Social Entrepreneurs' Conceptions of Incubator-based Learning

by

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Declaration

I, Aleia Bucci, declare that the thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

Ethics Statement

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this thesis, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's Code of ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research.

Abstract

Research on entrepreneurial learning tends to focus on formal environments while entrepreneurs typically learn in non-formal environments such as business incubators. Despite this, incubators are rarely designed with learning in mind. Recent calls for the application of learning theories in incubation research along with a lack of prior studies on the subject led to informal learning theory as the lens to understand the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs experience learning within an incubator. The research was conducted in South Africa, characterised dichotomously by a relatively advanced economy with an immense social need.

Through twenty phenomenographic interviews, eight conceptions of incubator-based learning were found: learnability, business concepts, entrepreneur concepts, practical application of knowledge, business transformation, personal transformation, having a champion, and co-created learning. Previous phenomenographic research has focused on formal learning environments but utilising the methodology in a non-formal learning environment led to two differences in commonly held conceptions of learning – no evidence of memorisation and two additional collective-focused conceptions. The eight conceptions were then used to create a model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes, contributing to the theory by demonstrating that this learning experience is different than informal learning experiences in other contexts.

Further analysis showed the conceptions are experienced in five varying ways, characterised as learning by the archetypes of Maximiser, Transformer, Collaborator, Student, and Consumer. As a concept, learning archetypes are not new, but the creation and application of learning archetypes in the context of incubation programmes is novel. A phenomenographic outcome space mapped the characteristics of each archetype across each conception, visualising how different archetypes experience each conception, and therefore the overall experience of learning, in a distinct way.

Incubators can utilise the findings to better support social entrepreneurs' learning by providing content relevant to social entrepreneurs, focusing on participants' identities as learners, and offering flexible and customisable programmes. Additionally, to create a more collaborative learning environment, incubators should consider relationship dynamics and learning potential when selecting participants.

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1. Introduction

Though an abundance of research in the discipline of entrepreneurship exists, one aspect of entrepreneurship that has not been sufficiently addressed in the literature is understanding how and when entrepreneurs, and more specifically social entrepreneurs, learn (J. Cope, 2005; Howorth, Smith, & Parkinson, 2012; Levinsohn, 2015; Rivers, Nie, & Armellini, 2015). Although most research on entrepreneurial learning takes place in formal environments, in practice, entrepreneurial learning often occurs in non-formal environments such as business incubators (Levinsohn, 2015). In the current study, business incubators, hereafter referred to as incubators for brevity, serve as a context for learning in which entrepreneurs are socially entrenched (Fang, Tsai, & Lin, 2010). There is little understanding as to how entrepreneurs learn and develop while part of an incubator (Albort-Morant & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2016; Politis, Gabrielsson, Galan, & Abebe, 2019; Theodorakopoulos, Kakabadse, & McGowan, 2014) and there are few scholars exploring the learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubators (Levinsohn, 2015). Theories of learning have been suggested for application in literature on entrepreneurship (Harrison & Leitch, 2005), social entrepreneurship (Howorth et al., 2012), and incubation (Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014; van Weele, van Rijnsoever, & Nauta, 2017) and the current study uses informal learning theory to understand the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs experience learning within an incubator in South Africa.

Social entrepreneurs differ from their commercial counterparts in many ways, but most pertinent to this research are the collaborative and trusting relationships social entrepreneurs build with others, their openness to sharing resources, and their use of social capital to unite diverse groups (P. A. Dacin, Dacin, & Matear, 2010; Estrin, Mickiewicz, & Stephan, 2013; Griffiths, Gundry, & Kickul, 2013). While collaborative relationships are voluntary, they have been shown to increase knowledge sharing, leading to an increase in innovation (Ribeiro-Soriano & Urbano, 2009). Furthermore, relationships have been found to be key in the facilitation of informal learning (Marsick, 2009).

More research is needed to properly educate and advise social entrepreneurs (Certo & Miller, 2008; Hervieux & Voltan, 2016), yet understanding the learning experience of social entrepreneurs has not been sufficiently explored in the literature (J. Cope, 2005; Howorth et al., 2012; Levinsohn, 2015; Rivers et al., 2015). Theories that place emphasis on learning as a socially situated activity are particularly insightful to use in understanding the learning experience of social entrepreneurs (Howorth et al., 2012) and informal learning is largely shaped by the social, cultural, structural, and systematic contexts in which it occurs (Marsick,

2009). Informal learning is best understood through examining the interaction of people and their contexts and due to the contextual nature of informal learning, studying it in other disciplines is highly beneficial and can uncover insights that contribute to the evolution of the theory itself (Marsick, 2009). Rae (2006) noted that entrepreneurial learning is formed through the context in which it takes place, with the context directing both what is learned and how the learning happens. However, the limited research on the learning experience of social entrepreneurs tends to occur in formal environments while in practice, social entrepreneurs learn in non-formal environments such as incubators (Levinsohn, 2015).

Prior research into incubators suggests that scholars move away from focusing on the incubator itself and instead try to understand the process of incubation and the subsequent influence this process has on the ventures within it (Ahmad, 2014; Tavoletti, 2013). Incubators serve as a context for learning (Fang et al., 2010), acting as both cooperative and competitive learning environments (Miles et al., 2017). An unexplored area of incubation focuses on how entrepreneurs learn and develop while part of an incubator (Albort-Morant & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2016; Politis et al., 2019; Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014). There is a need to explore conceptions of learning in different environments (Paakkari, Tynjälä, & Kannas, 2011; Täks, Tynjälä, & Kukemelk, 2016) yet few scholars are exploring the learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubators (Levinsohn, 2015).

Because the field of entrepreneurship can be characterised by the use of creativity and innovation in uncertain environments, utilising a methodology that focuses on the lived experience of entrepreneurs is valuable (Berglund, 2015). Phenomenography is a research approach that takes the perspective of people's experiences of the world instead of making statements about the world (Marton, 1981). By understanding a phenomenon through the experience of others (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016), phenomenography can shed new light on the key concepts of that phenomenon (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998, 2000). The outcome of a phenomenographic study displays the full range of ways to experience the phenomenon of study despite differing experiences of that phenomenon by different people in different contexts (Åkerlind, 2012).

Although research on social entrepreneurship has been increasing in recent years, much of the discussion is occurring in Western, developed contexts, leaving a void of knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon in a developing context (Urban, 2008). This is surprising, as the conditions in which social entrepreneurship emerges and flourishes are very typical of those found in developing countries (Santos, 2012). In an African context, research on social entrepreneurship is limited (Rivera-Santos, Holt, Littlewood, & Kolk,

2015; Urban, 2008) and factors such as colonial history, corruption, socioeconomic conditions, and development status can all play a role in understanding social entrepreneurship in different contextual settings (Littlewood & Holt, 2015). The country chosen for the current study, South Africa, has diverse contextual settings which are expected to contribute to the variation in experiences necessary for a phenomenographic study. Further, South Africa can be characterised as having a strong entrepreneurial culture (Herrington & Kew, 2018; Schwab, 2019), a unique positioning of social entrepreneurs somewhere between those in developed and developing countries (Littlewood & Holt, 2015), a growing incubation sector (van Eck, Yorke, & Martens, 2018), and challenges in the formal education system (Herrington & Kew, 2018; Schwab, 2018). This atypical combination makes South Africa well-suited to pursue research on the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes.

The current study fills multiple gaps in knowledge and brings together the disciplines of social entrepreneurship, incubators, and informal learning. The results highlight the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs experience informal learning within an incubator in a South African context, providing a model of the variation in learning experiences as well as a model of the ways in which learning occurs.

1.1. Research problem

Research on both entrepreneurs and incubators need innovative approaches, more stringent research designs, and enhanced theoretical focus and rigor (Albort-Morant & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2016; Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014; Zahra & Dess, 2001). Entrepreneurship is an ever-changing phenomenon, and because of this, the definitions, theories, and methodologies used to study it must evolve along with it, encouraging scholars to "study entrepreneurship in unorthodox empirical contexts, try out new research approaches and perspectives, and pose new questions" (Fayolle, Landstrom, Gartner, & Berglund, 2016, p. 484).

1.1.1. Entrepreneurship and learning

Entrepreneurship is a multidisciplinary concept (Welter, Baker, Audretsch, & Gartner, 2017; Zahra & Dess, 2001). Because of this, literature is marked by inconsistency in the core definition of entrepreneurship (Peredo & McLean, 2006; Shane, 2012; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Terjesen, Hessels, & Li, 2016). Shane and Venkataraman (2000) posit that entrepreneurship occurs at the intersection of an opportunity and an individual,

meaning any definition of entrepreneurship must recognise both. Based on this, Franco and Haase (2009) position entrepreneurship as "a never-ending learning process aimed at the identification of new or continued business opportunities" (p. 635).

Despite progress in the field of entrepreneurship (Venkataraman, Sarasvathy, Dew, & Forster, 2012), there is still a gap in understanding the entrepreneurial process (Shane, 2012). Given the previously referenced definition of entrepreneurship as a never-ending learning process (Franco & Haase, 2009), in order to understand the entrepreneurial process, it becomes imperative to understand how and when entrepreneurial learning takes place (Wang & Chugh, 2014). Entrepreneurial learning is a dynamic process, involving transforming both knowledge and experience into a tangible outcome (Politis, 2005; Rae, 2006). Studies have shown that entrepreneurial learning is highly dependent on context, with the context dictating what is learned and how it is learned (Rae, 2006). However, the field of entrepreneurship lacks a sufficient understanding of how entrepreneurs learn (J. Cope, 2005; J. Cope & Watts, 2000; Rae & Carswell, 2001), with scholars calling for the application of learning concepts within the field (Harrison & Leitch, 2005). Views of learning range from theories of cognitive learning (Bandura, 1971; Piaget, 1936) to experiential learning (D. A. Kolb, 1984) to informal learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Wang and Chugh's (2014) strategic literature review revealed that of the 75 articles covering the topic of entrepreneurial learning, 32 applied experiential learning as a theoretical lens, 12 utilised theories of cognitive learning, and none utilised informal learning theory. J. Cope and Watts (2000) posit that entrepreneurial learning may be an informal process, yet there is a gap in understanding this from the theoretical perspective of informal learning.

While there is a sizable body of literature covering the topic of entrepreneurship education, studies in this discipline mainly concentrate on the formal education of entrepreneurs (Fayolle, 2013; Nabi, Linan, Fayolle, Krueger, & Walmsley, 2017), focusing on increasing the number of and the performance of entrepreneurs (Martin, McNally, & Kay, 2013). Though there is debate about what entrepreneurship education truly is (Fayolle, 2013; Pittaway & Cope, 2007a), common topics in the entrepreneurship education literature focus on teaching entrepreneurship, management training for entrepreneurs, the role of the enterprising university, and student entrepreneurship (Pittaway & Cope, 2007a). Interestingly, entrepreneurship education literature does not have strong connections to education literature, is not often grounded in theory, and is typically disconnected from entrepreneurship in practice (Fayolle, 2013; Liñán & Fayolle, 2015; Nabi et al., 2017). Fayolle (2013) suggests that research in the discipline of entrepreneurship education begins

to look at entrepreneurship in practice in various contexts, specifically focusing on how entrepreneurs learn to solve problems. Insights from such real-life studies could provide valuable knowledge to transfer to the classroom (Fayolle, 2013).

1.1.2. Social entrepreneurship and learning

An understanding of social entrepreneurship should be built upon an understanding of entrepreneurship and the literature surrounding it as social entrepreneurs are merely one type of entrepreneur (Dees, 1998). Social entrepreneurship is a nascent field within entrepreneurship and similarly suffers from numerous debates surrounding definitions, concepts, and boundaries (M. T. Dacin, Dacin, & Tracey, 2011). The path of social entrepreneurship research has thus far resembled that of the field of entrepreneurship research in its early days, with definitional challenges, a focus on attribute-based descriptions of entrepreneurs, and an abundance of anecdotal evidence (Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Certo & Miller, 2008; Mair & Martí, 2006).

Often, social entrepreneurs embark on missions of social change because of undesirable or adverse contexts, as social problems tend to be entrenched in contextual factors (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006). Austin et al. (2006) found that while there are similarities between social and commercial entrepreneurs, the two types of entrepreneurs are, in fact, quite different; context plays a significantly different role in social entrepreneurship as social entrepreneurs "respond in fundamentally different ways to adverse contextual conditions than their commercial counterparts" (p. 9). What commercial entrepreneurs may view as a problem, social entrepreneurs see as an opportunity (Austin et al., 2006; Dees, 1998). Social entrepreneurs care deeply about their stakeholders (Levinsohn, 2015) and because of this, the opportunities social entrepreneurs identify tend to come from an internal motivation to help rather than an external rationality as is often the case with commercial entrepreneurs (Karanda & Toledano, 2012).

Further differentiating themselves from commercial entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs develop collaborative and trusting relationships with others, are open to sharing resources, and use their social capital to unite diverse groups (Casasnovas & Bruno, 2013; P. A. Dacin et al., 2010; de Bruin, Shaw, & Lewis, 2017; Estrin et al., 2013; Griffiths et al., 2013; Montgomery, Dacin, & Dacin, 2012). In fact, social entrepreneurs use collective terminology significantly more often than both the general English-speaking population and commercial entrepreneurs; the word 'we' is one of the most commonly used words by social entrepreneurs, second only to the word 'community' (Parkinson & Howorth, 2008). In

contrast to commercial entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs rarely succeed alone (Casasnovas & Bruno, 2013; Mair, Battilana, & Cardenas, 2012; Montgomery et al., 2012). Collaboration and collective action allow social entrepreneurs to achieve their social change objectives as they require a variety of resources in order to do so (Montgomery et al., 2012). Operating within and across multiple sectors, social entrepreneurs utilise their connections to spread their ideas, gain support, and ultimately incite change (Montgomery et al., 2012; Pache & Chowdhury, 2012).

Entrepreneurs have been classified as life-long learners (Franco & Haase, 2009; Rae & Carswell, 2001) and while there are numerous studies on entrepreneurial learning, there are few studies focused on social entrepreneurs' learning (J. Cope, 2005; Howorth et al., 2012; Levinsohn, 2015; Rivers et al., 2015). Further, this topic lacks clear understanding and theorising (Pache & Chowdhury, 2012). Learning how to become a social entrepreneur is more complex than learning how to be a commercial entrepreneur (Tracey & Phillips, 2007; Worsham, 2012) as social entrepreneurs must understand how to combine business models with social change imperatives (Estrin et al., 2013) while also being accountable to commercial, public, and social sector stakeholders (Howorth et al., 2012; Pache & Chowdhury, 2012). More research to understand the learning process and learning requirements of social entrepreneurs is necessary to properly educate and advise these types of entrepreneurs (Certo & Miller, 2008; Hervieux & Voltan, 2016).

1.1.3. Incubators

Despite increased research on incubators in recent years, there are still many avenues to explore. Incubator research often focuses only on directly measurable aspects such as average incubation time or number of graduated firms (Bøllingtoft & Ulhøi, 2005). This happens at the expense of understanding the indirect or social value of incubators, with little attempt to theorise what is being observed (Bøllingtoft & Ulhøi, 2005). There is a call to move away from focusing on the incubator itself and instead focus on the concept of incubation to understand the processes by which the incubator operates and how that influences the ventures within it (Ahmad, 2014).

An interesting and unexplored aspect of incubation is how entrepreneurial learning and development occurs within the incubator (Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014). To date, there has been little research exploring learning dynamics within incubation programmes (Politis et al., 2019), yet as Haugh (2020) points out, the role of incubators is to support entrepreneurs in developing new business ventures by providing them with training and

resources. A key feature contributing to incubator outcomes is learning (Hallen, Bingham, & Cohen, 2017), but there are a limited number of scholars exploring entrepreneurial learning within incubators (Levinsohn, 2015). Scholars have supported focusing on aspects of entrepreneurial learning within incubators such as how institutional factors impact entrepreneurial learning within the incubator (Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014), how an incubator can inspire and support multiple types of learning at once (Eveleens, van Rijnsoever, & Niesten, 2017), and how incubators can aid in knowledge acquisition (van Weele et al., 2017). The limited research that broaches the topic of learning within incubators has not focused on the learning process (Levinsohn, 2015), yet understanding how and when learning takes place is paramount to understanding the entrepreneurial process (Wang & Chugh, 2014). Additionally, there is a need to explore conceptions of learning in different environments (Paakkari et al., 2011; Täks et al., 2016) and the current study uses incubators as the environment in which social entrepreneurs learn.

1.1.4. Informal learning theory

Learning is "the process whereby knowledge is acquired" (Eraut, 2000, p. 114). People learn in a variety of ways (Marsick, 2009) with individual intentions and context contributing to how learning is classified (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004). Classifying learning as formal, non-formal, and informal demonstrates the full spectrum of learning that an individual can experience (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004). As the current study focuses on learning within incubators, it will focus on the non-formal and informal end of the spectrum; because an incubator programme is short-term, voluntary, not taught by certified teachers, and does not require prerequisite schooling, an incubator does not fit the definition of a formal learning environment (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004; Schugurensky, 2000), further discussed in section 2.1.1.

Marsick and Watkins (2001) believe that learning occurs while working and/or living in a particular setting, highlighting the importance of context to informal learning theory. An update of their original model of informal learning places context in the centre, depicting that the context in which the learning experience occurs is central and influences "the way in which people interpret the situation, their choices, the actions they take, and the learning that is effected" (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 29). Similarly, entrepreneurial learning has been shown to highly depend on context, with context dictating what is learned and how it is learned (Rae, 2006).

P. A. Dacin et al. (2010) encourage scholars to apply existing theories to social entrepreneurship instead of creating new ones but M. T. Dacin et al. (2011) posit that current management theories, such as institutional theory and network theory, do not fully explain the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship. Mair and Martí (2006) ask scholars exploring social entrepreneurship to consider theoretical insights from multiple fields of research and Howorth et al. (2012) suggest using social theories of learning to understand the learning experience of social entrepreneurs. Informal learning theory is best suited to situations where individuals can shape their learning (Marsick, 2009) and through the process of co-creation, social entrepreneurs within incubators have been shown to shape their learning into what is relevant to them (Levinsohn, 2015).

The highly contextual nature of informal learning theory allows its use in multiple disciplines to continuously contribute to the evolution of the theory itself (Marsick, 2009). Using informal learning theory to understand how social entrepreneurs experience learning within incubators provides a new context in which to study the theory.

1.1.5. Phenomenography

Interpretive methodologies are designed to understand how people experience a phenomenon or an aspect of reality (Lamb, Sandberg, & Liesch, 2011). Theodorakopoulos et al. (2014) suggests that future research questions on the topic of incubation should address how and why outcomes are achieved from an incubation process. As qualitative studies address these types of inquiries (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006), this call inherently leads to more qualitative research studies.

Interpretive, qualitative methods such as case study research and grounded theory research both seek general experiences within and between cases (Lamb et al., 2011). They take a first-order perspective of the world, making statements about it (Marton, 1981). In a first-order perspective, the researcher is able to directly understand a phenomenon themselves (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016). Phenomenography diverges from other interpretive methodologies as it takes the perspective of people's experiences of the world, also known as a second-order perspective (Marton, 1981), where the researcher must understand the phenomenon of study through the experience of others (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016). Utilising a methodology that focuses on the richness of a lived experience is especially valuable in the field of entrepreneurship, a field that can be characterised by the use of creativity and innovation in an uncertain environment (Berglund, 2015). Phenomenography begins with a phenomenon as a starting point (Svensson, 2016),

focuses on capturing and understanding the variation in experiences of that phenomenon (Lamb et al., 2011), and does not view individual cases as separate or isolated units but rather as parts of one whole (Svensson, 2016).

Phenomenography has the unique ability to shed new light on what the key concepts of a particular phenomenon are, often producing unforeseen outcomes (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998, 2000). Despite differing views of a phenomenon as experienced under differing circumstances by different people, phenomenography provides a collective way of viewing that experience (Åkerlind, 2012). The outcome of a phenomenographic analysis "represent[s] the full range of possible ways of experiencing the phenomenon in question, at this particular point in time, for the population represented by the sample group collectively" (Åkerlind, 2012, p. 323).

1.2. Research question and sub-questions

Phenomenography takes a second-order perspective of the world, meaning it looks at people's experiences of the world, whereas a first-order perspective makes statements about the world (Marton, 1981). Though qualitative research questions are usually formulated by asking *how* or *why* (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006), the second-order perspective of phenomenography reframes research questions into *how* or *what* (Yates, Partridge, & Bruce, 2012). Further, as the results of phenomenographic research are always based on the qualitatively different ways of experiencing a phenomenon, the research question is most often begun by asking, "*What are the qualitatively different ways…*" (Åkerlind, 2017; Pang, 2003).

When conducting research on learning, Eraut (2004) suggests uncovering answers to three primary questions: "What is being learned? How is it being learned? What factors affect the level and directions of learning effort?" (p. 248). This direction has been taken into consideration when designing the research question and sub-questions for the current study. However, to align the essence of these questions to a phenomenographic study, they have been reconceptualised. Therefore, the research question (RQ) and sub-questions (SQ) guiding the current study are:

RQ: What are the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs experience learning within an incubator in South Africa?

SQ1: What are the structural relationships between the ways social entrepreneurs experience learning within an incubator?

SQ2: How do social entrepreneurs approach and enact learning within an incubator?

The current study took the perspective of the individual social entrepreneur and explored these questions through a phenomenographic approach to gain a deeper understanding of the ways social entrepreneurs experience learning within incubators. While there is some debate as to the level of influence a researcher's views should have in a phenomenographic analysis, scholars seem to agree that researchers must, at the very least, keep an open mind when analysing results (Åkerlind, 2012; Ashworth & Lucas, 1998, 2000; C. Cope, 2004; Sin, 2010; Svensson, 1997). Because of this, propositions were not identified up front and were instead identified as conceptions as a result of the data analysis process. This ensured that there were no a priori conceptualisations of the data before the analysis process commenced.

1.3. Research contribution

From a theoretical perspective, applying informal learning theory provides a different theoretical lens with which to view the phenomenon of the learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubators, leading to new perspectives and insights. Recently, scholars have called for the application of learning theories in incubation research (Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014; van Weele et al., 2017) to view incubators through a different theoretical lens. Utilising informal learning theory extends the current incubator literature's reliance on common management theories such as network theory, social capital theory, the resource-based view, and the knowledge-based view of the firm (Diez-Vial & Montoro-Sanchez, 2017). Informal learning theory is typically used in fields such as education and social work (see: Gola, 2009; Hoekstra, Korthagen, Brekelmans, Beijaard, & Imants, 2009; Marsick, 2009) and has received little application in incubator or entrepreneurship literature. The contextual nature of informal learning theory makes it highly beneficial to study in other disciplines, helping to uncover insights that contribute to the evolution of the theory itself (Marsick, 2009). Studying informal learning theory in the new context of incubation programmes provides new perspectives on learning theory, just as studying informal learning theory in the context of a workplace instead of an educational environment did previously (Eraut, 2004). The current study utilised informal learning theory in a new discipline and in a new context by exploring the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs experience learning within incubators in South Africa, resulting in a model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation

programmes. Though there were some similarities with models of informal learning in other contexts, the model created in the current study shows that the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes is a unique experience, providing new insight into informal learning theory in differing contexts.

As with the theoretical contribution, the methodological contribution comes from extending the use of phenomenography, a research approach originally designed for use in formal educational contexts (Marton, 1986). While previous research has focused on utilising phenomenography to explore conceptions of learning in a formal environment, by conducting a phenomenographic study in a non-formal incubator environment, the current study found differences in commonly held conceptions of learning. Although growing in popularity recently due in large part to its use in doctoral theses (Åkerlind, 2017), phenomenography has rarely been used within the entrepreneurial or incubation disciplines. M. T. Dacin et al.'s (2011) analysis of prior articles covering social entrepreneurship found that case studies were by far the most popular qualitative research method of choice, with 80% of qualitative articles choosing this methodology. While there are a few exceptions, social entrepreneurial research has over-relied on case studies of exemplary social enterprises, leading to insights based on successful social entrepreneurs and their organisations (P. A. Dacin et al., 2010; Lepoutre, Justo, Terjesen, & Bosma, 2013; Montgomery et al., 2012; Nicholls, 2010; Short, Moss, & Lumpkin, 2009). Similar to the challenges of an overabundance of single case study research in social entrepreneurship, there is also an over-reliance on case study research in an African context (Rivera-Santos et al., 2015). Utilising phenomenography, which uncovers the qualitatively different ways of understanding a phenomenon (Larsson & Holmström, 2007; Marton, Dall'alba, & Beaty, 1993; Neuman, 1997; Stenfors-Hayes, Hult, & Dahlgren, 2013; Svensson, 1997), deviates from the norm and provides unique insights into the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs experience learning within the non-formal environment of incubators.

Practically, this research contributes to both social entrepreneurs and the incubator programmes designed to support them, providing insight into the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs learn within incubators in a South African context. Any new contribution to the field of social entrepreneurship also has the potential to contribute new insights to the overall discipline of entrepreneurship as well (Seelos & Mair, 2005). Phenomenography brought to light not only the experience of learning within incubators, but the variation in that learning experience as well.

Importantly, van Weele et al. (2017) found that entrepreneurs were unaware that incubators could provide them with business knowledge, though this knowledge ended up being the most important resource they received. Providing social entrepreneurs with the information that incubators are a context for learning as well as outlining the qualitatively different ways in which learning occurs will encourage social entrepreneurs to be open to learning and, as Marsick and Watkins (2001) found, increased awareness by a learner enhances informal learning. Social entrepreneurs should also ensure they recognise their own learning gaps, including those regarding concepts specific to social entrepreneurs, before entering incubation as this allows them to advocate for their own learning as well as have more productive conversations during incubation.

Organisational factors such as structure, practices, and leadership can create or hinder a climate of learning (Marsick, 2009); having insight into the ways social entrepreneurs learn within incubators can help incubators design their spaces and programmes in a way that enhances learning. Further, incubators can utilise the findings to provide content relevant to social entrepreneurs, establish a focus on participants' identities as learners, and build programmes with flexibility and personalisation. These changes could be managed through the implementation of a learning management system. The insights from the current study can also aid incubators in creating policies and developing a culture that supports informal learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Finally, the findings can be used by incubator managers to select participants in a way that maximises learning potential. Based on research conducted in incubators, Peters, Rice, and Sundararajan (2004) proposed that when the objectives of the incubator compliment the objectives of the participants, more participants will graduate from incubator programmes. Overall, incubators can utilise the findings from the current study to develop cultures, structures, and programmes as well as enhance their cohort selection process to better support the learning experience of social entrepreneurs in a South African context.

1.4. Document structure

The next chapter, Chapter 2, reviews the relevant literature, addressing definitions and theoretical backgrounds of informal learning theory, incubators, and social entrepreneurship. Chapter 2 further defines the research gap and provides the conceptual framework guiding the current study. Chapter 3 frames the research in an African context, addressing the African continent in general before focusing on South Africa. Chapter 4 introduces the research design of phenomenography, discussing the research paradigm,

seminal phenomenographic studies, population and sample, data collection process, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness. In Chapter 5, the phenomenographic analysis process of interview transcription, data interpretation, and conception identification is detailed before presenting the findings in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 discusses the findings in detail and in relation to prior literature. The research is summarised and brought to a close in Chapter 8, identifying the research contribution, implications, limitations, and areas of future research. A full list of references can be found in Chapter 9 and appendices are in Chapter 10.

2. Literature review

The current study brought together literature covering the disciplines of informal learning, incubators, and social entrepreneurship to uncover a research gap in understanding the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes. In this chapter, definitions, theoretical backgrounds, and prior research are examined in each of the three aforementioned disciplines of informal learning, incubators, and social entrepreneurship. The chapter concludes with a summarisation of the research gap and a recap of the research question and sub-questions guiding the current study.

2.1. Informal learning theory

2.1.1. Formal, non-formal, and informal learning

People learn in a variety of ways (Marsick, 2009). At the individual level, learning encompasses "the way in which people make meaning and acquire knowledge and skill" (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p.32). Both the intention of the individual as well as the context in which the learning takes place play a vital role in how learning is classified (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004). When individual learning is intentional, it can be observed through choices, activities, and processes; however, individual learning can also be incidental, in which case it is best understood through interactions with various contexts (Marsick, 2009). Categorising learning as formal, non-formal, and informal illuminates the full spectrum of learning an individual can experience, accounting for variations in both intention and context (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004).

Formal learning is intentional, explicitly designed as learning, and occurs in an organised, structured environment (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004). It is usually thought of as the institutionally structured learning from preschool to graduate studies, though many adult education programmes with certified teachers and prescribed curriculum can also fall

under this designation (Schugurensky, 2000). Non-formal learning occurs during planned activities that contain learning elements, and though these activities are not designed as explicit learning activities, learning is intentional (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004). Like formal education programmes, non-formal programmes can include teachers (though often referred to as instructors or facilitators) and a curriculum, but unlike formal programmes, non-formal programmes are outside of the typical school system, are often short-term and voluntary, and do not require prerequisite schooling (Schugurensky, 2000). Informal learning occurs without institutionally authorised instructors or prescribed curriculum (Schugurensky, 2000); it is unstructured and can be intentional or unintentional, as learning is often the result of another activity and can occur whenever a person has an opportunity for learning (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004; Marsick & Watkins, 2001). The learner is in control of how and what they learn, with learning often occurring as the by-product of another activity (Marsick, 2009; Marsick & Watkins, 2001). This type of learning can be deliberately encouraged through social interaction, networking, coaching, and/or mentoring (Marsick, 2009; Marsick & Watkins, 2001), aligning closely with the services of an incubator.

Schugurensky (2000) further categorised informal learning into three types: self-directed, incidental, and socialisation (more commonly referred to as tacit). Self-directed learning is intentional and undertaken by the learner but without a formal educator (Schugurensky, 2000). However, because self-directed learning is intentional, depending on the context in which the learning takes place, it could fall under Colardyn and Bjornavold's (2004) definition of non-formal learning. Contrarily, both incidental and tacit learning are unintentional, but with incidental learning, the learner is aware that they have learned something while with tacit learning, the learner is unaware (Schugurensky, 2000). Eraut (2004) preferred to think of learning as a continuum, with, on one end, informal learning, characterised as unintentional, opportunistic, and unstructured. On the formal end of the continuum, in contrast, is deliberate learning (Eraut, 2004). Combining ideas from Colardyn and Bjornavold (2004), Eraut (2004), and Schugurensky (2000), Figure 1 shows a model of the learning continuum. This model plots the three types of learning identified by Colardyn and Bjornavold (2004) on a continuum of intentionality identified by Eraut (2004). It further depicts the three forms of informal learning identified by Schugurensky (2000) and where they fall both in relation to Eraut's (2004) continuum and within Colardyn and Bjornavold's (2004) types of learning. This model has been used to underpin an understanding of learning in the context of the current study.
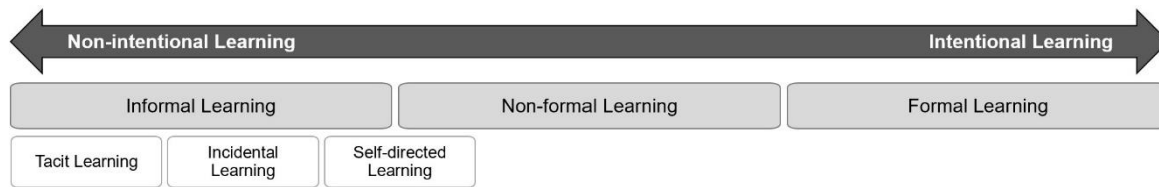
Figure 1. Learning continuum. Based on ideas discussed in "Validation of Formal, Non-formal and Informal Learning: Policy and Practices in EU Member States," by D. Colardyn and J. Bjornavold, 2004, *European Journal of Education*, 39(1); "Informal Learning in the Workplace," by M. Eraut, 2004, *Studies in Continuing Education*, 26(2); and "The Forms of Informal Learning: Towards a Conceptualization of the Field," by D. Schugurensky, 2000, *WALL Working Paper,* Vol. 19.

Informal learning is largely shaped by the environment in which it takes place, including the social, cultural, structural, and systematic contexts (Marsick, 2009). Marsick and Watkins' original model of informal and incidental learning was updated by Cseh, Watkins, and Marsick (1999) to place context in the centre (Figure 2), visually representing that the context in which the learning experience occurs is central. Marsick and Volpe (1999) identified the existence of an internal or external trigger as the start of the informal learning process. External triggers can include occurrences such as changing a job, obtaining new responsibilities, or the realisation of impending failure (Marsick & Volpe, 1999). Internal triggers begin when one re-evaluates their focus or direction or prepares for a future event (Marsick & Volpe, 1999). Preceding this trigger is an individual's way of seeing the world which frames the way in which they interpret their learning experience (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). During the informal learning process, alternative models for action are examined, followed by the individual deciding on learning strategies to undertake (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). After action is taken, the outcome of learning is assessed and a new frame is established (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Though the informal learning cycle starts and ends with a frame, the frame has changed after the learning process occurs.
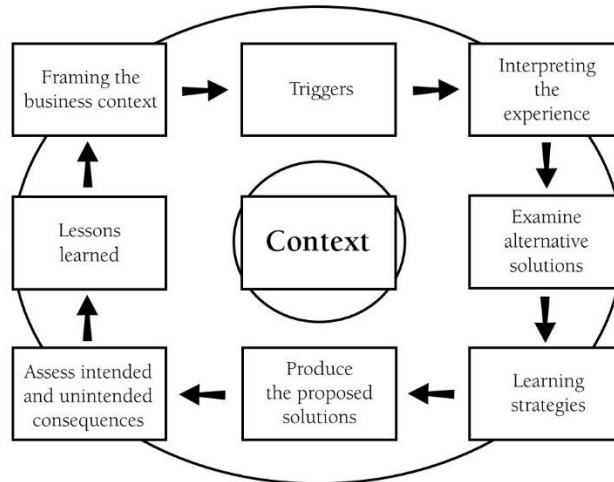
Figure 2. Cseh et al.'s (1999) informal and incidental learning model. From "Re-conceptualizing Marsick and Watkins' Model of Informal and Incidental Learning in the Workplace" by M. Cseh, K. Watkins, and V. Marsick, 1999, in K. P. Kuchinke (ed.), *Proceedings, Academy of Human Resource Development Conference*, Baton Rouge, LA: Academy of Human Resource Development.

2.1.2. Studies on informal learning

Informal learning theory tends to be used in caring professions such as healthcare and teaching (Jeong, Han, Lee, Sunalai, & Yoon, 2018; Thompson, Alvy, & Lees, 2000) as well as in the workplace (Eraut, 2004; Li et al., 2009; Marsick, Watkins, Callahan, & Volpe, 2009). Studies on informal learning in these disciplines have shown that both the individual and the context play a role in learning, aligning with Colardyn and Bjornavold's (2004) assertation. Gola's (2009) study of social workers' informal learning pointed out that learning can be enhanced by both the learner's intentions as well as the environment they are learning in. Jurasaite-Harbison's (2009) study on teachers' informal learning showed that a complex relationship exists among the broader context of study, an organisation's culture, and individual motivation to learn. Hoekstra et al. (2009) also studied teachers' informal learning and found that both the resources and conditions in the school as well as the teachers themselves actively shaped the optimal conditions for informal learning to occur. Marsick (2009) found that organisational support plays a role in the creation or hindrance of knowledge sharing and that organisations can shape informal learning via their culture, structure, and leadership. Eraut (2004) showed that individuals' variances in learning were influenced by both the quality of relationships in the workplace as well as the workplace context (Eraut, 2004).

Informal learning does not happen in isolation, but is a highly contextual, iterative activity that emerges from social interactions (Jeong et al., 2018). Through an integrative

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literature review on informal learning, Jeong et al. (2018) found that individual antecedents of informal learning are influenced by contextual variables and conversely, contextual antecedents can be influenced by individual variables.

Because learning is context-dependent, "different subjects involved in the same experiences will identify different meanings and the same subject will also interpret the same experience in different ways at different points in time" (Gola, 2009, p. 344), highlighting the subjective nature in which informal learning is embedded. Utilising phenomenography in the current study allowed multiple, diverse interpretations of reality to exist (Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013) and highlighted the different ways in which learning was experienced by social entrepreneurs within incubators.

In an analysis of 55 studies on informal learning, Jeong et al. (2018) showed that 31 were conducted in developed countries in either Europe or North America and none were conducted in Africa. However, in a context where limitations on formal learning exist, such as those in South Africa (described in detail in section 3.2.2.), supporting informal learning can provide an alternative form of learning that is less resource-intensive yet still fosters the development of knowledge and skills (Cerasoli et al., 2018).

2.2. Incubators

2.2.1. Definition

Despite many attempts to develop a universal definition of incubators, scholars have yet to come to a consensus (Albort-Morant & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2016; Hausberg & Korreck, 2018; Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014). Definitional ambiguity can be attributed to many factors, including adapting the incubator concept to the local context and the interchangeable way in which various terms are used to discuss incubators (Hackett & Dilts, 2004; Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014). This has led to a proliferation of studies attempting to analyse and synthesise existing articles on incubation (see: Albort-Morant & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2016; Diez-Vial & Montoro-Sanchez, 2017; Mian, Lamine, & Fayolle, 2016; Phan, Siegel, & Wright, 2005; Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014).

Even with an absence of a single, agreed-upon definition, many scholars define the concept of incubators similarly. Broadly, Theodorakopoulos et al. (2014) found that most studies view incubators as a development tool for entrepreneurs, offering both working space and support services to patrons. Chan and Lau (2005) assign the main role of incubators as supporting entrepreneurs through their start-up and development process. Phan et al. (2005) define incubators as "property-based organizations with identifiable

administrative centers focused on the mission of business acceleration through knowledge agglomeration and resource sharing" (p. 166). Hausberg and Korreck (2018) agree with using the term 'organisation' rather than 'institution', as calling incubators organisations indicates that they are in fact actively managed.

A new-generation incubator model, the accelerator, has emerged recently (Mian et al., 2016). As accelerators are a type of incubator, they share many similarities, but differ in that they provide assistance for a limited time only (Hallen et al., 2017; Levinsohn, 2015; Mian et al., 2016; Pauwels, Clarysse, Wright, & Van Hove, 2016). Further, accelerators typically provide investment, often in exchange for equity, and function on a cohort-based model (Hallen et al., 2017; Pauwels et al., 2016). As with incubators, there are various definitions of accelerators, but Hallen et al. (2017) defined them succinctly as "learning-oriented, fixed-length programs that provide cohorts of ventures with mentoring and education" (p. 6). In their definition of accelerators, Politis et al. (2019) categorised the education that occurs within acceleration programmes as non-formal.

In practice, there are a variety of ways incubators and accelerators are organised and managed (Casasnovas & Bruno, 2013). In South Africa, there is not necessarily alignment between what an entity calls itself and the services it offers (van Eck et al., 2018). For example, an entity may call itself an incubator, but it offers a time-based cohort structure, fitting more closely with the academic definition of an accelerator. Therefore, the current study adopted a broad definition of an incubator, focusing more on its mission rather than what it identifies itself as. Utilising Phan et al.'s (2005) previously referenced definition of an incubator, "property-based organizations with identifiable administrative centers focused on the mission of business acceleration through knowledge agglomeration and resource sharing" (p. 166), keeps the definition of an incubator for the current study broad enough to allow for the variety of incubator designs that exist within South Africa while ensuring that a focus of the incubator's mission ties into learning.

2.2.2. Theoretical background

The phenomenon of incubation began in 1959 with the opening of the Batavia Industrial Center in Batavia, New York in the United States (Hackett & Dilts, 2004; Mian et al., 2016; Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014). The concept quickly caught on across America before spreading globally, fuelled by studies showing their connection to economic development (Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014). Incubators have evolved over time, with early incubators focusing on infrastructure before evolving to focus on individual business advice

and finally on networking enablement (Eveleens et al., 2017). The theories used in incubation research have followed these shifts in focus.

Research into incubators began as far back as 1979 but was sporadic until its emergence period between 1996 and 2000 (Diez-Vial & Montoro-Sanchez, 2017). Early incubator research focused on the services provided by incubators to entrepreneurs, using theories based on small firms and high-tech industries to bolster research agendas (Diez-Vial & Montoro-Sanchez, 2017). From 2001 until 2005, incubator research began to grow significantly and concentrated on small businesses and technology-based firms with a focus on location benefits (Diez-Vial & Montoro-Sanchez, 2017). Similarly, theoretical focus expanded to use theories based on geography, agglomeration, and strategy (Diez-Vial & Montoro-Sanchez, 2017), providing much needed insight into how incubators work. Incubator research reached maturity in the period from 2006 to 2010 and evolved to discuss best practices across a variety of facets (Diez-Vial & Montoro-Sanchez, 2017). After the maturity period, incubator research began to consolidate around the idea that incubators provide experience, knowledge, and support to new companies developing their business, with further benefits derived from the network structure incubators provide (Diez-Vial & Montoro-Sanchez, 2017). As such, many theories that focus on social or network activities were applied to incubator research.

Recently, scholars have called for the application of learning theories in incubation research (Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014; van Weele et al., 2017). Theodorakopoulos et al. (2014) suggested viewing incubation through a situated learning theory lens to contribute to understanding the relational and intangible aspects of incubators, particularly how an incubator environment provides support for developing businesses. Situated learning theory posits that learning takes place between those who are actively pursuing a common initiative, also known as a community of practice (Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014). Further, in situated learning theory, knowledge resides in the community itself and the process of learning involves participation in the community (A. Kolb & Kolb, 2005). However, the temporary, transient nature of incubator participants and the variety of businesses within each incubator programme makes it difficult to classify all incubators as communities of practice; incubator participants do not necessarily share commonalities or engage in a collective learning process (Bøllingtoft & Ulhøi, 2005; McAdam & Marlow, 2007).

Van Weele et al. (2017) encouraged future incubation research to utilise organisational learning theories. Organisational learning theories posit that mutual learning occurs within organisations; organisations accumulate knowledge from their members over

time, store this knowledge, and use it to further socialise members within the organisation (March, 1991). Utilising this theory would mean that an incubator would be positioned as an organisation and would be required to learn from its participants, who would be positioned as employees. However, incubator participants typically stay at the incubator for a shorter period of time than an employee would stay at an organisation, with Casasnovas and Bruno (2013) finding that globally, most incubation programmes last two to five months and rarely continue for more than one year. In South Africa, programmes range from a few weeks to a few years (van Eck et al., 2018). Further, the current study focuses on learning at the individual level, not learning at an organisational level, making it difficult to apply organisational learning theories.

Instead, the current study follows the calls to view incubation through a learning theory lens (Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014; van Weele et al., 2017), but utilises informal learning theory to do so. Informal learning theory accounts for learning that occurs "wherever people have the need, motivation, and opportunity for learning" (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 28), aptly describing an incubator environment. Additionally, though entrepreneurial learning may be an informal process (J. Cope & Watts, 2000), studies on entrepreneurial learning have not sufficiently utilised informal learning theory to understand the phenomenon (Wang & Chugh, 2014).

2.2.3. Incubators as a context for informal learning

Due to the contextual nature of informal learning, studying it in other disciplines is highly beneficial as this can uncover insights that contribute to the evolution of the overall theory itself (Marsick, 2009). In 2004, Eraut significantly contributed to research on informal learning by studying it in the workplace. He argued that "the workplace context brings new perspectives to research on learning because it encompasses a wide range of more or less structured environments, which are only rarely structured with learning in mind" (Eraut, 2004, p. 247). Since Eraut's work, research has continued to use the workplace as a lens to better understand informal learning (Marsick et al., 2017). Because incubators serve as a context for learning (Fang et al., 2010) but are not typically designed for learning, the current study uses the context of incubators as the lens to view informal learning. Currently, there is little research that explores learning dynamics within incubation programmes (Politis et al., 2019).

In a recent study, van Weele et al. (2017) found that entrepreneurs, upon reflecting on their incubator experience, identified business knowledge as the most important resource an incubator provided them. However, they were not aware of an incubator's potential to

provide this type of knowledge when they joined; they instead were joining based on the support and services an incubator offered (van Weele et al., 2017). Incubators, though, are more than just their services (Hackett & Dilts, 2004). Fang et al. (2010) posit that incubators are a context for learning where entrepreneurs are socially entrenched yet the literature is largely silent as to an understanding of how and why entrepreneurs develop their businesses while part of an incubator (Albort-Morant & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2016; Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014). Focusing on the process participants experience while part of an incubator is an under-researched area of incubation (Tavoletti, 2013) and there is a need to understand learning conceptions in different educational contexts to determine which aspects are critical (Paakkari et al., 2011; Täks et al., 2016).

Results from Levinsohn's (2015) study on the learning process of social entrepreneurs within incubators demonstrated the existence of both non-formal and informal learning elements. Incubators hold planned activities that facilitate learning, fitting Colardyn and Bjornavold's (2004) definition of non-formal learning. Learning can also occur as a result of these activities or at any other time there is a learning opportunity, supporting both Colardyn and Bjornavold (2004) and Marsick and Watkins' (2001) definition of informal learning. Learning can be intentional in that social entrepreneurs expect to learn how to develop and grow their businesses as part of an incubator, and unintentional in that they may learn in ways that were not initially anticipated.

2.3. Social entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurs

2.3.1. Definition

Though social entrepreneurship may have existed for some time (Thompson et al., 2000), scholars have yet to agree on the boundaries, dimensions, and definitions of what social entrepreneurship is (M. T. Dacin et al., 2011; de Bruin et al., 2017; Littlewood & Holt, 2015; Mair & Martí, 2006; Rivera-Santos et al., 2015; Saebi, Foss, & Linder, 2019). Social entrepreneurship changes across a variety of contexts and organisational forms, with the concept further complicated by a lack of consensus on what is meant by the term "social" and in identifying whether social entrepreneurship should be classified as a subset of commercial entrepreneurship (Karanda & Toledano, 2012; Mair & Martí, 2006; Seelos & Mair, 2005; B. R. Smith & Stevens, 2010). While there is no right or wrong definition, the abundance of perspectives on what social entrepreneurship is makes it imperative for researchers to explicitly state the definition they are using (Casasnovas & Bruno, 2013). While there are many disagreements on the precise definition, Short et al. (2009)

encouraged scholars to use a broad definition in order to draw wide-ranging conclusions from the research. Pless (2012) noted that most scholars agree on setting a broad definition of the concept, as social entrepreneurship is known to cross disciplines and sectors.

The concept of the social entrepreneur began long before the term became commonplace (Dees, 1998). Across the myriad definitions, scholars agree that it is the commitment to creating social value that differentiates social from commercial entrepreneurs. Mair and Martí (2006) note that social entrepreneurs create value "by combining resources in new ways" that "explore and exploit opportunities to create social value by stimulating social change or meeting social needs" (p. 37). Others, including Austin et al. (2006), de Bruin et al. (2017), Dees (1998), Littlewood and Holt (2015), and Mair et al. (2012) agree with this definition, noting that social entrepreneurs look for opportunities that create social change, with their businesses seeking to improve conditions. However, as Santos (2012) points out, nearly all scholars recursively use the word social in their definitions of social entrepreneurs. He agrees with others in that social entrepreneurs focus on value creation but argues that this differs from commercial entrepreneurs who focus on value capture.

The current study will use a broad definition of social entrepreneurship (Pless, 2012; Short et al., 2009), modify the definition of social entrepreneurship from Austin et al. (2006), and take note of Santos' (2012) recursive warning. Therefore, for the purposes of the current study, social entrepreneurship is defined as an "activity that can occur within or across the nonprofit, business, or government sectors" (Austin et al., 2006, p. 2) with "a predominant focus on value creation as opposed to value capture" (Santos, 2012, p. 339). Social entrepreneurs are defined as those who initiate these activities.

2.3.2. Theoretical background

A lack of consensus on the definition of social entrepreneurship has led to an abundance of theoretical perspectives utilised to explain the concept with no single theory identified or developed. Mair and Martí (2006), however, view this as positive, stating that "knowledge on social entrepreneurship can only be enhanced by the use of a variety of theoretical lenses and a combination of different research methods" (p. 40). They discuss how the differing socioeconomic and environmental contexts in which social entrepreneurial ventures operate requires scholars to consider theoretical insights from multiple fields of research (Mair & Martí, 2006). De Bruin et al. (2017) further this idea, encouraging scholars

to embrace "greater theoretical diversity" (p. 581) to enable the advancement of social entrepreneurship literature.

P. A. Dacin et al. (2010) urge scholars to apply existing theories to explain social entrepreneurship instead of attempting to develop a new theory. In a later study, M. T. Dacin et al. (2011) posit that current management theories, including institutional theory and network theory, do not fully explain the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship, in particular noting that social processes would benefit from additional theorising. Along similar lines, de Bruin et al. (2017) encourage exploration of the collaborative dynamic of social entrepreneurs. Pache and Chowdhury (2012) also point out that there is a lack of theory when it comes to social entrepreneurship education and a lack of understanding of how it should be positioned versus commercial entrepreneurship education. Howorth et al. (2012) suggest it would be beneficial to use social theories of learning in future research on the learning experience of social entrepreneurs. Taken together, these theoretical gaps and encouragements led to the use of informal learning theory in the current study, an established theory outside of the management discipline. Informal learning theory is well-suited to situations where individuals can shape their learning (Marsick, 2009) as social entrepreneurs within incubators have been shown to do (Levinsohn, 2015).

2.3.3. Social entrepreneurs learning within incubators

Howorth et al. (2012) found that the social entrepreneurs they studied saw themselves as having different ideals than their commercial counterparts, leading them to conclude it would be difficult for social entrepreneurs to relate to a purely business-based programme designed for commercial entrepreneurs. While commercial entrepreneurship knowledge is relevant to social entrepreneurs, there is a need to expand the current programming to account for the knowledge intricacies of social entrepreneurs (W. K. Smith, Besharov, Wessels, & Chertok, 2012; Tracey & Phillips, 2007). Along similar lines, Pache and Chowdhury (2012) advocate that social entrepreneurs should be taught both social and commercial entrepreneurship concepts; in other words, social entrepreneurs should be taught about commercial entrepreneurship first and foremost, with social entrepreneurial education built upon this foundation. As previously discussed, social entrepreneurs differ from their commercial counterparts as they focus their businesses on creating value as opposed to capturing value (Santos, 2012). In Worsham's (2012) interview with Greg Dees, known as 'the father of social entrepreneurship education', Dees stressed that social entrepreneurs need to be equipped with the educational strategies and values they need in

order to be effective in their unique roles. What these strategies and values are, however, varies quite significantly in the literature, ranging from managing accountability, a double bottom line, and identity (Tracey & Phillips, 2007) to social finance (Weber, 2012) to reflective thinking (Howorth et al., 2012).

Levinsohn (2015), in one of the rare studies on the learning process of social entrepreneurs within an incubator environment, argues that much of the literature on entrepreneurial education focuses on formal environments while in practice, entrepreneurs often learn in non-formal environments such as incubators. One revelation from the study is that learning in non-formal environments is a product of co-creation, finding that the cohort of social entrepreneurs within an incubation programme had more of an influence on learning than did the design of the programme itself (Levinsohn, 2015). Similarly, Ahmad and Ingle (2011) found that incubation was dependent on the quality of relationships formed. Bergh, Thorgren, and Wincent (2011) showed that entrepreneurs form different types of trust with each other before sharing information, similar to findings on trust from Bøllingtoft and Ulhøi (2005). The concept of trust is further exemplified in Levinsohn's (2015) study which showed high levels of trust among most social entrepreneurs, with social entrepreneurs providing encouragement, support, and business development advice to each other. Social entrepreneurs often have precise intentions when they enter incubators, and through their behaviour and interactions with others, create a climate within the incubator that can influence the learning environment (Levinsohn, 2015). This process of co-creation is a characteristic unique to informal and non-formal learning environments (as compared to formal learning environments), allowing social entrepreneurs to morph and shape the learning process into what is relevant to them, even if certain aspects of the programme have already been designed (Levinsohn, 2015). Marsick (2009) posited that informal learning theory is well-suited for environments "where individuals can make a difference in what and how they learn" (p. 271), highlighting its applicability in studying the learning experience of social entrepreneurs in incubators.

Some studies have shown that not all incubator environments are conducive to learning, but it is worth noting that nearly all of these studies focus on commercial entrepreneurs who are not characterised by the high levels of trust, openness, and collaboration that are intrinsic to social entrepreneurs (P. A. Dacin et al., 2010; Estrin et al., 2013; Griffiths et al., 2013). Studies on commercial entrepreneurship show that many entrepreneurs lean toward protecting core competencies and avoid disclosing secrets, concerned their ideas could be stolen and replicated (Aarstad, Pettersen, & Henriksen,

2016; Chan & Lau, 2005; McAdam & Marlow, 2007; Nieminen & Hytti, 2016). That does not mean, however, that participants kept to themselves during their time in incubators, but rather focused on obtaining answers to basic questions they may have on general topics such as marketing, finance, and operations (Chan & Lau, 2005) until trust is built and barriers are eliminated (Nieminen & Hytti, 2016; Ribeiro-Soriano & Urbano, 2009). It is important that incubator participants have some common ground in order to begin to build trust (Nieminen & Hytti, 2016), but are not as similar as direct competitors who will be unwilling to cooperate and will therefore stifle learning within the incubator (Howorth et al., 2012).

By overlaying where the incubator environment operates on the previously identified learning continuum, a conceptual framework was developed as depicted in Figure 3. It is proposed that social entrepreneurs experience informal learning within the non-formal environment of incubators.

Incubator Environment

Social Entrepreneurs

Non-intentional Learning ← → Intentional Learning

| Informal Learning | Non-formal Learning | Formal Learning |

| Tacit Learning | Incidental Learning | Self-directed Learning |
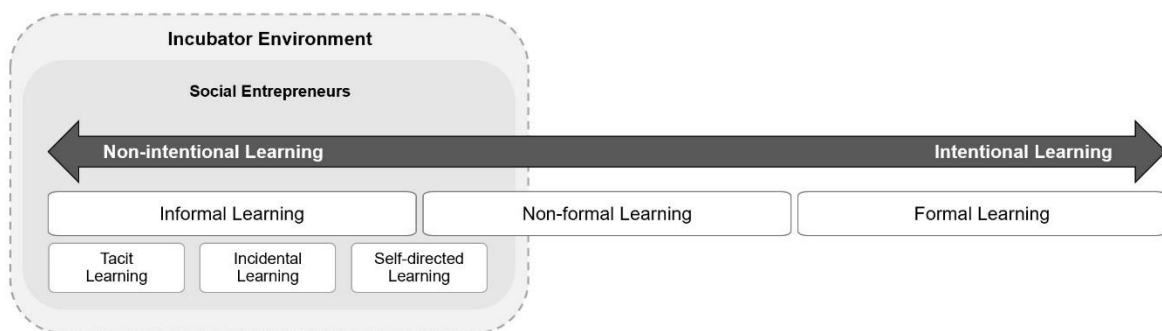
Figure 3. Conceptual framework. Based on ideas discussed in "Informal Learning in the Workplace," by M. Eraut, 2004, *Studies in Continuing Education*, 26(2); "The Forms of Informal Learning: Towards a Conceptualization of the Field," by D. Schugurensky, 2000, *WALL Working Paper*, Vol. 19; "Validation of Formal, Non-formal and Informal Learning: Policy and Practices in EU Member States," by D. Colardyn and J. Bjornavold, 2004, *European Journal of Education*, 39(1).

2.4. Research gap

A critical assessment of the literature revealed a lack of understanding the learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes. Despite attention to entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial learning in the literature, much of it is focused on formal environments while in practice, entrepreneurs often learn in non-formal environments such as incubators (Levinsohn, 2015). However, incubators are rarely designed with learning in mind. Typically, phenomenographic studies are conducted in formal education environments, but there is a need to utilise the methodology outside of the education discipline (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016) as well as a need to understand conceptions of learning in different environments (Paakkari et al., 2011; Täks et al., 2016).

Recently, there have been calls for the application of learning theories in incubation research (Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014; van Weele et al., 2017) as there has been little research on learning dynamics within the context of incubation programmes (Politis et al., 2019), including how and why entrepreneurs develop their businesses while part of these programmes (Albort-Morant & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2016; Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014). Further, there are few studies that focus specifically on the learning experience of social entrepreneurs (J. Cope, 2005; Howorth et al., 2012; Levinsohn, 2015; Rivers et al., 2015). Informal learning theory is well-suited in situations where individuals can influence how and what they learn (Marsick, 2009), highlighting its applicability in studying the learning process of social entrepreneurs within incubators. Though informal learning is beneficial in contexts with resource constraints as it can aid in the development of knowledge and skills in a less resource-intensive way (Cerasoli et al., 2018), it has not been adequately studied in an African context (Jeong et al., 2018). The research question and sub-questions guiding the current study are:

RQ: What are the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs experience learning within an incubator in South Africa?

SQ1: What are the structural relationships between the ways social entrepreneurs experience learning within an incubator?

SQ2: How do social entrepreneurs approach and enact learning within an incubator?

2.5. Summary of the literature review

Studies in the disciplines of informal learning, incubators, and social entrepreneurship have not adequately addressed how social entrepreneurs experience informal learning while part of an incubation programme. The current study aims to understand the qualitatively different ways in which this learning is experienced, the relationships between the varying ways of learning, and how learning is approached and enacted. The next chapter frames the research in an African context.

3. Context

Africa offers a vast yet little-explored context of study, particularly for management research. Despite its obstacles, the continent experiences high levels of entrepreneurship

and in South Africa specifically, a growing social entrepreneurship sector. Challenges in the South African education sector as well as the rise in popularity of incubation programmes offers an ideal context to study the learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes. This chapter provides more details on the current study's context.

3.1. Africa

The African continent represents 1.2 billion people with rising aspiration levels (World Bank Group, 2019), offering immense and valuable economic opportunities (George, Corbishley, Khayesi, Haas, & Tihanyi, 2016). Africa is home to the fastest growing population in the world and between now and 2050, nearly 70% of the increase in the global workforce will come from the continent (African Union Commission/OECD, 2018). The African continent is also experiencing notable economic growth as well – Africa saw the world's fastest and most sustained periods of economic growth over the last twenty years and is expected to continue, with 4% growth anticipated in 2020 (African Development Bank Group, 2019). Due to simplified procedures and a reduction in both startup and operational costs, the business environment in Africa has recently become more attractive for foreign investors (African Union Commission/OECD, 2018).

There have been many recent calls to embrace Africa as a research context as insights from the continent can bring new perspectives to management research, debates, and theories (George et al., 2016; Littlewood & Holt, 2015; Rivera-Santos et al., 2015). These insights can challenge current contextual assumptions (Rivera-Santos et al., 2015) as well as modify current theories and generate new theories and frameworks (George et al., 2016). Though the African continent serves as a rich context for gathering empirical data (George et al., 2016), African data can be difficult to collect (Rivera-Santos et al., 2015).

Africa is often discussed in conjunction with its widespread social and economic issues (Jones et al., 2018c; Rivera-Santos et al., 2015), but a strong entrepreneurial spirit and a desire for social change is seen throughout the continent (George et al., 2016). This offers unique opportunities for African social entrepreneurs (Rivera-Santos et al., 2015), but more research on social entrepreneurship in an African context is needed (Jones et al., 2018c). Despite the fact that it is more difficult to start a business in sub-Saharan Africa than in most parts of the world (Rivera-Santos et al., 2015), there is significant optimism surrounding the continent's potential (George et al., 2016).

3.1.1. Entrepreneurship in Africa

With nearly one in four people engaged in entrepreneurial activity, sub-Saharan Africa boasts the highest rate of entrepreneurship in the world (Bosma, Schøtt, Terjesen, & Kew, 2016). Sub-Saharan Africa also ranks highly in terms of entrepreneurs engaging in pure social entrepreneurship activity, and among young adults (aged 18 to 34), there are more social entrepreneurs than commercial entrepreneurs (Bosma et al., 2016). However, most entrepreneurial activity in sub-Saharan Africa is small-scale, employing few people and earning low levels of revenue (Bosma et al., 2016).

The challenges faced by those on the African continent are different than those faced in the developed world. Because of this, there is a view that entrepreneurs across Africa can relate to other entrepreneurs on the continent more easily than they can relate to entrepreneurs from developed countries. Much of this is due to the reality that in Africa you need to build a business that meets a need in daily life; novelty businesses that work in developed countries do not tend to work in developing ones. Further, the same business models that work elsewhere in the world may not work in Africa. Along the same lines, investment models need to be different as well.

However, it is a mistake to generalise only to an African context because the continent is made up of 54 distinct countries that are in many ways different from each other. Studies have found factors that contribute to entrepreneurial success do not necessarily translate across contexts (P. A. Dacin et al., 2010). While there are certain countries on the continent that face similar problems, many countries have challenges so diverse that a solution in one country may not be applicable in another. Adom and Asare-Yeboa (2016) found that in Ghana, entrepreneurs identified education as a critical success factor for their businesses, a contrast to Davidsson and Honig's (2003) findings on entrepreneurs in Sweden, where it was social capital that was the predictor of success. In their research covering 19 African countries, Rivera-Santos et al. (2015) found that African social enterprises were not only different from those in other regions but varied significantly throughout the continent as well.

Developing countries in Africa are often characterised by high poverty, corruption, government failure, and poor infrastructure, creating both challenges and opportunities for social entrepreneurs (Rivera-Santos et al., 2015). P. A. Dacin et al. (2010) posit that social entrepreneurship is more likely to occur in locations where there are a lack of institutions and where significant socioeconomic problems exist. Social entrepreneurs focus their business ideas where the development sector and for-profit enterprises meet, undertaking

projects that address social needs, create social change, and fulfil social missions (Grobbelaar, Tijssen, & Dijksterhuis, 2017; Rey-Martí, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Palacios-Marqués, 2016; Rivera-Santos et al., 2015). These types of socially innovative ideas play a substantial role in developing countries and often work in conjunction with government policies to address issues of economic development (Grobbelaar, Gwynne-Evans, & Brent, 2016). Encouraging entrepreneurial behaviour offers a way to improve systemic problems (Jones et al., 2018c) and good governance has been shown to play a key role in entrepreneurship development in Africa (Atiase, Mahmood, Wang, & Botchie, 2018). While funding and support for social entrepreneurs and the ecosystems that support them come from many recognisable global institutions such as the World Bank, World Economic Forum, Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, Skoll Foundation, Acumen, and Ashoka (Mirvis & Googins, 2018), a lack of entrepreneurial experience and expertise are current constraints to growing entrepreneurship in Africa (George et al., 2016).

Both social and commercial entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa are less educated than entrepreneurs in other regions of the world (Bosma et al., 2016). While currently limited, entrepreneurship education across the African continent is on the rise (Jones et al., 2018b). However, the development of entrepreneurial education, as well as entrepreneurial ecosystems that support entrepreneurial activity, are under-researched and emerging topics in Africa that deserve greater attention (Jones et al., 2018a) as insights from this research can inform and enhance global programme design (Jones et al., 2018b). Future research on African entrepreneurial education should focus on uncovering insights that can lead to an enhanced design of programmes customised for specific regions and communities (Jones et al., 2018b).

3.2. South Africa

African culture places a high importance on community through the communalist philosophy of ubuntu (Venter, 2004), a contrast to the individualistic tendencies seen in Western societies (Lutz, 2009; West, 2014). Ubuntu has been characterised as difficult to convey in English (West, 2014), but centres around the concept of humanness and that a person is a person through their relationships with others (Mangaliso, 2001). The concept of ubuntu is highly prevalent in South Africa and impacts many facets of everyday life, but particularly relevant to the current study is the concept of collective interdependence (Mangaliso, 2001).

3.2.1. Business environment in South Africa

Many of the current challenges in South Africa are a result of the legacy of apartheid where racial groups were required to live separately for nearly 50 years. Since the end of apartheid and the first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa's government has promised transformation and development of the country but to date has received mixed results, highlighting the limited capacity the government has in addressing its major issues (Littlewood & Holt, 2015). Specifically impacting entrepreneurs are ineffective government policies and programmes related to small businesses, high levels of bureaucracy, and burdensome labour laws (Herrington & Kew, 2018; Schwab, 2019). On the positive side, the Department of Trade and Industry established the Small Enterprise Development Agency with the aim of providing business development and support through both their network of partners and specific programmes (Herrington & Kew, 2018). However, the landscape of business in South Africa tends to be overrun by monopolies, making it difficult for small businesses to survive (Herrington & Kew, 2018). Current development indicators for South Africa can be found in Appendix A.

3.2.2. Education in South Africa

South Africa requires 9 years of compulsory education whereas comparable countries in Africa require the same or more – Nigeria requires 9 years, Ghana 11 years, and Kenya 12 years (World Bank, 2019). Developed countries typically require longer education with Canada requiring 10 years, the United Kingdom 11 years, and the United States 12 years (World Bank, 2019). In South Africa, 86% of the population completes at least primary education while 61% complete at least upper secondary education (World Bank, 2019). For many South Africans, the low-quality of secondary education they receive does not adequately prepare them for the demands of university-level education (Cliff, 1998) and only 8% of the population completes at least a bachelor's degree or equivalent (World Bank, 2019).

During apartheid, laws limited educational opportunities for black and multiracial South Africans (Swartz, Amatucci, & Marks, 2019). With apartheid only ending in 1994, many in this disadvantaged demographic have not had access to suitable education for long. Further, due to inadequate skill development, new labour markets that arose post-apartheid were largely inaccessible to black and multiracial South Africans (Swartz et al., 2019). Those who grew up in townships – designated underdeveloped areas without access to basic services – were faced with a dearth of traditional job prospects yet were never exposed

to the concept of entrepreneurship. The resulting shortage of skills and low education levels of this demographic remains a crucial developmental issue in South Africa today (Littlewood & Holt, 2015).

South Africa spent 6.2% of its gross domestic product on education in 2018, higher than other developed countries as well as other comparable countries in Africa who typically spend 5% or less (World Bank, 2019). Despite this, South Africans endure a poor quality of education which is a major barrier to increasing entrepreneurial activity in the country (Herrington & Kew, 2018). In 2018, South Africa ranked 114 out of 137 countries in terms of the quality of the education system (Schwab, 2018). However, the government has recently become concerned that formal education was failing to keep up with the country's challenges and implemented additional projects pertaining to education and vocational training programmes (Rovio-Johansson, 2017).

Though general education is ranked poorly, South Africa's quality of business schools are ranked highly at 45 out of 137 countries in 2018 (Schwab, 2018). Herrington and Kew (2018) found that 21% of early-stage entrepreneurs have received a post-secondary degree, significantly higher than the general population. Further, institutions such as the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the University of Cape Town, the Social Entrepreneurship Programme at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, and the Centre for Social Entrepreneurship and Social Economy at the University of Johannesburg all offer courses targeted at training and developing social entrepreneurs (Mirvis & Googins, 2018; Moreno & Agapitova, 2017). South Africa also ranked highly in 2018 with regard to the availability of high-quality, professional training services at 54 out of 137 countries (Schwab, 2018). Local organisations such as the Social Enterprise Academy South Africa and UnLtd South Africa as well as the pan-African organisation African Social Entrepreneurs' Network offer training specific to social entrepreneurs (Littlewood & Holt, 2015; Moreno & Agapitova, 2017).

3.2.3. Entrepreneurship in South Africa

South Africa ranked in the top 30% in terms of having an entrepreneurial culture at number 39 out of 141 countries in 2019 (Schwab, 2019). Bolstering the entrepreneurial culture is the amount of media attention focused on South African entrepreneurs which is higher than both other African nations as well as comparable countries around the world (Herrington & Kew, 2018). Early-stage entrepreneurial activity, defined as the percentage of adults age 18 to 64 who are in the process of starting or have just started a business,

reached 11% in South Africa in 2017 (Herrington & Kew, 2018). By comparison, South Africa falls between early-stage entrepreneurial activity in the developed countries of the United Kingdom at 8.4% and the United States at 13.6% (Herrington & Kew, 2018).

Entrepreneurship in developing countries is typically characterised as entrepreneurship by necessity (Haugh, 2020). However, in 2017, over 75% of early-stage South African entrepreneurs created businesses because of opportunity instead of necessity, a figure much higher than other African countries (Herrington & Kew, 2018). In South Africa, becoming an entrepreneur is widely accepted as a valid career path and because of this, most people do not view starting their own business as a big decision. Further, entrepreneurs feel that compared to developed countries, the risk of starting a business is much lower and that it is easier to make an impact in South Africa.

While participation in entrepreneurial ventures in South Africa is high, the sustainability of those ventures is poor and most entrepreneurs exit their businesses because they are unprofitable and lack funding (Herrington & Kew, 2018). South African entrepreneurs believe that finding investment is one of the largest issues entrepreneurs in the country face as there are more startups looking for investors than there are investors looking for startups, creating high competition for funding. However, research has found that the lack of access to funding in South Africa is no different than in other countries (Herrington & Kew, 2018). While South African entrepreneurs bemoan investors who listen to their pitches but still don't invest, they are less likely to take an introspective look at the reasons why. Often, investors tend to withhold investment because they believe an entrepreneur's business plan does not distinguish them from their competitors and that their market research is either inadequate or conducted poorly (Herrington & Kew, 2018). It is widely believed that money is available for South African startups, but it's not funnelling down to them (Herrington & Kew, 2018).

3.2.4. Social entrepreneurship in South Africa

Apartheid gave rise to a strong third sector and social activism in South Africa and in the last 20 years, social entrepreneurship has begun to take hold in the country (Littlewood & Holt, 2015). Social entrepreneurship in South Africa still remains an under-researched topic (Littlewood & Holt, 2015; Urban, 2008), but is receiving growing interest both internationally and locally (Littlewood & Holt, 2015).

South Africa's socioeconomic context and institutional environment shape the type of opportunities social entrepreneurs address, which are in many ways different than other

parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Littlewood & Holt, 2015). South Africa can be positioned as somewhere between a developed and developing country as it is characterised by strong formal institutions and an advanced economy yet also has a large informal economy and suffers from high levels of poverty (Littlewood & Holt, 2015). Social entrepreneurs in developing countries typically focus on providing basic needs (Littlewood & Holt, 2015) while social entrepreneurs in developed countries often address higher-order, more idealistic needs (Karanda & Toledano, 2012; Littlewood & Holt, 2015). The needs addressed by South African social entrepreneurs fall somewhere in the middle – more higher-order than in developing countries yet more basic than in developed countries (Littlewood & Holt, 2015).

Most social enterprises in South Africa are small, with an average staff of 30 people and annual income of under R300,000 (US$17,000) (Myres, Mamabolo, Mugudza, & Jankelowitz, 2018). Very few social enterprises make a profit, but when they do it is typically reinvested back into the business (Myres et al., 2018). South African social enterprises are locally focused (Karanda & Toledano, 2012; Moreno & Agapitova, 2017; Myres et al., 2018), operating in their community or province and serving approximately 100 beneficiaries per month (Myres et al., 2018). Typically, social enterprises attend to the specific societal and developmental challenges unique to the South African context (Karanda & Toledano, 2012; Moreno & Agapitova, 2017) and use cooperative relationships among the communities they serve to do so (Karanda & Toledano, 2012).

Being a social entrepreneur in South Africa can be challenging in many ways. First, it is difficult to explain what being a social enterprise means. Social entrepreneurship doesn't always have the same meaning across contexts (Karanda & Toledano, 2012) and in South Africa, social entrepreneurship is not clearly defined or used consistently in the same way (Moreno & Agapitova, 2017). Further, there is currently no legal designation for a social enterprise. Some social enterprises register as for-profit, some register as nonprofit, and some operate as a hybrid model where they register both a nonprofit and a for-profit entity (Moreno & Agapitova, 2017; Myres et al., 2018). Just under half of social enterprises choose to legally register themselves as nonprofits and one-quarter operate as for-profit (Myres et al., 2018). Those that operate as a hybrid require twice the amount of administrative work which can be a burden on startups. Currently, there is draft legislation outlining a preliminary social economy policy in South Africa. This policy is framed as an integrative one, aiming to grow and support the social economy in the country without dependence on the government (South African Economic Development Department, 2019). Part of the policy encourages the formulation of a definition of social enterprise along with tax incentives

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specific to this type of business (South African Economic Development Department, 2019), addressing two of the major challenges social entrepreneurs in South Africa face.

Another challenge facing social entrepreneurs in South Africa is access to funding and capital (Myres et al., 2018). While all entrepreneurs in South Africa face funding challenges as discussed in the previous section, social entrepreneurs find additional barriers. Social entrepreneurs feel that investors try to push social enterprises into a typical for-profit model where the focus is on maximising profits and because investment is hard to come by in South Africa, it can be difficult for social entrepreneurs to stay true to their values. Many social entrepreneurs also believe that investors in South Africa do not understand social impact and still expect large returns on their investment. Because of this, most investor attention and capital end up going toward traditional for-profit companies and not social enterprises. However, other aspects of the draft legislation intend to curb this issue as they focus on access to finance, access to markets, and ways to support those in the social sector who are creating innovative solutions to societal problems (South African Economic Development Department, 2019).

3.2.5. Incubation in South Africa

There is an absence of research on incubators in Africa (Mian et al., 2016) as well as little research into their effectiveness in the South African context (van Eck et al., 2018). Often, incubation programmes in developing countries replicate elements of famous programmes from developed countries when designing their programmes (Roberts et al., 2017). However, entrepreneurs, their startups, and the ecosystems that support them are different in developing countries (Roberts et al., 2017) and programmes should be customised to suit the local context.

Global trends coupled with national development priorities have led to an active and growing incubation sector in South Africa with nearly 150 organisations supporting entrepreneurs in 2017 (van Eck et al., 2018). South Africa's government has recently made funding available to any programme that creates employment and/or makes progress against social transformation objectives (van Eck et al., 2018). Inadvertently, this has led to confusion in the country in terms of definitional clarity of different types of incubators. In a study on the incubation space in South Africa, van Eck et al. (2018) found that 20% define themselves as incubators, 10% as accelerators and 30% as a hybrid between incubators and accelerators. However, discussions revealed that, for example, an entity may market

itself as an incubator in order to attract funding even though they do not actually consider themselves to be an incubator (van Eck et al., 2018).

There are varying models of incubation in South Africa and the source of an incubator's funding often impacts the model and how the programmes are executed (van Eck et al., 2018). Funding sources include government, academia, global or local corporates, and global or local nonprofits. Additionally, some incubators operate as local hubs within a larger global incubator network and others operate as self-funded independent businesses. Donor-funded incubators are the most common model in South Africa (van Eck et al., 2018). Nearly all incubators provide space, resources, and a network, but some provide outright funding or take an investment in the startup. Approximately one-third of incubators in South Africa provide funding (van Eck et al., 2018).

Programme length ranges considerably in South Africa, from as short as a few weeks to as long as a few years (van Eck et al., 2018). Most programmes are conducted fully on site at the incubator, though some make use of rotating venues. Many participants attend all activities in hopes of getting the most out of the programme; however, some do not find value in certain activities and choose not to attend.

Though incubator programmes in South Africa vary, many have similar elements. Most incubator programmes begin with educational content delivered in the form of in-person lectures, online modules, physical materials, templates, and/or checklists. Some programmes present content up front via modules while others have designed a curriculum to last throughout the programme. If all content is delivered early on, participants are typically required to attend daily sessions; sessions are generally weekly when content is spread throughout the programme. Content is often supplemented with deliverables in the form of homework or tasks to aid in accountability. Further aiding in accountability are formal group check-ins, occurring daily, weekly, or monthly. Some programmes offer weekly office hours with incubator managers or staff as well.

In addition to content, most incubator programmes offer sessions with industry experts. Talks are given by experts in various fields, including those in corporate and academia in addition to entrepreneurial peers running successful startups. Incubators who keep in touch with their programme alumni often invite them back to speak to a new cohort of participants. Additionally, participants are connected to others in the incubator's network through various networking events, workshops, and one-on-one meetings. Incubator networks include local, pan-African, and global ecosystem players, investors, and corporates. Most incubator programmes in South Africa also have a focus on pitching,

training participants throughout the course of the programme on how to present their business. The training typically culminates in a Demo Day where members of the community and/or investors are invited to watch participants pitch their business.

Another element nearly all incubator programmes have in common is pairing participants with mentors. Some programmes have one mentor for all participants while others have multiple mentors. Incubators in developing countries continuously struggle to recruit mentors for their programmes (Roberts et al., 2017) and mentorship remains a challenge in South Africa as there are too few entrepreneurs who are able to provide this type of guidance (Herrington & Kew, 2018). Though business advisors are often used as mentors, they do not have the right skills and experience nor the right training to give advice to entrepreneurs (Herrington & Kew, 2018). In addition to business advice, mentors in South Africa often need to provide soft skills as well as personal support (van Eck et al., 2018). Specifically for social entrepreneurs, access to support and advisory services is particularly challenging (Myres et al., 2018).

Incubators attempt to distinguish themselves through unique elements including entrepreneur support groups, in-house shared specialists, individual success managers, and free accommodation. Though not common to all incubation programmes, some provide free services such as legal, marketing, and public relations. Given the variation in models, incubators tend to develop their own unique cultures.

One of the largest benefits and biggest draws of participation in incubation programmes in South Africa is the ability to leverage the incubator's name and reputation. Acceptance rate into programmes in the country is low, with the more prestigious programmes accepting less than 1% of applicants. Being accepted into any programme increases visibility for a startup and gives both investors and clients confidence in the business's abilities. In South Africa, just 6% of incubators consider themselves to target their programmes only to social impact ventures (van Eck et al., 2018) and for social entrepreneurs who are applying to programmes whose focus isn't solely on social entrepreneurship, the selection process becomes more difficult as they are seen as an underdog. If social entrepreneurs are accepted into a mixed cohort incubation programme, they are sometimes pushed to maximise profits, resulting in challenging conversations about having a social mission as the focus. Further, social goals and values are not always discussed in mixed incubation programmes, so social entrepreneurs need to reflect on how to implement the learning specifically for their mandate.

3.3. Summary of the context

Though less commonly studied, research in an African context can provide valuable insights. Particularly in South Africa, a strong entrepreneurial culture, a unique positioning of social entrepreneurs, a growing incubation sector, and challenges in the formal education system make for an atypical combination. However, this combination makes South Africa well-suited to pursue research on the informal learning of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes. The next chapter will outline the use of phenomenography to explore the research question and sub-questions.

4. Research design and methodology

Phenomenography is an interpretivist research method that provides a collective way of viewing differing experiences of the same phenomenon. In the current study, that phenomenon is social entrepreneurs' experience of informal learning within incubation programmes. This chapter provides an overview of phenomenography, including seminal phenomenographic studies, before detailing the sampling and data collection process utilised in the current study. Matters of ethics and trustworthiness are also addressed.

4.1. Phenomenography

Interpretive research emphasises that reality is socially constructed and subjective (Bøllingtoft & Ulhøi, 2005) while seeking to understand how people experience a phenomenon or an aspect of that subjective reality (Lamb et al., 2011). Because the current study focuses on understanding how social entrepreneurs experience learning within incubators in South Africa, it requires an interpretive, qualitative research design, allowing for the generation of rich, contextual data (Marsick, 2009). This type of research design enables the variation and complexity of learning experiences to become accessible to the researcher (J. Cope & Watts, 2000).

As the current study sought to explore the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs experience learning, it used phenomenography as the research approach. Phenomenography supports the notion that multiple, diverse interpretations of reality exist, therefore fitting into an interpretivist paradigm (Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013) and aligning with the view of the current study.

Phenomenography is fundamentally a research orientation, but the inclusion of characteristics of method allows it also to be viewed as a research approach (Svensson,

1997). Indeed, many scholars refer to it as a research approach (Arden, 2017; Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Durden, 2018; Marton, 1986; Pang, 2003; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013), though it has also been referred to in many other ways such as a method, a methodology, a paradigm, a specialisation, and a perspective (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Lamb et al., 2011; Marton, 1986; Neuman, 1997; Tight, 2016b).

Phenomenography began as empirical education research in the 1970s, developed by Ference Marton and colleagues in Sweden (Harris, 2011b; Larsson & Holmström, 2007). Though not explicitly stated, it has been theorised that they drew inspiration from Gestalt psychology and Husserlian phenomenology when developing phenomenography (Harris, 2011b, 2011a). Phenomenography operates in the same domain as phenomenology, namely understanding the "concrete, existential, descriptive, and un-abstracted experiences of humans" (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016, p. 151). However, the two methods diverge in that phenomenology aims to understand the essence of a phenomenon while phenomenography uncovers the variation in how people experience a phenomenon (Sjöström & Dahlgren, 2002; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013).

Phenomenography's original purpose was to investigate, from a learner's perspective, learning in a formal education setting (Arden, 2017; Marton, 1986; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013). The aim of phenomenography is to "reveal the qualitatively different ways in which people experience and conceptualize various phenomena in the world around them" (Marton, Dall'alba, & Beaty, 1993, p. 278). This type of qualitative study will allow for the generation of rich information that can serve as a foundation in which future qualitative and quantitative measures can be built (Harris, 2011b; Marsick, 2009; Terjesen et al., 2016).

Phenomenography focuses on the qualitatively different ways of understanding a phenomenon (Larsson & Holmström, 2007; Marton et al., 1993; Neuman, 1997; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013; Svensson, 1997). Prior research has found that there are a limited number of qualitatively different ways in which any phenomenon can be understood, now a central assumption in phenomenographic research (Brew, 2001; Marton, 1986; Neuman, 1997; Röing, Holmström, & Larsson, 2018; Rovio-Johansson & Ingerman, 2016; Säljö, 1997; Tight, 2016b). The number of ways of understanding a phenomenon differs depending on the phenomenon, but often ranges from three to seven (Röing et al., 2018; Tight, 2016b). The role of the researcher is to uncover, define, and map these qualitatively different ways of understanding into conceptions (Brew, 2001; Rovio-Johansson & Ingerman, 2016). Eventually, conceptions form an outcome space, the end result of

phenomenographic research based on the logically interrelated conceptions from the research (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998; Marton, 1986; Svensson, 1997).

Figure 4 presents a high-level overview of the phenomenographic research design utilised in the current study. Data was collected through interviews as described in section 4.6. and transcribed verbatim as described in section 5.1.1. Transcriptions were interpreted and coded inductively, outlined in section 5.1.2. Interpretations were distilled into conceptions as discussed in section 5.1.3. These conceptions represent the qualitatively different ways social entrepreneurs experience learning within an incubator in South Africa, answering the research question. The final step in the phenomenographic analysis process visualised the outcome space, depicting how social entrepreneurs approach and enact learning within an incubator and answering the first research sub-question. The conceptions and elements of the outcome space were then combined to form a model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes, showing the structural relationships between the ways social entrepreneurs experience learning within an incubator and answering the second research sub-question.
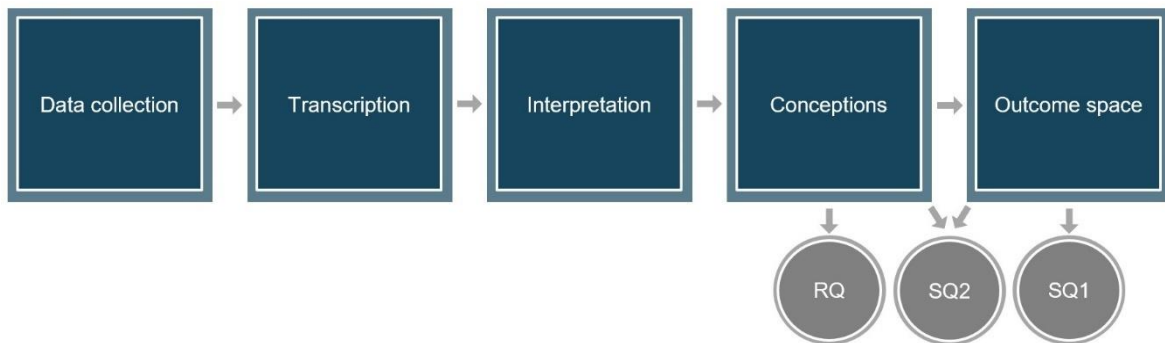
Figure 4. Phenomenographic research design utilised in the current study.

4.2. Research paradigm

In early work on phenomenography, Marton (1981) discussed two differing perspectives of the world: first-order and second-order. In the first-order perspective, "we orient ourselves towards the world and make statements about it" (Marton, 1981, p. 178). In the second-order perspective, the orientation shifts to people's ideas or experiences of the world; this is the aim of phenomenography, to make statements about how people experience aspects of the world (Marton, 1981). Marton (1981) argues that the descriptions obtained from a second-order perspective are unique and cannot simply be derived from descriptions attained using a first-order perspective.

Furthering his thoughts on phenomenography in a later publication, Marton (1986) positions phenomenography as an attempt to illustrate how phenomena appear to people and not merely a description of phenomena as they are. It is the "*relations* that exist between human beings and the world around them" that is the point of departure in phenomenography (Marton, 1986, p. 31).

Because phenomenography began as an empirical research tradition, it was not derived or deduced from a system of philosophical assumptions (Svensson, 1997). The assumptions and ideas specific to the empirical research come before any ontological or epistemological beliefs (Svensson, 1997). However, in the 1990s, various debates about phenomenography led to numerous discussions and advancements regarding its theoretical foundations and philosophical assumptions (Åkerlind, 2012, 2017; Entwistle, 1997; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013; Svensson, 1997).

Svensson (1997) described phenomenography as having "its own ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions with inspiration from and similarities to several older and concomitant traditions, without agreeing entirely with any of those" (p. 159). While earlier articles on phenomenography did not discuss any specific ontological assumptions (Svensson, 1997), it was later established that phenomenography operates on a non-dualistic ontology, observing the person and the world in relation to each other (Neuman, 1997; Pang, 2003; Sjöström & Dahlgren, 2002; Yates et al., 2012). In a dualist ontology, as is typically expressed in positivist paradigms, the person and the world are viewed as two distinct entities and not in relation to each other (Yates et al., 2012). Although Marton (1986) did discuss the phenomenographic focus on the relational aspect between the person and the world, he did not make any clear ontological statements.

The notion of conceptions has remained fundamental to phenomenography's epistemological assumptions. Svensson (1997) put forth that knowledge is relational and created "through thinking about external reality" (p. 165). He drew parallels between hermeneutics, mentioning that knowledge in phenomenography depends on both context and perspective and posited that "conceptions are the central form of knowledge" (Svensson, 1997, p. 171). While conceptions are bolstered by detailed descriptions and can stand on their own, the significance of the conceptions comes in describing the similarities and differences between them (Svensson, 1997). Descriptions in phenomenography are fundamental to knowledge about conceptions and this knowledge is "based on differentiation, abstraction, reduction and comparison of meaning" (Svensson, 1997, p. 171). Pang (2003) argues that with a non-dualist ontology, the epistemological stance becomes

grounded in intentionality with phenomenography striving to "describe the qualitatively different ways of experiencing various phenomenon" (p. 145). Sjöström and Dahlgren (2002) further state that while there are differences in the way in which people experience the world, people are capable of describing and understanding these differences.

4.3. Seminal phenomenographic studies

Phenomenographic studies are commonly conducted in formal learning environments (see: Entwistle, 1997; Marton et al., 1993; Marton & Svensson, 1979; Säljö, 1979a; Svensson, 2016), with most research residing in the education discipline (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016). In early work on phenomenography, Marton (1986) stated that results in phenomenography "though originating from a contextual understanding, are decontextualized and hence may prove useful in contexts other than the one being studied" (p. 34). Because of this, it has been shown that conceptions of learning in formal environments are generally universal (Boulton-Lewis, Marton, Lewis, & Wilss, 2004; Marshall, Summers, & Woolnough, 1999) and studying conceptions of learning in different contexts merely enriches the results (Dahlin & Regmi, 1997; Mugler & Landbeck, 1997). That is to say, in phenomenographic studies, the learning context of a formal learning environment holds constant with changes to the geographic and cultural contexts resulting in minor variations in conceptions, allowing the conclusion to be drawn that formal learning conceptions derived in one context will likely be applicable in another context. Mugler and Landbeck (1997) point to the pervasiveness of Western-style formal education as a factor in finding recognisable conceptions of formal learning globally, with cultural and geographical factors emphasising or backgrounding certain aspects of the conceptions.

In one of the earliest studies of its kind, Säljö explored conceptions of learning among a group of students (Säljö, 1979a). The results established five qualitatively different ways in which students experienced learning: (1) the increase of knowledge, (2) memorising, (3) acquisition of facts, procedures etc., which can be retained and/or utilised in practice, (4) abstraction of meaning, and (5) an interpretative process aimed at the understanding of reality (Säljö, 1979b). Since that ground-breaking study, numerous studies have replicated the results, showing the comprehensiveness of Säljö's work in uncovering the different ways in which students learn in formal education environments (Marton et al., 1993).

Marton et al.'s (1993) seminal study on conceptions of student learning in an academic setting is often used as means of comparison for other phenomenographic studies. Their study extended the work of Säljö (1979b) by adding a sixth conception –

changing as a person. Marton et al.'s (1993) conceptions of learning are (1) increasing one's knowledge, (2) memorising and reproducing, (3) applying, (4) understanding, (5) seeing something in a different way, and (6) changing as a person. Table 1 shows a comparison of the conceptions found by Säljö (1979b) and Marton et al. (1993).

Conception (1), increasing one's knowledge, is characterised by its vagueness and is seen as a general description of learning where information is consumed (Marton et al., 1993). Conception (2), memorising and reproducing, positions the consumption of learning material as a process of repetition with the goal of replication of that learning material. Conception (3), applying, typically pairs with conception (1), increasing one's knowledge, as it is the knowledge acquired and described in conception (1) that is discussed as being applied in practice through conception (3) (Marton et al., 1993). Conception (4), understanding, marks a turning point from the prior conceptions as it focuses on the learner developing meaning from the learning instead of viewing learning as an object to be acquired and utilised (Marton et al., 1993). In this conception, the learner examines their relationship to learning (Marton et al., 1993). Conception (5), seeing something in a different way, is similar to the previous conception in that the learner's view has changed, but differs in that it moves beyond merely understanding something differently to taking action and changing the way you see something; one has acquired more knowledge about something and it now appears differently (Marton et al., 1993). Conception (6), changing as a person, which was first described in Marton et al.'s (1993) study, exemplifies that once one begins to see the world differently, they change as a person as well (Marton et al., 1993).

Table 1

Seminal Conceptions of Learning

	Säljö	Marton, Dall'alba and Beaty
(1)	The increase of knowledge	Increasing one's knowledge
(2)	Memorising	Memorising and reproducing
(3)	Acquisition of facts, procedures etc., which can be retained and/or utilised in practice	Applying
(4)	Abstraction of meaning	Understanding
(5)	An interpretative process aimed at the understanding of reality	Seeing something in a different way
(6)	-	Changing as a person

Note. Conceptions of learning from seminal phenomenographic studies. Conceptions from "Learning in the Learner's Perspective. I. Some Common-sense Conceptions" by R. Säljö, Reports from the Department of Education, University of Göteborg, No. 76; "Conceptions of Learning" by F. Marton, G. Dall'alba, and E. Beaty, 1993, *International Journal of Educational Research*, 19.

4.4. Unit and level of analysis

Phenomenography studies a phenomenon as experienced by a group of people focusing on the "variation of people's ways of understanding or conceptualising the phenomenon, that is, the different ways the phenomenon with its different aspects appear to people" (Larsson & Holmström, 2007, p. 62). Given the focus on one phenomenon, it is imperative that the phenomenon is clearly defined by the researcher so that participants are describing the same phenomenon during the data collection process (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Neuman, 1997). In the current study, the phenomenon explored was social entrepreneurs' experience of learning within an incubator.

In phenomenography, a conception is the unit of analysis (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Pang, 2003) as the methodology focuses on the varying perceptions of a phenomenon and not the phenomenon itself (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016). A conception is "often used to refer to ways of making sense of a phenomenon in the world" (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013, p. 2). The variation, or range, of conceptions represent the qualitatively different ways participants experience the phenomenon of study (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Rovio-Johansson, 2017).

The range of meanings is analysed at the collective group level; though data are gathered at the individual level as the starting point, they are used to build the collective

experience and are not meant to be analysed in isolation (Åkerlind, 2012; Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Harris, 2011b; Yates et al., 2012). Therefore, the level of analysis in the current study was the collective group of social entrepreneurs interviewed.

4.5. Population and sample

Fundamental to a phenomenographic research approach is the requirement of participants to have experienced the phenomenon under study (Svensson, 2016; Yates et al., 2012). Purposive sampling is a sampling technique that allows the researcher to select participants who are known to have experienced the phenomenon under study (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Because phenomenography focuses on differences (Larsson & Holmström, 2007; Marton et al., 1993; Neuman, 1997; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013; Svensson, 1997), researchers must aim to obtain a range of experiences in order to maximise variation (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Lamb et al., 2011; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013). To do so, selecting participants who have different 'life-worlds', and therefore likely differing experiences of the phenomenon, is encouraged (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013).

4.5.1. Social entrepreneurs

When it comes to social entrepreneurship research, there is often a lack of accessible information about social enterprises, adding to the work required to identify these entities (Rivera-Santos et al., 2015). Further, Seelos and Mair (2005) found that social entrepreneurs often do not identify themselves as such and instead view themselves as being the same as their commercial counterparts. Therefore, it was important to adhere to the definition of social entrepreneurs outlined in section 2.3.1. when identifying research participants instead of solely relying on self-identification. In the current study, purposive sampling was used to select participants (social entrepreneurs) who attended different incubation programmes in different cities across South Africa with the intent of maximising the variation in experiences of learning.

Though the exact number of participants in a phenomenographic study varies in the literature, Stenfors-Hayes et al. (2013) suggest that sufficient information can typically be collected from 10-30 participants, aligning closely with Åkerlind (2012) and Tight (2016a) who both mention approximately 20 participants. The current study used purposive sampling to select 20 participants in total, with participant demographics found in Appendix B. This sampling method produced the necessary variation in experiences of learning

across geographies, incubators, and social entrepreneurs. Further detail on saturation is discussed in section 4.6.2.

Potential participants were identified through a mix of incubator managers, the researcher's personal network, referrals, networking at pitch events, reading online news articles, and browsing through incubator websites. Over 100 social entrepreneurs were contacted from November 2018 to March 2019 as detailed in Appendix C. Contact was often through email or an online form but was also attempted via phone, social media platforms, and WhatsApp. Given the high failure rate of startups in South Africa, many attempts at initial contact were met with bounced emails and disconnected phone numbers. Most messages were never answered, though a handful of responses declining participation were received. Those who responded and were willing to participate were screened to ensure that they fit the definition of a social entrepreneur, that they had in fact completed at least one incubation programme in South Africa, and that they were comfortable reading, writing, and speaking in English. Details of how each of the 20 participants for the current study were found are outlined in Appendix B.

Because phenomenography analyses data at the collective group level (Åkerlind, 2012; Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Harris, 2011b; Yates et al., 2012), characteristics of individuals are not of importance. However, phenomenography requires a diverse sample and because of this, details of the sample will be discussed briefly here with additional detail found in Appendix B.

The sample in the current study represents 20 social entrepreneurs who attended programmes from 17 different South African incubators. Though 16 participants are now based in Cape Town, only eight are originally from the city. In total, participants represent six South African cities across five provinces as well as four countries outside of South Africa. White males led the sample at eight, followed by four black males, three black females, two multiracial males, two multiracial females, and one white female. Participants varied in age from their 20s to 50s. Participants also varied in their business stage with some entering incubation with only an idea while others were already earning revenue. Additionally, some participants were serial entrepreneurs while others were starting their first entrepreneurial venture. The businesses participants entered incubation with were commonly focused on education, financial services, healthcare, and volunteering, with other sectors of science, youth empowerment, tourism, and communications represented as well.

Education background of the participants varied significantly. Some participants were highly educated from a formal standpoint with PhD and master's degrees. Many had

been exposed to business concepts through their tertiary education with some participants specifically studying entrepreneurship. There were also a handful of participants who studied other business-adjacent fields such as finance, engineering, computer science, and information science. A few participants with high levels of education had no business background and instead were trained scientists, studying genetics and biochemistry. Contrarily, there were participants who only had basic secondary education which did not include any business education. Those who grew up in township areas during apartheid were educated using the Bantu system which forced blacks into education of lower quality than what was received in white or private schools. Though the system no longer formally exists, its legacy remains and a few participants in the current study were recipients of this type of primary and secondary education.

During their years of formal education, participants represented two extreme types of students. Some participants loved school and considered themselves academics. They were intelligent, graduated at the top of their class, and were usually considered favourite students by their teachers. On the contrary, other participants were troublemakers. Some only went as far as fighting against the status quo of the traditional education system. However, others were rebellious, getting into arguments and creating conflict with both teachers and fellow students. They spent time in detention, and one participant was even kicked out of school.

Participants also varied as to why they became entrepreneurs. Some participants always knew, even as children, that they would eventually become an entrepreneur. Though they did not always have an idea, they were always hustling and had the drive to create their own path. Some grew up in entrepreneurial families and were exposed to the concept of entrepreneurship and an entrepreneurial lifestyle at an early age. Some participants simply needed a change in their lives and made the decision to become an entrepreneur. This often happened because they realised that their corporate role was not meaningful, and they instead wanted to make an impact through their work. Some participants became entrepreneurs out of necessity as they needed income to survive. Others never imagined calling themselves entrepreneurs and became one by accident. This typically happened when they found an issue that needed to be addressed or a side passion project of theirs unexpectedly had potential. Other ways business ideas came to participants include while traveling, during a competition, as a convergence of life and work experience, when they sat down and brainstormed ideas for a business, and when they recognised they could solve local problems on their own and not rely on the government.

Most participants in the current study were passionate about being social entrepreneurs, notably wanting their businesses to solve a problem and have a measurable impact on society. Central to participants' values of being a social entrepreneur was their focus on people. The starting point for many participants was to help, give back to, and benefit people through their businesses and they prided themselves on being able to see the differences their businesses made in people's lives. Despite the focus on a social mission and social impact, participants recognised that they also needed to run a successful enterprise in order to fulfil their mandate. No matter how worthy their cause, they believed their business needs to be sustainable to survive, placing high importance on having the right business skills to run the venture.

4.5.2. Incubators

Focusing their efforts on the complexity of helping social ventures, incubators and accelerators that cater specifically to social entrepreneurs have begun to emerge (Casasnovas & Bruno, 2013). However, there are a limited number of these types of incubators in South Africa, with only 6% of incubator programmes fully focused on social entrepreneurs (van Eck et al., 2018). While incubators that exclusively support social entrepreneurs in South Africa were included in the current study, it was necessary to include incubators who are known to support social, inclusive, and/or sustainable ventures in addition to supporting commercial entrepreneurs in order to provide additional variation in experience and to reach a sufficient sample size of social entrepreneurs. These incubators typically understand the value placed on social impact and endeavour to find the right mentors and networks aligned to social values. Though not all incubators selected solely support social entrepreneurs, the participants selected were required to be social entrepreneurs, aligning with the definition of social entrepreneurs previously discussed in section 2.3.1.

In the current study, participants attended 17 unique incubator programmes across South Africa. Thirteen participants attended only one incubation programme, two attended two programmes, four attended three programmes, and one participant attended four incubation programmes. Because some participants attended multiple programmes, there were times of overlap in terms of speaking to participants who attended the same incubator programme, though some were in different cohorts. However, given the diversity in the participants themselves, it was observed that even if participants went through the same

programme, they had differing experiences. Appendix B includes the list of incubator programmes participants attended.

Participants joined incubation programmes while in various stages of their businesses. Some entered incubation with only an idea while others had already begun selling products or services. Ideally, those in an idea stage would join idea-focused incubation programmes and those with clients and revenue would join acceleration programmes, but that was often not the case. In many instances, entrepreneurs with ideas were selected into acceleration programmes and idea-focused incubators selected startups in various stages of business. Participants expressed sentiments of not understanding the difference between incubation and acceleration, not knowing what programmes they should apply for, and not knowing what to expect of the programmes they were accepted into due to lack of information from the incubator.

Environments observed in the incubators of study varied as well. One immediately noticeable difference was that some were lively while others were quiet. In some cases, this had to do with the number of people in the space as some incubators always had people working in them while others did not. However, in some incubators, even though they were full of people, everyone seemed to work quietly on their own. In one example, the incubator space was designed with single partitioned desks mostly along the perimeter of the room. Aside from a couch and table near reception, there was not much space designated for collaboration and in turn, though the space was nearly full during each visit, it was always quiet. In contrast, another incubator space only had long communal tables to work from with smaller private meeting rooms on the perimeter to use as needed. This space was also nearly full during each visit but was always very active.

4.6. Data collection

The data collection strategy in phenomenography must allow for a thorough reflection of each participant's experience with the phenomenon of study (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013). The primary method of data collection in phenomenography is interviews (Åkerlind, 2012; Booth, 1997; Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Marton, 1986; Rovio-Johansson, 2017; Sjöström & Dahlgren, 2002; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013; Tight, 2016b; Yates et al., 2012). Data for the current study were collected over an approximate four-month period from the end of November 2018 through mid-March 2019 as shown in Appendix C.

4.6.1. Interviews

Interviews are a common method of data collection in incubator, social entrepreneurship, and informal learning literature as well as in an African context. Eraut (2004) mentioned that the most common form of data generation in informal learning research is interviews. Chan and Lau (2005) conducted in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs, creating an assessment framework that was applied to understand the effectiveness of incubators on venture creation and business development. To understand both the concept of and challenges facing incubators in the Western Cape of South Africa, Grobbelaar et al. (2016) used structured and unstructured in-depth interviews. In a later study, Grobbelaar et al. (2017) also used interviews to uncover the generic characteristics of inclusive innovation in the Western Cape of South Africa. Weerawardena and Sullivan Mort (2006) conducted in-depth interviews to explore social entrepreneurship, with broad-focused, open-ended questions as the base for the interview, allowing for flexibility to explore key issues as they emerged. When Littlewood and Holt (2015) wanted to explore the influence of the South African environment on social entrepreneurs, they turned to interviews. Though an interview guide was created for interviews, Littlewood and Holt (2015) took a flexible approach to the interviews, allowing discussions to flow naturally. Ensuring flexibility in interviews was also imperative in conducting research for the current study.

The goal of a phenomenographic interview is to obtain "a detailed and rich encounter with the lifeworld" of each participant (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000, p. 302). This type of interview focuses on how the participant experiences the phenomenon of study and is based on creating a dialogue rather than following a question and answer format (Lamb et al., 2011; Yates et al., 2012).

Phenomenographic interviews are in-depth and open-ended (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Booth, 1997; Lamb et al., 2011; Larsson & Holmström, 2007; Marton, 1986; Yates et al., 2012). Open-ended interviews may start with a set of specific questions prepared in advance, but each interview may follow a different path depending on how the conversation is flowing, often venturing into unforeseen areas (Booth, 1997; Marton, 1986). In-depth interviews follow all lines of discussion until an understanding of the phenomenon between the interviewer and participant is reached (Booth, 1997; Sjöström & Dahlgren, 2002).

Interviews can be thought of as a "conversational partnership in which the interviewer assists a process of reflection" (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000, p. 302). The interviewer must retain focus on the phenomenon of study in order to guide the conversation through various aspects of the participant's reflection (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013). Participants are

encouraged to speak openly while providing detailed examples of their experiences (Lamb et al., 2011; Larsson & Holmström, 2007). It should be made clear that the purpose of the interview is not to find a correct answer and that it is perfectly acceptable for the participant to pause and reflect before responding or to think out loud during the interview (Sjöström & Dahlgren, 2002; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013). The researcher must listen empathetically in order to find any underlying meanings, interpretations, and understandings that the participant may allude to (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000).

The questions asked as well as the way in which they are asked is of paramount importance to both phenomenography (Marton, 1986) and research on the subject of learning (Eraut, 2004). For the current study, participants were asked to describe their experience of learning within an incubator through examples, focusing on what learning means to them, the various methods of learning within the incubator, and how learning within an incubator may or may not be different than learning in other contexts (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2004; Täks et al., 2016). It was important to phrase questions so they focus on experience in general, referring to learning that has been accumulated over a longer duration rather than a single experience (Eraut, 2004).

Follow-up questions were necessary to ensure participants were providing as much detail, clarification, and elaboration as possible (Harris, 2011b). These follow-up questions only used terms mentioned by the participant to avoid any influence over the conversation or the participant's responses (C. Cope, 2004).   Common follow-up questions in phenomenography that were utilised in the current study include: "What exactly do you mean by that?", "Could you explain that further", and "Can you provide examples?" (Harris, 2011b; Lamb et al., 2011; Marton et al., 1993; Täks et al., 2016). To end the interview, participants were asked if there is anything else to discuss that has not been explored yet (Zygmont & Naidoo, 2018). A list of questions that guided the interview discussion is shown in Figure 5.
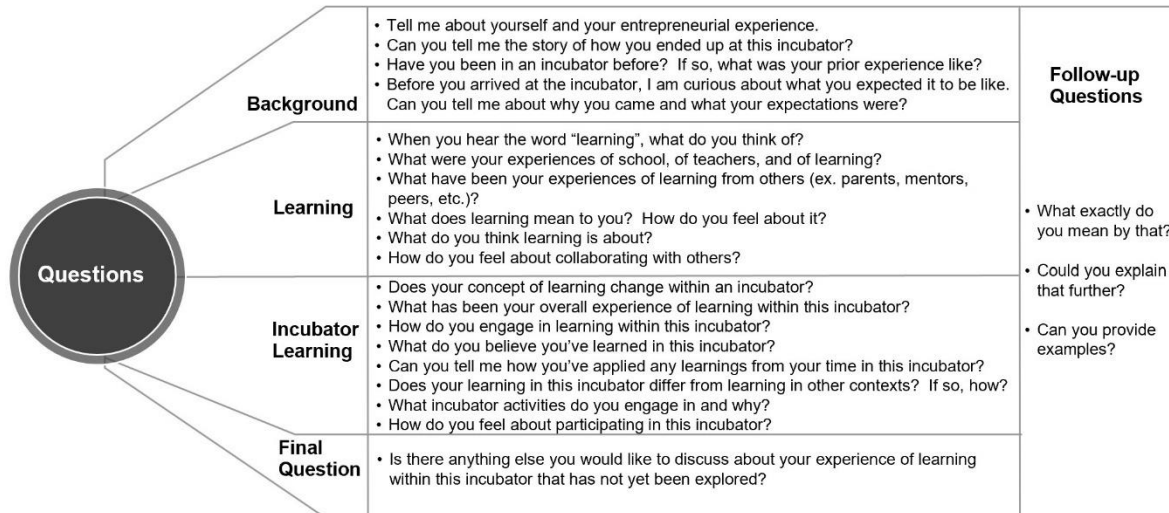
Figure 5. Questions to guide interviews.

For the current study, all interviews were conducted in English as it is the global language of business and is the primary language spoken in each incubator. English is also one of the official languages of South Africa. The location of the interviews varied as each participant was given the opportunity to choose the location that suited them best. Most interviews took place either on site at the social entrepreneurs' workspace or at a local coffee shop. On average, each interview lasted 48 minutes, but varied from as succinct as 27 minutes to as long as 91 minutes to allow for discussions to unfold. Participants were open in sharing their thoughts; it seemed as though for most, no one had ever asked them about their incubator experience before and they were interested in discussing it. Further, entrepreneurship can be a lonely experience with few people to speak with and participants seemed to welcome the opportunity to talk about their business and their experience with someone else. As the methodology suggests an open-ended approach to interviews, participants could, and often did, speak openly and freely. Each social entrepreneur was interviewed once, for a total of 20 interviews across the collective group of study.

Interviews were recorded using a recording device. In order to be present in the conversation, no notes were taken during the interview. However, a few lines of high-level observational notes about the interview were captured once the conversation was over and the participant had left. Notes mainly focused on the quality of the discussion, the participant's overall sentiments toward topics of discussion, and any aspects that stood out during the interview. Interviews were not transcribed until the full sample of 20 participants was reached and saturation was deemed to have occurred.

4.6.2. Saturation

As phenomenographic analysis does not commence until all data are generated (Åkerlind, 2012), there are no discussions in the literature surrounding saturation. However, the current study took an informal approach to saturation, with the researcher assuming saturation occurred when conversations with participants were no longer uncovering new experiences of learning (Booth, 1997; Marton, 1986; Täks et al., 2016). This informal approach was employed once a minimum sample size of 15 participants was reached to ensure alignment with sample sizes in conducting phenomenographic research (Åkerlind, 2012; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013; Tight, 2016a). For the current study, saturation was deemed to have occurred once 20 participants were interviewed. Though every participant had a unique story and perspective, after 20 participants, discussions began to sound similar. After the interview with participant 20 was completed, all interviews were transcribed, and the data analysis commenced, discussed in detail in chapter 5. Because the initial data analysis phase requires the researcher to keep an open mind about conceptions of the phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2012; Durden, 2018), it was not appropriate to consider additional interviews after the data analysis process was started.

4.7. Ethical considerations

In phenomenographic research, ethical issues arise due to its comprehensive nature. Informed consent statements were developed and reviewed with each participant. These statements contained detailed information on the purpose of the study, what information participants would be asked to provide, the time commitment expected of participants, and contact details of the researcher and supervisor. Details can be found in Appendix D. This process aided in avoiding any assumptions or misunderstandings between the researcher and participants. Participants were required to sign their informed consent to partake in the interview and have the interview recorded. As previously discussed, all interviews were conducted in English. It is a requirement of each incubator programme that its participants are fluent in English, but participants in the current study were asked to confirm their ability to read, write, and speak English on a scale of one to five before interviews began. Any participant who ranked their ability below a three would not be able to continue with the interview process, but no participants ranked themselves below a five in any category. As the interviews unfolded, it was clear that none of the participants struggled in any way to speak or comprehend English. Before each interview, participants

were reminded that their participation is voluntary and they could stop the interview at any time they wish (Rovio-Johansson, 2017). No harm occurred to any participant and no incentives for participation were given.

All participants in the current study were guaranteed anonymity; social entrepreneurs will not be able to be identified based on any of their interview quotations or any subsequent written text based on those quotations (Rovio-Johansson, 2017). Because phenomenographic results are viewed at a collective level and not as individual transcripts (Åkerlind, 2012; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013; Tight, 2016b), names were not included in any discussion of results. Any quotations used from interviews were not attributed to a specific person, organisation, or incubator, as these attributes were removed in an early stage of the data analysis process as discussed in the next chapter. Data collected for the current study has been stored electronically on a flash drive, a computer, and in the cloud, all of which are password protected for security.

4.8. Trustworthiness

Sandbergh (1997) stated that phenomenographic researchers must show how they have both controlled and checked interpretations during the entire research process. This should be done at every stage, beginning with the formulation of the research question and ending with the reporting of results (Sandbergh, 1997). In between, a researcher must explain and justify participant selection, the data collection process, and the data interpretation process (Sandbergh, 1997). The current study employed the concept of reflexivity to fully document any preconceptions at each stage in the research process and outline how those preconceptions were minimised (Sin, 2010). A timeline of the full research process is outlined in Appendix C.

The process of participant selection was fully documented and detailed previously in section 4.5. to show there was no bias in selecting participants (C. Cope, 2004). Further, the wide range of participants selected across multiple contexts helped to reduce any unintentional researcher bias, as any preconceptions were not strong enough to suppress the diversity and randomness in the responses (Eraut, 2004). Additional details about participant demographics can be found in Appendix B.

Interviews were designed to be in-depth and open-ended, allowing conversations to follow different paths depending on the lines of discussion (Booth, 1997; Marton, 1986; Sjöström & Dahlgren, 2002). However, a list of interview questions that guided the conversations has been outlined in Figure 5. Before interviews commenced, participants

were required to sign their informed consent to both partake in the interview and have the interview recorded. The consent forms can be found in Appendix D. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to reflect that there was no bias in the data collection process (C. Cope, 2004). Further, participants were encouraged to fully describe and articulate their experiences, adding to communicative validity (Lamb et al., 2011). Follow-up questions dove further into a participant's experience, ensuring there were no artificial answers and adding to pragmatic validity (Lamb et al., 2011). Further details of the interview process were previously discussed in section 4.6.1.

Codes used in the analysis process were derived directly from the data using the participant's own words (Harris, 2011b). No pre-existing conceptions were formulated or utilised in the analysis process; instead, they were derived from the multiple iterations of reviewing all transcripts (Harris, 2011b). All transcripts were treated as equally important during the analysis process (Lamb et al., 2011). The final conceptions were justified by using specific passages from the transcripts (Harris, 2011b; Sjöström & Dahlgren, 2002), ensuring interpretations were grounded in participants' experiences (Lamb et al., 2011). Details of the transcription and coding process are found in upcoming section 5.1. and quotations supporting the final conceptions are found throughout Chapter 6. Appendix E lists all code categories derived from the analysis process.

Some scholars believe that replication of an outcome space is necessary while others believe it is both unlikely and unnecessary (C. Cope, 2004). Marton (1986) argues that there are two issues at hand when discussing replication in phenomenography. The first issue deals with the process of discovery and questioning whether others, without prior knowledge of conceptions, would find the same conceptions when conducting the study for the first time (Marton, 1986). In response, Marton (1986) posits that the original process of finding conceptions is similar to inventing an experiment and researchers are not expected to independently invent the same experiment. The second issue focuses on recognition of conceptions, questioning whether others would recognise the conceptions in the data once they are aware of the conceptions (Marton, 1986). This type of replicability is reasonable to expect in phenomenography as once an experiment has been invented, it should be able to produce similar results regardless of context (Marton, 1986). Therefore, the conceptions do not have to be replicable without prior knowledge of their existence, however, other researchers must be able to agree on the presence or absence of the identified conceptions in the data (Marton, 1986; Sjöström & Dahlgren, 2002). Sandbergh (1997) calls the concept of other researchers' ability to recognise conceptions interjudge reliability. Since there can

be situations with several valid interpretations of the same data, Åkerlind (2012) suggests that researchers must be able to persuasively argue for their particular interpretation. Details of the data interpretation process are found in upcoming section 5.1.2. and justification for the conceptions is in 5.1.3.

As interpretation of results is done at the collective level in phenomenography (Åkerlind, 2012; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013; Tight, 2016b), it is not appropriate to seek feedback from participants as a method of validation as an individual interview cannot be removed from the collective interpretation of all interviews (C. Cope, 2004). Further, phenomenography seeks to understand how a participant experiences the phenomenon of study at a particular point in time (Åkerlind, 2012); there is no guarantee that returning to a participant at a later date to validate an interpretation will yield the same understanding of their experience as when the interview was conducted (C. Cope, 2004).

4.8.1. Bracketing

There are mixed opinions in the literature about how researchers' views are handled in phenomenography. While some scholars discuss bracketing one's views during analysis (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998, 2000; Sin, 2010), others have the opposite opinion and discuss allowing a researcher's views to have some level of influence on the data (Åkerlind, 2012; C. Cope, 2004; Svensson, 1997).

Ashworth and Lucas (1998) believe phenomenography must be "grounded in the lived experience of its research participants" (p. 417). Because of this, they argue, it is important that the researcher bracket their own views and become immersed in the lifeworld of the participant. They believe that researchers must be open to differing views, setting aside personal presumptions, concerns, or judgements, as well as assume an imaginative and empathetic position in understanding the participant's understanding of their experience (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). Other scholars believe a researcher's views are an important part of phenomenographic analysis, with Svensson (1997) stating descriptions depend on the perspective of the researcher and C. Cope (2004) stating that a researcher's background is an essential part of establishing a relationship with the data.

Åkerlind (2012) takes a mild approach to predetermined views, stating that one must keep an open mind while conducting phenomenographic analysis. Sin (2010) discusses reflexivity as another way to deal with preconceptions during phenomenographic research. Reflexivity goes beyond merely identifying preconceptions at the outset of research; at each stage in the research process, researchers document their preconceptions and outline how

they've been able to minimise their influence (Sin, 2010). Readers are then able to judge for themselves how the researcher has managed their preconceptions (Sin, 2010).

The current study aligned with Åkerlind's (2012) view in keeping an open mind while analysing data and used Sin's (2010) concept of reflexivity. These stances avoided the extreme position of bracketing while still remaining open to any unforeseen outcomes that phenomenography might uncover (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998, 2000). The prior sections of this chapter, Chapter 4, outlined and discussed all processes undertaken in the sampling and data collection stages. Chapter 5 will outline and discuss all processes undertaken in the data analysis stage.

4.9. Summary of the research design

Phenomenography, originally designed to investigate formal education from the learner's perspective, was used in the current study to investigate the learning of social entrepreneurs within the non-formal environment of incubators. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 social entrepreneurs in South Africa who collectively attended 17 different incubation programmes. The next chapter, Chapter 5, will detail the phenomenographic data analysis process.

5. Data analysis

The current study resulted in a detailed account of the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs in South Africa experience informal learning while part of an incubation programme. Eight conceptions of learning were identified, helping to answer the research question and sub-questions. As shown in Appendix C, the data analysis process began with transcribing interviews from mid-March to mid-April 2019, continued with the data interpretation and conception identification until the end of July 2019, and finished at the end of August 2019 with the outcome space development. This chapter provides details of the analysis process.

5.1. Phenomenographic analysis

Even though people can experience the same phenomenon and perceive it in different ways and in different circumstances, phenomenography offers a collective way to view the experience of that phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2012). The output of a phenomenographic analysis represents, for the collective sample group, the range of possible experiences of the phenomenon of study (Åkerlind, 2012). Until the

phenomenographic analysis is complete, the researcher has no way of knowing the extent of this range of experiences (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013).

Phenomenographic data analysis does not dictate precise steps and rules that must be adhered to, but rather provides guidelines for researchers (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Marton, 1986; Yates et al., 2012). Phenomenographic analysis is tedious, laborious, and iterative (Marton, 1986). During the analysis process, data are interpreted to produce categories of description or conceptions (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998), the most important component of phenomenography (Marton, 1986). A researcher is required to continuously sort and re-sort data, compare data between categories, and establish and re-establish these categories (Åkerlind, 2012; Booth, 1997; Brew, 2001; Lamb et al., 2011). The result of phenomenographic analysis is an outcome space based on the internal and structural relationships that exist among the categories (Åkerlind, 2012; Röing et al., 2018; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013; Svensson, 1997).

One challenge of the data analysis phase in phenomenography is that because the analysis process does not commence until all data are collected, the researcher must consider all transcripts as one set, leading to an often impractically large amount of data that must be held in an open manner in the researcher's mind (Åkerlind, 2012). There are varying ways of dealing with this obstacle, but the most common practice is utilising an iterative process of continuously viewing the data from different perspectives and at different times (Åkerlind, 2012). This practice was used during the data analysis process of the current study and is described in detail in section 5.1.2.

5.1.1. Transcription

Verbatim interview transcripts are the starting point for phenomenographic analysis (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Booth, 1997; Marton, 1986). While transcripts must be transcribed verbatim, the emphasis in the transcription process is on ensuring accuracy in transcribing the precise words that are spoken; linguistics are not a focus in phenomenography, so it is not necessary to transcribe inflections, tonal changes, and pauses that may occur during the interview (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013).

In the current study, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to reflect that there was no bias in the data collection process (C. Cope, 2004). An attempt at self-transcription without the use of any tools proved too time consuming and cumbersome so an exploration of transcription tools commenced. Free tools by Google (Text-to-Speech) and Microsoft (Dictate) as well as a free version of professional software Express Scribe by

NCH Software were tested using one interview recording but they all showed abysmal accuracy. In terms of paid options, transcription services performed by real people were too costly, so the next available option was to research online automated audio to text transcription services. HappyScribe, Scribie, Rev, and Temi were all tested using the same audio file snippet. In the end, Temi was the most accurate while having a favoured user interface. Temi's automated transcription service was therefore used as the tool to transcribe all interviews. As background noise made it difficult to hear some participants, three interviews were edited for sound quality before being uploaded to Temi using the free audio software Audacity.

Due to factors such as sound quality, accents, and unrecognisable names, transcriptions were not fully accurate using Temi and thus required two rounds of manual editing per transcript. During the first round of editing, the recording was slowed to 70% of actual speed to capture and fix any mistakes in the transcript. Some transcripts were highly accurate during the initial transcription from Temi and only took approximately two hours to edit. However, others required closer to four hours of editing work. Further, some outside research was necessary to ensure, for example, the correct spelling of names of people and places mentioned by participants. The second round of manual transcript editing helped to polish each transcript and took approximately one to two hours per transcript. While time consuming, this allowed deep familiarity with the transcripts before the coding process commenced. In total, transcription took approximately one month, from mid-March until mid-April as noted in Appendix C. Transcripts were exported from Temi into Word documents which were then used for coding in Atlas.ti.

5.1.2. Interpretation

The researcher determines what is important in a participant's responses during data interpretation (Sjöström & Dahlgren, 2002). A helpful strategy is to think about participants' usage of words, the meaning that is implied, and the context in which they are used rather than assuming the traditional definition of words is always intended (Mugler & Landbeck, 1997). Deriving meaning from context is especially important when conducting research across cultures (Mugler & Landbeck, 1997). A similar conception may be articulated in many ways and conversely, differing concepts may be articulated using similar language (Svensson, 1997).

Phenomenographic researchers take differing approaches to interpreting transcripts, but common tactics include looking for surprises, looking for commonalities, looking for

differences, looking for complementary information, and writing summaries (Åkerlind, 2012; Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Lamb et al., 2011; Marton et al., 1993). Interpreting data in phenomenography is a process of looking for distinctive characteristics that clarify how participants define their experience (Booth, 1997; Marton, 1986; Täks et al., 2016). Early-stage readings of transcripts require the researcher to keep an open mind about all possible conceptions of the phenomenon while subsequent late-stage readings become more focused on identified criteria (Åkerlind, 2012; Durden, 2018).

During phenomenographic analysis, transcripts are read multiple times (Booth, 1997; Lamb et al., 2011). When reviewing the transcripts, the researcher looks for quotations in the text that relate to the phenomenon of study (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013). The researcher marks these statements of interest, interprets them based on the context in which they were mentioned, and attempts to piece together a total meaning of the phenomenon according to the participant's experience (Booth, 1997; Marton, 1986). These selected quotations then become extracted from the individual and combined into one pool of data (Booth, 1997; Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Marton, 1986).

In the current study, each transcript was first loaded into Atlas.ti. Because the transcription process required two rounds of manual editing as described in the previous section, there was already deep and recent familiarity with each of the transcripts. Therefore, only one additional round of reading each transcript was conducted before coding commenced. After coding the first few transcripts, feedback on coding techniques was requested from a senior faculty member who specialises in qualitative research. During this consultation, it became apparent that transcripts had been coded at too high of a level initially. The codes were also one-dimensional and not nearly descriptive enough. For example, the quotation *"I have to say, I think when you were together there was a real sense of learning from each other"* was simply coded as "peer learning". Further, though coding had started inductively during the first transcript, there was a tendency to begin to formulate categories and therefore code deductively in certain instances in subsequent transcripts. After this recognition, techniques were put in place to ensure that inductive coding aligned to phenomenographic methods were followed for all transcripts. To become more familiar with different coding techniques, Saldana's (2009) coding manual, Dey's (2005) qualitative research guide, and videos from Atlas.ti were reviewed.

All previous coding was discarded in order to start over with a clean slate. This time, transcripts were coded with descriptive phrases and without thinking of any future categorisation. Using the previously mentioned quotation as an example, it was now coded

using the more descriptive phrase "when you were together, there was a sense of learning from each other" instead of simply "peer learning". Atlas.ti's memo functionality was leveraged to capture extraneous thoughts while coding to ensure they were kept separately from the actual codes. Further, the current code list was hidden to reduce temptation to fit any new quotations into current codes.

During this second start to the coding process, relevant quotations in the text were coded inductively. Codes used in the analysis process were derived directly from the data using the participants' own words (Harris, 2011b). All transcripts were treated as equally important during the analysis process (Lamb et al., 2011). To ensure an open mind through the coding of all 20 transcripts, as many codes as necessary were created to capture what each participant was saying. Some common, less descriptive codes, such as "access to external network", were used multiple times throughout the coding process, but most codes were newly created for each quotation. In the end, 1,222 unique codes were created, 925 of which were used only once.

From this point forward, selected quotations became extracted from the individual and combined into one pool of data (Booth, 1997; Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Marton, 1986). Data were viewed in a collective manner, as a single set instead of as individual transcripts (Åkerlind, 2012; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013; Tight, 2016b); an individual merely contributed to the collective variations in conceptions of the phenomenon (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Harris, 2011b). Individual transcripts were viewed as "parts of the whole" (Svensson, 2016, p. 280) and not as isolated pieces of information (Tight, 2016b).

5.1.3. Conceptions

Phenomenographers distil their interpretations into a limited number of qualitatively different ways of understanding the phenomenon of study (Åkerlind, 2012; Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Larsson & Holmström, 2007). These interpretations are called categories of description, or conceptions, and refer to the collective way in which participants understand their experience (Åkerlind, 2012; Larsson & Holmström, 2007).

Similar responses are grouped together and, after multiple iterations of rearranging, eventually become conceptions with clearly defined boundaries and attributes (Åkerlind, 2012; Booth, 1997; Marton, 1986; Neuman, 1997). The quotations that illustrate each conception are scrutinised again to ensure fit within these conceptions (Marton, 1986). Researchers are cautioned to not move too quickly into structuring the data into conceptions

(Åkerlind, 2012; Ashworth & Lucas, 2000), as repeated reviews of the data may yield new features, links, or dimensions (Booth, 1997).

Conceptions focus on the relationship between the participant and the phenomenon, with the richness of the results revealed through the structure and meaning both within and between the conceptions (Brew, 2001; Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013). A single conception represents one way of experiencing the phenomenon of study; each conception represents a distinct way of experiencing the phenomenon of study and in total, conceptions represent all of the ways in which the phenomenon is experienced (Svensson, 1997). Conceptions must be based on and accurately reflect the experiences of the participants, otherwise these conceptions become arbitrary and unreliable (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). Individuals were not attributed to specific dimensions of their experience during this process and no single conception represented the views of only one individual (Arden, 2017; Brew, 2001; Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013).

In the current study, no pre-existing conceptions were formulated or utilised in the analysis process; instead, they were derived from the multiple iterations of reviewing all transcripts (Harris, 2011b) to ensure they were methodical and reliable (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). In total, five rounds of code categorisation occurred over an approximate three-month span from mid-April to the end of July 2019 as shown in Appendix C. Initial codes were exported from Atlas.ti into Excel in order to keep track of any changes as well as to better allow for sorting and categorising the data. Before commencing the categorisation, the full list of codes was reviewed to become re-familiar with the data. The process of categorisation required continuous sorting and re-sorting, comparison between categories, and establishing and re-establishing categories (Åkerlind, 2012; Booth, 1997; Brew, 2001; Lamb et al., 2011).

During the first round of categorisation, six high-level themes were created – context, entrepreneur, incubator, learning, mentor, and networking – in order to group similar code categories together. Typically, one or two other sub-categories were also added to begin to break down the codes into more manageable pieces of information. Taking the prior referenced code as an example, "when you were together, there was a sense of learning from each other" then became "Incubator | learning | peer learning | when you were together, there was a sense of learning from each other". The second round of categorisation began by sorting the codes by their new names and adding more sub-categories based on major themes that were emerging. The example code became "Incubator | learning | from others | peers | when you were together, there was a sense of learning from each other". Round

three of categorisation followed a similar process, sorting codes by their new names and adding, changing, and/or removing sub-categories multiple times. Codes were checked against others in their category as well as compared to those in other categories to ensure similar codes were grouped together. Most work during this round focused on codes that fell under the incubator category as these codes were the most pertinent to answering the research question and sub-questions. During round three, the example code was not changed as it was already descriptive enough and deemed to fit with others in the category.

During round four of categorisation, a new tactic was employed as a quasi-quality check of the first three rounds of coding. All codes that fell within the incubator category (776 codes) were temporarily stripped of their current sub-categories and printed out onto A4 paper. Each code was then cut out separately and laid out so that a process of sorting and re-sorting the strips of paper could begin. This process helped to see the bigger picture of codes instead of only working within the confines of a spreadsheet. Over the course of approximately one month, codes were revisited and reshuffled until it was deemed satisfactory. Based on this exercise, codes were updated in the spreadsheet as needed. After round four of categorisation, the example quotation became "Incubator | learning | co-created learning | when you were together, there was a sense of learning from each other".

Finally, round five of categorisation took care of any remaining refinements and did one final check to ensure codes fit within and across categories. The example quotation went through one last minor change, ending at "Incubator | learning | co-created learning | cohort | when you were together, there was a sense of learning from each other". Through each round of categorisation, a decreasing rate of change was observed (Marton, 1986). An outline of the coding changes the example quotation went through is summarised in Table 2. Atlas.ti was updated to reflect the final codes for each quotation.

Table 2

Coding Changes

Stage	Result
Quotation	I have to say, I think when you were together there was a real sense of learning from each other
Original code	when you were together, there was a sense of learning from each other
Round 1 code	Incubator | learning | peer learning | when you were together, there was a sense of learning from each other
Round 2 code	Incubator | learning | from others | peers | when you were together, there was a sense of learning from each other
Round 3 code	No change was made
Round 4 code	Incubator | learning | co-created learning | when you were together, there was a sense of learning from each other
Round 5 code (Final code)	Incubator | learning | co-created learning | cohort | when you were together, there was a sense of learning from each other

Note. An example of the coding changes one quotation went through during the phenomenographic analysis process of the current study.

After multiple iterations of rearranging, the codes eventually became categories with clearly defined boundaries and attributes (Åkerlind, 2012; Booth, 1997; Marton, 1986; Neuman, 1997). A total of four major categories were identified – context, entrepreneur, incubator, and learning – as well as multiple levels of sub-categories beneath each. A sample of these categories and sub-categories is shown in Figure 6. Codes that fell into the category of incubator and sub-category of learning, as depicted in light blue in Figure 6, were the focus of the remaining analysis steps. These codes were divided further into eight sub-categories: learnability, business concepts, entrepreneur concepts, business transformation, personal transformation, practical application of knowledge, having a champion, and co-created learning. These sub-categories became the conceptions. The full list of code categories and sub-categories can be found in Appendix E.
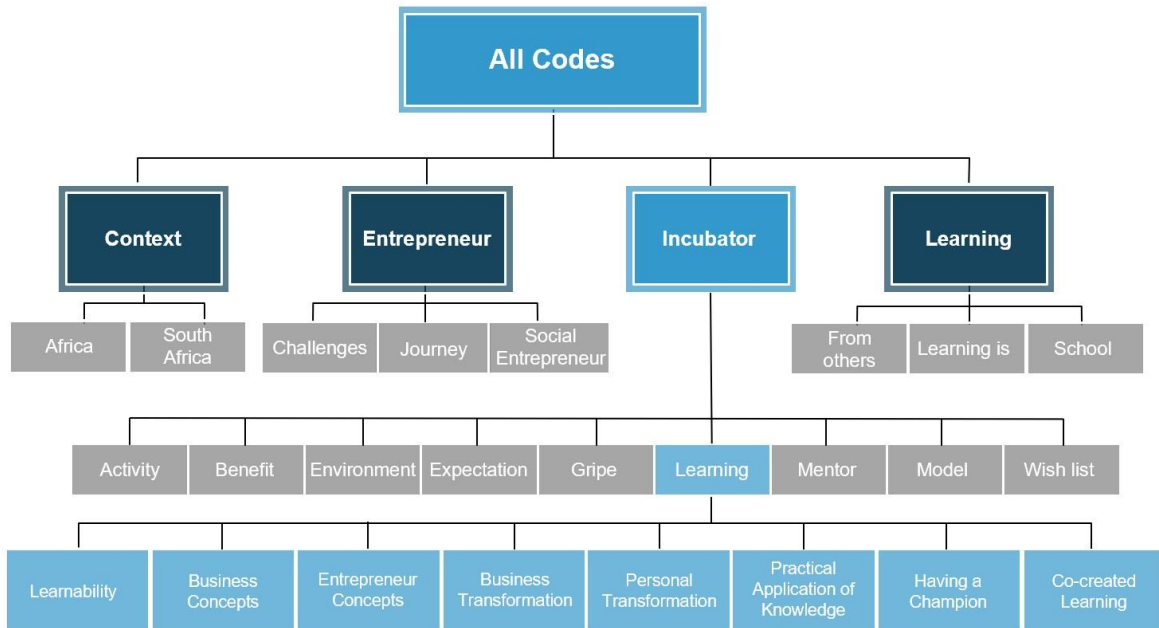
Figure 6. A sample of the hierarchy of code categories and sub-categories derived from phenomenographic analysis of the current study's interview transcripts.

5.2. Summary of the data analysis

The phenomenographic data analysis process began with a verbatim transcription of each interview followed by a process of identifying and coding relevant quotations in each of the transcripts. Through five rounds of code categorisation, eight conceptions of learning were identified – learnability, business concepts, entrepreneur concepts, business transformation, personal transformation, practical application of knowledge, having a champion, and co-created learning. The next chapter further details the process of how the eight conceptions were identified through the categorisation process and explains each of the eight conceptions in detail using quotations from the transcripts.

6. Findings

Throughout the five rounds of categorisation discussed in the previous chapter, the eight conceptions were identified; details of this process specifically for the eight conceptions are reviewed in this chapter. Additionally, this chapter presents each of the eight conceptions using quotations to justify them. During the phenomenographic analysis process, it was found that participants experienced each conception in varying ways, leading to the development of learning archetypes when forming the phenomenographic outcome space. Details of each archetype as well as the outcome space are presented in this

chapter. Finally, the chapter closes with a model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes in South Africa.

6.1. Conceptions

The codes that fell into the category of incubator and sub-category of learning went through significant changes during the five rounds of categorisation in order to arrive at the eight conceptions. Round one of categorisation served to separate incubator learning codes from other codes such as incubator activities, benefits of the incubator, the incubator environment, and complaints about the incubator. At times, it was difficult to separate learning from activities and benefits as participants discussed them interchangeably. Ultimately, the context of the quotation was used to determine how it would be coded. For example, a participant would alternate between discussing details of how meetings with mentors regularly occurred during their time in incubation, which would be coded as an activity, and explaining something they learned during those meetings, which would be coded as learning. Other times, conversations about learning would drift into discussions about other elements of incubation, especially complaints and wishes. Participants would start talking about, for example, what they learned from others in their cohort, which would be coded as learning, but then deviate into discussing how they would have liked more opportunities for collaboration, which would be coded as wish list. During this first round of categorisation, careful attention was given to ensure accuracy and consistency in what was coded as learning.

The second round of categorisation added a second level of description to the incubator learning codes and created 10 major sub-categories – abstract concepts, business concepts, mentor, business skills, mindset, tangible business changes, guidance, self, environment, and learning from others. In round three of categorisation, incubator learning codes were checked for fit against each other and against other incubator codes. While there were many codes shuffled around to other sub-categories, no new sub-categories were created, and none were removed.

The aforementioned process of removing the sub-categories, printing the incubator codes onto individual strips of paper, and sorting the strips of paper (in section 5.1.3.) resulted in numerous changes to the incubator learning sub-categories in round four of categorisation. During this round, the conceptions began to form, and the round ended with nine sub-categories – business concepts, business transformation, having a champion, co-created learning, entrepreneur concepts, learnability, mindset, practical application, and self.

Many of these sub-categories were similar to the ones identified in round two, but the names and definitions changed and therefore many of the codes were shuffled around. Codes were also moved in and out of the incubator learning category and the transcripts were referred to for context when necessary. During the final round of categorisation, the sub-category of personal development was created by combining the sub-categories of mindset and self, ending the categorisation process with eight sub-categories which became the conceptions of learning.

The eight conceptions – learnability, business concepts, entrepreneur concepts, business transformation, personal transformation, practical application of knowledge, having a champion, and co-created learning – are described in detail throughout the next sections. Each conception contains numerous sub-categories, but for brevity, only a few sub-categories that support the overall formulation of the conception will be discussed. The full list of sub-categories for each conception can be found in Appendix E. The conceptions are justified by using specific passages from the transcripts (Harris, 2011b; Sjöström & Dahlgren, 2002), ensuring interpretations have been grounded in participants' experiences (Lamb et al., 2011). Direct quotations have been italicised and are provided as an example of a response to illustrate the conception. Because phenomenography does not link individuals to conceptions (Brew, 2001; Harris, 2011b), quotations have not been attributed to individual participants.

6.1.1. Learnability

Several participants, when coming into the incubation process, discussed the concept of being learnable, understood as learnability. Participants recognised that both openness to learning and having the motivation to learn mattered when framing their incubator learning experience. While incubation provides the tools and resources entrepreneurs need, it's up to each person to make the most of their experience. One of the valued aspects of incubation is that it can also provide participants with what they don't know they need. This rings especially true for those who do not have formal education experience in business and/or are running their first startup. The quotations below illustrate the conception of learnability.

"So being open to learning is the most important thing."

"So the ability to learn is something that I was quite focused on here, which that hadn't been before. That was probably the biggest, like, change."

"And so we are very open to that kind of learning because we know that at the end of the day, it, it's going to have impact in how we build or progress forward."

"I had a drive within myself to make better use of the opportunity than everyone else."

"They will ask you what's going on, but they, you have the responsibility to make the most of the programme, you know"

"And it is very much a, it is what you make it, you know. If you put in a hundred percent, you'll get it all back out, where a lot of people come in with a different attitude."

"Cause it's often, there's that like you don't know what you don't know, so how do I ask?"

6.1.2. Business concepts

A variety of business concepts were learned during incubation with multiple participants learning concepts focused on best practices, branding, business conversations, measurement, strategy, and target markets. Other business concepts, which were placed in a miscellaneous sub-category, were typically learned only by one participant. These concepts included distribution, leadership, operations, market research, marketing, managing people, and technical skills. The quotations below illustrate the conception of business concepts.

"Starting a business at the same time of learning all the various aspects of business, it's just such a wonderful synergy between the two."

"And you know, this is a business model canvas, this is your customer segments and now it's all this information and terms that I didn't know."

"They really questioned the thinking and the opportunity behind our business, especially in terms of social change."

"And it was just really around how to think about your, um, your customer segment, um, how to think about your target customer, how to reach your target customer, how to sustainably grow that base of customers or your reach."

"We've learned how to deal with clients. We've learned how to keep the clients."

"I think the biggest thing from this incubator was understanding my target market. That was definitely the biggest thing."

"They've changed the way that, like, we manage people and the way that we fundraise and the way that we build our product."

Having numerous codes in a miscellaneous sub-category contrasted with other conceptions where most codes could be grouped together into sub-categories. This variation in concepts learned could be explained by individual differences in background education, prior experience, and/or stage of business when entering incubation. Some participants found the content too basic and repetitive. Other participants had gone through multiple incubation programmes before and while they may have gained other benefits from each subsequent incubation programme they attended, the repetition of content became a source of frustration.

"Um, again, we found the coursework, like, far too elementary."

"Because the content, you know, again, it's online."

"But the thing is now, like the first session was on lean canvas, you know, and like how many times have I seen this by now, you know."

"I think it was more of a refresher. So once everyone's like read The Lean Startup and you know, you, you've been agile and all of that…"

"Actually, it's kind of pointless. Like you don't, I don't want to be spending time writing a business plan."

"So we didn't gain too much on that front and there was a lot of hand holding on like business canvassing and like, how do you think about like building a business."

6.1.3. Entrepreneur concepts

Beyond business concepts, incubators taught entrepreneurship-specific concepts that participants may not have been exposed to before. These concepts gave an overview of how to build a startup as well as detailed information on funding, investors, and idea refinement. The quotations below illustrate this conception.

"Um, but yeah, there was, there was kind of an overview of every important aspect of, of trying to run a startup, which was nice."

"I learned a lot about being an entrepreneur and how to build a startup and that type of thing."

"But being at the incubator, it's like look, these are the things that are important to, to entrepreneurs and these are things that they should know. So we'll teach you this."

"I think where we really benefited more was in like talking to investors, um, learning how to frame those conversations, like learning what to look out for in term sheets, how to pitch."

"It's taught me quite a lot on how to position the model so that was, uh, I think that was one of the things they emphasise on. How to pitch your business, how to present your business, your financial model, how to present it, your revenue model and projections."

"This is the information you need to prepare when you're applying for funding."

"So there was some really new new stuff for me in this first six weeks, mostly related quite specifically to handling investors."

Incubators focused a lot of their efforts on ensuring participants knew how to pitch their business, with participants refining their pitch throughout the incubation programme. Many incubator programmes culminated with a Demo Day where each entrepreneur presented their business to a group of people which often included potential investors as well as members of the ecosystems and community. The quotations below illustrate this facet of the conception.

"The pitch definitely focuses you on, yeah, it makes you focus on saying it in much shorter, more relevant. So yeah, our pitch now is definitely way more refined."

"Also just in terms of of pitching the idea, we realised that there was, there was different things that you have to pitch to different people. So the things that we tell the users is not the things that we tell potential clients or partners. So just getting that difference right."

"[The incubator] literally trimmed all the fat and made me like a pitching machine."

"I left there knowing how to say, how to, how to simplify, how, explaining what I do, you know."

"It was for us to get the hang of pitching to potential investors and getting that feedback, um, and then have them interrogate our business model."

"There's been a big difference in my work because of that programme, right, in my ability to effectively convey ideas. It was the pitching that really got me there."

"But yeah, the pitch exercise is really great. I think if you cannot, if you cannot tell someone what you're doing in a relevant way, that's why it's so important."

6.1.4. Business transformation

Incubation helped participants transform their business throughout every stage in the process, from defining the problem their business is trying to solve through readying their business to scale. Transformation occurred along the foundational elements of the business, the product offering, and the structure of the company. Participants were encouraged to take a broad view of their startup as well as think about crucial elements of the company. Businesses that were not performing before incubation learned how to and participants were taught to think bigger in terms of global reach and scale. The quotations below illustrate the business transformation conception.

"We started way in the beginning on sort of a business model strategiser, right. Business model canvas, value proposition canvas. Really reviewing everything you've done up until that point. And that was really great for us and we embraced that fully because we knew that we had to review this, right, in order to survive."

"And I think that that was for the first time, the first time I started thinking about the business beyond just surviving."

"Pre-[incubator], we were, we were like that immature, angsty like preteen I would say. During the programme we were still angsty, very angsty teenager, but you know, getting to the sort of sweet sixteen stage. And now we're sort of, I would say in our late teens, early twenties. I hope that's a good metaphor to use."

"[The incubator programme] actually did give us that, that momentum to actually accelerate and stop being a kind of a really bootstrap startup to actually becoming a proper business."

"And it just, it wasn't, we weren't performing. And then we learned how to."

"There's many solid problems that a person can solve, but just focusing on this, this is the part of the problem that I'm going to solve, you know. So finding that part with, that will, uh, create the most impact but that you can still do something about, you know. So it was just defining those things and putting boundaries to say this I can do something about. This problem I cannot solve, so I don't, I'm not even going to bother with it."

"Um, and so they saw that as, as one of the values that we bring, um, particularly in the social impact aspect. Um, so it was quite interesting because again, it was one we didn't really, it wasn't one of our selling points. Like we just didn't use that as one of our you know value propositions. Um, and so they recognised that and they're like, yeah, like we, we see this as as valuable."

Though not everyone transformed their business at every stage, many did pivot their business model during incubation. Because the application of knowledge is iterative,

business transformation is not a linear process but rather a cyclical process that reoccurs during the bulk of time spent in incubation. The number of pivots as well as the time it took each business to pivot varied, but generally startups pivoted gradually by testing their potential model with customers and partners during incubation. The quotations below illustrate this facet of the conception.

"I mean, a lot of the, the pivots and the swivels that we've had have come out of whatever new knowledge that we acquire."

"But that pivot wasn't a straight zero to a hundred, it was more pivot gradually, test with the market, test with the partners, see how they respond."

"We pivoted. We pivoted about three times. We were called the pivot king. [The incubator co-founder] would come in every week, so what are you okes doing today? What's happening this week?"

"So then it forced us to make a shift of we then should stop targeting individuals and then move from a B2C to a more B2B2C."

"So the biggest drastic change was the fact that we shifted our entire business, uh, how our business runs and who our target market is, how much we charge."

"Here's, let's, let's look at some other options. And, and kind of got, got us to one where it was potentially viable but still being able to fulfil a kind of a very definite social mission."

"So what we've done is we've made that leap, also in terms of [the incubator], we made the leap and said, listen guys, we're a private company with a good heart. And that sort of the best we could find."

"They kept on saying you can't just sell one thing, you've got to have more than one revenue stream. And this thing is so obvious now, but initially I was like ehhh you know. It didn't click and I needed, you know, I needed to hear somebody say that."

6.1.5. Personal transformation

Not only did incubation change participants' businesses, it often changed them as a person as well. Incubation shaped participants' minds to think differently; participants let go of their past presumptions and began to see themselves in a new way. Most development came from having a champion to support them, provide affirmation, challenge them, and push them, but personal reflection also occurred during the co-created learning process. The quotations below illustrate this conception.

"And I think it's just, we, I think we're all kind of on this journey where we have to break free from everything we know to be here."

"So more psychologically, I think it was insane for us, it was just, yeah. We pivoted psychologically and in our business model."

"Because if I look at it, there's so many things that I gained from those two years. Um, me before those two years and me now are totally different people. Totally different."

"But I think at that point I really learned about myself as well."

"Because a lot of times we get carried away working on the business and you neglect your own needs and your goals…so [the mentor] focused on developing the entrepreneur behind the startup rather than the startup itself."

"Like in my mind, I'm still being incubated even though I'm out of it, you know. I've just now got that mindset and got a bit of strategy which I think is crucial."

"I think the way in which it shaped my mind to think about certain crucial elements of the company, sort of just how to phrase the company."

6.1.6. Practical application of knowledge

Participants were able to practically apply what they learned while in the incubator; this was regarded as highly beneficial to reinforce learning and accelerate growth. Practically applying knowledge during incubation contrasted with other forms of learning, such as formal education, which was often described by participants as *"forced"* and *"shoved down your throat."* Incubators provided a safe environment where participants felt comfortable exploring the ideas and concepts they were learning. Further, incubators provided a push for participants to go out into the field and engage with customers to test those new ideas and concepts. The quotations below illustrate this conception.

"Um, but at the same time, every other day we had to go engage with customers and validate, do a market, um, like market research and, and some sort of early market fit, market, product-market fit before we even built the product."

"It was get out there and experience the thing and learn from it. I mean, that is, that's it, right? You go, you think you have this idea, you have a hypothesis, go and test it in the field and not from behind your desk."

"And immediately we started implementing some of the learnings that we had and we went back to our business and from the first boot camp implemented our learnings."

"For the simple fact that it was very practical, it was tangible, it was iterative and it meant something."

"So we were privileged in that, in that, uh, in the accelerator it was already an ecosystem of all these other, um, sort of corporates and other financial services providers with whom we could test that aspect of the business with without having like, having built anything."

"Well it was kind of getting into the field trying to sell one thing, realising there was no real opportunity, but in the course of talking to customers, uncovered this other thing, and went, oh, this is, this is a potential interesting space. Maybe we can do this instead."

"Um, so at the point where I mean I would be taught how, what to do and how to do things, and I'd go back and I'd find myself doing things inefficiently. It started to like really click into place."

6.1.7. Having a champion

Sentiments about social entrepreneurship describe how it can be a lonely, isolated journey that requires an extreme amount of self-discipline and self-motivation; having a champion (or multiple champions) during incubation, though harsh at times, proved to be extremely valuable during the process. Champions helped by giving advice, offering support, providing affirmation, and instilling responsibility as well as by pushing and challenging participants. Champions came in the form of peers, mentors, incubator staff, or any other person involved during the incubation process. Often, champions were a source of providing knowledge in the form of business and/or entrepreneur concepts. Champions aided in both the business transformation process and the practical application of knowledge as well as guided the personal development of participants. Having a champion is generally a one-way relationship where a champion is providing something to a participant.

Participants benefited from being around others who provided moral support and understanding. Champions also helped provide validation and affirmation for the participants which helped to increase their confidence in themselves and in their business. The quotations below illustrate this aspect of the conception.

"I think one of the biggest things this incubation did though was kind of give you that affirmation that you are onto something good, which is very necessary at a vulnerable state of your startup."

"I think simply having, simply having some kind of validation makes a huge difference kind of psychologically as well."

"But now we've, because of the programme, just being in the programme, uh, never mind the content and the contacts and the support, just being in that programme and having that experience was enough for us to wake up and be like, okay. And believe in ourselves, actually. That's what it did for us."

"Um, but also just understanding, just having people that have gone through the struggles of operating as a startup or starting to operate as a startup was at that point a lot more fruitful than the actual content that was delivered for us like as a startup."

"You know, just, you know, like almost venting because it's hard. Just venting and saying, ah, this is what's happening. And funny enough to know that somebody else is going through hard times is consoling. Cause you're like, oh at least I'm not suffering on my own here. And you give each other advice, you know, how you deal with, you know, really just moral support."

"What they pushed was in terms of valuing yourself financially, in terms of what you are charging for your time, and that. I think a lot of people weren't, were under, were not, were not holding that kind of value for themselves, you know. Um, and so they pushed, how do you do I do it, how do you, and that was quite empowering."

"So it kind of validated among my circles that this is actually something valid. I haven't wasted two years. People actually believe it. And this exists."

Participants also benefited from the accountability an incubation programme provides.   Before incubation, participants tended to stick to their strengths, but champions asked the hard questions, pushed them on a path forward, and forced them to make decisions. The quotations below illustrate this aspect of the conception.

"I think just before being in an incubator, you kind of stay to your strengths and you're a bit scared to actually look at the things which might crash your company in the future. You know, you don't want to think about the negative things."

"And I mean unfortunately sometimes you need to be in an environment where someone is telling you just try it out even though the environment isn't necessarily the thing that's making you learn."

"I don't think our business would've got to where it was if it wasn't for [the incubator co-founder] just like pushing and chasing us."

"You've got to, like, get things done. And I think that no matter who you are, it can become easy if you're on your own to like relax and not do things."

"And they were super hard because I think the problem is that as entrepreneurs, we tend to believe our own hype, but these guys asked the hard questions."

"But someone who's going to be like very forward and direct and say you're full of shit, you need to do this and just go out and like stop fucking about, go out and try something. You need someone like that to actually kind of push you forward."

"Like what's happening, are you sorting things out, like follow up on what you said last week, have you done that this week. So that helped a lot. So for me, incubators and accelerators provide lots of accountability."

One of the challenges found by many during the incubation process was the quality of the incubation staff. Participants felt that the staff did not have time for them and did not help them when they needed it. Further, participants questioned if incubator staff could even help them, as they typically were not entrepreneurs and the perception was that they did not seem to understand what running a business was like. This led to participants feeling that incubator staff could not relate and subsequently not listening to them. There was also a high turnover amongst some incubator managers, leading to challenges in building relationships. The quotations below illustrate this aspect of the conception.

"Some of the people within the staff of the programme don't necessarily understand your business. That's a big issue. Um, because you switch off. They seem like they don't know what they're talking about, and then whatever the session's about you're just like tuned out. So you're not learning anything."

"Honestly I have not met an incubator run by somebody who runs a very successful startup, or a very successful business."

"They tried to [help] from time to time, but I think it's, I don't know, they're very busy. So yeah, it's a bit challenging."

"And but like really when the wheel hits the, the road, there's just no help."

"… because they also had like few people, high staff turnover when it came to incubation managers."

6.1.8. Co-created learning

Incubators created a space conducive to learning where learning was often a result of co-creation. Learning was co-created through both the environment and the people with participants learning through conversations, feedback, and observation. The level of professionalism, openness of others, ease of facilitating conversations, requirements of the programme, and characteristics of the cohort all contributed to the perceived culture of the incubator. The same people who can be, and often are, champions – peers, mentors, incubator staff, others involved in incubation – contribute to shaping the co-created learning environment. Co-created learning requires a collaborative relationship; this differs from having a champion which is a one-directional relationship. The quotations below illustrate the co-created learning environment within an incubator.

> *"But really the most important thing, and they kept saying it over and over and over again, is that this is not a boot camp that is structured for us to be able to try and tell you how you should do it or how it should be done. It's just us putting together the resources and putting together a structure that we think is most conducive to you learning and you taking something from this."*

> *"It wasn't like, as I said, it wasn't, it wasn't so much like let's force try and learn things from each other. It was more just the environment that was there."*

> *"I think just, just like in this like foreign place with like completely different people is quite nice, refreshing. And kind of open yourself up to learning a lot more. You get caught in your ways [in your own business]."*

> *"So you have to be in an environment where you see the different ways people hustle or run their businesses. So that, that was important."*

> *"So an incubator just allowed us to be in a safe environment where we would get the right, uh, sort of people poking around our business model,*

our thinking around the product and giving us some sort of structure and methodology to go about building a successful business."

"Like the, the programme actually facilitated a whole lot of conversations between like founders, um, which we found really, really good."

"I mean they're kind of, you know, there's a space where I can go oh my God, I can't, this is what I'm unpacking here, this is what I'm seeing. Am I really seeing something here?"

Having others around proved beneficial as it made it easy to obtain feedback as needed. However, participants also learned from others without even asking, as the environment was such that you learned from casual conversations as well as just observing what others are doing. The quotations below illustrate this aspect of the conception.

"I think the biggest thing I found was you're just having conversations with yourself. So you, you're asking yourself the question, you're answering your own question, you're debating your own question. Like here [in the incubator] you can actually ask somebody else their opinion, which is beautiful."

"Specifically from the incubator, I would say the best place of learning has been connecting with other startups, sharing their experiences, asking them."

"Um and being able to share information and bounce ideas off other people who are in the same boat. That was a very, very important element of it. I'd say as important as the, kind of the, the hard stuff that you're learning."

"Which then is also I think learning through conversation. Also brilliant compared to if I learn from a book, it will leave my head within the next three months to six months. Conversations stick."

"So through networking and actually talking with people, that's I guess for me where a lot of learning has happened."

"I think, uh, for me, what was just most impressive was, was to, to hear some of the tricks of the trade of some of Africa's best…and to, to, just to just like see these people who I didn't know existed, uh, and, and realised how much of an impact they have. And to be sitting there and absorbing some of the, the experience and knowledge that they have, uh, was, was really special."

"So there was a lot more learning from observing than there was from the, from the content part."

"And we learn simply from being in another country and in another context and being with someone from the opposite side of Africa with a whole lot of other stories and, and a lot more experience to share."

"You go up to each other and you hear conversations happening at another table and you're like oh that's interesting, please send me that, you know what I mean."

Co-creation is highly dependent on the people contributing to the environment and participants realised how important having the right people in a cohort was. Though many elements of incubation remain the same cohort after cohort, the culture can be influenced by the current cohort. The quotations below illustrate this aspect of the conception.

"But if you break down an incubation programme into its various elements and definitely the most important one that stood out were people. The right people."

"I think you really need to pick the right people with the right mindset because a lot of people apply for programmes like this because they think they're just going to get given everything where it takes a lot of work from yourself."

"And I think in order for incubators to be truly successful, it's on that application process and choosing the right people to bring into the space."

"Yeah I mean even just, yeah, having a look at like the same incubator but two different cohorts who had wildly different experiences."

To some degree, diversity was seen as an important factor to increase learning from each other, but it was also important to have some level of similarity in order to relate to one another. The quotations below illustrate these often-opposing sentiments of the conception.

"And the thing is, at [the incubator], we had quite a few females actually. And they bring something totally different to the cohort. Which is like what you want. Because they have a like different way of thinking, different perspective. And when you don't have that, I think it's a big thing that you're missing in your cohort. I think that you add a lot of value by having diversity in your cohort."

"We got some super interesting insights. Um, because I think mostly because everyone comes from such a different background and context and the way of understanding and looking at the world. It was just really interesting to hear what people had to say."

"When you're wearing the social enterprise cap and your cohort is all social enterprise, you're only speaking the same language. And that, that doesn't increase sort of the amount of insight that we got by being this, one of a few social enterprises within this mostly for-profit cohort."

"But there was quite a, quite a diverse range in terms of where we're all at. Which in some ways it's better because you learn from each other, in some ways not because some people can't relate."

"I think that the challenge that the domains were so different meant that we didn't get that much, like critical feedback on what our specific industry was like."

"And I think also just by nature, like the African challenges are very different to those faced in like developed markets and we could relate on much more about like infrastructure and the ecosystems and kind of thing."

"It was helpful being part of the [social enterprise] cohort because again, now you have like-minded people that are building their businesses with a focus of, you know, having a social impact. So it was great having just that kind of community of people that understand your decision making."

Since co-creation depends on the people involved, the level of its existence is difficult to predict in advance and not all participants had the same experience. Some participants believed others in their cohort had their own agenda or were untrustworthy which led to participants isolating themselves and only participating in superficial conversations. Other participants isolated themselves by not being involved in the programme. The below quotations illustrate this facet of the conception.

"The actual engagement of us sitting around having a beer and learning from one another and us being honest about it wouldn't happen. You just, it's too hardcore. You just don't want to open up."

"So I would say that some of the collaboration isn't happening because people, I mean people are just self-interested."

"So there are other things, but most of the time, most of the time people just sort of, everyone's got a fucking agenda…they're always looking for like what they can talk about, whatever they're interested in."

"So not everyone was there all the time. So there's probably less opportunity to have this real, uh, collegial sharing interaction-y thing. I think if anything, I missed a bit of that."

"But there's always the regular few companies that show up for [regular meetings] and the rest are just like in a coworking space, you know what I mean?"

"So, um, when people come into an incubator space and they're told, okay, cool, you need to come to these workshops at this time every day or like three times a week, people just don't care and they'll do their own thing."

"People were just frustrated about so many things that they did not, it did not turn into a peer learning support that we, what we intentionally wanted."

There were also mixed opinions about competition and stealing ideas. While a few thought competition existed and was a negative aspect of incubation, more thought the composition of the cohort mitigated any competition and that stealing ideas is a risk you have to take because in the end it's not about the idea. The quotations below show the varying opinions on competition.

"I found there was like a, there was like a competitiveness around the peers and no one...one thing about entrepreneurship and I don't know if this is just South Africa or whatever, but no one actually wants to talk about what's really going on."

"When we came to [the incubator] now it's only FinTech. Everybody's guarded about like what's going on and like they don't want to speak to each other. And you know if we, because like if we're going to go into insurance now, there's another company in insurance. Are we competitors? So people don't want to talk about what's actually going on."

"That, that added to the fact that they took people from a range of different, um, a range of different fields and a range of different countries. There was not, I didn't feel that there was any kind of competition in terms of business, uh business competition."

"And I think yeah, just because we were so like unique, we were very open sharing everything with everyone, um, even sharing our failures. Um, so yeah, we didn't, and yeah, I think the whole company, the whole, um, boot camp wasn't done in a way to make people compete, but rather complement each other."

"I mean, it's something that I've definitely come across is kind of that reluctance to share information and being worried about people stealing [ideas]. But on the counter side, whoever is experienced in the role when that thing's brought up, you know, the point is made that like people don't work on ideas because they stole them from someone else, they work on ideas because they're interested in something and because they're uniquely positioned to solve the problem."

"I think all entrepreneurs have a story of some company stole your idea and went and turned it around. But I've learned that if somebody is willing to steal it, it's a great idea. So as, as hard as it might sound, but I think if you have an idea that somebody is actually willing to steal or stealing, you should be proud of yourself. Because then you've thought of something great."

6.2. Outcome space

The result of phenomenographic analysis is an outcome space based on the internal and structural relationships that exist among the conceptions (Åkerlind, 2012; Röing et al., 2018; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013; Svensson, 1997). The outcome space differentiates phenomenographic analysis from other types of analyses (Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013). The underlying individual variations that constitute each conception are analysed to understand their meaning to the category in which they belong and then each of those conceptions is analysed to identify their relation to the other conceptions (Entwistle, 1997). Collier-Reed and Ingerman (2013) stress the importance of identifying this relationship, as referring to the outcome of phenomenographic research merely by the conception names is meaningless.

The outcome space is a visual representation of the phenomenon of study and the qualitatively different ways of experiencing it, depicting, in one visualisation, an explanation of the relationship between the differing ways of experiencing one phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2012; Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Yates et al., 2012). Outcome spaces are not standardised in the way they are visualised; as long as they illustrate the relationships between the conceptions, they may come in the form of a diagram, image, table, or figure (Röing et al., 2018; Yates et al., 2012). Categories in an outcome space are logically related and can often be represented hierarchically, with each successive category depicting a more complex understanding of the phenomenon of study (Åkerlind, 2012; Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Neuman, 1997). However, outcome spaces are not required to be linear hierarchies (Åkerlind, 2012).

Similar to other phenomenographic studies, the current study showed that participants approached learning from both *what* and *how* aspects (Harris, 2011b, 2011a; Lucas, 2002). Marton (1988) posited that "what is learned (the outcome or the result) and how it is learned (the act or the process) are two inseparable aspects of learning" (p. 53). The conceptions of business concepts, entrepreneur concepts, business transformation, and personal transformation can be categorised as *what* participants learned. These conceptions are listed in order based on their complexity, with business concepts seen as the least complex and personal transformation as the most complex. The conceptions of practical application of knowledge, having a champion, and co-created learning are *how* participants learned. These are also listed in order based on their complexity, with practical application of knowledge seen as the least complex and co-created learning as the most complex. Learnability stands on its own as a frame prior to the start of the incubation

programme. Taken together, these conceptions of learning form the structure of the outcome space.

Early goals of phenomenographic research focused solely on identifying the qualitatively different ways of experiencing a phenomenon, but after Marton and Booth's momentous publication of *Learning and Awareness* in 1997, further analysis has become an expectation (Åkerlind, 2017). This additional analysis adds complexity to phenomenographic research by looking at how differing levels of awareness of each conception leads to different ways of experiencing the phenomenon of study within the sample group (Åkerlind, 2017).

Once conceptions have been derived, the transcripts can be returned to and participants can be classified according to the conceptions they have expressed (Marton et al., 1993). Because participants often express multiple conceptions, a decision must be made by the researcher on how to categorise them. However, there are no exact guidelines in the literature on how to conduct this additional analysis process as conceptions can vary depending on the discipline of study. However, prior studies can offer some insight into how this has been previously executed. In a study on university students' learning, Boulton-Lewis et al. (2000) assigned participants to each conception based on the conception that was most representative of their views. In Marton et al.'s (1993) seminal study, they looked at the hierarchy of students' learning conceptions and assigned participants to conceptions according to the most complex conception they expressed.

Upon another review of the individual transcripts, it became apparent that neither of these methods would be an exact fit for the current study because most participants experienced each conception in varying ways. Therefore, to classify participants in the current study, the lens of the eight conceptions was used to write summaries of each conception for each participant. Summaries are a common tactic when initially interpreting transcripts in phenomenography (Åkerlind, 2012; Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Lamb et al., 2011; Marton et al., 1993), but in this instance were utilised through the lens of the eight conceptions. After the summaries of individual participation for each conception were written, they were each rated from high to low. For example, based on a summation of what they shared during their interview, participant 16 was rated high for learnability, business concepts, entrepreneur concepts, and business transformation, medium for practical application of knowledge, and low for personal transformation, having a champion, and co-created learning. Appendix F provides a succinct overview of the summary of each conception that led to this rating. This method continued for each of the 20 transcripts. Once

all transcripts were rated for the level of participation across each conception, participants were grouped based on their common levels of participation in each conception.

By grouping participants based on the level of participation in each conception, five varying ways in which participants experienced the conceptions were identified. These dimensions of variation were classified into distinct learning archetypes, classified as Maximiser, Transformer, Collaborator, Student, and Consumer based on their learning tendencies. Using participant 16 again as an example, the high participation in the concepts of learnability, business and entrepreneur concepts, and business transformation along with medium participation in personal transformation and low participation in practical application of knowledge, having a champion, and co-created learning classified this participant as a Student. Appendix F outlines three examples of participants, providing a succinct overview of the summary per conception, their subsequent level of participation rating across each conception, and their archetype classification. Judgements for the archetypes were made based on each participant's characterisation of the conceptions (Marton et al., 1993).

By mapping the characteristics of each archetype across each of the conceptions, an outcome space showing the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs experience learning within an incubation programme was developed as shown in Figure 7. The outcome space offers a way to explain visually what is difficult to convey through text or a table, though it is out of the scope of the current study to validate or test this outcome space. The underlying logic for the visualisation appears in Appendix G, including participant classifications by archetype. Displaying the outcome space in this way allows the results to be generalisable across the group of study while not losing sight of the unique individual experience (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000).
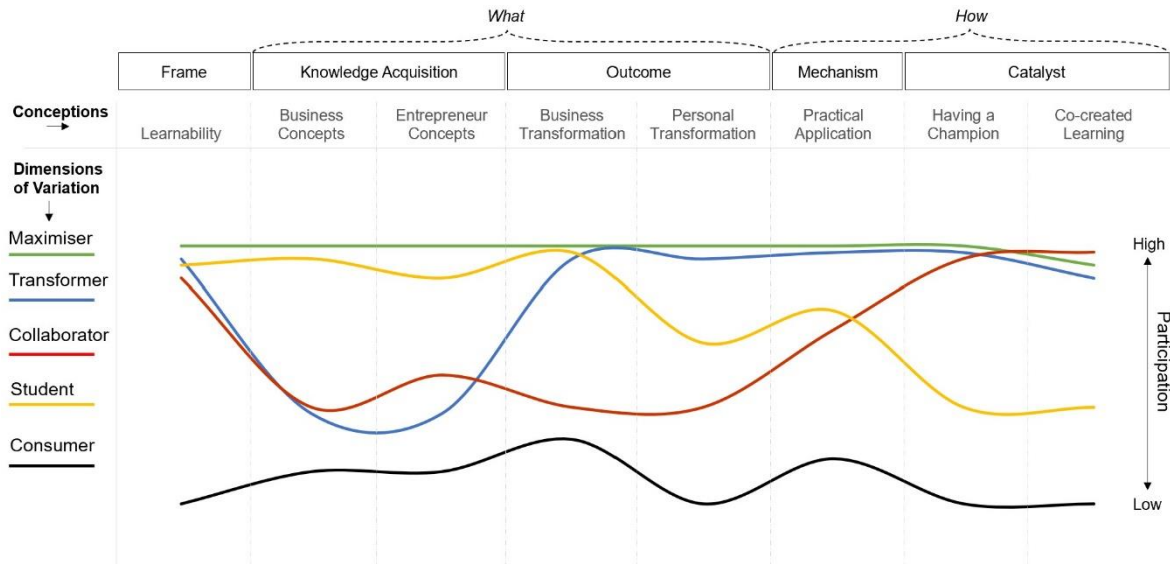
Figure 7. Phenomenographic outcome space.

Each archetype experiences each conception, and therefore the overall experience of learning, in a different way. These differences are explained in detail in the subsequent sections. As the archetypes are a synthesised view of learning representing the collective sample, no quotations are provided.

6.2.1. Maximiser

Maximisers were open to learning and learned from every aspect of incubation. They learned business and entrepreneur concepts and transformed both themselves and their businesses significantly. Maximisers viewed incubation as a formative time for their venture as it provided the content they needed to learn in a safe environment where they could test ideas and obtain feedback. Maximisers learned from practically applying knowledge, having a champion, and a co-created learning environment. The amalgamation of ways and types of learning lead to Maximisers experiencing exponential learning during incubation. Maximisers often talked about how incubation changed their lives. Four participants were classified as Maximisers.

6.2.2. Transformer

Transformers were also open to learning and learned from experts around them. Incubation programmes were particularly beneficial to Transformers as they learned in a co-created environment where they could practically apply what they are learning. While

Transformers either did not learn or did not need to learn business or entrepreneur concepts, they did need the guidance and support of having a champion to move their business forward. Incubation provided Transformers with affirmation, motivation, and the push that they needed. This archetype transformed their business in major ways, often from idea through execution. Not only did they transform their businesses, they transformed themselves as well. Five participants were classified as Transformers.

6.2.3. Collaborator

Collaborators were open to learning and benefitted from the co-created learning environment, as an important element of incubation for them was being able to discuss ideas with others. Collaborators found that they learn best when working together as they tend to be very open in discussions. Similar to Transformers, Collaborators didn't focus their learning on business or entrepreneur concepts. Collaborators learned by practically applying knowledge with the view that the best way to learn is to do things.

Collaborators made some business and personal changes, but they were much less significant than other archetypes. Collaborators thrived when surrounded by others and though they may not have transformed their business or themselves significantly, they did contribute to creating a collaborative environment within the incubator. Five participants were classified as Collaborators.

6.2.4. Student

Students were open to learning and learned from business and entrepreneur concepts. Incubation got Students out of the starting blocks, aiding in essentially re-programming them to become successful entrepreneurs. Students learned from situations where they were able to apply what they learned immediately, which helped the learning stick. These practical applications of knowledge led Students to make major business transformations as well as some minor personal changes.

Students moderately learned from having a champion and being in a co-created learning environment, but they mostly internalised learning. Students needed to learn concepts and spend time thinking on their own to move forward. Three participants were classified as Students.

6.2.5. Consumer

Unlike other archetypes, Consumers were not open to learning and did not seem to benefit from any aspect of incubator learning. Consumers were often in incubation programmes to obtain perceived benefits such as space, infrastructure support, exposure, and leveraging the incubator name. They were also looking for investment and partnerships. Consumers tended to be serial incubatees and often talked about what they took out of incubation programmes, extracting different things from different programmes. Three participants were classified as Consumers.

6.3. A model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes

A model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes, shown in Figure 8, uses the eight conceptions – learnability, business concepts, entrepreneur concepts, business transformation, personal transformation, practical application of knowledge, having a champion, and co-created learning – and five archetypes – Maximiser, Transformer, Collaborator, Student, and Consumer – identified in the current study and draws inspiration from Cseh et al.'s (1999) model of informal and incidental learning discussed in section 2.1.1. The current study's model shows that both a personal context and the incubator environment are factors influencing informal learning, similar to findings from many previous studies on informal learning that show the individual and the context play a role in informal learning (Eraut, 2004; Gola, 2009; Hoekstra et al., 2009; Jurasaite-Harbison, 2009; Marsick et al., 2009). Further, the model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes builds on the conceptual framework presented in Figure 3 (section 2.3.3.). The conceptual framework (Figure 3) demonstrates where the incubator environment operates on the learning continuum developed in Figure 1 (section 2.1.1.) and proposes that social entrepreneurs experience informal learning within the non-formal environment of incubators. The eight conceptions and five archetypes are arranged to show how social entrepreneurs experience learning within incubation programmes. This additional component is overlaid on the conceptual model to create Figure 8.

For each conception, the level of participation by archetype is depicted by colour-coded circles. Circles that appear toward the top depict archetypes with high participation in the conception while circles toward the bottom depict archetypes with low participation in

the conception. These circles are merely a different way to represent the levels of participation visualised in the outcome space (Figure 7) and detailed in Appendix G. A larger version of this model is shown in Appendix H to provide better readability.
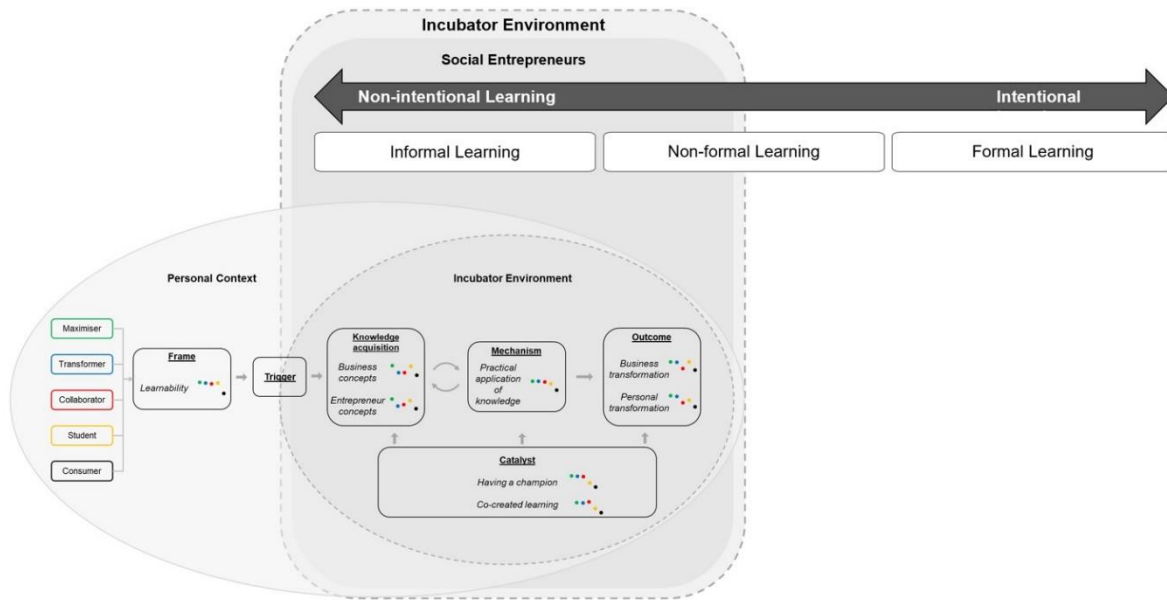
Figure 8. The model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes.

The current study's model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes utilises the elements of a frame and a trigger from Cseh et al.'s (1999) model of informal and incidental learning as the beginning of social entrepreneurs' informal learning within incubation programmes. Within the personal context, a participant's learning archetype both precedes and influences the entire informal learning experience within incubation. Marsick and Watkins (2001) describe the informal learning process as starting with a frame, or the way in which the learning experience will be interpreted. In the current study, the conception of learnability is viewed as the frame. As discussed in the previous section, the Consumer archetype was the only archetype that did not enter incubation with a learnability mindset; because Consumers were not open to learning at the outset, they did not seem to benefit from any aspect of learning during incubation. All other archetypes, on the other hand, experienced various levels of learning during incubation.

A trigger is seen as the start of an informal learning process (Marsick & Volpe, 1999) and in the current study, entering the incubator is the trigger. Once the incubation

programme commences, the experience of informal learning within the incubator environment begins. Participants start by acquiring knowledge about both business and entrepreneur concepts. Archetypes Maximiser and Student benefit the most from this knowledge acquisition phase, Transformers and Collaborators less so. Consumers benefit the least.

From there, participants use the practical application of knowledge as a mechanism to implement their learning. This phase is iterative, with participants continuously applying the new concepts they are learning throughout their time in the incubation programme. With the exception of Consumers, all archetypes found it advantageous to practically apply knowledge to their business in real time.

Finally, participants reach the outcome phase, consisting of business transformation and personal transformation. Maximisers, Transformers, and Students made the most significant transformations during incubation while Collaborators made minor transformations. Consumers transformed very little as a result of incubation.

The entire informal learning experience is supported by the catalysts of having a champion and being in a co-created learning environment. Champions provide knowledge, push participants to practically apply that knowledge, and guide both the business and personal transformation processes. The incubator is seen as a safe environment that promotes co-created learning among those within the incubator. Maximisers, Transformers, and Collaborators thrived when working alongside champions during incubation. Students only moderately benefitted from having champions available while Consumers saw nearly no benefit from champions.

6.4. Summary of the findings

The current study found eight qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs experience informal learning within incubation programmes in South Africa – learnability, business concepts, entrepreneur concepts, business transformation, personal transformation, practical application of knowledge, having a champion, and co-created learning. These eight conceptions can be experienced in five varying ways, characterised as learning through the archetypes of Maximiser, Transformer, Collaborator, Student, and Consumer. Further, the eight conceptions and five archetypes work together to form a model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes. The model depicts learnability as a frame prior to beginning an incubation

programme. Once in the programme, participants learn both business and entrepreneur concepts and practically apply knowledge in an iterative way throughout the course of the programme in order to obtain transformations in their businesses and in themselves. This process of learning is supported by having a champion and being in a co-created learning environment. The next chapter will discuss these findings and place them in the context of relevant literature.

7. Discussion

This chapter will deconstruct both the outcome space (Figure 7) and the model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes (Figure 8) to compare the conceptions and archetypes to existing literature. A discussion of each of the eight conceptions will be addressed first, followed by a discussion of archetypes. Next, the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes in South Africa is discussed. The chapter ends with a discussion of how the findings in the current study relate to literature on phenomenography and informal learning.

7.1. Conceptions

The main research question of the current study asked to identify the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs experience learning within an incubator in South Africa. Phenomenographic analysis showed that social entrepreneurs experience learning through eight qualitatively different ways, identified as the conceptions of learnability, business concepts, entrepreneur concepts, business transformation, personal transformation, practical application of knowledge, having a champion, and co-created learning. These conceptions describe what participants learn and how they learn. Each conception will be discussed in relation to literature in the subsequent sections.

7.1.1. Learnability

As described in the previous section, the conception of learnability is closely tied to informal learning as individual motivation is a driver of informal learning (Marsick, Watkins, Scully-Russ, & Nicolaides, 2017). However, learnability is also regarded as crucial in studies conducted outside the informal learning literature.

Levinsohn (2015) found that intentions of participants were an important consideration when managing the learning process of social entrepreneurs within

incubators. Nieminen and Hytti (2016) found that within an entrepreneurship training programme, the learning experience differed depending on the entrepreneur's commitment to the programme and their willingness to participate. Along similar lines, Howorth et al.'s (2012) results showed that social entrepreneurs' motivation to learn impacted their learning during education programmes and Rae and Carswell (2001) found that entrepreneurs' motivation to achieve something was what stimulated learning.

One challenging factor that can potentially hinder entrepreneurial learning is that entrepreneurs are typically unable to recognise their learning gaps or support needs (Ahmad, 2014; Branstad & Saetre, 2016; Miles et al., 2017; van Weele et al., 2017). When these gaps are not recognised, it can lead to a mismatch between what entrepreneurs are looking for when joining an incubator and what they actually need to learn (van Weele et al., 2017) as entrepreneurs tend to underestimate the importance of learning in areas where they have high learning needs (Branstad & Saetre, 2016). In effective incubation, the entrepreneur and incubator manager engage in co-production to help fill gaps in the entrepreneur's knowledge and increase entrepreneurial learning (Ahmad, 2014; Branstad & Saetre, 2016; Rice, 2002). This process, however, cannot begin unless there is recognition by the entrepreneur that they have gaps in their knowledge. While failing to recognise learning needs serves as a barrier to participating in co-produced learning (Branstad & Saetre, 2016), an entrepreneur's awareness of their knowledge, competency, and resource gaps leads to more effective co-produced learning (Rice, 2002). Learning events have been shown to trigger reflection in entrepreneurs (J. Cope, 2005) and incubators provide an immersive learning environment to overcome competency gaps (Miles et al., 2017).

7.1.2. Business and entrepreneur concepts

The results of the current study show that social entrepreneurs learn both business and entrepreneur concepts during their time in incubation. Recently, Haugh (2020) found that incubators in developing countries increase human capital through skill acquisition. Also in a study on incubators, van Weele et al. (2017) found that upon reflecting on their incubator experience, entrepreneurs identified business knowledge as the most important resource an incubator provided them. Business and entrepreneurship knowledge is particularly useful for those who enter incubation without a background in business (Chan & Lau, 2005; Howorth et al., 2012; van Weele et al., 2017) or for those who do not have prior entrepreneurial experience (Howorth et al., 2012; van Weele et al., 2017). In the current

study, many participants did not have prior formal business education or prior entrepreneurial experience.

During their study, van Weele et al. (2017) found that incubator staff identified business models, sales, marketing, fundraising, and pitching as concepts entrepreneurs did not understand. Further, Hallen et al. (2017) found that participants learned entrepreneur-specific concepts such as term sheets and pitching. The concepts found in both of these recent studies were also ones that entrepreneurs identified as learning during incubation in the current study, though the current study also found that participants learned other business concepts such as best practices, branding, measurement, strategy, and target markets. Additional entrepreneurship-specific concepts found in the current study include information on funding, investors, and idea refinement. The current study also found a large focus on pitching during the incubation process, aligning with Hallen et al.'s (2017) study.

What is striking about the concepts learned is that they are commercially focused. Participants in the current study did not discuss learning about specific social entrepreneurship concepts such as creating systemic social change, managing multiple stakeholders, or measuring impact. While this could be because the participants already knew these concepts going into incubation, it would be highly unlikely that all participants came into incubation with no gaps in this specific knowledge area, especially as there is little social entrepreneurship curriculum taught within formal education programmes in South Africa. Instead, what it may point to is a lack of content specific to social entrepreneurs within incubators in South Africa, even if those incubators focus solely on incubating social entrepreneurs. While it was not expected that incubators catering to a mix of commercial and social entrepreneurs would incorporate social entrepreneurship concepts in the content portion of their programme, participants in mixed programmes were typically provided with mentors who had experience in social entrepreneurship and had other social entrepreneurs in their cohort, meaning there were numerous opportunities to discuss and learn about social entrepreneur-specific concepts. However, as mentioned in the previous section, numerous studies point out that entrepreneurs do not necessarily recognise their learning gaps (Ahmad, 2014; Branstad & Saetre, 2016; Miles et al., 2017; van Weele et al., 2017) and social entrepreneurs in South African incubators may not know that there are concepts specific to their discipline that would be beneficial for them to learn.

The lack of social entrepreneurial concepts may also point to a larger issue in the country of treating social and commercial entrepreneurs similarly. On one hand, social entrepreneurs are pushed toward for-profit models since that is how many of them legally

register their businesses and funding tends to be more available for for-profit ventures. On the other hand, there is a tendency in South Africa to find a way to label any business as having a social impact even if they aren't necessarily focused on value creation; commercial entrepreneurs are at times viewed as though their businesses have a social impact merely because they create jobs in an economy with an unemployment rate of 29% (South African Government, 2020). Taken together, these contrasting tendencies have blurred the lines between social and commercial entrepreneurship in the country and it seems as though incubation programmes have followed suit.

7.1.3. Business and personal transformation

With little research on how and why entrepreneurs develop their businesses while part of an incubator programme (Albort-Morant & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2016; Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014), there are not many studies to compare the conceptions of business and personal transformation to. However, three recent studies have shown evidence of participants transforming during the incubation process.

Hallen et al. (2017) found that entrepreneurs learned concepts and skills leading to business model and strategy refinements and pivots. During incubation, participants changed their target market, distribution strategies, product features, revenue strategies, and scope of their business (Hallen et al., 2017). The current study also found similar evidence of business transformation based on the skills acquired during incubation, with participants pivoting their business models and adjusting their product offering. One difference in the results of the current study and Hallen et al.'s (2017) study is that in the current study, the idea of business transformation was seen as a more overarching concept with participants not only changing elements of their business, but actually seeing their business in a new way. Participants in the current study saw business transformation as taking a broad view of the company, increasing performance, and finding ways to scale.

Miles et al. (2017) found that the daily routines as well as intermittent events within incubation programmes provided entrepreneurs with an opportunity for self-assessment and self-reflection. Politis et al. (2019) found that personal reflection during incubation happens based on constructive feedback. An unexpected result from Hallen et al.'s (2017) study was that as a result of incubation, entrepreneurs adjusted their effort as well as their level of ambition. The current study found similar results in that participants learned about themselves during the incubation process and were able to change their mindsets as well.

The process of personal transformation in the current study was driven by having a champion and being in a co-created learning environment.

7.1.4. Practical application of knowledge

Many previous studies have shown that entrepreneurs learn through experience (J. Cope & Watts, 2000; Rae & Carswell, 2001). Most notably used in entrepreneurship studies, D. A. Kolb's (1976) experiential learning theory outlined a learning process that starts with having a concrete experience and moves into reflective observation of that experience. This leads to an abstract conceptualisation of learning from the experience and ends with active experimentation where the learner applies what was learned (D. A. Kolb, 1976). Though this process is general and high-level, elements of it are visible within the current study's model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes. In particular, the concrete experience of entering incubation begins the learning process and while the learning process during incubation doesn't end with active experimentation as in D. A. Kolb's (1976) model, the practical application of knowledge is a key mechanism in how learning occurs during incubation.

Incubators have been found to facilitate learning through the startup experience (Miles et al., 2017), providing entrepreneurs with the real experience of problem solving and reflection (Hunter & Lean, 2018). Similar to the results of the current study, Levinsohn (2015) found that social entrepreneurs within incubators acquired knowledge and then applied the knowledge they had learned. Further, Hallen et al. (2017) found that the format of an incubation programme created a unique pacing structure which encouraged entrepreneurs to transform their learnings into action. Practical application of knowledge was seen by most participants in the current study as unique to an incubator environment as they had not encountered learning through experience during their years of formal education. Participants in the current study also mentioned that incubation provided them with a safe environment to test their ideas, allowing them to feel comfortable practically applying what they learned.

7.1.5. Having a champion

Feedback during incubation has been found to be typically provided by mentors, advisers, and coaches (Levinsohn, 2015; Politis et al., 2019), and though terminology differs slightly, this aligns with the results of the current study. Learning during incubation was

found by Hallen et al. (2017) to occur via consultation where an expert translates their experiences on to the entrepreneurs' situation in order to provide advice. Incubator managers are also seen as vital connections to ensuring entrepreneurs receive the support they need (Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014); managers must have industry-specific knowledge and networks in addition to social skills in order to be effective (Branstad & Saetre, 2016). Studies on incubators in an African context have shown that an incubator manager's proactiveness plays an important role in the incubator's viability (Adegbite, 2001) and that the manager should have prior entrepreneurial experience to ensure things run smoothly (Lose & Tengeh, 2015). However, the current study found some instances of challenges with incubator staff, with many not having an entrepreneurial background or an understanding of how to run a business. Further, some participants in the current study recognised that ineffective incubator staff stifled the learning process at times.

Social entrepreneurs often find their entrepreneurial experience to be a lonely one and highly value the opportunity to interact with others during incubation (Levinsohn, 2015). Often, participants form emotional bonds with each other (Politis et al., 2019), encouraging and supporting each other during the incubation process (Levinsohn, 2015). McAdam and Marlow (2007) found that incubation provided comfort to entrepreneurs as they realised they all face the same challenges. The current study found many of these same sentiments, with participants expressing that their entrepreneurial journey was an isolated one and finding the moral support and understanding provided by champions during incubation comforting. The current study also found that having a champion provided both validation and affirmation during incubation which helped to increase participants' confidence in both themselves and their businesses. Other studies also found evidence of providing affirmation, with Politis et al. (2019) finding that positive feedback resulted in strengthening an entrepreneur's belief in their business and Hallen et al. (2017) finding that incubation offered a mechanism to legitimise their business.

Levinsohn's (2015) study showed that social entrepreneurs, in conversations with others, were able to come up with new ideas. Further, conversations led to social entrepreneurs being challenged to take a next step in their business or to create a better product than what they currently had (Levinsohn, 2015). Politis et al. (2019) also found evidence of entrepreneurs being positively challenged during incubation and that this type of feedback helped them broaden their perspectives. Similarly, in the current study, champions gave advice, instilled responsibility and accountability, and pushed and challenged participants.

7.1.6. Co-created learning

One of the more complex conceptions found in the current study is the idea that learning within incubation programmes is co-created through both the environment and the people. Bøllingtoft and Ulhøi (2005) found that networking within incubators depends on both the individual relationships formed as well as the construct of the social environment. Levinsohn (2015) found that social entrepreneurs learned inside of incubation programmes through a process of co-creation and that the cohort of social entrepreneurs within an accelerator programme had more of an influence on learning than did the design of the programme itself. Monsson and Jørgensen (2016) found similar results in that incubator participants valued benefits derived from their relationships with other participants more than other elements of incubation.

The frequency of as well as the quality of participant interactions work together to shape the atmosphere within incubation programmes (Politis et al., 2019). The relationships between those who are involved in the incubation process are what facilitates the activity during incubation (Ahmad, 2014) with these interactions leading to collective learning (Levinsohn, 2015; Peters et al., 2004). By actively leveraging their social capital, entrepreneurs increase their own learning and therefore their performance as well (Fang et al., 2010). The current study found that the openness of others and the ease of facilitating conversations among those in the cohort were important in creating a conducive learning environment within the incubator.

Miles et al. (2017) found that collaboration within accelerators was at times driven by the culture of the accelerator. Developing a collaborative atmosphere has been shown to increase learning within incubation programmes, particularly in the areas of motivation and constructive feedback (Politis et al., 2019). The current study found that through resources and structured programmes, incubators created environments that were conducive to learning without forcing or requiring learning. However, there were times that incubators helped to facilitate conversations. Aspects such as full-time co-location (Miles et al., 2017), working in close proximity to one another (McAdam & Marlow, 2007), and chance meetings and introductions (Ahmad, 2014) were perceived as components of creating favourable learning situations. The current study found the ease with which participants were able to obtain feedback to be highly beneficial, with participants learning through conversations, feedback, and observation.

Similar to findings by Politis et al. (2019), the current study found a mix of highly engaged participants and those who were disconnected from others. A despondent attitude from even one participant in the cohort can negatively impact the learning environment for everyone (Howorth et al., 2012) and participants in the current study complained about how some in their cohort did not participate in activities or even come to the space at all, reducing the opportunities to collaborate and learn. Similarly, the presence of competition was shown in some instances of the current study to have stifled learning. Though studies have shown social entrepreneurs exhibit high levels of trust, openness, and collaboration (P. A. Dacin et al., 2010; Estrin et al., 2013; Griffiths et al., 2013), the current study found some evidence of those within the incubator being guarded and being concerned about competition. However, because not all participants in many of the incubation programmes were social entrepreneurs, it is possible that those in the cohort who were less likely to collaborate and more focused on competition were commercial entrepreneurs. Studies on commercial entrepreneurs have shown that these types of entrepreneurs tend to be guarded about what they share as concern over stealing ideas is high (Aarstad et al., 2016; Chan & Lau, 2005; McAdam & Marlow, 2007; Nieminen & Hytti, 2016). If participants in the current study found others in their cohort untrustworthy, they tended to only engage in superficial conversations, similar to findings from Chan and Lau (2005) who found that commercial entrepreneurs discussed general topics such as marketing, finance, and operations if they felt concerned someone would steal their idea.

There are other potential explanations as to why there were some negative sentiments of collaboration and sharing. In a study on novice versus experienced entrepreneurs, Aarstad and Pettersen (2016) found that novice entrepreneurs were more likely to withhold disclosing business information than experienced entrepreneurs. As participants in the current study as well as in the overall cohorts of the incubation programmes of study were a mix of novice and experienced entrepreneurs, this could explain some of the behaviour seen. Alternately, some individuals prefer working alone (Mugler & Landbeck, 1997) as seen with the Student archetype. Another explanation could simply be that some personalities in the cohort clashed, making collaboration undesirable.

Participants in the current study recognised how important the right mix of people within a cohort was, as characteristics of the cohort contributed to the culture of the incubator. However, who those right people are remains unclear. While new knowledge often comes from interactions with others from different backgrounds (Eveleens et al., 2017), some entrepreneurs believe that cohorts with broad industry focus limit the exchange of

knowledge (van Weele et al., 2017). A recent study, however, found no evidence that industry-specific incubators enhanced participant performance (Vanderstraeten, van Witteloostuijn, Matthyssens, & Andreassi, 2016). The current study showed conflicting opinions on diversity in a cohort with some believing diversity increases learning by providing different perspectives while others found it difficult to obtain critical feedback if participants cannot relate to each other. Additionally, Howorth et al. (2012) found mixed results on the value of social and commercial entrepreneurs learning together. The current study aligned with this as well, discovering that some social entrepreneurs found it advantageous to be with other social entrepreneurs who understand them while other social entrepreneurs found that being with commercial entrepreneurs increased the insights they obtained. Howorth et al. (2012) posit that programmes specific to social entrepreneurs from the same area may suffer from constraints to learning and that learning together with commercial entrepreneurs can be effective for both parties. In a programme that includes both social and commercial entrepreneurs, it is important to understand both the differences and the similarities between the two types of entrepreneurs as ensuring relevance to social entrepreneurs in combined programmes helps social entrepreneurs achieve their particular learning goals (Howorth et al., 2012). It may be best that incubator participants have some common ground in order to begin to build trust (Nieminen & Hytti, 2016) as trust creates an atmosphere that allows the exchange of ideas and experiences, leading to learning (Howorth et al., 2012). However, participants should not be as similar as direct competitors (Howorth et al., 2012).

7.2. Archetypes

As a concept, archetypes were popularised by psychiatrist Carl Jung, who described them as "the contents of the collective unconscious" (Jung, 1968, p. 4). His view is that the way in which the collective unconscious expresses itself is through "archetypally formed ideas" (Jung, 1968, p. 21). Jungian archetypes are inherited by individuals but shared across humanity and focus on four major types: the anima, the shadow, the self, and the persona (Jung, 1968). Jung's work influenced multiple disciplines such as psychology (Goodwyn, 2010; Saunders & Skar, 2001), religion (Abramson, 2007), and management (Aurelio, 1995; Carr, 2002). The concept of archetypes has also been used in literature on learning (D. A. Kolb, 1976) and incubators (Allen & McCluskey, 1990; Bøllingtoft & Ulhøi, 2005; Grimaldi & Grandi, 2005; von Zedtwitz & Grimaldi, 2006).

In early work on incubator archetypes, Allen and McCluskey (1990) propose that incubator models can be arranged on a continuum of value-addition, from real estate on the

low end to business development on the high end. In this model, four archetypes of incubators were identified: for-profit property development, non-profit development corporation, academic, and for-profit seed-capital (Allen & McCluskey, 1990). Bøllingtoft and Ulhøi (2005) later extended this work, adding a fifth archetype, for-profit collaborative, in the centre of the continuum. Additional work on incubator archetypes was conducted by Grimaldi and Grandi (2005) who mapped incubators into four archetypes consisting of business innovation, university, independent private, and corporate private. Through their work, illustrated by case studies of incubators in Italy, they provided insight into how incubators should differentiate and position themselves based on these archetypes (Grimaldi & Grandi, 2005). This work was subsequently updated to include a fifth archetype, virtual incubators, and came to a similar conclusion in that incubators should use archetypes as an opportunity to develop strategic objectives and value propositions that align with the services they offer (von Zedtwitz & Grimaldi, 2006). Barbero, Casillas, Wright, and Ramos Garcia (2014) distilled earlier disjointed versions of incubator archetypes into their own four incubator archetypes – economic development, university business, basic research, and private – and through a quantitative study, showed that different types of incubators produce different types of innovation. Based on this outcome, they concluded that future research into incubators should not uniformly group incubators together (Barbero et al., 2014).

In a seminal study on learning, D. A. Kolb (1976) developed learning styles formulated from learning abilities and dimensions of learning. These learning styles accounted for individual differences in learning based on learner experiences and environment (A. Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Other studies on learning have consistently shown that not every person learns the same amount or in the same way, with people approaching learning in different ways based on the beliefs they hold about learning (Säljö, 1979a) and the variance in learning is affected by the quality of relationships as well as the context (Eraut, 2004). Specifically for entrepreneurs, learning also varies depending on the professional experience of a person (J. Cope & Watts, 2000; Levinsohn, 2015). Particularly in the context of incubation, learning is dependent on what stage a participant's business is at when they join the programme (Levinsohn, 2015). Despite this, prior studies within the incubation literature tend to ignore the unique characteristics of entrepreneurs and instead treat them as one homogenous group (Monsson & Jørgensen, 2016).

Though prior research has shown that incubators as entities, the entrepreneurs within them, and individuals as learners should all be treated differently, incubators continue to treat participants as if they are similar. Thus far, research has not addressed individual

learning styles of entrepreneurs within incubation programmes. Peters et al. (2004), taking the view of the incubator, called for research investigating whether different learning practices should be implemented for different incubators so that each incubator can reach their unique objectives. The current study, taking the view of the entrepreneur, showed through the identification of archetypes that different learning practices should be considered in every incubator given the variation in ways in which social entrepreneurs experience learning within incubation programmes. Because multiple factors shape what a participant needs to learn from incubation, it is nearly impossible that an entire cohort will need to learn the same things in the same way. Therefore, personalisation of learning should be introduced into incubation programmes as there is greater benefit in customisation for both the incubator and the participant. The archetypes developed in the current study can be used as a starting point for the personalisation of learning.

The outcome space, depicted in Figure 7, shows that each conception, and therefore the overall process of informal learning within an incubator, can be experienced in five ways: as a Maximiser, Transformer, Collaborator, Student, and Consumer. The visualisation of archetypes within the phenomenographic outcome space (Figure 7) answers the first research sub-question which sought to explore the relationships between the ways social entrepreneurs experience learning within an incubator. At the extremes, Maximisers experience high levels of participation across all conceptions and Consumers experience low levels of participation across all conceptions. Both Transformers and Collaborators highly benefit from having a champion and the co-created learning environment, but they differ in that Transformers make significant business and personal transformations whereas Collaborators do not. Students benefit by acquiring significant knowledge during incubation, internalising and practically applying the knowledge they learn.

When it comes to the archetypes identified in the current study, an incubation programme benefits from having those with various learning styles involved, contributing to the overall culture of the programme. There is one notable exception, however – Consumers. Consumers are only focused on receiving perceived benefits of incubation programmes and do not seem to benefit from any aspect of incubator learning. Not only do they not contribute to the incubator culture, but they often detract from it. For the other archetypes – Maximiser, Transformer, Collaborator, and Student – it is important that their learning styles match what types of learning an incubator is providing or that incubators provide multiple ways of learning to accommodate different learning styles.

7.3. The informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes

The second research sub-question looked at how social entrepreneurs approach and enact learning within an incubator. The model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes, as depicted in Figure 8 and described in section 6.3., shows how the eight conceptions of learning and five archetypes work together. Learnability is a personal frame prior to entering incubation – social entrepreneurs need to be open to and have the motivation to learn before beginning the programme. Once social entrepreneurs enter the incubator environment, they begin to acquire knowledge focused on both business and entrepreneur concepts. This knowledge is practically applied in an iterative manner which helps to reinforce the learning and leads to both business and personal transformations. The entire process is underpinned by the catalysts of having a champion and being in a co-created learning environment. Each archetype experiences varying levels of participation in each conception and therefore experiences the overall learning process differently.

The model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes drew inspiration from Cseh et al.'s (1999) model of informal and incidental learning (Figure 2). Cseh et al.'s (1999) model places context in the centre, signalling that the context in which the learning occurs is central to the informal learning process. The current study's model also places importance on the context of the non-formal environment of an incubator, as aside from learnability, the conceptions of learning are a direct result of what happens during the incubation programme. This is visualised in Figure 8 in two ways: by showing that the incubator environment operates on the non-formal end of the learning continuum and by showing how the conceptions of business concepts, entrepreneur concepts, practical application of knowledge, business transformation, personal transformation, having a champion, and co-created learning work together to create the learning experience within the incubator environment.

A trigger begins the informal learning process in Cseh et al.'s (1999) model. The current study's model shows that the process of entering incubation is the trigger that begins the informal learning experience for social entrepreneurs. Cseh et al.'s (1999) model also shows that prior to the learning process commencing, the learner's way of seeing the world, depicted as a frame, shapes the way the learning experience will be interpreted. In the current study's model, the conception of learnability frames the learning experience prior to the trigger of entering incubation. The Consumer archetype was the only archetype to not

enter incubation with the frame of learnability, and as the outcome space (Figure 7) depicts, their subsequent learning during incubation was minimal. Contrarily, Maximisers, Transformers, Collaborators, and Students were open to learning and had the motivation to learn during incubation; because of this, these archetypes were able to experience high levels of at least some form of learning during incubation.

Cseh et al.'s (1999) model shows that the process of learning occurs through interpreting the experience, examining alternative solutions, creating learning strategies, producing proposed solutions, assessing consequences, and learning lessons. This process can be seen throughout incubation and is executed in varying ways depending on the archetype. As Consumers did not experience high levels of learning during incubation, they will not be referred to for the remainder of this section. Cseh et al.'s (1999) model shows that during the informal learning process, individuals decide which learning strategies they will undertake after examining alternative options (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Because incubation offers numerous ways to learn, each archetype can focus on the ways of learning that work best for them – Collaborators and Transformers through having a champion and co-created learning, Students through business and entrepreneur concepts, and Maximisers through a combination of these four conceptions.

Cseh et al.'s (1999) model shows that once learning strategies are established, learning action is taken and the outcome of learning is assessed (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). The current study exemplifies this through the iterative process of practically applying knowledge in order to arrive at an outcome of business and/or personal transformation. This process is underpinned by the catalysts of having a champion and co-created learning, which work to provide knowledge, influence the practical application of knowledge, and bolster the subsequent transformations. Maximisers and Transformers utilise practical application, having a champion, and co-created learning to produce high levels of both business and personal transformation. While Collaborators also utilise practical application, having a champion, and co-created learning, they only saw minor transformation as an outcome of incubation. Students utilise practical application to create business transformation, but only saw medium levels of personal transformation. Additionally, Students minimally utilised having a champion and co-created learning.

Cseh et al.'s (1999) model of informal and incidental learning ends where it starts – with a frame – but this time the frame has changed because learning has occurred. Though the current study's model did not show evidence of the frame of learnability changing during the incubation process, there were instances where participants have taken what they

learned in one incubation programme with them as a new frame when entering a subsequent incubation programme.

The current study's model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes (Figure 8) depicts the experience of social entrepreneurs specifically, but it is noticeable that there are no elements that stand out as unique to social entrepreneurs. This raises a question as to whether the findings can be applicable to a broader audience of entrepreneurs. Though unable to be answered with the data collected from the current study, it is worth exploring a few reasons as to why the results may not necessarily look to be from a study on the learning experience of social entrepreneurs.

The participants in the current study are social entrepreneurs and they have identified themselves as such. Many described themselves as wanting to help, give back to, and benefit people and have focused their businesses around solving a problem and having a measurable impact on society. Further, many incubation programmes selected these participants specifically because they are social entrepreneurs, meaning they met their criteria and definition of being social entrepreneurs. However, the social entrepreneurs in the current study may be more commercially minded than the average social entrepreneur in South Africa. Most participants mentioned needing to run a successful enterprise in order to fulfil their social mandate, which may have drawn them to incubation programmes in the first place. Social entrepreneurs who attend incubation programmes may be a unique type of social entrepreneur, portraying more of a socially responsible business position than other social entrepreneurs in the country.

There is also the prospect of a selection bias when it comes to social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes. Particularly in South Africa, most social enterprises are small, serving only around 100 people per month in their local communities and not making a profit (Myres et al., 2018). These types of numbers are not necessarily appealing to incubators, who tend to select participants based on company performance and potential. After all, incubators themselves are businesses and often design and execute their programmes according to the mandate of their source of funding (van Eck et al., 2018). Just as social entrepreneurs seeking incubation programmes may be more commercially minded than their peers, incubators may also be inclined to select more commercially minded social entrepreneurs as well.

The unique context of South Africa may also play a role in why the results look the way they do. As mentioned previously, there is a tendency to position any business that creates jobs in South Africa as a social enterprise and as such, commercial and social

entrepreneurs at times are treated similarly. Further, as discussed in conjunction with business and entrepreneur concepts in section 7.1.2., the current study found a lack of concepts specific to social entrepreneurs discussed during incubation programmes. This absence in social entrepreneurship concepts would inherently lead to findings that show an absence of elements unique to social entrepreneurs as well. If social and commercial entrepreneurs are treated as one homogenous group in South African incubators, it would be expected that the findings in the current study do not show a distinction between the two.

Because researchers must keep an open mind when analysing phenomenographic results (Åkerlind, 2012; Ashworth & Lucas, 1998, 2000; C. Cope, 2004; Sin, 2010; Svensson, 1997), propositions were not identified at the outset to ensure there were no a priori conceptualisations of the data. Without identified propositions beforehand, it is not possible to pinpoint differences in outcomes versus expectations; however, it is surprising that the findings do not necessarily look like they would be from a study on the learning process of social entrepreneurs. The idiosyncrasies of the context in South Africa coupled with the uniqueness of the group of social entrepreneurs in the current study may explain this particular outcome.

7.4. Phenomenographic research

Phenomenographic studies conducted in formal learning environments have shown that conceptions of learning are generally universal (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2004; Marshall et al., 1999). Though conducted in a non-formal learning environment, the current study found conceptions comparable to those found in Säljö (1979b) and Marton et al.'s (1993) seminal phenomenographic studies discussed in section 4.3. To start with, the current study's conceptions of business concepts and entrepreneur concepts can be categorised as knowledge acquisition, fitting the description of Säljö (1979b) and Marton et al.'s (1993) conception of (1) increasing knowledge. The quotation from the current study, *"I learned a lot about being an entrepreneur and how to build a startup and that type of thing"* exemplifies a clear statement of learning occurring yet ambiguity about what exactly is being learned.

Säljö (1979b) and Marton et al.'s (1993) conception (3) discusses applying knowledge in practice, fitting with the current study's conception of practical application of knowledge. The model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes developed in the current study (Figure 8) also shows that the knowledge acquired (business and entrepreneur concepts) is practically applied during incubation, though in an iterative way. The quotation from the current study, *"And*

immediately we started implementing some of the learnings that we had and we went back to our business and from the first boot camp implemented our learnings" exemplifies participants learning during incubation and taking action by implementing those learnings within their businesses.

Säljö's (1979b) conception (4), abstraction of meaning, and Marton et al.'s (1993) conception (4), understanding, are comparable to the conception of learnability in the current study. Learnability is seen as the learning frame with which participants enter incubation. The quotation from the current study, *"And so we are very open to that kind of learning because we know that at the end of the day, it, it's going to have impact in how we build or progress forward"* demonstrates that participants recognise learning during incubation will help advance their business and that they must be open to it from the start in order to derive the most benefit.

The current study's conception of business transformation is similar to Säljö's (1979b) (5) understanding of reality and Marton et al.'s (1993) (5) seeing something in a different way. The quotation from the current study, *"And I think that that was for the first time, the first time I started thinking about the business beyond just surviving"* exemplifies how incubation programmes help participants see their business in a different way and because of that, their reality has changed.

Finally, Marton et al.'s (1993) conception (6) changing as a person is aligned with the current study's conception of personal transformation. The quotation from the current study, *"Um, me before those two years and me now are totally different people. Totally different"* illustrates how participants see themselves differently as a result of incubation.

Diverging from Säljö (1979b) and Marton et al. (1993), there are two main differences in the results of the current study. First, there was no evidence of Säljö (1979b) or Marton et al.'s (1993) conception of (2) memorising. While participants in the current study did use language alluding to memorisation when discussing previous formal learning experiences, there were no sentiments of memorising or reproducing knowledge during incubation.

Second, neither Säljö (1979b) or Marton et al.'s (1993) studies found any evidence of having a champion or co-created learning. However, in a phenomenographic study on how student teachers experience teaching health education, Paakkari et al. (2011) found an additional conception of collective meaning-making, though the conception was only expressed by one participant. They viewed this new conception as another turning point from prior conceptions as the focus of learning changed from the individual to a collective process (Paakkari et al., 2011). The class was observed to have formed a community

"where there is a place for everyone to learn, grow, develop and share" (Paakkari, Tynjälä, & Kannas, 2010, p. 913). The quotations from the current study on having a champion, *"And you give each other advice, you know, how you deal with, you know, really just moral support"* and co-created learning, *"Specifically from the incubator, I would say the best place of learning has been connecting with other startups, sharing their experiences, asking them"* align with Paakkari et al.'s (2011) finding of collective meaning-making.

Paakkari et al. (2011) questioned whether their departure from Marton et al.'s (1993) conceptions was due to an increase in socio-constructivist theories in education and if the concept of social meaning-making will become more common in the future. They also hint at the prospect that the nature of the subject of health content led to a more communal approach to learning (Paakkari et al., 2010, 2011). This line of thought may provide some explanation as to why the current study also showed evidence of collective learning, as social entrepreneurs place high emphasis on community (Parkinson & Howorth, 2008) and collaboration (Montgomery et al., 2012) and South Africa places high importance on the collective human experience through the philosophy of ubuntu (Mangaliso, 2001; Venter, 2004). Prior studies have also shown that conceptions of learning depend on whether learning is viewed as individual or communalist (Cliff, 1998) and can be linked to cultural characteristics and traditions (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2000), further providing support that social entrepreneurs within South Africa have influenced the results of the current study.

Another potential explanation as to why the results of the current study differ from prior phenomenographic studies is the use of the methodology outside of a formal learning environment. Originally, the purpose of phenomenography was to investigate learning in a formal education setting from a learner's perspective (Arden, 2017; Marton, 1986; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013) and most research has since focused on learning in formal environments (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2000). In studies replicating conceptions of learning in formal environments, results have been universal when those studies were also conducted in formal learning environments but in differing geographic or cultural contexts (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2000; Mugler & Landbeck, 1997; Paakkari et al., 2010; Watkins & Akande, 1994). However, by expanding the methodology's use outside of its original intention of formal learning environments, the current study has shown when the context of the learning environment changes – in this case from a formal to a non-formal environment – the conceptions of learning change as well. Therefore, the results seen in the current study may also be unique to a non-formal learning environment, such as an incubator, though a lack of research on informal learning within incubation programmes using phenomenographic

methods makes this difficult to confirm. More research is necessary to understand the reason for the differences in conceptions of learning found in the current study.

A summary of the preceding discussion can be found in Table 3. This table shows a comparison of Säljö's (1979b) original conceptions of learning and the conceptions of learning from Marton et al.'s (1993) seminal study as seen in Table 1, with the addition of the conceptions of learning from the current study.

Table 3

Phenomenographic Conceptions of Learning Comparison

	Säljö	Marton, Dall'alba and Beaty	The current study
(1)	The increase of knowledge	Increasing one's knowledge	Business concepts Entrepreneur concepts
(2)	Memorising	Memorising and reproducing	-
(3)	Acquisition of facts, procedures etc., which can be retained and/or utilised in practice	Applying	Practical application of knowledge
(4)	Abstraction of meaning	Understanding	Learnability
(5)	An interpretative process aimed at the understanding of reality	Seeing something in a different way	Business transformation
(6)	-	Changing as a person	Personal transformation
(7)	-	-	Having a champion Co-created learning

Note. Conceptions of learning from seminal phenomenographic studies as compared to the current study. Conceptions from "Learning in the Learner's Perspective. I. Some Common-sense Conceptions" by R. Säljö, Reports from the Department of Education, University of Göteborg, No. 76; "Conceptions of Learning" by F. Marton, G. Dall'alba, and E. Beaty, 1993, *International Journal of Educational Research*, 19.

7.5. Studies on informal learning

Individual perceptions, motivations, and experiences all play a role in shaping the conditions for informal learning (Hoekstra et al., 2009). Having the motivation to learn

(Hoekstra et al., 2009; Jeong et al., 2018; Jurasaite-Harbison, 2009; Marsick, 2009), being open to learning (Cerasoli et al., 2018; Noe, Tews, & Marand, 2013), having an intention to learn (Marsick, 2009; Marsick, Volpe, & Watkins, 1999), and being proactive about learning (Jeong et al., 2018; Marsick, 2009; Marsick et al., 1999; Marsick & Watkins, 2001) have all been found to be consistent factors that enhance informal learning. Comparably, in the current study, several participants recognised that they needed to have the motivation to learn when entering incubation, they should remain open to learning during incubation, and that it was up to them to make the most of their experience. This was identified as the conception of learnability discussed in 7.1.1.

Jurasaite-Harbison (2009) showed how teachers' learning preferences are shaped by culture; her results showed that a culture of collaboration exemplified by open sharing, a family atmosphere, a caring culture, and a focus on camaraderie positively influenced informal learning among teachers. Jeong et al. (2018) found similar results through an integrative literature review, listing factors such as open sharing, open communication, reflective dialogue, and positive encouragement as those that positively influence informal learning. An organisation can be designed to create a welcoming atmosphere that stimulates informal interaction or it can create barriers and reduce opportunities for the serendipitous encounters that lead to learning (Jurasaite-Harbison, 2009). Eraut (2004) found evidence that both management style and climate affect learning, retention, and improvement. Similarly, Marsick (2009) also found that organisations can shape informal learning via their culture, structure, and leadership and that organisational support plays a role in the creation or hindrance of knowledge sharing. These studies all support the ideas discussed in section 7.1.6. on co-created learning, namely that learning within incubation programmes is co-created through both the environment and the people. The current study showed that a conducive learning environment was created through resources and structured programmes, the openness of others, and the ease of facilitating conversations among those in the cohort.

In a rare quantitative study on informal learning in the workplace, Cerasoli et al. (2018) looked at how three levels of perceived support – interpersonal support from others, informal support through the environment, and formal support through systems – influenced informal learning. Results showed a positive link between these levels of support and participants engaging in informal learning behaviours (Cerasoli et al., 2018). Jeong et al. (2018) also found that support among group members and support from a manager were common antecedents of informal learning. Similarly, the current study found that having a

champion, as discussed in section 7.1.5., provided support to participants through validation and affirmation as well as through moral support and understanding. Champions also provided accountability and pushed participants to make hard decisions when necessary.

While studying informal learning in the workplace, Eraut (2004) found that what people learned fell into distinct categories: academic knowledge and skills, awareness and understanding, decision making and problem-solving, judgement, personal development, role performance, task performance, and teamwork. The current study found many similarities in the conceptions of what is learned, most notably those that also tie into typical phenomenographic results. Eraut's (2004) category of academic knowledge and skills is similar to Marton et al.'s (1993) conception of increasing one's knowledge and the current study's conception of knowledge acquisition in terms of business concepts and entrepreneur concepts. Awareness and understanding, another category found by Eraut (2004), aligns to Marton et al.'s (1993) conception of understanding and the current study's conception of learnability. Finally, Eraut's (2004) category of personal development is similar to Marton et al.'s (1993) conception of changing as a person and the current study's conception of personal transformation. While Eraut (2004) did not use phenomenography to derive his categories, comparing results across the contexts of formal learning in Marton et al.'s (1993) study, informal learning in the workplace in Eraut's (2004) study, and informal learning within incubation programmes in the current study show that some similarities of learning within these differing contexts do exist.

Eraut's (2004) study also identified how people learned in the workplace: by tackling challenging tasks, by working with clients, by working alongside others, and by participating in group activities. The current study's conceptions of learning through the practical application of knowledge, having a champion, and co-created learning align closely with these findings. Both tackling challenging tasks and working with clients relate to sentiments expressed in the current study's practical application of knowledge conception. Participants in the current study often referred to applying what they learned in the incubator by engaging with customers or testing their product with customers. At times, this was a difficult task and required participants to take action they had been avoiding, but the existence of a champion pushed them to forge ahead. Working alongside others can be seen through the conceptions of having a champion and co-created learning; the former conception is generally a one-way relationship where a champion is providing something to the participant and the latter is a two-way relationship between a champion and a participant, but in both instances people are working alongside each other. Having support, identified as having a

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champion in the current study, was also found by Marsick (2009), Cerasoli et al. (2018), and Jeong et al. (2018) to influence informal learning. Finally, learning from participating in group activities aligns with the current study's conception of co-created learning, where participants learned through conversations, feedback, and observation. Eraut (2004) and Marsick (2009) both found that an organisation's culture can influence informal learning, similar to the current study's finding that co-created learning is highly dependent on the people contributing to the environment, with the incubator culture influenced by the cohort.

Eraut (2004) also found that not every person learned the same amount or in the same way, with the variance affected by the quality of relationships in the workplace as well as the workplace context. The current study also found, through the creation of archetypes, that social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes did not all learn the same amount or in the same way. The outcome space, visualised in Figure 7, shows the variation in the way each archetype experiences each conception as well as the overall process of learning during incubation. Maximisers learned the most as well as learned from every aspect of incubation. Transformers learned a great deal, mostly from being able to practically apply knowledge and through having a champion and a co-created learning environment. Similarly, Collaborators learned through having a champion and a co-created learning environment, but their overall learning, and subsequent transformation, was not as high as Transformers. Students, on the other hand, learned the most through knowledge acquisition and less-so from having a champion and being in a co-created learning environment. Consumers learned the least during incubation, with low levels of participation seen across all eight conceptions. This was likely because Consumers did not enter incubation with the frame of learnability.

Given the multiple factors that impact informal learning, it should not be left completely to chance as deliberate planning can help ensure learning goals are met (Marsick et al., 1999). Marsick et al. (1999) encouraged the creation of learning contracts as part of planning informal learning. These contracts "ask that learners identify needs, set learning goals, decide on assessment criteria, and locate appropriate strategies and resources" (p. 93). Organisations also need to make the time and space for learning (Marsick et al., 1999). Marsick and Volpe (1999) posit that organisations should design themselves in such a way that encourages communication and collaboration amongst its members; organisations exemplified by cultures of collaboration and trust help people learn more easily (Marsick & Volpe, 1999; Marsick et al., 1999).

When framing the context of informal learning through work, Marsick, Watkins, Scully-Russ, and Nicolaides (2017) state that "learning from and through experience – typically in interaction with others – is at the heart of how people learn informally, but their learning is prompted by, and intertwined with, work" (p. 2). The current study's results demonstrate that this statement is also applicable in the context of an incubation programme. Informal learning within an incubator is prompted by participation in the incubation programme and enhanced by learning from and through the mechanism of practical application of knowledge and the catalysts of having a champion and a co-created learning environment.

7.6. Summary of the discussion

While evidence of each of the eight conceptions found in the current study can be seen throughout other studies, prior studies have not shown all eight conceptions together nor have they shown the entirety of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs during incubation. The current study also identified the existence of unique learning archetypes depicting the various ways in which social entrepreneurs experience each of the conceptions and the overall experience of learning during incubation. Although learning styles have been discussed and developed in other disciplines, they have thus far been absent in the limited literature on the learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes. Though the current study produced a model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes in South Africa, the model showed a lack of concepts that would be expected of social entrepreneurs learning. The idiosyncrasies of the context in South Africa coupled with the uniqueness of the group of social entrepreneurs in the current study may explain this absence. By utilising phenomenography in the non-formal learning environment of an incubator, the current study showed that while there are similarities to conceptions found in formal learning environment, there are differences in the absence of learning by memorisation and the addition of the collectively-focused learning conceptions of having a champion and co-created learning.

The next and final chapter will summarise and conclude the current study. Contributions to theory and methodology as well as implications for practice will be detailed. Limitations of the current study will be addressed and suggestions for future research are put forward.

8. Conclusion

The current study filled research gaps in multiple areas. To start, the current study contributes to the limited work on entrepreneurial learning within non-formal environments, with existing studies focusing on learning in formal environments. Further, phenomenographic studies typically seek to find conceptions of learning in formal environments, but the current study utilised this methodology to understand conceptions of learning in a non-formal environment outside of the education discipline. The current study also adds to the minimal discussion surrounding the learning of social entrepreneurs. Additionally, the current study has responded to widespread calls for research applying theories of learning in the discipline of incubation to understand learning dynamics and the business development process that occurs during these programmes. A final gap filled by the current study pertains to the use of informal learning theory. Thus far, the theory has received sparse application in the context of incubation, in the African context, and in social entrepreneurship literature.

This final chapter will review the theoretical and methodological contributions as well as the implications for practice for both incubators and social entrepreneurs. The chapter concludes with limitations of the current study and areas for future research.

8.1. Contribution

8.1.1. Contribution to theory

The current study responded to a call for the application of learning theories in incubation research (Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014; van Weele et al., 2017) and social entrepreneurship research (Howorth et al., 2012) by utilising informal learning theory to understand the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs experience learning while part of an incubation programme. The use of informal learning theory in the current study offered new insights from using the theory in the new contexts of incubation and South Africa as well as in the discipline of social entrepreneurship.

The main theoretical contribution of the current study came in the form of the development of a model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes (Figure 8). The model shows that prior to incubation, participants enter with a personal frame of learnability and that the process of beginning the incubation programme is a trigger to start the informal learning experience. During incubation, learning

begins with the acquisition of both business and entrepreneur concepts. These concepts are practically applied in an iterative manner to reinforce the learning, resulting in both business and personal transformations. The entire process of informal learning within incubation programmes is supported through the catalysts of having a champion and a co-created learning environment. Though there were some similarities with Cseh et al.'s (1999) model of informal and incidental learning, particularly in terms of including the elements of a frame and a trigger, the model developed in the current study illustrates that the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes is a unique experience. The current study also identified that during incubation, social entrepreneurs learn informally through five distinct archetypes. Though the creation of learning styles is not novel, the application of learning archetypes in the context of incubation programmes is.

There are further theoretical contributions in other disciplines as a result of the current study. In literature pertaining to entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial learning, most studies focus on learning in formal environments whereas the current study provides insights into learning in a non-formal environment. Further, studies on entrepreneurship education are often disconnected from practice (Fayolle, 2013; Liñán & Fayolle, 2015; Nabi et al., 2017), and insights from learning within incubation programmes can contribute valuable insights to classroom-based educational programmes. More specifically, the current study contributes to literature on the learning experience of social entrepreneurs, an area that has thus far been under-researched (J. Cope, 2005; Howorth et al., 2012; Levinsohn, 2015; Rivers et al., 2015). The current study also contributes significantly to incubation literature, addressing research gaps on learning dynamics (Politis et al., 2019) as well as how and why entrepreneurs develop their businesses while part of these programmes (Albort-Morant & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2016; Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014).

8.1.2. Contribution to phenomenography

The current study deviated from prior phenomenographic studies as it explored the qualitatively different ways of learning in a non-formal environment as opposed to a formal environment. Conceptions of learning discovered through phenomenography are thought to be more or less universal (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2004; Marshall et al., 1999) with different contexts of study only adding colour to the results (Dahlin & Regmi, 1997; Mugler & Landbeck, 1997). However, phenomenographic studies are typically only conducted in formal learning environments (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2000; Marton, 1981) and there is a need to examine phenomenography outside of the education discipline (Cibangu & Hepworth,

2016) as well as a need to understand conceptions of learning in different environments (Paakkari et al., 2011; Täks et al., 2016).

The current study's methodological contribution lies in the use of phenomenography to study learning in the non-formal environment of an incubator, showing that while some conceptions are similar between formal and non-formal environments, there are differences as well. Studying the learning process of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes modified the typical results seen from phenomenographic studies by showing no evidence of memorising or reproducing information and the addition of collective-focused learning experiences of having a champion and being in a co-created learning environment. Phenomenography brought to light not only the experience of learning within incubators, but the variation in that learning experience as well. Utilising phenomenography deviated from the norm, providing unique insights into the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs experience learning within incubators.

A final methodological contribution comes from the transferability of results to other contexts; though data collected in phenomenography originates from a specific context, the results are decontextualized and can be transferred to other contexts (Marton, 1986). Studies replicating the investigation of learning conceptions in formal environments across varying geographic and cultural contexts have shown more or less universal results (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2000; Mugler & Landbeck, 1997; Paakkari et al., 2010; Watkins & Akande, 1994). However, in the current study, changing the context of the learning environment from a formal environment to a non-formal environment produced differing conceptions of learning. Replicability from a phenomenographic perspective comes from the ability of researchers to find similar conceptions in studies across contexts (Marton, 1986) and the eight conceptions of learning found in the current study lay the groundwork for future studies on conceptions of learning in the non-formal environment of incubators. If results from phenomenographic studies conducted in formal environments across varying geographies and culture show similar conceptions, the conceptions found in the current study should be transferable to phenomenographic studies conducted in the non-formal environment of an incubator across a variety of geographies and cultures.

8.2. Implications for practice

8.2.1. Incubators

Incubators are rarely designed with learning in mind, but the current study shows that an incubator is a significant source of informal learning for social entrepreneurs. An

understanding of how entrepreneurs learn is imperative to developing programmes that facilitate this type of learning (Pittaway & Cope, 2007b) and the current study provides both a model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes as well as archetypes depicting the variation in ways social entrepreneurs learn while part of these programmes.

Because informal learning should not be left completely to chance as learning is "more productive if it is designed, planned, and facilitated in some way" (Marsick et al., 1999, p. 94), incubators should take steps that support and encourage informal learning (Cerasoli et al., 2018). Although "incubation is dependent on a myriad of subjective, dynamic and context-bound attributes and behaviors of incubator managements, as well as a particular client-mix" (Ahmad, 2014, p. 378), the current study offers numerous ways in which incubators can better design their spaces and programmes as well as implement more effective participant selection processes.

Organisations exemplified by cultures of collaboration and trust help people learn more easily (Marsick & Volpe, 1999; Marsick et al., 1999). Organisational factors such as structure, practices, and leadership can create or hinder a climate of learning (Marsick, 2009) and organisations need to create both the time and the space for learning (Marsick et al., 1999). Learning is often influenced by the physical design of an incubator (Levinsohn, 2015) and because interactions between people allows informal learning to flourish through communication and collaboration (Marsick & Volpe, 1999), incubators should be designed to encourage serendipitous encounters. It is also important to allow time for these types of interactions to occur (Marsick & Volpe, 1999); for incubators this means ensuring participants have time for exchanges with each other outside of the pre-set activities, meetings, and tasks that regularly occur. Creating a learning environment isn't just a one-time process, however, as the learning climate should be monitored at regular intervals to ensure learning is occurring (Eraut, 2004). An environment can become unstable, impeding informal learning (Marsick et al., 1999), and it is up to management to intervene and correct it (Eraut, 2004).

Incubator staff play a vital role in the development of participants, but the current study found many challenges with staff in the incubators of study. Incubator managers should have both prior entrepreneurial experience (Lose & Tengeh, 2015) and industry-specific knowledge and networks (Branstad & Saetre, 2016) in order to be effective in their roles yet most incubator managers in South Africa are staffed purely as administrative roles. However, given the challenges in South Africa of recruiting mentors with entrepreneurial

experience (Herrington & Kew, 2018; Roberts et al., 2017), it is not realistic to find incubator managers who also have entrepreneurial experience. Should this role in a South African context continue to focus solely on administrative work, it is essential that incubators ensure another staff member or someone affiliated with the programme (mentor, adviser, coach) step in and cover the responsibilities more commonly provided by the incubator manager, including facilitating the growth and development of participants.

As found in the current study, having the right people in a cohort is important for co-created learning to occur. Incubation is reliant on high-quality relationships and the continued participation of all those involved in the process (Ahmad & Ingle, 2011; Branstad & Saetre, 2016; Harper-Anderson & Lewis, 2018). Research has also shown that the fit between the participant and the incubator is an important factor for informal learning to occur (Jeong et al., 2018; Politis et al., 2019). An effective fit between participants and incubation programmes results in an increased level of learning that in turn helps to transform participants' businesses (Politis et al., 2019). Because of this, incubators should consider the rigour they use in their selection processes. Typically, application questions are solely focused on business metrics, performance, and strategy with the selection process favouring top applicants based on their startup's performance and potential. While these metrics may be imperative to the selection process, they do not help in understanding how a participant will approach and enact learning during the incubation programme. Incubators should use the selection process to assess entrepreneurial characteristics (Monsson & Jørgensen, 2016), adding questions focused on understanding learning perspectives, motivation, and working in a collaborative environment in order to select participants in a way that maximises learning potential.

Matching potential participants' motivations with programme goals (Howorth et al., 2012) ensures incubators can provide participants with the support they need (Monsson & Jørgensen, 2016). Incubators should also consider the dynamics of potential participants and the impact on the overall programme cohort (Hausberg & Korreck, 2018). Programmes should focus on ways to quickly foster trust and familiarity between the cohort (Howorth et al., 2012) in order to increase learning. Incubators should also ensure that they do not select participants who are or could become competitors as this will stifle the learning process not only for those participants, but potentially the entire cohort as well. While an incubation programme seems to benefit from having multiple learning archetypes within a cohort, incubators should aim to screen out Consumers during their selection process as this

archetype is not focused on learning and often detracts from the overall culture of the incubation programme.

The current study did not find significant evidence of participants learning concepts specific to social entrepreneurship during incubation. Though the reason for this cannot be determined by the data collected in the current study, potential explanations include a lack of content specific to social entrepreneurs and a tendency in the country of treating social and commercial entrepreneurs homogenously. However, social entrepreneurs are different than their commercial counterparts, and it would be beneficial for incubation programmes to recognise this, ensuring that they provide content specific to them. In order to provide this content to social entrepreneurs, incubators could look to partner with formal programmes that teach social entrepreneurship in South Africa to understand the content needed to educate this specific type of entrepreneur in this particular context. As mentioned, institutions such as the University of Cape Town, the Gordon Institute of Business Science, and the University of Johannesburg offer courses targeted at training and developing social entrepreneurs (Mirvis & Googins, 2018; Moreno & Agapitova, 2017) and organisations such as Social Enterprise Academy South Africa and UnLtd South Africa offer training specific to social entrepreneurs (Littlewood & Holt, 2015; Moreno & Agapitova, 2017). The role of social entrepreneurs is unique, and they need to be equipped with strategies and values necessary to be effective (Worsham, 2012). Though there is still no alignment on what these strategies and values are, topics ranging from managing accountability, a double bottom line, and identity (Tracey & Phillips, 2007) to social finance (Weber, 2012) to reflective thinking (Howorth et al., 2012) will be helpful to cover. Incorporating content from other social entrepreneurship programmes into incubation programmes that are developing social entrepreneurs will aid in properly educating this specific type of entrepreneur and address any learning gaps they may have in this area.

Learning gaps are another area that incubators should address with each participant as both incubators and social entrepreneurs would benefit from the recognition of learning gaps before entering incubation. This could be done via a checklist, rating system, tool, or test. Incubators should also ensure participants are developing the right competencies based on what they reveal as their learning gaps, which may require an intervention (van Weele et al., 2017). As deliberate planning can help ensure people reach their learning goals, Marsick et al. (1999) encourage the creation of learning contracts as part of planning informal learning. These contracts "ask that learners identify needs, set learning goals, decide on assessment criteria, and locate appropriate strategies and resources" (Marsick et

al., 1999, p. 93). Setting goals for participants may encourage them to focus on acquiring the knowledge they need to reach those goals (van Weele et al., 2017). Additionally, it may also be beneficial to provide guidance to participants on how to become more effective learners such as encouraging active listening, requesting feedback, observing experts, and persistently asking questions (Cerasoli et al., 2018). By focusing on their identities as learners, incubators can bolster the learning outcomes achieved during their programmes.

Though given equal opportunities for learning, participants move through incubation programmes at different rates (Dobson, Maas, Jones, & Lockyer, 2017), highlighting the need for flexibility and personalisation. A universal incubation programme is not likely to work for everyone as participants tend to benefit from different elements (Monsson & Jørgensen, 2016). The current study exemplified this through the identification of archetypes which show the variation in ways participants learn during incubation. Dobson et al. (2017) suggest understanding the career development of participants to better understand and manage their differing points of entry. This can include education background, their path to entrepreneurship, and what stage their startup is at. Creating differing optional elements or creating elements specific to participants could benefit both participants and the incubators themselves (Monsson & Jørgensen, 2016). Additionally, ensuring that participants are engaging in activities that are relevant to them will also alleviate concerns from participants that their time is not being well spent.

Another way personalisation can benefit incubation is in the creation of a learning management system. As shown in section 6.1.2., some participants found the content offered during incubation too basic and repetitive. A learning management system can address this by delivering content in a way that addresses a participant's pre-assessed learning gaps and learning style. This information could be stored in the system and accessible to incubator staff as well as mentors to aid them in their interactions with participants. With personalised content available, participants would only be required to complete lessons where learning gaps have been identified and progress against these gaps could be tracked within the system. Additionally, the delivery format of this content could be customised based on participants' learning styles, aiding in knowledge retention. Offering on demand lessons could also help to deliver content at the right time, allowing participants to review content when it is relevant to them throughout the incubation process. As the model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs during incubation programmes (Figure 8) shows, knowledge is practically applied iteratively during incubation and having content available when the need arises could help support this process.

The current study has shown through the conceptions of having a champion and co-created learning that incubation is not only about content, it is about people as well. A learning management system would also allow content to be removed as part of in-person incubation and instead delivered to participants virtually as a prerequisite. This could address complaints highlighted in section 6.1.8. that some participants are not fully involved in the incubation programme, often choosing to skip content sessions if they do not believe they will be a valuable use of time. By making content a prerequisite, participants can spend their time during incubation focused on practically applying the knowledge they have learned, referring back to content on an as-needed basis. Instead of spending time on organising content sessions during incubation, incubator staff can instead focus their time on providing the right mentors and networks for participants. A focus on cultivating relationships during incubation could strengthen the impact of having a champion and co-created learning, the catalysts of learning during incubation.

There are many ways to design programmes with learning in mind (Howorth et al., 2012) and the knowledge gained from the current study can aid incubators in creating policies and developing a culture that supports informal learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Understanding how learning occurs in a specific cultural setting can help inform the structure and content of learning programmes (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2000). Though entrepreneurs, startups, and the startup ecosystem is different in developing countries, incubators in these countries often design their programmes based on those located in developed countries (Roberts et al., 2017). Incubators can utilise the model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs as well as the creation of archetypes from the current study to develop cultures, structures, and programmes that better support the learning process of social entrepreneurs in a South African context.

8.2.2. Social entrepreneurs

Social entrepreneurs will benefit from any constructive changes incubators make to the programme design, selection process, or personalisation. However, there are additional ways in which social entrepreneurs can benefit from the findings of the current study.

Providing social entrepreneurs with the information that incubators are a context for learning as well as outlining the qualitatively different ways in which learning occurs can encourage social entrepreneurs to be open to learning. Increased awareness by a learner enhances informal learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001) and individuals deciding what and how they need to learn is a crucial factor for informal learning (Marsick et al., 1999). Learning

can be enhanced when people recognise the benefits of informal learning (Noe et al., 2013), are more intentional about what to learn, understand the impact of their learning, and know how to best learn given their own personal and contextual situations (Marsick et al., 1999). It is also important to ensure participants are aware of the variation in how learning can be experienced during incubation as it can help them reflect on their own ways of learning in addition to thinking through how to learn in other ways (Paakkari et al., 2011). Further, as the current study has shown through the concept of learnability, social entrepreneurs should ensure they recognise the need to be open to learning and have the motivation to learn before entering incubation as well as recognise that it is their responsibility to make the most of the incubation programme.

Knowing the ways in which learning can occur in an incubator can assist entrepreneurs in selecting which incubator(s) to apply to as it has been found that participant outcomes are improved when the objectives of the incubator compliment the objectives of the participants (Peters et al., 2004). Selecting an incubator to apply to can be thought of in the same way as selecting a university to apply to; if an entrepreneur understands what knowledge they need to acquire during their time at the incubator, they will be more apt to select the incubator whose offerings best fit those needs. Currently, many participants do not understand the difference between incubation and acceleration programmes, know what programmes they should apply to, or know what to expect of the programmes they are accepted into. As only 6% of incubators in South Africa target their programmes to social entrepreneurs specifically (van Eck et al., 2018), it is likely that social entrepreneurs will be applying to mixed cohort programmes. During these programmes, caution must be taken to avoid being pushed into business models that seek to maximise profits at the expense of social value. Because social goals are not necessarily prioritised in mixed cohort programmes, social entrepreneurs may need to spend time reflecting on what has been learned in order to implement these learnings in a way that stays true to their social mission.

The recognition of learning gaps is not only important for incubators, but for social entrepreneurs as well. When entrepreneurs are aware of gaps in their knowledge, competencies, and resources, the co-produced learning process during incubation is more effective (Rice, 2002). If social entrepreneurs find that the incubation programme they are entering does not ask about or check for learning gaps before the programme begins, they should take it upon themselves to assess their own learning gaps, especially when it comes to concepts specific to social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurs need to learn how to combine business models with social change imperatives (Estrin et al., 2013) while also

being accountable to stakeholders in the commercial, public, and social sectors (Howorth et al., 2012; Pache & Chowdhury, 2012). Because of this, becoming a social entrepreneur is more complex than becoming a commercial entrepreneur (Tracey & Phillips, 2007; Worsham, 2012). However, the current study found a lack of content specific to social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes in South Africa. While the reason for this cannot be determined by the current study's data, it is important for social entrepreneurs to recognise and take action to address this content gap in incubation programmes. Acknowledging personal learning gaps and programme content gaps beforehand can lead to more productive conversations with champions during incubation.

It may be difficult for social entrepreneurs to relate to pure business-based content typically taught to commercial entrepreneurs (Howorth et al., 2012). While social entrepreneurs still need to understand concepts regarding commercial entrepreneurship (Pache & Chowdhury, 2012), content needs to be expanded to account for the intricacies of being a social entrepreneur (W. K. Smith et al., 2012; Tracey & Phillips, 2007). Recognising that incubators are not likely to proactively provide content specific to social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurs should assess content provided by entities focused on educating social entrepreneurs in South Africa – the University of Cape Town, the Gordon Institute of Business Science, and the University of Johannesburg (Mirvis & Googins, 2018; Moreno & Agapitova, 2017) as well as the Social Enterprise Academy South Africa and UnLtd South Africa (Littlewood & Holt, 2015; Moreno & Agapitova, 2017) – to gain a better understanding of the concepts they need to learn. Being a social entrepreneur in South Africa comes with additional challenges due to the unique societal and developmental challenges their businesses focus on (Karanda & Toledano, 2012; Moreno & Agapitova, 2017), an inconsistent definition of what social entrepreneurship is, and the lack of a legal designation for a social enterprise (Moreno & Agapitova, 2017; Myres et al., 2018). Social entrepreneurs should advocate for their own learning during incubation programmes, ensuring they are discussing concepts and challenges specific to being a social entrepreneur in South Africa.

8.3. Limitations

While the current study was designed to minimise weaknesses where possible, there are some limitations. Limitations in the current study relate to the use of phenomenography, the design of the research, the study of informal learning, and the context of study.

One limitation of phenomenographic research is that it represents the experience of participants in a particular place at a particular time (Åkerlind, 2012). However, although results of the current study are specific to the context in which they occurred, the phenomenographic analysis process decontextualizes the results and therefore the findings can be transferable to other contexts (Marton, 1986). An additional limitation of phenomenography is that the analysis process of viewing the data as one large pool removes individual stories from the results. This does not allow for an understanding of how the learning process may be different for those with different educational backgrounds or account for differences based on prior experiences.

As the design of this research was solely based on participants' experience, there is a risk that the participants did not feel comfortable enough to fully reflect on that experience, limiting the results that were derived (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). A further limitation related to a participant's experience is that the current study relies on a reconstruction of past events (J. Cope & Watts, 2000). There is a risk that participants may not accurately remember their learning experience, have learned more than they've internalised (J. Cope & Watts, 2000), do not entirely understand their own learning (Gola, 2009), or their learning was tacit, unconscious, or unrecognised (Eraut, 2004; Marsick & Watkins, 2001). A final risk in seeking to understand a person's experience is specific to the African context. Robson, Haugh, and Obeng (2009) caution that in Africa, participants may provide researchers with the answers they think they want to hear.

Another limitation in the design of the current study involves the study of informal learning. It is often difficult to separate formal, non-formal, and informal learning. Marsick (2009) points out that although scholars have clearly defined the boundaries of each, in practice, these different ways of learning are often difficult to distinguish. It can also be difficult to standardise and assess informal learning as it is not easily observable (Eraut, 2004; Marsick, 2009; Marsick et al., 2017; Schugurensky, 2000). However, because the aim of phenomenography is to "reveal the qualitatively different ways in which people experience and conceptualize various phenomena in the world around them" (Marton et al., 1993, p. 278), its use in the current study helped to mitigate this limitation.

A final limitation in the current study focuses on the context. Because the research was conducted solely within the confines of incubation programmes, it has limited application to social entrepreneurial pedagogy in other environments, especially formal environments. South Africa can be characterised as a country with established institutions but vast social needs, making it a unique context and potentially limiting the use of the findings.

8.4. Future research

As a result of the current study, many avenues of future research have emerged. One of the larger unanswered questions is if the conceptions of learning found only pertain to social entrepreneurs. Because the conceptions identified in the current study were fairly broad, similar results may be found in a study of commercial entrepreneurs in South Africa and it is worth replicating this study using commercial entrepreneurs as the sample to see if this is the case.

The use of phenomenography was vital in identifying the conceptions of learning and subsequent archetypes, but one limitation of the methodology is that it removes individual aspects from the analysis. It would be beneficial to use a quantitative methodology to investigate individual factors such as education background, prior startup experience, and prior incubation experience to understand how these factors may impact the process of informal learning as well as how they influence the archetypes. Further, while there were many interesting stories discussed during interviews, the use of phenomenography removed the individual stories from the results. A case study approach following the learning experience of a diverse set of social entrepreneurs through their time in various incubation programmes would be enlightening. The results could also serve as marketing material for the incubator and would be useful for future social entrepreneurs to understand the programme experience before applying.

The diversity in the sample of the current study contributed to the variation necessary in a phenomenographic study, but it would also be useful to conduct more focused studies. Conducting a study on informal learning within one single incubation programme could help to uncover more detail on the processes that occur as well as allow visibility into the variation in learning experiences between participants in the same programme. Conducting this type of focused study within incubators who focus solely on social entrepreneurs as well as conducting the same study within incubators who have mixed cohorts would both provide intriguing results, especially when compared.

Because the current study found conceptions that differ from the typical results of phenomenographic studies, a better understanding of why this may have occurred is needed. This could be explored through a study of commercial entrepreneurs in South Africa to see if the additional conceptions are because the current study selected social entrepreneurs as participants. It could also be explored by conducting the same study among social entrepreneurs in a different country to see if the results are influenced by the

South African context, particularly its prevalent focus on the concept of ubuntu. Because phenomenographic results derived from formal learning environments are decontextualized and can be generalisable to other contexts (Marton, 1986), replicating the study in other countries would be useful to gauge whether conceptions of learning derived from non-formal environments are also transferable. The results of such a study could have implications for the increasing focus on contextualization in entrepreneurship research (Welter et al., 2017), the importance of context in entrepreneurial learning (Rae, 2006), and the focus of context in informal learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

Another avenue of interest may be a longitudinal study on learning that begins before the incubation programme commences and continues post-graduation. The participants in the current study had all completed incubation programmes at the time they were interviewed, meaning the results reflected their past recollection of learning during their time in the programmes. Collecting real-time data over the course of a programme may produce different results or provide a more detailed experience.

There were many implications for practice as a result of the current study, particularly for incubators. It would be interesting to find an incubator willing to make changes that support informal learning and look at how this may impact their cohorts using a test versus control approach. For changes to the application process, a study should investigate if the co-created learning process differs when accepting participants based not only on their financials, but on their approaches to learning and collaboration as well. For changes to the programme, it would be beneficial to understand the implications to the entirety of the informal learning experience. Particularly if an incubator were to begin their programme by addressing the learning gaps of participants, it would be fascinating to design a study that assesses the learning outcomes when participants have an influence on programme design in terms of how and what they learn.

The current study revealed that concepts specific to social entrepreneurs seem to be absent from incubation programmes. While a number of reasons for this were hypothesised in sections 7.1.2. and 7.3., no conclusions could be drawn as this was outside the scope of the current study. Future research should investigate this potential issue to gain a better understanding of the causes and outline solutions to address it. Outside of the incubator environment, having a better understanding of what social entrepreneurs need to learn within a South African context would also be valuable. As this content is typically only available through specialised programmes, speaking to practicing social entrepreneurs in various stages of their venture who have and have not completed these specialised

programmes would be beneficial. It would also be advantageous to understand the learning requirements of social entrepreneurs in South Africa as a whole and how that differs (or should differ) from commercial entrepreneurial learning.

8.5. Summary of the current study

Studying the learning experience of social entrepreneurs in a South African context in the non-formal environment of incubators uniquely brought together different disciplines in a way rarely seen in the literature. The current study advances the understanding of this phenomenon and contributes to the literature on informal learning theory and phenomenography while also offering implications for practice.

The current study set out to understand the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs experience learning within incubation programmes. Past research in the disciplines of entrepreneurship education and social entrepreneurship have not sufficiently addressed the learning process or learning requirements of social entrepreneurs in non-formal environments. Within the non-formal environment of an incubator, there is a gap in scholars applying theories of learning to understand the learning dynamics and the business development processes that occur within incubation programmes. Though informal learning is beneficial in contexts with resource constraints and the theory is well-suited for use in situations where individuals can influence how and what they learn, there are limited studies utilising informal learning theory in the African context and in the discipline of incubation. The current study contributes to literature in the disciplines of entrepreneurial learning, social entrepreneurship, informal learning, incubators, and phenomenography by identifying the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs experience informal learning within incubation programmes in South Africa.

Based on phenomenographic interviews with twenty social entrepreneurs, it can be concluded that social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes experience learning through eight qualitatively different ways: learnability, business concepts, entrepreneur concepts, practical application of knowledge, business transformation, personal transformation, having a champion, and co-created learning. Further, these eight conceptions can each be experienced in five varying ways, described as learning through the archetypes of Maximiser, Transformer, Collaborator, Student, and Consumer. The outcome space mapped each archetype across the eight conceptions, visualising the varying ways of experiencing learning within incubation programmes. The conceptions and

archetypes were then used to create a model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the informal learning literature by applying the theory in the new contexts of incubation and South Africa as well as in the discipline of social entrepreneurship. Though there are some similarities with other studies on informal learning, the model of the informal learning experience of social entrepreneurs within incubation programmes developed in the current study shows that this experience is unique. The current study also identified that during incubation, social entrepreneurs learn informally through five distinct archetypes. Though the idea of learning archetypes is not new, it has received limited application in understanding learning within incubation programmes.

Previous phenomenographic research typically focuses on formal environments, but the current study contributes to the literature by exploring conceptions of learning in a non-formal environment. This change in contexts found two main differences in the commonly held conceptions of learning in formal environments. First, there was no evidence of memorising or reproducing knowledge during incubation. Second, additional collective-focused conceptions of having a champion and co-created learning were found. These differences may be due to utilising phenomenography in a non-formal environment, the community-focused nature of social entrepreneurs, or the communalist philosophy of ubuntu that exists in South African society.

The current study also has a wide range of implications for practice. Incubators, which are rarely designed with learning in mind, can utilise the findings from the current study to enhance learning by developing cultures, structures, and programmes that better support the learning process and requirements of social entrepreneurs in a South African context. Incubators should strive to build a culture of trust coupled with a physical design that encourages collaboration and a programme that allows time for interactions to occur. Further, offering content specific to the needs of social entrepreneurs is necessary if incubators seek to educate this particular type of entrepreneur. Focusing on participants' identities as learners, acknowledging their learning gaps, and offering programmes with flexibility and personalisation can aid in increasing the learning that occurs during incubation. The implementation of a learning management system can coordinate these programme developments. Finally, incubators can further enhance the collective learning process by modifying the participant selection process to focus on relationship dynamics and learning potential instead of solely on a venture's prior performance and future financial potential. Social entrepreneurs will benefit from changes incubators make, but will further benefit by

being open to learning, being intentional about what to learn, understanding the impact of their learning, and knowing how to best learn given their own personal and contextual situations. Utilising findings from the current study, social entrepreneurs can become aware of the variation in learning experiences during incubation. Further, social entrepreneurs must recognise their own personal learning gaps as well as incubator programme content gaps in order to have more productive conversations during incubation. As the current study found, incubation programmes are lacking in concepts specific to social entrepreneurs. Because of this, social entrepreneurs must be sure to advocate for their own learning during incubation programmes.

Social entrepreneurship in South Africa is growing and steps should be taken to ensure this growth continues by properly educating and advising social entrepreneurs in the country. Though South Africa suffers from challenges in the formal education sector, informal learning offers the opportunity to advance the development of knowledge and skills utilising fewer resources. Social entrepreneurs help catalyse economic development by embarking on social missions that address local needs and facilitate change. As a developing country, South Africa will benefit from a thriving, educated social entrepreneurship sector. Incubators have a prominent role to play in this by actively fostering informal learning within the country's incubation programmes.

9. References

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10. Appendices

Appendix A. Development Indicators for South Africa

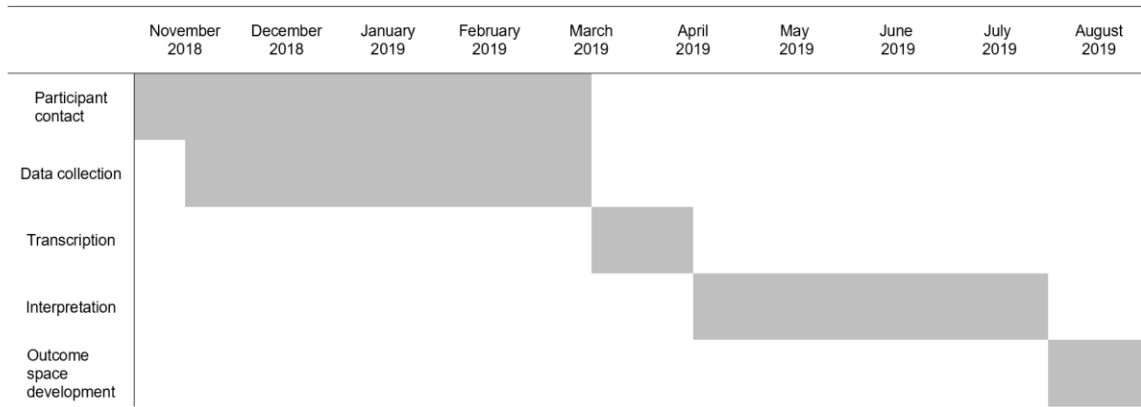| Indicator	Data [a]
Population [b]	57.8M
Population growth [c]	1.4%
GDP [d]	$368B
GDP growth [e]	0.8%
GNI per capita [f]	$5,750
National poverty [g]	56% [n]
Compulsory education [h]	9 years
GDP spent on education [i]	6.2%
Adult literacy rate [j]	87% [o]
At least primary education [k]	86% [o]
At least upper secondary education [l]	61% [o]
At least Bachelor's degree [m]	8% [o]

Note. From "DataBank | World Development Indicators," by The World Bank, 2019, Retrieved December 12, 2019 from http://databank.worldbank.org/data/source/world-development-indicators.

[a]All data from 2018 unless otherwise noted. [b]Based on the de facto definition of population, which counts all residents regardless of legal status or citizenship. The values shown are midyear estimates. [c]Annual population growth rate. Population is based on the de facto definition of population, which counts all residents regardless of legal status or citizenship. [d]GDP at purchaser's prices is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products. Data are in current U.S. dollars. [e]Annual percentage growth rate of GDP at market prices based on constant local currency. [f]GNI per capita is the gross national income, converted to U.S. dollars using the World Bank Atlas method, divided by the midyear population. GNI is the sum of value added by all resident producers plus any product taxes (less subsidies) not included in the valuation of output plus net receipts of primary income (compensation of employees and property income) from abroad. Data are in current U.S. dollars. [g]Percentage of the population living below the national poverty lines. [h]Number of years that children are legally obliged to attend school. [i]General government expenditure on education expressed as a percentage of GDP. [j]Percentage of people ages 15 and above who can both read and write with understanding a short simple statement about their everyday life. [k]Percentage of population ages 25 and over that attained or completed primary education. [l]Percentage of population ages 25 and over that attained or completed upper secondary education. [m]Percentage of population ages 25 and over that attained or completed bachelor's or equivalent. [n]Data from 2014. [o]Data from 2017.

Appendix B. Participant Demographics

No.	Gender	Race	City based in	City from	Incubator(s)	Found through
1	Male	Black	Cape Town	Expat (Rwanda)	Solution Space, LaunchLab	Solution Space manager
2	Male	White	Cape Town	Cape Town	Solution Space	Personal network
3	Male	Black	Johannesburg	Expat (Zimbabwe)	Awethu Project	GIBS faculty
4	Male	White	Cape Town	Cape Town	Solution Space	Pitch event
5	Male	White	Cape Town	Cape Town	LaunchLab	News article
6	Male	Multiracial	Cape Town	Cape Town	RLabs	News article
7	Male	White	Cape Town	Pretoria	Injini	Personal network
8	Male	Black	Cape Town	Johannesburg	Startupbootcamp AfriTech	Incubator website
9	Female	Black	Cape Town	Cape Town	Seed Academy, 500 Startups	Personal network
10	Male	Multiracial	Cape Town	Cape Town	Solution Space, Startupbootcamp AfriTech, AlphaCode	Pitch event
11	Female	Multiracial	Johannesburg	Johannesburg	Impact Hub Johannesburg	Impact Hub website
12	Male	Black	Pretoria	Pretoria	Innovation Hub	Personal network
13	Male	White	Cape Town	Cape Town	Google Launchpad	News article
14	Male	White	Cape Town	Expat (UK)	Techstars, Sw7, Boost VC	News article
15	Female	White	Cape Town	Expat (Namibia)	Startupbootcamp AfriTech	Startupbootcamp website
16	Female	Multiracial	Cape Town	Eastern Cape	Startupbootcamp AfriTech	Startupbootcamp website
17	Female	Black	Durban	KwaZulu-Natal	Red Bull Amaphiko, Spark, YGAP	Red Bull Amaphiko website
18	Male	White	Cape Town	Cape Town	Startupbootcamp InsureTech, Google Launchpad Accelerator, XL Africa	News article
19	Female	Black	Cape Town	Mpumalanga	Solution Space, Startupbootcamp AfriTech, AlphaCode, LHoFT	Referral from another participant
20	Male	White	Cape Town	Johannesburg	Startupbootcamp AfriTech	Startupbootcamp website

Appendix C. Research Timeline

	November 2018	December 2018	January 2019	February 2019	March 2019	April 2019	May 2019	June 2019	July 2019	August 2019
Participant contact										
Data collection										
Transcription										
Interpretation										
Outcome space development										

Research Project: Social Entrepreneurs' Conceptions of Incubator-based Learning

Interviewer: Aleia Bucci   **Interviewee:** [Name]

To participate in this research project, you will need to understand and agree to the terms of participation in the study. The contents of this consent form ensure you understand the purpose of your involvement. Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time throughout the process with no consequence.

This research project aims to understand the qualitatively different ways in which social entrepreneurs experience learning within an incubator in Southern Africa. The interview will focus on your personal experience of learning and will be conducted in English.

Data will be collected via an in-person interview conducted by the Researcher. Notes will be taken and the session will be recorded for future transcription. The interview is expected to last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and consists of approximately 15 questions, though these numbers may change depending on the extent of answers and any follow-up questions necessary. Should the interview need to run longer than 90 minutes, it will be terminated and a new interview session will be scheduled.

It is important to understand that all data collected will <u>not</u> be confidential as the results will be reported, but these reports will always be anonymous. Your personal and/or company name will be recorded during the interview and transcription process but will never appear in any research outputs. You will not be able to be identified based on any interview quotations or any subsequent written text based on those quotations. Partial or full excerpts of the transcribed interview will be used anonymously in the researcher's thesis and may be used in subsequent journal articles and/or reports.

While there will be no form of compensation for participation, you will be given a copy of the final research output as a thank you for your participation. There are no known risks associated with this study, though if any questions make you uncomfortable, you may decline to respond or end the interview.

Signing this form certifies that you agree to and approve of the terms of your participation in the research project, which includes an interview and the recording of that interview. Your signature also confirms that you have established your ability to read, write, and speak in English. You are able to ask any questions you may have during the interview process as well as contact me with any future questions should they arise.

Researcher Name: Aleia Bucci
Researcher Email Address: aleia.bucci@gmail.com
Researcher Phone: +1 315 427 5319 (WhatsApp)

Research Supervisor Name: Dr. Jonathan Marks
Research Supervisor Email Address: marksj@gibs.co.za
Research Supervisor Phone: +27 11 771 4000

_____   _____

Participant Signature   Date

(signature)
_____   <u>10 September 2018</u>

Researcher Signature   Date

(signature)

_____   <u>13 September 2018</u>

Researcher Supervisor Signature   Date

Appendix E. Code Categories

CONTEXT

Context | misc
Context | Africa
Context | Africa | Cape Town
Context | Africa | challenges
Context | Africa | social entrepreneur
Context | Africa | South Africa
Context | Africa | South Africa | benefits
Context | Africa | South Africa | challenges
Context | Africa | South Africa | challenges | demographics
Context | Africa | South Africa | challenges | ecosystem
Context | Africa | South Africa | challenges | entrepreneur
Context | Africa | South Africa | challenges | funding
Context | Africa | South Africa | challenges | social entrepreneur

ENTREPRENEUR

Entrepreneur | misc
Entrepreneur | challenges
Entrepreneur | challenges | reality
Entrepreneur | challenges | relationships
Entrepreneur | challenges | women
Entrepreneur | journey
Entrepreneur | journey | accidental
Entrepreneur | journey | always knew
Entrepreneur | journey | found idea
Entrepreneur | journey | necessity
Entrepreneur | journey | needed change
Entrepreneur | journey | youth
Entrepreneur | personal traits
Entrepreneur | social entrepreneur
Entrepreneur | social entrepreneur | business
Entrepreneur | social entrepreneur | challenges
Entrepreneur | social entrepreneur | impact
Entrepreneur | social entrepreneur | personal traits

INCUBATOR

Incubator | misc
Incubator | activity | check in
Incubator | activity | content
Incubator | activity | deliverable

Incubator | activity | event
Incubator | activity | meeting
Incubator | activity | misc
Incubator | activity | pitch
Incubator | activity | social
Incubator | activity | talk
Incubator | benefit
Incubator | benefit | funding
Incubator | benefit | network | external
Incubator | benefit | network | internal
Incubator | benefit | reputation
Incubator | benefit | resources
Incubator | benefit | support
Incubator | business stage
Incubator | environment
Incubator | expectation
Incubator | expectation | funding
Incubator | expectation | growth
Incubator | expectation | knowledge
Incubator | expectation | mentor
Incubator | expectation | network
Incubator | expectation | none
Incubator | expectation | self
Incubator | experience
Incubator | future incubation
Incubator | gripe | content
Incubator | gripe | environment
Incubator | gripe | lack of information
Incubator | gripe | misc
Incubator | gripe | model
Incubator | gripe | model | context
Incubator | gripe | model | forced
Incubator | gripe | model | funding
Incubator | gripe | model | is a business
Incubator | gripe | model | no time for business
Incubator | gripe | model | personalisation
Incubator | gripe | staff
Incubator | gripe | staff | not entrepreneurial
Incubator | learning | business concepts | abstract
Incubator | learning | business concepts | best practices
Incubator | learning | business concepts | brand
Incubator | learning | business concepts | conversations
Incubator | learning | business concepts | measurement
Incubator | learning | business concepts | misc

Incubator | learning | business concepts | skills
Incubator | learning | business concepts | strategy
Incubator | learning | business concepts | target market
Incubator | learning | business transformation | bigger picture
Incubator | learning | business transformation | foundation
Incubator | learning | business transformation | misc
Incubator | learning | business transformation | model
Incubator | learning | business transformation | performance
Incubator | learning | business transformation | problem
Incubator | learning | business transformation | product
Incubator | learning | business transformation | scale
Incubator | learning | business transformation | stepping away
Incubator | learning | business transformation | structure
Incubator | learning | champion | advice
Incubator | learning | champion | affirmation
Incubator | learning | champion | challenge
Incubator | learning | champion | push
Incubator | learning | champion | responsibility
Incubator | learning | champion | support
Incubator | learning | co-created learning | cohort
Incubator | learning | co-created learning | cohort | challenges
Incubator | learning | co-created learning | cohort | competition
Incubator | learning | co-created learning | cohort | diversity
Incubator | learning | co-created learning | cohort | ideas
Incubator | learning | co-created learning | context
Incubator | learning | co-created learning | conversation
Incubator | learning | co-created learning | environment
Incubator | learning | co-created learning | experts
Incubator | learning | co-created learning | feedback
Incubator | learning | co-created learning | mentor
Incubator | learning | co-created learning | observation
Incubator | learning | co-created learning | team
Incubator | learning | entrepreneur concepts | funding
Incubator | learning | entrepreneur concepts | idea
Incubator | learning | entrepreneur concepts | misc
Incubator | learning | entrepreneur concepts | pitch
Incubator | learning | entrepreneur concepts | startup
Incubator | learning | learnability | create learning
Incubator | learning | learnability | motivation
Incubator | learning | learnability | open
Incubator | learning | learnability | what you don't know
Incubator | learning | personal development | mindset
Incubator | learning | personal development | self
Incubator | learning | practical application | customers

Incubator | learning | practical application | misc
Incubator | learning | practical application | testing
Incubator | learning | type
Incubator | mentor | challenges
Incubator | mentor | content
Incubator | mentor | mentor experience
Incubator | mentor | process
Incubator | mentor | relationship
Incubator | model | comparison
Incubator | model | element
Incubator | model | misc
Incubator | model | structure
Incubator | motivation
Incubator | path to incubator
Incubator | path to incubator | competition
Incubator | path to incubator | incubator
Incubator | path to incubator | network
Incubator | path to incubator | reason
Incubator | path to incubator | reason | knowledge
Incubator | path to incubator | reason | resources
Incubator | path to incubator | reason | self
Incubator | path to incubator | reason | skills
Incubator | post-incubation
Incubator | post-incubation | mentor
Incubator | post-incubation | network
Incubator | post-incubation | outcome
Incubator | post-incubation | outcome | change
Incubator | post-incubation | outcome | direction
Incubator | post-incubation | outcome | investment
Incubator | post-incubation | outcome | progress
Incubator | post-incubation | relationship
Incubator | purpose
Incubator | serial incubatee
Incubator | social entrepreneur
Incubator | wish list | activity
Incubator | wish list | content
Incubator | wish list | mentor
Incubator | wish list | personalisation
Incubator | wish list | resources

LEARNING

Learning
Learning | belief

Learning | comparison
Learning | education background
Learning | from others
Learning | from others | family
Learning | from others | family | parents
Learning | from others | mentors
Learning | from others | network
Learning | from others | peers
Learning | is
Learning | learnability
Learning | lifelong
Learning | practical
Learning | school
Learning | school | beyond academic
Learning | school | forced
Learning | school | limitations
Learning | school | minimum effort
Learning | school | negative
Learning | school | positive
Learning | school | postgrad
Learning | school | teachers
Learning | school | university
Learning | self-directed
Learning | skill
Learning | type
Learning | type of student

Appendix F. Archetype Summary Examples

Conception	Participant 6 | Maximiser	Participant 10 | Collaborator	Participant 16 | Student
Learnability	High | Learned as much as possible	High | Intended to learn from incubation	High | Went to incubation to learn
Business concepts	High | No business background so had to learn everything	Medium-low | Went to business school so already knew concepts	High | Learned the most from business content
Entrepreneur concepts	High | Became an entrepreneur through incubation	Medium-low | Had already been an entrepreneur before	High | Learned how to be an entrepreneur
Business transformation	High | Changed the business model entirely during incubation	Medium-low | Haven't come up with a way to make the business work	High | Pivoted business completely
Personal transformation	High | Discussed becoming a completely different person after incubation	Medium-low | Still the same person but questioning being an entrepreneur	Medium | Gained confidence
Practical application of knowledge	High | Learned by applying knowledge	High | Learning was all about the practical application	Medium | Practically applied some learnings
Having a champion	High | Relied heavily on champions during incubation	High | Champions were a key factor in incubation	Medium-low | Champions had their limitations
Co-created learning	High | Believes in collaborative learning	High | Benefited greatly from the diversity in the program	Medium-low | Not enough time together to learn from each other

Appendix G. Archetype Classification

	Learnability	Business concepts	Entrepreneur concepts	Business transformation	Personal transformation	Practical application of knowledge	Having a champion	Co-created learning	Participant number
Maximiser	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	3,6,11,19
Transformer	High	Medium-low	Medium-low	High	High	High	High	High	4, 8, 13, 15, 20
Collaborator	High	Medium-low	Medium-low	Medium-low	Medium-low	High	High	High	5, 7, 9, 10, 18
Student	High	High	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium-low	Medium-low	1, 14, 16
Consumer	Low	Low	Low	Medium-low	Low	Low	Low	Low	2, 12, 17

Appendix H. Details of the Model of the Informal Learning Experience of Social Entrepreneurs within Incubation Programmes