

An investigation into the knowledge requirements for
entrepreneur and small business support practitioners

Robert Luke Martin

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Promoter: Prof. M. Pretorius

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MY HELP IS FROM THE LORD

ROBERT LUKE MARTIN

DECLARATION

I Robert Luke Martin, declare that **AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE KNOWLEDGE REQUIREMENTS FOR ENTREPRENEUR AND SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT PRACTITIONERS** is my own work and that all resources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Questionnaire

ABSTRACT

To date attention appears to have been mainly concentrated on the development and support of the learning, skill and competence requirements that entrepreneurs and small business owners need to succeed. However, very little attention is placed on the ability of support practitioners to provide the required support. Generally accepted standards with regard to the knowledge, skills and competence requirements for support practitioners seem to be lacking. Support practitioners are also drawn from various education and work experience backgrounds. The lack of industry standards as well as the fact that support practitioners are drawn from various education and work experience backgrounds may be the reason why no clear guidelines exist with regard to the knowledge requirements for support practitioners.

In view of the above, the problems that this study is concerned with are the following:

- a) To investigate the nature of entrepreneur and small business support;
- b) To determine what the knowledge criteria for entrepreneur and small business support practitioners should be; and
- c) To investigate whether support practitioners possess the required knowledge to provide relevant and meaningful support to entrepreneurs and small businesses as suggested by the literature on entrepreneurship.

To obtain a better understanding of the need for this study, a logical framework was developed using the Transcendental Model development methodology. The conceptual model (see Figure 4.2) and theory building process have provided two main benefits:

- Firstly, a holistic view of the broader problem environment within which support practitioners function has been provided.
- Secondly, the focus for the research study and where it fits into the broader problem environment has been established.

The transcendental research methodology was also used to develop a stratified research model (see Figure 4.3) which highlights three phases that the research should move through:

1. The first phase starts with investigating existing theories and standards relevant to entrepreneur and small business practitioners at the real level. This was done through the exploratory discussions and the literature review. The literature review assisted to determine the knowledge areas that are required by support practitioners.
2. The second phase investigates what knowledge with regard to entrepreneurship, business management and the practice disciplines support practitioners possess at the actual level. This was done through the field research which measured the knowledge that support practitioners actually possess.
3. The third phase investigates whether the required results with regard to the industry objectives of reducing the high failure rates of start-ups and the development of sustainable ventures were obtained at the empirical level.

The study uses the abovementioned approach to obtain the following goals:

- firstly, to investigate the knowledge, skills and competence criteria that support practitioners should possess in order to assist entrepreneurs and small businesses to create and develop sustainable ventures that would in turn lead to the decline in start-up failure rates; and
- secondly, to establish what knowledge, skills and competencies practitioners *do* possess.

The study identified the key measures required to evaluate support practitioner outputs and it also identified that support practitioners lack specific knowledge constructs in all three knowledge areas. It further provides suggestions of how these knowledge gaps can be addressed.

As there is a dearth of South African and international research with regard to the knowledge criteria for support practitioners, this study makes a unique contribution to the field in this regard and specifically in the South African small business landscape.