themes and sub-themes and re-ordered supporting quotes and statements that anchored and evidenced what the participants expressed in the interviews.

Revisiting the work allowed me to piece together the exploratory notes, and my interview observations allowed for a much more synergistic data analysis.

The new themes and sub-themes offered a comprehensive characterisation of the participants' experience, allowing me to capture how they interpreted and applied what they had learned from gaining their degree.

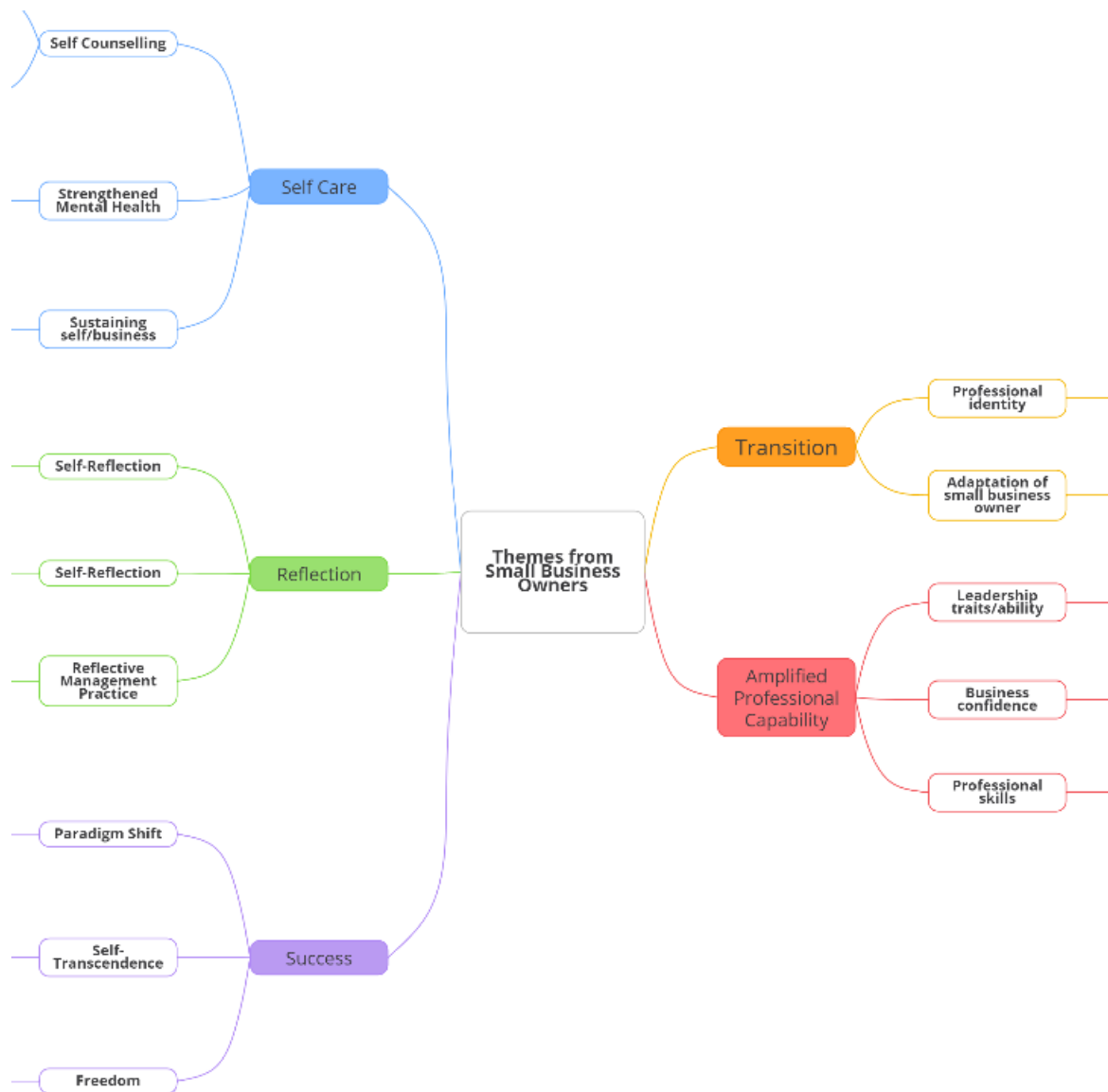


Figure 5. Themes from Small Business Owners  
Created by the author

**Emergent Themes:** Five significant themes stood out, and I supported the themes with sub-themes. Sub-themes became important when I began planning the write-up of my research findings. I recognised the requirement of providing substance and meaning behind naming the themes. It also allowed me to unpack and demonstrate the patterns within the themes, clearly identifying what data supported the sub-category. This required an analytical shift in working with individual categories, the notes and back into the transcripts.

As the researcher, I had to take a step back, re-immense myself in the data, and include other sources of information like my interview observations. I also sought external feedback from colleagues. The feedback from another colleague proved to be a valuable exercise. Getting a third-party, unbiased

opinion about the grouping and naming themes allowed me to enrich the process because it now "made sense" to someone other than myself, my academic mentor.

The theme should reflect the participant's voice and experience and represent the interpretation analysis. Thus, this is a synergistic process of description and interpretation. Throughout the process, I asked myself, what is being told? Furthermore, have I captured the elements of the narrative? The thorough analysis enabled me to discover many aspects connected to the participant's descriptions. Thus, the theme brings together a range of understandings relating to the research.

The final revision casts further light on my analysis. Smith et al. (2012) urge the researcher to consider whether they have connected the part back to the transcript. I asked myself if what I had captured reflected how the participant made sense of their experience.

Finally, this chapter describes my data collection method, reflective learning, and analysis, which will inform my professional practice framework. The following chapter will review my research findings.

## Chapter Four: Research Findings

In the previous chapter, I explored my data analysis process using thematic analysis, colour coding and mind-mapping. The maps were colour-coded categories, and the subsequent branches unpacked the evidence of my observations, direct quotes, and extracts from the participant interview. I created a mind-map for each participant, same colour codes across each participant map, allowing patterns to form, and inter-connections began to appear as each map progressed, and five themes emerged.



*Figure 6. Themes and Sub-Themes  
Created by the author*

The analysis identified five themes; this chapter presents the findings of these key themes and their sub-themes. The participants described a broad range of experiences and discussed how the applied learnings had impacted them within their business and the flow on into their personal lives. I have reported the findings in the words of the participants; all nine participants contributed to every theme generated; however, each participant's contribution to developing the themes varied. Interpreting the findings, I also bring my observations and draw upon my experience working with learners in CNZ for the past nine years.

## Theme: Self-Care

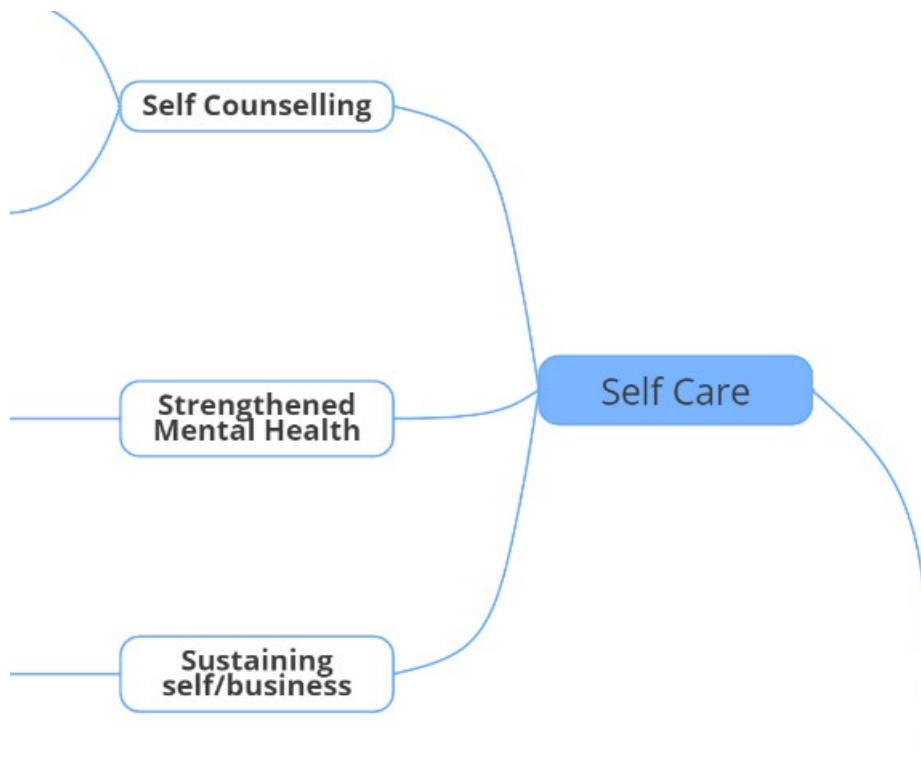


Figure 7. Theme for Self-Care  
Created by the author

All the participants identified the need to apply self-care practices for themselves or gained a new appreciation of self-care as a business owner and its importance within their business.

Three sub-themes emerged. First, self-counselling was described as having the tools to “cope” within their business. Second, when the participants referred to strengthened mental health/well-being, they identified it as an outcome of their study; reflective practice enabled them to analyse, evaluate, discuss and lay to rest experiences of significant impact. The value of that exercise was classified as strengthening their mental health. Lastly, sustaining self and business was a theme that emerged from the participants recognizing that a more holistic approach to business was required for long term business viability. The participants discussed the focus of self-care practices to benefit their well-being and employees, enabling the business's longevity.

### Sub-theme: Self-Counselling

Some participants discussed why they felt having the skill to “self-counsel” was essential. For example, participant A shared the impact of the personal strain of business ownership “The overwhelming pressure felt from being a business owner where you have to be all things to all of your team”. As participant G conveyed, the theme of self-counselling started to emerge from this statement: "SBO's

require skills similar to a therapist to manage the excessive pressures of the business and keep themselves sane". Similarly, other participants expressed similar challenges in managing the pressure of business ownership. The term "self-medicate" was used by participant C to describe the method of "managing their own healing" via their study, which included learning and self-discovery. The significance of this expression was of tremendous importance when I considered how business owners sustain themselves within their businesses.

Participant B described how impactful the reflective thinking process was personally and professionally. In addition, participant B illustrates the concept of self-care and self-counselling as an effective tool "It was a cathartic process writing my story; through this exercise, I gained a sense of inner peace and the ability to let go of a painful past".

A similar tool to manage themselves was described by participant B as "healing within the business". Although "healing" seemed like an extreme expression, participant B said, "it is important to have the skill of self-reflection as a business owner - you have your tools to heal within the business". Thus, when put into the context of dealing with stressful experiences and the onerous decisions made by business owners, participants A, B and C all said tools are required to manage the impacts of business decisions. Therefore, healing became a vital process moving forward unburdened and ensuring business impacts do not negatively impact their well-being.

The belief in knowing oneself justified the view that business owners need to know themselves, understand their past and come to terms with past events. Often past events had weighed on the participant's consciences, burdening them with anger, resentment, and sadness as they could not understand why certain events had transpired. This sentiment was one I understood from my own experience. Therefore, during interviews, when this came up, I probed further on forgiveness, asking some participants why they thought it necessary to forgive themselves and others.

Participant A shared this as a crucial moment within their study:

I think the more important part is the realization you are self-counselling through the process, and how incredibly important it is that we can do this, e.g. I could stay incredibly resentful that my mum ditched 3 kids but the impact that it has is challenging yourself to accept some of the bad shit and be ok with it and understand that it is what it is. That person's choices have affected you but you need to build a bridge and get over it and actually be accepting of it is the way it is and be comfortable with it.

Similarly, some participants experienced intense cultural impacts, which they had to negotiate. For example, participant B reflected on a memory that had a profound impact in terms of them letting go of anger and finally understanding why things had happened.

I wrote about the fact my parents couldn't get past the fact I was just a female or that I could aspire to be better and gone and graduated. They were stuck in the thinking that they wanted their son to go out and get a degree and the girls just look after the household. That is why I describe it as liberating as I cried so much through my process but at the end of it I felt like a massive weight had been lifted off me. I can walk around now with freedom, yes I might have got a degree when I was 40 plus but I have so much more knowledge I am more grounded in the person that I am.

Participant B discussed cultural challenges and gender bias within the family. Her experience now allows her to be a strong advocate in her community, advocating business ownership for the younger generation; however, she had to come to terms with her past first. Many of the participants shared similar experiences. It was generally acknowledged that working through the study process allowed for healing and laying to rest of previous injustices. As stated by Participant B, once they had dealt with their "demons", it was described as "freeing themselves".

Additionally, Participant B reflected:

Important I could lay this to rest, once you can deal with your own demons you can actually open up and deal with other people's issues and problems. I'm not stigmatizing other cultures but personally for Pacific Islanders it is massive. Even now when I go to a Pacific Island trust meeting... I think why don't we encourage our kids to be their own bosses or entrepreneurs... kids grow up thinking they have to work for someone else.

Due to completing their study, the impact of this learning and ability to self-counsel is demonstrated in how the participants are significantly more effective in the wider community as business leaders. The unburdening of trauma enabled the participants to be more effective within their business, and most importantly, they were kinder to themselves. The learning gained was applied while studying, but the more significant impacts were not identified until they had completed their qualification. The interviews offered another opportunity for deeper reflection on the learning and what had been impactful from the process. It was evident from all the participants that they initially had no idea how much they would gain by discovering a strong sense of identity or how it would change how they work within their business.

### **Sub-theme: Strengthened Mental Health**

The topic of mental health and well-being are considered highly relevant across many industries in the current business climate. Participant E reported that business owners have “exhaustive responsibilities, and it is often lonely at the top”. Participant E expanded on this notion:

Being a business owner is a lonely life; unless you have a partner within the business, there is nobody at work you can talk to without exposing yourself too much. There is nobody to turn to; to bear your soul... gaining the degree was a great way to acknowledge that I am doing all right.

The feelings of loneliness, the concern about correct operational processes, and exposure or vulnerability were significant and legitimate concerns for all the participants. The transition from an employee with technical knowledge to a business owner left many feeling vulnerable and unsure of what they were doing was adequate. Similarly, participant A said, “being a business owner is lonely; there is nobody to talk with without exposing yourself”. Many participants used similar language, describing that they were unsure of their abilities and how they were working was “right”. Participant E reflected on the impact of having their work processes validated, eased self-doubt and increased business confidence, “This study process was essential for me to identify I am doing well and doing the right things”.

The language in the quotes above describes their feelings of inadequacy and generally feeling lonely within the business. Several participants discussed the process of reflection as cathartic in writing about previous experiences and laying issues to rest. Considering business confidence, reflective thinking was acknowledged as the strategy that validated their work processes, thus increasing confidence in their capability.

### **Sub-Theme: Sustaining self/business**

After completing the participant interviews, I was left with a sense that small business owners had discovered that they required a method to sustain themselves within their businesses. Participant I reflected on improving the technical skills of her team as a way of sustaining the business in the long term, as well as herself “we care about our people, we’re not numbers, so if we are all healthy and growing professionally, then the business does better”. Additionally, participant I discussed coming to terms with previous business challenges which had an impact on them as a younger business owner:

I had to harden my heart a little bit... drawing a line under things quicker rather than letting it affect how people view you personally. Because I’ve had times where I’ve run myself into the ground, now I can look back and think, I did that for other people, not for myself.



Others viewed sustaining self and business differently. For example, participant C said, “The study highlighted a greater need for work/life balance. Health and longevity start to feature more prominently once kids come along or you are over 40”. This quote represents the sub-theme and aligns several participants' quotes around work/life balance and spending quality time with their family.

Lastly, Participant H reflected that he had improved his perception of himself through his study, strengthening his business “theory informs my business approach and underpins how I make decisions now”. Achieving the degree increased his confidence and identified necessary tools like reflective practice to improve business performance. Self-care becomes a method for sustaining the individual, directly impacting the business's longevity. Business health is no longer just a financial position; it encompasses all aspects of the business operation.

Similarly to the participants' voices above, I view self-care as a multi-pronged approach from this research, including individual responsibility to value and prioritise health and wellness requirements. I also include the management of onerous workloads and the type of response to stressful situations. Being aware and able to do this could sustain individual well-being and prolong the business owner's longevity, viability, and business.

## Theme: Reflection

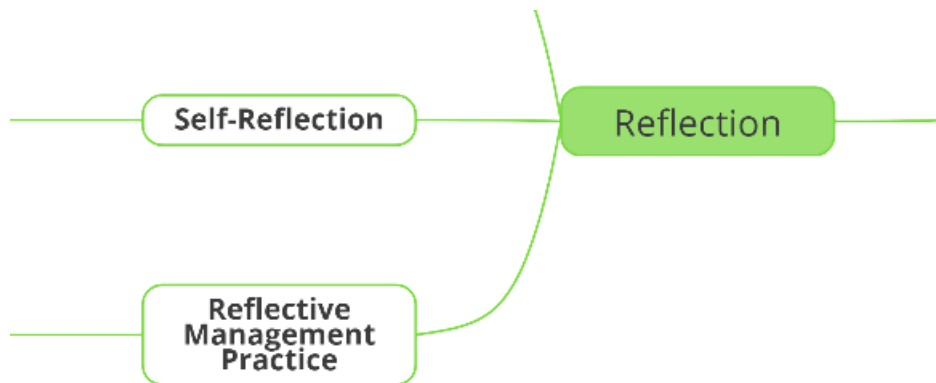


Figure 8. Theme for Reflection

This theme explores the impact of reflection and the participants understanding of the concept. Two sub-themes emerged Self-Reflection and Reflective Management Practice.

### Sub-theme: Self Reflection

The participants reflected on developing a solid sense of self which enabled them to use their emotional intelligence, interactions, and behaviours as sources of learning.

Participant F identified a calmer approach during interactions with staff and customers. The subject of calmness was identified by a few participants who reported having less apprehension due to recognizing their personal and professional growth. Participant F identified having acceptance that there is no "right way". Reflection allowed the participants to focus more on what worked well for them and questioned what they might do differently next time? Most participants identified an increase in confidence by evaluating their effectiveness. Participant C identified how this changed his practice "there seems to be a self-awareness from me that has increased my ability to be more useful and curious".

Reflection was considered an essential tool to increase emotional intelligence. In addition, it heightened awareness of what they were good at and, in a broader sense, a new awareness of how they can help others. Some participants revealed that now they have a greater awareness of themselves, their personal and professional identity was strengthened, stating their passion for work has been re-ignited. Participant C's evaluation of increased usefulness links the value of reflection with increased work curiosity and purpose by sharing knowledge to benefit others.

Many of the participants acknowledged there was a lack of conscious reflection before undertaking their study. However, participant H said, “reflection has become a valuable management tool, because now I have a greater understanding of being intentional about what I am trying to do”.

Many of the participants changed either how they think or how they approach their work. Most participants referred to reflection as understanding themselves better because they take the time to think about what they are doing and what they are trying to achieve instead of working reactively within their business. Hence the shift from being unconsciously aware to being consciously aware of how they work.

### **Sub-theme: Reflective Management Practice**

All the participants acknowledged that they had a greater sense of who they were as managers and leaders because of their study. In addition, many of the participants considered the use of reflective practice as a management tool.

Participant H explained:

When I drive home at night, I now ask myself, how did the day go, would I change anything and what sort of style or approach am I using? There is a lot of constant thinking, I am understanding that as I am reflecting, things become clearer.

Critical reflection allowed the participants to make this process explicit instead of subconsciously reflecting on work. By increasing their ability to reflect, participants enhanced their ability to use challenges as learning opportunities. Participant D explained, “I see reflection as the tool that allows business owners to work on their business, not just in the business”. Participant D explained that the notion of “working on the business” previously created confusion for him as a business owner. A few participants indicated a previous lack of understanding of how they could effectively work on their business. However, many participants believed that reflective practice allows them to identify where to focus within the business. The participants learned how to critically reflect on themselves and their business and apply it to their everyday practice. Participant C stated, “people create opportunities they are not discovered, reflection allows strategic thinking to happen”. This conveyed an increase in business performance by reflecting on how they worked and evaluated their effectiveness.

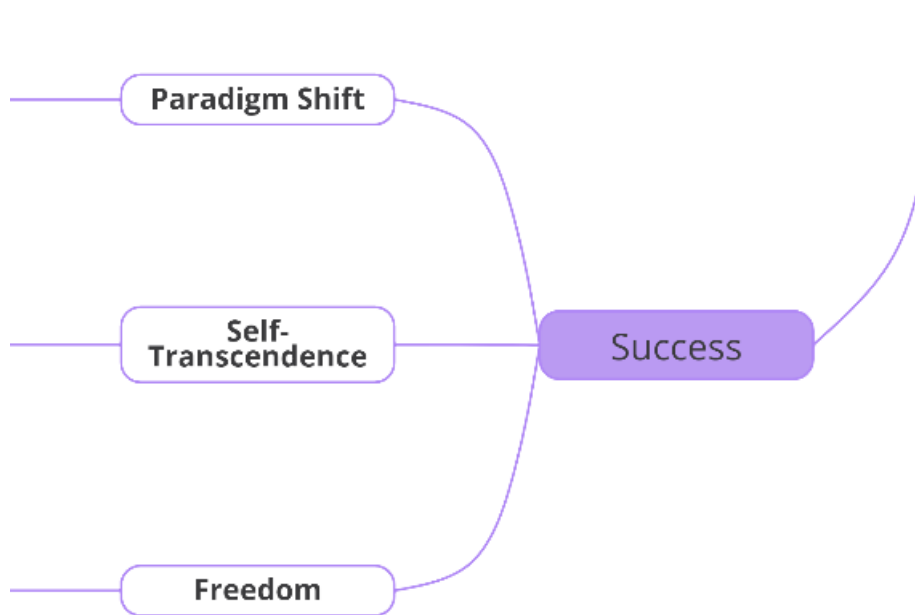
Participant D shared this:

I now understanding the power of my actions through reflection. I understand my actions have consequences, when you are unaware it is easy to be ignorant to the consequences your actions can have within the business. When I started reflecting about my work, I became more forward thinking with the business vision and strategy. I learned I needed to be looking ahead all the time.

Most participants agreed that reflection had become invaluable within their management practice. The benefits were described in how they now managed themselves; many participants referred to a strengths-based approach as managers. As such, participant H said, “reflection has become a valuable management tool, because I reflect, I have enhanced my communication skills, and I can clearly articulate my expectations to varying stakeholders”.

It became clear that the examples of the impacts of their study were manifesting through significant change in how the participants approached their work; reflective practice became the method of creating change.

## Theme: Success



*Figure 9. Mind-map for the theme Success  
Created by the author*

This theme explores how participants perceived success after their study. Distinct sub-themes emerged describing a change in how the participants perceive and measure success.

### **Sub-theme: Paradigm Shift**

Most of the participants discussed that they had changed their point of view of success. For example, participant C explained, “The process allowed me to change my way of thinking. As a mature student, it allowed me to realign my personal strategy and give that prominence over my professional strategy”. Success was discussed as an evolving state. Some participants reflected on a change in their stage of life, allowing them to have different drivers for success. Such as Participant C they further explained “as a mature student who had already achieved professional and financial success”, his stage in life allowed him to realign his priorities, placing personal matters ahead of professional gains.

Success was not just about earning a small business owner money. Many participants claimed a shift in how they viewed the success of their business. For example, participant F discussed moving away from financial targets to focus on developing their younger staff. Although this was a substantial shift from how they usually work, it was reported as a more meaningful approach for employee development.

Similarly, Participant F said:

I remember thinking it's not all about money it is more satisfying being that person that can direct somebody to doing something amazing and different, I know we will not even know we have had the impact or influence, that's ok.

Likewise, Participant E shared this change:

After my study, I approached performance reviews differently, I gave them the pay rise first, by removing the scrutiny I got more honest feedback about what I am doing well and what I can do differently?

A recurrent statement from the participants was recognising the value gained from "writing their story". After graduating, many participants reported a shift in their thinking away from operational or financial targets. Instead, they now seek ways to support the growth and development of their younger employees by sharing professional knowledge and building workforce capability.

Participant D described a change in strategic thinking, developing a more worldwide viewpoint:

I needed to go through this process to expand my ability to think and act differently. I needed to go through the process so I could share my knowledge to help more people with a bigger audience domestically and globally.

A few of the participants discussed the impact of reflective practice as a tool to expand their current mindset. The shift was compared as moving from a micro perspective to a more macro perspective. The impact was significant by increasing their confidence; it enhanced their professional identity.

### **Sub-theme: Self-Transcendence:**

Self-Transcendence is described as rising above the self, realising that you are one small part of a greater whole, and acting accordingly (Maslow 1973, as cited in Ventner 2016). During the interviews, I shared the notion that graduates have anecdotally noted that completing the qualification is professionally and personally transformational. I was curious to discover if, in any way, this had happened to the participants. The data revealed that the participants were all seeking ways to improve themselves and achieve success differently.

Participant C declared that they had changed by "releasing their ego". Interestingly several of the participants used "released my ego". Participant C used a personal example, "there was a point somewhere during my BAppMgt, I realised I was seeking adoration from others that I didn't really need to achieve success".

However, Participant F chose to focus on the betterment of others:

I now ask, "What do you want to do with your time here?" I want to help them with those opportunities. Yes. My ego has gone. I have a new job to do, to focus on having a legacy of helping my team to better themselves.

Most participants provided evidence of professional change and significant personal growth. First, the ability to identify changes in their approach suggests that they have a deeper understanding of themselves, emotional intelligence (EQ) increased, gained through critical reflection on their practice. Second, there is congruence between expressed beliefs and their described practice.

There were similar examples where the participants described that having a business is about growing successful people.

For example, Participant I said:

Having a business is also about developing successful people, I didn't get that when I was a younger business owner.

Likewise, Participant F said:

Previously I thought, to retire you need money to live and do stuff. This was my accounting mentality. Halfway through the study I remembered having a light bulb moment and thought to myself the mark you can leave here is if you can influence someone to go and do something amazing and be part of that journey with them.

Equally, a few participants shared that they now look for ways to influence or support their younger employees to achieve their life goals or aspirations; now, they prefer to stay in the background.

Participant F shared this significant shift in thinking:

I remember having a light bulb moment and thought to myself, the mark you can leave here is if you can influence someone to go and do something amazing and be part of that journey with them.

There were multiple instances of the participants acknowledging that they now viewed success with a different lens and that lens was focusing on the betterment of others. For example, participant A conveyed this change "I felt a release of ego and need for recognition, my own success is self-identified and now I look to empower and influence others instead of seeking it all for myself".

During the interviews, I heard common language and expressions, for example, makes me happy to help others, or, I have experienced enough success and the recognition that it is somebody else's time. Strong positive emotions were displayed when they discussed the legacy they could leave behind. I observed a healthy sense of self from many of the participants.

Participant C shared this powerful sentiment:

My strategic goals have shifted; there has been a pivot in what I see as success. Previously it was about accumulating wealth and praise from people and accolades. Now it's less about that, in fact, now I don't want to be recognised out in the front, I want to pass on what I have learnt to people so others can take that forward.

The interviews provided strong evidence from most participants that they had experienced a significant shift in measuring their success and value the opportunity to support others with their professional development. In addition, the theme of self-transcendence was significant as the message was emphatically clear that their role was no longer predominately focused on self but now on the betterment of others.

### **Sub-theme: Freedom**

This sub-theme explores what the participants perceived as a measure for success, equated to freedom. During the interviews, I heard common expressions and similar desires from the participants. For example, freedom was described as having the choice in how/where they work. I also heard references of freeing themselves mentally from measuring up to other people's expectations or uncertainty of their competence. For example, this quote from Participant E explains, "what used to be important is not so much now, now I am looking for freedom of time, not so chained to the business. Freeing up time feels like true success to me".

The participants now recognize freedom of choice in how they work as a measure of success. I observed that there were different motivators for different stages of life.

Participant G declared a different benefit:

With the shop's location being close to my elderly mum, I can come and go as I please, I am not tied to the shop... I won't consider selling until that point happens. Being a business owner affords me the time to be able to spend time with my mother until she passes.

Having the freedom of choice was very important for many of the participants. Participant H reflected on being a role model for whānau and hoped to influence others on the marae:

I wanted to role model behaviour of doing right by my family and being the best I can be, as a father and grandfather, but also fulfilling some of the things that I expect of my own family and my children... I really wanted my family to be proud of my achievements.

As previously described by participant E, business ownership is exhaustive with a multitude of responsibilities. In addition, participant H experienced challenges during the study which linked to their health and well-being; their motivators for success significantly altered after graduating:



Additionally, Participant H described:

Sometimes, I put myself in harm's way, and I looked after everyone else except myself. My health suffered; I was diagnosed with depression during my study. Gaining the qualification had a significant impact by strengthening my mental health, because I learnt I had transferable knowledge and skills. I learned to put myself first, doing this study for me, gave me the confidence to create professional boundaries.

The participants voiced a common expression of now having the ability of "letting stuff go". Freeing the mind and achieving success were deemed incredibly powerful for many of the participants. For example, participant C stated, "When I stopped seeking adoration from people I didn't care about; it freed my mind". Many participants identified that not worrying about what others thought about them or their business is a significant measure of success. This sub-theme links to success, which is significant for strengthening professional identity.

This quote was meaningful as many of the participants wanted to role model specific behaviour for their children; Participant A acknowledged:

I believe I achieved a greater level of business success because I was not bound within a certain way of thinking ... I wanted to role model a different education pathway for my kids. I also want them to do what they are passionate about, not feel compelled to go straight from school to university.

Participant D shared a similar view that success was different for everyone "I am not focusing solely on monetary rewards, I learnt I can create freedom to live life the way I want to live, at this time of my life it means spending time with my family".

Hence, both participants discussed the "unshackling" feeling when they discovered success as an individual measure. Although there was a strong theme throughout the interviews, preconceived ideas for success measures like being constantly attached to the business or growing their business were not what the participants wanted now. Letting go of some of these ideas equated to a "freeing of the mind". It was discussed that they could achieve greater success when they got to this stage due to working with a different mindset.

There was a sense that all the participants reflected on what success meant to them and redefined how they measure success. In summary, the language used was underpinned with positive encouragement for other people and their success. A common thread is woven throughout these findings using the term "letting go".

## Theme: Transition

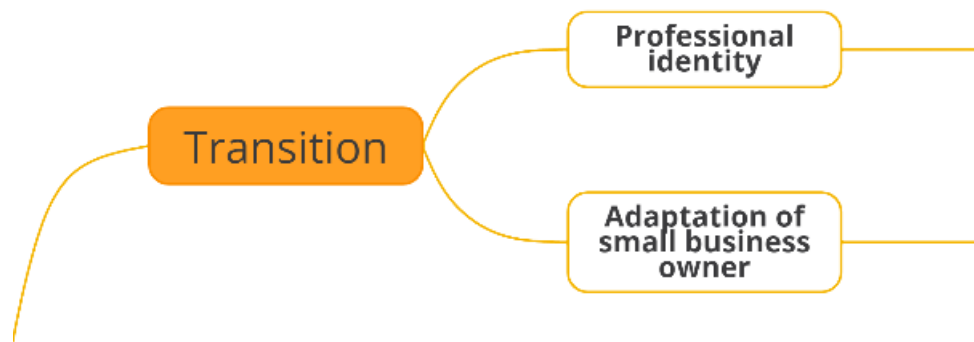


Figure 10. Theme Transition  
Created by the author

This theme explores how participants recognize the importance of preparing themselves for exiting their current business, diversifying business opportunities, or preparing for their next professional role

### **Sub-theme: Professional Identity**

This sub-theme emerged from the discussions around motivation for completing the qualification. A few participants discussed how isolated they felt within their business. They reported that the feeling of isolation directly impacted their confidence. This lack of confidence drove them in their quest for academic credibility; this was achieved by attaining a bachelor's degree, strengthening their professional identity.

Participant H shared:

I thought, if I want to reinvent myself, I need to get a little bit more current... I've learnt some stuff owning a business, I enjoy learning..... gaining a degree showed I have done more than run a business for 15 years and prove I have thought past these four walls. Also, to challenge myself and to start something and complete it.

Identifying the transferability of skills and knowledge was a prevailing thought among the participants. It allowed them to demonstrate a standardized breadth and depth of business and management knowledge by gaining a degree in applied management. However, the participants acknowledged that they might not be considered good team members because they were used to having complete control as business owners.

Participant E said:

It's a bit ironic, as a potential employee often employers will see someone who has owned their own business as someone who will be difficult to manage as they won't be a team

player... In reality, it's the opposite; as a Managing Director, you are constantly trying to manage relationships... you become the biggest team player trying to keep everyone happy.

Participant H discussed the concern that their knowledge might not be broad enough and often referred to their skills as "just been running a small business" before studying.

However, gaining a management qualification allowed the participants to appreciate the breadth and depth of experiences and extensive business skills required as an SBO. Many participants observed that they had lost touch with the real world; working within their own business did not allow them to evaluate the skills and knowledge gained from business ownership.

Participant D discussed this but framed it positively as the process allowed them to unpack their skills and identify the transferability of knowledge and capability:

I have enhanced my ability to create other business opportunities as I am now able to work across multiple work contexts, I realised if I wanted to achieve my big goals, I needed to develop other skills.

The realisation that they had considerable business knowledge was incredibly affirming for many of the participants. Furthermore, gaining a degree enabled the participants to strengthen their professional identity and understand their value which directly increased their self-belief.

### **Sub-theme: Adaptation of the SBO**

Completing the qualification instilled greater confidence in their skillset and transferability of knowledge across different industries, and most importantly, encouraged them to think beyond being an SBO. Many participants said they were now confident in applying for directorships, change of career or diversifying into other businesses and attributed this to achieving their qualifications. Thus, after completing their qualification, the participants identified that they had adapted to the demands of an ever-changing business environment and enhanced their former selves.

Participant F acknowledged:

I felt I needed the mana when I approach a business for a directorship. I can either do two things where I can do more professional roles, this will work well as I get older, and I need to move out of the business but still be working in a way that I enjoy what I am doing.

Interestingly, participant F described the need for a level of "mana" before approaching an organization regarding a directorship. It was a consistent statement among the participants that they felt they lacked credibility by not having a degree. Thus, most participants felt compelled to attain a degree as it was vital to recognize that their knowledge was validated and equitable to other graduates. Furthermore, Participant F explained, "this process was like being given a mandate, as you

are trying to manage and trying to lead, now I have the recognition to do that as previously I have felt I didn't have the confidence".

Achieving the qualification allowed most participants to gather other valuable business tools like models and theories. In addition, many shared an increase in their strategic thinking and other abilities like relationship management. There was also a recognition of being comfortable not knowing everything; previously, this was a weakness. Several quotes acknowledged this feeling of inadequacy. For example, participant D said, "it reduced a self-stated view of not being good enough or an imposter, increased confidence with professional interactions as I no longer feel inadequate professionally".

Similarly, Participant E said:

It was good to get external validation, of what we were doing in the business was right and good business practice... I wanted to remove barriers if I decide to sell the business.

This factor was crucial for many participants as they were future-focused and planning their next career move. Many acknowledged a desire to challenge themselves into a more demanding role like governance. Additionally, participant E explained, "this allowed me to look for new business ventures or to look to sit on a Board in a governance role".

For a few, it was expressed more as a way of validating their skills and knowledge and how they viewed their role as a small business owner. For example, Participant I conveyed,

This study allowed me to package all my business knowledge so that it gave me the self-belief to move forward and not have to worry ever again that I wasn't good enough.

Also, Participant I, regarded the value gained from achieving the degree, which they had never considered:

I didn't think I needed the qualification to do my job, but once I did the process, I did need it, and I needed all this information to be put altogether so I could move forward successfully.

The reflections and quotes eloquently describe participants previous feelings of inadequacy and lack of understanding if they were good enough to adapt from being a small business owner into a more challenging role within a larger organisation, a new business venture or a governance role. Thus, several participants acknowledged that they were thinking about future opportunities, and gaining their degree allowed them to positively frame their current skillset and business knowledge.

This theme identified how SBO's had adapted and enhanced their belief about their professional identity, which inhibited moving forward successfully.

## Theme: Amplified Leadership Capabilities

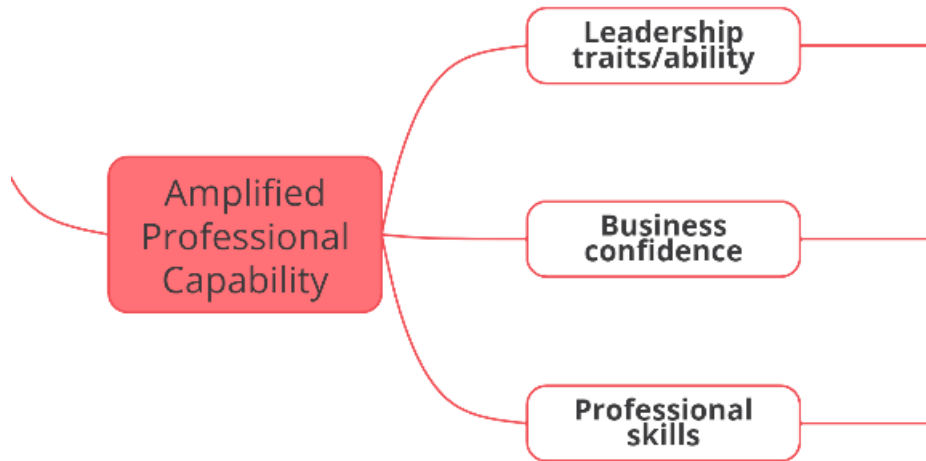


Figure 21. Theme amplified leadership capabilities  
Created by the author

This theme explores the enhancement of leadership capability. New life paths became clear, newfound confidence was discovered and purpose suddenly illuminated. Multiple examples illustrated how gaining their qualification amplified their current leadership skill set to a level that revealed their true potential.

### Sub-theme: Leadership traits/capability

Participant C illustrated how powerful the process had been, particularly concerning their approach to work after completing their qualification and the transformation created.

Post qualification my leadership styles haven't changed but they have been more enhanced. The traits were already there, but with education they have been amplified.

This statement represents how most participants explained multiple enhancements to their professional and personal lives. Before undertaking the study, the participants shared occasions that identified where they lacked self-belief. Understanding a gap motivated them to study for skill enhancement or attain further knowledge. Loneliness within the business also planted doubt about how they performed or contemplated achieving more in their personal and professional lives. Many participants discussed having core leadership skills; however, the amplification in their abilities was connected to their study. Many had not had the time to review and enhance their skillset. Participant C further explained how the amplification of his leadership traits affected his business performance:

Transformational, for me it is about trying to make sure any interactions, with subordinates or with superiors like board members, get everyone to align, where we are all about trying to help each other out.

Education empowered many of the participants to feel comfortable with their leadership styles. Participant C discussed the clarity that came with increased calmness. A term that various participants described was a feeling of being “calmer and confident in their decision making. Participant A stated, “I have the confidence to now take my time making decisions, not feeling so rushed”.

Although many participants referred to calmness as allowing themselves time to make a well-considered decision. They were confident to take the time required and not feel rushed into an ill-considered decision. Additionally, Participant C revealed, “in business you develop a “sixth sense”, I am now more confident to follow that gut feeling”.

From the findings, the evidence supports multiple enhancements to the participant's leadership capabilities. The quote from participant C concisely describes the learning, which revealed that small business owners had the traits. Still, education facilitated a process to enable the traits to amplify for the business owner.

#### **Sub-theme: Business Confidence**

Confidence became a recurring sub-theme. Many participants expressed a desire to validate their knowledge; the feeling of not being “adequate” underpinned a self-imposed identity of imposter syndrome. A common view amongst the participants was that achieving the qualification eliminated their self-stated position of not being good enough or an imposter. In addition, it increased their confidence with professional interactions as they no longer felt inadequate professionally. For example, participant D explained, “I had a fear of not having any qualifications within my technical field, gaining this qualification stopped clients asking where I was trained”.

This was a significant insight for many participants who declared they suffered from imposter syndrome. Gaining the degree removed this negative mindset, allowing them to think positively, ultimately reframing their skillset to identify themselves as business owners with technical knowledge. Additionally, Participant D said, “this process enhanced my strategic thinking mindset. I changed from working as a practitioner within the business to being a business owner with technical skills”. Finally, applying meaning to what they had learned enabled the participants to identify their higher-level thinking skills to grow their cognitive ability.

The broader implications meant the participants started to recognise a responsibility to develop their staff with technical knowledge and enhance their business knowledge or professional skills. For

example, participant E reflected from a business perspective; “I now spend more time asking my guys what do you want to do, in terms of professional development?” In addition, many of the participants discussed how gaining the qualification identified ways to grow and develop their teams, particularly with strategic and business continuity planning.

Such as, Participant A shared this example:

Now I ask them to contribute to the plan and now they own part of the vision, and it is even more empowering for them to go and achieve something they have had a part in identifying and conceptualizing.

Increasing business confidence allowed many participants to be more receptive to include team input, and “bringing the team alongside them on the journey” has become more critical. Connecting and impacting others offers insight into the shift from enhancing oneself to the participants acknowledging a desire to empower their team. In addition, their worldwide view and sense of self now incorporate their mentoring and coaching of up-and-coming professionals.

Participant B shared this:

We are comfortable in our skin and we are not seeking constant recognition of our achievements. We may have been driven by it in the past but now we are content... so we go back to our vision and our people and what can we do for them and the community, and that drives you harder than any awards that you can achieve.

The participants expressed a variety of perspectives; however, there was a consistent acknowledgement that the achievement of this qualification boosted their business confidence. In addition, external validation of their aptitude for business enhanced many interactions within their own business or externally in the wider business community. Therefore, the next sub-theme will identify some elevated skills that allow for a shift in their professional performance.

### **Sub-theme: Professional Skills**

The participants illustrated an enhanced sense of purpose after gaining their qualifications. What appeared to develop from enhancing their purpose was clarity in how they were operating within their business. Words like “enhanced my strategic thinking” were used or referred to as having a “calmer approach to decision-making”. Many of the participants reflected on a change in how they recognized their knowledge and capability within their business. For example, participant D said, “I increased my strategic thinking, my mindset changed from working as a practitioner within the business to being a business owner”.

Gaining a degree gave many participants the external validation they desired but eliminated their perception of working by 'guesswork'. Additionally, participant D described, "The degree increased my confidence in running a more efficient business, it validated that what we were doing was right, instead of it being guesswork".

Most participants experienced increased confidence, which directly amplified their leadership capability. Self-belief was vital to the participants, as a few reflected on the challenges they faced by not believing they were good enough.

Participant E revealed his surprise at his business's performance, "As I wrote my portfolio, it increased my confidence, and I was truly surprised at how much we have achieved within the business; it identified my range of professional skills". The value of taking stock of business achievements and identifying essential business skills was impactful. It enforced their leadership approach and developed additional professional skills like strategic planning, governance leadership, enhanced research capability. Hence, many of the participants reported a renewed passion for their business. For example, participant I succinctly summed up the value of her enhanced strategic thinking "the focus of my planning is to now thrive not survive".

This revelation demonstrates a shift in thinking from putting out fires to being more strategic and intentional with business planning and management tasks. In addition, most participants shared a common reflection: they recognised they had developed a more strategic approach to their work. Participant C alluded to a feeling of calmness and what it allowed "I became alert to opportunities, and you can create opportunities you never would before".

The three sub-themes are critical aspects of leadership development. Leaders need to be self-aware, have good emotional intelligence and can adapt to an ever-changing business landscape.

### **Summary**

The findings in this chapter determine that the experiences differed between the participants, but overall, the effects were often described as life-changing. In addition, the participants shared a common view that being a small business owner was a lonely life. However, the participants agreed that completing the degree allowed them to work with a facilitator, which was generally acknowledged as valuable, as the collaboration lessened the feeling of working alone.

The experiences and transformative process altered participants' perceptions of their ability and capacity for personal transformation and enlightenment. During the interviews, the participants shared numerous instances allowing me to identify the enrichment of leadership capability, increased business confidence, and new professional skills.



Some surprises along the way have impacted my learning as both a facilitator and a small business owner; mainly, the reference to reflective practice as the tool to make meaning of experience and deepen the learners understanding of their professional and personal self. The findings also provide compelling examples of the impact of business ownership on mental health and well-being.

Thus, the findings offered a rich narrative around learner transformation and how it impacts their small business. The next chapter will review the discussion and recommendations derived from this research project.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

This research project aimed to investigate the “lived experiences” and applied learnings of a sample of our small business owner graduates. These findings contribute to a detailed IPA account of such experiences. In addition, the personal accounts highlight five themes central to their experience.

I began the interviews, contemplating that some participants may have comparable experiences to mine; however, I did not predict that many would openly discuss mental health impacts on their business. Nevertheless, having comparable experiences, I could relate and authenticate these accounts as a small business owner and a learner. Prior studies had noted the increasing emergence of burnout; however, I was genuinely surprised when faced with many revelations of mental health impacts.

### **Self-Care**

The findings identified self-care as a method to enhance the longevity of the business owner and the business. Reviewing the literature, there was significant evidence of the challenges faced by small business owners. The work of McAlpine 2021 and Weir 2018 outlined the impacts on businesses and individuals when burnout occurred. There was considerable published evidence highlighting the risks of burnout and the impacts on mental health (Fernet et al., 2016; Godin et al., 2017). The recent work of Weir (2018) and McAlpine (2021) outlined the considerable impacts of burnout and how debilitating mental health recovery can be on the individual. The literature provides a compelling message that small business owners are vulnerable and are at high risk, especially within the first few years of trading (Goodin et al., 2017).

Considering the broader implications, this research found that a lack of prioritising self-care impacts wellbeing and increases the risk of burnout, which could harm both employers and employees. As discussed in the literature, a possible flow-on effect is the employee impact, suffering burnout due to heavy managerial pressure (McLennon, 2011). Previous research provides strong evidence of the need for business owners to role-model healthy work behaviours as they influence the culture within the business. My study’s findings indicated that post-qualification, participants claim a greater understanding of why self-care is required. It was evident that new learning occurred by undertaking the learning journey, which created change within their businesses. The effect stated in the literature and from my participant accounts is that business owners are better prepared to sustain the business and their employees by strengthening their mental health and wellbeing.

The participants identified new tools and strategies obtained through their study; one method was reflective practice. Reflective thinking is not a simple process; the facilitator's support includes

probing and questioning to guide the learner. An outcome of gaining the ability to reflect critically was linked to the sub-theme self-counselling as a tool for well-being. This perspective could be critical for new business owners; as previously indicated in the literature, new business owners are often not equipped to manage all aspects of running a business (Business Mentors NZ, 2017).

After analysing my data, I explored additional literature, exploring aspects consistent with my findings. One article highlighted a recurrent theme "It's tough at the top, owning and managing a business is hazardous to your mental health" (Baker, 2019, p.4). Although the article cites many precautions, the most compelling statement was why business owners hesitate to admit their mental health challenges. Within the article, a business coach Zac Da Silva explains, "Many business owners are reluctant to talk about mental health as they need to be perceived as having everything under control" (p.4). As a result, showing vulnerability is still not the norm in NZ small businesses.

Recommendations generally suggest 'putting yourself first'. Mental health champions like Sir John Kirwan espouse messages like admitting you are not superman or superwoman and stress that when business owners are so busy trying to keep their business running, they forget to take personal care of themselves. Multiple sources from the literature review (e.g., Godin et al., 2017; Moss, 2021; Weir, 2018) and my participants identify the implications of onerous workplace stressors. Drawing on the burn-out literature supports the notion that business owners need to modify unhealthy and unsafe work practices to sustain themselves and their businesses in the long term. Developing better self-care practices will create a flow-on effect throughout the organisation, positively affecting small business owners and their staff by creating a safe environment to acknowledge well-being issues.

Regarding OP and CNZ, focusing on SBO's benefits could be valuable marketing material. In addition, this research may have a further benefit in identifying additional professional development options available for SBO's for external organisations like the Chamber of Commerce or Employers Association. What is evident from the research findings is that many SBO's feel isolated and often lack confidence in their businesses. Therefore, targeting SBO's requires a focused campaign marketing the advantage of engaging with education professionally and marketing to expand their skill set to meet future business demands.

### **Professional Practice Impact:**



In hearing about the value of self-care for my participants, I reflected and processed what could be practical suggestions of self-care management for small businesses. From my experience and reviewing the literature, I know there needs to be a method to manage additional

stress and conflict created from workplace pressures. A combination of critical reflection and Fraser's (2020) framework, The Third Space, is a valuable solution for managing daily issues.

## **Reflection**

This study set out with the aim of investigating the personal and professional impacts of gaining the BAppMgt. Critical reflection is the process undertaken by the participants, making explicit the skills and knowledge they have acquired in their work and lives and relevant to their degree. Regarding the impacts of gaining their degree, there were shared experiences and emotional responses; words describing the process of critical reflection during their study were anguish, confusion, anger, and forgiveness.

This research sought to answer whether the participants still used reflection as a management tool. All the participants acknowledged the use of and the importance of reflection within their daily work. The participants' words to describe self-reflection or reflective management practice included: "create more opportunities, power of my actions, more analytical, I often reflect, enhanced my inquisitiveness; lastly, I feel more energized".

After the interviews, I undertook further research on reflective management to understand the influence of reflective practice. The theoretical framework of Seligman's theory of well-being (2011) considers reflecting through a positive lens and discusses the five building blocks of the PERMA model that enable flourishing and well-being. Dixon et al., (2016) discussed how reflective practice could enable change to be better managed by business leaders. The building blocks of the PERMA theory have similar meanings to the five themes from my research. Furthermore, Seligman (2011) believes the five elements contribute to increasing well-being through flourishing. For example, meaning is dedicating time to find your purpose, work that has meaning. Hence, the opportunity to help others flourish and achieve their goals was particularly significant for many participants. Lastly is the element of achievement; the participant's associated success either from completing their studies or assisting others to achieve their goals, thus, improving their sense of well-being.

My research findings build on existing evidence like the PERMA theory for well-being. In addition, the findings provide evidence of why well-being is a focus for self-care management for small business owners. The literature proposes that management and leadership development requires an increased capacity to learn through challenging situations, strengthen the ability to build networks, and have a greater sense of purpose and satisfaction (Dixon. et al., 2016).

**Professional Practice impact:** I had not considered the value of this learning within my small business.



The building blocks of the PERMA theory are essential factors in terms of personal effectiveness by increasing well-being and flourishing. Immediately I considered various ways of sharing this information with my staff and how they could use this information to support our clients. The desired outcome is associating an increase in well-being due to our services. Thus, the five elements of flourishing become the focus, but the supportive environment and our specialised services are the elements which enable this transformative process.

Additionally, facilitation can add value to the learner journey or lessen the transformative process, but facilitators must be mindful of their influence. Change happens when the learner has a more in-depth understanding of who they are, enabling them to flourish through engagement and accomplishment (e.g., finishing a case study/portfolio). Marshall (2014) defines the Māori concept of Ako as the relationship between teacher and learner and that the educational experience influences both through their shared experience. What I have experienced as a facilitator is the reciprocal activity that facilitators learn and develop while navigating through the learner journey, increasing their knowledge by learning from the learner as we use all five pillars to engage in a meaningful and supportive way.

By conducting the interviews and observing how participants have changed, I experienced a paradigm shift within my practice. Previously, I had underestimated the powerful impact of reflective practice. Undertaking academic study can be impactful and emotionally exhausting for learners while balancing multiple workloads. My research has highlighted the significance of pastoral care as a facilitator, colleague, and business owner. For example, recently I have had conversations with learners where I have paused discussions about a case study and asked, are you ok? Having a greater understanding of the influence and benefit of these conversations, I know when to park discussions about learning. Our learners engage with study whilst managing excessive workloads and expectations. Facilitators need to adapt quickly and readily. The findings support the power of these professional conversations. It is valuable for the learner to have someone they can talk to outside their business.

## **Success**

A further objective of this research was to determine the effect of gaining a degree on small business owners and their impact on their businesses. What was surprising were the revelations around the change in measurement of success. As previously indicated, I did not initially inquire about success. However, success was discussed in various ways by all the participants. The findings uncovered a significant shift in business owners' motivators or measures for success.

This relates to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which describes self-actualisation as focusing on individual capability. According to Venter (2012), the gap between self-actualisation and self-transcendence is when the transcended person seeks "benefit beyond mere personal often engaging in selfless service to others" (p.67). Consequently, my research findings align with some of Maslow's viewpoints; the participants expressed a sense of "letting go of their ego" and a strong desire to help others succeed. The participants expressed a genuine relinquishing of self and commitment to the "betterment" of others became truly rewarding and a privilege that comes with business ownership. Venter (2012) also argued that self-transcended leaders could effect lasting change because they are guided within and rely on their inner voices to develop values and rules for living and start to care less about what others think. The findings identified various changes; however, the significant changes were caring less about what others thought of their success and a broader view of how they can help others develop professional knowledge or achieve success. The findings offer sound evidence of the impact of reflective practice and the benefits for sustaining small business leaders.

However, caution must be applied to the small sample size in my research, as the findings will only be transferable to some small business owners. Nevertheless, what has been discovered can be credited as strengthening small business owners' confidence, providing credibility of knowledge and enhancing their ability to continue within their business, potentially developing the future workforce.

#### **Professional Practice Impact:**



This study's findings found that SBO's require some form of self-care. Business owners must prioritise their well-being and provide a culture of safe work practices for the whole business. It is worth noting that I was evaluating the research data when Capable NZ began transitioning into Te Pūkenga. Concurrent with my study, I established another company; the findings increased my awareness of work environments across multiple businesses.

While previous research focused on the implications of burnout (Moss, 2021), these findings demonstrate the value of a reflective management approach, and I considered its impact on self-care practice. I considered the significance of flourishing within a work capacity. In addition, I discussed with my business partners what changes they had observed with current clients; many are now completing wellness questionnaires to indicate how they rate their mental health. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many clients now report poor mental health. A significant change is clients willingly self-reporting. Therefore, the findings offer a powerful reason for discovering individual purpose and gaining perspective of what is perceived as a life worth living. Facilitation provides a

source of value and meaning to our work as Facilitators. Meaningful work has increased my perception that what we do has meaningful value.

### **Transition**

Another valuable finding was the acknowledgement of participants preparing themselves for future opportunities. The findings indicated numerous options, e.g., selling the business, preparation for senior roles like governance or directorships or the opportunity to diversify into other business ventures. Costley (2010) indicates that learning experiences nurture creativity, innovation, and business intelligence. The findings of this research suggest that the validation of knowledge strengthened our SBO's professional identity.

The findings confirmed the learner skill set and business knowledge transferability across differing contexts. The findings build on the literature of Fuller-Love (2006), which suggests that improving management knowledge would improve business performance and strengthen specific skill sets. After completing the qualification, learners transform their evaluation of their competence and capability. Critical reflection allowed the participants to review and revise their long-term business goals and identify how they adapted to business challenges. Often SBO's maintain an employee mentality that lacks the strategic planning required to move out of the business or advance the business through innovative new practices. Recent data indicated that approximately 47% of business owners within NZ have no formal succession plan set in place (MBIE, 2018).

My research findings provide valuable marketing opportunities for CNZ and Otago Polytechnic. Multiple benefits could be marketed to future small business learners; however, the benefits of an ILP are transferable across varying professions.

### **Amplified Professional Capabilities**

An initial objective of the research project was to explore how the learnings gained from the participants' study had impacted or affected business performance. The findings revealed that all the participants showed an enhancement of their leadership confidence and enhanced leadership capability. The findings support the ideas of Dawe et al., (2007), who suggested that if small business owners were to engage with education, it would increase their professional skills and management and leadership knowledge. Similarly, Fuller-Love (2006) argued that improving the management knowledge and skillsets of SBO's will enhance the survival and growth of a small business. The findings further support the more recent ideas proposed by Dawe et al., (2012) and the Small Business Council

report (2018) that business owners lack of formal education may have a detrimental effect on the business by not meeting future business needs.

Therefore, it can be demonstrated that education plays a pivotal role in small businesses by increasing leadership capability. The findings identified that participants had leadership traits before the study; however, education enhanced and amplified these traits. The marketing opportunities are considerable for CNZ and Otago Polytechnic. The learner experiences reveal the benefits of achieving the degree and illustrate the opportunities to reach their true potential. There is an opportunity to share the findings with other organisations like the Chamber of Commerce, Employers Association and Business Mentors NZ.

#### **Further research opportunities:**

I considered other implications from my research, and an area that would benefit further study would be an investigation of cultural impacts on employees. For example, I did not explore in depth if cultures, particularly Māori, are more susceptible to workplace burnout than others. Haar & Martin (2021) describe the value Māori place on maintaining, strengthening, and developing relationships, meeting traditional Māori world views whilst living in modern-day society. As indigenous people, Māori have double impacts on work obligations (Haar & Martin, 2021) by meeting cultural obligations. The authors propose that Māori employees respond to organisational requirements to meet cultural expectations, e.g., when employees draw on personal relationships and reputation within their cultural world, these may “occur from a genealogical perspective, whānau, hapū and iwi” (Haar & Martin, 2021. p3). Considering the factors underpinning Māori values, the authors argue that maintaining and strengthening work relationships may place additional demands on Māori employees. Future studies on this topic would be beneficial.

There were limitations on what I could do within my current research, as my research focused on the business owner's impact. However, as I near the end of this research project, there is an opportunity for further investigation. I want to explore other impacts on small businesses. Research questions that could be explored include burn-out implications on various groups, e.g., comparing the effect of burn-out on men vs women or differing age or ethnic groups. Identifying other areas that could support and sustain small businesses is exciting.

This chapter has reviewed the outputs and implications of the research findings. The findings have contributed to a greater understanding of supporting business owners and marketing the program benefits for potential new learners. In addition, there are considerations for programme



enhancement as Capable NZ transitions into Te Pūkenga in 2023 and additional research opportunities to support priority learners. The next chapter will review my recommendations bringing together the snippets I have interspersed throughout the last two chapters.

## **Chapter Six: Recommendations and Conclusion**

In this chapter, I will review what this research project has achieved, provide recommendations for various audiences, and my community of practice, and reflect on the impact of this master's on my professional practice.

This research project aimed to understand the learners' personal and professional impacts from gaining a degree for small business owners. The research provided a rich account of learner insights and the implications for small businesses. In addition, I obtained valuable information on strategies and tools that enrich the facilitator/learner relationship. The research findings also provide evidence of the efficacy of the ILP delivery for the BAppMgt for CNZ.

Where to from here? Is to share the findings of this research with my colleagues in Capable NZ, commencing with our facilitation team. At a Capable NZ team meeting, there is an opportunity to share the research findings with the entire team. In addition, it will be valuable to aim at subgroups, e.g. under-graduate facilitation team, new facilitators as part of their induction and the administration and marketing teams within OP. Finally, I will advance my professional practice by presenting my findings at the Professional Practice Symposium in November.

The experience of the learner journey disseminates critical areas of learning essential for business owners and their learning requirements. Knowledgeable businesspeople can feel vulnerable and apprehensive stepping into an academic world. Our learners seek academic credibility when enrolling in the BAppMgt programme, but acquiring these new skills is a complex task. The role of the facilitator is influential in this process, and I now understand the value of empathy, a scaffolding of educational processes, and the value of pastoral care during the learning journey.

CNZ has challenges as it navigates through operational change processes and transitions into Te Pūkenga in 2023. Nevertheless, this research evidence supports the efficacy of our ILP pathway and the facilitation model particularly “fit” for the learner. The findings of this research provide additional evidence identifying the complex skills required for learning facilitators as they provide one-on-one support and form a high-trust relationship between facilitator and learner. The evidence of the complex nature of facilitation is no longer anecdotal; it is evidenced from CNZ research outputs and could lead the way for innovative education delivery within Te Pūkenga, supporting our high-priority Māori and Pacifica learners.

The findings add value to a wider business audience: the local Chamber of Commerce, Otago Employers Association, CNZ team, and OP staff. In addition, there is an opportunity for the research evidence to guide content for organisational resources, e.g., a well-being toolkit. The well-being area has piqued my interest as it embodies all my current and past roles as a business owner, personal trainer, massage therapist and facilitator. I wish to explore this further and consider further research regarding organisational well-being.

### **Primary learning outcomes for my audience**

- Capable NZ – as service providers for this qualification, a deeper understanding and evidence of the professional impact for the learners.
- Capable NZ and Otago Polytechnic - add credibility and value for the Independent Learning Pathway, Capable NZ and Otago Polytechnic.
- New Learners – evidence of how the BAppMgt qualification may be relevant to them and the value it may provide their entity to enhance business performance.
- Capable NZ Facilitators – engaged in facilitation and looking to enhance their practice - a richer understanding of the application of learning.
- Otago Polytechnic – informing other departments within the institution, e.g., Marketing around the value and impact of the qualification for our learners.

## **Recommendations for Program Delivery CNZ**

The findings of this research project also provide valuable and rich evidence supporting the ILP and work-based learning pedagogy. In addition, throughout the research process, I have considered what type of degree fits best for small business owners, a programme underpinned by management principles or something more in line with our professional practice qualifications. This option may be applicable if the Bachelor of Leadership for Change (BLfC) is modified after its review. If there is a change, many learners could be interested as there is still a desire to achieve a Bachelor's degree over a Graduate Diploma.

Additionally, rebranding may allow for greater accessibility and equity to our Māori and Pacifica learners by focusing on a challenge or goal in the workplace. The same rich content would be present, except professional practice could appeal to a wider set of learners, especially those not interested in management. For example, professionals such as business consultants, high-performance athletes or subject matter experts working in a specialised field. We often take many inquiries from occupations or industries that sit on the outer limits of applied management but lack extensive experience managing people; however, their professional experience is vast and deep.

## **Conclusion**

In this thesis, I have described the dual development of a work project investigating the impacts of the BAppMgt on small business owners and my professional practice framework as a Learning Facilitator and Assessor. These conclusions are reached in the context of established literature and practice, reflecting on my learnings and validating my findings.

My professional practice framework is a dual practitioner working as a small business owner and Learning Facilitator. In completing this research, I aimed to develop a deeper understanding of the personal and professional impact of gaining the BAppMgt on small business owners. Applying this new knowledge serves these purposes: enhanced awareness of how I can best support my learners through the learning journey and share the findings of this work within my community of practice. In addition, I now understand the pivotal role of education within small businesses and how I can contribute to my professional network by sharing these findings.

During this research project, I read extensively to expand my professional practice and learn how to research and engage with current literature. I have observed the change in my professional practice throughout my research project and increased my leadership capability within Capable NZ. I have experienced significant transformation within my professional practice and contributed further

research evidence within our school. There is room for further exploration of this study topic, particularly research investigating the effect of burnout on employees within small businesses.

Examining my practice framework has allowed me to identify my life approach, characteristics and motivators. Lastly, I am a business owner at heart, ready to transition into my next space and my effervescence for life fuels the new venture.

## References

- Baker, G (2019, Oct). Stressed Out: A mental health guide for business owners. NZ Business magazine, Oct 2019, p.14
- Baumgartner, TA, & Hensley, LD. (2006). *Conducting & Reading Research in Health & Human Performance*. (4<sup>th</sup> edition). McGraw-Hill
- Business Mentors NZ (2017), The State of SME. A white report on the issues and opportunities facing small and medium enterprises in New Zealand today. <https://nzentrepreneur.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/The-State-of-SME-Business-Mentors-New-Zealand-White-Paper.pdf>
- Costley, C., & Critten, P. (2012). The business value of structured workplace learning. *Global Focus Magazine*, 6(1), 14-17.
- Costley, C., Elliott, G. C., & Gibbs, P. (2010). Doing work based research: Approaches to enquiry for insider-researchers. Sage.
- Dalley, J., & Hamilton, B. (2000). from the SAGE Social Science Collections . All Rights. *International Small Business Journal*, 18(3), 51–59. <https://sci-hub.se/10.1177/0266242600183003>
- Dando, C. J., Wilcock, R., Behnkle, C., & Milne, R. (2011). Modifying the cognitive interview: Countenancing forensic application by enhancing practicability. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 17(6), 491-511.
- Dawe, S., Naidu, R., & Harris, L. A. (2007). Education and Training that Meets the Needs of Small Business: List of 198 Studies with Abstracts and Reasons for Exclusion. Support Document. *National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)*.
- Deakins, D., Battisti, M., Coetzer, A., & Roxas, H. (2012). Predicting Management Development and Learning Behaviour in New Zealand SMEs. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 13(1), 11–24. <https://doi.org/10.5367/ijei.2012.0060>
- Dixon, M., Lee, S., & Ghaye, T. (2016). Strengths-Based Reflective Practices for the Management of Change: Applications from Sport and Positive Psychology. *Journal of Change Management*, 16(2), 142–157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2015.1125384>
- Dorey, R. (2020, Jan 23). *The biggest business issues facing NZ Business owners in 2020*. Blog article. Retrieved 10 July 2021. <https://www.businesssuccesspartners.co.nz/blog/post/30736/The-Biggest-Business-Issue-Facing-NZ-Business-Owners-in-2020/>
- Duarte, F., & Fitzgerald, A. (2006). Guiding principles for a reflexive approach to teaching organisation studies. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 3(1), 3.
- Dudovskiy, J. (2016). The ultimate guide to writing a dissertation in business studies: A step-by-step assistance. Pittsburgh, USA, 51.
- Durie, M. (2008). *Māori concepts of well-being*. Dunedin, New Zealand: Compass Seminars.
- Fernet, C., Torrès, O., Austin, S., & St-Pierre, J. (2016). The psychological costs of owning and managing an SME: Linking job stressors, occupational loneliness, entrepreneurial orientation, and burnout. *Burnout Research*, 3(2), 45–53. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.burn.2016.03.002>
- Fraser, A. (2021). *The Third Space*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Penguin Life, 2021

- Garnett, J. (2016). Work-based learning: A critical challenge to the subject discipline structures and practices of higher education. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*.
- Godin, I., Desmarez, P., & Mahieu, C. (2017). Company size, work-home interference, and wellbeing of self-employed entrepreneurs. *Archives of Public Health, 75*(1), 1-9.
- Goleman, D. (1996). Emotional intelligence. Why it can matter more than IQ. *Learning, 24*(6), p 49-50.
- Gray, A (2021, May). *Burned out? You are not alone*. NZ Management Magazine. Retrieved 5 July 2021. <https://management.co.nz/article/burned-out-you-are-not-alone%C2%A0>
- Hallowell, E (2005). Overloaded Circuits. Why smart people underperform. HBR. Retrieved 10 July 2021. <https://hbr.org/2005/01/overloaded-circuits-why-smart-people-underperform>
- Haar, J., & Martin, W. J. (2021). He aronga takirua: Cultural double-shift of Māori scientists. *Human Relations, 00187267211003955*.
- Hussey, J & Hussey, R. (1997). *Business Research: A practical guide for undergraduate and postgraduate students*. MacMillan Press Ltd.
- Kapaln, K. (2019). The Science of Silence: Intentional Silence as a Moderation Technique. Nelson Norman Group. Retrieved 26 June 2021. <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/intentional-silence-ux/>
- Kashdan, T. B., & Rottenberg, J. (2010). Psychological flexibility as a fundamental aspect of health. *Clinical Psychology Review, 30*(4), 865–878. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2010.03.001>
- Ker, G. R. (2017). Degrees by independent learning: A case study of practice at Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin, New Zealand (Doctoral dissertation, Middlesex University).
- Ker G. Carpenter, H. (2018). Facilitation: The future of Teaching. *Scope, Contemporary Research Topics, 3*, 30-33.
- Killam, L. A. (2013). *Research terminology simplified: Paradigms, axiology, ontology, epistemology and methodology*. Sudbury, ON:Author.
- Knowles, M. S. (1975). *Self-directed learning: A guide for learners and teachers* (Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 135). New York: Association Press.
- Kolb, D. A. *Experiential Learning*, 1984.
- Koudenburg, N., Postmes, T., & Gordijn, E. H. (2011). Disrupting the flow: How brief silences in group conversations affect social needs. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 47*(2), 512-515.
- Lester, S., & Costley, C. (2010). Work-based learning at higher education level: Value, practice and critique. *Studies in Higher Education, 35*(5), 561-575.
- McAlpine, S (2021). *Beyond Burnout*.
- McLennon, K. (2011, Jan 23). *An understanding of (ADT) the Attention Deficit Trait*. Retrieved 20 July 2021 <https://blog.aboutmybrain.com/an-understanding-of-the-attention-deficit-trait>
- Mammen, J. R., & Mammen, C. R. (2018). Beyond concept analysis: Uses of mind mapping software for visual representation, management, and analysis of diverse digital data. *Research in nursing & health, 41*(6), 583-592.

- Marshall, S. (2014). Open Educational Curricula Interpreted Through the Māori Concept of Ako. In *Curriculum Models for the 21st Century* (pp. 55-70). Springer, New York, NY.
- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. (2019, July). *Defining Small Business 2019. Recommendations of the Small Business Council for the Minister of Small Business.* <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/7450-defining-small-business>
- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. (2018). *Why Succession Planning?*  
<https://www.business.govt.nz/news/succession-planning/>
- Moss, J (2021). *Beyond Burnout*. HBR (2021, 10 Feb). Retrieved 15 July 2021.  
<https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>
- National Centre for Biotechnology Information. (2020, June 18). *Depression: What is Burn-out?* Retrieved 25 July 2021. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK279286/>
- Organisation for Economic co-operation and development (OECD), overview of the education system 2020.  
<https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=NZL&treshold=10&topic=EO>  
<https://www.oecdilibrary.org/sites/9c1e1c70en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/9c1e1c70-en>
- Peel\*, D. (2005). Dual professionalism: facing the challenges of continuing professional development in the workplace?. *Reflective Practice*, 6(1), 123-140.
- Raelin, J. A. (2006). The role of facilitation in praxis. *Organizational Dynamics*, 35(1), 83-95.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage.
- Saunders, M.N.K., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2015). *Research methods for business students*. (Seventh edition). New York: Pearson Education
- Smith JA, Flowers P, Larkin M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Theory, Method and Research*. (reprinted 2012). Sage Publications Ltd.
- Smith, L. (2019). *The role of the assessor in the assessment process*. (Unpublished master's thesis). Otago Polytechnic.
- Tell, J., & Gabrielsson, J. (2013). Management development in small firms: Understanding the learning dilemma for small business managers. *International Journal of Innovation Science*, 5(3), 143–151. <https://doi.org/10.1260/1757-2223.5.3.143>
- Turner, D. (1999). Clive Seale (ed.), *Researching Society and Culture*, London: Sage, 1998, £45.00 (£14.99 pbk), 349 pp. (ISBN 0-7619-5276-4 hbk; 0-7619-5277-2 pbk). *Sociology*, 33(4), 835-865. <https://doi:10.1017/S0038038599390532>
- Venter, H. J. (2012). Maslow's self-transcendence: How it can enrich organization culture and leadership. *International Journal of business, humanities and technology*, 2(7), 64-71.
- Wall, T., & Stokes, P. (2014). *Research methods*. PALGRAVE, MacMillan Publishers Ltd.

- Walker, E., Redmond, J., Webster, B., & Le Clus, M. (2007). Small business owners: Too busy to train? *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 14(2), 294–306. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14626000710746718>
- Weir, B (2018). *Why businesses fail ... and the journey through our irrational mind*. RJ Weir Ltd 2018
- World Health Organisation. (2019, May 28). *Burn-out an “occupational phenomenon” International classification of diseases*. Retrieved 18 July 2021. <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>
- Zull, J. E. (2002). *The art of changing the brain: Enriching teaching by exploring the biology of learning*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.



## Figures List

Figure 1. Methodology: Emerging Research Approach .....	22
Figure 2. Framework for a qualitative research design .....	24
Figure 3. Overview of the data collection process.....	25
Figure 4. Screenshot of Participant mind map .....	31
Figure 5. Themes from Small Business Owners .....	34
Figure 6. Themes and Sub-Themes.....	36
Figure 7. Theme for Self-Care .....	37
Figure 8. Theme for Reflection .....	42
Figure 9. Mind-map for the theme Success.....	45
Figure 10. Theme Transition .....	50
Figure 11. Theme amplified leadership capabilities .....	53

