CHAPTER 4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter Outline

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

The need for this study arises from the concern within South Africa and elsewhere for the development and promotion of sustainable entrepreneurial and small business ventures. The continuous low rating by the South African Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Report of Total Entrepreneurial Activity in South Africa (Driver *et al*., 2001; Foxcroft *et al*., 2002; Orford *et al*., 2003; Orford *et al*., 2004) as well as the high failure rates of start-ups (Nieman & Pretorius, 2003; Nieuwenhuizen, 2003) suggests that attention should be given to the nature of business development services that are provided to entrepreneurs and small businesses.

The research questions that arose from the concern to reduce the failure rate of start-ups and to develop and promote sustainable ventures are:

1. What is the nature of the entrepreneur and small business support problem environment?
2. What are the knowledge, skills and competence requirements of entrepreneur and small business support practitioners?
3. Are support practitioners able to contribute positively to the reduction of start-up failure rates as well as to the development and promotion of sustainable ventures?

4.2 PROJECT PROCESS OUTLINE

The process that the study followed is outlined in Figure 4.1. This outline sets out the different steps that were followed as well as the objective of each research process step.

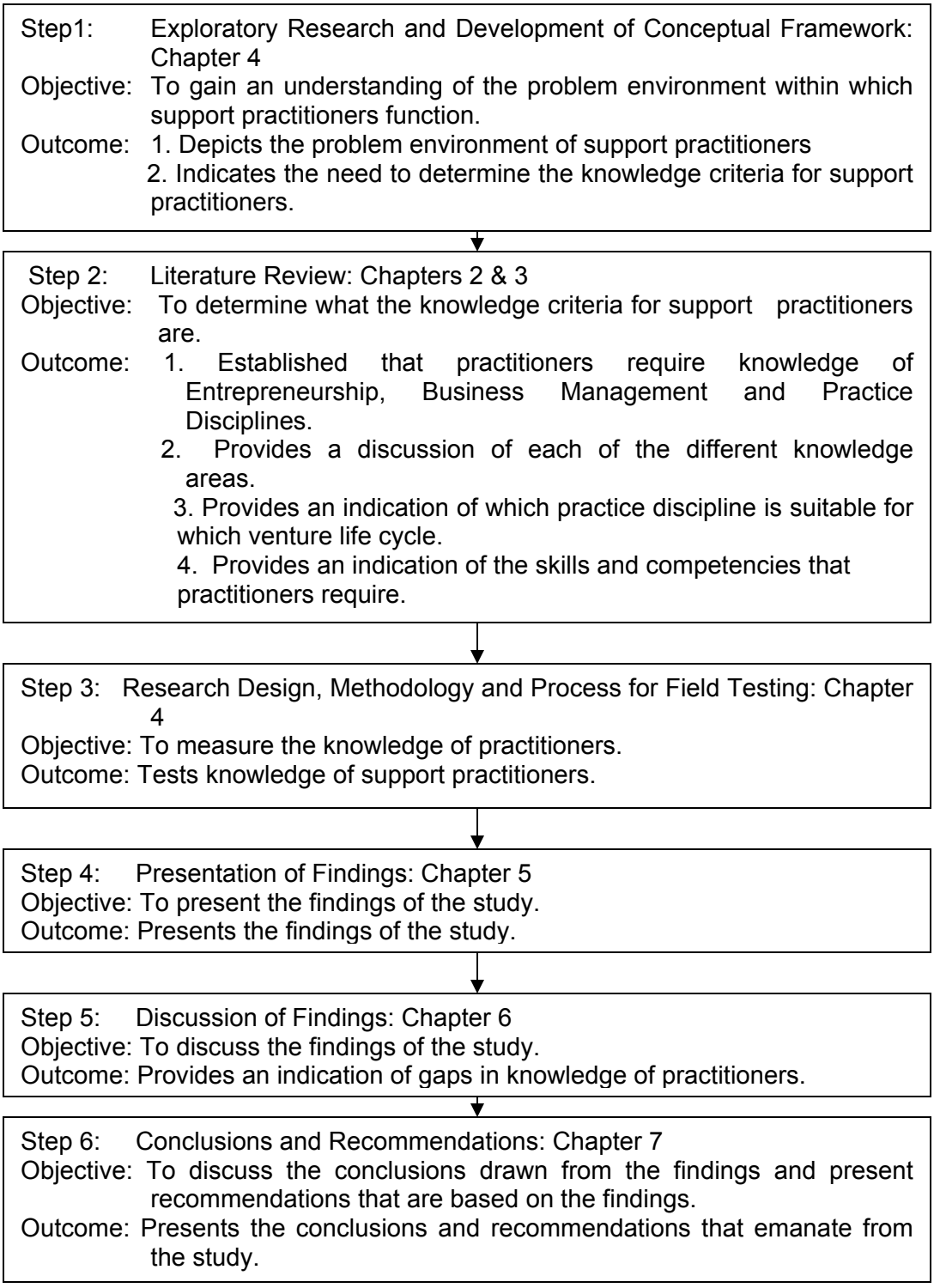

Figure 4.1 Project outline

4. 3 THEORY BUILDING

To obtain a better understanding of the need for this study, a logical framework was developed using the Transcendental Model development methodology. A transcendental question or issue is one which focuses on those things that must be in place for other things to be possible (Yirenkyi-Boateng, 2003:76). Transcendental questions guide the research process, and are also relevant to the practical areas of project implementation (Yirenkyi-Boateng, 2001). Transcendental arguments according to Yirenkyi-Boateng (2003:76) can help to distinguish between what is the case and what must be the case (for certain things to be possible). In terms of this research project, the goals or vision of entrepreneurial and small business support practices should thus be stated first. Yirenkyi-Boateng (2003:77) states that it is necessary to start any research we do by first outlining what we want reality to be like in the first case. Although it may not be possible to make comparisons of reality through scientific representations, it is possible to establish *a priori* (in advance of experience) that reality must have certain features for scientific activity to be possible (Yirenkyi-Boateng, 2003:77).

Through the use of the transcendental approach, a conceptual model of the support practitioners' problem environment (Figure 4.2) was developed.

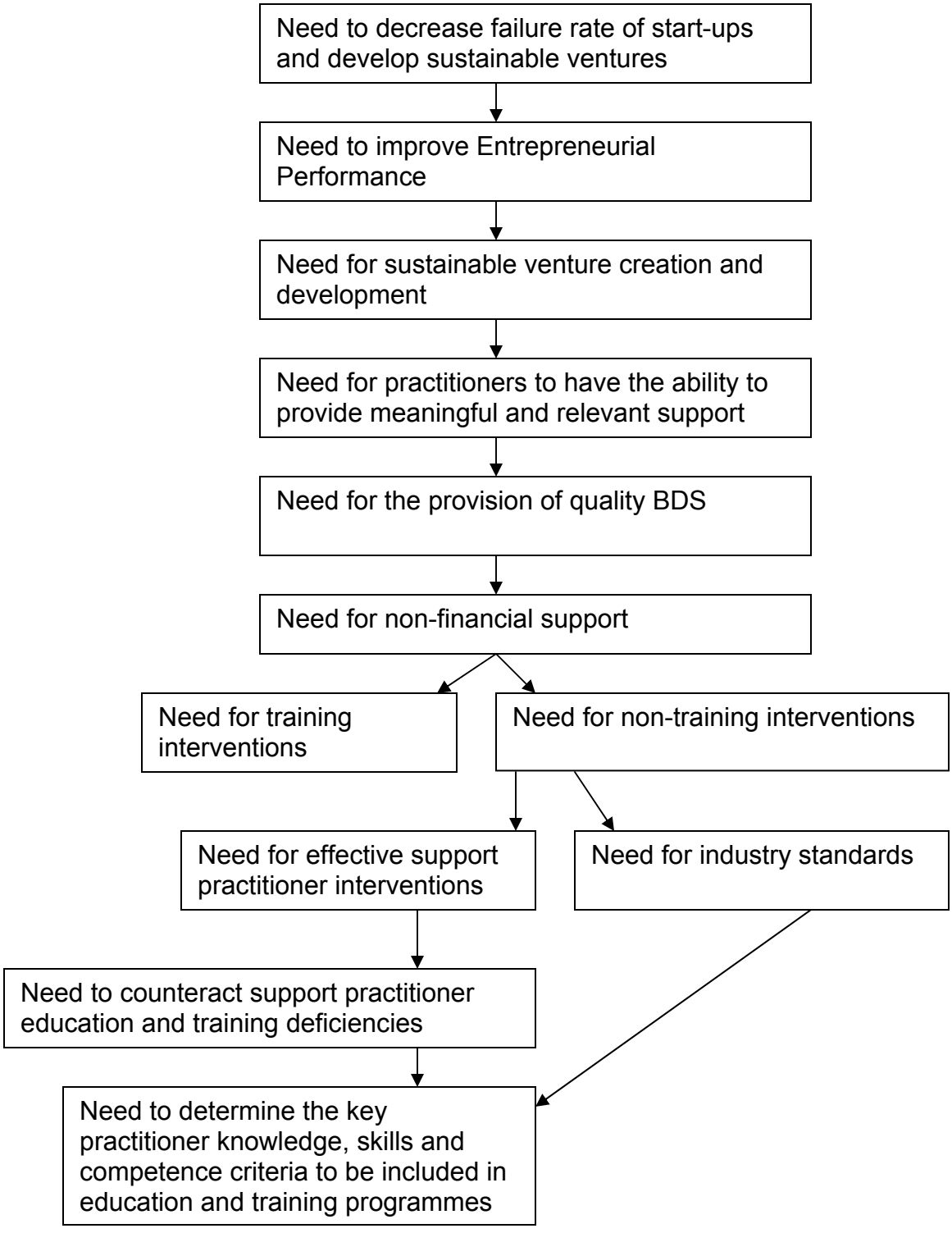

Figure 4.2 Model of support practitioners' problem environment

The starting point for the transcendental model was derived by focusing on one of the major concerns that support practices hope to address, namely, the need to reduce the failure rate of start-ups and to create sustainable entrepreneurial and small business ventures. Model development (Figure 4.2) began by asking the transcendental question: "What are the necessary conditions that must be present to reduce the high failure rates of start-ups and to develop and promote sustainable ventures?" To solve any problem, realist philosophy requires that the process begins with one important element and asks what else is required for the existence of that element to be possible (Yirenkyi-Boateng, 2003:77). Thus, Figure 4.2 suggests that for a decrease in the failure rate of start-ups to take place, we need to increase the levels of entrepreneurial performance. This logical deduction is confirmed by the Van Vuuren and Nieman Entrepreneurial Performance Model (1999). The necessary condition to affect increases in entrepreneurial performance is the ability of practitioners to provide meaningful and relevant support. The iterative process of establishing the necessary condition of a particular element is followed from top to bottom throughout Figure 4.2 to the last set of variables that indicate the need to determine the key knowledge, skills and competencies for practitioners.

The different model elements are objects with a real existence that are defined in terms of the relationships that exist within the whole, and the nature of each element can be understood in terms of its relationship to some other element in the model (Yirenkyi-Boateng, 2003:77). Thus, it can be deduced that the knowledge, skills and competencies that practitioners gain through education and training programmes enable them to provide meaningful support that will contribute to the decrease in the failure rate of start-ups.

The conceptual model (see Figure 4.2) and theory building process have provided two main benefits:

- Firstly, a holistic view of the broader problem environment within which support practitioners function has been provided.

- Secondly, the focus for the research study and where it fits into the broader problem environment have been established.

In addition to the two benefits mentioned above, the conceptual model has also answered the research question, “What is the nature of the entrepreneur and small business support environment?” The conceptual model also places the research focus on the need to determine the key knowledge, skills and competence criteria for entrepreneur and small business support practitioners (as one intervention). The model postulates that if practitioners receive training and education in key knowledge, skills and competencies, they will be able to provide meaningful support which will lead to a reduction in the failure rate of start-ups.

The conceptual model also leads to the second and main research question: “What are the Knowledge, Skills and Competencies that Support Practitioners require?” The rationale for focusing on this research question was based on the fact that if the knowledge, skills and competence requirements of support practitioners were known, we would be able to measure whether South African practitioners possess the knowledge, skills and competence as described in the criteria. It can be deduced from the literature (Deakins & Freel, 1998; Timmons, 1999; Wickham, 2001; Hisrich & Peters, 2002) that if practitioners possess the required knowledge, skills and competencies, they will be able to contribute positively to the prevention of start-up failure rates as well as the development and promotion of sustainable ventures.

4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The philosophical basis for the research methodology was also derived from the transcendental realist approach. By means of this approach, a stratification research model was developed (Figure 4.3). The goals of the study project are:

- firstly, to investigate the knowledge, skills and competence criteria that support practitioners should possess in order to assist entrepreneurs and

small businesses to create and develop sustainable ventures that would in turn lead to the decline in start-up failure rates;

- secondly, to establish what knowledge, skills and competencies practitioners *do* possess.

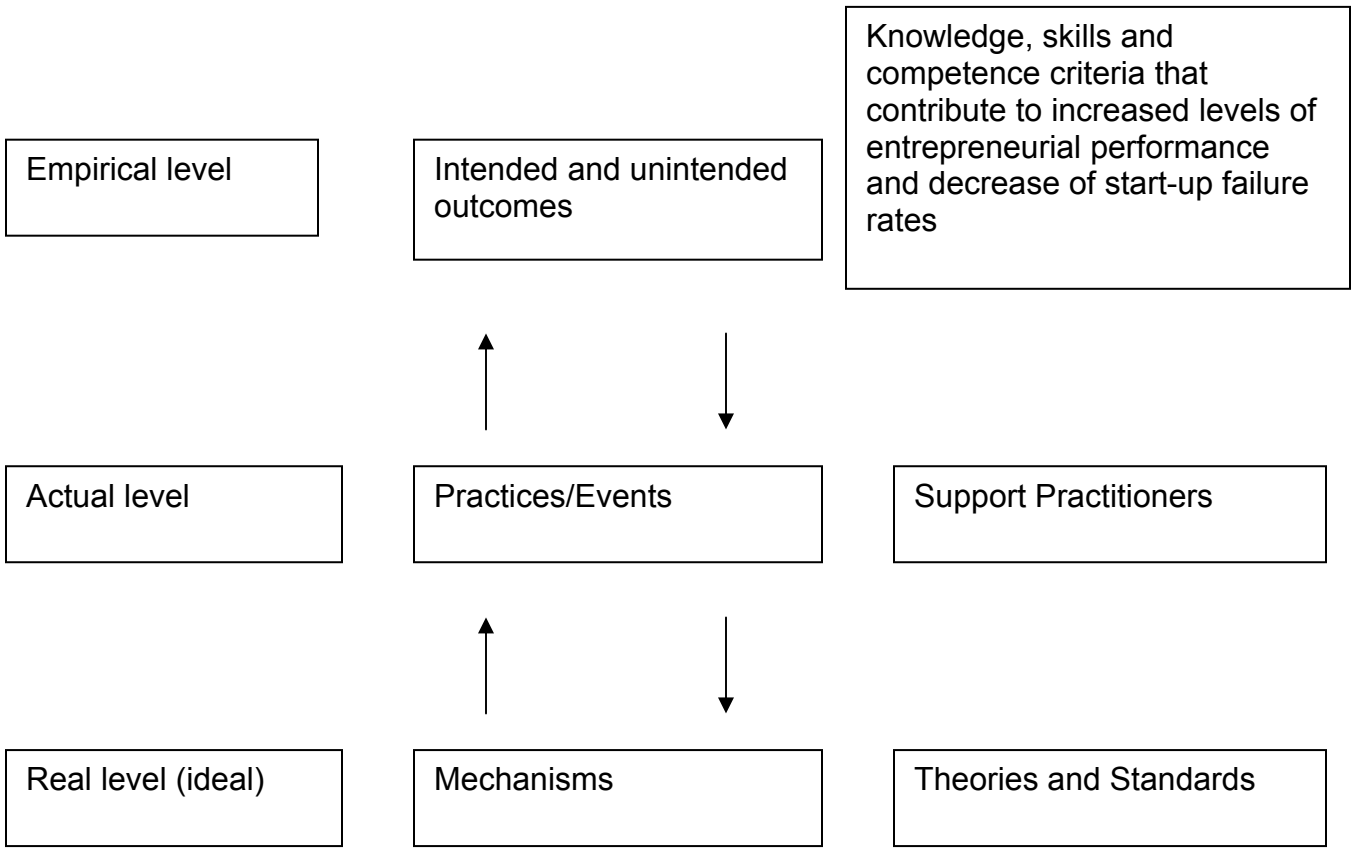

Figure 4.3 Stratification research model for support practitioners (adapted from Yirenkyi-Boateng, 2003:73)

Figure 4.3 shows that a research project structured along such lines involves moving, initially, from very abstract concepts of the practitioner problem environment (the real level). Hereafter the research moves through lower levels of abstraction which involves the knowledge, skills and competencies of entrepreneur and small business support practitioners and related concepts (the

actual level). Finally, the research moves to the more concrete empirical levels of the outcomes of the processes involved (adapted from Yirenkyi-Boateng, 2003:77).

Figure 4.3 also shows that the research project moves from firstly investigating the mechanisms at the real level with regard to entrepreneurial and small business support practices. This level is also referred to as the ideal (Yirenkyi-Boateng, 2003) and takes into account the existing theories and standards with regard to support practices. This was done through the exploratory research and literature review phases.

4.4.1 EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

The exploratory research was aimed at establishing whether knowledge, skills and competence criteria for support practitioners already existed. The following process was followed during the exploratory phase:

- Contact was made with different industry experts attached to support organisations to explain the objective of the study and obtain their agreement for a one hour one-on-one discussion to discuss further the rationale for the study as well as to obtain their views on the support practitioners' environment. The discussions were unstructured as the purpose was to gather information and to obtain the personal views of the particular expert. The industry experts were arbitrarily selected.
- The exploratory literature review was undertaken through searching electronic databases as well as other secondary sources to obtain information on available relevant literature. The model of the support practitioners' problem environment (Figure 4.2) provided the motivation to focus on the knowledge requirements of support practitioners. A detailed discussion of the exploratory research findings is provided in chapter five.

The exploratory phase of the study (exploratory literature review and exploratory discussions) revealed that there is a dearth of industry standards as well as education and training programmes with regard to entrepreneur and small business support practitioners.

4.4.2 Literature Review

A literature review was undertaken to determine the knowledge, skills and competence requirements of practitioners with regard to entrepreneurship and business management skills necessary to increase entrepreneurial performance. The literature review thus sought to answer the second research question: "What are the knowledge, skills and competence requirements of entrepreneurial and small business support practitioners?" This research question was derived from the model of the support practitioners' problem environment (Figure 4.2). It was also established through the literature review that practitioners should understand the differences between entrepreneurial and small business ventures as well as what personal characteristics are needed for each (Chapter Two).

The literature review also focuses on the entrepreneurial and small business learning requirements as well as the different practice disciplines. The literature review provides a discussion, among other things, of the role and the requirements of each practice discipline (Chapter Three).

Extensive use is made of tables in the literature review to either summarise or compare certain key issues or criteria. The purpose of this methodology was to use some of these table data to seek relationships with data obtained from practitioners in the field research.

4.4.3 Field Research

An investigation was also undertaken of the practices and events, which are basically an assessment of what is happening on the actual level (see Figure

4.3). This was carried out by way of the field research phase. The purpose of the field research was to establish whether support practitioners possess the required knowledge criteria, that is, entrepreneurial knowledge, business management knowledge and knowledge of the different practice disciplines.

The motivation for focusing on the knowledge aspects of support practitioners is supported by Stewart and Hamlin (1992:12), who state that mastery in terms of knowing and understanding certain concepts, definitions of terms, ranges of techniques, theories of explanation and prediction, results of research, sources of information, etc., is essential in just about any occupation. They state further that it remains the case that knowledge is an essential requirement in occupational performance and therefore a component which must be assessed (Stewart & Hamlin, 1992:12). Another reason why attention should be given to knowledge according to Stewart and Hamlin (1992) is the fact that knowledge is the starting point in skills development. It can thus be accepted that if practitioners possess the required knowledge they would then at least have the basis for skills and competence development which in turn would contribute to them being able to provide meaningful support to entrepreneurs and small businesses.

The actual level influences the empirical, in other words, through the actual practices one hopes to achieve the intended outcome of increased levels of entrepreneurial performance which in turn would result in sustainable ventures and thus also a decline in the failure rate of start-ups.

The field research was done by opting for a cross sectional, ex post facto descriptive study as the purpose of the research is to establish whether South African practitioners possess the required knowledge as determined by the literature review. The field research also served to seek support for the propositions and hypotheses.

4.4.4 Propositions

The propositions seek to investigate the knowledge levels of support practitioners with regard to their knowledge of entrepreneurship, business management and knowledge of the practice categories.

- Proposition 1: Support practitioners lack entrepreneurial knowledge.
- Proposition 2: Support practitioners lack business management knowledge.
- Proposition 3: Support practitioners lack knowledge of the practice disciplines.

4.4.5 Hypotheses

The field research also assisted with the testing of the hypotheses. The purpose of the hypotheses was to test the support practitioners' attitude with regard to important business issues, their frequency of contact with different venture types as well as the frequency with which they deal with different company problems.

Ho1 – Ho3 measures the level of *importance that support practitioners attach* to different business issues. The measurement is at three levels:

- the total sample as a group;
- between the different practice categories;
- within each of the different practice categories.

Ho1: All business issues are ranked with similar importance (no difference) by all support practitioners.

Ha1: All business issues are not ranked with similar importance by all support practitioners. (There is a different ranking.)

Ho2: All business issues are ranked with similar importance (no difference) by the different practice categories.

Ha2: All business issues are not ranked with similar importance by the different practice categories. (There is a different ranking.)

Ho3: All business issues are ranked with similar importance (no difference) by support practitioners within each of the different practice categories.

Ha3: All business issues are not ranked with similar importance by support practitioners within each of the different practice categories

Ho4 – Ho6 measures the *frequency of support practitioner contact* with different venture types. The measurement is at three levels:

- the total group;
- between the different practice categories;
- within each of the different practice categories.

Ho4: The frequency of contact with different venture types is the same for all support practitioners.

Ha4: The frequency of contact with different venture types is not the same for all support practitioners.

Ho5: The frequency of contact with different venture types is the same between the different practice categories.

Ha5: The frequency of contact with different venture types is not the same between the different practice categories.

Ho6: The frequency of contact with different venture types is the same for support practitioners within each of the practice categories.

Ha6: The frequency of contact with different venture types is not the same for support practitioners within each of the practice categories.

Ho7 – Ho9 measures the *frequency of contact with different types of company problems* by support practitioners. The measurement is at three levels:

- the total group;
- between the different practice categories;
- within each of the different practice categories.

Ho7: The frequency of contact with different company problems is the same for all support practitioners.

Ha7: The frequency of contact with different company problems is not the same for all support practitioners.

Ho8: The frequency of contact with different company problems is the same between the practice categories.

Ha8: The frequency of contact with different company problems is not the same between the practice categories.

Ho9: The frequency of contact with different company problems is the same for support practitioners within each of the practice categories.

Ha9: The frequency of contact with different company problems is not the same for support practitioners within each of the practice categories.

4.5 RESEARCH PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

The conceptual model (Figure 4.2) provides a description of the support practitioners' problem environment. The model also depicts the need for the study which points to the need to focus on the knowledge, skills and competence criteria that support practitioners require to provide adequate assistance to entrepreneurs and small businesses. Figure 4.2 thus answers the research question: "What is the nature of the entrepreneur and small business support practitioners' problem environment?" Figure 4.2 also implies that possession of the required knowledge, skills and competencies would assist practitioners to provide meaningful and relevant support to entrepreneurs and small businesses.

This in turn could lead to the reduction of start-up failures as well as contribute to sustainable venture promotion.

The stratified research model (Figure 4.3) indicates the process that the research process follows:

- An investigation into the existing theories and practices was undertaken through an exploratory study as well as a literature review. This phase of the study revealed that support practitioners need knowledge, skills and competencies in especially three areas, namely, entrepreneurship, business management and the practice disciplines. The literature review has thus assisted in answering the research question: “What are the knowledge requirements for support practitioners?”
- The objective of the field research was to answer the research question: Do support practitioners possess the required knowledge criteria to provide meaningful support?

4.5.1 Measurement Elements

The measured elements contained in the questionnaire had to include all three areas of knowledge as determined by the literature study, namely, entrepreneurship, business management and the practice disciplines. To establish practitioner knowledge and competence further, two case studies were also used, which practitioners had to examine and answer a set of open-ended questions on.

One case study aimed to measure the practitioner’s knowledge of entrepreneurship and business management issues such as knowledge with regard to entrepreneurial characteristics and business planning, while the second case study aimed to measure the practitioner’s knowledge with regard to the different non-training practice disciplines. The inclusion of the two case studies and open-ended questions could have contributed to a lower than expected

response rate as the questionnaire may have been perceived as an examination of the respondents' knowledge which they might have felt uncomfortable with.

The purpose of the research, however, was to measure the knowledge of the practitioners with regard to entrepreneurship, business management and the practice disciplines and it was felt that the case studies and open-ended questions would provide a more accurate indication of their knowledge of these issues. Despite the lower than expected response rate it is believed that the integrity of the data was improved above that which was expected by only doing a questionnaire that focuses on the perception of own skills.

4.5.2 The Communication Approach

The research was executed mainly by way of self-administered emailed questionnaires. The original design of the project intended for the questionnaires to be either posted or emailed to respondents who would have been randomly selected from a sample of practitioners within each employing organisation. Alternatives to the communication approach were not really under the control of the researcher as employing organisations denied direct access to respondents and requested that surveys be emailed to a contact person within the organisation. The contact person within the organisation would then forward the questionnaires electronically to practitioners. This system proved ineffective with the follow-up of non-responses. Questionnaires were hand delivered to three Local Business Service Centres, however, and collected after completion.

Although the email approach had some advantages, such as the perception of more anonymity and allowing respondents time to think about questions (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:313), it also had certain disadvantages, such as no interviewer intervention available for probing or explanation (Cooper & Schindler, 2003: 313), which could have assisted with addressing possible interpretation problems.

4.5.3 Constructing and Refining the Measurement Questions

This research followed Cooper and Schindler's guidelines (2003). They state that drafting the questions begins once one develops a complete list of investigative questions and decides on the collection processes to be used (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:336). The order, type, and wording of the measurement questions, the introduction, the instructions, the transitions, and the closure in a quality communication instrument should accomplish the following:

- encourage each respondent to provide accurate responses;
- encourage each respondent to provide an adequate amount of information;
- discourage each respondent from refusing to answer specific questions;
- discourage each respondent from early discontinuation of participation;
- leave the respondent with a positive attitude about survey participation (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:336).

The questionnaire used in this study (see Appendix A) adheres to the above mentioned guidelines stated by Cooper and Schindler (2003) as respondents appeared not to have experienced major difficulties in completing the questionnaire.

4.5.4 Question Content

With regard to question content, Cooper and Schindler (2003:337) state that four questions covering numerous issues guide the instrument designer in selecting appropriate question content:

- Should this question be asked?
- Is the question of proper scope and coverage?
- Can the respondent adequately answer this question as asked?
- Will the respondent willingly answer this question as asked?

The question content of the questionnaire appears to be adequate as very few returned questionnaires had unanswered sections.

4.5.5 Questionnaire Design

Several situational factors affect the decision whether to use open-ended or closed questions. The decision is also affected by the degree to which these factors are known to the interviewer. The factors are:

- the objectives of the study;
- the respondent's level of information about the topic;
- the degree to which the respondent has thought through the topic;
- the ease with which the respondent communicates;
- the respondent's motivation level to share information (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:346).

According to Cooper and Schindler (2003:346), open-ended questions are appropriate when the objective is to discover opinions and degrees of knowledge. This study wanted to measure the knowledge of practitioners with regard to entrepreneurship, business management and the practice disciplines and thus open-ended questions were used (see Appendix A).

The questionnaire design followed Cooper and Schindler's guidelines (2003) and was structured as follows:

1. The first ten questions were biographical and sought to establish the province within which the practitioner operates, the practice label/s by which the practitioner is known, age, gender, race, educational and other qualifications, industry experience, business ownership and the percentage time spent on certain activities.

The purpose of questions such as age, race and gender is mainly to assist with the profiling of practitioners. The enquiry into the educational qualifications of practitioners is to determine whether practitioners do have education and training in all three knowledge, skills and competence criteria areas, namely, entrepreneurship, business management and the practice disciplines – as determined through the literature review.

2. In the second part of the questionnaire the respondent is provided with definitions of the practice disciplines which are Advising, Coaching, Counselling, Consulting and Mentoring. Respondents were then requested, firstly, to indicate the percentage of time they spend on the different practice disciplines and, thereafter, to give an indication of what percentage they think they should spend on each practice discipline. The situation they described in the first answer could be duplicated if they were satisfied with the answer they provided the first time.

3. The objective of the first case study was to measure the knowledge, skills and competencies of practitioners with regard to entrepreneurship and business management. The respondents were provided with a description of an individual who is considering different business opportunities and who was referred to the support practitioners by the bank to provide assistance with the development of a business plan. The case study stated that the individual did not have clarity as to which business to start. The respondents were then required to complete one structured question and six unstructured questions that required them to indicate whether they regarded the individual as an entrepreneur. The respondents could choose between Yes/No/Maybe. The respondents were also asked to give reasons for their answers. The respondents were also asked:
   - to provide details of which characteristics they regarded as entrepreneurial;

- to provide details of typical screening tools or methodologies they use when evaluating business ideas;
- to name three key factors they consider crucial in the evaluation of viability;
- to list the major elements that they would include in the business plan;
- what they regard as the functions of the business plan;
- to provide details of the roles or tasks they would normally assign to the individual in a situation as described in the case study.

4. The purpose of the second case study was to measure the knowledge, skills and competencies of practitioners with regard to business management and the practice disciplines. A description of four partners who own a brick-making and roof tiling business was provided. The partners are experiencing problems and approach the practitioner for assistance.

   The practitioners were firstly asked to indicate the methodology they would follow to determine the company's problem(s). The purpose of this question was to measure whether practitioners do make use of methodologies to clarify problems as well as which methodologies most commonly are used. In the second question the respondents are provided with seven reasons for or causes of business failure and the respondents are then required to indicate the percentage of blame they would assign for each cause to the venture's failure. The respondents are then also asked to indicate what advice they would give to the clients.

   The next section refers the respondents to the definitions of the practice disciplines and then requires them to indicate on a four-point summative scale what the likelihood would be that they would follow a particular discipline in dealing with clients. The respondents are also required to provide reasons for their answers. The motivation for this approach is to determine, firstly, whether the practitioners have knowledge of the different practice disciplines

and, secondly, whether they know under which circumstances each practice discipline would be most appropriate to employ.

5. In the last section of the questionnaire the respondents were provided with three sets of questions in table format. The first table comprised a set of eight business issues and the respondents were required to indicate the importance that they assign to each of these issues within a venture. The respondents were required to make their choices by choosing between four categories: Not important, Somewhat important, Important and Very important.

The second table listed five venture life stages and the respondents were requested to indicate how often they deal with these types of businesses. The respondents were required to choose between Very rarely, Rarely, Often and Most often.

The last table listed seven business problems and required the respondents to indicate the seriousness of the problem(s) that companies experience which seek their assistance. The respondents were requested to choose between Very rarely, Rarely, Often and Most often.

4.5.6 Measurement Scales

Some questions required respondents to assign a rating on a four-point summated rating scale. The respondents were required to agree or disagree with each statement. Each response was given a numerical score to reflect its degree of attitudinal favourableness, and the scores may be totalled to measure the respondents' attitude (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:234).

A four-point rating scale was decided upon to avoid respondent errors, as cautioned by Cooper and Schindler (2003:235-236), such as:

1. leniency (when a respondent is either an “easy rater” or “hard rater”);
2. central tendency (when raters are reluctant to give extreme judgments);
3. halo effect (the systematic bias that the rater introduces by carrying over a generalised impression of the subject from one rating to the next).

Open-ended questions were also linked to rating questions in an attempt to determine the knowledge and attitude of the respondents on the various issues.

4.5.7 Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings

Data processing started with coding the different closed and open-ended questions. To code open-ended questions each respondent’s open-ended response was first summarised. Categories were then developed for each open-ended question, which were either taken from the literature or arbitrarily determined by using the respondents’ answers to develop the different categories. The next step was to content-analyse the responses to fit them into the different categories of the open-ended questions. This process made it possible for the different open-ended questions to be coded.

When the data of closed-ended question responses was captured, the number of respondents to a particular question was measured against the number of the total sample to calculate the percentage response rate. For questions that required respondents to indicate their degree of agreement with a particular statement, the response rate percentage was determined by measuring the number of respondents per question category against the total number of respondents for that particular question.

The open-ended questions provided respondents with the opportunity to give more than one answer to a question. For this reason the total number of response elements was used to determine the response rate percentage of open-ended questions.

Codes were allocated to both closed and open-ended questions and then entered into a computer programme to obtain frequency data per question response. The data was used to develop different tables and charts that assisted with the interpretation and discussion processes.

4.5.8 Sampling

The initial objective of the study was to use a probability sample that would have been drawn from the sampling frame consisting of support practitioners employed by all entrepreneur and small business support service providers in South Africa. These employing organisations or service providers are the Local Business Service Centres throughout the country, Khula Thusa Mentoring Scheme, Sizanani, The Umsobomvu Youth Fund and Business Partners.

The original decision was to draw a stratified sample from the various employing organisations. A stratified sample divides the population into sub- populations or strata and uses simple random sampling on each stratum (Cooper & Schindler, 2001:190). The stratified sample would have been made up of a random sample drawn from each employing organisation. Local Business Service Centres in each province would also have been grouped and a random sample drawn from each provincial grouping. The motivation for this approach was to measure whether any significant differences in knowledge and approach existed between support practitioners attached to different employing organisations.

The research, however, met with certain difficulties which necessitated a change in approach:

- Firstly, the employing organisations were not willing to provide access to their respective databases with Khula, Sizanani and the Umsobomvu Youth Fund and were only prepared to forward emailed questionnaires to their practitioners. The researcher thus had no access to prospective

respondents of employing organisations. Business Partners opted not to participate in the study.

- Secondly, by the time the field research was undertaken, Ntsika, the government agency that accredited Local Business Service Centres in the country, was in the process of being transformed into SEDA branches.

Although seventy-five Local Business Service Centres were in existence countrywide during the time of Ntsika, these centres were either closed or in the process of being transformed into SEDA Centres by the time the field research was undertaken. As a result three centres in Mpumalanga as well as Libsa (Limpopo Province), Red Door (Western Cape) and two centres in the Eastern Cape were willing to participate in the study. The researcher did not have any control over the sample selection as all the organisations denied direct access to their practitioner databases and were only willing to forward emailed surveys to their practitioners. This situation created problems with follow-ups although some of the business development centres did provide some assistance with follow-ups.

The population that the study concentrated on consisted of the total number of practitioners attached to the employing organisations, which were 526 at the time that the study took place and are represented as follows:

- Khula 320;
- Umsobomvu Youth Fund 80;
- Sizanani 55;
- Mpumalanga's three local business service centres 12;
- Libsa 22;
- Red Door 25;
- Eastern Cape centres 12.

The total number of practitioners attached to each employing organisation that participated in the study could not be confirmed as the researcher did not have

access to the databases and thus was dependent on the feedback from the different organisations.

It must also be mentioned that some practitioners attached to Khula, Umsobomvu Youth Fund and Sizanani do work for two and sometimes all three organisations, which would influence the total number of the population due to double counting. From the responses received, however, it does not appear that double counting occurred with regard to respondents who could have responded on behalf of all the different organisations they are attached to as respondents were required by their employing organisations to respond directly to the researcher.

A total of 83 questionnaires were received back, which translates into a response rate of 15.77% of the estimated population.

It can be seen from the above discussion that a random sample was pursued but the end result could rather be regarded as a non random purposeful sample.

4.5.9 Pre-testing

This research project made use of researcher and respondent pre-testing methodology as described by Cooper and Schindler (2003:359-360). During the researcher pre-testing phase the designers typically test informally in the initial stages and build more structure into the testing along the way (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:360). The researcher performed the first level pre-test while his statistical advisory team performed the second level pre-test.

The respondent pre-testing requires that the questionnaire be field-tested by sample respondent surrogates, individuals with characteristics and backgrounds similar to the desired respondents (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:360). The respondent pre-test was performed by a sample of five practitioners attached to

different employing organisations but all have experience in the provision of entrepreneurial and small business support. According to Cooper and Schindler (2003) the purpose of the pre-test is to check respondent interest to answer questions; to question meaning, transformation, continuity and flow as well as sequence, variability, length and timing.

4.5.10 Statistical Analyses Process

The statistical analyses served to test the hypotheses.

The three question sets sought to enquire about:

- the importance that respondents attach to different given business issues within a venture (respondents were required to give a rating on a four-point Likert type scale, question 15.1 ranging from Not important to Very important);
- the frequency of contact that respondents have with different venture types (respondents were required to give a rating on a four-point Likert type scale, question 15.2 ranging from Very rarely to Most often);
- the type of problems that companies experience which seek the assistance of respondents (respondents were required to give a rating on a four-point Likert type scale, question 15.3 ranging from Very rarely to Most often).

To make meaningful deductions from the data for this section and to look for significant differences three approaches were employed:

1. Significant differences for the total group were first explored for each question set (Friedman two-way analysis test).
2. Significant differences were also explored for each question set between the practice categories (Kruskal-Wallis test).
3. Significant differences were further explored for each question set within each of the practice categories (Friedman two-way analysis test).

The five practice categories were reduced to four by combining the business counsellor category with business coaching. The combination of these two categories was merely done so that meaningful statistical tests could be performed due to the lower number of respondents within each of these categories.

4.6 PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED DURING THE RESEARCH

The fact that the survey was mainly done through emailed questionnaires could have been one reason why not more responses were received. Feedback received from some respondents indicated that formatting problems were experienced, that is, in the process of completing the downloaded questionnaires formatting problems occurred, which required respondents to spend time on sorting out these problems. It appears that respondents did not want to proceed with the completion of the questionnaires when these problems occurred. These formatting problems were unfortunately not picked up during the pre-test phase. The fact that respondents were requested, as an alternative, to print the questionnaires, complete the questionnaires by hand and then fax them back to the researcher, also did not contribute to a higher response rate.

It further appears that the number of open-ended questions could also have contributed to a lower response rate. Open-ended questions take longer to complete and, although this fact was taken into account with the construction of the questionnaire, it appears that the time allocated for the completion of the questionnaire was underestimated. Some respondents could have interpreted this as an attempt to mislead them into participating. However, the completion time estimate was not picked up as a cause for concern during the pre-test phase.

During the data capturing process it was also discovered that question 15.3 in the survey could have been misinterpreted as the question statement requires respondents to rate the seriousness of the problems that companies experience

that seek their assistance, while the rating scale measures frequency. The rating scale, however, is in line with the hypotheses and it does not appear from the responses that this anomaly greatly affected the reliability of the responses. This anomaly was not picked up during the question testing phase.

4.7 INTERPRETATION OF DATA AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The data was interpreted by using frequency analyses and cross tabulations for the first two sections of the questionnaire. Open-ended questions were first content-analysed and then grouped into categories. Categories were derived either from the literature or from the responses to open-ended questions.

For the general questions in the last section of the questionnaire Mean comparisons were used via t-tests. The objective of these tests was mainly to test the hypotheses. Two nonparametric tests were used to test the data, namely, the Friedman two-way analysis of variance test and the Kruskal-Wallis test. The Friedman two-way analysis of variance tests matched samples, ranking each case and calculating the mean rank for each variable across all cases. It uses these ranks to compute a test statistic. The product is a two-way table where the rows represent subjects and the columns represent the treatment conditions (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:519). The Kruskal-Wallis is a one-way analysis of variance by ranks. It assumes random selection and independence of samples and an underlying continuous distribution (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:517).

4.8 SUMMARY

This chapter provides a discussion of the conceptual framework and the research methodology process. The conceptual framework provides a description of the support practitioners' problem environment. This conceptual framework illustrates the need to focus on the knowledge, skills and competencies of support practitioners and further provides the focus for the literature review and field

research phases. The research design and methodology processes are also discussed.