

**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

**Exploring experiential learning in the context of
organisational competitiveness**

Natasha Steyn
15406891

A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria,
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration.

6 November 2017

Abstract

Organisational competitiveness is a challenge to achieve and sustain in a complex business environment that is changing rapidly, constantly and unpredictably. The best leaders are agile enough to anticipate and respond to change, and are able to actively create competitive advantage which changes the business environment. Human capital development has been identified as one of the least replicable and most sustainable competitive advantages at the disposal of firms.

This aim of this research was to seek insights into experiential learning and the potential implications that investment into experiential learning could have on organisational competitiveness.

Purposive and snowball sampling methodology was used in this study. Seven semi-structured interviews were held with participants from the field of learning and development, and data gathered was analysed using thematic analysis.

The research found that

- (i) a robust process of developing learning frameworks is required for deliberate human capital development
- (ii) outputs from learning interventions can be maximized through customisation, and finally
- (iii) experiential learning is required to generate competitive advantage because it transforms information into the critical thinking skills required for problem solving rather than knowledge transfer.

A combination of these findings would empower management to actively shape organisational competitiveness.

Keywords

Organisational competitiveness

Human capital development

Organisational learning

Experiential learning

Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

Natasha Steyn

6 November 2017

Contents

Abstract.....	2
Keywords	3
Declaration.....	4
List of tables.....	10
List of figures	10
List of appendices	11
List of abbreviations	11
1. Chapter 1: Introduction to research problem	12
1.1. Description of the study	12
1.2. Context	12
1.3. Importance of the study	14
1.4. Scope	14
1.5. Research objectives.....	14
2. Chapter 2: Theory and literature review	15
2.1. Introduction to literature review	15
2.2. Competitiveness	16
2.2.1. The nature of competitiveness.....	16
2.2.1.1. Competitiveness is DELIBERATE.....	16
2.2.1.2. The objective of competitiveness is to DEFEAT the opposition.....	16
2.2.1.3. Competitiveness is DYNAMIC	17
2.2.2. Porter’s diamond: Determinants of competitiveness	18
2.2.3. Firm level competitiveness	20
2.3. Human Capital	20
2.3.1. The nature of human capital	20
2.3.2. Definition and relevance of human capital	20
2.3.3. Formation, composition and benefits of human capital	21
2.3.4. The value of human capital development	22

2.4.	Theoretical frameworks for effective human capital development	22
2.4.1.	Paradigm of Constructivism: the creation of knowledge.....	22
2.4.2.	Adult learning theory: Evolution of Pedagogy to Andragogy	23
2.4.3.	Organisational learning theory.....	26
2.4.4.	Contrasting theories on the success of different learning formats.....	28
2.5.	Learning methodology selection in business.....	30
2.5.1.	Learning methodology selection in business	30
2.5.2.	Experiential learning.....	31
2.6.	Conclusion to literature review	34
3.	Chapter 3: Research questions.....	35
3.1.	Introduction to research questions	35
3.2.	Research questions	35
3.2.1.	Research question 1: What makes an organisation competitive?	35
3.2.2.	Research question 2: To what extent can employees influence organisational competitiveness?.....	35
3.2.3.	Research question 3: What informs the learning framework?.....	36
3.2.4.	Research question 4: What are the strengths and challenges of experiential learning in organisations?	36
3.2.5.	Research question 5: how does experiential learning help participants to contribute to organisational competitiveness.....	36
4.	Chapter 4: Research design and methodology	37
4.1.	Introduction to research design.....	37
4.2.	Research design.....	37
4.2.1.	Nature of the study	37
4.2.2.	Methodological Fit	38
4.2.3.	Rigour rather than rigid quality criteria	39
4.3.	Research methodology	40
4.4.	Population.....	40
4.5.	Unit of analysis	40
4.6.	Sampling.....	40
4.6.1.	Sampling technique.....	40
4.6.2.	Sample size.....	41
4.7.	Measurement.....	41
4.7.1.	Measurement instrument design	41

4.7.2.	Data gathering process	41
4.8.	Data analysis	43
4.9.	Data validity and reliability.....	43
4.10.	Limitations	44
5.	Chapter 5: Results	45
5.1.	Introduction to research results	45
5.2.	Participant synopsis	45
5.2.1.	Implications of demographic landscape	45
5.2.1.1.	Overall	46
5.2.1.2.	Gender.....	46
5.2.1.3.	Age	46
5.2.1.4.	Race	46
5.2.1.5.	Industry.....	46
5.2.1.6.	Nature of the role	46
5.2.1.7.	Level in organisation	47
5.2.2.	Participant one	47
5.2.3.	Participant two.....	47
5.2.4.	Participant three	48
5.2.5.	Participant four	48
5.2.6.	Participant five.....	48
5.2.7.	Participant six.....	48
5.2.8.	Participant seven.....	49
5.3.	Presentation of results	49
5.3.1.	Research question 1: What makes an organisation competitive?	49
5.3.2.	Research question 2: To what extent can employees influence organisational competitiveness?.....	54
5.3.3.	Research questions 3 & 4: what informs the learning framework and what are the strengths and challenges of experiential learning?	57
5.3.3.1.	Determinants of the learning framework.....	57
5.3.3.1.1.	Needs analysis	57
5.3.3.1.2.	Accelerate speed of learning.....	58
5.3.3.1.3.	Shift behaviour	58
5.3.3.1.4.	Return on investment.....	59
5.3.3.1.5.	Learning styles and preferences	60

5.3.3.2.	Learning methodologies identified.....	63
5.3.3.2.1.	Experiential learning defined.....	63
5.3.3.2.2.	Coaching and mentoring.....	64
5.3.3.2.3.	Self-directed learning.....	65
5.3.4.	Research question 5: How does experiential learning help participants to contribute more to organisational competitiveness?.....	66
5.4.	Conclusion to research results.....	68
6.	Chapter 6: Discussion of results.....	69
6.1.	Introduction to discussion of results.....	69
6.2.	Landscape of organisational competitiveness.....	69
6.3.	Role of leadership in competitiveness.....	70
6.4.	Objective of competitiveness.....	71
6.5.	Determinants of competitiveness.....	72
6.6.	Competitive advantage.....	75
6.7.	Influencing the competitive advantage.....	76
6.8.	Return on investment.....	81
6.9.	Conclusion to discussion of results.....	82
7.	Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	83
7.1.	Introduction.....	83
7.2.	Principle findings.....	83
7.2.1.	Research question 1: What makes an organisation competitive?.....	84
7.2.2.	Research question 2: To what extent can employees influence organisational competitiveness?.....	84
7.2.3.	Research questions 3 & 4: what informs the learning framework and what are the strengths and challenges of experiential learning?.....	84
7.2.4.	Research question 5: How does experiential learning help participants to contribute more to organisational competitiveness?.....	85
7.3.	Implications for management.....	85
7.3.1.	Development of customised strategic learning framework.....	86
7.3.2.	Learning framework dissemination plan.....	86
7.3.3.	Monitoring and evaluation for self-correction.....	86
7.4.	Limitations of the research.....	87
7.5.	Recommendations for future research.....	87
	References.....	89

Appendices	94
Appendix 1: Consistency matrix.....	94
Appendix 2: Ethical clearance	95
Appendix 3: Letters of consent	96
Appendix 4: Interview schedule	97
Appendix 5: Transcripts	101

List of tables

Table 1: Leadership and organisational agility

Table 2: Distinctive aspects of constructivism

Table 3: Assumptions of andragogy

Table 4: Objective based learning methodologies

Table 5: Overview of prevalent experiential learning techniques

Table 6: Methodological fit in field study: Nascent research

Table 7: Demonstrating rigor within the framework of social phenomenology

Table 8: Comparison of Porter's forces of competitiveness with research findings

List of figures

Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of literature review

Figure 2: Porter's diamond model of national competitiveness

Figure 3: OECD's formation, composition and benefits of human capital

Figure 4: Psychological evolution of self-concept

Figure 5: Implications of andragogy on educators when initiating learning interventions

Figure 6: Comparing Dale's experience cone with Bloom's taxonomy

Figure 7: Field research as an iterative, cyclical learning journey

Figure 8: Participant demographic portrait

Figure 9: Knowledge versus learning continuum

Figure 10: Landscape of competitiveness

Figure 11: Comparing learning framework structures from literature and observation

List of appendices

Appendix 1: Consistency matrix

Appendix 2: Ethical clearance

Appendix 3: Letters of consent

Appendix 4: interview schedule

Appendix 5: transcripts

List of abbreviations

L&D: Learning and development

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

SETA: Sector Education and Training Authority

1. Chapter 1: Introduction to research problem

1.1. Description of the study

A thematic exploration of the role which experiential learning has to play in organisational competitiveness.

1.2. Context

The survival of both nations and firms is a function of their competitiveness (Oral & Kettani, 2009), generating interest around this concept across multiple disciplines for centuries. The ultimate goal, therefore, is to be consistently competitive, which becomes increasingly challenging in a VUCA environment – volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous - where trends such as globalisation, technological advances and a knowledge-based economy are on the rise, demanding the need for deliberate and dynamic strategies that will sustain competitiveness (Kwon, 2009; Caiazza, Richardson & Audretsch, 2015).

A subtle but important distinction exists between success and competitiveness. Success may be the accomplishment of a list of defined variables measured at a point in time, whilst competitiveness is the interaction of a complex group of dynamic variables which needs to be sustained relative to competing entities (Horney, Pasmore & O'Shea, 2010).

All firms strive to be successful as defined by their business goals, yet the very definition of success is equivocal: industry specific, fluid with time, heavily dependent on the philosophies of each new leader who enters the organisation eager to stamp his signature on his era of reign, and furthermore depicted by an array of performance indicators deemed relevant by management- including but not limited to- profitability, cost savings, productivity, market share, and geographic expansion (Oral & Kettani, 2009). Regardless of how individual firms define their success at any given point in time one thing remains true, the firm desires to be sustainably competitive, in a constant state of stature relative to their peer set (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005), anchoring competitiveness as the iconic goal for any entity, transferable across boundary and border, organisation and industry alike.

The nature of competitiveness has been thoroughly studied in academic history and can be deconstructed into a number of forces of influence, some within the direct sphere of influence of decision-makers and others further removed. These forces operate as part of a complex system meaning that no force in isolation can act as the silver bullet able to set an organisation apart from

its peer group (Porter, 1990). Competitiveness is a result of deliberate strategies designed and communicated by leadership to the rest of the organisation, and it is only with careful alignment of the strategy to individuals goals and performance indicators that the leader's vision of success relative to peers can be sustained (Horney, Pasmore & O'Shea, 2010).

As management sets about developing execution plans for the strategies communicated they have a number of determinants to consider and a myriad of tools at their disposal to support their endeavours (Ghemawat, 2002; Amabile & Khair, 2008). The determinants can generally be categorised into the factors influencing competitiveness as defined by Porter (1990):

- Factor conditions or inputs,
- Demand conditions which relate to the business environment,
- Firm strategy, structure and rivalry which speak to the vision and direction for competitiveness, the way companies are set up and the entities to which one company compares its own relative positioning within an industry
- Related and supporting industries

In addition to the primary conditions listed here Porter (1990) adds two factors of government and chance as further contributors to competitiveness. An awareness of the factors which management has influence over versus those entirely dominated by the market yields a clear path for managers to identify which factors to leverage for actively driving competitiveness for firms in an uncertain economy, one of which would be labour. (Horney, Pasmore & O'Shea, 2010)

Human capital is an internal lever said to have a direct impact on competitiveness (Souleh, 2014; Kleynhans, 2006), and with deliberate human capital development interventions this asset can be actively shaped, enhanced and empowered to generate a sustainable competitive advantage for the organisation within a dynamic and unpredictable market (Shukla, Pattanaik & Maity, 2015).

There exists an extensive pool of learning formats (such as classroom training, on the job coaching, job shadowing, out-sourced formal training programmes, action learning projects, case studies, business simulations, e-learning, and many more) devised to facilitate human capital development, but it remains subjective as to which techniques are the most effective. Not only do adults have different styles of learning which plays an immense role in the impact of learning interventions selected, but simultaneously organisational structure, financial planning, and legislation are the types of determinants which could inhibit or enhance the process of upskilling their staff (Kolb, 2014; Pant, 2012).

1.3. Importance of the study

Any organisation whose leaders are able to actively influence their levels of competitiveness would have greater control and predictability within a VUCA environment, and would thus necessarily have a competitive advantage within the industry. The outputs of this study aim to empower decision-makers within such firms to make more informed and conscious investment decisions in targeted areas that could have greater impact on amplifying the organisation's competitive advantage.

1.4. Scope

A review of the most commonly leveraged programmes yields little empirical evidence within the academic literature as to how experiential learning as an increasingly popular learning format enables employees to contribute more towards organisational competitiveness.

Whilst forces of competitiveness admittedly work within a complex system, this study focuses on the component of human capital development, with a more deliberate lens on experiential learning and its ability to influence employee contribution to organisational competitiveness.

This study therefore delves into the experiences of employees directly exposed to experiential learning and explores its relation (if any) to organisational competitiveness.

1.5. Research objectives

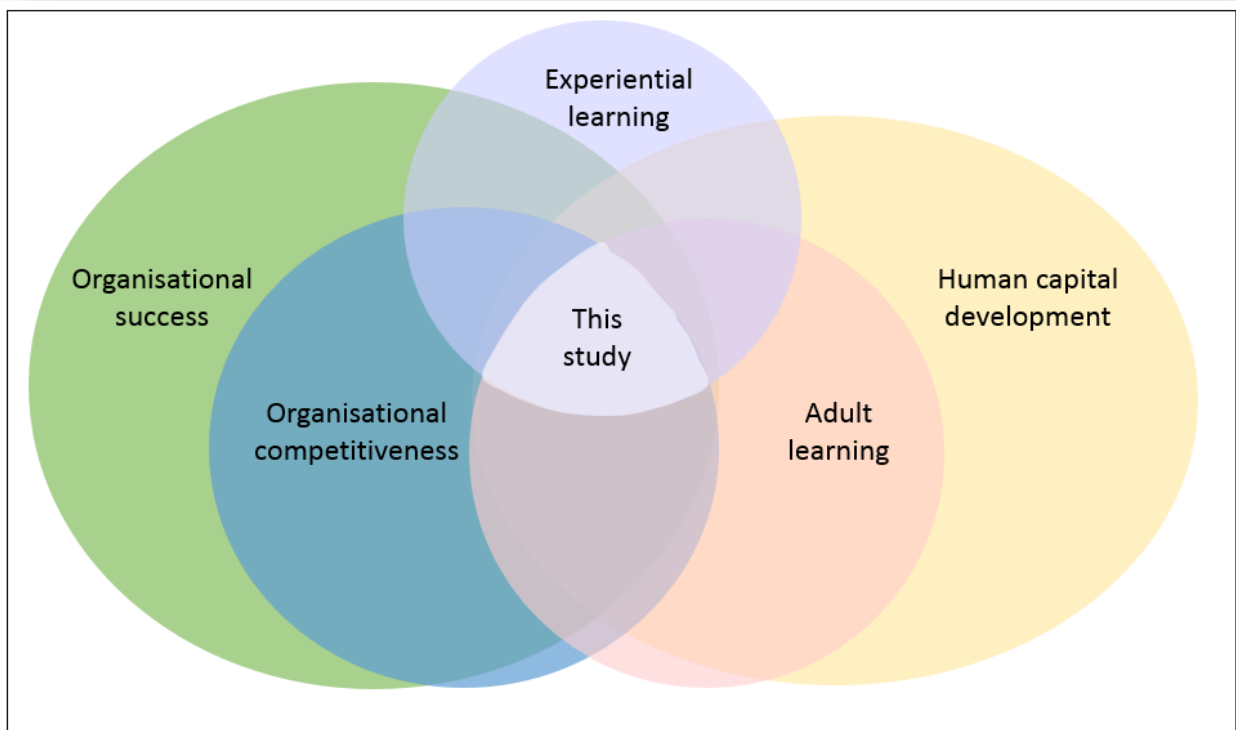
This study aims to explore the motivations, experiences and outputs of employees exposed to experiential learning within their organisations and what this may mean for organisational competitiveness. Furthermore, this study will aid in optimising management's investment decisions in human capital development by providing insight into structuring effective and impactful human capital development strategies with the deliberate objective of amplifying organisational competitiveness.

2. Chapter 2: Theory and literature review

2.1. Introduction to literature review

This chapter captures, scrutinizes and describes prevalent concepts from the body of academic literature around the constructs of organisational competitiveness in contrast with success, human capital development, adult learning theory, and further zooming into experiential learning as a format of adult learning. The focal area is viewing any relationship which may exist between experiential learning and organisational competitiveness. The researcher formulated the various ideas into a diagrammatic representation for ease of comprehension.

Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of literature review



Source: Researcher's graphical representation of the literature review

2.2. Competitiveness

2.2.1. The nature of competitiveness

The following 3D- flow forms a structure within which to discuss selected attributes of competitiveness within the context of this study.



Source: Researcher synthesis of relevant aspects of competitiveness

2.2.1.1. Competitiveness is DELIBERATE

National prosperity is said to be intentionally created rather than an implication (Porter, 1990). The very definition and interrogation of the concept of competitiveness would be futile and lack credibility without acknowledgement of one of the most influential thinkers on management and competitiveness and the founder of the modern strategy field, Michael Porter. The inherent assumption within the definition of competitiveness is that the concept is never accidental but necessarily a deliberate act, and furthermore the notion cannot be separated from strategy which is a form of active leadership and planning processes taking into account input factors, transformation and resultant outputs.

2.2.1.2. The objective of competitiveness is to DEFEAT the opposition

Ghemawat (2002) postulates that the use of strategy in a self-consciously competitive context within business is a recent phenomenon relative to the origins of strategy from the ancient Greeks who used the term to describe the military commander in chief. This introduces the idea that the objective of any activity involving strategy would be an aggressive desire to defeat the opposition as in the military, and reinforces the premise that competitiveness is a premeditated act which has already considered all possible outcomes and implications, supporting Porter's theory.

At its most primitive level competitiveness benchmarks economic performance amongst rivals at a given point in time within a market or industry, and moreover represents the ambition of one rival to yield superior economic performance relative to the market. Challenger schools of thought exist around the defining attributes of competitiveness which differ based on context, landscape and time. Competitiveness is said to be the ability to create a better solution for satisfying an economic need (Oral & Kettani, 2009; Schwab, 2010).

2.2.1.3. Competitiveness is DYNAMIC

Competitiveness is not static because the environment in which it is relevant is dynamic and this necessarily makes competitiveness contextual (Shukla, Pattanaik & Maity, 2015). Sustained competitiveness is the evaluation of the state of relative superiority of one unit versus its peer group at multiple consecutive points in time, preferably over the long term. Complexity within the system means that any minor change in the market would necessarily alter the competitive positioning of one firm relative to another and thus an awareness of this constant state of flux is required to actively manage and maintain competitiveness and superiority.

Just as the field of strategy is rooted in war origins the term VUCA was coined by the US Army War College to name a dynamic business environment 'characterised by:

- Volatility – the nature, speed, volume, magnitude and dynamics of change,
- Uncertain – the lack of predictability of issues and events,
- Complex – the confounding of issues and the chaos surrounding any organisation, and
- Ambiguous – the haziness of reality and the mixed meaning of conditions.'

(Horney, Pasmore & O'Shea, 2010)

Leadership agility in a VUCA environment is a prevalent theme in the study of competition theory since traditional managers are not set up for agility and adaptation but rather more static business conditions, which could prove detrimental to a firm's competitiveness. When leaders actively manage their organisations setting clear strategies, disseminating them accordingly to the business, and constantly checking for relevance in the market, only then can sustainable competitive advantage be achieved (Horney, Pasmore & O'Shea, 2010).

Petrie (2011) studies some global leaders in a report on future trends in leadership to find an alarming positive correlation between high performing organisations and the ability of their leaders to anticipate and initiate change needed to sustain their high performance, as well as the ability to recognise and respond to strategic challenge in a timely manner, where performance is depicted by measures of profitability, market share, revenue growth and customer satisfaction.

Furthermore, whilst the critical skills required from leaders has changed to become more complex their learning methodologies have not, and in a VUCA world it's not the amount of knowledge taught, or number of trainings attended, that will create a disruptive competitive advantage for an organisation within the market but rather a shift in learning style towards vertical development, where adults synthesis the complexity of their business environment across many levels that are not easily replicable if at all (Petrie, 2011; Shukla, Pattanaik & Maity, 2015).

Table 1: Leadership and organisational agility

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY: A COMPARISON OF HIGH-PERFORMING AND LOW-PERFORMING FIRMS.		
Organizational Performance – measured by profitability, market share, revenue growth and customer satisfaction		
i4cp Agility Research Items	Percentage of Responses from HIGH-PERFORMING ORGANIZATIONS	Percentage of Responses from LOW-PERFORMING ORGANIZATIONS
Can anticipate and initiate changes needed for sustained high performance	49%	20%
Can recognize and respond to strategic challenges in a timely manner	58%	30%

Source: Petrie (2011)

2.2.2. Porter's diamond: Determinants of competitiveness

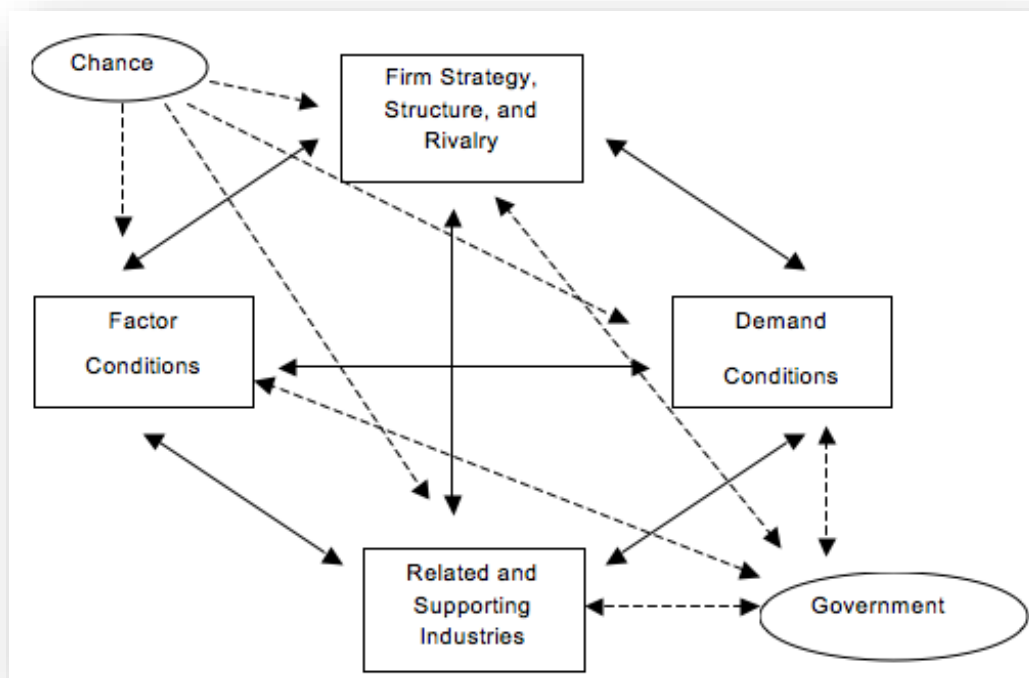
Porter's theory on assessing economic competitiveness amongst nations, industries and firms has been the foundation of leadership strategies aimed at maximising competitive positioning. (Snowdon & Stonehouse, 2006; Porter, 1990), and is said to bridge the gap between strategic management and international economics (Grant, 1991). In this contribution Porter proposes a diamond representation of the determinants of national competitiveness.

Factor conditions are the relative position in factors of production such as labour, land, capital, natural resources and infrastructure - which could be contextualised as inputs in the production process within organisations. Demand conditions on the other hand depict the nature of the home-market demand for products or services produced. Related supporting industries in turn are the network of firms within the market that supply or interact with the given firm. Firm strategy,

Structure and Rivalry are associated with the national conditions that guide company management, as well as the nature of domestic rivalry (Porter, 1990).

An additional two variables are suggested to have significant interplay within a market – Chance and Government – where Chance represents external forces outside of the sphere of influence of government or the firm itself that have the ability to reshape the industry affecting any or all of the four core model attributes, and Government is the use of policy and legislation to influence the key attributes and have bearing on the firm or industry in which it plays (Porter, 1990).

Figure 2: Porter’s diamond model of national competitiveness



Source: Porter (1990)

This model can be categorised into those attributes which the organisation has zero ability to influence, and those which the organisation can shape to a certain extent.

Critical to this study would be a firm’s ability to influence its Factor conditions, and more particularly its labour force, through intentional policy and investment choices that would ultimately positively change the company’s relative competitive positioning in the market.

2.2.3. Firm level competitiveness

Firm level competitiveness is impacted both by the state of the nation and industry within which it operates, but of particular interest to corporate leadership is the internal levers which management has the power to influence in order to create a competitive advantage versus peers.

Mayikana presents a powerful proposition that the future of competition is human (Mayikana, 2002) supporting the resource based view, found in the disciplines of Economics and Strategy, which describes the direct source of a firm's competitive advantage as reliant on a set of unique and differentiated resources, the least replicable and most sustainable of which would be its human capital deposit (Wernerfelt, 1984).

The economic argument that optimising human capital results in improved competitiveness through maximised profits commercialises the concept making it more tangible and attractive for management (Kleynhans, 2006), and buoys human capital as a focal construct for this study.

2.3. Human Capital

2.3.1. The nature of human capital

'The value of human capital is inherently dependent upon its ability to contribute to the competitive advantage or core competencies of the firm' (Lepak & Snell, 1999). On the premise that talent links innovation, competitiveness and growth (Schwab, 2015) a thorough understanding of the nature of human capital could guide organisations as to how to use this asset as a tool to advance and accelerate competitiveness (Mayikana, 2002).

2.3.2. Definition and relevance of human capital

The proposition of human capital places emphasis on the important role that the labour force holds in shaping the success of a company, and is described as the human factor in the organisation, combining intelligence, skills, abilities and knowledge, distinguishing one firm from another and enabling the firm to survive (Bontis, Dragonetti, Jacobsen & Roos, 1999).

Whilst the function of human resource management views the acquisition, development and retention of staff as a cost element the concept of human capital highlights the role that talent plays in creating the competitive advantage upon which the resource based view is founded, emphasising the strategic value added by certain employed professionals to drive organisational performance, accelerate organisational competitiveness and viewing human capital as an investment and asset (Lepak & Snell, 1999).

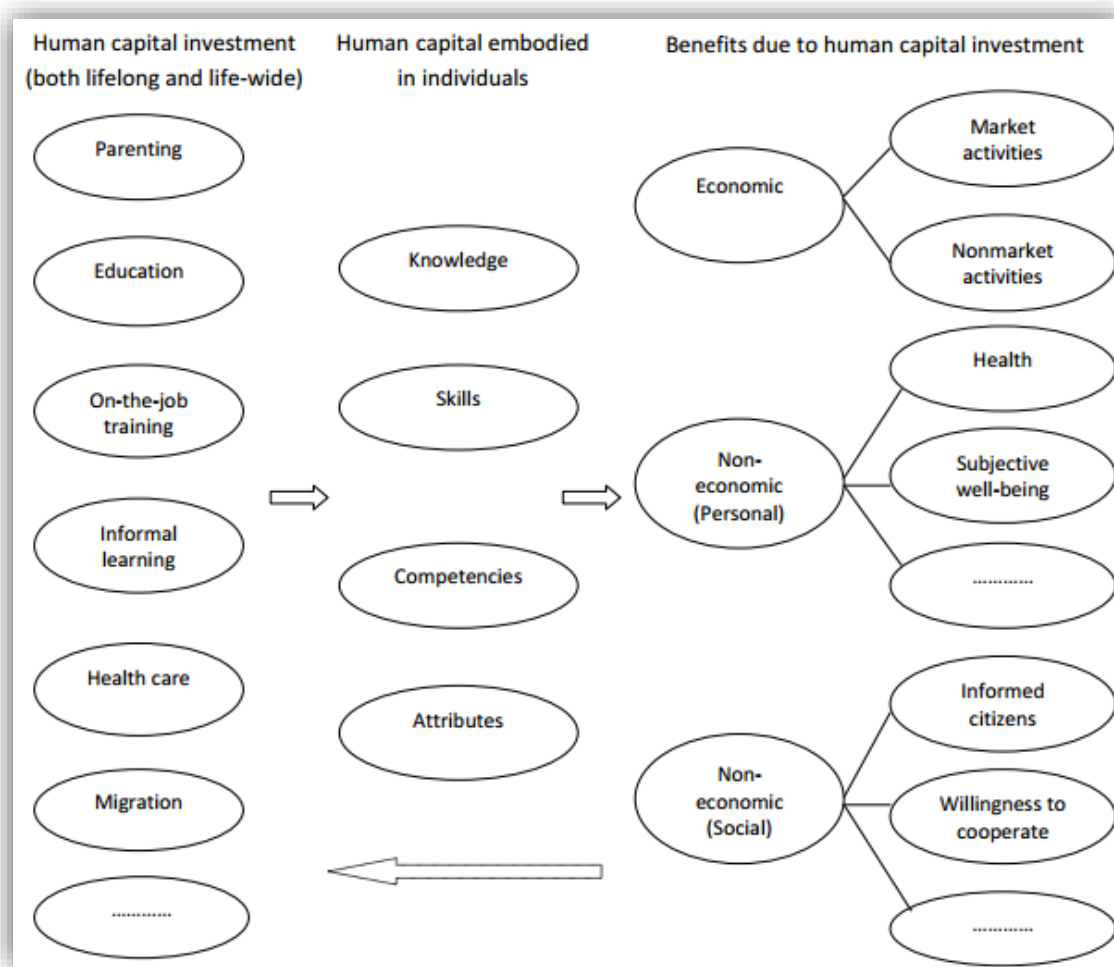
2.3.3. Formation, composition and benefits of human capital

Human capital development is a process where inputs are the investments made transforming into both economic and non-economic benefits.

The organisation for economic co-operation and development (OECD) offers a definition for human capital recognising both the economic and non-economic value, tangible and intangible components and allows for the evolution of the concept in future.

Applying the OECD's human capital model to the business context organisations are able to invest in on-the-job training and informal learning as a means of stimulating knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes which generate economic benefits in market (Liu & Fraumeni, 2014).

Figure 3: OECD's formation, composition and benefits of human capital



Source: Liu & Fraumeni (2014)

2.3.4. The value of human capital development

The investment in human capital for the purposes of this study will be limited to employee learning and development, where the art of turning investment into superior economic performance lies in maximising its returns. A thorough understanding of the complexities behind the creation of knowledge and the way in which adults learn would be crucial to learning and development (L&D) planners and decision-makers if investment in this asset is to be optimised.

2.4. Theoretical frameworks for effective human capital development

2.4.1. Paradigm of Constructivism: the creation of knowledge

The field of psychology advocates different tenets around the creation of knowledge and learning, most dominantly categorised into the ideologies of behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism. Academia is saturated with insights into these theories which management can tap into to reinforce human capital development strategies over and above the simple assimilation of adult learning in attempt to drive competitive advantage (Liu & Matthews, 2005).

Whilst behaviourism conveys the process of knowledge acquisition as a change in behaviour given external stimuli or environmental conditions and denies the role for subjective experience, cognitivism favours thought over affect, and the theory of constructivism postulates that people create their own knowledge through experiences and reflection on those experiences within the context of the environment in which they find themselves (Liu & Matthews, 2005).

A key differentiator between constructivism and its behavioural and cognitivist counterparts is that constructivism encourages a learning type that allows for problem solving whereas the other paradigms affect a learning type skewed towards knowledge retention (Liu & Matthews, 2005).

Critical thinking and creativity are prized attributes in the most successful leaders as they enable distinctive and effective decision-making. Learning to think in this way is rooted firmly in the field of constructivism highlighting the importance for human resource teams to understand the nature of this philosophy in their people development designs (Baldoni, 2010; Amabile & Khair, 2008).

Table 2: Distinctive aspects of constructivism

Constructivism	
Type of learning	Personal discovery and experimentation, problem solving in realistic and investigative situations
Instructional strategies	Active and self-regulated learner
Key concepts	Personal experience and discovery generally from first principles, iterative learning style

Source: Liu & Matthews (2005)

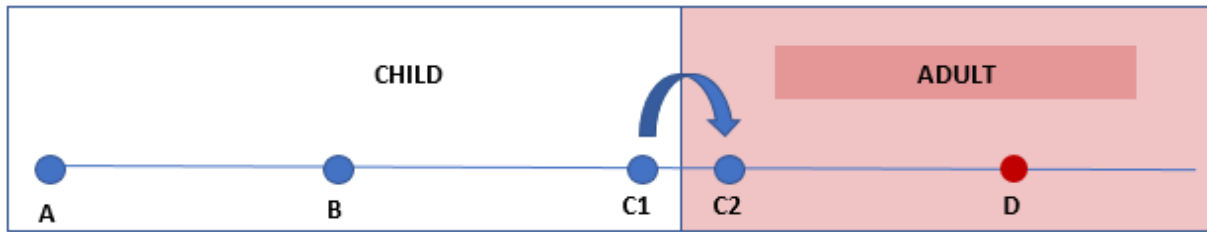
2.4.2. Adult learning theory: Evolution of Pedagogy to Andragogy

Can adults learn at all? Studies from as early as the 1920's questioned the ability of adults to learn at all, and research in this space was flooded by behavioural tests from psychologists and educational psychologists comparing adult with preadult learning, resulting in mixed interpretations. Only later when curiosity in this field was more professionalised were the findings of such research challenged and classified as the era of understanding that adults are in fact able to learn, but any differences found versus children were non cognitive by nature (Merriem, 2001).

Whilst the concept of andragogy dates back to 1833 when introduced by Alexander Kapp the notion gained popularity with the in-depth studies conducted by Malcolm Knowles (an educator himself) from the early 1970s in his endeavours to understand the adult learning process and its distinction from that of children (Knowles, Holton III & Swanson, 2015). Knowles defines andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn' in contrast with pedagogy "the art and science of teaching children" (Knowles, 1970, p.43).

A fault in prior studies in the assumption that children and adults are mutually exclusive entities, where the reality is that every adult has had the experience of being a child which has a direct impact on the adult's ability to learn. This concept highlights the role of experience in adult learning theory.

Figure 4: Psychological evolution of self-concept



Source: Knowles (1980)

The importance of the psychological evolution of self-concept in this study is that progression from learning as a child to the state of learning as an adult which have distinct implications for those responsible for learning development strategies within an organisation, the post pivotal point of which is that of self-correction and where the adult becomes self-directed in endeavours to accumulate knowledge.

Knowles describes the point at which self-correction occurs: In childhood the role of the child as learner is conditioned as pure dependency by society at large, and reinforced by all figures of authority from parents, to spiritual leaders, and even educators. In this phase represented by point A in Figure 4 learning is a passive activity from the child's perspective being fed information to store for use in future. As the child matures to point B early indicators of a willingness to make decisions may be evident, but these decisions are minor and generally impact only the child and not necessarily the ecosystem in which the child operates. Further development over time sees a hunger for a broader scope of responsibility, adolescent child approaching adulthood is restless, finding his identity, and self-concept often overshoots its appropriate psychological level at point C1 into adulthood at point C2 prematurely which manifests in a type of rebellion. This often stabilises at point C1, eventually reaching adulthood at point D, where the individual believes they are able to make all decisions for themselves, face respective consequences, challenge the norms expected of him up to that point, and project an identity that he is comfortable with. 'The psychological definition of adulthood is the point at which individuals perceive themselves to be essentially self-directing.' (Knowles, 1970)

An individual's experience of the psychological evolution of self-concept drives their response to associated situations in the future. When an adult is faced with a learning opportunity and their

educator approaches learning using pedagogical methodologies of one way transmitted content to the learner the adult's psyche quickly creates an unintended inner conflict between 'the preconditioned intellectual model of the role of the learner and the adult's deep psychological need to be self-directed' (Knowles, 1970) resulting in psychological barriers (conscious or unconscious) and ultimately diluting the effectiveness, comprehension, or application of the intended learning.

Contrasting the assumptions of pedagogy versus andragogy one finds that their distinction lies across various dimensions, which can be summarised into four themes: the internal locus of motivation for learning as found in adults whereas children are externally motivated, and the fact that adults learn from each other's experiences whilst children are reliant on their teacher's experience. The practices of questioning the need for learning, and in so doing not succumbing to academic pressure, and orientating the learning experience to life activities or specific problems are also unique to adult learners (Holmes & Abington-Cooper, 2000; Knowles, 1970).

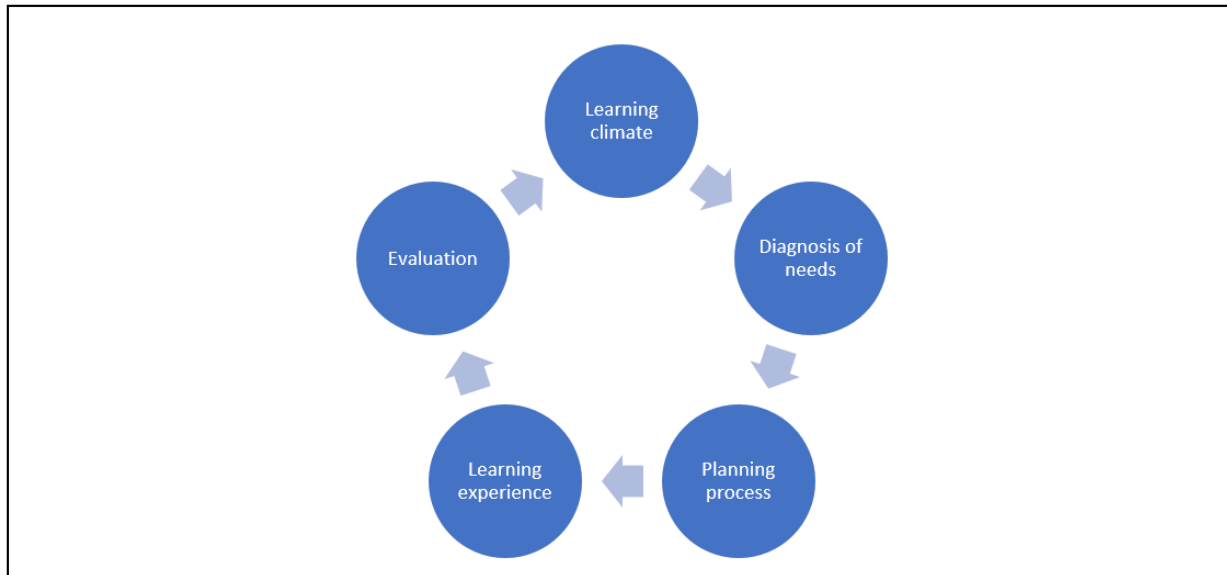
Table 3: Assumptions of andragogy

Andragogy	
Self-concept/Motivation	Internal: feels responsible for own learning
Experience	Adults learn from each other's experience
Readiness to learn	Requirement for social role rather than academic pressure
Time perspective	Immediate application (problem oriented)

Source: Knowles (1973 & 1980); Holmes & Abington-Cooper (2000)

Knowles proposes implications of the assumptions of andragogy for the educators by discussing basic success drivers of learning interventions for adults which may be particularly different to that designed for a child, but are critical to maintaining psychological buy-in from the individual intended to learn.

Figure 5: Implications of andragogy on educators when initiating learning interventions



Source: Knowles (1980)

These implications are instrumental for business to understand as they could inform the guardrails for management's investment decisions when gauging which learning interventions would be most impactful in their particular organisations, and the learning environment could thus be formed deliberately with this in mind.

Due to an increasing desire for self-direction towards adulthood diagnosis needs and planning processes where the individual is actively involved (if not leading the process) are favoured. Diagnosis would be the identification of competencies and characteristics required together with a gap assessment of how far the individual is from achieving success. The planning element would be a process of scenario planning to identify possible interventions, evaluate which would be most impactful and to actually initiate the intervention. The learning experience involves the individual's participation and immersion in the learning activity whilst evaluation reflects and assesses progress towards the gaps identified. (Knowles, 1970).

2.4.3. Organisational learning theory

The origin of the concept of organisational learning is born of an age-old debate in the 1960's where individual learning theory was expanded that of the firm, followed shortly thereafter by

Organisational learning theory (Castaneda & Rios, 2007). In this era the definition of organisational learning oscillated back and forth from being a change in cognition to a change in behaviour with valid assumptions and observations from both schools.

Towards the 1990's the conversation started to stabilise to a point where most researchers were able to agree that organisational learning is the change in the potential range of behaviours, or in other words the capacity of an organisation to act competently, the result of which would yield the production of new outputs in the future (Argote, 2012; Huber, 1991).

Further deliberation lies in the domain of measurement where there are abstract outputs of learning such as tacit knowledge or hard to articulate knowledge that are easily missed in dominant measurement techniques such as surveys and knowledge testing. Measurement techniques tend to stem from the philosophies held when research questions have been posed, and so at the onset they have been either cognitive or behavioural in design.

Cognitive testing should be sensitive to the fact that not all participants have the same distribution of change in their outputs because their starting points are unique. This can be seen in the scenario where participant A has a smaller change in cognition than participant B, but in reality participant A already had a certain level of exposure to the content delivered in the learning intervention whilst participant B hadn't been exposed to this before- both participants would display the ability to use the new knowledge transferred in the intervention, but their levels of change in cognition would yield different results. Behavioural testing should be sensitive to exogenous factors which could have impacted the end point. An example is where participants work faster after a learning intervention, if no accommodation is made for the fact that technology was introduced at the same time contributing to improved speed then the results would be exaggerated in favour of the success of the learning intervention.

Given the sensitivities defined as disclaimers in the measurement of either approach it is commonly believed that neither cognitive nor behavioural measurement should be considered in isolation for a credible view of success in the transmission of learning, but rather constant evaluation in a dynamic environment against predetermined learning objectives (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011), and this aligns to the paradigm of constructivism described earlier.

A theoretical framework for analysing organisational learning is proposed by Argote and Miron-Spektor in 2011 as a process which is cyclical in nature, suggesting that learning is not static but iterative and thus in constant flux much like the business environment discussed in 2.2.1.3 where

competitiveness is described as dynamic in nature and where systems thinking is a non-negotiable component of managing for competitiveness in a VUCA environment.

Their model describes how the context (environment, both internal and external) affects the organisational experience (learning) within a firm. The context includes elements inside the firm such as structure, strategy, resourcing and company policy, as well as outside of the organisation such as political environment, competition, and even natural resources. The experience results in particular outputs which change the context and, so the cycle is repeated as new environmental conditions impact the experience of the organisation resulting in different learning and different outputs which flow back into the environment (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2010).

2.4.4. Contrasting theories on the success of different learning formats

Business teaching techniques can be evaluated and assessed across a continuum of various dimensions. Dale's cone of experience model roots its intentions in the level of retention achieved by the teaching technique whilst Bloom's taxonomy expresses the depth of learning or concrete experience as its core attribute of success, placing priority on how the recipient of knowledge is able to absorb and transform the information to produce something new from it (Dale, 1969; Orey, 2010). Similarly, Kolb defines learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 2014), again integrating constructivist philosophies, and the following learning modes represent this.

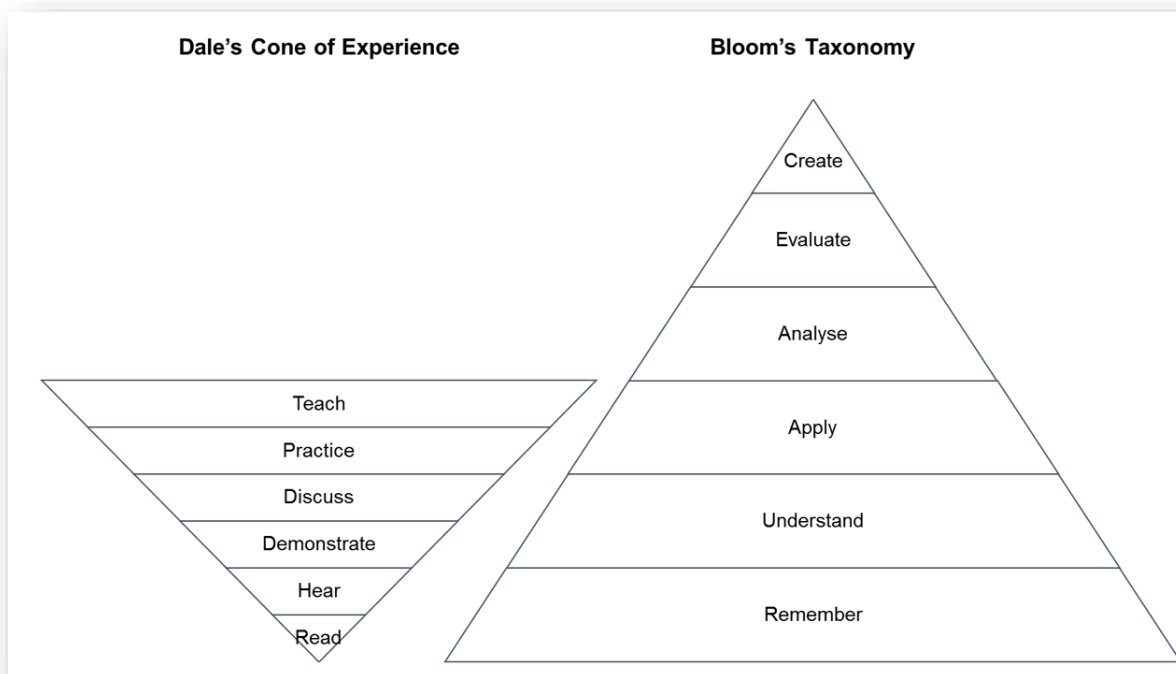
1. Concrete Experience - a new experience of situation is encountered, or a reinterpretation of existing experience.
2. Reflective Observation - of the new experience. Of particular importance are any inconsistencies between experience and understanding.
3. Abstract Conceptualisation - reflection gives rise to a new idea, or a modification of an existing abstract concept.
4. Active Experimentation - the learner applies the new ideas to the world around them to test the outcomes.

(Kolb, 2014)

Dale's model is limiting in that pure memory allows rivals to compete with points of parity delivering the same value, whilst if either rival is to gain a point of difference and deliver added value then knowledge retention, whilst necessary, is not sufficient.

Figure 6 contrasts Dale's cone of experience with Bloom's taxonomy, showing how the cone can be represented as being contained within the taxonomy when evaluated from the perspective of knowledge retention versus transformation of such knowledge into new outputs. Bloom does not disregard the need for memory, but essentially the base of Bloom's taxonomy refers to the least successful learning method which allows the learner to simply recall information, and the pinnacle suggests that the most successful learning format will result in the student being able to design, formulate, produce or create original work, which is the point at which competitive advantage can be fostered (Orey, 2010).

Figure 6: Comparing Dale's experience cone with Bloom's taxonomy



Source: Dale (1969) & Orey (2010)

2.5. Learning methodology selection in business

Given the debate between cognitive and behavioural learning constructivism accommodates both philosophies in a dynamic environment. Using this paradigm, with aligned support from the frameworks of pedagogy versus andragogy, organisational learning and the theories of Dale, Bloom and Kolb on learning methodology success this section reviews the selection of organisational learning techniques.

2.5.1. Learning methodology selection in business

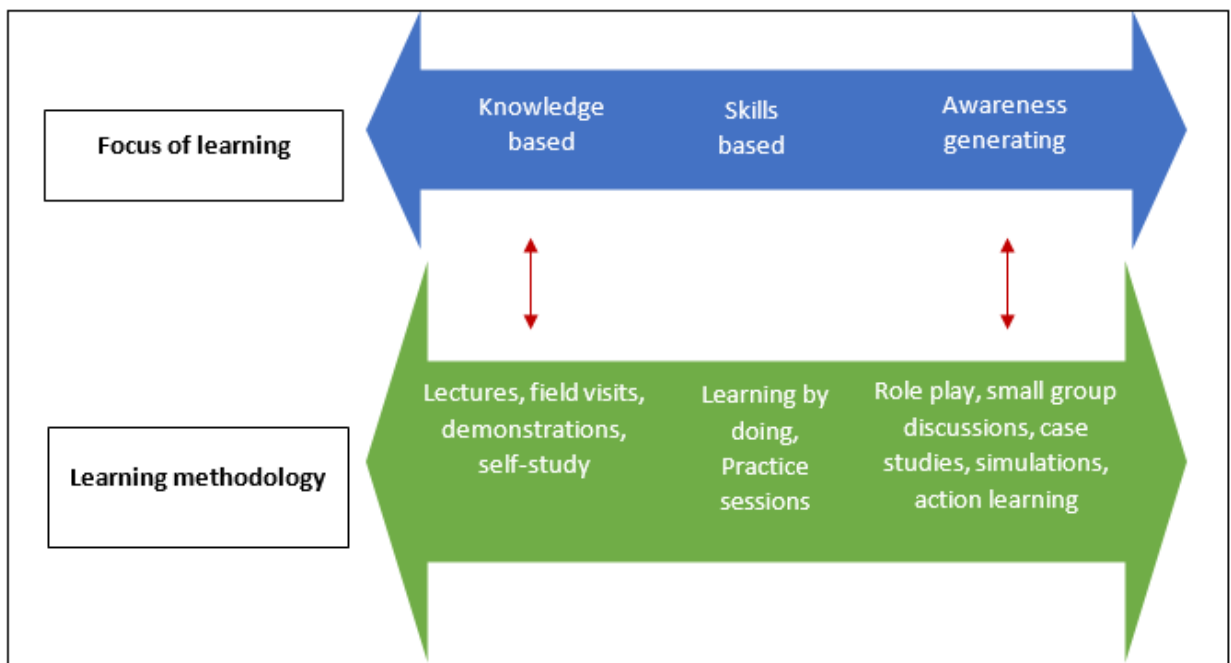
In order to achieve this highest level of learning success according to Bloom's taxonomy, where employees are able to create original work that solves business problems to generate value, training formats should be strategically selected.

The human resources fraternity is responsible for the design of policies that guide decision-making and level of investment around the types of training programmes to implement within their organisations. It's important to commence with problem identification as this defines the focus and objective of learning. Performance gaps can most commonly be classified into three distinct categories with the associated training methodologies falling in line to portray a landscape from which learning formats can be selected.

- **Knowledge based learning** describes expanded information around a certain topic and it leans on cognition levels and memory. The training types in this category align to Dale's experience cone and the lower tiers of Bloom's taxonomy.
- **Skills based learning** is more practical and forms a participatory method of instruction, aligning to the tiers of application and analysis in Bloom's taxonomy which tend to be more behavioural in nature.
- **Awareness generating learning** is the most integrated form involving not only assimilation of knowledge and participation but also interaction, aligning to the peak in Bloom's taxonomy, the point at which employees are equipped to produce a new output through the experiential transformation of knowledge conferred. This inevitably is the type of learning which organisations seek in order to command the competitive advantage in market. These training methodologies form the tools of experiential learning theory.

(Pant, 2012)

Table 4: Examples of objective based learning methodologies



Source: Pant (2012)

2.5.2. Experiential learning

Experiential learning does not propose experience to exist as an alternative to behavioural and cognitive learning, rather that an integrative perspective exists holistically incorporating experience, perception, cognition and behaviour' (Kolb, 2014). Experiential learning is thus not a discrete training format in itself but rather the tenet behind a subset of training structures with similar traits designed to transfer knowledge through the process of participant experience, reflection, theorising and testing.

Self-directed learning is learner orientated and involves the structured approach of an individual participant planning, monitoring and evaluating the learning process, placing emphasis on the personal desire to participate in the learning intervention for societal gain rather than an imposed view of external parties such as instructors or business leaders (Siminica & Dumitru, 2013).

Experiential learning defined

Experiential learning is a self-directed, continuous process of learning which involves the transformation of knowledge resulting in the generation of innovative ideas for problem solving. The process includes one or more points of reflection or feedback to facilitate self-correction in a dynamic environment rather than absorption and replication of static information, giving rise to competitive advantage (Kolb, 2014; Liu & Matthews, 2005).

Kolb's Experiential Learning Model requires the perspective that learning is not outcome based but rather a continuous process which participants undertake to accumulate and moreover create knowledge in the context of a changing environment (Kolb, 2014).

Experiential learning techniques include but are not limited to role play, small group discussions, case studies, business simulations and action learning projects. Implementation of each format may differ but the logic which links them is consistent (Pant, 2012):

- Requirement for action as a basis for learning
- Profound personal development resulting from reflection upon the action
- Use of this new learning in solving problems
- The iterative generation of new questions that challenge the initial theory

Experiential learning methodologies are a primary learning style when complex skills are being transferred, the rationale being that one way learning in reading format cannot teach the participant to apply knowledge but only encourage a flow of information which may or may not be useful at the time when thinking is required (Pant, 2012).

Each learning methodology is useful in context. Role play and small group discussions tend to be selected when a number of small theoretical problems are identified and need to be worked through over a short space of time. Case studies reflect on past activity and allow for reflection, possibility finding and a possible comparison to the real outcome to inform learning. Business simulations are realistic problems close to reality but don't necessarily make real impact in business at the time of learning. Action learning is most frequently used as interchangeable with experiential learning (although all methodologies presented by Pant are in fact experiential in nature), and the premise of action learning is to take a real and current problem, allow a group of individuals to solve for it in a controlled environment which is safe for learning, often with a facilitator or coach to assist with feedback sessions for deeper reflection and more meaningful learning outcomes (Kolb, 2014; Pant 2012; Liu & Matthews, 2005).

Table 5: Examples of prevalent experiential learning methodologies

Learning methodology	Description
Role play	Individuals enact specific historic situations in order to identify insights that can shape future decisions.
Small group discussions	Groups of fewer than 6 people gather around a predefined problem and provide different perspectives.
Case studies	A particular instance of something used or analysed in order to illustrate a thesis or principle with the objective of informing future decisions.
Business simulations	Imitation of a situation or process. A technique to replace and amplify real experiences with guided ones, often “immersive” in nature, that evoke or replicate substantial aspects of the real world in a fully interactive fashion.
Action learning	The process of solving a real life problem as a small group, practicing decision-making, reflecting on the outcomes and recording results for future reference.

Source: Pant (2012)

2.6. Conclusion to literature review

The literature review deconstructs academic theory on organisational competitiveness and human capital development, with particular reference to experiential learning to provide a basis for thematic analysis of the qualitative data captured through semi-structured interviews amongst participants who share their experiences in the business environment.

Competitiveness is intentional and as such requires strategic and agile leadership that will direct the firm into a superior relative position to competing entities in an ever changing and unpredictable business environment.

Whilst many factors influencing national competitiveness are out of the direct control of management, the labour force sits firmly within the sphere of control of the business. Human capital has a direct impact on organisational competitiveness and the ability to strategically shape and develop human capital in this endeavour improves management's ability to determine the firm's fate in the battle for market leadership.

Immersion into the nature of human capital, learning paradigms, the tenets and implications of adult learning theory and organisational learning theory, as well as learning styles and preferences all work together to inform the development of learning frameworks which can be used as management tools in a volatile environment. A synthesis of this theory into guardrails that empowers decision-making with more predictable outcomes has the potential to yield competitive advantage and ultimately economic benefit.

Human capital development comprises a number of models that are relevant at different times for different purposes. The notion of constructivism speaks directly to a type of learning where knowledge is created rather than a static transfer of information, and its differentiator to other paradigms is the ability to result in problem solving and critical thinking skills necessary for decision making in business in order to generate competitive advantage. This is a behavioural form of learning, and experiential learning is a particular format prioritised in this study which falls into this class of learning styles. Experiential learning is a self-directed process of continual knowledge creation through experience and reflection, yielding real time results and satisfying the key assumptions of andragogy or the art of adult learning.

Theory suggests that investment into adult learning, and in particular the type of learning that results in knowledge creation such as innovation, has the ability to impact organisational competitiveness.

3. Chapter 3: Research questions

3.1. Introduction to research questions

The researcher suggested that experiential learning by design may enhance the ability of participants to contribute to an organisation's competitiveness.

The research questions focused on the key constructs in this study and formed the basis of the interview schedule to guide the semi-structured conversations with participants.

3.2. Research questions

3.2.1. Research question 1: What makes an organisation competitive?

The literature review revealed that different variables define success for organisations operating in different industries and at the helm of leaders who have their own agenda towards business growth, however the desire to be sustainably competitive exists regardless and is distinguishable versus the notion of success.

This study explored the participants' lens on competitiveness, it sought to understand the active forces prevalent in and around firms which could stunt or accelerate the firm's relative positioning in the market.

3.2.2. Research question 2: To what extent can employees influence organisational competitiveness?

The forces of competitiveness can be categorised into those entirely attributable to external environmental change, and those which business can actively shape given the right strategies and resource investments to implement.

Participants were required to divulge experiences on when employees have been able to contribute to organisational competitiveness and where resistance has been met, discussing the observed implications of these experiences.

3.2.3. Research question 3: What informs the learning framework?

Literature further highlighted the existence of a portfolio of learning methods from which to select on a needs basis, some dependent on the outcome desired by the business and some informed by learning styles of individuals. Inquiring into the motivations informing learning method selection within participants' organisations provided context around if, how, when and where different learning methodologies are selected and where experiential learning falls within the broader learning framework.

3.2.4. Research question 4: What are the strengths and challenges of experiential learning in organisations?

This question allowed the researcher to dig deeper into how experiential learning culminates in the organisations in reality and aimed to uncover the benefits or disadvantages of the approach as experienced by participants.

3.2.5. Research question 5: how does experiential learning help participants to contribute to organisational competitiveness

Finally the researcher aimed to tie the constructs of organisational competitiveness and experiential learning together in order to grasp how participants viewed the two in context.

4. Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

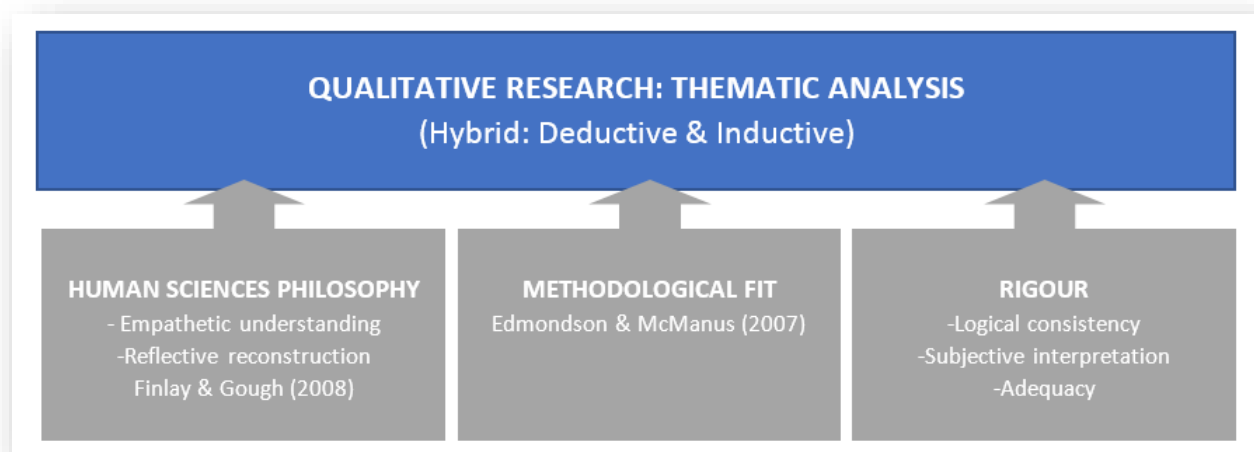
4.1. Introduction to research design

The aim of this research was to extract insights from participants on their experiences with experiential learning and to explore the meaning of those experiences for the respective individuals in light of their understanding of organisational competitiveness.

The research design was thus informed by this objective and furthermore guided by prior knowledge on the key constructs being studied in order to most effectively obtain the require data from the prospective participants in the most appropriate and valid way.

4.2. Research design

The research design was rooted in the principles found in three key sets of work.



Source: Researcher's graphical representation of guiding principles

4.2.1. Nature of the study

A philosophy from Human Sciences rather than Natural Sciences

While quantitative studies are based in a positivist and natural science paradigm emphasising universal laws of objectivism and neutrality, the social science philosophers' interpretivism and constructivism are centred on how humans synthesise their subjective reality and attach meaning to it (Finlay & Gough, 2008). The type of data collected would be contextual, participant specific and time-bound, including the intangible variables such as values and interests which are unique to each respondent and cannot be detached from the data. The intention is to view the reality

largely from the perspective of the individual experiencing the reality (Schwandt, 1998). Where quantitative studies aim to explain observations, their qualitative counterparts focus on empathetic understanding not in the psychological sense which is non-conscious and intuitive, but as reflective reconstruction and interpretation of the actions observed (Finlay & Gough, 2008).

4.2.2. Methodological Fit

Methodological fit is deemed to enhance the quality of research according to Edmondson and McManus who go on to quote Bouchard in his emphasis that “the key to good research lies not in choosing the right method, but rather in asking the right question and picking the most powerful method for answering that particular question” (Edmondson & McManus, 2001, p.1157).

These theorists propose a model for determining the appropriate research methodology using the state of prior knowledge as its foundation. The constructs of organisational competitiveness and experiential learning have rich academic archives but the proposed application of experiential learning in the context of organisational competitiveness does not have empirical findings to support the notion, making the proposed study nascent in prior knowledge. The implication infers a need for qualitative research. The goal and method of data analysis give direction toward the thematic approach of pattern identification selected for this study.

Table 6: Methodological fit in field study: Nascent research

ARCHETYPE: NASCENT STATE OF PRIOR RESEARCH		
Research questions Open-ended inquiry about a phenomenon of interest	Type of data collected Qualitative, initially open-ended data to be interpreted for meaning	Goal of data analysis Pattern identification
Constructs Typically new constructs	Method for data collection Interviews & observation	Method of data analysis Thematic, content analysis, coding for evidence constructs

Source: Edmondson & McManus (2007)

4.2.3. Rigour rather than rigid quality criteria

The aspect of quality in research is important and also contentious amongst proponents of different research philosophies, with Tracy's eight universal quality indicators highly praised as a formula for quality in qualitative research methods (Tracy, 2010). According to Tracy the topic should have relevance, make a significant contribution and be meaningfully coherent in how it's communicated' (Tracy, 2010). The researcher should share observations in depth and with transparency to be deemed credible, paying special attention to acknowledging personal biases so as to write ethically and with the utmost sincerity (Tracy, 2010). The report should resonate with the reader in an impactful manner and with rigor as the essential tool to ensuring overall quality of the study all of these criteria can be achieved.

Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006) refer to Schutz's philosophical framework of social phenomenology describing the ability of people to attach meaning to experience and observation. With this view the authors present Schutz's proposition of a methodology to study social action through induction which is data driven and then thematic interpretation. To this end three key postulates guide the process for quality assurance (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Table 7: Demonstrating rigour within the framework of social phenomenology

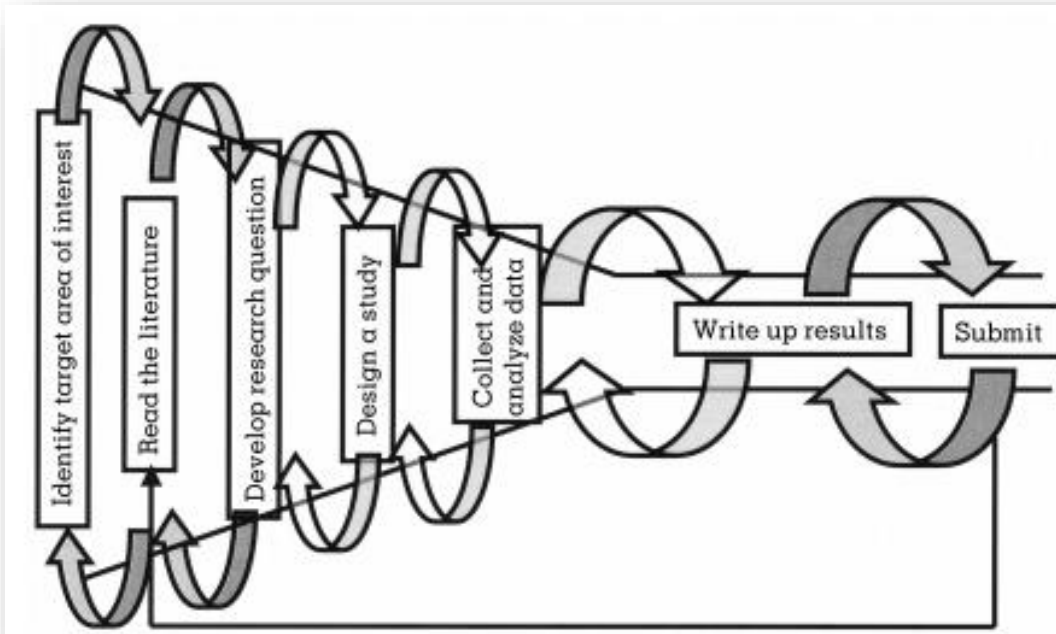
Postulate	Description
Logical consistency	The researcher must establish the highest degree of clarity of the conceptual framework and method applied, and these must follow the principles of formal logic
Subjective interpretation	The model must be grounded in the subjective meaning the action had for the "actor."
Adequacy	There must be consistency between the researcher's constructs and typifications and those found in common-sense experience. The model must be recognizable and understood by the "actors" within everyday life.

Source: Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006)

4.3. Research methodology

Edmondson & McManus (2007) describe the iterative and cyclical nature of learning typical of qualitative research which informed the methodology of this study to capture the richness and depth of the participants' experiences.

Figure 7: Field research as an iterative, cyclical learning journey



Source: Edmondson & McManus (2007)

4.4. Population

Individuals who have been exposed to experiential learning initiatives in South African corporates.

4.5. Unit of analysis

Individual participants who have been exposed to experiential learning in the workplace.

4.6. Sampling

4.6.1. Sampling technique

Purposive sampling which is a form of non-probability sampling was used, combined with an element of convenience and snowball sampling. Saunders & Lewis (2012) suggest that purposive

sampling is used when the researcher uses judgement to select participants appropriate to answer the research questions best, and that snowball sampling is an approach used when it is difficult to identify individuals within a certain population so referral is required. Participants with extensive exposure to experiential learning in the work-place were identified by the researcher either from direct network or as referrals from those direct contacts to ensure ease of accessibility to the researcher. It was critical that the researcher was impartial to whether the prospective participants were formally employed by the corporates or not because this opened the universe up to consultants, a typical phenomenon in the human capital development field in South Africa. Applying such judgement would allow participants to contribute to insightful findings for this study (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

4.6.2. Sample size

A sample size of seven participants was achieved which was deemed adequate to sufficiently answer the research questions.

In qualitative research, provided the appropriate and knowledgeable participants are selected, it is not the number of participants nor observations that ensures quality of the research but rather a focus on rigour within the methodology and adequacy in findings to capture a range of experiences, and ensure that research questions are answered sufficiently but not repetitiously (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012).

4.7. Measurement

4.7.1. Measurement instrument design

An interview schedule was designed to facilitate semi-structured interviews led by the researcher. The first section captured discrete demographic information about respondents whilst the second represented the exploration of research questions which were born from the research questions. Open ended questions were used, aimed at extracting unpredictable insights from the respondents for further interpretation, and to minimise the possibility of interviewer bias, while providing structure to the enquiries (Saunders & Lewis, 2012; Edmondson & McManus, 2007).

4.7.2. Data gathering process

A list of participants was drawn up using researcher discretion and judgement to determine which individuals within corporate South Africa had been exposed to experiential learning in the duration of their respective careers. In some instances participants were referred by the researcher's direct network as individuals who had actively engaged with experiential learning.

Prospective participants were contacted either telephonically or via email to initiate the research. The researcher shared a description of the origins of the study, the research objectives and requested participation. Participants were keen to be involved in a study which could have a meaningful impact in the nation's ability to compete effectively in future, however scheduling was a challenge with many potential participants being quite senior within their organisations and having little time to avail themselves for interviews. At times interviews were scheduled after hours, whilst others were at participants' offices during working hours.

Data collection ensued through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Observations highlighted potential gaps in prior learning and reinforcing the iterative nature of the study.

At the start of each interview the participants were asked to complete a consent form and they were informed that the interview was entirely at their own discretion and that they would be able to retract from the interview at any time with no liability.

The interviews were recorded via an audio recorder, and participants were notified that the need for recording was to validate the data captured, and all participants were comfortable with this.

The researcher took manual notes during the interview in case there were topics which participants raised unprompted which would add further value if explored deeper, and this could potentially change the direction of the interview as compared to the interview schedule composed. This approach was useful as some participants had extensive knowledge in the field of learning and experiential learning in particular, encouraging further reading on the part of the researcher ahead of the next interview, reinforcing the iterative approach of the qualitative study (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). The order of the questions was varied during the interview, depending on the responses given by the interviewee (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

After each interview the researcher manually reviewed the data to determine any particular themes emanating from the conversations and to inform any change in direction or probing questions which had not been used in prior interviews and which could have the potential of revealing deeper insights.

Whilst the interview schedule was designed to be open ended in nature, it was apparent that the construction of the questions limited the participant's ability to tell a story that could unveil depth beyond that the researcher had anticipated. The approach in the next interview was to try different ways of wording the questions to ask the participants to describe a process or tell a story about a

time when they had experienced certain phenomena, and this yielded significantly more narrative to analyse and interpret.

4.8. Data analysis

Once data was captured via audio recordings the data was transcribed. Analysis took the form of inductive data driven interrogation. The researcher proceeded to code data with the use of the Atlas TI8 tool in order to view relationships between codes and uncover meaning to the observed data, however the researcher was able to identify patterns and achieve deeper and more meaningful interpretation via manual analysis of the participant's data, so manual analysis was used throughout the process for consistency.

Once all interviews were captured, coded and themes identified, common themes were analysed for the next level of pattern identification and interpretation.

New insights and patterns were sought around the existing phenomena of organisational competitiveness and experiential learning amongst adults, but more importantly in a new context of the potential interconnectedness of these two constructs.

4.9. Data validity and reliability

Research validity is an indicator of the accuracy with which the data collection method measures what it was intended to measure, and the findings captured are actually what they claim to be about (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Reliability indicates that data collection and analysis methods would produce consistent findings if repeated (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

Measures undertaken by the researcher to ensure validity and reliability lie in the rigour and adequacy space previously defined:

Three participants were called back telephonically after data transcription to clarify statements made and the researcher's understanding of the context of the discussion to ensure interpretation would be reflective of the participant's view rather than the researcher's translation which would be weighed down by researcher bias.

Data was shared in the words of the participants to show transparency which could be verified through independent parties evaluating the validity.

The researcher was very conscious of researcher bias in the context of this process and made every effort to position participant views using their language and the true meaning implied in their statements.

4.10. Limitations

Context:

Potential participant loyalty to employers could skew data rather than depict true opinions on the topic.

Strategies devised by learning and development managers could be mandated by senior leadership, meaning that insights obtained could be a result of this directive.

Methodology:

Subjectivity guides the qualitative research approach, which may result in researcher bias. (Ratner, 2002).

Non-probability sampling necessarily means that the sample would not be statistically representative of the entire population. Additionally, the results of the study would not be conclusive, and further quantitative research would be required to statistically prove a relationship between the constructs (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). This was an expectation of qualitative research but should be acknowledged to avoid incorrect usage of the findings within this report.

The aspect of snowball sampling which occurred in two instances meant that the initial participants referred contacts from their personal networks for interviews, and the potential effect of this phenomenon was the possibility of homogeneous perspectives between the initial and the referred participants rather than true diverse opinions.

Time pressure amongst senior participants meant that the duration of some interviews were shorter than what the researcher would have wanted, stunting the potential richness of experiences shared.

Whilst rigour and adequacy were consciously favoured over saturation as a quality assurance criteria for the purposes of this study there is a possibility that increasing the number of interviews and thus quantity of data captured for this report would have yielded more, different or deeper findings and implications for business, particularly since all data in this type of research are context-bound.

5. Chapter 5: Results

5.1. Introduction to research results

Academic literature supporting the problem definition was reviewed to yield research questions relevant for business. The methodology was designed to integrate the objectives of the study with the envisioned outcomes, and semi-structured interviews were held to facilitate this process and obtain insights from participants on the topic, as depicted in the results.

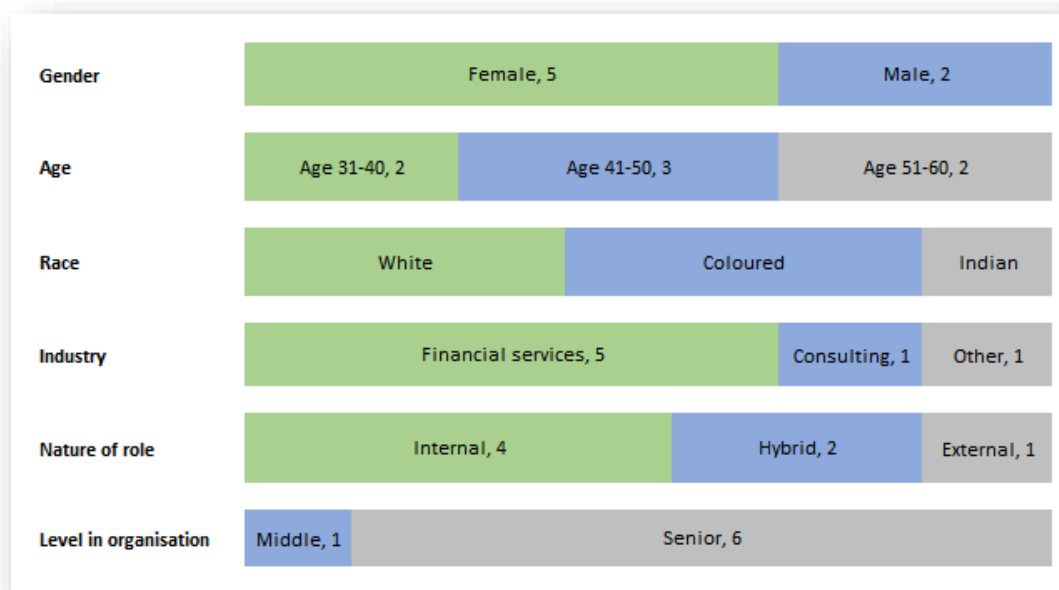
5.2. Participant synopsis

An overview of the seven participants interviewed is provided with implications of the demographic distribution of the cohort to the study. A portrait of each participant then provides further context for the findings which are presented clustered around respective research questions. The participant synopsis is an integral part of the researcher's interpretation of the results.

5.2.1. Implications of demographic landscape

Since participants were identified for their exposure to experiential learning it was not possible to get an evenly distributed sample of individuals, the implications of which are rendered below.

Figure 8: Participant demographic portrait



Source: Participant declarations

5.2.1.1. Overall

Whilst all participants worked in the field of learning and development, similarly all of them have had exposure to experiential learning from the perspective of an employee where they too have participated in experiential learning programmes.

5.2.1.2. Gender

More than half of the respondents were female however the researcher did not find this distribution as reflective of a significant split in the industry. The researcher's initial prejudice that females have innate maternal instincts which would make them more personally invested in the development of their teams was actively challenged and discarded in this study with the findings of depth and knowledge on people development observed in both males interviewed in this study.

5.2.1.3. Age

The role of age in the study did not impact observations as participants across the spectrum had a similar tenure in the learning and development field.

5.2.1.4. Race

The race of participants did not influence the study.

5.2.1.5. Industry

Unintentionally the majority of participants worked in the financial services industry, with two of the participants being referrals from other participants within the financial services sector. This could result in industry bias which the researcher was aware of.

5.2.1.6. Nature of the role

Most candidates were employed internally within South African corporates with only one independent consultant. Two participants, however, made it clear that they've spent a large part of their careers as consultants of learning and development and so the researcher classified them as hybrid participants. The psychological attachment which internal participants may hold to their organisations could result in bias - positively, negatively or just strongly sway the opinions on learning and development in the direction of the strategies or leadership views experienced at their respective companies.

5.2.1.7. Level in organisation

Only one participant was at middle management level with all others operating at senior management level, however their tenure seemed very similar within the range of fifteen to twenty years in the field. The researcher observed that the middle manager had frequent contact with senior management, and that this participant held a particularly strong view about the power balance within organisations being skewed towards senior management.

5.2.2. Participant one

Participant one (P1) was the middle manager in the cohort whose career in learning and development started in the context of the initiation of SETA's in the mining industry in South Africa, where a SETA is a Sector Education and Training Authority organisation established by government to actively manage the skills development within prioritized industries in the country.

This participant raised the responsibility that companies have to develop their people versus a willingness of organisations to invest in such initiatives. In this participant's experience the entire system of learning and development has been one enforced by regulation and external constraints such as budget. This participant's interview was laden with sentiments of guilt, oppression and inequality, and the narrative was punctuated with explicit and emotive language.

P1: "They [mine workers] had come, previously only disadvantaged people worked in the mine. So, they were digging underneath. The mine companies that had raped the country had not done anything with regards to training..."

P1: "a lot of the companies there was a bit of guilt that sat on their chests you know, around what they did not do."

5.2.3. Participant two

Participant two (P2) although formally employed in a large commercial bank in south Africa spent a lot of time consulting in the capacity of learning and development, people change management and executive coaching. This participant's focus has been on leadership development with an undercurrent of experiential learning as the foundation of learning interventions applied nationally.

5.2.4. Participant three

As head of learning and development in a second large bank in the African continent the narrative of participant three (P3) had an orientation towards the business environment and the role of adaptation within this space. The dynamic of the international market in contrast to the local market was highlighted.

The researcher found that this participant was not very forthcoming with sharing experiences unprompted, but rather specifically answered questions posed by the researcher from the interview schedule, limiting the richness of insights extracted from this interview. This observation led the researcher to adjust the interviewing approach in interviews which followed.

5.2.5. Participant four

Participant four (P4) held the role of human resources manager at a leading global re-insurance company employing predominantly professional staff to drive the business. This participant had an innovation mind-set with a diverse career background. One example shared was a previous role leading learning and development in a private prison where experiential learning was a core focus to enable staff to survive in a volatile and dangerous environment.

5.2.6. Participant five

Participant five (P5) was a referral from P2 working in the same leading bank, including a history of extensive consulting work and exposure to learning and development in the mining industry. This participant was extremely well read on the theory of learning styles, learning methodologies, the design of learning programmes, and experiential learning, supported by a wealth of examples from personal experience that complemented the theory on what works and does not work in learning and development strategies in business.

5.2.7. Participant six

Participant six (P6) was a consultant working predominantly in the financial sector and was referred to the researcher by P4. P6 like P2 was heavily involved with business and executive coaching and her focus was in the arena of employee engagement and designing programmes to solve corporate learning and development challenges.

5.2.8. Participant seven

Participant seven (P7) was the only participant in the FMCG industry working across the Africa continent. The scope of the role was fairly broad including the development of change initiatives, strategy roll-outs, and the design, monitoring and execution of capability projects for the organisation.. This participant had a strong inclination towards the measurement of learning interventions and placed priority on such measurement tools and assumptions at the design stage of learning programmes.

5.3. Presentation of results

Results have been clustered around the research questions supported by relevant quotes from the interviews. Research questions three and four have been combined in the results section as the findings have shown that a number of the strengths or challenges of experiential learning are determinants of the learning framework.

5.3.1. Research question 1: What makes an organisation competitive?

Competitive advantage

An organisation must qualify to compete before being able to establish its differentiating competitive advantage which is not easily replicated. People and skills are commonly called out as differentiating factors contributing to organisational competitiveness.

P5: *“Competitive advantage is predominantly hinged on technical experience. Technically if people cannot do programming at the bank- everything will fail. We do not care if they have got a good personality – everything will fail; we do not care if you are ugly to your colleagues – everything will fail. So, the basics have to be in place first.”*

P1: *“What sets you apart as a business, do you want to be set apart?... what is your special thing, why would people want to come to you?”*

P1: *“Well all the time competitiveness for me would mean skills.”*

P2: *“Probably one of the theories that we have is you can duplicate systems processes, you can duplicate bricks and mortar, you can steal the brand and replicate all of it. The one thing you cannot do is to replicate the peoples’ skills and the knowledge and the passion that people have. For me what gives a company the competitive edge is the people.”*

P4: *“I think we live in a world where everything can readily be reproduced. So when a new product comes out it is just a matter of time before that gets duplicated. And I think that is organisational competitiveness today is that things just get duplicated very quickly. Nothing is really, I think in the older days things were kept a secret until it was launched, today that doesn’t happen anymore.”*

In contrast to other participants P5 expressed a view that people cannot be the differentiator in today’s business world, in the context of a changing economy.

P5: *“Look, they make a big fact that people make the difference. I am not so sure that our economy is there any more. I do not think – if you look at process there is automatisation, robotics, how things are standardized, how they make [things] easy, that you really looking for the best people out there.”*

P5: *“So, people yes, but I think Anglo has got fantastic people, but their commodity price kill them. So, what is the differentiator? Not the people.”*

Investment into people development and retention

Investment in employee development and their retention was highlighted by some participants as a means of stabilizing and securing competitiveness.

P2: *“If you have the right leadership and the right skill set and the right competence and you invest in those people ... the more time and energy and effort you spend on developing and retaining your talent, that for me is a competitive edge.”*

P2: *“And what I did when I became a manager, I started investing in people as well and I realised that if you spend and invest in people you will get a result.”*

P3: *“...And then also ensure that we have a retention of employees as opposed to people leaving the organisation... Because obviously if you’re not providing the people with the right tools in order to enhance their knowledge for them to grow people leave the organisations.”*

Dynamic business environment

The rapidly changing business environment, and a generational evolution of the workforce impacts on an organisation's ability to remain competitive. Firms are thus challenged to keep abreast of such change and adapt learning methodologies in order to remain relevant and competitive in the market.

P3: *"...So, how do we ensure that we constantly keep abreast of the market, making sure that we remain competitive?"*

P7: *"My view of organisational competitiveness would be the ability of the organisation to adapt to change to get ahead of the competitor activity and to stay relevant in the market... I mean you don't get to be the largest brewery in the world by staying still."*

P6: *"I think a number of things have changed and it may not all be classroom based."*

The world of business is moving away from individualism and more towards collectivism.

P4: *"I have spoken to a few people where this has already applied –where they have more work teams than someone being assigned to a specific department and doing a specific job."*

P5: *"I also think they are moving certainly away from individualism to team, that means to build greater teams if you go listen to Google. It is not about the individual, it is how you put the team together."*

P2: *"He came in and presented on his own and they listened to his entire business case and then they asked him: Where is the rest of your team? And he said: Well, I don't need a team. They said but it is impossible... you may start it with one individual but for you to grow and be successful you need people around you."*

Innovation, underpinned by learning, is a driver of competitiveness. Both the ability to produce new products and services and the speed to market are contributors of this advantage.

P4: *"I think for companies today competitiveness is around producing new products, learning as quickly as possible – faster than their competitors and using that learning to come up with new products and services."*

P4: “ [Context: From what you’ve described, would you say that what makes you competitive is being at the cutting edge, being innovative, being the first mover?] “ *Yeah – but I think as a reaction to new knowledge and new learning.*”

P7: “*...yeah and just the ability to innovate... Yeah definitely competitive.*”

Relative positioning

Competitiveness is about relative positioning and is context specific. It depends on the landscape that the firm believes they are competing in- geographical (local or global), industry dynamics, or even whether the organisation views its competitiveness as a relative internal positioning at various points in time.

P3: “*I think the company that I work for definitely relates that competitiveness in the environment itself... Because you’re competing internationally, as well as locally.*”

P5: “*You know I think it is different to different organisations. I think the competitiveness in the financial industry is everything to do with customer loyalty. Where in a Sasol or an Anglo it is nothing to do with that. It is about commodity price ... So yes, the competitiveness depending on the industry I think it will differ.*”

P6: “*I suppose it is to be seen as the leader in the industry, in your specific industry and that is how I understand organisations competing with each other. However, there are some organisations that we work with where for them it is less about competing with other organisations but actually this is what we expect of ourselves and so they are actually striving to achieve what they have set as a standard for themselves regardless of what the standard is for their industry but those are, I suppose, few and far between.*”

P7: “*The fact that you are operating on a global scale; the fact that the largest brewer in the world wanting to buy you out because you pose as a threat... the inability of competitors to outperform us.*”

Indicators of competitiveness

Internal and external perceptions act as indicators of this relative positioning in the market. Employee surveys, independent industry benchmarking boards, corporate brand identity and company performance measures such as market share, revenue growth and share price are signals of relative positioning in the market.

P2: "There was two. One is the employee opinion survey which is internal and that is saying how happy you are... what motivates you to stay. And the second one was an external benchmark which is run independently which says this is the best company to work for... our brand identity said that we were the best company to work for, plus we saw the revenues go up and the share price goes up."

Summary of research question 1 findings

Before an organisation can establish its competitive advantage it must qualify amongst stakeholders by delivering the basics. There are conflicting views as to whether people and skills can be deemed the differentiator for companies today. Those who believe that people are the point of difference have a firm belief that appropriate investment into people development and retention will accelerate competitiveness.

The speed at which the business environment is changing presents a challenge for firms to maintain their competitive positioning in the market, indicated by internal and external benchmarking measures. Generational shifts, a conscious change from individualism to collectivism and the rate of innovation are some of the trends identified which impact a firm's ability to compete.

5.3.2. Research question 2: To what extent can employees influence organisational competitiveness?

Responsibility of organisational competitiveness

The responsibility of organisational competitiveness lies not in the upper echelons of the firm but requires both top-down and bottom-up participation. Employees are able to contribute to organisational competitiveness when there is a clearly articulated and communicated strategy, where goals are aligned to this strategy, and where employees have been engaged and have bought into the direction actively set by business leaders.

P1: *"I do not think it is about the seniority.... Everyone has a role to play.... it may not be at an influential or strategic level, but who implements it."*

P3: *"There's a strategy in the organisation. So, each business unit would then follow that strategy. And, ultimately each employee in the organisation has to contribute to that strategy."*

P4: *"One of our junior staff members identified a project and that was taken forward. So you know if someone has an interest and he comes up with an idea we allow them to investigate and to spend time on that. So it is not always driven from the top to the bottom"*

P5: *"I think they [employees] contribute to competitiveness if their roles are clearly defined and they know what they should be doing... If good leaders know where to shift their energy so that the table balances in that point in time... they need to continuously scope the world for how these sands are changing and might be changing... That is where strategy comes in."*

P6: *"I think it is our belief that leadership drives behaviour but because employee engagement is something that is incredibly important to how we go about things it is not 'either-or', it should be 'both-and' [top-down and bottom-up]."*

P6: *"I think where employees are engaged and where the organisation firstly is clear on what their strategy is. Secondly where it has actually been communicated to employees in a way that they can connect with and thirdly where employees have bought into the strategy."*

P7: *"It is both ends – top down and bottom up. Top down because strategy is made that way. You don't develop a strategy based on gut feel. It is based on facts and what is currently happening in the market – and bottom up because there is room for innovation. And there is room for people to you know view things that may not be seen at the top."*

Power dynamics and resistance from leadership

At times resistance was evident from leadership towards employee contribution to competitiveness. Factors such as power, money and time are quoted as inhibitors.

P2: *“My fear is, if right at the top our chairperson or managing director or chief executive said: This is the way we are going to do it, we would fundamentally shift the organisation. People will listen to what the leaders are saying and the leaders then put their money there and put their time there and that is how they measure you, based on the performance development, based on the incentive scheme, based on the bonuses it is what the chief executive wants in the organisation. They set the pace, they set the culture.”*

P2: *“I would like to say yes [employees can contribute to competitiveness] but it is no... The amount of resistance we got from senior executives because they did not buy into this concept because it threatened the way they work... the responsibilities change from having a lot of power, a lot of bureaucracy... and I have seen where, because it was not sponsored from the top, there was not enough money pumped into the organisation.”*

Improving employee contribution to organisational competitiveness

Employee contribution to competitiveness can be actively improved if there is (i) strategy alignment throughout the business, (ii) a deliberate, robust and relevant people development strategy, and (iii) a team and project based company structure conducive to rewarding and encouraging employee contribution.

Strategy alignment

P3: *“Our goals have to be aligned to strategy... if you understand your goals that already empowers you to know that you are achieving the strategy in what you are doing. Empowers you to make sure that you’ve contributed to an organisation going forward.”*

P6: *“How do you enable and empower them [middle managers] to do this [effectively communicate the strategy down to lower levels] as part of stuff they are already doing... how do you integrate it into the things they are already doing.”*

P7: *“So within a company—look I am beginning at the score cards because that is quite a huge driver of competitiveness within the company.”*

People development

P2 described how at the lower end there is a lack of basic communication skills, presentation skills, and commercial acumen to develop a sound business case and to argue that case to decision makers. As a result these employees motivate their demands through emotion and even violence.

P2: "Personal mastery is where you build self-awareness, you build emotional intelligence, you build in your employees the best in them to be able to be resilient to change, to be self-aware, to have empathy, to have sustainability in terms of their skills and their knowledge. They also do a lot of introspection and reflection in terms of where they are and they become independent."

P2: "For me it is the post implementation of training that often falls short because people measure what did you learn at the end of the training course? If you have learned in those two or three days but if I go back six weeks later there is very little retention."

P5: "The old way of thinking was yes, let us train them, the other way is just to recruit better people. Firstly... If you really ask people what do you need to be better at your job they want R150 to R200 000. The payroll percentage will never give in... Secondly people need to become more self-directed in their learning, because companies do not care that much."

P5: "If you take experiential learning... by putting people in roles that are meaningful- giving the autonomy to grow with good coaching and guidance- -I think we will be okay. You might not even need a training and development function, to be honest."

Company structure

P4: "So I think if we can work towards creating a structure where it is more work based teams that is created and not departments as such. ... I think that is the future of our organisation."

Summary of research question 2 findings

Interviews found that everyone has a role to play in organisational competitiveness. Whilst at times corporate leaders have felt threatened by employee contribution to competitiveness they are actively able to shape their' employees level of contribution through deliberate decisions around strategy alignment, people development and company structure.

5.3.3. Research questions 3 & 4: what informs the learning framework and what are the strengths and challenges of experiential learning?

5.3.3.1. Determinants of the learning framework

5.3.3.1.1. Needs analysis

The first step to planning an organisation's learning framework is to identify the business and individual needs, for specific target audiences.

P1: *"We have looked at competencies, we have looked at performance, we have identified skills gaps and potential."*

P1: *"Out of the assessments will come what training is required. It does not tell you the method... the method depends on the level... and what is the objective, the outcome that I am looking for."*

P6: *"A lot of our clients come to us and say look these are either the challenges or the pain points or these are our objectives, can you design something that will address that?"*

P7: *"In every learning intervention your return on investment needs to be considered. So, you start with the end in mind."*

P3: *"You're also faced with different generations in the organisation. So where you find that your younger generations are all technology advanced and they quickly want to learn, they'll connect with people a lot quicker and they come up with ideas. Whereas your baby boomers and maybe your generation X - very different."*

P4: *"I think what I certainly see happening around the millennials is that the traditional company structure is going to change within the next few years."*

P7: *"For instance you will be more aware of who your target audience is; what is the best way to make the training or the learning more relevant in their lives."*

5.3.3.1.2. Accelerate speed of learning

The rate at which the business environment is changing means that both employers and employees prioritise speed of learning as an important determinant of learning framework planning.

P3: *"It's how quickly can learning transform?... For them [learners] it's more about, how quickly can you give me the knowledge? How quick can I learn? So I'm looking for a 5 minute video, I'm not looking for a 30 minute session."*

P3: *"So we can have bite sized chunks of learning as opposed to content that have been developed and that's taken you forever to develop and is taking them a day or two days, or even maybe 4 hours, 3 hours to actually go through content."*

P4: *"I think for companies today competitiveness is around producing new products, learning as quickly as possible – faster than their competitors."*

P7: *"How do you get them competent as quickly as possible?... So it's how much of money you have available and then of course timing plays a huge role in how quickly you want to get a learning intervention out."*

5.3.3.1.3. Shift behaviour

Learning methodologies should shift behaviour to add value to the business, knowledge transfer and retention of information are not sufficient.

P2: *"For me that is the ultimate aim of training, is to shift behaviour."*

P4: *"What we have seen often is that someone attends training but their behaviour doesn't necessarily change afterwards."*

Knowledge retention and application are essential for learning interventions to be deemed successful and there is an acknowledgement that at times this step is missing in the learning and development process in organisations.

P2: *"For me it is the post implementation of training that often falls short because people measure you what did you learn at the end of the training course? If you have learned in those two or three days but if I go back six weeks later there is very little retention."*

P4: *“The most important thing I think often is a recap session or a review session – six months after the training was presented for the impact to be reviewed.”*

Experiential learning by design allows participants to apply new knowledge transferred to the business immediately.

P2: *“We look back and say how much of these projects have been implemented and that made that programme very sustainable because the sponsors, the executives saw the value of the training.”*

P3: *“We identify projects upfront which is – we engage with the business to work projects that’s going to add meaning and value to business... So here’s an opportunity for them to give back to the business, so return on investment.”*

P5: *“In all fairness experiential learning should be the way organisations upskill people, because they are already getting value versus training it is nothing, there is nothing there. There is no value it is just cost.”*

5.3.3.1.4. Return on investment

Priority is placed on extracting value from any form of training or learning intervention because there is an acute awareness of how costly it is.

P1: *“What is the cost, not what is the process. For all organizations: what is the cost.”*

P2: *“What is the cost/benefit analysis?”*

P4: *“When companies are trying to cut costs they often have to start from the training budget.”*

P4: *“I think what has always been the most important thing is the impact of the training and we hear a lot about it you know. They say the return on your investment and how to use that.”*

P5: *“[Classroom training] It is costly.... in all fairness experiential learning should be the way organizations upskill people, because they are already getting value versus training it is nothing, there is nothing there. There is no value it is just cost.”*

P7: *“So it’s how much of money you have available and then of course timing plays a huge role in how quickly you want to get a learning intervention out.”*

P7: *“In every learning intervention your return on investment needs to be considered. So you start the end in mind.”*

5.3.3.1.5. Learning styles and preferences

People have different learning styles and preferences which should be considered when designing learning frameworks for effective results.

P2: *“When I do a course and presentation class I use every single possible scenario where there are tools, there is techniques because some people would love to stand up and write up on a whiteboard, some people would like a flipchart. Other people would like to do videos, other people would like to feel and touch this thing, other people would just sit in a small group and concentrate and talk... so for me you need to find what works.”*

P3: *“You find some people want just tutorials, some people want a little bit more information. Some people likes reading, some people likes videos. So, what we offer is make sure that we can actually cater for most of our audience.”*

P3: *“Adults learn very differently... there’s content, there’s peer learning, there’s networking, various functions. There’s learning from your coaches, your mentors as well. And then how do we ensure that you also have a broader understanding of best practice perspective... it’s online learning, its videos, ted talks, its master classes, one hour power sessions, bite sized chunk learning.”*

P6: *“You have people who learn visually, people who learn auditory, people who learn through the doing.”*

One participant displayed dissatisfaction at an experience where the organisation did not effectively use the results of the needs analysis to customize training and development needs, but applied the same methodologies and content to everyone.

P2: *“My experience is most organisations would go and decide on one cookie cutter approach...We do a lot of performance evaluation... we have a pray and spray approach... We said we put everybody through soft skills training, we said everybody needs customer service, everybody needs the same kind of training and we do not customise the training.”*

It is evident that not only do different learning styles and preferences need to be considered but also the fact that different types of learning require a different way to impart that knowledge, so customisation is pivotal in designing an effective learning framework.

P2: *“If you understand people’s learning styles, then you can customise training.”*

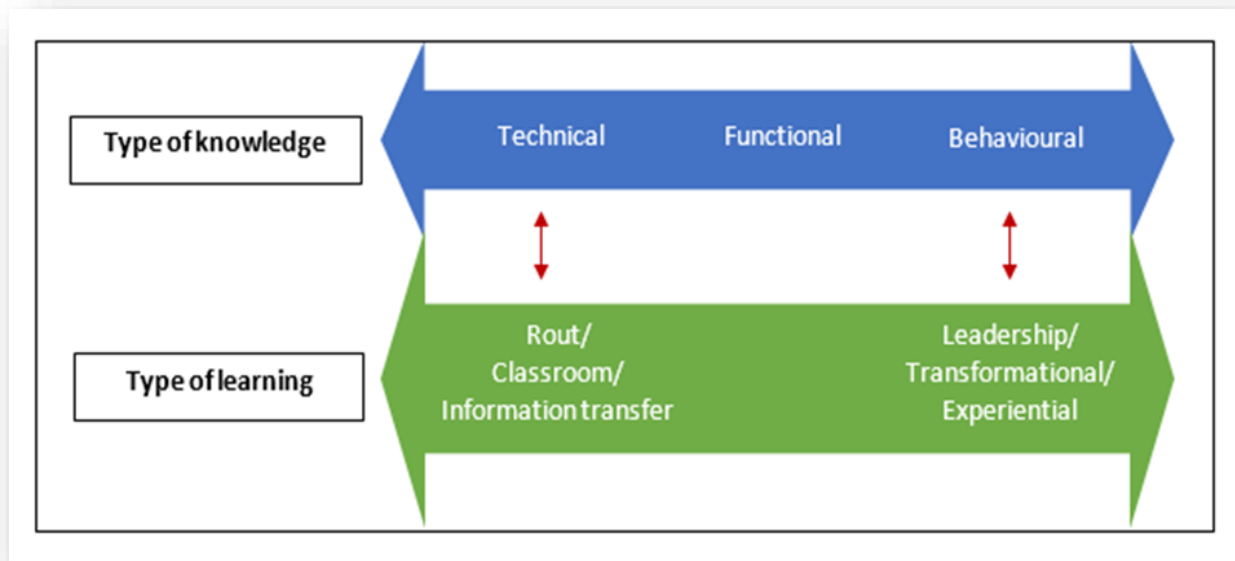
P6: *“We do not believe in a one size fits all.”*

P4: *“If it is purely knowledge being transferred and then often class room situations will be used. But if it is behavioural components to it, you know, competencies then it will definitely involve experiential learning.”*

P5: *“So, the basic framework before you even decide on the mechanism is to understand how you make up competence. And that will either be technical, functional or behavioural, pre the leadership. So, if you understand there are three of these, you need to understand how do you impart the knowledge into those three legs.*

- *Technical has to be trained any way because it changes all the time and needs to be updated, you need to have that functionality. That is typically rout training, practice training to prove competence.*
- *Functional is typically what all people need to know to get their job done, do you know the company’s processes. So, if we training the processes of the company that is also rout training – people are trained, they become capable and through time they become competent.*
- *Behavioural training is just your leadership training, anything that is transformational change, behavioural, how do you show up better as a manager in an area. In the old days, they referred to that as soft skills training”*

Figure 9: Knowledge versus learning continuum



Source: Researcher interpretation of participant description of types of learning required

The knowledge continuum above reflects the internal desires of knowledge transfer from the firm's perspective, but it ignores the compliance factors required by legislation either through government or company policy that are required to happen regardless of corporate initiatives in people development.

P1: "Government said well I am going to regulate anybody that goes into the workplace going forward, companies are going to have to train their people on specific needs for the organization...that was one element of transferring skills, that is where the need came from...not so much for the organization, the need was more about compliance."

P2: "Most of the training was compliance training, ... training on health and safety."

P3: "Certain things you can't move away from, for example compliance, where you need to understand certain things."

P5: "At ABSA functional training would be compliance based, you cannot work for the bank if you do not understand full how the bank works."

5.3.3.2. Learning methodologies identified

A variety of methodologies should be used to upskill employees because they are context dependent and customisation is important. There is room for classroom training and transformational learning at the right time. The types of experiential learning identified are workshops, role play, action learning using real business projects, small groups, business simulations, case studies.

P2: "People would go through a three to four-day workshop course in groups and people would be then divided into syndicate groups. You would then be given an assignment, we would meet again within two or three weeks for feedback on the assignment. We would evaluate your team dynamics, how you work in a team, you would evaluate each other. We would also evaluate what you have learned because in the four-day workshop we only cover the theory but in addition to that, during the workshops we use role plays extensively in recruiting people"

P3: "We would give them charts, topics, they would work together in groups and they would start sharing the knowledge and experience, and identify. So they would look at what their skills are, what's happening in the workplace? Where could they improve? Use examples of what's working, share amongst each other. So for us that's a lot around experiential learning as opposed to me just giving you the content."

P3: "I can definitely confirm in case studies, discussions we do have a simulation built into both the programs currently as well. And then the action learning projects."

5.3.3.2.1. Experiential learning defined

Experiential learning is a learning format that allows participants to connect and engage with the content rather than just transferring knowledge. It necessarily requires participants to practice what they are learning, apply the skills to projects as close to the real thing as possible to deliver outputs while they are learning it, adding immediate value to the business rather than just costs. The feedback aspect of this format accelerates the learning process and results in understanding of knowledge transferred and a shift in behaviour.

P4: "For me experiential learning is about experience that the person has and applying the skills or the knowledge. In other words you don't just sit in a classroom setup where someone shares knowledge with you. You actually practice that, either in a role play format or in a real"

job situation where you know on the job evaluation I guess. I think it is about what would assist the transfer of learning for the new behaviour.”

P5: “So, experiential learning, the way I have experienced it, maybe not theoretically, Is exposing people to something very close to the real thing...The closer you bring feedback to the real owner the quicker they learn.”

P5: “in all fairness experiential learning should be the way organisations upskill people, because they are already getting value versus training it is nothing, there is nothing there. There is no value it is just cost. “

P6: “My understanding of experiential learning is it is not just fact based... that does not mean it translates into any kind of understanding and a lot of people need to actually engage with something for it to make sense to them... You need them to connect with it and different people connect in different ways.”

P6: “Experiential learning, for me, is on different levels. Firstly, it understands how we learn differently. It is also getting me to actually exercise some of that learning, in other words practice while we are doing it ... you need to actually connect with me before I am even open to the experiential learning.”

5.3.3.2.2. Coaching and mentoring

Coaching is considered integral to experiential learning, and the built-in feedback system within coaching allows participants to reflect and actively change behaviour, which enforces the sustainability of the skills transferred.

P2: “My current bias is coaching... When you have one on one coaching, when you have coaching circles with people, that for me makes the training sustainable forever.”

P2: “They also do a lot of introspection and reflection in terms of where they are weak and they become independent and you help them or you assist and support them through that process that they become healthy self-fulfilling, self-sustaining employee who is able to make the right choices, able to contribute.”

P3: “There’s learning from your coaches, your mentors as well.”

P5: *“Behavioural training is much better with exposure through time, coaching, constant feedback mechanisms. So, the best way to learn is by doing it and being in a role that challenges you and getting coaching and mentoring.”*

P5: *“Coaching and mentoring are probably the most powerful tool in organisations and it is the most ineffectively used tool in organisations. You will fundamentally transform your function by just getting mentoring and coaching out there. It is the strongest human feedback mechanism that you will find for leadership and functional management... Very much experiential, because it is a feedback loop.”*

5.3.3.2.3. Self-directed learning

Learning becomes more relevant if the participant has bought into it and often this improves the effectiveness of the learning intervention.

P1: *“So, they have got to be committed to do something... so it has to be buy-in from the individual as well.”*

P6: *“You have to bring people into the room and one of the ways of doing that is making them connect with what they are learning, in other words making them see value in it... how is this going to serve me, how is this going to make a difference in my life, how is this not going to be a one or two day or two-hour waste of my time.”*

P7: *“You’re going to take the things out that are most relevant to you. If you create in the beginning of an learning intervention the awareness of what is relevant to the individual- it makes it easier for the training – while you’re going through the process with the delegate for them to start picking and choosing what they need so that by the time that they leave it is easier for them to go out into what they need to do.”*

Summary of research question 3 and 4 findings

In the process of planning a learning framework for an organisation there are typical determinants to be observed.

- A needs analysis articulates the business and learning objectives and identifies the target audience.

- Speed of learning is crucial to stay abreast of a rapidly changing business environment and this must be evident in the learning methodologies selected.
- Learning interventions must result in a shift in behaviour that necessarily delivers on return on the investment with real value added to the business as soon as possible.
- Customisation of learning programmes is essential to address the variety of learning styles and preferences present in complex firms.

A number of methodologies are at the disposal of organisations, and each method is relevant to transfer different types of knowledge. Experiential learning has been highlighted as an effective methodology for transferring behavioural knowledge for leadership transformation. Self-direction, together with the feedback and reflection components of coaching, were identified as factors which cement the effectiveness of experiential learning.

5.3.4. Research question 5: How does experiential learning help participants to contribute more to organisational competitiveness?

P2: *“At the organisational level, no. I suppose it is not just training that makes you competitive, you need to have the entire value chain in place. But at an individual level I can share the feedback and evidence that I have collected where people say: As a result of this programme, this is how my life has changed, as a result of this concept.”*

P3: *“If we don’t stay abreast from a learning or an experiential learning perspective... how are we going to constantly be able to compete and remain relevant in the business? And also, continuously grow in the future? We can’t be stuck, unfortunately without edges, you have to adapt. And it’s all around the agility at the moment. So how agile are we? And then it’s also flexibility. We’re working in an environment where they refer to as the VUCA world of work.”*

P4: *“I think that we often assume that, especially in our environment, I think our biggest challenge is we mainly employ youngsters that come from the University... and we think that they’re equipped for the job... but there are a lot of soft skills that we need to develop and that definitely leads to organisational effectiveness.”*

P5: *“The methodologies mean people need to learn as they do, which will make them more competitive. So, the quicker you can put product to market the best your competitiveness... So, your methodology should be experiential learning and not rout learning.”*

P5: *“Some of the principles between experiential learning in competitiveness is the principle of how experiential learning is a generative process. That is why it contributes to extraordinary organizations.”*

P7: *“I am a firm believer that if your learning is not relevant the organisation will not get ahead... The more experiential it is, the more effective your intervention as well as the ability to drive the competitiveness of the organisation. Because if you can link why you’re doing it and how this ties into your role and you’re constantly linking it to the big picture you will drive the right behaviour.”*

Summary of research question 5 findings

Participants acknowledged that learning works in conjunction with the entire value chain within an organisation to drive competitiveness and would not be the end in itself. There is a sentiment that experiential learning allows employees to learn as they do, delivering value and immediate returns on investment keeping abreast of a fast paced business environment which contributes to organisational competitiveness.

5.4. Conclusion to research results

The participant cohort comprised a group of seven individuals each with extensive and diverse experience in the learning and development field.

People and skills were raised as a competitive advantage for organisations given the difficulty that rivals may have in attempting to replicate them. Participants shared the view that optimal investment into people development and retention will accelerate competitiveness.

The speed at which the business environment is changing presents a challenge for firms to maintain their competitive positioning impacting a firm's ability to compete.

Strategic management is required where leaders are in a position to actively shape employees level of contribution through deliberate decisions around strategy alignment, people development and company structure.

The focus of this study was on experiential learning in the context of organisational competitiveness, elevating the need to review the process of planning a learning framework for an organisation to accurately identify the individual and firm needs, constantly stay abreast of environmental changes to remain relevant, ensure that learning interventions selected cause a behavioural shift in employees and generate timely returns that add real business value and to customise learning programmes for optimized results.

Though different learning styles and types of knowledge required inform the learning methodology selection experiential learning was highlighted as an effective methodology for transferring behavioural knowledge for leadership transformation. Self-direction, together with the feedback and reflection components of coaching, were identified as factors which cement the effectiveness of experiential learning.

Participants acknowledged that learning works in conjunction with the entire value chain within an organisation to drive competitiveness and would not be the end in itself. There is a sentiment that experiential learning allows employees to learn as they do, delivering value and immediate returns on investment keeping abreast of a fast paced business environment which contributes to organisational competitiveness.

6. Chapter 6: Discussion of results

6.1. Introduction to discussion of results

In chapter five the findings of seven semi structured interviews were presented according to the research questions defined in chapter three.

The research topic required the researcher to deconstruct observations and interpret the results in order to superimpose them into the context of organisational competitiveness. The aim of this approach would be to demonstrate any associations found between the two core constructs of experiential learning and organisational competitiveness identified in chapter one.

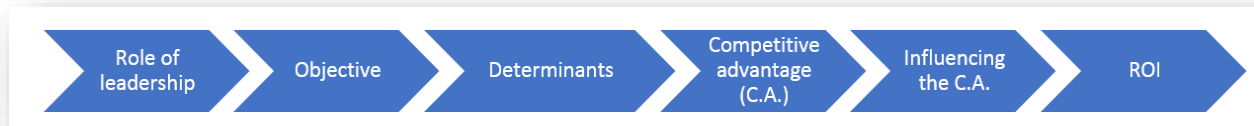
As such the structure of the discussion in chapter six follows key themes within the field of organisational competitiveness as represented in the study, both from the literature review and the interview findings.

6.2. Landscape of organisational competitiveness

It's important to document the researcher's synthesis of organisational competitiveness and to understand where experiential learning fits into this landscape to ease the navigation of the discussion of results in the context of this study. Naturally the majority of findings fall into the category where experiential learning dominant, the remainder being contextual.

Outline: The role of leadership in organisational competitiveness is largely setting the vision and strategy of the business. The purpose or objective of competitiveness is to be relatively superior to peers in the industry ultimately defeating them. Determinants of competitiveness are all the factors which may affect the relative positioning of one competitor to another including both internal and external variables. Competitive advantage is that specific factor which is a point of difference versus any other competitor and is not easily replicable, and people and skills are frequently thought of as that competitive edge. Influencing the competitive advantage would be any methodology of shaping and enhancing the competitive edge determined in the prior step, and this is where experiential learning falls if people and skills development are deemed a competitive advantage for a firm as any investment into people would necessarily result in a different outcome with regards to competitive behaviour. Finally, the ROI or return on investment speaks to the yield generated from spend in a certain area, and in this instance it narrates how investment in human capital development has a positive effect on the key performance indicators.

Figure 10: Landscape of organisational competitiveness



Source: Researcher's synthesis of research findings superimposed on literature review

6.3. Role of leadership in competitiveness

Competitiveness is necessarily a deliberate act which cannot be separated from strategy, an active form of leadership and planning processes taking into account input factors, transformation and resultant outputs (Porter, 1990).

This study found that whilst leaders are source of the design and dissemination of a corporate strategy, without which the business would not be able to function effectively to be competitive, the responsibility of organisational competitiveness lies not solely with senior management but requires employee contribution. P3: "There's a strategy in the organisation. So, each business unit would then follow that strategy. And, ultimately each employee in the organisation has to contribute to that strategy."

P6: "I think it is our belief that leadership drives behaviour but because employee engagement is something that is incredibly important to how we go about things it is not 'either-or', it should be 'both-and' [top-down and bottom-up]."

Leaders are also the enablers to executing the strategy that drives competitiveness. Where leaders have resisted employee participation their power to back initiatives, investment to support projects and the allocation of time have fallen short and operationally suffocated any employee contribution to competitiveness.

P2: "My fear is, if right at the top our chairperson said: This is the way we are going to do it, we would fundamentally shift the organisation. People will listen to what the leaders are saying and the leaders then put their money there and put their time there and that is how they measure you... They set the pace, they set the culture."

6.4. Objective of competitiveness

The strategic roots of competitiveness means that business operations are premeditated to outperform competing firms by delivering superior products and services before anyone else (Ghamawat, 2002; Oral & Kettani, 2009; Schwab, 2010).

Participants discussed the relative positioning of organisations on a landscape that could be geographical, within an industry or even relative to itself at a different point in time where the objective would be to perform better than previously. This notion of defeat at the core of competitiveness, embodied in the quotations below, supports the literature findings.

P7: *"The fact that you are operating on a global scale; the fact that the largest brewer in the world wanting to buy you out because you pose as a threat... the inability of competitors to outperform us."*

P4: *"I think for companies today competitiveness is around producing new products, learning as quickly as possible – faster than their competitors and using that learning to come up with new products and services ."*

The strategic need for understanding the nature of human capital and for investment into human capital development is evident in the work of Lepak & Snell (1999) and Mayikana (2002), highlighting the incremental value such investment may have into business results and furthermore the acceleration of organisational competitiveness, viewing spend on developing people as an asset rather than a cost element.

Both employers and employees were sensitive to the rate at which the market evolves and the resultant requirement for speed of learning as a pivotal criterion when designing programmes for staff in order for the organisation is to stay ahead of the curve.

P3: *"It's how quickly can learning transform?... For them [learners] it's more about, how quickly can you give me the knowledge? How quick can I learn? So I'm looking for a 5 minute video, I'm not looking for a 30 minute session."*

6.5. Determinants of competitiveness

Porter's diamond (2002) is a leading model depicting the forces that influence the competitiveness of nations. The contrast below shows similarities in what literature describes those forces to entail and what the researcher found in the interviews relating to this study.

Argote & Miron-Spektor (2010) reinforce Porter's theory on contextual influencers of competitiveness, with particular reference to structure, strategy, resourcing, company policy, external factors such as political environment, competition, and even natural resources.

Table 8: Comparison of Porter's forces of competitiveness with research findings

Porter's diamond forces	Determinants of competitiveness found in interviews
Factor conditions (Inputs): labour, land, capital, infrastructure, natural resources	People (labour) considered an asset for business competitiveness
Demand conditions: the nature of the home market	Contrasting global versus local market conditions
Related supporting industries	<i>*Not much conversation about alliances or strategic related industries</i>
Firm strategy, structure and rivalry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Role of leadership in competitiveness is defining and communicating a strategy for employees to contribute towards competitiveness - Company structure deemed a determinant of competitiveness in response to changing market needs - Rivals identified at industry level, but sometimes even internally
Chance	Volatility and uncertainty in the market (VUCA)
Government	Compliance and policy directed learning interventions

Source: Researcher's synthesis of participant interviews

Factor conditions:

The important role of the labour force in organisational competitiveness is emphasised by Bontis, Dragonetti, Jacobsen & Roos (1999) where the people are seen as a differentiator for business, combining intelligence, skills, abilities and knowledge and enabling the firm to survive.

The labour force, or human capital, was identified as an asset amongst participants in this study to organisational competitiveness.

P2: *“The one thing you cannot do is to replicate the peoples’ skills and the knowledge and the passion that people have. For me what gives a company the competitive edge is the people.”*

Demand conditions:

The global and local markets were considered in the competitiveness landscape when participants described the environment in which their businesses operate.

P3: *“Because the nature of the business as such, asks for that competitiveness. Because you’re competing internationally, as well as locally.”*

Related supporting industries:

Participants did not go into much detail on related industries or strategic alliances, and this was not probed in the interview process.

Firm strategy, structure and rivalry:

- Firm strategy as presented in the role of leadership in competitiveness is a powerful tool in driving competitive advantage.
- Company structure shifts with market changes influencing the relative positioning of firms.
- Competing entities in an industry are monitored closely to ensure superior relative positioning against them.

P5: *“I think they [employees] contribute to competitiveness if their roles are clearly defined and they know what they should be doing.”*

P4: *“I think what I certainly see happening around the millennials is that the traditional company structure is going to change within the next few years.”*

P5: *“I think the competitiveness in the financial industry is everything to do with customer loyalty. Where in a Sasol or an Anglo it is nothing to do with that. It is about commodity price.”*

P6: *“I suppose it is to be seen as the leader in the industry, in your specific industry and that is how I understand organisations competing with each other.”*

Chance:

Chance would be the impact of unpredictable forces on the competitiveness of a firm. The concept of a VUCA environment was raised by one participant as a factor affecting corporate competitiveness, and this same volatility and uncertainty in the market was discussed more indirectly by other participants in their respective interviews. The VUCA theory was portrayed in detail in the literature review emanating from the work of Horney, Pasmore & O'Shea (2010), where competence of leadership in such dynamic times was highlighted as a concern given the lack of innate agility to weather the unpredictable and complex storms.

Factors such as a rapidly changing business environment, innovation, a shift from individualism to collectivism in the workplace and even generational theory were raised by participants as potential threats to competitiveness if not managed closely as captured in their quotes below.

P7: *"My view of organisational competitiveness would be the ability of the organisation to adapt to change to get ahead of the competitor activity and to stay relevant in the market... I mean you don't get to be the largest brewery in the world by staying still."*

P4: *"I think for companies today competitiveness is around producing new products, learning as quickly as possible – faster than their competitors and using that learning to come up with new products and services."*

P7: *"...yeah and just the ability to innovate... Yeah definitely competitive."*

P4: *"I have spoken to a few people where this has already applied –where they have more work teams than someone being assigned to a specific department and doing a specific job."*

P5: *"They are moving certainly away from individualism to team, that means to build greater ... It is not about the individual, it is how you put the team together."*

P3: *"So it's how quickly can learning transform? So if I may use the term, if you refer to your millennials these days... what are they using? Technology."*

Linked to the strategy and role of leadership in competitiveness there is also evidence within literature and unprompted from the interviews that hints strongly towards a need for leaders to remain in touch with the evolving world to keep their strategies relevant in order to survive. Petrie (2011) noted the positive correlation between leadership's ability to anticipate and respond to change and the performance of their organisations.

P5: *"If good leaders know where to shift their energy so that the table balances in that point in time... they need to continuously scope the world for how these sands are changing and might be changing... That is where strategy comes in."*

6.6. Competitive advantage

Competitive advantage was described by the participants as having something special which could not be easily replicated by competitors, a differentiator. Whilst some debate ensued, people and skills featured as a common factor that corporates could leverage as a competitive advantage if nurtured adequately.

This finding supports work by Mayikana (2002) and Wernerfelt (1984) who explicitly promote human capital as that one source of differentiation which cannot be replicated thus providing firms with a sustainable advantage ahead of peers.

P1: *"What sets you apart as a business, do you want to be set apart?... what is your special thing, why would people want to come to you?"*

P2: *"Probably one of the theories that we have is you can duplicate systems processes, you can duplicate bricks and mortar, you can steal the brand and replicate all of it. The one thing you cannot do is to replicate the peoples' skills and the knowledge and the passion that people have. For me what gives a company the competitive edge is the people."*

The researcher's acknowledgement from the debating participant's contribution is that people do not work in isolation, but the complex combination of these influential forces to competition must be considered simultaneously to the people factor in order to understand the nature of competition more realistically rather than idealistically, and to use this knowledge to determine how individuals would be able to actively shape competitiveness in the future on this basis. This observation aligns to Schwab's (2015) premise that talent links innovation, competitiveness and growth.

P5: “Look, they make a big fact that people make the difference. I am not so sure that our economy is there any more. I do not think – if you look at process there is automatisation, robotics, how things are standardized, how they make [things] easy, that you really looking for the best people out there.”

P5: “So, people yes, but I think Anglo has got fantastic people, but their commodity price kill them. So, what is the differentiator? Not the people.”

6.7. Influencing the competitive advantage

Human capital was identified as a competitive advantage in the prior section, and understanding how this resource can be intentionally moulded through management investment decisions was a priority in the interviewing process.

The researcher found that (i) a robust process of developing learning frameworks and (ii) the ability to maximise outputs from learning interventions were the two key themes echoed by participants as pertinent to the task of actively influencing the competitive advantage of human capital within the organisation.

(i) Developing a robust learning framework

Needs analysis

Knowles (1980) developed a cyclical process which allows for self-correction by design. This process begins with a diagnosis of needs followed by planning, the intervention itself where learning occurs, a period of review or evaluation against a set of predetermined criteria and that informs the learning environment as decisions are made to adjust where necessary to ensure optimal outcomes from the learning framework.

Delving deeper into how participants described the process of learning framework development the starting point would be a thorough needs analysis assessment including the desired objectives of the business, state of competency of individuals and identifying the gaps to be closed.

P1: “We have looked at competencies, we have looked at performance, we have identified skills gaps and potential.”

Shifting behaviour

Literature evolved from a an oscillation between theorists arguing that learning is the change in cognition and those arguing that learning is a change in behaviour. Towards the 1990's the conversation started to stabilise to a point where most researchers were able to agree that organisational learning is the change in the potential range of behaviours (Argote, 2012; Huber, 1991;). Orey (2010) and Kolb (2014) discuss the need to go beyond knowledge retention and actually to ensure that learning results in a state of problem solving, the formulation and creation of something innovative to enable competitive advantage.

Supporting this literature an imperative determinant of the learning framework as found in the interviews was the ability to shift behaviour through the interventions rather than transfer static knowledge which may or may not be retained, and the need for immediately visible returns on investment in order to prove the impact affected by the intervention.

P2: *"For me that is the ultimate aim of training, is to shift behaviour."*

(ii) Requirement to maximise outputs by customising learning methodologies

The ability to maximise outputs from selected learning methodologies was influenced by the fact that people learn in different ways, and also by the type of knowledge which needed to be imparted onto individuals.

P2: *"If you understand people's learning styles, then you can customise training."*

Learning styles

Participants were conscious that individuals have different learning styles and preferences which could impact the level of learning, knowledge absorption and the transfer of that knowledge into value for the organisation.

P2: *"When I do a course and presentation class I use every single possible scenario where there are tools, there is techniques because some people would love to stand up and write up on a whiteboard, some people would like a flipchart. Other people would like to do videos, other people would like to feel and touch this thing, other people would just sit in a small group and concentrate and talk... so for me you need to find what works."*

P3: *"Adults learn very differently... there's content, there's peer learning, there's networking, various functions. There's learning from your coaches, your mentors as well. And then how do*

we ensure that you also have a broader understanding of best practice perspective... it's online learning, its videos, ted talks, its master classes, one hour power sessions, bite sized chunk learning."

The psychological definition of adulthood is said to be the point at which individuals perceive themselves to be essentially self-directing and the practices of questioning the need for learning, is something found to be unique to adult learners (Knowles, 1970; Holmes & Abington-Cooper, 2000). Similarly participants in this study noted how self-directed learning is powerful in terms of demanding more impactful results.

P1: *"So, they have got to be committed to do something... so it has to be buy-in from the individual as well."*

P6: *"You have to bring people into the room and one of the ways of doing that is making them connect with what they are learning, in other words making them see value in it... how is this going to serve me, how is this going to make a difference in my life, how is this not going to be a one or two day or two-hour waste of my time."*

Knowledge transfer required

In the results the researcher synthesised the participants descriptions of the different types of knowledge to be transferred and the appropriate learning tools to assign for effective achievement of those objectives. A continuum of knowledge transfer overlaid with learning methodologies was designed to graphically represent this tool for learning intervention selection.

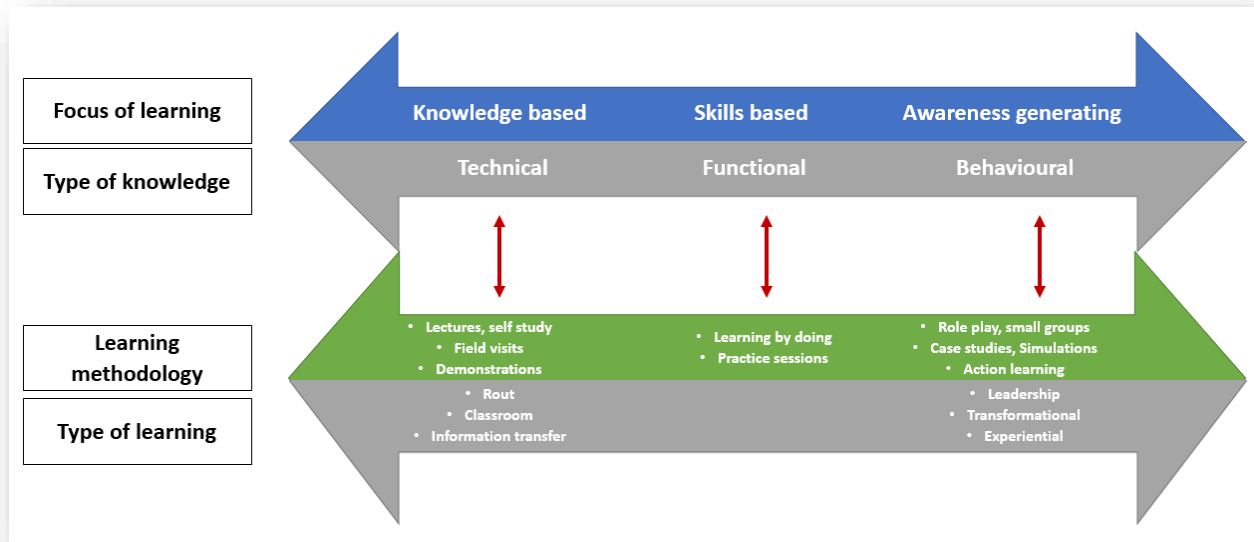
The work of Kolb (2014) articulates how learning is created through the transformation of experience, and four tenets of experience are proposed (Concrete experience, reflective experience, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation). This is a cyclical framework which describes how the knowledge is formed amongst individuals engaging in learning interventions. Pant (2012) further suggests that there exist three types of learning from Knowledge based, to skills based and finally awareness generating.

Overlaying the theory with observations from interviews would be graphically represented as follows: Pant (2012) and Kolb (2014) versus interview observations in this study.

The combination of these two theories can be contrasted with the observations in the interviews held as they present a similar continuum from which learning methodologies can be more

appropriately determined to suit the type of knowledge transfer required for most impactful results and optimised investment.

Figure 11: Comparing learning framework structures from literature and observation



Source: Researcher’s interpretation of findings

On the one hand where knowledge required is technical or even moving towards functional a classroom set-up of rout learning would be effective as there is a lot of standard content to be shared. As one progresses along the continuum to a space where thought leadership is a requirement and soft skills and emotional intelligence training are seen as critical to enable decision making and management at this level then a more behavioural approach to learning must be taken.

The key differentiator in behavioural learning is that it moves beyond the point of knowledge transfer and into the space of transformation of knowledge for deeper insights and the ability to create something new and disruptive for competitive advantage.

Experiential learning as a critical tool for behavioural change

The paradigm of constructivism (Liu & Matthews, 2005) reinforces Kolb’s theory by postulating that individuals create their own knowledge through experience and reflection in a given context.

Experiential learning is a learning format resting on the cyclical nature of experience, reflection, synthesis and creation of new knowledge as described by Kolb and supported by the constructivist view.

Participants spoke in favour of the experiential learning approach to shift behaviour and make the required impact in market that would result in organisational competitiveness.

P3: *"If we don't stay abreast from a learning or an experiential learning perspective... how are we going to constantly be able to compete and remain relevant in the business? And also, continuously grow in the future? We can't be stuck, unfortunately without edges, you have to adapt. And it's all around the agility at the moment. So how agile are we? And then it's also flexibility. We're working in an environment where they refer to as the VUCA world of work."*

P5: *"In all fairness experiential learning should be the way organisations upskill people, because they are already getting value versus training it is nothing, there is nothing there. There is no value it is just cost."*

P5: *"Some of the principles between experiential learning in competitiveness is the principle of how experiential learning is a generative process. That is why it contributes to extraordinary organizations."*

P7: *"I am a firm believer that if your learning is not relevant the organisation will not get ahead... The more experiential it is, the more effective your intervention, as well as the ability to drive the competitiveness of the organisation."*

Coaching was raised as a necessary enabler in the process of experiential learning as it allows for the facilitation of the processes of reflection and synthesis, without which would leave employees with pure knowledge transfer and sometimes an element of retention rather than the required transformation of knowledge and in the long term sustainability of learning.

P2: *"When you have one on one coaching, when you have coaching circles with people, that for me makes the training sustainable forever."*

P5: *"Behavioural training is much better with exposure through time, coaching, constant feedback mechanisms."*

6.8. Return on investment

Kleynhans (2006) argued that if investment into human capital were optimised profit would grow accordingly, and this awareness would enable management to see the value of investing in learning programmes for the organisation. There was a distinct need amongst participants to commercialise the results of learning interventions for senior management to buy-in to proposals as depicted in the results of this study. Return on investment was topical along with the evidence to prove that one company is more competitive than the next as a result of particular investment decisions made. Internal and external surveys were identified as perceptual signals, combined with publicly available business performance results such as growth in revenue and share price.

P4: *“I think what has always been the most important thing is the impact of the training and we hear a lot about it you know. They say the return on your investment and how to use that.”*

P7: *“In every learning intervention your return on investment needs to be considered. So you start the end in mind.”*

P2: *“One is the employee opinion survey which is internal and that is saying how happy you are... what motivates you to stay. And the second one was an external benchmark which is run independently which says this is the best company to work for... our brand identity said that we were the best company to work for, plus we saw the revenues go up and the share price goes up.”*

6.9. Conclusion to discussion of results

The discussion of results took on the format of the landscape of competitiveness, experiential learning was overlaid to find the contextual synergies set out as the objective of this study.

Competitiveness is deliberate with leaders holding the responsibility for setting the strategy essential for competitiveness, and enabling employees to deliver upon that strategy through decisions around investment, power and time. Competitiveness can't be achieved without employee buy-in and engagement, and alignment of goals to the overarching strategy.

Human capital has been identified as a competitive advantage and a strategic investment tool able to accelerate competitiveness, reinforced by Porter's national competitiveness diamond model (1990) where human capital falls into the category of labour as an input factor able to influence the competitiveness of an organisation., within the complex system of other variables impacting the firm simultaneously some outside the control of management.

Organisations have a keen awareness as to which determinants of competitiveness they are able to influence and which not. Leadership investment into (i) a robust process of developing learning frameworks and (ii) maximising outputs from learning interventions through customisation have the power to drive company performance and competitiveness.

Unpacking the concepts of human capital development, adult learning, and experiential learning exposed nuances in the way that adults take on knowledge but more importantly how they are receptive to learning versus information transfer. Primarily the fact that learning is a continual process which necessarily involves active reflection and feedback loops that directly influence the next cycle of learning to yield in participants the creation of knowledge, innovation and critical thinking skills required to solve complex problems at the heart of competitiveness.

7. Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to take the key findings from chapter five, synthesis of those findings into thematic interpretation with prior learning on the topic from chapters two and six, and to translate that into something meaningful for management to apply. Furthermore recommendations for future research are proposed.

7.2. Principle findings

This study set out using a qualitative research design to deconstruct the concepts of organisational competitiveness and experiential learning, to understand the perceived interconnectedness of the two and moreover to identify how this would change management's decision-making around experiential learning given the insights gleaned.

Seven participants shared their experiences in a volatile and unpredictable business environment describing the role that strategic leadership has to play in competitiveness but the dual responsibility that employees should hold. It was evident that management would be able to empower and enable employees to contribute more to competitiveness through goal alignment, employee engagement and optimised investment in the areas of competitive advantage where management has a level of predictability and control within the firm for maximised results.

For the purposes of this study investment focused on the competitive advantage of human capital development and findings indicated that (i) a robust process of developing learning frameworks and (ii) maximising outputs from learning interventions through customisation have the power to drive company performance and competitiveness.

7.2.1. Research question 1: What makes an organisation competitive?

Competitive advantage can be established by first meeting the economic needs of society and then by creating something new that exceeds such expectations with a differentiator that rivals are unable to compete with.

The key to establishing a point of difference is to make it as difficult for peers to replicate as possible, and investment into people development and skills were identified as one such advantage for firms to leverage for maximum competitiveness.

The business environment is a complex system with multiple influencers changing and impacting its constituents at a rapid speed simultaneously, presenting a challenge for firms to maintain their relative positioning within a given industry.

7.2.2. Research question 2: To what extent can employees influence organisational competitiveness?

Strategic leadership was a requirement of competitiveness whereby no employee could effectively contribute to the organisation's competitiveness without a clearly articulated and communicated strategy as a guardrail. Power dynamics came into play where leaders have the discretion to either empower or inhibit the contribution of their employees to competitiveness through strategy alignment techniques, people development and building a conducive company structure.

7.2.3. Research questions 3 & 4: what informs the learning framework and what are the strengths and challenges of experiential learning?

The process of planning a learning framework comprises different influencers and results in an understanding as to when and where experiential learning may be useful.

Supported by the work of Kolb (2014) and Pant (2012) a needs analysis allows both the firm's objectives and the employee's learning expectations to be at the core of customised learning methodology selection, giving learning interventions a higher chance of shifting behaviour and providing returns on investment at a faster rate. Adults have different learning styles and preferences which also play a role in the delivery of the learning interventions, most pertinent of which is the self-directed nature of adults who have a desire to command their own learning and feel in control of the need for learning as an enrichment for social value rather than to fulfil external commitments.

Findings explored how different knowledge types can effectively be transferred through specific types of learning, where technical knowledge or a knowledge based focus of learning requires simplistic knowledge transfer in the format of reading or classroom training, whilst more complex learning that requires behavioural aspects and the transfer of soft skills which results in problem solving and critical thinking, typical leadership abilities, requires more experiential learning.

7.2.4. Research question 5: How does experiential learning help participants to contribute more to organisational competitiveness?

Volatility and rapid change happening within the complex system of the business environment requires that leaders are agile enough to preempt such change and even proactively create such change in order to maintain any competitive edge. From this study a core component in actively managing an organisation's competitiveness would be through strategically optimized investment into customised human capital development.

Pure information cannot be a competitive advantage because by nature it is replicable and available for all participants in an economy. Conversely the nature of experiential learning is to impart the type of knowledge that generates critical thinking resulting in innovation that has the potential to disrupt organisations, industries and even nations, necessarily establishing a competitive advantage relative to other entities.

7.3. Implications for management

The importance of this study for business was to empower decision-makers within firms to make more informed and conscious investment decisions to optimise their spend for greater impact in, and amplification of, the organisation's competitiveness.

The findings of this study show a willingness of employees to contribute more to organisational competitiveness, and that leadership within firms have sufficient power to enable this acceleration of competitiveness through people development techniques such as experiential learning.

The researcher's recommendation is for business to use the findings of this study as a clear guardrail to inform such decision-making in the following ways.

7.3.1. Development of customised strategic learning framework

Investment into the development of a well-defined learning framework for the organisation entails a robust needs analysis process which is not limited to performance reviews or learning interventions dictated by legislation or compliance, but which is holistic.

The starting point would be to articulate the organisation's objectives, such as developing talent with critical thinking ability to step-change the company's competitive advantage.

Secondly, employee requirements must be considered including performance assessments to identify competency gaps, employee's desired learning outcomes since adults are self-directed, as well as employee learning styles and preferences in order to customise learning interventions for individuals, teams and business units.

The intention from this study is to incorporate experiential learning as a large component of the framework where behavioural and transformational development is identified either as a business or employee need. This directs the third step of formalising an optimised human capital development strategy that disproportionately invests in experiential learning with the objective of driving disproportionate competitiveness in market.

7.3.2. Learning framework dissemination plan

Formulation of an execution plan in which leadership allocates time and resources to the designed learning framework would be integral to the success of human capital development strategies designed to this end. Sufficient management support and priority placed on talent development would drive the right behaviour. The dissemination plan requires a dedicated project team whose key performance indicators ensure that this is their sole priority and thus drive the right behaviour.

In the space of experiential learning a holistic solution should be explored where there is variety in the learning methodologies to suit the organisation's requirements, including internal and external sources of knowledge transfer.

7.3.3. Monitoring and evaluation for self-correction

Given the VUCA environment of business one of the key challenges identified in organisations was the ability to sustain their competitive advantage, so it's pivotal to ensure that relevance is always maintained in business products and in the learning methodologies employed to retain such advantage.

A predetermined method of monitoring the success of the learning framework and of the experiential learning methodologies must be established at the onset, with key indicators determined to validate improved learning at an individual and organisational level, as well as improved competitiveness. Measures such as innovation awards, investment into critical thinking programmes and market leadership in the public domain are considerations, but industry specific criteria should be applied.

7.4. Limitations of the research

- Complexity within the business environment was identified as one of the influencers of competitiveness since a multitude of factors are affecting the business in different directions simultaneously. The same factor is a limitation on this study because it is very difficult, particularly in qualitative research, to control for extraneous factors that may impact the response of participants.
- The level to which corporate culture and policy may have biased participants' views was not explored in the scope of this study and could have an influence on the findings.
- Interviews were limited to the respondent's direct contact list and a few referrals all within the same geographical area, and mostly within one industry, this could influence access to information and skew the real magnitude of possibility in the learning and development field beyond what was captured within the context of this study.

7.5. Recommendations for future research

- Conducting this research amongst participants in experiential learning methodologies, rather than only the learning and development planners as in this study, may yield different findings as to the importance of and effectiveness of experiential learning in the context of organisational competitiveness.
- The construct of innovation was only touched on lightly in this study, but the researcher found that a number of the dominant tenets of experiential learning benefits are aligned to innovation studies and a further dimension around innovation could be explored to add depth to this research.
- Industry specific studies which dig deeper into legislative boundaries could unfold nuances within certain industries that are not relevant to the financial sector which is the dominant category in this study.
- Study in the entrepreneurship space would be of interest. Entrepreneurship faces different environmental dynamics, or they experience the same environment differently to large

established organisations, partially because of the maturity of the business, partially because of access to resources, partially because of existing level of competitiveness relative to the market. Competitive influences are felt with far greater intensity amongst entrepreneurs and power dynamics are different so this study replicated amongst entrepreneurs may in fact yield very powerful insights for how to prioritise people and skills development for start-ups so as to generate maximum competitiveness.

- The opportunity to quantify this qualitative research and show a directional relationship between experiential learning and organisational competitiveness would serve the business environment well because as participants mentioned it's a very tough sell to commercialise the need for investment into learning and development, let alone experiential learning which is behavioural in nature, without numbers and figures as support. Empirical evidence in this regard would be useful.
- Either as part of the quantitative version of this report or as a separate piece of analysis, organisational leadership would find value in a quantification of the return on investment from experiential learning in monetary terms or in terms of the prioritised measures of competitiveness for the firm, be it profit, market share cost savings or any other.

References

- Amabile, T. A., & Khaire, M. (2008). *Creativity and the role of the leader*. Harvard Business School Publishing.
- Argote, L. (2012). *Organisational learning: Creating, retaining and transferring knowledge*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- Argote, L., & Miron-Spektor, E. (2011). Organizational learning: From experience to knowledge. *Organization science*, 22(5), 1123-1137.
- Baldoni, J. (2010). How leaders should think critically. *Harvard Business Review*.
- Bontis, N., Dragonetti, N. C., Jacobsen, K., & Roos, G. (1999). The knowledge toolbox: A review of the tools available to measure and manage intangible resources. *European management journal*, 17(4), 391-402.
- Caiazza, R., Richardson, A., & Audretsch, D. (2015). Knowledge effects on competitiveness: From firms to regional advantage. *The Journal of Technology Transfer*, 40(6), 899-909.
- Cascio, W. F., & Aguinis, H. (2005). *Applied psychology in human resource management*.
- Castaneda, D., & Rios, M. F. (2007). From individual learning to organisational learning. In *ECKM2007-Proceedings of the 8th European Conference on Knowledge Management: ECKM* (p. 192). Academic Conferences Limited.
- Dale, E. (1969). *Audiovisual methods in teaching*.
- Edmondson, A. C., & McManus, S. E. (2007). Methodological fit in management field research. *Academy of management review*, 32(4), 1246-1264.

- Fereday, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 5(1), 80-92.
- Finlay, L., & Gough, B. (Eds.). (2008). *Reflexivity: A practical guide for researchers in health and social sciences*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Ghemawat, P. (2002). Competition and business strategy in historical perspective. *Business history review*, 76(1), 37-74.
- Grant, R. M. (1991). Porter's 'competitive advantage of nations': an assessment. *Strategic management journal*, 12(7), 535-548.
- Holmes, G., & Abington-Cooper, M. (2000). Pedagogy vs. andragogy: A false dichotomy?
- Horney, N., Pasmore, B., & O'Shea, T. (2010). Leadership agility: A business imperative for a VUCA world. *Human Resource Planning*, 33(4), 34.
- Huber, G. P. (1991). Organizational learning: The contributing processes and the literatures. *Organization science*, 2(1), 88-115.
- Kleynhans, E. P. J. (2006). The role of human capital in the competitive platform of South African industries. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 4(3), 55-63.
- Knowles, M. S. (1970). *The modern practice of adult education* (Vol. 41). New York: New York Association Press.
- Knowles, M. S., Holton III, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2015). *The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (8: e uppl.).
- Kolb, D. A. (2014). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. FT press.

- Kwon, D. B. (2009, October). Human capital and its measurement. In *Proc. The 3rd OECD World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy* (pp. 6-7).
- Lepak, D. P., & Snell, S. A. (1999). The human resource architecture: Toward a theory of human capital allocation and development. *Academy of management review*, 24(1), 31-48.
- LiuOF, G., & Fraumeni1F, B. M. (2014). Human capital measurement: country experiences and international initiatives.
- Liu, C. H., & Matthews, R. (2005). Vygotsky's Philosophy: Constructivism and Its Criticisms Examined. *International Education Journal*, 6(3), 386-399.
- Mayikana, M. (2002). The future of competition is human. *Management Today*, 18, 26-27
- Merriam, S. B. (2001). Andragogy and self-directed learning: Pillars of adult learning theory. *New directions for adult and continuing education*, 2001(89), 3-14.
- Oral, M., & Kettani, O. (2009). *Modeling firm competitiveness for strategy formulation* (Vol. 52). CIRRELT.
- O'Reilly, M., & Parker, N. (2013). 'Unsatisfactory Saturation': a critical exploration of the notion of saturated sample sizes in qualitative research. *Qualitative research*, 13(2), 190-197.
- Orey, M. (2010). *Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching and technology*. CreateSpace.
- Pant, M. A. N. D. A. K. I. N. I. (2012). Participatory Training. *Course*, 1, 118-120.
- Petrie, N. (2011). Future trends in leadership development. Center for Creative Leadership white paper, 5, 5.
- Porter, M. E. (1990). The competitive advantage of nations. *Harvard business review*, 68(2), 73-93.

- Ratner, C. (2002, September). Subjectivity and objectivity in qualitative methodology. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Vol. 3, No. 3).
- Saunders, M. N., & Lewis, P. (2012). *Doing research in business & management: An essential guide to planning your project*. Pearson.
- Schwab, K. (2010, September). *The global competitiveness report 2010-2011*. Geneva: World Economic Forum.
- Schwandt, T. A. (1994). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. *Handbook of qualitative research*, 1, 118-137.
- Shukla, T., Pattanaik, D., & Maity, R. *ROLE OF TALENT MANAGERS IN A VUCA ENVIRONMENT*.
- Siminica, M., & Dumitru, A. (2013). Self-directed learning in economic education.
- Snowdon, B., & Stonehouse, G. (2006). Competitiveness in a globalised world: Michael Porter on the microeconomic foundations of the competitiveness of nations, regions, and firms. *Journal of international business studies*, 37(2), 163-175.
- Souleh, S. (2014). the impact of human capital management on the innovativeness of research center: The case of scientific research centers in Algeria. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 2(4), 80-96.
- Thomas, J., & Harden, A. (2008). Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. *BMC medical research methodology*, 8(1), 45.
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837–851. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>

Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing & health sciences*, 15(3), 398-405.

Wernerfelt, B. (1984). A resource-based view of the firm. *Strategic management journal*, 5(2), 171-180.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Consistency matrix

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	LITERATURE REVIEW	DATA COLLECTION TOOL	ANALYSIS	FINDINGS
1 What makes an organisation competitive?	Porter, 1990 Ghemawat, 2002 Oral & Kettani, 2009; Schwab, 2010 Horney, Pasmore & O'Shea, 2010 Petrie, 2011 Snowdon & Stonehouse, 2006 Mayikana, 2002 Wernerfelt, 1984 Kleynhans, 2006	Section B: Question 1	Thematic analysis	- For competitiveness a competitive advantage must be created which is not easily replicable and this must be sustainable through changing business environments. - People development and retention is identified as a critical competitive advantage which leadership can leverage to influence competitiveness, whereas other factors external and out of the control of management.
2 To what extent can employees influence organisational competitiveness?	Lepak & Snell, 1999 Schwab, 2015 Mayikana, 2002 Bontis, Dragonetti, Jacobsen & Roos, 1999 Liu & Fraumeni, 2014 Liu & Matthews, 2005 Baldoni, 2010; Amabile & Khair, 2008	Section B: Questions 2 to 4		- Employees are willing to contribute to organisational competitiveness, but are only able to contribute to the extent that leadership empowers them to. - Through a clearly articulated and communicated strategy, company structure, and investment into people development employees are able to influence organisational competitiveness.
3 What informs the learning framework?	Merriem, 2001; Liu & Matthews, 2005 Baldoni, 2010; Amabile & Khair, 2008 Knowles, Holton III & Swanson, 2015 Knowles, 1980; Holmes & Abington-Cooper, 2000 Castaneda & Rios, 2007 Argote, 2012; Huber, 1991; Pentland, 1992 Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011 Dale, 1969; Orey, 2010 Kolb, 2014; Pant, 2012	Section B: Questions 15 (adapted)		- A robust learning framework must be developed, with predetermined mechanisms allowing for monitoring and self correction as the environment changes (to stay relevant). - Learning methodologies selected must result in behaviour shift for it to be effective and they should be customised for maximum results.
4 What are the strengths and challenges of experiential learning in organisations?	Kolb, 2014 Siminica & Dumitru, 2013	Section B: Question 5 - 11		
5 How does experiential learning help participants to contribute more to organisational competitiveness?	Pant, 2012 Liu & Matthews, 2005	Section B: Question 12		- Experiential learning is imperative as it transforms knowledge into critical thinking skills required for innovation and problem solving that are essential for driving organisational competitiveness

Appendix 2: Ethical clearance


Rubric Detail

A rubric lists grading criteria that instructors use to evaluate student work. Your instructor linked a rubric to this item and made it available to you. Select **Grid View** or **List View** to change the rubric's layout.

Name: **Ethics rubric**

Exit

Grid View | List View

	Not approved	Conditional approval	Approved
Feedback	<p>0 (0%)</p> <p>Further to your application for Ethical Clearance, I regret to advise that your submission was unsuccessful. The Ethical Clearance Committee cited the following reasons for not approving your application:</p>	<p>1 (50%)</p> <p>Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved subject to the following conditions. Once you have made this minor amendment and submitted the changes to the Research Coordinator, you will be allowed to continue collecting your data.</p>	<p> 2 (100%)</p> <p>Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved. You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data. We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.</p>

Raw Total: 2.00 (of 2.0)

Feedback to Learner

Goodluck

Name: **Ethics rubric**

Exit

Appendix 3: Letters of consent

Appendix 4: Interview schedule

Interview schedule

This study aims to understand if an employee's exposure to experiential learning enables him to influence organisational competitiveness. More broadly the results would aid organisations in structuring effective human resource development strategies allowing them to actively shape their sustainable competitive advantage.

The research methodology selected is semi-structured interviews conducted in two phases: (i) with relevant learning and development (L&D) planners responsible for the design of learning interventions for their corporates, and (ii) with employees at any level who participate in the various learning programmes.

The sample size contains an initial five to seven L&D planners, followed by referrals of at least one employee within each respective organisation. If saturation has not been achieved with this given sample size then a second iteration of respondent selection will be undertaken and the same process followed.

Consent will be sought prior to the commencement of interviews and confidentiality will be assured. Participants will also be advised that the interview will be recorded, to ensure that accurate data is collected and analysed.

The draft questionnaire which follows has been designed in two sections to facilitate the semi-structured interviews. The first section aims to capture discrete demographic information about respondents whilst the second explores the research questions identified. The second section is more exploratory allowing respondents to share experiences that may reveal insights into the topic.

Section A: Demographics

Respondent information

1. Full name
2. Title (Ms/Miss/Mrs/Mr/Dr/Prof)
3. Personal telephone number
4. Email address
5. Highest level of education
6. Designation in organisation
7. Department in organisation
8. Tenure in organisation

Organisation information

1. Registered name of organisation
2. Business telephone number
3. Industry
4. Nature of the business
5. How long has the business been operational?
6. Approximate number of employees

Section B: Research questions

Research question 1: What are the drivers of organisational competitiveness?

1. What makes your firm competitive or not?

Research question 2: To what extent can employees influence organisational competitiveness?

2. Who are the stakeholders in organisational competitiveness? Is there an individual or committee who controls this? Can any employee get involved, and to what extent? Please describe how this plays out in your organisation?
3. What has been your personal contribution to your company's competitiveness? Give an example/examples
4. Do you think you can improve your ability to contribute to the company's competitiveness in future? If so, how. If not, why not?

Research question 3: What are the outputs from experiential learning that are effective in equipping employees to make better business decisions?

5. What types of training and development have you been exposed to in your role? Give examples
6. Are you familiar with the term 'Experiential learning'?
 - a. If yes – describe your understanding of Experiential learning and if/how you've been exposed to it. (After answering this, move onto Q7)
 - b. If no – move directly onto Q7
7. I'd like to introduce the concept of experiential learning from an academic perspective (i.e. previous research on the topic). It is defined as the transfer of knowledge through experience and reflection, and it comprises some of the following types of learning and development.

- 1 Role Play
- 2 Small group discussions
- 3 Case study
- 4 Business simulation
- 5 Action learning

Have you used/been exposed to any of these forms of development in your organisation?

8. Select the type of training **most frequently** used (either from the list above, or any other), and tell me more about the experience and the benefits.
9. Which type of training do you believe is the most effective in equipping employees to make better business decisions? What aspects make some methods better than others?

Research question 4: Is there a perceived link between experiential learning and organisational competitiveness?

10. Reflecting on this interview thus far we've spoken about the drivers of organisational competitiveness, how individuals are able to influence this, and then we've discussed experiential learning methodologies. Do you think there is a relationship between experiential learning and organisational competitiveness? Discuss

General

11. Do you have any other thoughts on the topics of human capital development and organisational competitiveness?

Adapted: To be included after Q8

12. Q15 How do you go about selecting the most appropriate learning methodologies? What process do you follow?

Finally, if I have any further questions could I follow up on email?

Thank you for making the time to meet with me and sharing your views.

Appendix 5: Transcripts

Saved on data disc