

**Gordon Institute
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**Unlearning in founder chief executive officers: A critical
competence for success**

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ABSTRACT

Founder-CEO's are highly influential in the growth of their businesses which operate in increasingly complex and turbulent environments. It is key for the businesses' survival that the Founder is adaptive and flexible in coping with changes in the external environment. Typically, Founder-CEO's bring certain knowledge and behaviours into the business, which may be unsuitable for the developing business context.

The literature shows a significant relationship between unlearning and change. Unlearning can facilitate the discarding of attachments to old knowledge and outdated behaviours. The literature, however, does not extensively discuss Founder-CEOs attachments and how they are unlearned. This study fills this gap in literature through the use of qualitative, exploratory research methods to gain deeper insights into the unlearning of unfavourable attachments of Founder-CEO's. A total of 15 semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with Founder-CEO's of businesses from 14 different industries.

The key findings confirmed that Founder-CEO's are unfavourably attached to various knowledge structures, behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and skills. Certain external events transpire that force the Founder to unlearn these attachments during different stages of their businesses lifecycle. Letting go of a deeply entrenched attachment has an emotional impact on the Founder-CEO, as they find it difficult to let go of their preferred practises. However, the Founder-CEO's propensity for growth outweighs these emotions.

This study provides two major contributions towards the literature. Firstly, the findings provided the necessary insights to make adjustments to Rautenbach, Sutherland, & Scheepers (2015) original process model of unlearning an attachment for the context of Founder-CEOs. Secondly, and most importantly, a model for the Founder-CEO Unlearning Stages for Business Growth emerged from the findings. This model provides a means for the early identification of an unfavourable attachment through the processes of pre-unlearning, unlearning and post-unlearning. This will help the business transition to the next stage of its growth and improves its chances of survival.

KEYWORDS

Unlearning, Small business growth, Founder-CEOs, Life cycle stages

DECLARATION

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

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

This purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how Founder-CEOs of small growing businesses experience the unlearning process as they let go of their unfavourable attachments which impede change and growth. Furthermore, this study aims to determine whether letting go of the Founder-CEO's unfavourable attachments will improve their personal growth and the subsequent future survival of their business.

1.2 Description of the Problem and Background

Founder-CEO's will retain knowledge structures, skills and attitudes from their past experiences and perceptions of the environment (Macpherson & Holt, 2007). The extent to which Founders are attached to their past experiences and knowledge will depend on how entrenched the experiences have become in the Founders memory through regular use (Fern, Cardinal, & O'Neil, 2012; Glaub, Frese, Fischer, & Hoppe, 2015). The Founder will bring these experiences and knowledge into their small businesses which will significantly shape the way in which they think, and will influence the actions taken to grow the business (Macpherson & Holt, 2007; Zheng, Devaughn, & Bruhn-Zellmer, 2016).

Circumstances could arise as the business grows where the Founder-CEO's past experiences and knowledge will become unsuitable for the business environment in which they operate (Chaston & Sadler-Smith, 2012). Brook, Pedler, Abbott, and Burgoyne (2016) noted that Founder-CEOs will undoubtedly deal with what they termed as "wicked problems", which are intractable in nature during the development of their businesses. This characterisation is due to the fact that typically wicked problems cannot be easily described; they involve multiple stakeholders with competing perspectives and complex interdependencies, and they lack a single obvious solution, which means that any given action could lead to a number of unexpected outcomes. These wicked problems could arise due to several internal and external factors, including the constraints of the Founder's abilities and changes in the external environment.

Nowadays, small businesses operate in dynamic and turbulent environments where knowledge becomes obsolete far quicker (Cegarra-Navarro, Sánchez-Vidal, & Cegarra-Leiva, 2016; Leal-Rodríguez, Eldridge, Roldán, Leal-Millán, & Ortega-

Gutiérrez, 2015). Founder-CEO's who are attached to knowledge, attitudes and skills that are no longer favourable for the business environment will be less able to pursue opportunities identified as their choices will be constrained by these unfavourable attachments, which will most likely lead them to replicating the strategies of their previous employers (Fern et al., 2012). However, attempts to resolve wicked problems will require unconventional problem-solving processes and a deliberate learning strategy for the Founder-CEO, as well as the business as a whole (Brook et al., (2016). Therefore, it is necessary for the Founder-CEO to evolve in order to cope with these problems. Unfortunately, their unfavourable attachments may prohibit their natural evolution.

Souder, Simsek, and Johnson (2012) discussed how a CEO's "paradigms and repertoires of skills evolve during their time in office, positing that CEOs do not think, behave, or perform uniformly over their tenures" (p. 24). This behaviour is seen when tracking the evolution of the skills needed by a Founder-CEO. Founder-CEOs undergo a process where they must make certain choices and trade-offs when starting their business ventures in pursuit of their vision. At the very beginning they will need to decide on which industries to enter based on their assessment of the barriers to entry and the associated rewards (Lofstrom, Bates, & Parker, 2014). Thereafter, their choices and trade-offs will take into account the product and geographic markets in which the business will compete, the product or service which they will provide to these markets, and the physical resources that they will use to deliver the product or service to customers.

These key strategic elements that Founders must decide on can have serious consequences for their business' growth, long-term performance and overall survival (Fern et al., 2012). Unlearning plays an important role in acquiring new knowledge that is incompatible with previous knowledge (Cepeda-Carrion et al., 2012). Therefore, it is envisaged that the process of unlearning and letting go of certain attachments will help the Founder-CEO evolve according to the needs of the business as this will eliminate some of their biases, and in so doing open them up to new choices (Brook et al., 2016; Cepeda-Carrion, Leal-Millan, Ortega-Gutierrez, & Leal-Rodriguez, 2015).

1.3 Research Scope

Many businesses are led by Founder-CEOs and form a large sub-category of the broader categorisation of Owner-CEOs, as they not only own a substantial percentage of their businesses, but also retain control (Souder et al., 2012). The role of leadership

is vital in small businesses, and although there are several reasons for their failure, the role of the Founder is undeniable in navigating through the challenges that arise during the business' growth.

Few studies have investigated the influence of pre-founding experience on the choices of entrepreneurs as they embark on new business ventures. Although a Founder's experienced-based knowledge does constrain their choices, the manner in which Founders unlearn and let go of these experience-based constraints is still unclear (Fern et al., 2012).

Apart from financial resources, Founders starting new business ventures need certain skills and knowledge to grow the business (Lofstrom et al., 2014). As such, it is important to study the leadership of new and established businesses, especially in developing economies such as South Africa, in order to gain a better understanding of the challenges they will face when trying to grow and transition their businesses to maturity. The results of this study will therefore have valuable implications for research on Founder-led businesses.

1.4 Research Motivation

The development and growth of small businesses have societal and economic benefits, particularly in developing countries, as they enhance an economy's productivity, intensify market competition, and promote economic growth (Glaub et al., 2015; Lofstrom et al., 2014; Macpherson & Holt, 2007). These businesses are also able to help create jobs, develop local technology and encourage indigenous entrepreneurship, which in turn results in an increase in the overall standard of living in the country (Adisa, Abdurraheem, & Mordi, 2014; Glaub et al., 2015). It is thus important to study small growing businesses in order to develop a deeper understanding of the critical challenges they face. It is envisaged that helping Founders of small growing businesses to navigate through these challenges will increase their chances of survival which will have positive consequences for the contributions they make to the economy.

The National Planning Commission has recognised the role of small businesses in increasing employment and growth in South Africa. As a result, the government tries to support small business initiatives and entrepreneurship in the country in an effort to enhance entrepreneurial capability (National Planning Commission, 2011). Despite these initiatives, South Africa has seen consistently low levels of entrepreneurial

activity relative to other developing nations (Herrington & Kew, 2016; Herrington, Kew, & Mwanga, 2017). Table 1 shows the prevalence rates of entrepreneurial activity amongst adults in South Africa, as per the 2016/2017 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report. It can be seen that of the five phases of entrepreneurial activity, the new business ownership rate (3.8%) and the established business ownership rate (3.4%), as a percentage of the population aged between 18-64 years, was the lowest.

Table 1: Prevalence Rates of Entrepreneurial Activity among the Adult Population in South Africa

	2001 (%)	2005 (%)	2009 (%)	2013 (%)	2014 (%)	2015 (%)	2016 (%)
Nascent entrepreneurial rate	5.3	3.6	3.6	6.6	3.9	5.5	3.9
New Business Ownership rate	1.4	1.7	2.5	4.1	3.2	3.8	3.3
Total entrepreneurial activity	6.5	5.2	5.9	10.6	7.0	9.2	6.9
Established business ownership rate	-	1.3	1.4	2.9	2.7	3.4	2.5
Business discontinuance	-	2.9	3.5	3.9	3.9	4.8	4.5

Source: Adapted from Herrington, Kew and Mwanga (2017)

In fact, Herrington, Kew and Mwanga (2017) noted that South Africa has one of the lowest established business rates of all the countries that were reviewed in the GEM Report for 2017, ranking 46th out of 65 countries on this rating. This is of concern because entrepreneurial businesses that are established or newly established are seen to be most valuable to an economy, this is because they have overcome many of the challenges associated with starting a business and are positioned to create jobs which leads to overall economic growth.

In more recent times, all businesses, regardless of size, have been operating in turbulent, hostile, heterogeneous and unstable environments (Wiklund, Patzelt, & Shepherd, 2009). This environment is a result of pressures and demands from globalisation, technological advances, increased competition and changes in legislation and government policies which put them at risk of failure (Hislop, Bosley, Coombs, & Holland, 2014; Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015). As a result of this, businesses need to continuously change and adapt to the shifts in the external environment in order to remain relevant and ultimately survive.

This ability is a key competence that all businesses need to develop, but is significantly more difficult for small growing businesses to achieve given that they struggle to accomplish a level of stability, let alone flexibility and adaptability. It is thought that unfavourable attachments within the Founders of these small businesses could prevent them from achieving the level of flexibility and adaptability required to survive during unstable times. Ultimately, small business development depends on the ability of the Founder to plan for and adapt to the constantly evolving business environment over which they have no control (Chan, Bhargava, & Street, 2006; Raymond, Marchand, St-Pierre, Cadieux, & Labelle, 2013).

1.5 Research Problem

Unlearning is most generally described as forgetting, giving up, letting go, discarding or the abandonment of knowledge, values, or behaviours, and is generally closely coupled with new learning (Brook et al., 2016; Hislop et al., 2014; Tsang & Zahra, 2008). Typically, unlearning is viewed as having a supporting role to the process of learning, because of the common notion that learning must be a good thing. Cegarra-Navarro, Sánchez-Vidal and Cegarra-Leiva (2016) suggested that unlearning can help to “counteract the negative effects of inappropriate beliefs and combine depreciated knowledge with new knowledge updated and acquired by managers and employees at the company” (p. 3). Based on this thinking, it is envisaged that this study will help to create a better understanding of how Founder-CEOs can grow their start-up business ventures by unlearning the out-dated or unfavourable attachments to certain knowledge structures, attitudes and skills which impede change.

Cepeda-Carrion, Cegarra-Navarro and Jimenez-Jimenez (2012) found that developing an environment that supports the unlearning process will facilitate knowledge exploitation and exploration within the business. In doing so, the business will develop a dynamic capability that will allow it to adjust and respond to changes in the external environment. According to Tushman and O'Reilly (2011), a business' ability to both “exploit and explore” is known as “organisational ambidexterity”, which helps to improve the innovativeness of the business. The authors explained that ambidexterity involves the completion of two important management tasks:

- Sensing changes in the competitive external environment by tracking factors such as shifts in competition, regulation, technology and customer's needs.
- Acting on opportunities and threats by reconfiguring the businesses assets to meet new challenges as they occur.

An unlearning context can mediate the effects of knowledge exploration and exploitation on organisational performance (Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015). The process of unlearning can also help to improve productivity by identifying out-dated systems, procedures and knowledge through the introduction of new procedures and processes in the business (Cepeda-Carrion et al., 2012). In this way, it is envisaged that the process of unlearning can help Founder-CEOs to expand their knowledge-based experiences in ways that will help them to break down their unfavourable attachments to out-dated knowledge, behaviours, and attitudes currently constraining the growth of their businesses. The unlearning process will force Founder-CEOs to ask new questions and consider new possibilities that are necessary to resolve wicked problems.

The process of unlearning has not received as much attention as the process of learning in academia, and as a result is far less understood (Hislop et al., 2014; Tsang & Zahra, 2008). This could be because unlearning is typically viewed as being negative, whereas learning is positive (Brook et al., 2016). As such, the focus has been more on the processes of acquiring new knowledge and practices, rather than on the processes of abandoning established knowledge and practices (Hislop et al., 2014). This is not necessarily always the case if the new learning is based on old or out-dated logic and knowledge. This reveals a major gap in the learning body of knowledge which this study aim to contribute towards.

Few studies have investigated the process of unlearning in business. Although, most recently a study was conducted by Rautenbach et al. (2015) who investigated the unlearning process in executives as they let go of their attachments in order to facilitate change. The findings showed that the unlearning process can be effectively used by executives to identify their dysfunctional attachments that maybe negative and harmful when executing change initiatives. Through their findings, Rautenbach et al. (2015) developed the De Jure model of unlearning for identifying and releasing attachments to allow change to occur. This study aims to build on the research conducted by Rautenbach et al. (2015) to further shed light on this useful yet relatively unknown process that facilitates change (Hislop et al., 2014).

In summary, this research aims to:

- identify the unfavourable attachments that constrain the choices and decision-making ability of Founders, as well as to assess the significance of these attachments and from where they originate;
- understand whether there is a catalyst that necessitates the need for the unlearning process, the actual actions taken to commence the process, and the emotions experienced by the Founder whilst undergoing the unlearning process;
- determine how Founders actually experience the unlearning process in terms of the breaking points encountered, the difficulties they have to overcome and the actions taken in order to prevent reverting back to the status quo and;
- determine the impact of unlearning on ensuring the survival of the small growing businesses, and assess whether the unlearning process has any impact on the Founder that leads to improvements and growth in the business.

Qualitative interviews conducted with Founder-CEOs from diverse industries will give context to the unfavourable attachments of the Founder prior to the unlearning process, the breaking point that leads to the unlearning, the actions of the Founder-CEO during the unlearning, the emotions experienced by the Founder-CEO during the unlearning process, and finally the perceived impact of the unlearning on the business.

Chapter 2 presents a literature review which will focus on the role of the Founder-CEO as well as their personal characteristics in a small start-up business. This will help to identify whether or not a potential exists to use the process of unlearning as a catalyst for change in the Founder-CEO and to develop new capabilities and competencies in the Founder-CEO. In addition the pertinent issues regarding the growth of a business will be determined in order to better understand the evolutionary process that a business undergoes as it grows.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This Literature Review is comprised of seven major themes which were comprehensively reviewed along with their major sub-themes. These themes included the role of the Founder; the effect of their attachments, skills, knowledge and routines; the process of unlearning; the relationship between unlearning and change management; the role of absorptive capacity for facilitating unlearning; small business growth; and lastly the growth life cycle models of businesses. The literature review presents various definitions, frameworks and explanations throughout the seven themes, with each theme being reviewed thoroughly in order to retrieve the necessary information for formulating the research questions in Chapter 3.

2.2 The Role of the Founder

2.2.1 The Founder's Influence

It is during the initial years of the business that Founder-CEOs have the greatest influence, due to their knowledge, power, experience and credibility in the markets they operate in (Souder et al., 2012). Entrepreneurs get a great deal of personal satisfaction from starting and growing a business until it reaches maturity (DeCarlo & Lyons, 1987), however their enthusiasm will begin to dissipate as the business matures and becomes more complex. The business may thus lose its allure for the Founder, especially if new and different skills are required to operate the business. Furthermore, the psychological rewards for the Founder may be different for starting versus operating the business, resulting in the Founder's loss of interest once the business is stable (DeCarlo & Lyons, 1987). These psychological rewards could be what drive entrepreneurs to repeatedly start new businesses, even after experiencing setbacks and failures (Glaub et al., 2015).

Typically, Founders strongly identify with their businesses and see them as a life achievement, which reinforces their commitment to making their business a success. As a result, the business usually becomes tightly intertwined with the Founder's personal aspirations. This illustrates what Leroy, Manigart, Meuleman and Collewaert 2015 referred to as psychological ownership, where the individual feels possessive and psychologically tied to an object.

The Founder is a product of their social background and interacts with a social environment in which there are many stakeholders to consider (Raymond et al., 2013). The Founder's family is a crucial stakeholder that can play an important supportive role, but family conflict represents a resource drain if not adequately managed (Leroy et al., 2015; Raymond et al., 2013). As such, the Founder's family situation will guide their business behaviour.

2.2.2 Founder Characteristics

Founders exhibit certain key entrepreneurial characteristics, such as innovativeness when developing products and services; risk taking to try out new and uncertain approaches; and lastly being more proactive than competitors in response to opportunities (Altinay, Madanoglu, De Vita, Arasli, & Ekinici, 2016; Glaub et al., 2015; Patel, Kohtamaki, Parida, & Wincent, 2015; Wales, Parida, & Patel, 2013; Wiklund et al., 2009). These characteristics will assist in increasing the variability in a business' innovation portfolio through non-routine trial and error exploratory learning, where knowledge is recombined in new and different ways (Patel et al., 2015). As such, small businesses are encouraged to pursue a diverse mix of opportunities in order to mitigate against the limitations of a single focus. Altinay et al. (2016) warned that these activities are not sufficient for maintaining a competitive advantage, however, noting that the Founder will need to combine these entrepreneurial activities with other disciplines such as strategy and operations management to make the business more sustainable. This study sought to determine whether entrepreneurs may need to let go of certain attachments that prevent them from being innovative, proactive and taking risks.

Founders also exhibit self-starting and future-oriented behaviour when overcoming barriers (Glaub et al., 2015). Personal initiative is indispensable for small business owners, Founders, and entrepreneurs alike, as it helps them to take control of situations. This is important because Founders operate under conditions of uncertainty, risk, urgency, complexity and resource scarcity which requires them to develop certain capabilities to capitalise on opportunities they identify (Glaub et al., 2015; Macpherson & Holt, 2007). Wu and Parker (2012) found that it is possible to induce an individual's proactive behaviour by encouraging curiosity, core self-evaluation, and future orientation to help them master their environments.

Other Founder characteristics cover wealth and the educational background of the individual. Wealthier individuals are able to invest more in a new venture and are able access credit facilities from financial institutions by using their personal assets as

collateral, thereby avoiding borrowing constraints (Lofstrom et al., 2014). Advanced education often facilitates entrepreneurial entry by providing the much needed cognitive skills and knowledge for successful business operation (Lofstrom et al., 2014). It is very likely that entrepreneurs will form attachments to, and as a result of, their financial resources and educational background, which they may need to let go of at some point whilst growing their business.

2.2.3 Founder-CEOs vs. Agent-CEOs

Growth of the organisation may bring about a state of crisis, wherein new leadership is required. According to Tsang and Zahra (2008) “removing the people associated with crises is a quick and effective way of erasing organisational memory” (p. 1448). A time may come where the Founder is a hindrance to the organisation and needs to be replaced with a professional CEO with the skills and expertise to overcome the crises faced by the business (Souder et al., 2012; Wasserman, 2003).

2.2.4 Founder Motives and Intentions

Businesses come to life when individuals are confronted by an opportunity to “pursue grand projects, demonstrate their efficacy, and establish their reputation” (Souder et al., 2012, p. 27). Founders of these businesses are seen to have many different motives and intentions for their decision to start a business, apart from maximising economic returns (Chan et al., 2006; Leroy et al., 2015; Raymond et al., 2013; Wiklund et al., 2009). External factors such as competition influence the Founder’s decisions regarding whether growth is a priority. As a result, growth is not a desired outcome for all Founders as some will prefer to keep their companies as lifestyle businesses (Chan et al., 2006; Wiklund et al., 2009). Founder objectives can be grouped into the following three categories:

- **Personal level:** Ensuring one’s economic security, autonomy, quality of life, social recognition, developing ideas and a need for achievement (Lofstrom et al., 2014); Raymond et al., 2013; Wiklund et al., 2009).
- **Organisational level:** Growth for, but not at the expense of, personal objectives and the well-being of employees (Raymond et al., 2013).
- **Social and environmental level:** Reputation, employee well-being, retaining loyalty, respecting business ethics and investing in society (Raymond et al., 2013).

2.3 The Effect of Past Experience

2.3.1 Introduction

Zheng et al. (2016) highlighted that Founder-CEOs often retain useful industry knowledge from their previous working experiences, which gives them a competitive advantage over new businesses that do not have such experience. A Founder's experience shapes their thinking and establishes a framework for conducting analyses, selecting future strategies and developing the required policies (Macpherson & Holt, 2007; Zheng et al., 2016). The problem comes when the Founder clings to out-dated knowledge structures that were once successful, resulting in them misinterpreting important events (Tsang & Zahra, 2008). This could bring about a crisis in the business accompanied by superficial remedies and delays, as the Founder refuses to interrogate their values and beliefs.

Thus, it is seen that a Founder's past experiences will affect their behaviours and attitudes when they move into a new setting. The literature is not clear as to the nature of this effect, although Glaub et al. (2015) indicates that it will contribute to greater firm success. However, when the need for unlearning arises, it is critical that the Founder visibly takes the first steps in order to encourage employees to follow suit (Fiol & O'Connor, 2017).

2.3.2 Attachments

A Founder's behaviour is significantly guided by their attachments; negative attachments such as attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance lead to insecurities in an individual (Harms, 2011; Richards & Schat, 2011; Sadikaj, Moskowitz, & Zuroff, 2011). Insecurities due to these attachments influence an individual's behaviours in the workplace as they reflect how individuals view themselves and others, which in turn influences how they think and behave (Harms, 2011).

2.3.3 Skills

Founders must already have the necessary industry specific skills, power and credibility to attract capital and employees when starting their businesses (Souder et al., 2012). Fern et al. (2012) discussed how the application of Founder experience in differing contexts will strengthen and reinforce their existing skills. This will help boost the Founder's confidence in applying new skills (Fern et al., 2012; Rautenbach et al., 2015; Tsang & Zahra, 2008).

2.3.4 Knowledge

Individuals gather knowledge through their experiences and observations, and retain them in their memories (Tsang & Zahra, 2008). The Founder's past experience and perception of the environment will have an important influence on how the firm responds to the challenges it encounters (Macpherson & Holt, 2007). The extent to which the individual relies on their past experience is dependent on how entrenched the Founder's knowledge structures have become through repeated use (Fern et al., 2012; Glaub et al., 2015).

An individual's memory highly influences their behaviours and actions, and might promote cloning behaviour (Fern et al., 2012), hence they are less willing to relinquish past practices, which constrains their decision making (Becker, 2010; Fern et al., 2012). The individual may even doubt the unlearning process because they are comfortable with the old ways of doing things (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2016), whereas knowledge that is less primed might prompt novel behaviour which allows for heterogeneity (Fern et al., 2012). Trying new things is critical to overcome inertia and facilitates innovation (Becker, 2010). Positive future expectations drive decisions to experiment new approaches, whereas satisfaction with old approaches seems to drive decisions to maintain and accept behaviour patterns (Becker, 2010).

Individuals also carry their knowledge from one organisation to the next. As such, the knowledge of individuals within an organisation can be a significant resource, which degrades as they leave the organisation and increases as the organisation recruits new employees (Tsang & Zahra, 2008).

Circumstances could arise where Founders may inherit inappropriate knowledge or apply knowledge that is not suited to their environment (Chaston & Sadler-Smith, 2012). Fern et al. (2012) explained this phenomenon through the example of entrepreneurs who are likely to copy the strategies of their previous employers when starting a business in the same industry. If the industry is going through some fundamental changes, the strategy of the new business will most probably be inconsistent with the current environment. For this reason, the influence of a Founder's past experience on the business' vision is important, as it will dictate the knowledge that is required for developing products and services (Altinay et al., 2016). Founders must learn how to quickly adapt their prevailing approaches and develop novel practices that are more suited to their business environments which are characterised

by stiff competition with speedy developments in technology, which will require the rigorous use and updating of knowledge (Cepeda-Carrion et al., 2012).

2.3.5 Routines

Over an organisation's life cycle a Founder will develop simple and repetitive patterns for success that employees become accustomed to. These patterns come in the form of rules and procedures, which are used in organisations to perform complex activities, and limit the options and choices of those who repeatedly follow the same pattern (De Holan, 2011, 2011). In an organisation, routines become part of the organisational memory and may even decay organisational knowledge as routines become institutionalised (De Holan, 2011). Consequentially, Founders are likely to replicate the knowledge structures they develop in their new businesses.

2.4 The Importance of Unlearning

2.4.1 Introduction

Tsang and Zahra (2008) defined organisational unlearning as “the discarding of old routines to make way for new ones, if any” (p. 1437). This, like so many definitions of unlearning, is quite broad, defining unlearning as abandoning or giving up knowledge, ideas, or behaviours, or changing beliefs and routines (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2016; Hislop et al., 2014; Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015). Knowledge becomes obsolete quickly in the dynamic and turbulent environments that small businesses operate in nowadays (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2016; Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015). As a result, their existing products and services become out-dated faster, which creates the necessity for new knowledge to generate fresh products and services. This will require the business to undergo a process of learning in order to survive and remain competitive. Yet this may not be sufficient to create the kind of learning context that is required to create the competitive advantage that the business requires to adapt to the environment at a rate that is faster than its competitors (De Holan, 2011).

For this reason, in conjunction with generating new knowledge, the organisation needs to develop an internal capability for unlearning where new knowledge is evaluated and then combined with existing knowledge to create new opportunities for growing the business (Becker, 2010). Unlearning facilitates a more flexible response to rapidly changing markets and technologies, which is greatly needed in the modern-day business environment (Brook et al., 2016; Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015). Unlearning can therefore be a beneficial process, whereby dominant social paradigms and knowledge are interrogated. Unlearning is essential for renewing and restoring repressed and

subjugated knowledge, which could result in new ways of thinking and understanding (Altinay et al., 2016; Brook et al., 2016). Unlearning enables capabilities that would remain dormant otherwise (De Holan, 2011).

Unlearning can occur both unconsciously and deliberately (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2016; Hislop et al., 2014; Wensley & Cegarra-Navarro, 2015). Unconscious unlearning is commonly known as forgetting, and refers to the accidental giving up of something which results in the apparent loss of the knowledge that individuals store in their long-term memory (De Holan, 2011; Wensley & Cegarra-Navarro, 2015). Deliberate unlearning involves more of a conscious process, where a particular knowledge, value, or behaviour is purposefully chosen to be abandoned (Hislop et al., 2014). This study will look at both unconscious and deliberate unlearning.

Growth and innovation relies on the available knowledge in an organisation that can be applied to take advantage of market opportunities. This knowledge lies in the individual cognition of the employees of the organisation, and is also codified in the organisational memory (Macpherson & Holt, 2007). For this reason, individual and organisational levels of unlearning are treated as separate distinct processes in the literature, however, together they are able to encourage business performance enhancement by improving the firm's learning capabilities (Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015).

Hislop et al. (2014) examined the antecedents, processes and consequences of unlearning across the unlearning body of literature and noted the following:

- **Antecedents of unlearning:** Organisational context, environmental turbulence and organisational size.
- **Consequences of unlearning:** Processes and outcomes including knowledge transfer processes, processes of internalisation, the non-academic impact of academic scholarship, organisational performance and health care policies.

Although previous knowledge and values are abandoned through unlearning, these knowledge structures are not permanently lost. Thus, at some point in the future one may choose to, either consciously or unconsciously, reuse or relearn the knowledge and values that were previously abandoned or unlearned (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2016; Hislop et al., 2014; Kim & Seo, 2009; Tsang & Zahra, 2008).

2.4.2 Individual Unlearning

Becker (2010) referred to individual unlearning as “individuals undergoing a process of releasing old ways and embracing new behaviours, ideas” (p. 252). Through this process individuals are able to improve their performance by reflecting and identifying their inappropriate actions (Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015). Reflection allows the individual to become aware of knowledge that is no longer valid or useful (Tsang & Zahra, 2008), however an individual’s inability to abandon outdated knowledge represents their inflexibility, limited thinking and inadaptability. Hislop et al. (2014) referred to this as cognitive blinkering, where “useful competencies become outdated through never being challenged, revised, or abandoned” (p. 541). It is thus important for Founder-CEOs to discard obsolete knowledge through the unlearning process in order to transform their businesses.

There are three types of individual unlearning, which differ in terms of catalysts, internationality, speed and impact (Hislop et al., 2014):

- **Fading:** Routine unlearning that occurs in an individual over time (Brook et al., 2016; Hislop et al., 2014). Individuals may only become aware that they have unlearned something when they are asked to consciously identify the skills and capabilities lost.
- **Wiping:** Individuals undergo a more deliberate process of change that is activated by some external stimuli (Brook et al., 2016; Hislop et al., 2014). This requires the individual to purposefully up established behaviours, which is a cumbersome and energy-consuming process (Tsang & Zahra, 2008).
- **Deep unlearning:** This is a rapid and radical form of unlearning that occurs as a result of an unexpected experience, which brings into question some of the individual’s basic assumptions (Brook et al., 2016; Hislop et al., 2014; Wensley & Cegarra-Navarro, 2015).

Deep unlearning is the most transformative type of unlearning due to the emotional impact that an individual experiences whilst reflecting on their core values, assumptions, knowledge and behaviours (Macdonald, 2002). These emotions can lead to learning and survival anxiety, which may deter people from unlearning what they know in order to learn something new (Tsang & Zahra, 2008). Fiol and O’Connor (2017) noted that unlearning can lead to discomfort when the individual is confronted with new information that is incompatible with an old pattern. Trust and security in the workplace can help individuals lower their defences, which will make them more

receptive to experiences that force them to question their values and beliefs (Brook et al., 2016).

Challenging emotions such as anxiety, confusion and fear may accompany deep unlearning (Becker, 2010; Brook et al., 2016; Cepeda-Carrion, Cegarra-Navarro, & Martinez-Caro, 2012; Hislop et al., 2014; Tsang & Zahra, 2008). An aversion to change makes people fearful when trying new behaviours, which manifests as fear of failure and fear of losing credibility (Fiol & O'Connor, 2017). Alternatively, individuals with opposing beliefs to the change may frustrate the efforts aimed at unlearning (Zahra, Abdelgawad, & Tsang, 2011), which represents an internal barrier to change (Glaub et al., 2015).

2.4.3 Organisational Unlearning

Organisational unlearning refers to the letting go of assumptions, behaviours and routines that the organisation at large will conform to (Hislop et al., 2014), and plays an important role in inducing learning, exploiting existing capabilities, and developing a competitive advantage for overall better performance (Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015). Individual and organisational unlearning are closely linked to one another, but the literature suggests that organisational unlearning is rooted in, and emanates from, individual unlearning (Hislop et al., 2014).

Organisations retain information and learning from experiences within the organisational memory, and transfer this information between members of the organisation (Altinay et al., 2016; Becker, 2010; Cepeda-Carrion et al., 2012; De Holan, 2011b; Kim & Seo, 2009; Souder et al., 2012; Tsang, 2008; Tsang & Zahra, 2008; Zahra et al., 2011). Knowledge retention or the lack thereof is a result of the effectiveness of the process by which knowledge is embedded in the memory system of the organisation (De Holan, 2011). Organisational unlearning may be triggered by other events such as employee turnover, downsizing and organisational memory decay, which destabilises old knowledge (Tsang & Zahra, 2008; Wensley & Cegarra-Navarro, 2015). The organisational memory needs to be updated on a regular basis by letting go of, or forgetting, old logic, knowledge and routines that are no longer relevant for the times and contexts in which the organisation is operating (De Holan, 2011; Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015).

It is difficult for organisations to question their dominant logics, established wisdoms and other organisational defensive routines, which all refer to the organisational norms,

values, practices and knowledge which have proven to be successful for the organisation in the past (Becker, 2010; Bettis & Prahalad, 1995; De Holan, 2011; Hislop et al., 2014; Wensley & Cegarra-Navarro, 2015). These ways of doing things become institutionalised through repeated use, and act as information filters where attention is only drawn to data that are deemed relevant by the dominant logic. They create inertia within the organisation, which can inhibit change and prevent unlearning as they are embedded in all areas of the business and are reinforced by repetitive routines (Bettis & Prahalad, 1995). In so doing they become positively held dysfunctional behaviours (Fiol & O'Connor, 2017). Hence, it is critical that they are identified early and that the organisation takes steps to unlearn them.

2.4.4 The Unlearning Context

Central to the unlearning context is its “ability to reorient organisational values, norms and/or behaviours by changing the cognitive structures, mental models, dominant logics and core assumptions which guide behaviour to attain a competitive advantage” (Cepeda-Carrion et al., 2012, p. 111). It helps an organisation to build a knowledge capacity that enables the acquisition, creation, storage and replacement of knowledge by letting go of outdated ways of doing things (Altinay et al., 2016; Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2016; De Holan, 2011). This context is able to link both individual and organisational unlearning. It allows individuals to reflect on their knowledge and practices, and allows organisations to ignore the institutionalised knowledge and defensive routines entrenched in the organisational memory that forms barriers to the achievement of organisational goals (Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015; Souder et al., 2012).

2.4.5 Unlearning Process Models

The extent to which individuals are attached to their existing knowledge and ideas shapes how they interpret the world, which makes it difficult for them to understand the limitations of the knowledge and ideas (Hislop et al., 2014). Typically, the process of unlearning is triggered by some type of negative stimuli, such as a problem-event or crisis in the organisation leading to undesirable outcomes or discontent in the business (Fiol & O'Connor, 2017). These crises may be chaotic and may not encourage new learning (Brook et al., 2016; Zahra et al., 2011). As such they can be stressful, painful and time-consuming, due to “the competitive struggle between the need for new learning and the desire for stability and continuity” (Brook et al., 2016, p. 373; Zahra et al., 2011). Fiol and O'Connor (2017) referred to this as emotional and cognitive dissonance, where one begins to question old routines, beliefs and knowledge, which can become a powerful motivator for change.

Furthermore, Brook et al. (2016) found deep unlearning to be more difficult and demanding than simply discarding, because deep unlearning forces individuals to confront and challenge their fundamental assumptions. Identifying and questioning the unfavourable attachment will bring about initial destabilisation, but this is insufficient to ensure commitment to take action to adequately unlearn and prevent reverting back to the status quo (Fiol & O'Connor, 2017). Continued effort is required to fully relinquish knowledge and habits that have been learned and embedded in an individual's behaviour (Becker, 2010).

This process of unlearning has been modelled by many authors. Each model differs quite drastically from the next, and as a result there is not a standardised model in use. Some of the more well-known process models in literature are by the following authors: Fiol and O'Connor (2017), Becker (2010) and Macdonald (2002). Most recently, Fiol and O'Connor (2017) proposed a model for unlearning well-established organisational routines through three sub processes, i.e. discarding from use aspects of the old, accompanied by multiple instances of trial-and-error new learning, and noting that the old is never fully extinct. This model is shown in Table 2.

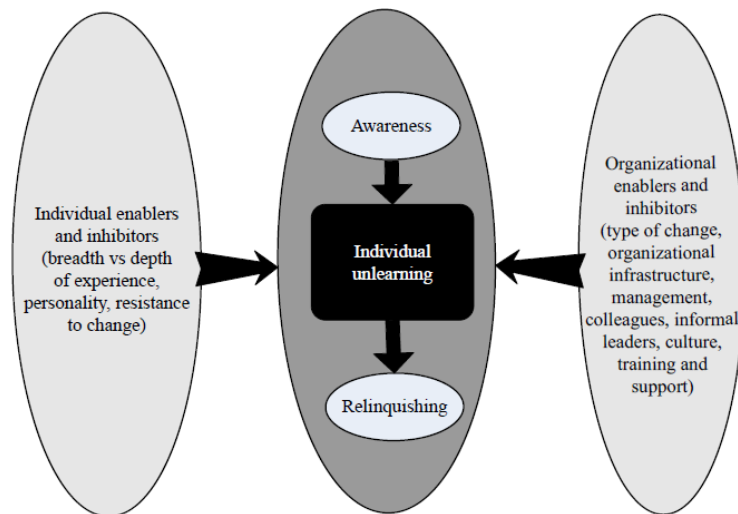
Table 2: Distinctions between Sub-Processes of Unlearning Embedded Routines

Unlearning Sub-processes	Primary Nature	Primary Stimuli
Initial destabilisation of old routine	Personal, ostensive	Negative
On-going discarding from use (old) and experimenting (new)	Increasing social and interactive, social	Progressively positive
Develop a new understanding and release an old understanding	Social, ostensive	Tempered, positive

Source: Adapted from Fiol and O'Connor (2017)

Figure 1 illustrates Becker's (2010) model of the process of unlearning, which focuses on the individual and organisational antecedent issues that impact individual unlearning. This model shows that individual unlearning is triggered by internal and external events, which is contrary to other authors who explain that the unlearning is triggered by an internal sudden and rapid realisation of the need for change and an equally sudden process of change (Hislop et al., 2014). Macdonald's (2002) view was that transformative unlearning is a slow process which occurs over a period of time.

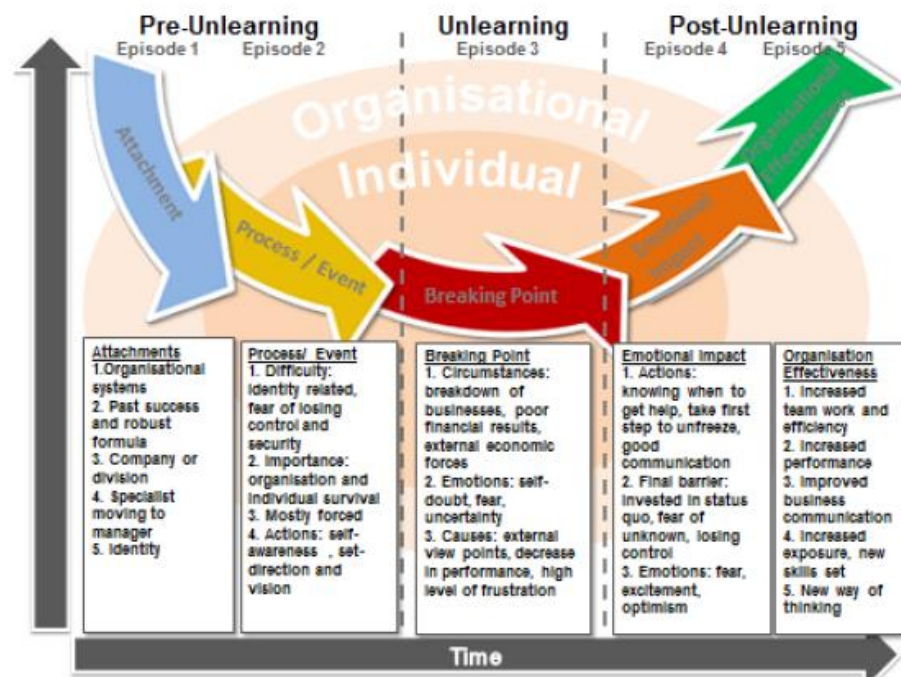
Figure 1: A Process Model of Unlearning (Becker, 2010)



Macdonald (2002) proposed a simple process of unlearning, with three distinct yet overlapping steps. The first step is receptiveness, where the individual becomes open to new possibilities and challenges their core beliefs; the second step is recognition, where the individual acknowledges that their perspectives may no longer be favourable and that alternative viewpoints may be better suited; and the third step is the process of grieving, where the individual comes to terms with the emotional loss of their core beliefs. The final step acknowledges the emotional core of unlearning and usually arouses feelings of doubt and uncertainty in the individual for their core beliefs, which have stood the test of time up until now (Hislop et al., 2014).

The Process Model of Unlearning an Attachment developed by Rautenbach et al. (2015) is shown in Figure 2. The model effectively uncovering the lived experiences of executives and identified the attachments they had to release to allow change to occur. The model divides the process of unlearning into three phases, much like Lewin's (1951) three stage change model and Macdonald's (2002) process model of change. These phases include pre-learning, unlearning and post-learning. The three phases are further broken down into five episodes, where each episode represents a smaller process of unlearning. The episodes are attachments, processes/events, breaking point, emotional impact and organisational effectiveness. Using this model was useful to diagnose the experiences of Founder-CEOs, and improved the reliability and validity of the study.

Figure 2: The Process Model of Unlearning an Attachment (Rautenbach et al., 2015)



2.5 Change Management

Unlearning draws attention to, and casts doubt on, deeply held, and perhaps unacknowledged, assumptions and beliefs, which can result in the need for change. Hislop et al. (2014) stated that “the ability of people or organisations to unlearn established knowledge, behaviours or values can be a significant catalyst for, and facilitator of, change” (p. 541). As such, unlearning plays a role in successful change management and the general transformation of the organisation over time (Becker, 2010; Tsang & Zahra, 2008).

Change is in and of itself a disruptive process and is challenging for individuals, as they feel a loss for their fundamental beliefs which have brought them security (Cepeda-Carrion et al., 2012). In the context of unlearning, change will require a conscious effort to set aside the existing knowledge or behaviour that is hindering the business. In this way, change through the process of unlearning can be transformative in that it will allow the Founder-CEO to see things in new ways; they will open themselves up to new experiences and perspectives, critical questioning, reflection, introspection, open discussion, radical debate and continuous experimentation (Brook et al., 2016).

A well-known model for change is Lewin’s three-stage model, which suggests that change occurs in three sequential phases, defined as unfreezing, transition and

refreezing (1951). Although widely criticised for being too simple, this model shows the relationship between unlearning and change (Hislop et al., 2014). The unfreezing phase is the initial stage where the prevailing knowledge structures are suspended. This stage represents the point where the Founder-CEO realises that their current knowledge structures are outdated or inappropriate for the dynamic business environment they operate in. The second stage of the model is the transition phase, and is most akin to the process of learning and unlearning (Hislop et al., 2014). During this stage it is expected that the Founder-CEO will take time to change their knowledge structures through “cognitive restructuring, semantic redefinition and new standards of judgement” (Cepeda-Carrion et al., 2012, p. 1554). The third and final stage is the unfreezing stage, where the Founder-CEO will adopt the new knowledge structures by adjusting their social and personal behaviours and attitudes.

Change in organisations requires people to let go of old ways of doing things in order to develop new competencies. People’s attitudes to unlearning is strongly linked to their attitudes to the change processes that precipitated it (Hislop et al., 2014), therefore it is unlikely that people will have positive attitudes if they do not perceive the change to be favourable and vice versa.

2.6 Absorptive capacity

Absorptive capacity improves a business’ ability to unlearn by abandoning less valuable initiatives and capitalising on innovation opportunities that are potentially more successful (Patel et al., 2015). In so doing, this capability helps the business obtain and integrate knowledge and use to commercial ends for generating profits (Cepeda-Carrion et al., 2012; Cepeda-Carrion et al., 2015). This capability can be achieved through learning, solving problems and developing new capabilities or skillsets. Individuals will engage in new practices, which may differ from the existing ones, and develop and apply new knowledge structures which enable the updating of learning practises. In so doing, absorptive capacity allows the business to utilise new knowledge to develop new products and services which will strengthen the business’ competitive advantage and financial performance (Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015).

2.7 Small Businesses and Entrepreneurship

2.7.1 Small Businesses

Large corporations have been extensively researched, as they are accountable for most of the economic activity in a country and also provide most of the employment opportunities for a country’s citizens (Souder et al., 2012). Yet large corporations only

make up a small portion of all organisations. According to Wiklund et al. (2009), small businesses can be viewed as all business activities controlled by an individual or group of individuals.

The size of small businesses are seen in the literature as both an advantage and a disadvantage. Small businesses are capable of being more innovative than large businesses because their size gives them more flexibility, versatility and independence from institutional bureaucracy, which gives them the capacity to adapt quickly to the environment (Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015; Verreynne & Meyer, 2010). They also have the advantage of more efficient collaboration and the co-operation of a smaller workforce, which requires less effort to co-ordinate than large businesses. A major disadvantage of small businesses, however, is that they do not have the resources of large businesses to invest in innovation, research and development; relying more on incremental diverse types of innovations (Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015).

The individuals who start small businesses are referred to as Founders. Small businesses are important because they create multiple types of value for the Founder, employees and society at large. As a result, small businesses can be viewed as being socially constructed because their social outcomes are just as important as the economic ones (Raymond et al., 2013). It is important to study these Founder-led businesses because they provide insight that can help improve the success rates of small businesses.

2.7.2 Entrepreneurial Businesses

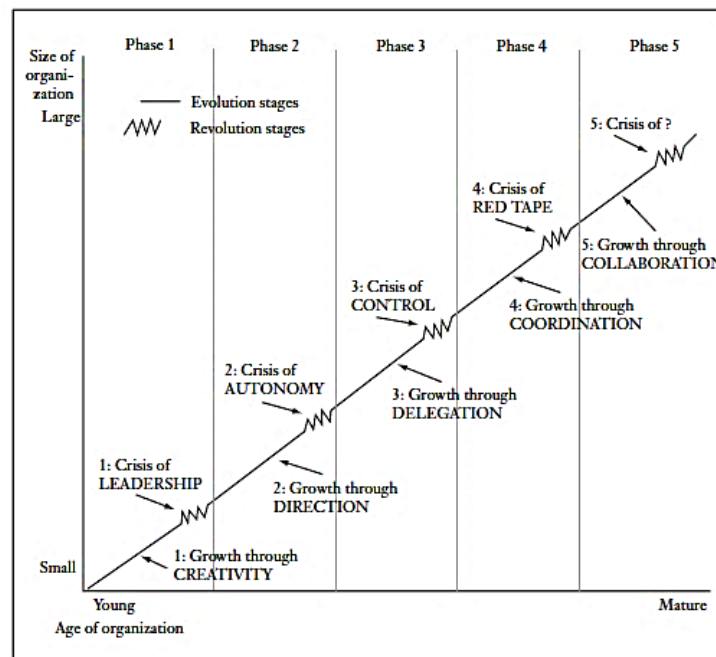
All small growing businesses have a certain degree of entrepreneurship during their growth. An entrepreneurial firm is a business that “engages in product-market innovation, undertakes somewhat risky ventures, and is first to come up with proactive innovations, beating competitors to the punch” (Wiklund et al., 2009, p. 353). Innovation is seen as a proactive strategy for responding to changes within the wider business environment, including changes to the needs and demands of customers (Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015; Macpherson & Holt, 2007). Whilst innovation is important, small businesses need to be aware of the high probability of success or failure that could result from uncertainties inherent in their innovation efforts (Patel et al., 2015).

2.8 Growth of Small Businesses

2.8.1 Small Business Life Cycle Models

Life cycle models represent the growth of a business as it advances through distinct phases of development (Churchill & Lewis, 1983; Greiner, 1972; Scott & Bruce, 1987). These phases are based on three general assumptions: the stages are consecutive, they occur in a hierarchical progression that is not normally reversed, and they involve changes to a broad range of organisational activities and structures (Chan et al., 2006). Small businesses undergo a variety of complex changes during their growth processes which allows them to transition into maturity (Wiklund et al., 2009). Many researchers have investigated the life cycles of businesses, the most notable being Greiner (1972), who developed the General Growth Model depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The Greiner Model of the five Phases of Growth (Greiner, 1997)



Greiner (1972) proposed that growing organisations pass through five phases of development as they transition into large mature organisations. The business will start with birth, then continue to grow through a sequence of transitions marked by a crises, and will culminate with maturity, reinvention, revitalisation or death (Phelps, Adams, & Bessant, 2007). In addition to Greiner (1972), a few other authors have contributed seminal works to this field of interest with their own adaptations of the phases of development, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Varying Phases of Development

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
Steinmetz (1969)	Direct Supervision	Supervised Supervisions	Indirect Control	Divisional Control	
Greiner (1972)	Creativity	Direction	Delegation	Co-ordination	Collaboration
Scott and Bruce (1987)	Inception	Survival	Growth	Expansion	Maturity
Churchill and Lewis (1983)	Existence	Survival	Success	Take-off	Resource Maturity

These models illustrate that businesses grow and develop through a series of phases, each comprising an evolutionary stage followed by a revolutionary stage (Chan et al., 2006; Greiner, 1998). Each evolutionary stage is characterised by the dominant management style used to achieve the growth, while each revolutionary stage is characterised by the dominant management or crisis that must be resolved for growth to continue (Churchill & Lewis, 1983; Greiner, 1997). A crisis could include competitive issues, functional problems or a change in customer needs or expectations (Macpherson & Holt, 2007). The activities for success will vary across the stages, and will call for different systems, processes and functional and specific knowledge lacking in the business, as well as different skills, competencies, satisfaction levels and intensities (DeCarlo & Lyons, 1987; Macpherson & Holt, 2007; Souder et al., 2012).

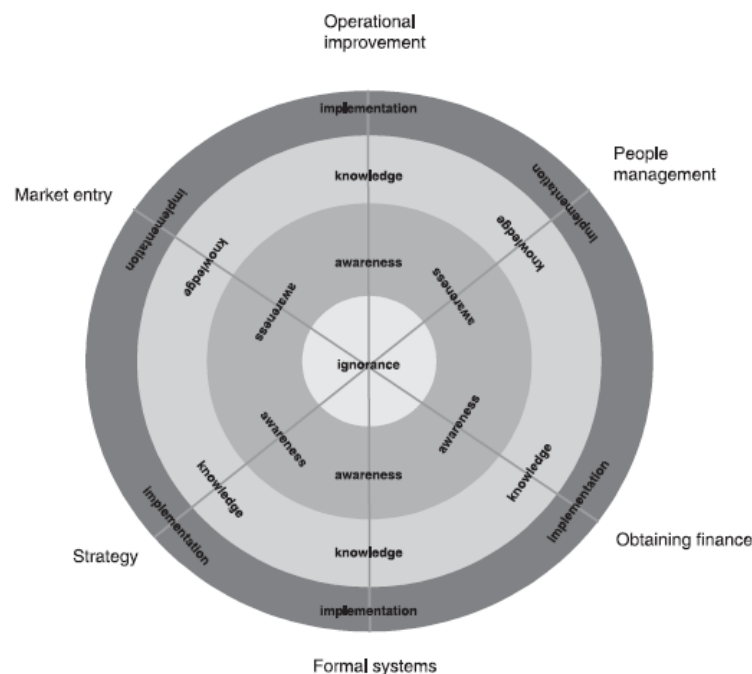
Growth models are criticised is that there is no such thing as typical business growth, as growth is heterogeneous amongst firms and small businesses do not follow a single progression of development (Chan et al., 2006; Churchill & Lewis, 1983; Delmar, Davidsson, & Gartner, 2003). Macpherson and Holt (2007) argued that the business growth process is significantly more challenging and complex than stage models portray. They claim that businesses grow in many different ways and that the patterns and causes of growth vary significantly.

Greiner (1998) posited that historical forces shape the future growth of an organisation, thus management with a deep understanding of their organisation's history and roots can anticipate and prepare for the next developmental crisis. However, management often overlook the past in their haste to grow, instead focusing outward on the environment and to the future, neglecting the lesson they can learn from looking inward. Macpherson and Holt (2007) offered an alternative view, citing that a crisis will

force small businesses to learn quickly by seeking support and alternative sources of knowledge that are missing from within the firm. This reflects more of an outward view.

Phelps et al. (2007) claimed that life cycle models are alluring because they simplify the challenges of transformation and reduce the complex to a uniform and predictable pattern. These authors argued that it is more likely that organisations will experience periods of both expansion and contraction. Similarly, Headd and Kirchhoff (2009) posited that growth in small businesses will occur in spurts. Macpherson and Holt (2007) and Phelps et al. (2007) all agreed that a crisis will occur in the business, which will provide an opportunity for the business to acquire knowledge and learn in response. Phelps et al. (2007) proposed an alternate conceptualisation of business growth as depicted in Figure 4. The authors suggested that as businesses grow they will encounter a myriad of problems in no particular order, which will need to be addressed at some critical tipping point in order for growth to continue. This model attempts to combines absorptive capacity with organisational capability in an effort to encourage the usage of external knowledge to address problems.

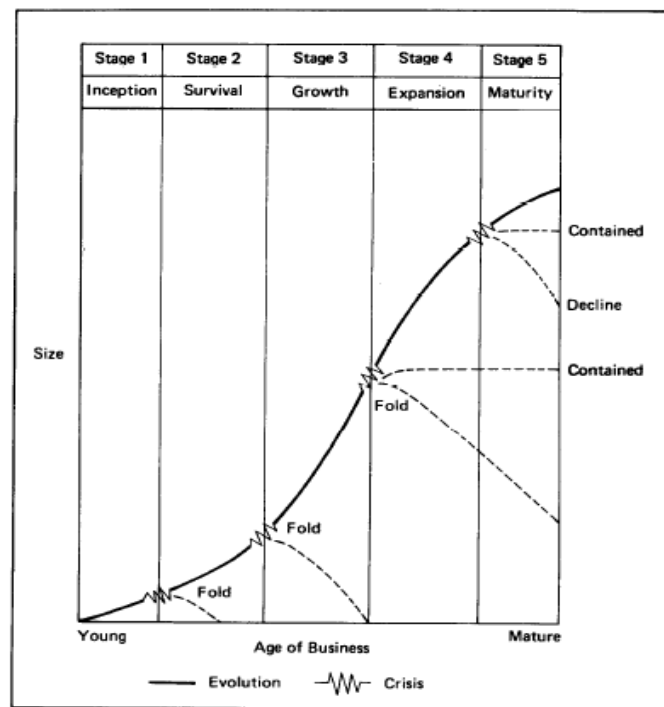
Figure 4: The Tipping Point Framework for Growth firm States (Phelps et al., 2007)



It was envisaged that the life cycle model was suitable for the purposes of this study, because it is based on organic growth characteristic of smaller younger businesses rather than older larger businesses who have grown by acquisition and franchising (Churchill & Lewis, 1983; Delmar et al., 2003; Greiner, 1998; Phelps et al., 2007).

Scott and Bruce (1987) adapted the growth model for the context for small growing start-up businesses as shown in Figure 5. Smaller businesses need to be more alert to changes in their external and internal environment, which can precipitate developmental crises. This includes their geographical location, the industry and the market that the business caters to (Wiklund et al., 2009).

Figure 5: The Five Stages of Growth in Small Businesses (Scott & Bruce, 1987)



2.8.2 Stage 1: Inception

This stage of the growth model is dominated by the Founder's motive for starting the business. The functional emphasis of the business will be dependent on the Founder's skills, past experiences and perceptions of the environment (Macpherson & Holt, 2007). Their previous functional, technical and managerial experience will provide critical knowledge resources for managing the business (Cepeda-Carrion et al., 2012; Fern et al., 2012; Garud, Dunbar, & Bartel, 2010; Phelps et al., 2007).

During this stage, the Founder's main objectives are to develop a commercially viable product or service, and establish the business in the market, which will depend on the stage that the industry is in in its life cycle as well as the maturity of the market (Scott & Bruce, 1987; Wiklund et al., 2009). Typically many new ventures do not have defined strategies, however the Founder is responsible for ensuring that the venture is focused

on a commercially viable opportunity (LeBrasseur, Zanibbi, & Zinger, 2003). The business at this stage will have a basic structure and will be in a single market with limited distribution channels (Scott & Bruce, 1987). The Founder will bear the entire financial risk of the business (Souder et al., 2012). There are three possible crises that could occur during this stage that will lead the business into the next stage

The first crisis looks at the necessity for generating positive cash flow in order to survive (Scott & Bruce, 1987). This will require a different management attitude, where the Founder pays more attention to product profitability as opposed to establishing the business (Lofstrom et al., 2014). This links directly to the second crisis, which encompasses the administrative demands on the Founder. The drive for profits will lead to increased business activity, which will necessitate the need for proper systems and record-keeping. These tasks may not be within the skillset of the Founder and could become quite demanding and cumbersome to handle (Souder et al., 2012). Consequently, this will put added demands on the Founder's limited time, which is the third crisis for this stage. The excessive administrative load on the Founder will require a change in management style or even a change in the organisational structure (LeBrasseur et al., 2003).

Some Founders struggle with these changes in their working conditions as the business grows, and may develop a negative attitude toward expanding their businesses (Wiklund et al., 2009). The Founder will need to start delegating tasks and take on a more supervisory role, which could be quite difficult for them. Delegation is encompassed in the human capital resources of small businesses. Human capital refers to the broad range of capabilities, knowledge, skills and experience that reside in the individuals who execute the relevant tasks of the businesses that translate resources into rents (Macpherson & Holt, 2007; Wiklund et al., 2009). These individuals include the Founder and the employees in the business. Furthermore, the Founder's general and specific human capital provides access to resources, stimulates aspiration for higher goals and pay-outs, and encourages general self-belief in one's own abilities (Leroy et al., 2015).

2.8.3 Stage 2: Survival

Businesses that reach this stage have become workable business entities, although they are still relatively basic in nature with a single product offering. The range of problems during this phase are expected to be quite vast across industries, and

Founders will consider more tactical rather than strategic solutions (Macpherson & Holt, 2007).

Founders face a challenge when it comes to the need for additional financial capital for increased inventory and receivables. Financial resources have received more attention than any of the other resources required for the growth of a small business, primarily because of the limitations that the lack of financial capital can have on the growth of a business (Wiklund et al., 2009). Some businesses may reach a stage where they are able to receive creditor financing from suppliers and banks by establishing a good reputation, or even attract the attention of venture capitalist (Phelps et al., 2007), but this will require a good commercial strategy and business plan that outlines risk mitigation and has contingencies in place for unforeseen events.

There are three possible crises that businesses could face in stage 2. The first talks to uncontrolled growth, which Scott and Bruce (1987) defined as overtrading. The external environment provides growth opportunities for small businesses to exploit (Wiklund et al., 2009), however small businesses need to be mindful of the opportunities they pursue in order to avoid uncontrolled growth. Firms will need to start adopting control systems that will help control the business more efficiently.

The second crisis talks to the increased complexity of expanded distribution channels. In this crisis, a growth in sales will require the business to expand its geographical range and perhaps cater to a new customer type. The business will also need to make operational improvements by learning to adapt to new industry norms and implementing best practices as it caters to new customers and different geographical areas (Phelps et al., 2007). Small businesses are slower to adopt best practices however, due to their reluctance from a cost perspective, a lack of information, indecision and an absence of motivation.

Increasing complexity will require the business to restructure and adopt a new management style that emphasises an even greater amount of delegation. The role of structure in any business is powerful as it provides a framework for specific behaviours by dividing tasks and labour, but it also contributes to sustaining the values that have been fused into the business (De Holan, 2011). The implication of growth is that the Founder will need to employ people to delegate tasks to, however the additional people will have to be managed, giving rise to other human resource issues (Phelps et al., 2007).

Small businesses at this stage will need to consider their performance management to ensure efficient resource utilisation. Raymond et al. (2013) noted that pre-existing performance measurement frameworks are not suited to small businesses because the information they provide is not aligned to what the Founder perceives as performance, resulting in decisions being made on irrelevant information that does not give a fuller picture of the business' actual performance. The authors recommended that it would be more appropriate to measure the performance of small businesses against the Founder's objectives. In so doing, the performance would be intrinsically linked to the business' capacity to meet the objectives that the Founder aspires to.

The ability to sense and adapt to environmental changes greatly influences growth, thus the Founder needs to develop interpretive and flexible management to assist him/her to alter their plans in response to the changing environment (Macpherson & Holt, 2007). This depends on the Founder being open to learning from new experiences, however. Furthermore, the resources and skills within the business may be insufficient for achieving stability in the current conditions (Chan et al., 2006). For this reason, it is envisioned that Founders need to use their own personal initiative and self-starting behaviours to approach providers of resources, and use their size advantages to deal with resource constraints (Glaub et al., 2015).

The third most likely crisis would come from changes in competition, as an increase in competition is to place greater emphasis on price at the expense of differentiation. Competitive pricing can be achieved using economies of scale that will require infrastructure upgrades; hence the business will need new skills and capital which the Founder may not be able to fund personally. This will create additional demands on the Founder and the business.

The abovementioned will put pressure on the business' information systems, which will mark the fourth crisis expected in this stage. The revolution in information technology has put a large amount of information at the fingertips of Founders, which should make the task of sensing change and responding effectively considerably easier. However, the Founder needs to be careful not to fall into the information-rich but interpretation-poor trap going forward (Bettis & Prahalad, 1995).

2.8.4 Stage 3: Growth

Growth will cause radical changes in the characteristics of the business, which may not be consistent with the Founder's initial goals (Wiklund et al., 2009). This is seen in this

stage of business growth, where profits are still not enough for the Founder's personal use. Profits must be reinvested to finance the increased working capital demands. The increased financial capital impetus will provide a resource slack that will create the space for experimenting with new strategies and innovative projects, which might not have been possible in a resource constrained environment (Wiklund et al., 2009).

Most notable is that at this stage a more formal organisational structure should be emerging to improve the coordination of the different functional areas in the business. When restructuring or expanding the existing management structure, Founders need to ensure that the system chosen will serve as a knowledge management tool in the organisation (Phelps et al., 2007). For instance, bureaucratic management systems are more rigid and support performance management and quality improvement, whilst systems that support innovation, participation and empowerment are more flexible in nature (Macpherson & Holt, 2007). This level of transformation in the business will require it to recombine knowledge that is readily available and transfer it to existing resources and capabilities to develop new products (Patel et al., 2015). Wiklund, Patzelt and Shepherd (2009) advised that small businesses should develop a heterogeneous resource base as it is far less easy to copy.

Only two crises can be expected in stage 3 of the growth of a small business, which could result in either the decline of the business, further growth of the business, or the business could remain in its current state. Growth will require a more deliberate and considered strategy than the opportunistic reactive operations which the business has become accustomed to up until this point (Phelps et al., 2007). A more focused strategy will require the business to target winning orders for a certain type of work or client, or to build a brand and market position that is critical for growth.

The first crisis looks at the threat of larger competitors who have the advantage of greater economies of scale, while the second most likely crisis in stage 3 looks at the demands of expansion into new markets or products (Phelps et al., 2007; Scott & Bruce, 1987). Founder-CEOs will need to think about how to capture more market share and overcome the disadvantages of the business' size. Founders have three major strategies to choose from: cost leadership, product differentiation and market expansion (Ansoff, 1957; Porter, 1979; Souder et al., 2012). These three strategies will allow the business to grow without departing from their current mission.

Cost leadership requires significant capital investment in additional infrastructure, which will increase the pressure on the business and could even result in a change in the scale and structure of the business (Souder et al., 2012). This will give the business the additional capacity needed to develop and exploit economies of scale, which will lead to cost savings for more competitive pricing. The high fixed capital requirement in this strategy is difficult for small businesses to overcome (Lofstrom et al., 2014).

Product differentiation strategies utilise a business' unique skills, knowledge and innovation to produce superior products (Lofstrom et al., 2014). This strategy will allow the business to compete on the basis of product differentiation by exchanging volume for margin. This could require the small business to leverage its intellectual capital assets in the form of intellectual property and knowledge stocks (Koryak, Mole, Lockett, Hayton, Ucbasaran & Hodgkinson, 2015). This will be difficult for businesses that do not possess the necessary intellectual capital and skills needed for developing superior quality products that allow them to ask for higher prices. Unfortunately, this could mean that the business will remain in this stage unless the business can acquire the intellectual capital and skills needed, which can be costly and difficult for the Founder, who may need to partner with others to achieve this result. However, through differentiation, small businesses may be able to create niches for themselves within their existing markets (Lofstrom et al., 2014; Wiklund et al., 2009).

The market expansion strategy will require the business to identify new markets and products to expand into. With market expansion comes increased market complexity, which "broadly refers to the dissimilarity of market elements and the extent of their interconnectedness", which will further stretch managerial and financial resources (Souder et al., 2012, p. 28). Market expansion and market complexity are two important factors in a Founder-CEO's decision environment, and create the following challenges for them:

- The need for more sophisticated information processing capabilities to correctly assess the strategic situation of the business (Souder et al., 2012).
- Complexity and diversity in new, larger markets will require greater administrative and structural infrastructure (Souder et al., 2012). The business may need to move from an entrepreneurial approach to a more professional approach with a higher degree of decentralisation. Decentralisation represents a more participatory approach to strategy-making. Verreynne and Meyer (2010) noted that a participatory approach is more suited for small businesses in growing industries, arguing that in

this approach the views of the stakeholders must be included and the strategy should not be solely influenced by the Founder, which is frequently seen in small businesses.

- A growing business will require greater administrative control in order to better co-ordinate a more diverse business. The Founder will need to quickly learn how to manage numerous competitive activities in a business environment with many uncontrollable factors (Souder et al., 2012).

Partnerships are an element of network resources that will become increasingly important for the growth of the small business from this stage onwards. Entrepreneurial networks are the strategic relationships that businesses develop with other organisations to acquire knowledge, financial capital, manufacturing and marketing capabilities, as well as for receiving the necessary feedback required for a better understanding of the business environment and opportunity identification (Koryak et al., 2015; Raymond et al., 2013; Wiklund et al., 2009). Networks of people can serve a more strategic purpose such as lobbying, where for instance the Founder can use his informal power to get support and acceptance for his ideas (Becker, 2010; Koryak et al., 2015).

2.8.5 Stage 4: Expansion

The basic features of this stage include budgetary control, management reporting, and decentralised authority (Auzair & Langfield-Smith, 2005). This will be accompanied by formalised approaches in all areas of the business and to systemise most administrative functions (Phelps et al., 2007; Scott & Bruce, 1987). This will create the need for professional functional managers who will typically not have the same commitment to the business as the Founder, which can potentially become a weakness within the business. Formalised processes will help the business to acquire and apply knowledge more effectively, which will positively shape the growth trajectory of the business (Macpherson & Holt, 2007).

Funding for long-term growth and sustainability will become even more crucial now, yet it is envisaged that the positive track record of the firm at this stage should allow it to attract equity or long-term debt using the businesses assets as collateral. The business will not be able to sustain itself on its past performance alone, however.

Small businesses do not undertake regular, structured, proactive performance measurements due to their lack of formal strategic planning (Raymond et al., 2013). Phelps et al. (2007) noted that a positive relationship exists between growth and

strategic planning. As such, small businesses will need to spend more time in this stage to develop strategic goals across a range of strategy possibilities, which the business will be measured against.

Two crises are expected in this stage of the business' growth. The first crisis deals with the distance between the top management and the action. As small businesses continue to grow, they will become more decentralised, causing a significant change in the Founder's role from entrepreneur to leader. This could be difficult for the Founder as it goes against their nature.

The second crisis occurs when the business needs to change from an internal to an external focus in order to remain competitive. It is at this point that small businesses have to put the correct processes in place to successfully exploit new opportunities in the external environment in innovative ways (Wiklund et al., 2009). In so doing, it is envisaged that the business will be able to develop certain dynamic capabilities that will change the way in which it tackles problems in the future (Koryak et al., 2015; Tushman & O'Reilly, 2011; Wensley & Cegarra-Navarro, 2015; Wiklund et al., 2009). The business will need to achieve a greater focus on customer needs in order to make product adaptations that meet those needs. Intensified competition in maturing industries will create more turbulent operating conditions, which will precipitate the need for the business to be proactive and anticipatory towards its external environment. For this reason, a more adaptive management style will be more appropriate for mature industries (Verreynne & Meyer, 2010).

Investment in innovation, research and development is critical for identifying new opportunities in the external environment, however small businesses find it hard to make these investments because they do not have the same capacity and resources as larger businesses (Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015). DeCarlo and Lyons (1987) noted that those things that led to the business' success are not the same as those that will lead to long-term success, and in fact are the very things that need to be changed. As such, it is expected that the expansion stage will be difficult for the Founder, as formalising processes will remove equivocality and freedom, both hallmarks of entrepreneurship.

2.8.6 Stage 5: Maturity

Most companies in this stage will soon move out of the small business categorisation. The Founder will face issues regarding expense control, productivity and future growth opportunities. The businesses will thus need to adopt a stronger focus on innovation to

improve their points of differentiation (Altinay et al., 2016). Major investments will include marketing initiatives and upgrading and/or maintaining existing infrastructure (Lofstrom et al., 2014; Souder et al., 2012; Wiklund et al., 2009; Zahra et al., 2011).

Ultimately the future of the business at this stage hinges on the Founder, who could choose to shrink the business, continue as is, or further grow the business. This will put further pressure on the Founder, and there may come a time when they will need to decide whether it is time to step down or to select a successor (Souder et al., 2012; Wasserman, 2008).

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter the literature highlighted the complexities of small business growth and emphasised the critical role of the Founder in facilitating the transition of the business through the stages of growth. From the literature it is apparent that Founders will have a number of attachments that could hinder both their and the business' growth. These attachments include the Founder's previous work experiences as well as their personal characteristics, motivations, skills and influences. Unfortunately, it appears that this list is not exhaustive to properly understand the types of attachments Founders bring into the business, their significance to the Founder and their roots. Furthermore, the manner in which to identify the nature of an attachment in terms of its favourability and the challenges of letting go of these deeply entrenched attachments is still relatively unclear.

The literature provided a thorough understanding of the process of unlearning, which is undergone in order to discard old knowledge and abandon outdated behaviours that have become unfavourable for the current business environment. Although newer research has attempted to provide a better understanding of how an attachment is released, further research is required to understand the deeper nuances of unlearning and how it differs in other contexts. The literature shows that the unlearning process will be triggered by some type of negative stimuli, such as a problem event or crisis in the organisation, leading to undesirable outcomes. This can be likened to the crisis stages seen in the Small Business Growth Model, which illustrates the transformation of small businesses as they go through a series of evolutionary and revolutionary phases.

It is envisaged that each crisis stage could represent a point where the Founder and/or the business will need to undergo the unlearning process in order to let go of the things

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to better understand how Founder-CEOs can grow their businesses by unlearning their unfavourable attachments that prevent their personal and business growth.

The research questions were formulated from the concepts that emerged from the literature review in Chapter 2, in light of the problem defined in Chapter 1. The research questions were developed to explore the Founder-CEO's experience-based attachments prior to the unlearning process, the breaking point that leads to the unlearning, the actions taken by the Founder-CEO during the unlearning, the emotions experienced by the Founder-CEO during the unlearning process, and finally the perceived impact of the unlearning.

3.2 Research Questions

There are four research questions developed for this study:

3.2.1 Research Question 1

What do Founder-CEOs need to unlearn in order to grow their businesses?

This question will identify the unfavourable attachments that are ingrained in the Founder-CEO prior to unlearning. These unfavourable attachments have to be unlearned in order to remove anything that might constrain the Founders thinking and decision-making abilities and thereby limiting their capacity to respond to opportunities for growth. This question will also explore the significance of these attachments and their sources. This will help to ascertain where these attachments originate from and the associated value that the Founder places on the origin, thereby making it more difficult to let go of the attachment.

3.2.2 Research Question 2

What is the catalyst for the unlearning process?

It is envisaged that the results from this question will list the events or circumstances that lead to the unlearning process. This question will also highlight what actions the Founder can take once they have decided to change, and the emotional impact experienced by the Founder during the unlearning process.

3.2.3 Research Question 3

How do Founder-CEOs experience the unlearning process?

The aim of this research question is to gain a better understanding of how Founders actually experience the unlearning process. This will be achieved by exploring the reasons why Founder-CEOs reach their breaking points thereby forcing them to unlearn certain things, as well as the difficulties experienced by Founder-CEOs when releasing their unfavourable attachments. The continued actions of the Founder-CEO will also be investigated to gain insights into the actives required to maintain their focus on the unlearning process thereby preventing them from reverting back to the status quo.

3.2.4 Research Question 4

What is the perceived impact of the unlearning process as a lever for long-term business success and growth?

This question will investigate the perceived impact of the unlearning process on personal and business growth and development. The main aim is to interrogate the impact of letting go of an unfavourable attachment post the unlearning process.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

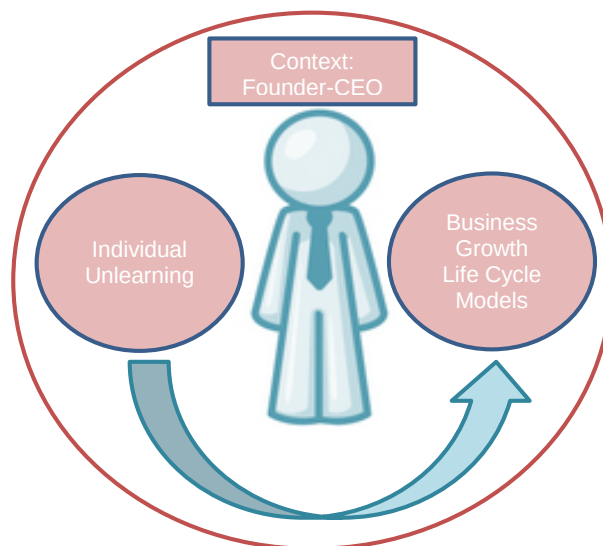
4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology that was used to prepare and collect data for the study. The literature review formed the basis of the design of the methodology and data collection tool used in the study. It was important that the research methodology choices were critically assessed in order to confidently ensure that the data collected did, in fact, answer the questions that this study wished to answer (Davies, 2007). The study adopted a qualitative and exploratory approach which informed the research method and design, sampling method and size, data collection method and data analysis procedure.

4.2 Research Context

Kohler (2016) noted that it is of utmost importance in qualitative research to explain how the setting of the study provided an optimal context to address the research questions. The research context for this study is illustrated in Figure 7. The Literature Review in Chapter 2 highlighted that two major constructs are being studied in this research, i.e. Unlearning and Life Cycle models for business growth. These two constructs were studied in the context of the Founder-CEOs.

Figure 7: The Research Context



A Founder plays an instrumental role in a business, and is very influential on the long-term survival of the business (Altinay et al., 2016; Fern et al., 2012; Lofstrom et al., 2014; Souder et al., 2012; Wasserman, 2003; 2008). During the Founder's tenure, their

skills, knowledge, behaviours and attitudes will need to change to deal with the pressures of a growing organisation. Unlearning is closely related to change management, which is in and of itself a disruptive and transformative process. It allows for the eliminating, discarding and abandoning of old routines and obsolete knowledge, values, behaviours, beliefs and assumptions, hence the context of the Founder is deemed to be appropriate as it provides the space to investigate whether the unlearning of Founder-CEOs leads to their personal and business growth, and how these Founders actually experience the unlearning process. This ties to the purpose of this research and the research questions outlined in Chapter 3.

4.3 Research Method and Design

Pratt (2009) noted that qualitative research is “great for addressing ‘how’ questions - rather than ‘how many’, for understanding the world from the perspective of those studied and for examining and articulating processes” (p. 856). Exploratory qualitative approaches pursue fresh insights by asking different questions and assessing findings from a new perspective (Jebb, Parrigon, & Woo, 2017; Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Exploratory approaches are useful in instances where the study first pursues a basic understanding about an emergent theory, which will then be followed by more detailed quantitative research to provide a deeper and more meaningful understanding (Becker, 2010; Creswell, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to discover new insights into an area of study where little research has been conducted. The existing theory on individual unlearning is being applied in the novel context of Founder-CEOs to develop new emergent theory on the effect of the unlearning process to grow and develop both the Founder and the business. This is achieved as the Founder unlearns certain unfavourable attachments that impede change and growth. Thus, it is clear that a qualitative and exploratory research approach was suitable for this study.

Most research done on the process of unlearning has been quantitative in nature, as evidenced by the numerous surveys conducted on the topic (Hislop et al., 2014; Tsang & Zahra, 2008). A qualitative exploratory approach was more useful in this study as this approach helped to address the gap in the unlearning body of knowledge by probing for greater understanding in a new and unexplored context. Further, quantitative studies can provide statistics to generalise the findings found in the qualitative research at a later stage.

The processes of learning and unlearning are complex, sensitive and intricate in nature. Typically, organisations and individuals alike will take time to go through the process and possibly different iterations if the need arises (Zahra et al., 2011). As a result it is difficult to observe or take a snapshot of these processes occurring in a particular context.

Other researchers have overcome the unobservability aspect of the unlearning process by collecting data at two different stages. Tsang (2008) used a multi-stage approach when studying the transfer of knowledge in joint ventures, where he interviewed managers in two time periods - early in the acquisition and two years later. Similarly, Delmar et al. (2003) utilised the multi-period assessment of growth recommended by Weinzimmer, Nystrom and Freeman (1998). Unfortunately, due to the time constraints of this study it was not feasible to utilise a multi-stage data collection approach. Instead a cross-sectional study was performed, whereby data were collected at particular point in time from a single sample group (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). This allowed for the assessment and review of the Founder-CEOs' unlearning processes up to a particular point.

Qualitative inductive research approaches have become increasingly associated with the development and advancement of theory through the insights, ideas and practises of those most closely related to the focal phenomena, or the empirical patterns they reveal (Bansal & Corley, 2012; Jebb et al., 2017). Using an inductive approach in this study has thus uncovered new concepts and generated persuasive new theories about the concept of unlearning, its impact on business growth, and the influence of the Founder (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012). This was achieved through the discovery of patterns, categories and interrelationships, through the exploration of in-depth, descriptive questions (Rautenbach et al., 2015).

4.4 Population

The population that was identified as being relevant for this study can be described as the individuals who manage businesses that they have either created or co-created and are still involved in the leadership of their businesses. In reality their roles are interchangeably described as Founder-CEOs, Founder-Owners or Owner-Managers. These individuals possess the fundamental knowledge and experience from the process of growing their businesses from the initial inception stage to the maturity stage of its life cycle. Hence, these Founder-CEOs were of interest in this study. By virtue of the survival of their businesses, they show that they were able to evolve their

repertoire of skills in response to wicked-problems encountered during the businesses growth. Insights from the unlearning of these Founder-CEOs will be highly valuable for Founder-CEOs of new entrepreneurial ventures who wish to grow their businesses.

4.5 Sampling Method and Size

Participants were selected using non-probability sampling techniques. A combination of purposive, snowball and stratified sampling was used to identify appropriate participants (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). These three sampling techniques fall under the purposeful sampling technique group, and are very useful for inductive qualitative research such as this (Flick, 2014, p. 54; Kohler, 2016).

Snowball sampling was the most useful sampling technique as it increased the certainty of securing participants. Difficulties were experienced in securing interviews with Founders due to the pressures of their work demands and schedules. It was found that they were more likely to consent to the interview and actually make time for it if they were referred by, or in some instances connected to, a personal friend, colleague or family member who was also a participant in the study.

The sample consisted of Founder-CEOs who reside in Gauteng. Generally, heterogeneity is expected of managerial challenges and patterns during small business growth due to the difference in the objectives of Founders (Raymond et al., 2013). Kohler (2016) noted that “authors need to obtain information from different types of participants with access to different information” (p. 408), hence in order to gain a richer and fuller perspective, it was important to ensure that the sample was diverse in terms of the size of the businesses included and the industries they represented. The National Small Business Act segments small businesses into four categories: medium, small, very small and micro enterprises, based on the number of full-time employees, total turnover and the total gross asset value (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Businesses larger than these classifications are considered to be large enterprises. The population of this study was stratified according to these organisational categories to ensure that all categories were represented in the sample.

Chan, Bhargava and Street (2006) found that once small businesses are able to sustain high growth, their management challenges converge regardless of their size, revenue level or industry. This shows that there is greater homogeneity amongst small businesses once they begin to sustain high growth rates. Therefore, it can be inferred that the results of an assessment of a diverse group of small businesses will be

generally applicable to the group at large. For this reason it was vital that Founder-CEOs from a wide variety of industries were engaged with to increase the application of the findings and improve the generalisability of the study. Focusing on a specific industry would have limited the insights gained and eliminated the potentially “confounding effects due to heterogeneous industry factors” (Wales et al., 2013, p. 625). Furthermore, the Founder-CEOs selected for this study possessed past working experience before embarking on their new ventures, and their businesses had been in operation for five years or more.

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, the sample was small in size and consisted of 15 individuals. These individuals served as the Founder-CEO in their respective businesses. All of the members of the sample were critically involved in the creation of the business either solely or within a coalition, and were still running the business at the time of the interview. The businesses that they represented were all formal, established business in the maturity phase of their life cycles. This was determined by the number of employees, the age of the business, and whether the business had been formally registered. Table 4 shows the characteristics for the sample.

Table 4: Sample Characteristics

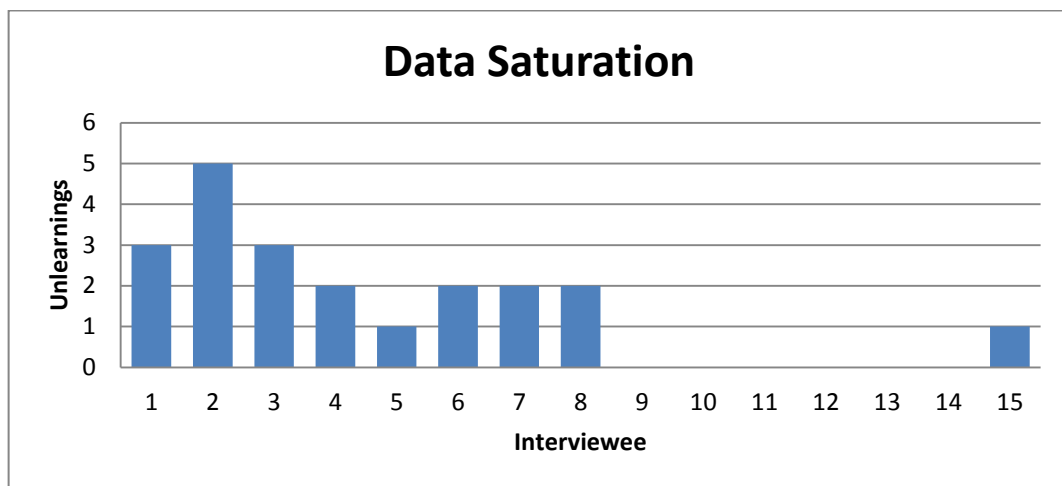
Industry	Employees	Business age (years)	Classification
Beauty	150	26	Medium
Beauty	2500	12	Large
Information Technology	222	10	Large
Manufacturing	47	24	Very Small - Small
Telecommunications	30	11	Very Small - Small
Fuel and Oil	40	9	Very Small - Small
Flavour/Food	65	18	Small – Medium
Logistics	60	21	Small – Medium
Construction	100	5	Small – Medium
Health Care	1500	18	Large
Pharmaceuticals	34	5	Very Small - Small
Property Finance	876	17	Large
Insurance	12	17	Very Small - Small
Project Management Services	80	4	Small – Medium
Engineering services	17	16	Very Small - Small

The 15 Founder-CEOs in the sample represented 14 different industries. Beauty was the only one industry represented twice. However, since the businesses had different classifications, medium and large, it was deemed that the Founders would provide

different insights. Lastly, there was significant variation in the age and number of employees in each business within the sample. The age of the businesses ranged from 4 to 26 years old, while the number of employees in each business ranged from 12 to 2,500 employees. These highlight the heterogeneity in the sample.

Figure 8 illustrates the number of unlearning's that was received per interviewee. A total of 21 unlearning types were obtained across the 15 interviewees.

Figure 8: Data Saturation



Data saturation was achieved after the eighth interview. However, unpredictably during the fifteenth and final interview a new type of unlearning emerged. According to Flick (2014) theoretical saturation is reached when no additional thematic insights is obtained from further data collection. However, it is expected that the heterogeneous nature of the sample will increase thematic variability and maximize variability amongst the emergent themes (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Hence, this result is deemed acceptable because the uniqueness and diversity of the sample increases the chances of new and unexpected themes emerging.

4.6 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis was the accumulated experiences of the Founder-CEOs during the unlearning process. The specific units consisted of the:

- types and significance of the unlearning;
- source of the attachments;
- events that led to the unlearning;
- emotions experienced;
- actions taken to start unlearning and to continue unlearning;

- breaking points persuading the unlearning;
- difficulties encountered that challenged the letting-go process;
- personal and emotional impact of the unlearning on the Founder-CEO; and
- improvements and growth in the Fonder and business.

4.7 Data Collection Tool

Zahra et al. (2011) noted that due to “the unobservability of unlearning and learning, researchers may need to apply diverse methods to gather and discern the dimensions of the phenomena being examined” (p. 328), which may include the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods. Typically, case studies, interviews, surveys and archival data are useful for studying learning (Zahra et al., 2011). Saunders and Lewis (2012) noted that it is most useful to conduct in-depth interviews in qualitative exploratory research. As such, data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth, mostly face-to-face interviews with 15 Founder-CEOs.

The spoken account of events described by the Founder-CEOs in the interviews facilitated the creation of a narrative of their experiences of unlearning their unfavourable attachments as they grew their businesses. According to Garud et al. (2010) the narrative development approach helps people to learn from their unusual experiences through story-telling and discourse. This study thus drew from the benefits of the narrative development process as the Founder-CEOs described the events and experiences they went through whilst growing their businesses.

Identified participants were solicited to take part in the interviews through a standard formal email, which was personalised and included the details of the person who had referred the participant for the study. Interestingly, a potential participant was most likely to agree and make time for the interview when contacted either through their personal assistant or someone else close to them. Attached to the email was a personalised cover letter that outlined the purpose of the study and highlighted that the input from the participant would be kept confidential and only for the purposes of this research. The contact details of the research supervisor were included so that the participants could verify the legitimacy and purpose of the interview if desired. The cover letter also invited the participant to ask questions prior to the interview. An example of the cover letter is given in Appendix 1. Upon agreeing to take part in the interview, a meeting was scheduled through Outlook.

Prior to commencing an interview the participant was asked to review, complete and sign a consent form that highlighted that they were voluntarily participating in the research, and that all data would only be used for the purposes of this research and reported anonymously. An example of the Consent Letter is given in Appendix 2.

The data collection was structured to best suit the needs and availability of the participants. This level of consideration was especially important as the sample for this study was Founder- CEOs who were difficult to access due to their business schedules. Thus, the interviews were conducted at a convenient time and location for the participants, which was in most cases their office at their normal place of work. Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) noted that holding interviews at the normal workplace of the participant helps to “enhance contextual richness and minimize fragmentation”. One interview was conducted over Skype due to the geographical location of the participant. Three other interviews took place in locations other than the personal workplaces of the participant, namely the Gordon Institute of Business Science; the place of work of the researcher; and one of the Johannesburg branches of the Founder’s business. The duration of time taken to complete each interview varied depending on the individual being interviewed. The longest interview was approximately 74 minutes long, whilst the shortest interview was approximately 30 minutes long. On average, the interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes.

The interviews were guided by a series of pre-determined questions that were open-ended and closed, in-depth and descriptive in nature. These questions were derived from the major concepts found in the Literature Review in Chapter 2, in response to the research questions set out in Chapter 3. Table 5 illustrates the major concepts that emerged from the Literature Review.

Table 5: The Major Concepts that Emerged from the Literature Review

Unlearning	Individual unlearning
	Organisational unlearning
	Process of unlearning: process, catalyst, emotional experience, difficulties,
	Change management
Business growth	Life cycle growth stages
	Entrepreneurial nature
Founder-CEO’s	The founder’s critical influence in the business
	Personal characteristics
	Motives and intentions for starting and growing the business
	The effect of the founders past experiences

Table 6 shows how each of the interview questions is mapped to the Research Questions in Chapter 3. Appendix 3 includes the interview guidelines that were followed while interviewing the Founder-CEOs. These questions were submitted to an expert committee at the Gordon Institute of Business Science in order to obtain ethical clearance prior to usage. Appendix 4 includes the ethical clearance approval received.

Table 6: Research Questions and Interview Mapping

Research Questions	Interview Questions
Research Question 1: What do Founder-CEOs need to unlearn in order to grow their business?	Q1: What were the major things that you had to unlearn or let go of whilst growing your business? Q2: What was the significance of this unlearning? Q3: How did you become attached to this way of doing things?
Research Question 2: What is the catalyst for the unlearning process?	Q4: Explain the event/circumstances that led up to the unlearning Q5: What were the experienced when you realised that you had to start unlearning and letting go? Q6: Which actions did you take to start the unlearning process and let go of your attachments? Q7: Was the unlearning self-initiated?
Research Question 3: How do Founder-CEOs experience the unlearning process?	Q8: Was there a particular breaking point that persuaded you to let go and unlearn? Q9: What actions did you take to continue the unlearning process and let go of your attachments? Q10: What made it difficult to release this way of doing things?
Research Question 4: What is the perceived impact of the unlearning process as a lever for long-term business success and growth?	Q11: What was the unlearning on you both personally and emotionally after you had let go of the attachment? Q12: Did the unlearning lead to any improvements in your business? Q13: What was the effect of the unlearning on the growth of the business? Q14: Looking back, what was the overall experience of unlearning? Q15: Rate the impact on a five point scale (1=minimum, 3=intense impact, 5=extreme impact)

Two pilot interviews were carried out using Founder-CEOs who fitted the desired sample characteristics. Flick (2014) emphasises that a pilot phase in a study is important to identify the potential shortcomings of the interview methods to answer the research questions. The pilot interviews conducted in this study revealed that the interview guideline was adequate for obtaining the necessary data for answering the research questions. It also showed that participants may find it difficult to understand the concept of unlearning and that the interviews would be highly unstructured and messy; requiring rigorous methods for adequate analysis.

4.8 Data Collection Methodology

During the interviews it was important to take time to explain the purpose of the research in order to give the participants a better understanding of what the researcher was trying to accomplish. Furthermore, prior to commencing the interviews with the participants, time was taken to explain the process of unlearning and its relation to learning. Two examples were used by the researcher to give the participants a practical example of unlearning. This included a general and personal example from the researcher's background that adequately illustrated the unlearning process and stimulated their thinking.

- Example 1: In some cultures children are taught at a young age that boys and girls can do specific jobs. But when you enter the workplace, you might realise that men and women can do the same kind of work which means they will need to unlearn and let go of their prior beliefs.
- Example 2: In my work as an engineer, I am used to working by myself, but when I started my MBA, I had to participate in syndicates to complete group assignments. This was initially difficult for me and I had to let go of my previous habits and other ways of doing things that allowed me to work on my own.

Although the interviews had pre-set questions, there was a need to paraphrase or state questions in the context of the participants unlearning. This helped to make the questions clearer and helped the participant to better understand what the questions were asking. All the interviews were audio-recorded which allowed the researcher to focus on facilitating the process and take note of visual observations, instead of transcribing the narratives of the interviews.

4.9 Data Analysis

The purpose of the data analysis was to identify, interrogate and report common themes that emerged out of the narratives in the data collected from the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These narratives were quite diverse, dense, complex and nuanced, which is typical of qualitative data. Spiggle (1994) commented that meaning cannot be extracted from this type of data by executing a set of operations in a mechanical fashion. Rather, he proposed the use of a set of operations (categorisation, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalisation, integration, iteration, and refutation) for effectively managing qualitative data. These operations are not separate activities, nor do they occur in any particular sequence.

In more recent times many authors have divided qualitative data analysis into a series of steps, which has given rise to thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Cassell & Symon, 2004; Flick, 2014). Thematic content analysis is viewed as a foundational method for qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Most step models put forward by authors are different, but all follow the same ideal and streamlined process. Saldana (2016) illustrated this basic process in his codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry. Through this process data is organised, meaning is extracted, conclusions are derived and conceptual theories that describe the data are generated. This process is useful for assisting novice researchers to make sense of qualitative data by analysing it in a systematic way. As such, Saldana's (2016) model was used to analyse data in this study. The process used is mapped in five stages, which are described in Table 7. The codes developed through this process are given in Appendix 5.

Table 7: Qualitative data Analysis Procedure

Stage	Description
1. Data	Listening to interview recordings, transcribing data, reading and re-reading transcripts, re-organising source data according to the research interview guide, comparing transcripts with written notes, noting initial ideas.
2. Code	Coding significant phrases and interesting ideas that emerges from the data in a systematic way across the data set.
3. Category	Collating data relevant to each code, establishing relationships and common meanings amongst codes, combine codes to form categories, identifying sub-categories, recoding and re-categorising if needed.
4. Themes	Comparing categories, consolidating categories into thematic concepts that broadly and concisely capture the meaning of the data, reviewing and refining themes.
5. Theory	Analytical reflection of themes in conjunction with literature to establish a common process or phenomenon that represents the overall story emerging from the data.

All the interviews were audio-recorded and translated into written text. The recordings, transcripts and written notes taken during the interviews were analysed to convert the data from unstructured codes to theory (Saldana, 2016). On average it took approximately four hours to analyse each interview, using Saldana's codes to theory process. The analysis of all 15 interviews took approximately 60 hours to complete.

4.10 Data Validity and Reliability

Creswell (2000) defined validity as “how accurately the account represents participants’ realities of the social phenomenon” (p. 1). Creswell outlined nine validity procedures within qualitative lens and paradigm assumptions. Validity procedures are important to

ensure the trustworthiness, authenticity and generalisability of results (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Flick, 2014; Grant & Pollock, 2011; Jebb et al., 2017; Kohler, 2016). Table 8 describes how five of the nine validity procedures were used in this study.

Table 8: Validity Procedures Utilised

Validity Procedure	Application
Triangulation	Corroborating evidence was found to support themes that emerged from the data by comparing the findings to existing literature. More importantly, findings were compared to the results of the study conducted by Rautenbach et al. (2015), which this study is based on.
The Audit Trail	A third person external to the study reviewed three of the interview transcripts. This individual was not familiar with the constructs and provided an unbiased perspective to the analysis.
Thick Rich Descriptions	Deep, dense and detailed accounts of the participants' narrative accounts are given in Chapter 5 in order to accurately illustrate the participants' thoughts. Lengthy quotations and descriptions of the participants' accounts are used to eliminate the researcher's biases from the interpretation.
Peer Debriefing	The supervisor for this study was familiar with the process of unlearning and supported or challenged the assumptions, methods and findings in order to elevate the thinking of the researcher.

4.11 Research Limitations

The quality issue involved in qualitative research methods was a limitation in this research due to the unintentional influence of the researcher on the participant as well as the researcher's unconscious lack of objectivity when analysing and interpreting data. In so doing it was possible for the researcher to distort or "falsely portray the phenomena such methods seek to reveal" and may have threatened the authenticity of the findings (Tosey, Lawley, & Meese, 2014, p. 630). Furthermore, due to the qualitative nature of this study insights were drawn from a smaller number of participants within the sample. Hence, this study should ultimately be followed by more detailed quantitative research which will provide a deeper and more meaningful understanding of unlearning of Founder-CEOs of small businesses.

Even though attempts were made to improve the validity of this study, most of the activities were carried out by a single individual. These activities included data collection, analysis and interpretation of the results. This inherently limited the content analysis to the ideas and thoughts of a single individual which may be biased or leading. Brook et al. (2015) note that this has the added risk of the workings of the

“double hermeneutic” wherein the researcher is making sense of himself and that which is being studied at the same time thereby resulting in the erroneous mixing of the two and unconsciously reporting the findings as such.

4.12 Conclusion

It can be concluded that this research design and methodology helped to achieve the purpose of this study as stipulated in Chapter 1. They helped the researcher to engage with the Founder-CEOs on a deeper and more profound level. Face-to-face interactions with the Founder-CEOs gave the data collection process a more personal touch, and encouraged the Founders to share their intimate thoughts and feelings, and perhaps sensitive information, about their businesses. This was critical in ensuring that the results of this study are a true reflection of what happens in practice.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the results of the study are presented, and are laid out according to the research questions set out in Chapter 3. This section provides the findings of the analysis of the data that were collected through conducting in-depth, one-on-one interviews with Founder CEOs. The questions were formulated from the concepts that emerged from the literature review discussed in Chapter 2, together with the expression of the problem defined in Chapter 1. A consistency matrix was used to map the interview questions against the research questions to ensure that alignment existed between the questions, literature, data collection and methods of analysis.

5.2 Description of the Sample

A combination of purposive, snowball and stratified sampling was used to identify 15 Founder-CEOs for the sample of this study. These individuals were considered to be Founders as they had all played an integral role in establishing the businesses in question, and had been running the businesses since their inception. Further, consideration was given to the industries that the businesses operated in, the number of employees in the businesses, and the age as well as its size of the business. A list of the interviewees, together with the companies they represented and their current position or title is presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Information and Details of Interviews from the Sample

Name	Position	Company
Paul Fox	Co-Founder & CEO	Paul James Hairdressing
Gerald Naidoo	Founder & CEO	Logikal Consulting
Stephen Prophet	Owner-Manager	Fluid Power
Edward Lawrence	Managing Director	Work Online
Ian Fuhr	Co-Founder & CEO	Sorbet
Gabriel Naidoo	Managing Director	SA Fuel and Oil
Johan Smith	Owner-Manager	Unique Flavours
Billy Hoemoedt	Owner-Manager	AFNET
Thulani Fakaude	Managing Director	Inyosi Projects
Ian Barton	Co-Founder & CEO	Imperial Health Services
Martin Magwasa	Co-Founder & CEO	BGM Pharmaceuticals
Kevin Penwarden	CEO	SA Homeloans
Erica Serra	Owner-Manager	Insurrite
Amanda Dambuza	CEO	Uyandiswa
Daniel Mathosi	Managing Director	Mathosi Engineering

The entire sample consisted of two females and thirteen males all of whom were classified as Founders-CEO's of their respective businesses. However, the formal title of the individual verified across the sample as shown in Table 9.

All the participants had a secondary level of education with a matric certification, with 60% of the Founder-CEOs in the sample having achieved some type of tertiary educational qualification prior to starting their business. The remaining 40% commenced their business ventures without any educational background, as shown in Figure 9. The higher education qualifications verified across the sample and ranged from National Certification to Post-graduate qualification.

Figure 9: Founder's with Tertiary Qualifications Prior to Starting Business

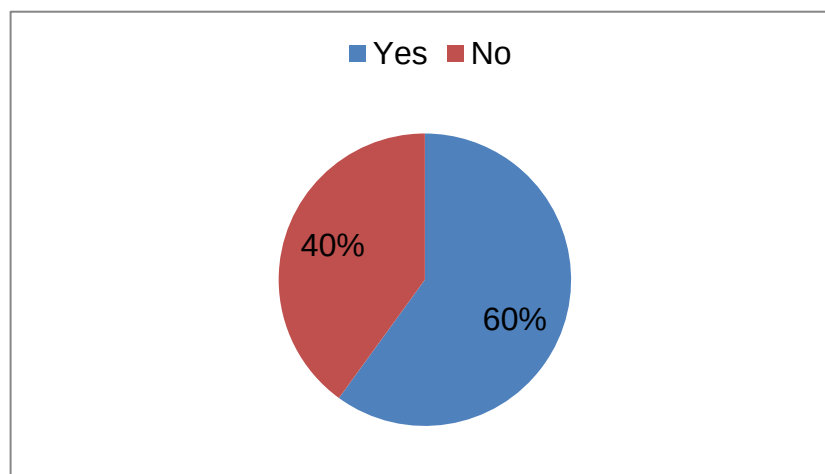
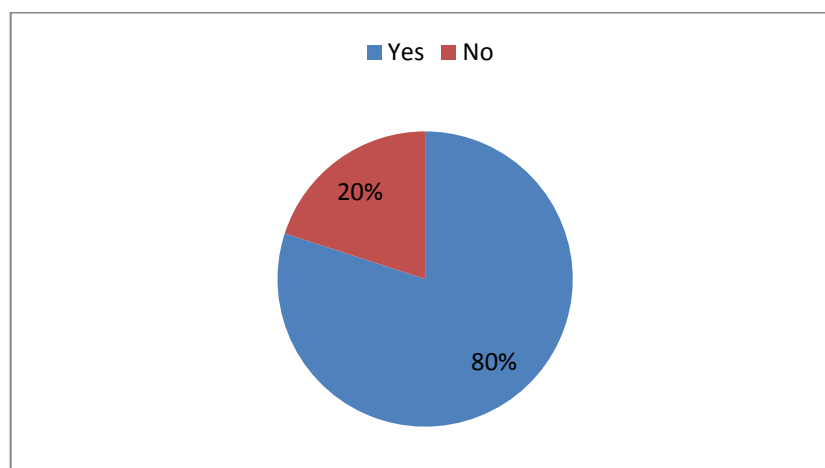


Figure 10 shows that 80% of the Founder-CEOs were previously employed at some point prior to commencing their business, whereas 20% have never been employed by another organisation.

Figure 10: Founders with Previous Work Experience



5.3 Presentation of the Results

In the following section, the aggregated research findings are presented. The results are categorically discussed within the constructs of the Research Questions presented in Chapter 3 and are directly correlated to the interview questions as they have been mapped in Table 6. The tables illustrating the results represent the top 10 themes that emerged from the data for each interview question. A total of 21 types of unlearning were obtained during the interviews. Generally there was a low level of frequency counts for all 21 types due to the heterogeneity of the sample. However, some types were cited strongly across the sample and as a result only the top 10 were selected for presentation in the results.

5.4 Results for Research Question 1

Research Question 1: What do Founder-CEOs need to unlearn in order to grow their business?

The aim of Research Question 1 was to identify the specific attachments that Founder-CEOs need to let go of in order to grow and transition their businesses into maturity. The three interview questions that pertained to Research Question 1 were set up specifically to determine what attachments Founder-CEOs need to unlearn, why these unlearnings are significant with respect to the Founders' personal and professional experiences, and how the Founder inherited or formed these attachments prior to unlearning. Furthermore, the question sought to confirm if Founder-CEOs need to unlearn the specific unfavourable attachments identified in the literature review.

5.4.1 Types and Significance of Unlearnings of Founder-CEOs

The first and second interview questions dealt with the major things that the Founder-CEOs had to unlearn or let go of whilst growing their businesses. In the first question each interviewee was requested to provide some of the major things they had to unlearn. The number of unlearnings provided by each interviewee ranged between two to five. In response to the second interview question the interviewees unpacked the unlearnings by describing their significance, which was influenced by the Founders' personal circumstances and the resulting impact they had on the businesses. Table 10 illustrates the top 10 types of attachments that the Founder-CEOs had to unlearn.

Table 10: Types of Attachments That Had To Be Unlearned

Rank	Attachments	Frequency
1	Control and power	10
2	Conventional industry processes and practices	7
3	Assumptions about external factors in the business environment	6
3	Human resource management	6
5	Identity	5
5	Bad habits and practices	5
5	Financial resources	5
5	Decision-making practices	5
9	Theoretical business models	4
9	Socially acceptable beliefs around the markers of success	4

The participants offered a wide range of unlearnings across the sample, with varying significance placed on each unlearning. Significant emphasis was placed on letting go of 'Control and power' in the organisation in order to allow others to share and participate in the business. Many interviewees described the early days of the business, where they had to do everything from invoicing to attending tender briefings, completing tenders, making deliveries, conducting sales and doing computer work, to even being the tea lady, which was humorously emphasised by a particular interviewee. These individuals discussed the difficulties they experienced in letting go of the power and control, as they couldn't trust someone else to do as good a job as them. Interviewee 1 described how s/he would sit at her/his desk and listen to what her/his employees were saying on the phone to customers, before going to them whilst they were on the phone and badgering them with what s/he thought they should be saying.

The participants highlighted both positive and negative significances related to letting go of 'Control and power'. Interviewee 9 noted that, "I have always believed that if you want something done right, then do it yourself", whilst Interviewee 2 highlighted, "Being a strong person, I've got a bit of a control freak personality okay. So everything has to go my way or it's not right". These accounts were countered by positive significance accounts that revealed the necessity and greater need of letting go of 'Control and power' by the interviewees to grow the business. This was shown in one particular incident where Interviewee 3 stressed that "one person can be as busy as you want, but 50 people can do more business than one person, so that's why I did business. So I can bring in R100, 000.00 per month turnover but 50 people can bring in R2, 000,000.00 turnover".

Table 10 shows that over half of the sample noted that they had to unlearn ‘Conventional industry processes and practices’, however the form and types of processes and practices varied across the sample for different industries. For instance, Interviewee 12 spent a lot of time discussing how they had to let go of their attachment to rigid organisational structures commonly used in corporate organisations, where “people do particular roles based on their training and what they have been hired for”. Interviewee 10, however, expressed that s/he had to let go of large corporate comforts. In her/his personal experience, large corporate organisations have room for waste as they have an abundance of resources. S/he gave the example that corporate organisations can afford to have machinery standing on site unutilised because they have many of them, but in her/his experience, small businesses cannot afford this level of inefficiency and need to let go of these practices if they are to be profitable.

Interviewee 14 offered an unlearning that overlapped into more than one of the types of attachments that had to be unlearned, which was common. In this instance, the interviewee noted that s/he had to unlearn how s/he had been taught to do performance management of employees as it had been done in the corporate organisation that s/he had previously worked for. The interviewee noted that “in big organisations you’ve got very formal, very long processes of performance management, and half the time you don’t actually spend a lot of time with the people coaching them, encouraging, hand holding them where they require to get better”. However, this approach proved to be ineffective when the interviewee started her own business. It can be seen that this unlearning pertains to ‘Human resource management’ as well as ‘Conventional industry processes and practices’, as illustrated in Table 10.

The Founder’s ‘Identity’ was a recurring theme seen during the interviews, where the owner’s identity became intertwined with that of the business. Interviewee 9 discussed how the business became their alter ego, whilst Interviewee 3 expressed that “I am not the brand, the brand is the most important, I’m just a part of it”, and Interviewee 4 explained that it was difficult not to become too emotional or personally attached to business. This was a fundamental unlearning that many of the interviewees struggled with as their businesses grew.

As a result of ‘Identity’ issues, many Founders developed bad habits whilst running their businesses that they had to let go of. Through repetition these bad habits became

practices. A case in point was time and resource management, where typically the Founders did not pay themselves a salary during the earlier stages of the business and just took what they needed. This led to bad habits, where in the one instance the Founder used business funds to purchase a new car.

5.4.2 The Source of the Attachments

Interview question 3 investigated the sources of the Founders' attachments in order to better understand where they came from. The interviewees described the deeper or fundamental roots from which these attachments developed. Table 11 illustrates the major sources of the Founders' attachments. The highest ranked source was the 'Previous work experience' of the Founder, which was followed by the 'Industry norms' of the business and the 'Personal characteristics of the Founder'.

Table 11: The Sources of the Founders' Attachments

Ranking	Source of the Attachment	Frequency
1	Previous work experience	9
2	Industry norms	6
2	Personal characteristics of the Founder	6
4	Past success	5
4	Education	5
6	Upbringing	4
6	Wealth creation	4
6	Original model	4
6	Self-reliance	4
10	Founder's influence in a position of power or strength	3
10	Old ways of doing things	3

Many of the unlearnings that the interviewees had to let go of were rooted in, or inherited from, their past work experiences, as evidenced by the ranking in Table 11. Figure 10 shows that 80% of the interviewees had 'Previous work experience', ranging from working in large multinational organisations to government organisations and other private businesses. Some of the interviewees held very high ranking positions in the companies that they had worked for, and were "very instrumental in the building of those companies" as highlighted by Interviewee 5.

It is worth noting that Interviewees 8 and 12 emphasised that they had to let go of the amount of analysis and research they would typically do in their previous jobs when assessing new opportunities. They noted that it was an incredibly slow process and as a result in their own businesses analysis and research often meant that they were late to the market and lost out on opportunities.

‘Previous work experience’ overlapped with the source category of ‘Industry norms’ which is ranked second in Table 11. These were not listed as two separate categories, as in some instances the industry norm unlearned was not related to the interviewees’ past experience, but was generally known and used in the industry. For instance, Interviewee 4 recalled that as s/he expanded the business by purchasing new stores, a lot of knowledge was gained about how things worked in the industry. Eventually these were the very things that s/he had to get rid of as they were hindering the business from differentiating itself from competitors in the industry.

Figure 9 shows that 60% of the interviewees had attained a tertiary educational qualification prior to starting their businesses. This is significant because many of the unlearnings that the interviewees had to let go of were as a result of their educational background, as the Founder attempted to “manage the business using a textbook” which was noted by Interviewee 8. Interviewee 12 surmised that “its human nature to rely a lot on a more mechanistic vision that you press this button and then this happens. You switch here and it’s almost as if there is a very linear and direct relationship between particularly levers and response”. Models and theories learnt whilst studying provide a means to achieve this mechanistic vision, but in reality business is not so straightforward and controlled.

‘Personal Characteristics of the Founder’ was a significant source of attachment that had to be unlearned and varied in type across the sample. In terms of personality, Interviewee 1 noted that they were a particularly impatient person and always wanted things done now. This was similar to Interviewee 2, who described themselves as a control freak. Attachments as a result of one’s personal circumstances were seen in certain accounts given by the interviewees, for instance Interviewee 1 noted that with s/he had an eight month old baby on the way which made them take fewer risks in the business because there was more to lose.

Interviewee 10 noted that s/he had to let go of the belief that s/he would become wealthy when working in her/his own business. This belief came from role models who had similar backgrounds, but who were able to become extremely successful in business. This was further compounded by articles in the media about CEOs’ earnings. These accounts reflect important sources of attachments related to one’s personal beliefs, perceived ‘Industry norms’ and ‘Wealth creation’, as illustrated in Table 11.

Some of the interviewees talked about their 'Past success' being a source of their attachment, which they had to unlearn. Interviewee 14 referred to her/himself as a highly successful person, which became their mode of thinking. Another interesting example showing the 'Past success' as a source of attachments was the account given by Interviewee 4, who described her/his attachment to the 'Past success' of the businesses brand such that the business logo became sacred to her/him. S/he soon realised, however, that "you should never be complacent about believing that what got you here is going to get you there".

Interestingly, some of the less educated participants expressed their dislike for educational qualifications that have been commonly promoted in society as a marker for success and earnings potential. Interviewee 6 talked about how organisations place importance on the knowledge passed on at universities, but argued that in actuality, more importance should be placed on whether the person is passionate about what they do and that they have learnt or done it on their own. As such, the interviewee's view was that "five years of self-driven experience is far more valuable than five years of being told specific things which aren't actually that specific". Interviewee 7 shared the same sentiments when they talked about a time when they had to stop and assess the true meaning of wealth, and came to the realisation that money and education is not necessarily wealth.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that the interviewees' 'Upbringing' emerged as a significant source of attachment within the sample. Interviewee 1 related an account where they had to unlearn their aversion to acquiring 'Financial resources' through borrowing from banks. This scared them because they needed to borrow millions of Rands but had never encountered or accessed that amount of money whilst growing up, so it was really hard to fathom.

5.5 Results for Research Question 2

Research Question 2: What is the catalyst for the unlearning process?

The aim of Research Question 2 was to explore the events or circumstances that lead to a breaking point that causes or allows Founder-CEOs to unlearn and let go of their attachments. Furthermore, the question aimed to gain a better understanding of the emotions experienced during the unlearning event and the actions decided on by the Founder-CEO in order to unlearn.

5.5.1 Events and/or Circumstances Leading to the Unlearnings

The purpose of interview question 4 was to probe interviewees to share the events or circumstances that led to the unlearning of their attachments. Table 12 includes some of the main reasons that lead to Founder-CEOs letting go of their attachments. The primary reasons revolved around the ‘Business Growth’ or conversely a ‘Lack of business growth’ due to stagnation of the business, inability to win orders and generate profits. This was followed by ‘Changes in the external environment’ such as Legislation, technology and industry regulations.

Table 12: Events or Circumstances that led to the Unlearning of the Attachment

Rank	Event or circumstance that led to the unlearning	Frequency
1	Business growth	8
2	Lack of business growth	7
2	Changes in the business environment	7
4	Burning platform for change	6
4	Staff issues	6
6	Competition	5
7	Restructuring	4
7	Slow response time	4
9	Poor execution	3
10	Rejected by banks	2

The results were close for the events/circumstances that led to the unlearning occurring, with the first and second top ranked events both pertaining to the growth of the business. In the first case, the interviewees specifically referred to circumstances where the business was growing and expanding but the unfavourable attachment was hindering them, i.e. the growth of the business triggered the need to let go of the attachment.

Interviewee 1 mentioned that their business went into a sudden growth spurt and that led to the realisation that they would need to borrow capital from the bank in order to capitalise on the opportunities they were facing. Similarly with regards to resources, Interviewee 9 noted that “realistically in business, you can only grow to the extent that you can grow dependent on your resources”. Interviewee 2 mentioned that the unlearning was almost an automatic or natural process that was necessary because “as customer demands increase, you’ve to increase your actual performance”.

The second case offered an opposing view to growth and expansion, as interviewees emphasised their ‘Lack of business growth’ in this case. A few accounts were cited by

interviewees where they were unable to win orders and were not generating a profit. Interviewee 5 described how in four years they had never won a tender for four years from government, even though they met all the requirements and had all the credentials. This prompted the Founder to let go of some of their assumptions about government. Similarly, Interviewee 15 highlighted that “after registering the business, the first six months of the business we had zero orders”.

Events due to ‘Changes in the business environment’ were another strong theme that emerged during the interviews. Interview 6 noted that compared to other markets, businesses in South Africa need to constantly adapt to changes in local rules. These sentiments were echoed by Interviewee 13, who noted that the industry in which their business operates is highly regulated; the regulatory authorities are continuously moving the goal posts and rolling out legislation that businesses need to comply with. As a result, in order to survive and remain competitive, they had to let go of assumptions, ‘Bad habits and practices’.

Several interviewees recalled situations where they could no longer do everything in the business and this became a ‘Burning platform for change’. For instance, Interviewee 10 noted that they needed to stop trying to do everything by themselves and start to delegate; otherwise they were going to become a hindrance to the business. This unlearning event was also closely related to events associated with staff issues being experienced by the interviewee at the time. A significant event was recounted by Interviewee 14, who had hired an employee at an executive level in the business but after nine months of acclimatisation was still doing both of their jobs. It was at this point that s/he realised that, “I am not getting to do my job, and if I am paying you 1.3 million, 1.4 million, there’s no way that I should be the one hand holding you”.

Lastly, some interviewees highlighted events that had to do with ‘Competition’ in their external environment that triggered the need to let go of certain attachments. In a particularly noteworthy account, Interviewee 12 realised that “in the opportunities I was chasing it was not clean. People weren’t playing according to the rules. And in fact everyone else has the same textbooks. They’ve read the same play”. This event initiated the need for the interviewee to let go of their attachments to ‘Theoretical business models’.

5.5.2 The Emotional Experience of Having to let go

The purpose of interview question five was to gain a better understanding of the emotional impact experienced by the Founders during the events that caused a paradigm shift and resulted in an unlearning. Table 13 presents the major emotions that the sample of Founder-CEOs experienced whilst letting go of their attachments. The most highly experienced emotion was 'Frustration', followed by 'Self-doubt' and 'Fear'.

Table 13: Emotions Experienced by the Founders

Rank	Emotions Experienced	Frequency
1	Frustration	11
2	Self-doubt	7
3	Fear	6
4	Anger	5
4	Stress	5
6	Anxiety	4
7	Loss and Regret	3
7	Disappointed	3
7	Embarrassed	3
10	Enlightened/Accomplished	2

In general, the unlearning and letting go of unfavourable attachments was an emotional experience for the interviewees. This was evident in the statement given by Interviewee 11, who noted that there was, "A lot of frustration, irritation, anxiety that what I was doing was actually right. Because you are letting go. So you have got to be confident it's the right thing to do".

'Frustration' was widely recognised as the strongest emotion experienced by the interviewees during an unlearning. This was seen in statements such as:

- "Frustration gets to any person when it comes down to things not being done or not being done timeously or not being done the way you want them done" (Interviewee 9).
- "The first thing was frustration, because you expect that people know you, they have to you know, I mean. Why should I have to sell myself and my company?" (Interviewee 14).

Other than frustration, interviewees highlighted other negative emotions. Interviewee 12 noted that they felt 'Rejected' and started to 'Self-doubt', because "we were begging for money and people were not buying it and you think well maybe there is something

wrong with the way I present this; maybe I don't fit the profile of the kind of people that get financed; maybe it's because we are a black-owned company, and all those things. A lot of things come to mind, all that negativity". Doubt was also a commonly cited emotion by the interviewees because the unlearning process made them question themselves, even leading themselves to ask "Am I good enough to stand on my own or am I employee material?".

Some interviewees experienced fear of the unknown as they let go and adopted new ways of doing things, while others got angry with themselves for being naïve. Interviewee 15 said to himself, "You are smart you should've known better", but later realised that it was a necessary journey for their own personal growth.

Although emotions of frustration during unlearning were frequently mentioned amongst the interviewees, the emotional experiences of the interviewees were harder to assess than expected. Certain interviewees noted that they are unemotional in business and treated the unlearning as a necessary change, whereas two other interviewees indicated that the unlearning was a necessary change and that letting go of the attachment brought up positive emotions. Interviewee 8 revealed that "it was really an emotion of accomplishment, of evolvment". This account was quite contrary to those of most other interviewees.

5.5.3 Actions Taken to Start Unlearning

Interview question six explored the actions taken by the Founder-CEOs during the unlearning process in order to help them let go of their attachments. The interviewees discussed the activities they engaged in once they realised that they needed to let go of the attachments that were not helping them grow their businesses. Table 14 illustrates the results of interview question six, which includes the top 10 actions that were most common amongst the interviewees. 'Acquiring the necessary resources' and 'Exploring new ways of doing things' were equally ranked as the most common actions undertaken by the Founder-CEOs to unlearn their unfavourable attachments, with 'Develop and improve the skills, abilities and competencies of employees' and 'Self-interrogation and introspection' in second and third place.

Table 14: Actions Taken to Start the Unlearning Process

Rank	Actions Taken	Frequency
1	Acquiring the necessary resources	28
1	Explore new ways of doing things	28
3	Develop and improve the skills, abilities and competencies of employees	20
4	Self-interrogation and introspection	18
5	Altering the original business plan, model and structure	16
5	Development of the Founder	16
5	Build credibility and brand: establishing a track record	16
8	Being open to change and changing the Founder's mind-set	13
9	Implementing proper systems, processes, standards and measures	8
9	Looking at the bigger picture	8

'Acquiring the necessary resources' encompassed a wide variety of actions associated with the interviewees filling the gaps in their businesses. Interviewee 1 spoke about what they required in the earlier years of the business, including "simple things like employing one more staff member, and buying our own forklift". A few interviewees shared the same sentiments, where they took a gradual approach to build up the resources they needed. Interviewee 13 said "step-by-step was starting with the one employee", while Interviewee 2 told a story of how they had started production in her/his garage and had to gradually acquire larger premises to operate out of as the business grew, to the point where they had to build a factory some years later.

Obtaining 'Financial resources' came through quite strongly from many of the interviewees. For Interviewee 1 this meant accepting credit facilities from the bank, while Interviewee 10 noted that they had to "reinvest and apply our capital and resources back into the business, as opposed as to shopping trips in Milan and that sort of stuff". A few interviewees discussed their struggles with obtaining finance from banks; interviewee 12 spoke about how they had been rejected by all of the banks. Various interviewees emphasised the importance of creating contingencies to protect the business against financial losses, especially when they had borrowed money from the banks. Interviewee 5 spoke about ensuring that one has collateral, while Interview 9 said "you have to have the safety net, you know. You need to have the mechanisms in place that if it goes wrong; you can accommodate and alleviate the stresses that caused it to go wrong".

Some interviewees' resource acquisitions were included in an assessment activity, wherein they took stock of what the business was good at and what they were lacking

in. “Not in order to become good at that which you are weak, but so that you can concentrate at becoming brilliant at that which you are good at and you can surround yourself with people who are brilliant at that which you are as explained by Interviewee 11.

Interviewee 12 explained that they realised that “what we are good at is knowledge, analysis, manipulation and structure”. They then leveraged this as a core competency and outsourced non-core competencies such as manufacturing. As a result, this interviewee took actions to establish partnerships with global businesses that had the capacity for manufacturing her/his products and s/he invested heavily in Research and Development in order to maintain their core competence. Two other interviewees (10 and 15) utilised a similar approach, where in the early stages they outsourced work with partners they had identified. Interviewee 10 noted that they were “sub-contracting work because we didn’t have the skills and the resources and the capital to execute some of these jobs”, while interviewee 15 said that “in the first two years of the business we were running with skeleton staff and most of our specialised work, we sub-contracted to companies that knew”. As such, acquiring resources through partnerships was a major theme.

‘Exploring new ways of doing things’ was also quite a broad theme, but was necessary to open the interviewees to new ways of doing things. Interviewee 6 noted that they spent a lot of time researching, reading articles, drawing knowledge on new sources about business, looking into a lot of different people’s thinking and then deciding what was best for the business. For other interviewees this meant opening themselves up to learning from the perspectives of others, even though they may be challenging their own. This was seen in an interaction between Interviewee 13 and the company’s marketing executive. “She started asking a few questions. She first said: ‘Which one of the three of us is the target market here?’ So, then she said: “The average age of our target market is 33. I’m 31, I’m female. You guys are in your 60s and you’re male. Which one of us, do you think, has a better feel for what’s right here?” Interviewees 7 and 9 chose to go overseas to see what another company was doing there.

For other interviewees, ‘Exploring new ways of doing things’ included activities such as testing, where a more of a trial and error approach was used to ensure the viability of what they wanted to do.

‘Self-interrogation and introspection’ were found to be a key activity amongst the interviewees in the sample. Most of the time it occurred as a prelude to other actions taken, such as acquiring the necessary human resources to grow the business. Interviewee 11 indicated that s/he had to determine what core value they were adding to the business and how s/he could maximise their impact on the business. In this case it was selling, which led them to realise that s/he didn’t have the time to fulfil some of the functional roles in the business like the financial accounting, and they needed to get people in to fill those roles. In this scenario, the self-interrogation required a lot of acceptance from the interviewee. Interviewee 6, meanwhile, noted that ‘Self-interrogation and introspection’ was necessary because “most decisions are made when one is prepared to confront oneself and one’s own demons... and that change only really happens when one is prepared to confront why we are acting or behaving or thinking in a certain way”.

‘Altering the original business plan, model and structure’ was a necessary action for many of the businesses to survive. Interviewee 12 noted that s/he realised that s/he needed to find a new way to structure the resource base so that it was more suited to a knowledge-based company. As a result, they developed a more fluid structure where employees are on permanent staff rotation, and they rely “less on their qualification they have on entry, and rely more on what they learn as we go”. Interviewee 5 discussed how they had to dump the original green IT vision for the business because they found that “sometimes there is a gap in the market because there is no market in the gap”. Interviewees 1 and 8 also noted that they had to diversify in order to “have other businesses that can contribute into the bottom line” and to “try and offer a one-stop shop”.

In addition to recruiting new employees, many interviewees talked about how they needed to train and develop their employees. Interviewee 14 talked about how the first step in this process was setting the psychological contract with the employee, noting that “we have a clear understanding of what the job is, here’s what’s expected of your job, here is what you can expect from me”.

Two of the interviewees discussed how they went about ‘Build credibility and brand’ for their businesses by marketing themselves and building a strong track record. Interviewee 15 went as far as doing 30% of the work without having the order to show clients, “look, this is what we are capable of”, while interviewee 5 talked about how they

focused their organisational strategy on building the brand and spent a lot of money on social advertising and brand awareness.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that many of the Founders expressed how they themselves had to change, which in some cases came as a result of some of the other activities discussed. Interviewee 15 provided significant insight from their personal journey, discussing how s/he changed their views about money: “I currently treat money as energy; it’s more of an energy transaction, than a money transaction. So when I have positive energy, my supplier has positive energy, my client has positive energy, we all benefit. So we have learnt now that we need to do business in a positive energy space”.

5.5.4 Self-Initiated or Forced Unlearning

Interview question seven sought to determine whether the initiation of the unlearning was self-driven or forced. The aggregated results from the interviewees are shown in Table 15.

Table 15: Unlearning is Self-Initiated or Forced

Rank	Self-initiated or Forced	Frequency
1	Mostly forced	20
2	Self-initiated	17
3	A mix between forced and self-initiated	9

The majority of the interviewees indicated that the unlearning was ‘Forced’ as they were triggered by external forces that were outside of their control or the possible closing of the business, however a significant amount of unlearnings were ‘Self-initiated’. Interviewee 8 realised that the old way of doing things was not getting them anywhere, whereas Interviewee 2 felt that it had to come from her/him being the leader of the organisation. Interestingly, Interviewee 12 noted that in the beginning their unlearnings were forced, but as time went by s/he had a higher appetite for change and letting go of things that didn’t work, so it became more self-driven.

A few interviewees did note that the unlearnings were ‘A mix of forced and self-initiated’. Profound insight was received when Interviewee 10 noted that, “you’ve got to harmonise between the context on the ground and the strategic decisions that you take in the boardroom”.

5.6 Results for Research Question 3

Research Question 3: How do Founder-CEOs experience the unlearning process?

The aim of Research Question 3 was to examine the manner in which Founder-CEOs experience the unlearning process. The interview questions sought to gain insight into whether breaking points persuaded the Founders to unlearn, the actions undertaken by them to continue unlearning, and the difficulties they confronted whilst unlearning.

5.6.1 Breaking Point Persuading the Unlearning Process

Interview question eight explored whether there was a breaking point that persuaded the Founder-CEOs to unlearn their unfavourable attachments, and if so, the circumstances that led to them. Table 16 illustrates the top 10 reasons that led to the breaking point to unlearn the attachment. The top ranked breaking point was the 'Breaking down of the existing philosophies of the Founder about the business'.

Table 16: The Unlearning Breaking Point

Rank	Breaking Point	Frequency
1	Breaking down the existing philosophies about the business	10
2	Gradual process that required time	9
3	Founder's personal circumstances	5
4	Old ways of doing things is not viable	4
4	Shifting mind-sets leading to certain realisations	4
6	Burnt out	2
7	Frustration - moving away or towards change	1

In general not many breaking points were highlighted throughout the sample; many of the interviewees noted that there was some sort of a fundamental breakdown in their existing philosophies that finally persuaded them to let go of the unfavourable attachments that were holding them back. The related breaking points were very different across the sample, as they were specific to the interviewees' contexts. Interviewee 14 told a story of challenging the way a client was treating employees, which wasn't received very well by the client. The Founder's attitude came as a result of 'Previous work experience' where s/he held a very senior position and her/his word was held in high regard, but this situation showed a need to treat clients in a particular way because they pay the bills and s/he no longer has that power.

The breaking point came for Interviewee 15 when s/he realised that s/he was "not anything special", and that the company was not going to get orders just because

government policy favoured her/his demographic at the time. Interviewee 13 mentioned a situation where s/he had a nervous breakdown after receiving her/his first professional indemnity claim, describing the physical response to the claim as “my back went into a complete spasm. I couldn’t even walk. I had to go and see a chiropractor. My nerves were shot. I was crying constantly”.

Interestingly, many interviewees noted that the unlearning was a ‘Gradual process that required time’ and was not initiated by a breaking point as such. Interviewee 11 even stated that “It’s not like I woke up screaming in the middle of the night”.

5.6.2 Further Actions Required to Continue Unlearning

Interview question nine looked at further actions required by Founder-CEOs to continue unlearning and not fall back into their previous ways of doing things. The interviewees were probed with this question in order to investigate the actions that were taken by the Founders to oppose any tendencies to revert back to the status quo. Table 17 contains the top 10 ranked actions found across the sample. The most important actions to help Founders continue on their growth journey were to ‘Transition from a management style to a leadership style’ of running the business. This was closely followed by ‘Opening oneself to trusting others’ and ‘Staying in tune with the context of the business’ in order to be able to adapt and/or innovate the business in accordance with changes.

Table 17: Further Actions Taken to Continue Unlearning

Rank	Further Actions	Frequency
1	Transition from a management to a leadership	8
2	Opening oneself to trusting others	7
2	Staying in tune with the context of the business	7
4	Improving ambidexterity	6
4	Alignment in all aspects of the business	6
6	Awareness of strengths and limitations and leveraging them	5
7	Societal contribution	4
7	Perseverance and motivation	4
9	Maintaining relationships	3
10	Patience	2

Not many further actions emerged across the sample, as can be seen from the low frequencies in Table 17. Those that were highlighted seemed to come from a higher or a more strategic space. Many interviewees noted that to ‘Transition from a management style to a leadership style’ helped them in their unlearning process. Interviewee 4 described how they used leadership to get employees to buy into new

ideas, stating that “so, it’s about leadership really to get people to follow you to places they wouldn’t normally go”. Interviewee 14 expressed that “what I do enjoy is you know what we call servant-leadership, because I work for the people, they work for me and I really don’t like hierarchy”. Employing this leadership perspective helped them to better manage their employees. A completely different view came from two interviewees who moved away from handling the day-to-day activities in the business. Interviewee 2 spoke about how s/he got heads to run each of the departments, who would make all the little decisions and not run to him. Interviewee 8 noted that “I only get involved in new projects. Now I’m a mentor”.

‘Opening oneself to trusting others’ emerged a number of times across the sample. Interviewee 13 noted that their trust in their employees grew as they proved themselves; “Whenever I have passed the ball, they catch it. I have never had somebody let me down where they’ve forgotten to do something. They’ve caught that ball; they’ve carried out that instruction”. A few interviewees noted that they were able to trust their employees once they had trained them. Interviewee 2 noted the importance of trusting an employee, accepting that they may make a mistake, but that with proper coaching and learning it can eventually come right.

‘Improving ambidexterity’ within the business was raised a few times in the sample and was significant as interviewees undertook activities that would help the business grow. Interviewee 12 noted that “I have more time to focus on some of the strategic actions to look at the 5 to 10-year horizon for our business. Because you know with this particular change I’ve realised that it helped me with getting more balance between the exploration and the exploitation. That balance was totally skewed”. Three other interviewees noted that they were able to focus more on building relationships with clients and investors in order to market the business and bring in new work.

The interviews revealed that unlearning required that the interviewees ‘Staying in tune with the context of the business’ and adapt to changes as they occur in order to remain competitive. In support of this thinking, Interview 6 noted that, “There’s a constant flow of knowledge and if we don’t adapt, we don’t learn, we don’t progress and that’s true very well... so there is a constant learning and unlearning process that happens in all of us”. Interviewee 10 echoed these thoughts, stating that “you’ve got to be in touch with the reality and context. And you’ve to be adaptable and flexible”.

Special attention should be drawn to the few interviewees who mention that their further actions included some form of ‘Social contribution’. Interviewee 12 described a situation where an investor had asked how many jobs’ s/he had created, which no one had ever asked before. As a result, “that also changed me into start thinking more about broader social impact than the Ferraris; that is personal success”. Interview 8 spoke about the business’ role in the country to resolve the issues of the past, noting that: “I like the feeling that we are correcting the problems of the past. Similarly transformation is being something that we’ve been focussed on, and we’ve got a transformation plan and that transformation plan doesn’t go down well with everybody. But what I’ve said to my senior management team, we are the generation that has to fix the problems of the past”.

5.6.3 Difficulties in Releasing Previous Ways of Doing Things

Interview question 10 explored the difficulties experienced by the Founder-CEOs when letting go and unlearning their unfavourable attachments. The interviewees discussed their experiences whilst letting go of their previous ways of doing things and the reasons that contributed to the difficulties encountered. Table 18 includes the top 10 reasons that increased the difficulty associated with unlearning the unfavourable attachments. The top ranked difficulty was ‘Dealing with differing groups of people’ to achieve the objectives of the business. Interestingly, in second place, many of the interviewees noted that it ‘Was not difficult’ to unlearn and viewed it as being a necessary change in order to grow their businesses.

Table 18: Difficulty Releasing the Attachment

Rank	What makes it difficult to release the attachment?	Frequency
1	Dealing with differing groups of people	9
2	Was not difficult : It was a necessary change	7
3	Risk issues impacting the business	5
3	Took time: difficult at first but then it became easier	5
3	Dealing with growing pains of the Founder and the business	5
6	Tough balancing act: dealing with competing demands and perspectives	4
6	Feelings of inadequacy of the Founder	4
8	Fear of unknown	3
8	Invested in the status quo	3
8	Personal ambitions of the Founder	3

Many interviewees indicated that the level of difficulty required to release an attachment was directly correlated with their need to work and ‘Deal with differing groups of people’ to achieve the objectives of the business. Interviewee 10 indicated

that although they had made improvements in their unlearning of unfavourable attachments, “I am not perfect yet in this journey of unlearning. We haven’t mastered it and there are reasons for that, one of the reasons is that, I, as the individual am not alone in the company”. Adding to this, Interviewee 4 emphasised that the difficulty was a result of the challenges experienced when having to persuade others about ideas and get their buy-in.

Contrary to many of the experiences of the interviewees, a few noted that the difficulty level in releasing certain attachments was next to nothing. Interviewee 7 noted that the lack of difficulty to let go was because the motivation to do so was quite clear to them, whereas Interviewee 8 explained that due to the lack of time available to turn the business around, there wasn’t any time dwell on it. A slightly different theory for the lack of difficulty experienced came from Interviewee 12, who indicated that it was difficult to let go initially, but it became easier after the first win based on the new structure adopted. “It became more exciting because it was like a secret that had been kept from me”; it felt like s/he was pioneering a new way of doing things.

The ‘Risk issues’ of unlearning and the potential impact that these risks could have on the business influenced the level of difficulty the interviewees experienced. The types of risks mentioned by the interviewees included those associated with borrowing money when there was instability in the external environment, risks of the interviewee losing their licence as a result of professional indemnity claims brought against them, as well as risks of competitors capturing the interviewees’ clients as they cut down on their workload to give employees time to recover. Many of these risks were associated with the reputational damage of the interviewees. Interviewee 10 noted that it was difficult to make certain sacrifices that came with the unlearning because “you are managing the reputation that you are trying to build because we trade on reputation as well, so you are trying to enhance that reputation in order that you know that people remember you next time that you throw in your submission”.

Other issues impacting the difficulty level experienced by the interviewees included ‘Dealing with growing pains of the Founder and the business’ and the ‘Tough balancing act’ whilst dealing with competing demands and perspectives many interviewees go through on a daily basis. The issue of growing pains in the organisation was seen when Interviewee 10 highlighted the setbacks experienced whilst letting go of attachments, because “just when we think 80% of the people are almost there then we get attrition, which means people resign and new people come in and then it sets us back again”.

A few interviewees discussed the competing demands they have to continually deal with, which impacts the level of difficulty they experience as they unlearn. Interviewee 13 spoke about how s/he felt like s/he was always wearing two contradictory hats to satisfy the different needs of the client and suppliers. As a result, s/he often felt like s/he was fence-sitting and didn't know which way to go.

5.7 Results for Research Question 4

Research Question 4: What is the perceived impact of the unlearning process as a lever for long-term business success and growth?

The aim of Research Question 4 was to explore the impact of the unlearning process on the personal development of the Founder-CEO and the overall growth of the business. The question investigated whether the impact and manner of letting go of the unfavourable attachment post-unlearning led to any improvements in the Founder and the business. The results from the interview data and aggregated frequency counts showed the following results.

5.7.1 Person or Emotional Impact of the Unlearning on the Founder

Interview question 11 investigated whether the process of unlearning has an emotional or personal impact on the Founder-CEO after they have let go of the attachment. Table 19 illustrates the top 10 personal and emotional impacts highlighted by the interviewees.

Table 19: Personal and Emotional Impact of the Unlearning on the Founders

Rank	Personal and Emotional Impact on the Founders	Frequency
1	There is no substitute for hard work	14
2	Becoming a better businessman	10
2	Improved quality of life	10
4	New personal goals	9
5	Stimulation and challenge	8
6	People	6
6	Failure is not such a bad thing	6
6	Easier to do things: open-mindedness	6
9	Authenticity	4
10	Celebrate and be proud of achievements	3

The major personal and emotional impact was the realisation that 'There is no substitute for hard work' and that one should never give up. This helped the interviewees to persevere through the unlearning process, despite the emotional and other difficulties that were experienced whilst unlearning. In one case, Interviewee 3

was experiencing challenges with getting their online store up and running, but now realises that s/he needed to work harder at getting the store to function properly. In a more insightful account, Interviewee 15 recalled that their business struggled during the early years and s/he had been attracted to join a business venture that was projected to make significant profits. The lure of financial gratification persuaded them to leave their business, but in the eight years at the new business venture, no profits materialised. During this time s/he was still getting calls from people who wanted to work with the initial business, which made them realise that there are no quick fixes or short cuts to success; s/he should have stuck it out, worked hard and made the business work.

‘Becoming a better businessman’ and an ‘Improved quality of life’ were both ranked second in terms of their personal and emotional impact on the Founders. Interviewee 3 specifically said that “I am better at business now than I was before because I learnt through the experience”. Actions associated with self-interrogation and learning helped the interviewees with their personal growth and development in business. Interviewee 14 noted that “in our businesses with every lesson you just become a better person and you know with every lesson, you learn how you can get the best out of your people”, while interviewee 15 mentioned that the lessons learnt about money helped to keep the business afloat and get to a profitable stage.

During the interviews it was revealed that the process of unlearning had a profound impact on the Founders’ quality of life, and many of them noted that they were able to enjoy life more and value the smaller things. The interviewees noted that as they let go of their control and delegated more, they were able to take off when needed. Interviewee 1 went as far as saying that “I’ve been away for three weeks and I think we did better when I was away than when I was here”. Similarly, Interviewee 12 noted that s/he lost less sleep when delegating to capable and knowledgeable employees that s/he had recruited and trained.

5.7.2 Improvements and Growth in the Business Resulting from the Unlearning

Interview questions 12 and 13 jointly examined whether unlearning and letting go of unfavourable attachments led to any improvements and growth in the business. Table 20 represents the results for the improvements and growth experienced by the interviewees in their businesses.

Table 20: Business Improvements and Growth

Rank	Business Improvements and Growth	Frequency
1	Growth and expansion	19
2	Strong, stable and sustainable business	12
3	Reduced staff turnover	8
4	Profit and asset value creation	7
5	Better relationships with customers, clients and suppliers	6
5	Continuous improvement	6
7	Inculcated values of the business	4
7	Improved efficiency	4
9	Improved credibility and reputation	3
9	Ability to take risks	3

It was found across the sample that the interviewees experienced ‘Growth and expansion’ in the businesses as they let go of their unfavourable attachments. Interviewee 5 stated that “we’re growing 30% year on year”, while interviewee 15 noted that “we grew tenfold”. Interviewee 10 commented that “we’ve seen considerable growth in the past two years. We’ve seen considerable growth, growth that has exceeded initial projections and expectations and that’s a big plus”, but could not say whether it was solely attributable to the unlearnings.

Expansion was seen to be closely linked to growth, and typically interviewees discussed how they had moved into new industries and businesses. It was seen that as the interviewees undertook certain actions to unlearn their unfavourable attachments, they were able to focus on what was important to grow and keep the business alive, such as exploiting new opportunities. Examples of expansion from the sample included illustrations by interviewees 3, 1, and 12, who respectively noted that “since then I have opened more stores”; “then we got onto things, I’ve got a container handler here now that picks up fully loaded containers. That thing can lift 45 tons on its own one lift and the thing costs two million bucks. I didn’t think too hard about getting it because I thought this is another expansion point in the business” and “very positive. I think by allowing me space to explore more, we’ve created value, in excess of R2 billion. I would have missed those opportunities if I was more internally focused and also in terms of exploiting existing opportunities within different channels, we were able to extend our reach without hiring a lot more people”.

Many interviewees discussed how a ‘Strong, stable and sustainable business’ was achieved as they unlearned the attachments that were holding them back. In so doing the businesses became stronger, more stable and more sustainable. This was the

second most highly ranked business improvement. In some cases the interviewees noted that whilst letting go of their attachments they fundamentally changed the way they ran their businesses. In general, the interviews showed that unlearning helped the businesses become more resilient. Interviewee 13 went as far as stating that businesses in their industry that are able to survive turbulent conditions are the ones that are serious about what they are doing. Actions taken to unlearn attachments helped the businesses to become more stable, including implementing proper systems and structures and eliminating 'Bad habits and practices'. This helps to formalise the businesses and improve efficiencies.

Across the sample it was found that unlearning helped to significantly 'Reduced staff turnover', which was a significant circumstance that lead to the unlearning. The interviewees were able to develop happy and committed teams through remuneration, motivation and development.

An increase in 'Profit and asset value creation' was also commonly raised across the sample as an indicator of business growth and improvement. The interviewees cited scenarios regarding increases in turnover, revenue, value and profit under this theme. Interviewee 2 noted that they were able to grow their turnover from R140,000 to R140,000,000, while interviewee 8, whose business was facing potential closure, mentioned that by letting go and unlearning certain attachments they turned the business around from loss making to profit making.

Some of the interviewees highlighted that the unlearning process enabled 'Continuous improvement' of the business. Interviewee 12, who had initially struggled with adopting new technological trends, was able to increase their affinity for technology, and is now using new technology to overcome challenges in the industry to offer a more personalised service to clients and be generally more accessible across distances.

5.7.3 Overall Experience of the Unlearning

Interview question 14 determined the overall experience of the unlearning of Founder-CEOs in both a business and a personal context. Table 21 illustrates the results obtained for the overall experiences of the interviewees' unlearnings.

Table 21: Overall Experience of Unlearning

Rank	Overall Experience	Frequency
1	Overall a positive experience	32
2	It was the right thing to do	7
3	Not nice to go through it - came with many challenges	4
4	Deliberate experience	1

It was strongly emphasised across the sample that unlearning and letting go of unfavourable attachments was 'Overall experience a positive experience'. Interviewee 13 emphasised that "it's paramount. I can't even put a number to it. It's just, it's an imminent need. You need to move. You need to evolve. You need to change. You need to diversify. It's exciting".

Some interviewees noted that 'It was the right thing to do' for the business, with interviewee 3 saying that it was the right decision for the business as s/he was able to learn from it and came out the other side stronger, even though it wasn't great at the time. Two interviewees echoed these sentiments when they commented that unlearning was particularly difficult in the beginning when they first realised that they needed to unlearn, but it got easier with time. Interview 10 stated that "I would say yes, overall it's not without its own challenges, but I would say overall it's a positive experience to have gone through that".

5.7.4 Rated Impact of the Unlearnings

Interview question 15 made use of a five point Likert scale to measure the overall impact of the unlearning on the Founder-CEO and the growth of the business. The Likert scale ranged from minimum impact (1) to intense impact (3) and extreme impact (5). Table 22 represents the results across the sample for the ratings of the overall impact of the unlearnings. The results show that most interviewees agreed that the unlearning had a strong impact on the business, with the vast majority of the unlearnings being rated 4 or 5.

Table 22: Ratings of Impact

Scale	Minimum		Intense		Extreme
	1	2	3	4	5
Rating of impact	0	0	2	11	33

5.8 Unlearning Timeline

During each interview the interviewees were asked to indicate on a timeline of the business approximately when they had to let go of the unlearning which is depicted in

Figure 11. This figure maps out the types of unlearning's that occurred according to the relevant stages of the life cycle model in which they were identified and let go off. In so doing, this figure combines the data set out in Table 10 which includes the types of attachments that needed to be unlearned and the theoretically amended model for small business growth in Figure 6. As a result this graphically illustrates during the unfavourable attachments that need to be unlearned during each stage if the businesses life cycle. During each interview the interviewees were asked to indicate on a timeline of the business approximately when they had to let go of the unlearning. Figure 11 includes the consolidated results of the unlearning's' life-cycle growth timeline.

Figure 11: Unlearnings' Lifecycle Timeline

STAGE 0	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5		
PRE-INCEPTION	INCEPTION	SURVIVAL	GROWTH	EXPANSION	MATURITY		
	Theoretical Business Practises						
	Socially Acceptable Markers of Success						
	Assumptions of External						
	Factors in Business						
	Environment						
	Decision-Making Practises						
	Identity						
	Credibility and Brand						
	Conventional Industry Processes and Practises						
	Control and Power						
	Financial Resources						
	Human Resource Management including Performance Management						
	Bad Habits and Practises						
	Diversification						

5.9 Reflections

At the end of each interview, the participants were asked to reflect on the unlearning process and comment on their experience of the process. Many of the interviewees provided significant insights that reveal the remarkable value that the unlearning process offers. Table 23 includes some of the more noteworthy reflections provided by the interviewees.

Table 23: Interviewee Reflections

Interviewee	Quote
4	You know you always seem to focus on what you're learning and what's important to learn and not enough on what you must let go of. I call it letting go as opposed to unlearning. You've got to let go. It's almost like a cleansing process.
3	You can actually only grow through reflection to be honest with you. And one of the things that I had to appreciate is that, the more you let go of the stuff that you have known, the more you find even better ways of doing things. You open yourself up, you create room but also something happens in the universe when you open yourself up and be vulnerable you know, it's okay as probably one of the things that I had to learn, to be vulnerable and to be okay with not knowing everything you know. So it definitely had a great positive impact and I am quite a highly reflective person.
11	I do a lot of coaching and mentoring for young folks coming out of business school, and it is something that I will definitely use in my coaching and mentoring discussions, is talking to them about what they should unlearn. It's a nicer or more socially acceptable way of saying go leave your prejudices at home.
12	In terms of the process I think the construct, as it of unlearning, it's something that I personally would like to explore more if there are tools, strategies that one could employ. I think the biggest limitation is the blind spots. If we can find a way of uncovering these blind spots, I think the process will be clearer.
15	I just think I have actually never sat with someone and did a post mortem on the business from the beginning to now. You literally took me back on a journey of 16 years. I do not think I'll be able to work after this interview. I guess I am an emotional being. So I will take the rest of the afternoon to reflect and see where the business was back then, what was the ambition of the business, have I deviated from the original aim? What are the goals moving forward now?

5.10 Conclusion

The results obtained from the four research questions support the constructs found in the Literature Review in Chapter 2. The findings contribute to new knowledge and have provided insights regarding the unlearning of Founder CEOs as they let go of their unfavourable attachments. In Chapter 6, the results will be discussed in light of the existing literature. Rautenbach et al.'s (2015) process model of unlearning an attachment will be updated to include the findings specific to the unlearning of Founder-CEOs of small businesses.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the research findings are comprehensively discussed in light of the literature that was reviewed in Chapter 2 in order to obtain deeper insights from the findings. The data obtained was gathered from a process of 15 in-depth interviews of Founder-CEOs in order to answer the four research questions set out in Chapter 3 developed for this study. Thematic analysis with the use of data coding allowed for the consolidation and assessment of the data and provided insights into the unlearning process for releasing a Founder-CEOs unfavourable attachments. The research results discussed in this chapter contribute towards a better understanding of the unlearning of Founder-CEOs, explaining how this helps them to be more successful personally and in their businesses.

6.2 Discussion of results for Research Question 1

Research Question 1: What do Founder-CEOs need to unlearn in order to grow their businesses?

The purpose of Research Question 1 was to determine what Founder-CEOs need to unlearn, why these unlearnings are significant with respect to the Founder's personal and professional experiences, and how the Founder became attached to these ways of doing things.

6.2.1 Types and Significance of Unlearnings of Founder-CEOs

The data from the interviews emphasised the types of unfavourable attachments and the significance of the attachments that Founder-CEOs need to let go of in order to grow their businesses. Table 10 displays the combined sample of the top 10 types of attachments that the Founder-CEOs had to unlearn. The results cover a number of the specific knowledge structures, behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and skills that the Founder-CEOs were attached to and had to let go of. Based on the aggregated results across the sample of 15 interviews, the first ranked unlearning with a frequency count of 10 was the Founder's attachment to 'Control and power', which prevented them from trusting others and allowing them to share and participate in the business. This type of attachment appears to be the most prevalent amongst the Founders.

In the context of the existing literature, this attachment supports the research on psychological ownership (Leroy et al., 2015). Founders are entirely responsible for

nurturing their businesses, growing them from idea inception onwards, and in so doing become emotionally attached to the business and exhibit high levels of psychological ownership. This is especially the case during the early stages of a business' development, where the Founder's skills, past experiences and perceptions of the environment are most influential on the functioning of the business (Macpherson & Holt, 2007). This makes it very difficult for Founders to relinquish 'Control and power' when the need for delegation arises, and could result in the development of 'Bad habits and practices', which was ranked jointly as the fifth unlearning across the sample with 'Identity', 'Financial Resources' and 'Decisions-making practises'.

The competing demands on the Founder's time make it difficult for them to execute all the administrative activities of the business (Greiner, 1998; Scott & Bruce, 1987; Wiklund et al., 2009). For this reason, the business will reach a point where it will grow out of the Founder's managerial capacity, which will create the need to recruit employees to distribute the workload and eliminate the pressures on the Founder (Koryak et al., 2015). The results support the literature in this regard, but also emphasise that Founders soon realise that they can achieve more with additional people, which helps them let go of their attachment.

These issues, intertwined with the Founder's emotional attachment to the business, will make it difficult for them to let go of 'Control and power'. It is for these reasons that Founders will struggle when confronted with the Founder's Dilemma; they will grapple with the thought of relinquishing power and control of their hard-earned businesses, even though the economic benefits will be far more significant (Wasserman, 2003, 2008).

The second ranked type of attachment, with seven frequency counts, was the attachment to 'Conventional industry processes and practices'. The accounts from the interviews on this type of unlearning broadly revolved around the structures, processes, practices and procedures typically used in established or corporate business. The interviewees became accustomed to these ways of doing things in their previous jobs, and attempted to duplicate them in their businesses.

Phelps et al. (2007) supported the implementation of more formalised systems in small businesses to help them grow, as they will assist in focusing the limited resources and concentrating efforts, thereby promoting effectiveness, improving morale, and increasing innovation. However, other literature emphasises that conventional industry

practices are suited to large bureaucratic organisations, i.e. they are unsuitable for implementation in a small business context. Leal-Rodríguez et al. (2015) provides two reasons for the unsuitability: because these practices and processes will limit the small business' flexibility, versatility and capacity to innovate; and because small businesses do not have the same resources that large organisations do to support formal structures and other activities for growth, such as innovation and research and development. As such, letting go of and unlearning 'Conventional industry processes and practices' in the context of small businesses is in agreement with the literature, and Founder-CEOs need to make a special effort to refrain from using them in their businesses.

'Assumptions about external factors in the business environment' and 'Human resource management' were jointly ranked across the sample as the third most cited attachment that Founder-CEOs need to let go of with a frequency count of six. The interviewees noted that they had to let go of some of the assumptions they had made about the business environment in which they operated. This finding was expected because small businesses operate in environments that are uncertain, risky, urgent, complex and resource scarce, which makes it difficult to make accurate assumptions (Glaub et al., 2015). The literature is not clear as to the exact assumptions that may be made regarding the business environment that are unfavourable, but the findings show that these assumptions cover factors such as the industry, competitors, government, and legislation.

The results also show that the Founder may adopt the human resource and performance management practices of their previous organisations. This relates to the unlearning of the 'Conventional industry processes and practices'. Bureaucratic management systems are more rigid and support performance management and quality improvement, whilst systems that support innovation, participation and empowerment are more flexible in nature (Macpherson & Holt, 2007). The former is more synonymous with large organisations, and the latter with smaller organisations. Raymond et al. (2013) noted that pre-existing performance measurement approaches are developed for large enterprises and are not adapted for practices in small businesses. The findings of this study are thus in agreement with the literature, and it can be concluded that the Human Resource practices of large organisations are unsuitable for small businesses, i.e. the Founder must unlearn this way of doing things.

6.2.2 The Source of the Attachments

The third interview question explored the source of the Founders' attachments in order to better understand the roots of these attachments. Table 11 illustrates the aggregated interview data across the sample for the top 10 sources of the Founders' attachments. The highest ranked source, with a frequency count of nine, was the 'Previous work experience' of the Founder. This result was expected due to the extensive rhetoric in the literature that discusses the influence of the technical, functional and managerial experiences and critical knowledge resources that Founders retain and bring to their new businesses from their previous organisations (Cepeda-Carrion et al., 2012; Zheng et al., 2016). If the Founder fulfilled a senior or executive role in their previous employment, the influence of 'Previous work experience' was that much greater.

The Founder's past experiences and knowledge could lead to cloning behaviours, as they are less willing to let go of the past practices that have become entrenched in them through regular use, and which constrain their decision-making (Becker, 2010; Fern et al., 2012). This can be especially worrisome, because according to Chaston and Sadler-Smith (2012), the knowledge inherited could be inappropriate or unsuitable for their new environments. Founders should release their attachment to their 'Previous work experience', which is consistent with the findings of this research.

The following two sources of the Founder's attachments were ranked together in second place with a frequency count of six – 'Industry norms' and the 'Personal characteristics of the Founder'. The interview data showed that unlearnings rooted in 'Industry norms' include two major categories: personally experienced 'Industry norms' and externally perceived 'Industry norms'. The former shows that there is a relationship between the 'Previous work experience' source and the 'Industry norms'. Interviewees cited similar examples for both source categories.

The interviewees explained that 'Industry norms' are viewed as the standard approach to doing things, and are perceived to be order qualifiers for a new entrant into the industry. According to Phelps et al. (2007), businesses must learn to adapt to new industry norms and implement best practices that cater to new customers. However, small businesses may be slower to adopt best practices due to their reluctance from a cost perspective, a lack of information, indecision and an absence of motivation (Altinay et al., 2016; Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2016; Koryak et al., 2015; Lofstrom et al., 2014). Based on the latter notion therefore, Founders should let go of their attachments

resulting from 'Industry Norms', as they are unfavourable in the small business context and hinder flexibility.

The results showed that the specific 'Personal characteristics of the Founder' is the source of some unlearnings. In terms of the specific characteristics, these looked at the Founders' personality traits. Some traits that emerged in the results included the Founder's impatience, controlling tendencies, risk-aversion, and pride. The literature revealed a number of personal characteristics in Founders that are necessary for overcoming challenges and mastering their environments, including self-starting behaviours, proactiveness, innovativeness, risk-taking tendencies, future-orientation, personal initiative, and enthusiasm (Altinay et al., 2016; Glaub et al., 2015; Patel et al., 2015; Wales et al., 2013; Wiklund et al., 2009; Wu & Parker, 2012). It appears that these are all positive characteristics, which will create positive outcomes such as business improvement, and will not require unlearning. This study reveals the necessity of identifying a Founder's negative characteristics, because these will lead to unfavourable attachments and negative outcomes. The Founder will thus need to change these characteristics or adjust their style to prevent unfavourable attachments forming.

The results also show that many of the interviewees had family, financial and quality of life pressures, i.e. a Founder's personal circumstances and interests create certain attachments that the Founder has to let go of. Some of these findings are loosely explored in the literature, for example Leroy et al. (2015) argued that the Founder's family situation can impact their performance due to the supportive or conflicting role that their family plays. Raymond, Marchand, St-Pierre, Cadieux and Labelle (2013) noted that the quality of life, economic security, independence and social recognition of the Founder are some of the factors that will drive their performance orientation and objectives for the business. The literature does not specify whether these attachments are favourable or unfavourable, hence the findings of this study add to the literature as it shows that the Founder's personal circumstances and interests could yield unfavourable attachments.

The results show that Founders are likely to make unfavourable attachments as a result of their 'Education' and 'Past success', as they were jointly ranked in fourth position with a frequency count of five, however the literature posits that the Founder's educational background will provide the necessary skills and knowledge required to operate a business (Lofstrom et al., 2014). The literature also notes that the dominant

management styles used to achieve growth are likely to be replicated in future evolutionary stages of the business (Greiner, 1972; Scott & Bruce, 1987). Greiner (1998) asserted that this kind of an internal focus is important because the knowledge from the business' history and roots will prepare it for the next stage of development. Macpherson and Holt (2007) suggest that a more outward view is better as it will enable the business to learn and adapt quickly by seeking support from alternative sources. A few of the interviewees echoes these sentiments, as they highlighted their dislike of educational qualifications because they believe they constrain thinking. They noted that a self-driven experience is more important, hence these findings support the view that shows that the dominant management styles that led to successful growth may not be appropriate for future evolution, thus the Founder will need to let go of them.

6.2.3 Conclusive Findings for Research Question 1

The results revealed that Founder-CEOs are unfavourably attached to a number of knowledge structures, behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and skills, which they need to unlearn. These unfavourable attachments are unlearned at different stages in the business' growth cycle, as illustrated in Figure 11. The results showed that the major unfavourable attachment of Founders is to the 'Control and power' they have in their businesses, which they nurture from inception. As a result, Founders become emotionally and psychologically attached to the business, which may lead to an identity crisis in the future. During the early days Founders are able to do as they please in the business, thereby creating certain 'Bad habits and practices' that they will have to unlearn in later stages of growth. Letting go of 'Control and power' will help the Founder to delegate and trust others in the business, which is important when they reach the limits of their managerial capacity and to multiply efforts.

The data showed that 'Conventional industry processes and practices' are also a significant attachment that Founders need to unlearn. This type of unlearning broadly revolves around the structures and procedures typically used in established or corporate businesses. The Founder inherits these ways of doing things from their 'Previous work experiences' or typical 'Industry norms'. The business will need to be formalised at some point in its growth, but in the long run the conventional practices and past knowledge could be unsuitable for the small business context, thus the Founders should release them.

Founders should identify their negative ‘Personal characteristics and circumstances’ that will lead to unfavourable attachments and negative outcomes. This source is also related to the Founder’s ‘Education’ and ‘Past success’, which reflects an inward and historical outlook. An outward view that values experiential learning will help the business to learn and adapt quickly to the complex environments in which they operate. Furthermore, given the complexity of the external environment, assumptions about factors influencing the environment could also be unsuitable and the attachments must be released.

6.3 Discussion of Results for Research Question 2

Research Question 2: What is the catalyst for the unlearning process?

The purpose of Research Question 2 was to explore the events or circumstances that lead to the breaking point that initiates the unlearning process in Founder-CEOs, allowing them to let go of their attachments. In addition, this research question aimed to gain a better understanding of the emotions experienced during the unlearning process and the actions taken by Founder-CEOs in order to let go of their unfavourable attachments.

6.3.1 Events and/or Circumstances Leading to the Unlearnings

Interview question 4 required the interviewees to share the events or circumstances that led to their unlearning of an unfavourable attachment. Table 12 illustrates the combined responses for the sample. The primary instance that led to the unlearning of an unfavourable attachment was the ‘Growth of the business’, with a frequency count of eight. The interviewees discussed various accounts where the business was growing and expanding, which triggered the need to let go of the attachment. This helped the interviewees to acquire the necessary resources needed to take advantage of opportunities. The literature on small business growth showed that small businesses undergo a variety of complex changes as they grow, and will require a broader range of organisational activity, skills, capital and structures to facilitate the transition of the business to the next stage of its growth cycle (Chan et al., 2006; Scott & Bruce, 1987; Wiklund et al., 2009). The changes and pressure of growth could thus create the circumstances that lead to a Founder realising that certain attachments need to be unlearned and released as they are hindering growth. Alternatively, some Founders may realise that growth is no longer an objective for the business and may prefer the business to be a lifestyle business that maintains their economic security (Chan et al., 2006). This is consistent with the findings of this study.

In close second place, both the 'Lack of business growth' and 'Changes in the external environment' had a frequency count of seven. During the interviews, issues of stagnation and the inability to win orders and generate profits emerged as circumstances where the lack of growth led to the unlearning of an attachment. The literature firstly showed that growth occurs in spurts and that organisations experience periods of both expansion and contraction (Headd & Kirchhoff, 2009; Phelps et al., 2007). These periods can be attributed to a lack of managerial resources, financial capital and competencies, which could undermine the business' ability to grow further (Macpherson & Holt, 2007; Wiklund et al., 2009). The lack of these resources prevent the business from acquiring the necessary infrastructure to create the same economies of scale that large organisations have, which enables them to take on a cost leadership strategy through more competitive pricing (Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015; Lofstrom et al., 2014). This will impact the business' profit generating and order winning ability, as per the results. It is likely that the business will experience periods of no growth, which could lead to the Founder realising that certain attachments could be holding the business back and thus need to be unlearnt as a result. The findings of this study support this thinking.

The data showed that 'Changes in the business environment' in terms of legislation, technology and industry regulations result in the unlearning of certain attachments that are unfavourable for the changing context. According to the results, in order to survive and remain competitive in changing business environments, Founders will need to let go of their 'Assumptions' and 'Bad habits and practices' that prevent them from being adaptable. This finding supported the research by Verreynne and Meyer (2010), who discussed how intensified competition can create more turbulent operating conditions, which will precipitate the need for businesses to be proactive, anticipatory and adaptive towards changes in the external environment. Founders therefore need to be alert to changes in the external environment because they may precipitate a crisis that will require a change in approach (Scott & Bruce, 1987). This study adds to the literature as it shows that a change in response to 'Changes in the business environment' could be a result of unlearning an unfavourable attachment.

The fourth ranked event or circumstance that led to the unlearning process was both the 'Burning platform' and 'Staff issues', both with a frequency count of six. A 'Burning platform' may arise when an individual recognises that their perspectives may no longer be favourable or that alternative views may be more suitable (Macdonald, 2002).

The interview data showed situations where a 'Burning platform' for change was created when Founders realised that they had to let go of their 'Control and power' because they could no longer do everything by themselves, and that their employees had become overly dependent on them. The literature showed that growth will put additional demands on the Founder as they will have to undertake a variety of new tasks, which will require different knowledge, skills and competencies (DeCarlo & Lyons, 1987; Jebb et al., 2017; Souder et al., 2012). The findings in conjunction with the literature thus illustrate that situations that over extend or conversely constrain the Founder will lead them to realising that a change is needed.

Many interviewees discussed staff issues that resulted in a 'Burning platform' for change and triggered the unlearning process. The staff issues covered in the results encompasses poor performance, high staff turnover, low morale, and inefficient utilisation. Phelps, Adams and Bessant (2007) highlighted that additional people in the business will have to be managed, giving rise to other human resource issues which the Founder will need to manage. These events will trigger the need for Founders to let go of the attachments that are holding them back from adequately managing human resource issues.

6.3.2 The Emotional Experience of Unlearning

Interview question five explored the emotions experienced by the Founder-CEOs during the unlearning process. The aggregated results for the sample are shown in Table 13. The most experienced emotion is 'Frustration' with a frequency count of 11. This emotional response is expected in light of the literature, which noted an individual's frustration as a result of divergent beliefs that acts as an internal barrier to change (Glaub et al., 2015; Zahra et al., 2011).

The second ranked emotional experience across the sample, with a frequency count of seven, was the Founder-CEO's 'Self-doubt'. The results showed that as the interviewees began to let go of their unfavourable attachments they started to question themselves, leading to doubt. The literature showed that unlearning arouses feelings of discomfort in individuals as they are confronted by new information that conflicts with existing information, thereby leading the individual to question their values and beliefs (Fiol & O'Connor, 2017). This will arouse feelings of doubt and uncertainty in the individual as their core beliefs have stood the test of time (Hislop et al., 2014).

The emotions of 'Fear' and 'Anger' were ranked third with a frequency count of six each, followed by 'Stress' with a frequency of five and then 'Anxiety' with a frequency count of four. These types of negative emotions were expected as they emerged quite strongly in the literature that discussed the emotional impact of change, crises in business and unlearning. For instance, Fiol and O'Connor (2017) noted that people are change averse, making them more likely to be fearful of trying something new, which manifests as a fear of failure and a fear of losing credibility, whilst Zahra et al. (2011a) discussed that when a business goes through a crisis it is chaotic and can be stressful, painful and time-consuming. When looking at the process of unlearning specifically, the emotions as a consequence of unlearning include anxiety, fear and confusion (Becker, 2010; Brook et al., 2016; Cepeda-Carrion et al., 2012; Hislop et al., 2014; Tsang & Zahra, 2008). The literature showed that as individuals reflect on their core values, assumptions, knowledge and behaviours, it could lead them to experiencing learning and survival anxiety (Macdonald, 2002; Tsang & Zahra, 2008).

The seventh ranked emotional experience across the sample, with a frequency count of three, was 'Loss and regret'. Unlearning and letting go can be challenging for individuals, as they feel loss for the fundamental beliefs that have brought them security; they may have to go through the grieving process to come to terms with their loss (Cepeda-Carrion et al., 2012; Macdonald, 2002). It can be seen, therefore, that negative emotions emerged very strongly in the results, which is supported by the literature. Thus, it can be concluded that Founder-CEO's will experience a set of negative emotions whilst letting go of their attachments which will act as an internal barrier to the change needed.

It is worth discussing that the tenth ranked emotion was 'Enlightened/Accomplished', with a frequency count of two. This is more of a positive emotion which does not appear in the literature. When discussing the emotional impact of the unlearning one interviewee revealed that "...it was a really an emotion of accomplishment, of evolvment". This result adds to the body of literature on the emotional impact of unlearning, as it shows that unlearning could result in the individual feeling enlightened, accomplished or refreshed by releasing the attachment that was holding them back.

6.3.3 Actions Taken to Start Unlearning

Interview question six explored the actions taken by the Founder-CEOs during the unlearning process in order to help them let go of their attachments. The interviewees were asked this question to determine the activities they engaged in once they realised

that they needed to let go of the attachments that were not helping them grow their businesses.

The top 10 ranked actions across the sample are presented in Table 14. The interview data ranked both 'Acquiring the necessary resources' and 'Explore new ways of doing things' first, as they both had a frequency count of 28 for the action taken to commence the unlearning process.

'Acquiring the necessary resources' encompassed a wide variety of actions associated with filling the gaps in the business. Many interviewees discussed how they had to acquire additional human resources as the business grew and they could no longer do everything by themselves. This supports the literature, which noted that Founders will need to recruit the required human capital in order to acquire the capabilities, knowledge, skills and experience that they do not themselves possess, but which are required to achieve their aspirant goals (Macpherson & Holt, 2007; Wiklund et al., 2009). Obtaining 'Financial resources' came through quite strongly from many of the interviewees, which was expected because Founders continuously need additional capital to transition the business through the various stages on the growth cycle (Scott & Bruce, 1987). Wiklund et al. (2009) noted that increased financial capital creates the space for experimenting with new strategies and innovative projects, hence actions associated with 'Acquiring the necessary resources' is needed for initiating the unlearning process.

'Exploring new ways of doing things' was also a broad theme in the results. This was singled out in the literature as being important for small businesses, as it encourages them to pursue a mix of opportunities to mitigate against the risk of a single focus (Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015). The findings for this action broadly covered a variety of the methods that Founders use, such as researching, reading articles, drawing knowledge from new sources, and drawing on the diverse perspectives from different people. In so doing, these Founders were able to develop what Becker (2010) described as an internal capability to combine new knowledge with existing knowledge in order to create new opportunities for the business to grow. 'Exploring new ways of doing things' also assists in increasing the variability in a business' innovation portfolio through non-routine trial and error exploratory learning, where knowledge is recombined in new and different ways (Patel et al., 2015). This type of trial and error approach was also mentioned in the findings for testing the viability of an opportunity.

The third ranked action taken was 'Develop and improve the skills, abilities and competencies of employees', with a frequency count of 20. The interviewees discussed a variety of ways in which they trained and educated their employees in order to develop their skills and competencies. More specifically, the literature noted that unlearning is necessary for the development of employees, as they need to let go of the practices of their previous organisations in order to help them adopt the practices of the new one (Tsang & Zahra, 2008). Training and education appears to be one way to help employees release their practices from the previous organisation; however it was not strong enough in the results to be conclusive.

The fourth ranked action taken was 'Self-interrogation and introspection', with a frequency count of 18. Tsang and Zahra (2008) noted that through reflection, individuals become aware of knowledge that is no longer useful or valid. These sentiments emerged in the accounts given by the interviewees, who shared that it challenged their fundamental knowledge about the business and resulted in the necessary change. In some instances this process required a lot of acceptance from the Founder to understand that their fundamental knowledge was no longer valid. This is in line with Macdonald (2002), who commented that the process of reflection helps individuals become more receptive to new possibilities that challenge their core beliefs.

The fifth ranked actions taken were 'Altering the original business plan, model and structure', 'Development of the Founder' and 'Build credibility and brand: Establishing a track record and marketing yourself', all of which had a frequency count of 16.

'Altering the original business plan, model and structure' is a necessary action for the evolution of the business. Restructuring the resource base as the business grows so that it is more inclined with the nature of the business was noted in the data. The literature supports this action, as a change in the systems, processes and functional and specific knowledge lacking in the business might be necessary to overcome the crisis impacting the growth of the business and for exploiting opportunities in the external environment in innovative ways (Macpherson & Holt, 2007; Wiklund et al., 2009). The data also showed that as their businesses grew, some Founders had to modify or diversify their original business model to suit the evolving needs of the business to ensure survival.

The data also showed that as a business grew, the original business model had to be revised wherein the focus of the business had to change to suit the context or diversify

into other areas in order to offer a fuller range of services to customers. The literature supports the evolution of the business model, because the opportunistic or entrepreneurial approach that worked during the inception of the business only offers a temporary competitive advantage (Altinay et al., 2016). Long-term survival requires a deliberate, considered, and focused strategy, and also prioritises strategic actions, as strategic planning and the acquisition and analysis of information is necessary to improve decision-making (Altinay et al., 2016; Phelps et al., 2007). The findings of this study thus support the need to alter the business model and structure to allow the process of evolution to continue.

Many of the interviewees discussed how the growth of their businesses necessitated the 'Development of the Founder' through the acquisition of new skills, knowledge, experiences and learning. Souder et al. (2012) found this action necessary for managing competitive activities in a business environment with many uncontrollable factors.

The 5th ranked action taken was " Build credibility and brand' by establishing a track record and marketing themselves has a frequency count of 16. The data showed that it is important for a Founder to establish a brand for their business by marketing themselves and building a strong track record. This action is necessary because the business is new and unknown to the industry or market, making it difficult to attract customers. The literature highlighted that the credibility of CEOs and their businesses increases their social capital and establishes a track record, which will be helpful to attract equity or long-term debt facilities and attain organisational support for initiatives (Scott & Bruce, 1987; Souder et al., 2012). It is clear that this action will facilitate business growth, but it is unclear whether it will facilitate unlearning an unfavourable attachment.

6.3.4 Self-Initiated or Forced Unlearning

Interview question seven sought to determine whether the initiation of the unlearning was self-driven or forced. The aggregated results across the sample are shown in Table 15. The majority of the interviewees stated that the unlearning was forced, which ranked this manner of initiation first with a frequency of 20. The majority of the interviewees indicated that the unlearning was 'Forced', as they were triggered by external forces that were outside of their control or the possible closing of the business. Rautenbach et al. (2015) found the same result in their study, where changes to the global context, the economy, the organisation and the individual forced the unlearning

to occur. This conflicts with the existing literature, which claims that unlearning is triggered by an internal sudden and rapid realisation of the need for change (Becker, 2010). This is in line with the second highest manner of initiation of the unlearning which is 'Self-initiated' with a frequency count of 17.

6.3.5 Conclusive Findings for Research Question 2

It is clear from this study that an event or circumstance will transpire which will make the Founder aware of their need to change. During these events, the Founder will realise that s/he may have unfavourable attachments that could be holding the business back. The most substantial circumstances dealt with the pressures of 'Business growth' or the 'Lack of business growth'. Although, in general the results covered events where a change occurred which triggered the unlearning.

A significant link exists between unlearning and change; Hislop et al. (2014) established that the unlearning of existing knowledge, behaviours or values can be a significant catalyst for, and a facilitator of, change. These changes pertain to internal and external factors to the Founder, which creates a 'Burning platform for change' in the Founder to let go of the attachments impacting the growth of the business. External factors found in the data include legislation, technological advances and regulations, while internal factors include the Founder's limitations when dealing with 'Staff issues'. The literature recommends a proactive, anticipatory and adaptive strategy in the business to better cope with changes as they occur.

Founders will have to undertake certain actions to discard their unfavourable attachments and overcome their negative emotions to help grow the business. The most notable actions identified in this study include 'Acquiring the necessary resources', 'Exploring new ways of doing things', 'Self-interrogation' and "Altering the original business plan, model and structure". These actions will allow the Founder to achieve a more a proactive, anticipatory and adaptive management style as required. However, confronting attachments and starting the process through these actions will elicit certain negative emotions in the Founder, such as 'Frustration', 'Self-doubt', 'Fear', 'Anger' and 'Stress'.

These emotions will act as an internal barrier in the Founder for change. Interestingly, this study also uncovered certain positive emotions in Founders as they began the unlearning process, such as 'Enlightenment' and 'Accomplishment'. This finding adds to the literature in that it shows that the emotional impact of unlearning on the Founder

is positive, as they are more inclined to unlearn because they have a lot more to lose if their business fails. This is in line with the literature, which argues that unlearning is internally driven by the individual. However, this study adds to the literature as it found that the process of unlearning will be forced on the Founder by external events that are out of their control. This is a new finding in the field of unlearning.

6.4 Discussion of Results for Research Question 3

Research Question 3: How do Founder-CEOs experience the unlearning process?

The aim of Research Question 3 was to gain a more profound understanding of the manner in which Founder-CEOs experience the unlearning process. As such, the interview questions explored the breaking points that persuaded the Founder to unlearn, the actions undertaken by Founders to continue unlearning, and most importantly, the difficulties experienced by the Founder when unlearning. In so doing, this research question helped to determine how Founders navigate through the challenges that could allow them to slip back into the old ways of doing things, thus maintaining the status quo.

6.4.1 Breaking Point Persuading the Unlearning Process

Interview question eight explored the breaking point that persuaded the Founder-CEOs to let go of their unfavourable attachments and the situations that led to the breaking point. The top 10 breaking points that led to an unlearning are illustrated in Table 16. The breaking point that attained the highest frequency count of 10 was 'Breaking down the existing philosophies about the business'. The interview data revealed that there was some sort of a fundamental breakdown that challenged the existing mental models of the Founder, which finally persuaded them to let go of the unfavourable attachment that was holding them back. This breaking point was associated with changes in the brand, the role of the Founder, the industry as an eco-system, the Founder's vision/goals, the Founder's assumptions, and the Founder's credibility/reputation. Hislop et al. (2014) noted that due to cognitive blinkering, an individual's existing knowledge and competencies will never be challenged and soon become incompatible with the changing business environment. Reflection will allow individuals to become aware of knowledge that is no longer valid, which will trigger the need for letting go and change (Tsang & Zahra, 2008).

The results show that for some interviewees the unlearning was a 'Gradual process that required time', and was not initiated by a breaking point as such. This was the second ranked breaking point with a frequency count of nine. This closely resembles the unlearning process of fading, where unlearning in an individual occurs over time and the individual may only become aware that they have unlearned something when they are asked to recall the skills or capabilities lost (Brook et al., 2016; Hislop et al., 2014). Macdonald (2002) added that unlearning that occurs through a slow process over time is more transformative in nature; other forms of unlearning reflect a far less gradual process. Wiping refers to an individual unlearning through a more deliberate process of change (Brook et al., 2016; Hislop et al., 2014), while deep unlearning is rapid and radical and occurs as a result of an unexpected experience (Brook et al., 2016; Hislop et al., 2014a; Wensley & Navarro, 2015). It can thus be concluded that some unlearnings may not require a specific breaking point, as the Founder transforms through the gradual fading of their unfavourable attachments.

The third ranked breaking point with a frequency count of four was 'Founder's personal circumstances'. Many interviewees discussed the personal financial and family circumstances that led them to unlearn and release their unfavourable attachments. This finding was expected and is in line with the literature, which discussed the strain that Founders experience due to family conflicts and stress, as well as the financial burden of outlaying personal capital to fund the business or ploughing back profits into the business to facilitate growth (Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015; Raymond et al., 2013).

The fourth ranked breaking point with a frequency count of nine was 'Old ways of doing things is not viable'. The interviewees discussed specific scenarios where the organisational structure, commission structure and technology advancements necessitated the need for unlearning. The literature broadly discusses that existing resources, skills and activities within the business may be insufficient for maintaining a competitive advantage and achieving stability in the current conditions (Altinay et al., 2016; Chan et al., 2006). Hence, when the business reaches a point where the current mode of operation is inadequate, the Founder will be persuaded to let go of the attachments that are creating this mismatch. As such, this finding is consistent with the literature.

6.4.2 Further Actions Required to Continue Unlearning

Interview question nine investigated the actions required by Founder-CEOs to continue unlearning and prevent them from reverting back to their previous ways of doing things.

The aggregated results of the combined sample are available in Table 17. Few further actions emerged across the sample, which is evident from the low frequencies in Table 17. Those that were highlighted seem to come from a higher or a more strategic space, for instance the first ranked further action taken by interviewees was to make the ‘Transition from management to leadership’, which had a frequency count of eight.

According to the literature, this action is vital because growth is an outcome of leadership (Koryak et al., 2015). Scott and Bruce (1987) noted that as the administrative load of the business grows, the Founder will require a change in management style. The authors stated that business growth will lead to a change in the Founder’s role from entrepreneur to leader, which may be difficult for the Founder as the change could be completely out of character for them. Macpherson and Holt (2007) suggested that Founders should develop an interpretive and flexible management style to assist them to be more adaptive to environmental changes. Hence, the literature clearly shows that there is a need for the Founder to change their management style to deal with changes in the business and external environment.

The interview data showed that a ‘Transition from a management to a leadership’ helped the Founders receive buy-in in the organisation for their ideas, and also helped them to better handle the daily activities of the business. Two accounts from the interview data illustrated somewhat contrary sentiments around the need for the transition to leadership, however. These accounts highlighted the higher purpose of the Founder as they took on a mentorship role and servant leadership, i.e. Founders should consider their higher purpose to help them let go of unfavourable attachments.

The aggregated interview data ranked in second position the following two sets of further actions taken with a frequency count of seven: ‘Opening oneself to trusting others’ and ‘Staying in tune with the context of the business in order to be able to adapt and/or innovate the business in accordance with changes’. Learning how to trust others emerged a number of times across the sample as an important action to help Founders let go of their unfavourable attachments. Brook et al. (2016) supported the need for trust and security to help individuals lower their defences, and in so doing become more receptive to confronting their unfavourable attachments.

‘Staying in tune with the external environment in order to be able to adapt and/or innovate the business in accordance with changes’ was seen in the interview data to be crucial to remain competitive. The literature strongly supported this action because

the external environment provides growth opportunities for small businesses to exploit (Wiklund et al., 2009). The interview data showed that some of the interviewees felt that staying in tune with the external environment is important, because there is a constant flow of knowledge that requires on-going learning and unlearning in order for them to remain in touch, and as a result be adaptable and flexible. The literature review extensively covered the fluidity of knowledge in modern day times. Knowledge becomes obsolete quickly in the turbulent and dynamic environment that small businesses operate in, and as a result products and services become out-dated faster, which necessitates the creation of knowledge to generate new products and services (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2016; Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015).

Small businesses thus need to 'Stay in tune with the external environment' in order to identify changes early so that the business can adapt or respond quickly in return. Proactive strategies such as embracing innovation can help the business respond to changes in the business environment and customer demands (Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015; Macpherson & Holt, 2007). Whilst innovation is important, small businesses need to be aware of the high probability of success or failure that could result from uncertainties inherent in innovation efforts (Patel et al., 2015). Unlearning provides a useful alternative as it facilitates a more flexible response to rapidly changing markets and technologies, which is needed in the modern day business environment (Brook et al., 2016; Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015).

The aggregated interview data ranked in fourth position the following two sets of further actions taken, with a frequency count of six: 'Improving ambidexterity' and 'Alignment in all aspects of the business'. 'Improving ambidexterity' within the business was raised a few times in the sample, and was significant as the interviewees found it necessary for achieving the balance between exploration and exploitation that is essential for growth. Previously the Founders were focused on the daily running of their businesses, but 'Improving ambidexterity' allowed them to take on the future and strategic-orientated activities that would ensure the long-term survival of the business. These activities included looking at the '5-10-year horizon for our business' and 'Building relationships with clients and investors'. According to the literature, these activities aid in improving the organisation's innovativeness through the tasks of sensing the environment for changes and acting on opportunities (Tushman & O'Reilly, 2011).

The sixth ranked further action taken, with a frequency count of five, was 'Awareness of strengths and limitations and leveraging them'. Interestingly, other interviewees

discussed the process they went through to assess what the business was good at and what they were lacking in. In so doing, one interviewee realised that he needed to leverage his core competency and establish partnerships with businesses to obtain his non-core competencies. Acquiring partnerships and entrepreneurial networks are important for growth as they allow businesses to acquire the knowledge, capital and capabilities that they do not possess internally, as well as the feedback required for better understanding the business environment (Raymond et al., 2013; Wiklund et al., 2009).

The results made special mention of further actions that included some form of 'Social contribution', where the interviewees noted that they began to think about the bigger picture and their role in, and contribution to, the country. This further action taken was ranked seventh, with a frequency count of four. This finding was supported by Raymond et al., (2013), who noted that owner-managers will consider their social and environmental objectives when starting and growing their businesses. Amongst other things, these social and environmental objectives include investing in society.

6.4.3 Difficulties in Releasing Previous Ways of Doing Things

Interview question 10 explored the difficulties experienced by Founder-CEOs whilst letting go and unlearning their unfavourable attachments. The interviewees were asked to share the reasons that made letting go of the unfavourable attachments difficult for them. Table 18 includes the top 10 reasons for the difficulty of releasing an attachment across the sample. The aggregated interview data ranked in first place the difficulty of 'Dealing with differing groups of people' to achieve the objectives of the business, with a frequency count of nine.

The interview data showed that Founders are not alone in the business and need to persuade others which can be difficult. Hislop et al. (2014) noted that people's attitudes to unlearning are strongly linked to their attitudes to the change processes that precipitated them. Founders generally found it difficult to delegate and decentralise their businesses, hence it was expected that they would have a negative attitude towards the process that led to them having to unlearn their attachments that were preventing them from working with others.

Interestingly, in second place with a frequency count of seven, many interviewees noted that the unlearning 'Was not difficult', citing that it was in fact a necessary change. This finding significantly conflicts with the literature, which strongly noted that individuals find the unlearning process to be quite difficult and demanding (Brook et al.,

2016). However, De Holan (2011a) argued that letting go of one's dominant logic is difficult but not impossible. This could be because the level of difficulty is associated with the extent of the attachment (Hislop et al., 2014). The unlearning of Founders could thus be less difficult than expected, as they may be more willing to let go of an unfavourable attachment that is impacting the survival of their business.

The following three difficulties for releasing the attachment were all ranked in third place with a frequency count of five: 'Risk issues impacting the business', 'Took time; difficult at first but then it became easier and exciting' and 'Dealing with growing pains of the Founder and the business'. The findings showed that the process of unlearning took time, and during this period it was difficult to let go at first but then it became easier and exciting. Fiol and O'Connor (2017) noted that unlearning will be accompanied by multiple instances of trial and error, while the data showed that risk issues and the potential impact on the business make it difficult for the Founder to unlearn and contributes towards the length of the process. Founders are also concerned about their reputation which they work hard to establish during their tenure (Souder et al., 2012).

The interview data showed that the difficulty level experienced by the interviewees includes issues relating to 'Dealing with growing pains of the Founder and business', which was confirmed in the literature. Wiklund et al. (2009) noted that Founders may struggle with the changes in their working conditions, which will impact their attitude towards growth. As the business grows, more distance will be placed between top management and the action, which the Founder will find difficult to deal with (Scott & Bruce, 1987). Brook et al. (2016) also found deep unlearning to be more difficult and demanding than simply discarding, because deep unlearning forces individuals to confront and challenge their fundamental assumptions. As such, individuals may doubt the unlearning process because they are uncomfortable with relinquishing the old ways of doing things (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2016). The findings of this study thus support the literature. This reflects that unlearning can be quite cumbersome, as Founders navigate through the risk issues and growing pains that result from the unlearning.

6.4.4 Conclusive Findings For Research Question 3

The results of this study show that the top breaking point that persuades Founder-CEOs to let go of their unfavourable attachments is when there is a fundamental breakdown in the Founder's existing philosophies about the business. This could be triggered by changes in the external environment, which force the Founder to reflect on

her/his out-dated mental models which have never been challenged due to their cognitive blinkering. However, the results also show that the unlearning of Founder-CEOs may not necessarily require a specific breaking point, as the Founder can transform through the gradual fading of their unfavourable attachments.

The evolution of the business will require that the Founder transition from a management to a leadership style of running the business. This will significantly reduce the Founder's work load as they will manage less of the daily activities of the business and make fewer operational decisions. The results suggest that Founders should consider their higher purpose to determine the social contribution they can make to the country. This type of higher or strategic focus will stop the Founder from reverting back to the status quo. Trust and security in the Founder and the business as a whole can also facilitate the unlearning process, as it will open, the Founder and employees alike, to confronting their closely held beliefs and attitudes by lowering their defences.

From this study, it can be concluded that staying in tune with the external environment is crucial in order for a business to remain adaptive, proactive and flexible in the dynamic and turbulent environments they operate in. Unlearning and innovation will help a business to rapidly let go of old knowledge and develop new knowledge to create products and services that meet changing customer demands. However, at the same time, unlearning can be difficult for Founders of small businesses, because they are not alone in the business and will need to manage the negative attitudes of their employees towards the changes that unlearning brings to the organisation. It is also entirely possible that the Founder may not experience any difficulties whilst letting go of their unfavourable attachments, i.e. the extent of an attachment may be lower than the Founder's need to turn around or grow their business.

6.5 Discussion of Results for Research Question 4

Research Question 4: What is the perceived impact of the unlearning process as a lever for long-term business success and growth?

The aim of Research Question 4 was develop a deeper and more profound understanding of the impact of the unlearning process on the personal development of the Founder-CEO and the overall growth of the business. In so doing, this research question attempted to confirm that the unlearning process can improve organisational effectiveness through the concurrent development and growth of the Founder and the business post unlearning an attachment.

6.5.1 Personal or Emotional Impact of the Unlearning on the Founder

Interview question 11 probed whether the process of unlearning has a deeper emotional or personal impact on the Founder-CEO after they have let go of the attachment. Table 19 illustrates the top 10 personal and emotional impacts highlighted across the sample. The top impact on the Founder is that they realised that ‘There is no substitute for hard work’, with a frequency count of 14. Thereafter, jointly in second position, were the impacts of ‘Becoming a better businessman’ and ‘Improved quality of life’, both with a frequency count of 10.

The interview data showed that at the end of the unlearning the Founder-CEOs realised that it is important to persevere throughout the growth of the business, despite the difficulties they encounter along the way. The literature showed that unlearning is a challenging process that could cause individuals to revert back to the status quo (Hislop et al., 2014; Rautenbach et al., 2015). However, according to the data, Founders should not give up and must remain motivated as they deal with the challenges inhibiting the growth of their businesses (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2016).

Actions associated with self-interrogation and learning helped the interviewees with their personal growth and development in business, such that one interviewee even noted that, “I am better at business now than I was before because I learnt through the experience”. The literature agreed with this finding, i.e. the process of unlearning is transformative as it allows individuals to see things in a new way and opens people up to new experiences and perspectives, critical questioning, reflection, introspection, open discussion, radical debate and continuous experimentation (Brook et al., 2016). Leal-Rodríguez et al. (2015) added to this that reflection and identifying their inappropriate actions helps individuals improve their performance. Hence, it can be concluded that the unlearning process will help the Founder become better at business through personal growth and development activities.

The interview data revealed that the process of unlearning has a profound impact on a Founder’s quality of life. Some Founders noted that they were able to enjoy life more and value the smaller things once they had let go of their unfavourable attachments. Delegating and trusting their employees gave the Founder peace of mind to know that their business was in capable hands even when they were not around. Raymond et al., (2013) illustrated that quality of life is a significant objective for many owner-managers and that the performance of a small business will be intrinsically linked to its capacity to provide the owner-manager with their aspirant quality of life as well as other objectives.

The results show that once the demands on the Founder reduce, they will have more time to consider 'New personal goals and their greater purpose', which was the fourth ranked impact with a frequency count of nine.

6.5.2 Improvements and Growth in the Business Resulting from the Unlearning

Interview questions 12 and 13 jointly examined whether unlearning and letting go of unfavourable attachments led to many improvements and growth in the business. The top 10 growth and business improvements across the sample are presented in Table 20. The first ranked business improvement was 'Growth and expansion' with a frequency count of 19, followed by 'Strong, stable and sustainable business' with a frequency count of 12, and 'Reduced staff turnover' with a frequency count of eight.

The literature highlights numerous organisational benefits associated with unlearning. Leal-Rodríguez et al. (2015), for example, posited that organisational unlearning can induce learning that enables businesses to develop and exploit capabilities for gaining competitive advantage and better overall performance. De Holan (2011a) and Hislop et al. (2014), meanwhile, noted that unlearning is a significant catalyst for, and facilitator of, change, while Becker (2010) argued that learning and unlearning is critical for innovation and requires strategic direction to focus the process. As such, unlearning plays a role in successful change management and the general transformation of the organisation over time (Becker, 2010; Tsang & Zahra, 2008).

It can be seen from the literature that there are many positive outcomes as a consequence to unlearning, including 'Growth and expansion' or any of the major business improvements that emerged from the data obtained from this study. 'Growth and expansion' were seen in the data in the form of growth in the businesses' revenues, sales and number of employees, as well as through expansions in the stores, premises, infrastructure and equipment. The unlearning process also helped the make the businesses stronger, stable and more sustainable. Through this improvement the businesses were able to survive turbulent times; hence this study shows that the unlearning process can lead to the improvement and growth of small businesses.

6.5.3 Overall Experience of Unlearning

Interview question 14 sought to determine the overall experience of unlearning amongst Founder-CEOs in both a business and a personal context. Table 21 illustrates the aggregated results across the sample, and listed in first place was 'Overall a positive experience' with a frequency count of 32. The second ranked overall

experience was that 'It was the right thing to do', with a frequency count of seven. It was thus strongly emphasised across the sample that the overall experience of unlearning and letting go of unfavourable attachments was positive. This finding was supplemented by the data retrieved for interview question 15, which measured the overall impact of the unlearning on the Founder-CEO and the growth of the business on a five point Likert Scale. Table 22 represents the results across the sample and shows that most unlearnings were rated between intense and extreme. These results were in line with those of Rautenbach et al. (2015).

6.5.4 Conclusive Findings for Research Question 4

The results indicate that the unlearning process led to improvements in, and the growth of, both the Founder and the business. The experiences and actions taken during the unlearning process helped the Founders with their personal growth and development, enabling them to open themselves up to new experiences and perspectives, and forcing them to challenge their existing mental models. This process had a professional and personal impact on the Founders, as it helped them become better at business and improved their quality of life. This definitely reveals a transformation in the Founder, in contrast to the individual characteristics seen at the beginning of the process. In this evolved state Founders are able to look to the future and establish higher order goals for themselves. Interestingly, the transformation of the Founders came despite the negative emotions and difficulties experienced during the process of unlearning. The data obtained showed that the overall experience of unlearning was positive and the right thing to do, even though it was not a nice experience initially. This is significant to emphasise to new Founders. In the beginning letting go of ones attachments will be difficult and uncomfortable. But it is important to persevere and maintain the motivation to unlearn because the results will be worth the efforts.

The results also showed that unlearning will improve a business and help it transition into maturity, ensuring that it will be stronger, stable and more sustainable in response to shocks in the external environment. The overall impacts of the unlearning process on the Founder and the business were found to be intense to extreme, which substantiates the need for the process.

6.6 The Founder-CEO Unlearning Stages for Business Growth

6.6.1 Introduction

The theoretical model of unlearning in small businesses illustrated in Chapter 2 built on the five stages of growth in small businesses, as per Greiner (1972), Lewis and

Churchill (1983), and Scott and Bruce (1987). The theoretical model suggests that at each stage of growth the Founder will undergo a process of unlearning, which will help the business transition and evolve from one stage to the next until it reaches maturity. The findings of this study support this suggestion and highlighted additional enhancements that should be made to the model.

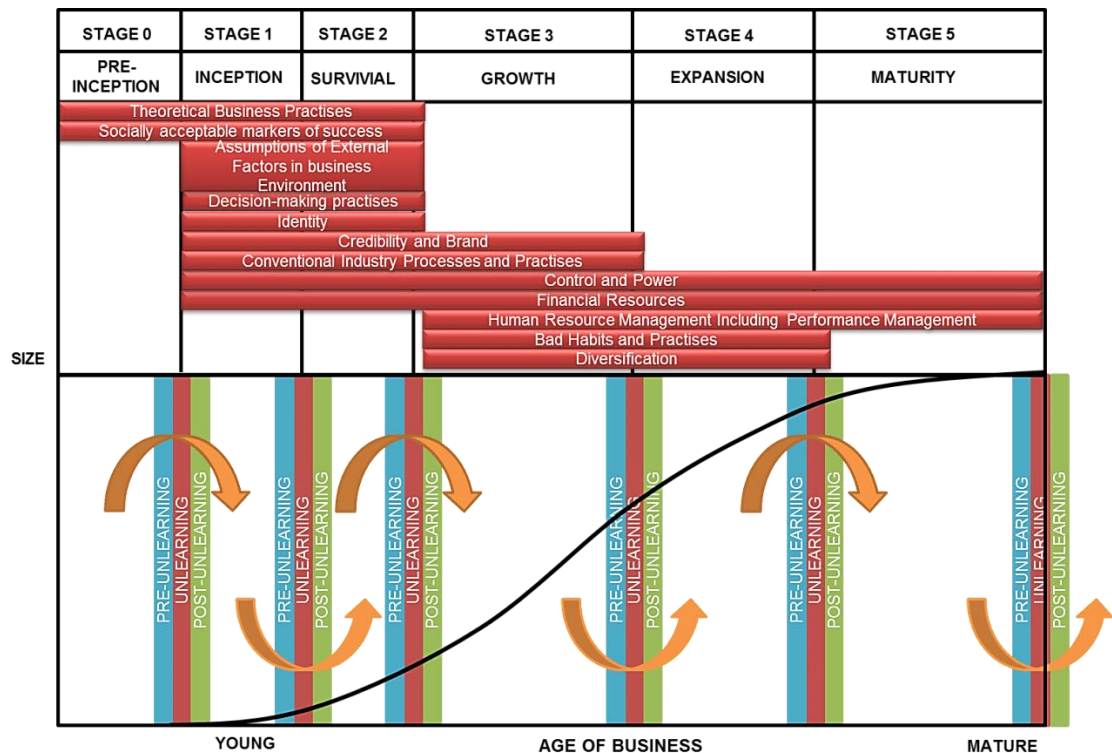
6.6.2 Enhancements to the Model

The empirical research in this study offered insights into the unlearning process when letting go of an unfavourable attachment in a Founder-CEO, and emphasised the following findings which should be added to the theoretical model developed in Chapter 2:

- Unlearning of the Founder-CEO actually commences prior to starting the business.
- Founder-CEOs are unfavourably attached to a number of knowledge structures, behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and skills that they need to unlearn.
- These unfavourable attachments are unlearned at different stages in the business' growth cycle.
- The same unlearning may occur over multiple stages of the business' growth. As the circumstances leading to the unlearning persist, the Founder makes continued efforts to fully let go of the attachment by taking further actions to prevent reverting back to the status quo.

Based on these findings, the theoretical amendment to the Small Business Growth Model was enhanced to create the model of the Founder-CEO Unlearning Stages for Business Growth, as illustrated in Figure 12.

Figure 12: The Founder-CEO Unlearning Stages for Business Growth



The unlearnings at each stage are discussed below:

- **Pre-inception – Survival:** Prior to and whilst starting the business, the Founders must let go of their attachment to ‘Theoretical business model’ and ‘Socially acceptable markers of success’. These attachments are a result of the Founders’ educational background and upbringing.
- **Inception – Survival:** Once the Founder starts the business, their attachment to their ‘Assumption of external factors in business environment’, ‘Decision-making processes’ and ‘Identity’ will be challenged. Releasing these attachments will allow the business to transition into the growth phase.
- **Inception – Growth:** During these stages the Founder must refrain from relying on their attachment to their ‘Credibility’, ‘Brand’ and ‘Conventional industry processes and processes and practices’, which are established or inherited from their past experiences and previous employment.
- **Growth – Expansion:** Expanding the business will require the Founder to let go of any attachment that prevents them from diversifying the business from its original plan and all ‘Bad habits and practices’ established during the early stages of the business where the Founder had sole authority and influence.

- **Inception – Maturity:** The Founder will struggle to relinquish ‘Control and power’ throughout their business’ growth as the business grows out of the managerial capacity and moves the Founder further from the action. ‘Financial resources’ will be a constant need throughout the growth of the business, thus the Founder should let go of their attachments as they will hold the business back. Additional human capital must be employed at each stage of growth and the Founder must find innovative ways to attract financial capital or replace it with an alternative solution.

6.6.3 Fundamental Purpose of the Model

The Founder-CEO Unlearning Stages for Business Growth Model integrates the results from the research as well as the existing literature on unlearning and small business growth cycles. The model has five stages of growth as seen in typical growth models. In addition, the model has an additional pre-inception stage where certain attachments need to be identified and unlearned before the commencement of the business. The business will need to undergo the unlearning process in order to transition to the successive stage, thus transitioning from one stage to the next will require the business to go through a process of pre-unlearning, unlearning and post-unlearning. This process will allow the business to change and adapt to the growth requirements for the following stages. This will subsequently lead to improvements in, and the growth of, both the Founder and the business.

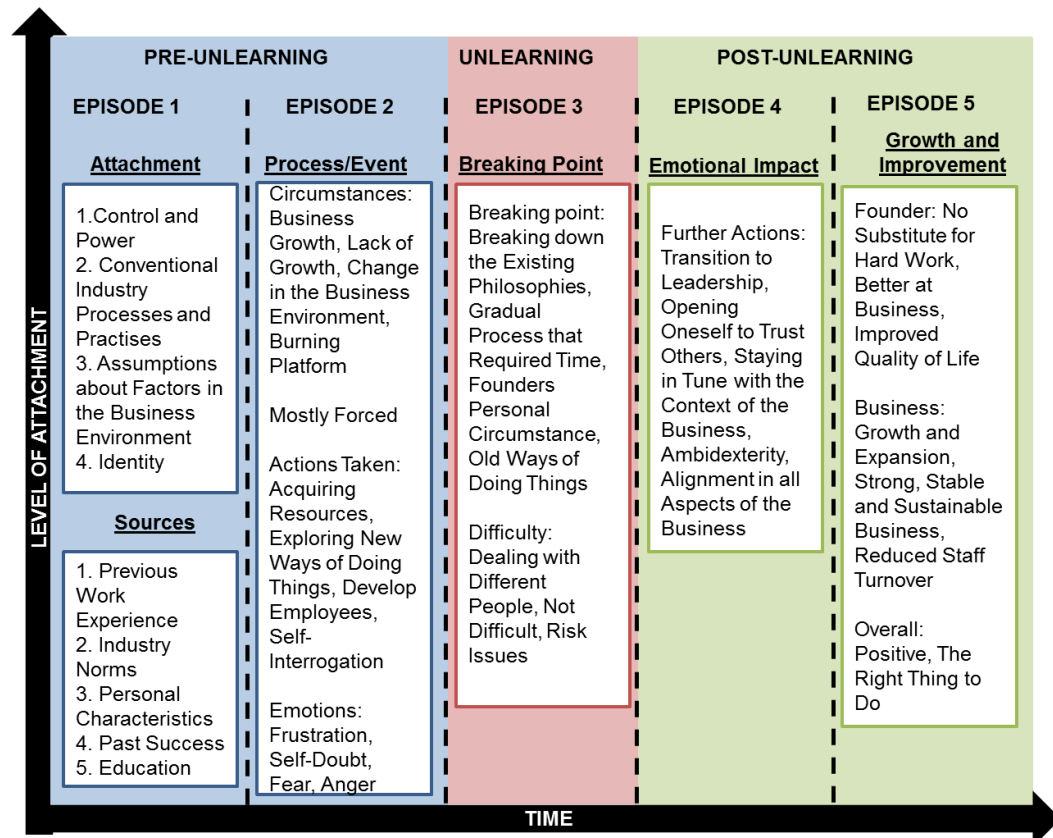
6.6.4 Other Contributions to Literature

The results of this study also add to the research conducted by Rautenbach et al. (2015), who developed the process model for unlearning an attachment. The major differences in the results include:

- Unlearning in Founder-CEOs leads to growth and improvement as opposed to the more specific organisational effective, which was originally found when the authors studied the unlearning of executives.
- Founder-CEOs need to let go of slightly different attachments to executives.
- The source of the Founders’ attachment is significant in the pre-unlearning process, which was not found in the original study.
- Founder-CEOs do not experience the unlearning process in the same way that executives do, as they are less likely to experience a breaking point that will force them to unlearn or to experience a high level of difficulty.

Based on these and other smaller differences, Rautenbach et al. (2015)'s Process Model for Unlearning an Attachment, has been adjusted for the context of a Founder-CEO in a small business. The adjusted model is shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13: The Process Model of Unlearning of Founder-CEOs



6.7 Conclusion

The revised model of unlearning in small businesses includes the five stages of small business growth, the three phases of unlearning at the transition point from one phase to the next, and the major unlearnings that need to be undertaken to transition to the next stages. This model establishes the significance of unlearning to assist small businesses to grow and adds to the existing literature.

Furthermore, Founder-CEOs will experience the unlearning process in a slightly different manner to other leaders such as business executives; however the process is seen to be highly influential in both contexts, and will aid the improvement, growth and development of the business and the individual.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter the main contributions of this study are discussed. The model of the Founder-CEO Unlearning Stages for Business Growth, and the adjustments to Rautenbach et al.'s (2015) original Process Model of Unlearning an Attachment is summarised. Thereafter, recommendations are suggested for Founder-CEOs and small businesses. The chapter concludes with the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research.

7.2 Synthesis of Research Data

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the unlearning process in the context of Founder-CEOs of small growing businesses in developing countries. The main objective of the study was to determine how Founder-CEOs unlearn their unfavourable attachments which constrain their ability to respond to wicked problems arising from both internal and external changes. This is critical because the manner in which Founders respond to these problems will invariably dictate their businesses survival. This is currently a challenge in the South African business environment where entrepreneurial activity is low as businesses struggle to survive.

Four research questions were set out in Chapter 3 to explore the Founder-CEOs' unfavourable attachments prior to the unlearning process, the breaking point that leads to the unlearning, the actions of a Founder-CEO during the unlearning, the emotions experienced by a Founder-CEO during the unlearning process, and finally the perceived impact of the unlearning. In light of these research questions, the findings of this study set out in Chapter 6, as well as the existing literature, revealed the following contributions to the unlearning process, small business and Founder-CEO bodies of knowledge.

The **first contributions** relates to the types of unfavourable attachments that constrain the decision-making ability of Founders, as well as the significance and origination of these attachments. The findings confirm that:

- Founder-CEOs are unfavourably attached to a number of knowledge structures, behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and skills, which they need to unlearn;
- these unfavourable attachments are unlearned at different stages in the business' growth cycle as illustrated in Figure 12.

- the two major unfavourable attachments that Founder-CEOs need to let go of are ‘Control and power’ and ‘Conventional industry processes and practices’; and
- the Founder inherits these ways of doing things from three major sources, i.e. their ‘Previous work experience’, ‘Industry norms’ and negative ‘Personal characteristics and circumstances’.

This study affirms the findings of Cepeda-Carrion et al. (2012), Fern et al. (2012) and Zheng et al. (2016), who related that individuals are likely to take their experience-based knowledge into their new jobs.

This study also shows that Founders display what Leroy et al. (2015) described as psychological ownership, as they become emotionally and psychologically attached to their businesses. This makes it difficult for them to trust and delegate to others, and leads to the creation of ‘Bad habits and practices’ and possibly an ‘Identity’ crisis in the future. The Founder will have to let go of these attachments to achieve growth.

The business will need to be formalised at some point in its growth, but in the long run the conventional practices and the Founder’s past knowledge could be unsuitable for the small business context, thus the Founder should release them. This concurs with Leal-Rodríguez et al.’s findings (2015) that conventional industry practices are developed for large organisations and limit the flexibility and capacity of small businesses to innovate.

The **second contribution** of this study concerns the catalysts that necessitate the need for the unlearning process, the actual actions taken to commence the process, and the emotions experienced by the Founder whilst undergoing the unlearning process. The findings confirm that an event or circumstance will transpire which will make the Founder aware of their need to change. This supports the literature by Hislop et al. (2014), who noted that the process of unlearning can be a significant catalyst for, and facilitator of, change.

The most influential circumstances that lead to the unlearning of an attachment dealt with the pressures of ‘Business growth’ and conversely the ‘Lack of business growth’. These findings are endorsed by Macpherson and Holt (2007) and Wiklund et al. (2009), who discussed how small businesses undergo complex changes as they grow, which will require a broader range of resources, skills, capital, capabilities and competencies. However, a lack of these resources will undermine a business’ ability to grow. The findings confirmed that:

- the most notable actions undertaken by Founder-CEOs for discarding an attachment include: 'Acquiring the necessary resources', 'Exploring new ways of doing things', 'Self-interrogation' and "Altering the original business plan, model and structure";
- changes in the internal and external factors to the Founder may create a 'Burning platform for change' thereby forcing in the Founder to let go of the attachments impacting the growth of the business.

The work conducted by Becker (2010), Cepeda-Carrion et al. (2012), Hislop et al. (2014), Tsang and Zahra (2008) and Zahra et al. (2011) supports the emotional impact of unlearning, while this study notes that confronting attachments through the unlearning process will elicit certain negative emotions in the Founder, such as 'Frustration', 'Self-doubt', 'Fear', 'Anger' and 'Stress'. The Founder may alternatively experience certain positive emotions such as 'Enlightenment' and 'Accomplishment', as they are more inclined to unlearn because they have a lot more to lose if their business fails.

Lastly, this study found that the process of unlearning will be forced on the Founder by external events that are out of their control. This conflicts with the existing literature that claims that unlearning is triggered by an internal sudden and rapid realisation of the need for change (Becker, 2010).

The **third contribution** of this study relates to the Founder's actual experience of the unlearning process in terms of the breaking points they encounter, the difficulties they have to overcome, and what actions they need to undertake in order to prevent reverting back to the status quo. The findings confirm that the top breaking point that persuades Founder-CEOs to let go of their unfavourable attachments is when there is a fundamental breakdown in their existing philosophies about the business. However, this study also found that the unlearning of Founder-CEOs may not necessarily require a specific breaking point as the Founder transforms through a 'Gradual process that requires time'. This conflicts with the literature that states that unlearning occurs as a deliberate process of change that can be rapid, radical and as a result of an unexpected change (Brook et al., 2016; Hislop et al., 2014; Wensley & Cegarra-Navarro, 2015). The findings also confirm that:

- the top three further actions taken by Founder-CEOs to assist them from reverting back to the status quo include, 'Transitioning from a management to a leadership style', 'Opening oneself to trusting others' and 'Staying in tune with the context of business'; and
- unlearning and innovation will help the business to rapidly let go of old knowledge and develop new knowledge for products and services demanded by changing customer demands.

This research also found that unlearning can be difficult for the Founders of small businesses because they have to deal with differing groups of people to achieve the objectives of the business. This supports Brook et al. (2016), who found the unlearning process to be difficult and demanding. However, some Founders may not experience any difficulties whilst letting go of their unfavourable attachments, as they perceive this to be a necessary change for growth. This affirms De Holan (2011a) findings that unlearning may be difficult but not impossible.

Lastly, this study concludes that Founders need to manage the negative attitudes of their employees towards the changes that unlearning brings to the organisation. Trust and security in the Founder and the business as a whole can also facilitate the unlearning process, as it opens people up to confronting their closely held beliefs and attitudes by lowering their defences.

The **fourth contribution** of this study relates to the impact of unlearning on ensuring the survival of small businesses and the impact on the Founder, which leads to improvements and growth in the business. This process has a professional and personal impact on the Founders, allowing them to 'Become a better businessman' and 'Improve quality of life'. The experiences and actions taken during the unlearning process help the Founders to open up to new experiences and perspectives, and force them to challenge their existing mental models. This supports the findings of Brook et al. (2016) and Leal-Rodríguez et al. (2015), who discussed the usefulness of reflection, introspection, new experiences and critical questioning to allow individuals to see things in a new way and to identify their inappropriate actions, which helps performance. Interestingly, the transformation of the Founder occurred despite the negative emotions and difficulties experienced during the process of unlearning. In the beginning, letting go of one's attachments will be difficult and uncomfortable, but it is important to persevere and maintain the motivation to unlearn because the results will be worth the efforts.

The findings confirm that unlearning will improve the business and help it transition into maturity. The following major business improvements resulting from the unlearning process are confirmed by the data:

- Growth and expansion in different ways.
- Stronger, stable and more sustainable in response to shocks in the external business environment.
- Reduced staff turnover.

In general, the literature notes that unlearning is critical for change and innovation (Becker, 2010; De Holan, 2011; Hislop et al., 2014). Furthermore, it helps the business to transform by inducing learning, which enables the business to develop and exploit capabilities for gaining competitive advantage and better overall performance (Leal-Rodríguez et al., 2015). The findings of this study thus empirically confirm the findings of the literature, as it shows that in practice unlearning will lead to the improvement of a business. Lastly, the data obtained showed that the overall experience of unlearning for the Founder and the business was extremely positive, even though it may not be a nice experience initially.

7.3 The Founder-CEO Unlearning Stages for Business Growth

The Model of the Founder-CEO Unlearning Stages for Business Growth demonstrates a level of consistency with the literature on small business growth, unlearning and Founders. It also identifies and demonstrates new structures as an outcome of the research conducted in this study. The new additions to the original small business life cycle model include:

- Each crisis for transitioning to the next stage of growth represents a point where the Founder and/or the business will need to undergo the unlearning process.
- The unlearning process during each crisis will constitute three phases - pre-unlearning, unlearning and post-unlearning.
- The unlearning of the Founder-CEO actually commences prior to starting the business, which represents an additional pre-inception stage in a small business' growth.
- These unfavourable attachments are unlearnt at different stages in the business' growth cycle.
- The same unlearning may occur over multiple stages of the business' growth.

The above findings contributed to the enhancement of the original Small Business Growth Model. It can be concluded that the enhancements made to the model are not abstract, as they are based on the empirical data obtained during this study which are combined with the current literature on business growth and more specifically life cycle models.

7.4 The Process Model of Unlearning an Attachment for Founder-CEOs

The Process Model of Unlearning of Founder-CEOs is an adjustment to Rautenbach et al.'s (2015) original Process Model of Unlearning an Attachment. The adjustments made are shown in Figure 13 and include:

- Unlearning in Founder-CEOs leads to growth and improvement, as opposed to organisational effectiveness.
- Founder-CEOs need to let go of slightly different attachments to executives.
- The source of the Founder's attachment is significant in the pre-unlearning process.
- Founder-CEOs do not experience the unlearning process in the same way that executives do.
- Founder-CEOs are less likely to experience a breaking point that will force them to unlearn and are less likely to experience a high level of difficulty.

These adjustments add value to Rautenbach et al.'s (2015) study, as they show the usability or applicability of the Process Model of Unlearning an Attachment in a different context. This highlights the potential of elevating Rautenbach et al.'s model to a grand construct through future studies.

7.5 Recommendations for Founder-CEOs

The recommendations for Founder-CEOs are developed from common themes discovered throughout the process.

The findings in this study show that the emotional and psychological impact of starting and growing a business on the Founder is quite strong; hence it is recommended that Founder-CEOs separate their identities from those of their businesses to prevent a potential identity crisis. Founders should also be aware of the attachment they have to 'Control and power' which can prevent them from delegating and trusting in the business.

Founders need to become more aware of their attachments to past experience, especially those from the previous work environment. The conventional industry norms that they may have become accustomed to in their previous employment may not be suited to the context of their small businesses and will hinder the flexibility of the business.

Small businesses operate in complex and dynamic environments where changes occur rapidly and knowledge becomes obsolete far quicker. Hence, it is recommended that Founders develop a proactive, interpretive and flexible management style to assist them in being more adaptive to environmental changes.

Founders should identify the negative personal characteristics and circumstances that could lead to unfavourable attachments and negative outcomes. These attachments could be rooted in the Founder's educational background, upbringing and past successes, which give them a more internal outlook. The findings of this study recommend a more outward outlook for staying in tune with the business environment.

Once the business has reached a stage where the Founder's personal objectives are met, they should start considering their higher purpose to determine the social contribution they can make to the country.

7.6 Recommendations for Growing Businesses

The recommendations for growing businesses were developed from the common themes discovered from the interviews conducted and the literature reviewed.

The growth of businesses should not be limited by the financial resources available. Founders need to identify potential partnerships and networks that they can establish to acquire the capacity and capabilities that the business does not possess internally. This entails identifying the business' strengths that can be leveraged in return. Small businesses have the ability to be innovative due to their size, thus small businesses need to develop an innovative capability to help identify new ways of doing things that could attract the attention of those who have resources that they do not.

Growing small businesses need to develop an internal capability for sensing changes in the business environment. This is very important as it will allow the business to stay in tune with the context of their environment, thereby allowing them to stay ahead of trends and competitors, especially those that could be detrimental to their survival. This

requires the business to become more ambidextrous, so that time and effort is spent on both exploring new opportunities and exploiting the existing ones.

The business model of small businesses needs to remain flexible throughout the business' growth, as a flexible business model allows for diversifications and alteration in response to changes in the businesses environment. In addition, small businesses should refrain from adopting the rigid organisational structures typically seen in larger, more established businesses. The functional division of resources will not encourage innovation, which is greatly needed in growing business. Small businesses should adopt a more fluid structure that encourages a more efficient utilisation of resources, where less emphasis is placed on functional roles, allowing employees to develop quicker through exposure to a diverse range of tasks.

7.7 Limitations of this Study

The quality issues associated with qualitative research methods was a limitation in this research. It was possible for the researcher to distort or “falsely portray the phenomena such methods seek to reveal”, and may have threatened the authenticity of the findings (Tosey et al., 2014, p. 630). Even though attempts were made to improve the validity of this study, most of the activities were carried out by the researcher. These activities included data collection, analysis and interpretation of the results. This inherently limited the content analysis to the ideas and thoughts of a single individual, which may be biased or leading. Brook et al. (2015) noted that this has the added risk of the “double hermeneutic”, wherein the researcher is making sense of himself/herself and that which is being studied at the same time, resulting in the erroneous mixing of the two and unconsciously reporting the findings that the researcher would like to see.

7.8 Recommendations for Future Research

The following areas are suggested for future study:

- It is first recommended that Rautenbach et al., (2015)'s process model for unlearning an attachment should be applied in multiple other context to test its generalisability and validity.
- It is recommended for future research that a multi-stage data collection approach is used where Founder-CEO's are interviewed at different stages. Data could be collected at each of the five stages of the businesses growth or alternatively, the Founder could be interviewed early in the businesses inception and then a few years later. This method will better track the change in the Founder as a result of the unlearning process.

- A study focusing on the unlearning of female Founder-CEOs in business could provide some valuable insights to encourage female entrepreneurship.
- It will be valuable to determine how businesses can facilitate the unlearning of employees to help them let go of the attachments that prevent them from accepting or adopting new change initiatives.
- Further research is required to understand how an individual would go about relearning knowledge, behaviours, attitudes and skills that have been abandoned.
- Lastly, future studies should compare and contrast the unlearning of Founder-CEOs from developed and developing countries to understand the differences in the challenges they experience.

7.9 Concluding Remarks

Small businesses in developing countries contribute significantly to the economic growth of a country. However, their survival rates are poor. This study contributes to the literature through empirical research, which confirms that unlearning is a critical competence for Founder-CEOs as it allows them to let go of their unfavourable attachments which limit their choices and constrain their decision-making ability. In this way unlearning in the Founder will lead to their personal development and subsequently will improve the stability, flexibility and adaptability that small businesses typically struggle with.

This study contributes the model for the Founder-CEO Unlearning Stages for Business Growth to literature, which is as useful for Founder-CEOs who are embarking on or are currently in new entrepreneurial business ventures. The model offers a means of early identification of unfavourable attachments that are preventing the Founder from proactively responding to changes in the complex and turbulent environments in which they operate.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Cover Letter

Gordon Institute of Business Science

University of Pretoria

DD-MM-YYYY

Mr/Mrs/Miss Participant

Johannesburg

RE: MBA Research Project – The Unlearning Process in Founder CEO's

Dear Sir/Mrs/Miss

My name is Virosha Singh. I am a registered student at the Gordon Institute of Business Science and I am conducting an MBA research project under the supervision of Professor Margie Sutherland. The purpose of the research project is to gain a better understanding of how Founder-CEOs of start-ups can grow their businesses by unlearning unfavourable knowledge structures, behaviours, attitudes and skills that impede change and limit the future survival of the business. Unlearning refers to the intentional discarding of old knowledge and practices to make way for new ones.

I would like to humbly request an interview with you to discuss your experiences whilst letting go of your experience-based attachments during the unlearning process. I believe that you will be able to provide me with great insights from your experiences due to the success of your business during your tenure as the owner-manager of the business which will add tremendous value to my research.

During the interview I will present a theoretical background on the topic. A model for Unlearning will be used during the interview to illustrate the basic steps of the Unlearning process. The information gained from the interview will be confidential and the results and information will be aggregated.

The content of the interview will be solely for use in my research project. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. The interview will take approximately one hour to complete. The date and time of the interview will be set at your earliest convenience.

I hope you will favourably consider my request. Your help and assistance will be greatly appreciated.

Warm Regards,

Virosha Singh

Appendix 2: Consent Form

Gordon Institute of Business Science

University of Pretoria

Dear Participant,

I am conducting research to gain a better understanding of how Founder-CEOs of start-ups can grow their businesses by unlearning unfavourable knowledge structures, behaviours, attitudes and skills that can impede change and limit the future survival of the business. Our interview is expected to take approximately one hour and will help us understand the lived experiences of Founder-CEOs whilst releasing their past attachments through the unlearning process.

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. Of course, all data will be reported anonymously. If you have any concerns, please contact me or my supervisor. Our details are provided below:

Researcher: Virosha Singh

Email: 15391303@mygibs.co.za

Phone: 083 270 5001

Supervisor: Professor Margie Sutherland

Email: sutherlandm@gibs.co.za

Phone: 011 771 4000

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

Date: _____

Participant Number: _____

Introduction and Background Information

- Welcome
- Discuss confidentiality of the interview and request permission to record the interview
- State the purpose of the Research which is to understand what Founder CEO's need to unlearn as they grow their businesses and the process of unlearning that they go through
- Explain the structure of the Interview

Theoretical Discussion

Explain the theoretical concept of Unlearning and the Process of unlearning

Pre-qualifying Criteria

What is your background? _____

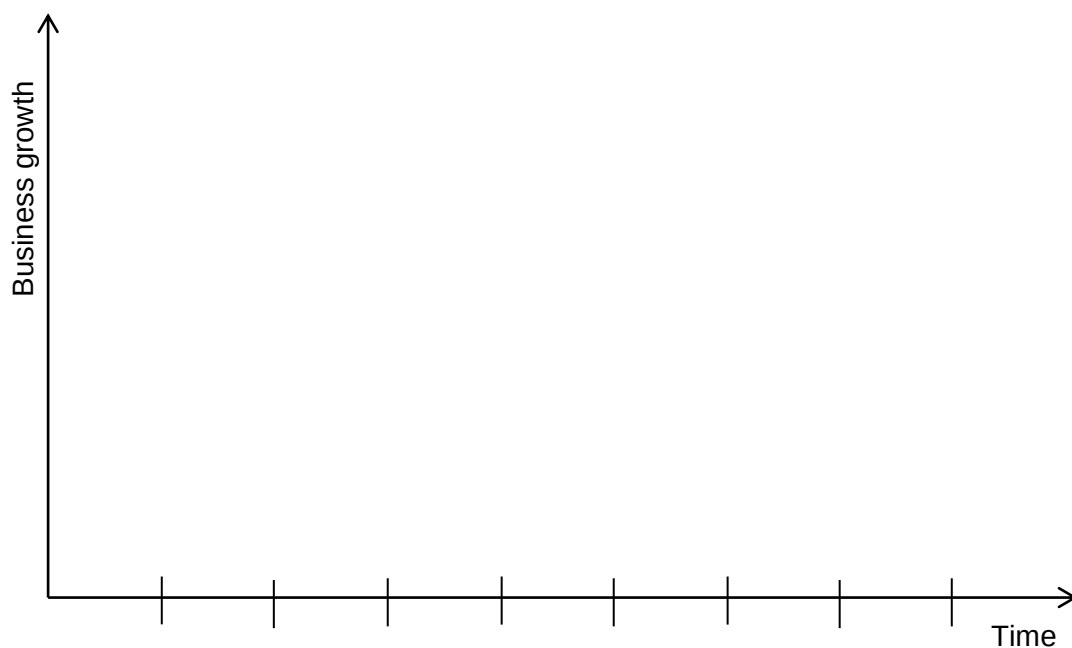
Did you have any qualifications before starting your business? _____

How old is your business? _____

How many employees do you have? _____

Business Timeline

Ask the participant to jot down the timeline of their business on the graph below.



Research Questions:

What are the major things that you had to unlearn or let go of whilst growing your business – 2 or 3 unlearning's: (Plot all unlearning's on the timeline)

Unlearning 1	Unlearning 2	Unlearning 3
Q1: What was the <u>significance</u> of this unlearning?		
Q2: <u>How</u> did you become <u>attached</u> to this way of doing things?		
Q3: Explain the <u>event/circumstances</u> that <u>led</u> up to the unlearning?		

Q4: What were the <u>emotions</u> you experienced when you realised you had <u>to start unlearning and letting go</u>?		
Q5: What <u>actions</u> did you take to <u>start</u> the unlearning process and let go of your attachments?		
Q6: Was the unlearning <u>self-initiated or forced</u>?		
Q7: Was there a particular <u>breaking point</u> that persuaded you to let go and unlearn? If so, what was it?		

Q8: What <u>actions</u> did you take to <u>continue</u> the unlearning process and let go of your attachments?		
Q9: What made it <u>difficult to release</u> this this way of doing things?		
Q10: What was the <u>impact</u> of the unlearning on you both <u>personally</u> and <u>emotionally</u> after you had let go of the attachment?		
Q11: Did the unlearning lead to any <u>improvements</u> in your business?		

Q12: What was the <u>effect</u> of the unlearning on the <u>growth</u> of the business?		
Q13: Looking back, what was the <u>overall experience</u> of unlearning?		
Q14: Rate the impact on a five point scale (1=minimum, 3=intense impact, 5=extreme impact)		

Closing

- Reflect on the unlearning process and the experiences of the participant

- Final Comments

- Is there any other information you can share in the form of reports or documentation that can add value to this study?

- Do you have any questions?

- Do you know of anyone else who you could recommend as a participant in this study?

- Thank participant for their time and for contributing in this study!

Appendix 4: Ethical Clearance

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

22 June 2017

Virosha Singh

Dear Virosha Singh,

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Kind Regards

GIBS MBA Research Ethical Clearance Committee

Gordon Institute of Business Science
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Research question 2			
Interview question 4	Interview question 5	Interview question 6	Interview question 7
Growth	Easy, not difficult	Risk management	Reactive
Partnerships	Difficult at first	Perspective	Ext. Environment
Founder limitations	Negative emotion	Delegation	Time constraints
Brand value	Positive emotions	Partnerships	Threat to business
Downsizing/acquisition	Ego is tarnished	Brand/credibility	Self-driven
Gradual process	Surprised/surprised	Diversification	Intuition
Performance	Questioned himself	Self-interrogation	Change
Turnover	Emotions	Innovation	Responsibility
Lack of growth	Uncertainty	Change	No alternative
Fresh perspective	Lose connection	Employee	Learning process
Views challenged	Feeling stuck	Alignment	Leadership
Ext. Environment	Social contribution	Trends	Balance
Delegation	Role model	Acquiring resources	Influence of others
Not profitable	Realisations	Goal-setting	
Investment in people	Personal circumstances	Remuneration	
Role of leadership	Delayed gratification	Recruitment	
New knowledge	Bigger picture	Planning	
Demands increases	Nervous break down	Performance measurement	
Conflict	Time consuming	Org structure	
Cultural evolution	Inadequate	Strategy	
Business plan	Risk averse	Learning behaviours	
Missed opportunities	Begging for money	R &d	
Competition	Building confidence	Knowledge	
Social issues	Patience with employees	Atmosphere	
Customer demands	Credibility	Differentiation	
Rejection	New reality	Business model	
Neglecting family	High achiever	Decision-making	
Textbook principles		Internal assessment	
Assumptions wrong		Founder dev.	
Org structure		Setting standards	
Employee utilisation		Marketing	
Financial resources		Management style	
Internal focus		Work ethic	
Lack of awareness		Social issues	
Losing control		Attitude	
Org personality fit		Culture and values	
		Sustainability	
		Locus of control	

Research question 3		
Interview question 8	Interview question 9	Interview question 10
No breaking point	Managing clients	Difficult
Gradual process	Leadership style	Not difficult
Constant process	Trust	Got easier
Constantly learning process	Social contribution	Took time
Process	Alignment	Necessary for growth
Constant improvement	Ambidexterity	Fear of failure
Poor execution	Perseverance/motivation	Fear of unknown
Missed opportunity	Maintaining relationships	Uncertainty
Business decline	Patience	Working with people
	Behaviours	Persuade and influence others
Time constraints	Learning	Opinions and perspectives
Growth	Peer review	Control and power
Family crisis	Identity	Traditional views
Personal finances	Focus	Mental block
Nervous break down	Adaptation	Balancing act
Pressure limitations	Experience	Competing demands/roles
Rejection	Communication	Challenging views
Realisation		
Demotion	Staying up to date with changes	Time constraints
Testing	Improving execution ability	Autonomy
Strategizing	Institutions	Growing pains
Introspection	Approach	Risk
Behavioural patterns	Simplicity	Work ethic
Turnaround the business	Leverage strengths	Exciting
	Enhancing businesses reputation	
Conflict with client	Maintain composure	Aha moment
Values compromised	Limitations	Motivation
Change in mind-set	Initiatives and clubs	Struggled
Securing business	Financial prudence	Responsibility
	Strategic thinking	Lacking capability
		Misalignment
		Employee attrition
		Delayed gratification
		Past success
		Relationships
		Assimilate culture
		Decision-making
		Acceptance
		Compliance
		Individuals
		Other considerations
		Threats competition

Research question 4		
Interview question 11	Interview question 12 &13	Interview question 14
Positive impact	Growth/expansion	Right thing to do
Growth	Long-term improvements	Strong leader
Ego	Share the business	Positive role mode
Flexibility	Failure is ok	Challenging
Quality standards	Decision-making	Learning experience
Work ethic	Positive reaction	Necessary
Better at business	Turned around	Bad practises
Learning exercise	Staff turnover	Positive experience
Power	Attract talent	Business approach
Attached to people	Best practises	Growth
Stimulation and challenge	Formal education	Morale
Never complacent	Volumes	Benefits
Change acceptance	Awards	Deliberate experience
Delegate	Labels	Important for change
Trust	Established the business	Learning
Financially secure	Trends	Evolution
Responsibility	Constant learning	
Motivation	Evolution	
Failure is ok	Revenue	
Success	Remuneration	
Authenticity	Competition	
Open-mindedness	Diversity	
Understand emotions	Credibility	
Stop to think	Economy	
Behaviour	Turnover	
Honesty	Vision	
Treatment of employees	Sustainably profitable	
Higher purpose	Job creation	
Creativity	Competitive advantage	
Sacrifices	Different approaches	
Empowerment	Look and feel	
Personal life	Important vs. Urgent	
Simplicity	Client facing	
Mentor	Customer service	
Future orientated	Credit/debt	
Able to do more	Constantly evolving	
Team work	Achievement	
Quality of life	Humility	
Survived -endurance	Ethics	
Passion	Resources	
Customer service	Personalized service	
Professionalism	New areas	
Business knowledge	Industry norms	
Pride	Constant improvement	
Explore and exploit	Revenue	
Education	Relationships	
Superficial attachments	Speed to market	