

**Understanding the Entrepreneurial Mindset: How Key Motivational Factors  
can impact an individual's Behavioural Dimensions in decision making  
through a South African context.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The concept of entrepreneurship is regarded as significant driver for economic growth; however, within the entrepreneurial mindset, it was determined that the behavioural dimensions of decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability are under-researched. This study aimed to address this gap by examining how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation shape these behavioural mechanisms, to understand how behaviour is influenced among first-generation South African entrepreneurs. The Self-Determination Theory was used as an explanatory lens to examine how the psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness influence the entrepreneurial mindset and motivation through the different behaviour dimensions.

Through an exploratory qualitative research design, the study conducted semi-structured interviews and thematic narrative analysis with Gauteng-based entrepreneurs.

The findings revealed that motivation is a progressive force of internalisation, through which intention is transformed into sustained action. The study determined that the psychological needs operate interdependently, influencing motivation by either strengthening or weakening it, depending on the entrepreneur's contextual conditions.

The study contributes theoretically by positioning the Self-Determined Theory as an integrated behavioural framework, which demonstrates how motivation is influenced and transformed into action. The study also provided practical insights into strategies to encourage the strengthening of an entrepreneur's motivation over time.

## **KEYWORDS**

- Entrepreneurial Mindset
- Self-Determination Theory
- Behavioural dimensions
- Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this research project is my own work. I submit this research project in partial fulfilment of the requirements and credits necessary for the degree of Master of Business Administration at Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. This is the first submission of this research project and has not been submitted before for a degree or assignment through any other University. I also declare that the appropriate ethical clearance and authorisation were obtained, and consent was given to carry out this research.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

### **1.1. Introduction**

There is broad recognition that entrepreneurship has the potential to contribute to economic development and growth in many countries that are confronted with increasing levels of unemployment due to a combination of socio-economic and other systemic challenges (Kim et al., 2022; Tahir & Burki, 2023). This expectation and aspiration also apply to the South African context, despite the reported low levels of entrepreneurial activity and high failure rate of small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) in South Africa (Meyer et al., 2024; Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). South Africa's poor performance in these areas is often attributed to external factors such as limited access to funding, onerous regulatory systems and infrastructure constraints, as well as internal factors related to a lack of functional skills among entrepreneurs to operationalise businesses (Basson & Omoruyi, 2025; Fatoki, 2014; Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). However, many of the internal factors that contribute to entrepreneurial failure or success tend to focus on surface-level elements and generalised desired traits and qualities instead of exploring the underlying drivers of entrepreneurial mindset and behaviour (Celestin & Vanitha, 2018; Lynch & Corbett, 2021, 2018; Pidduck et al., 2021).

The study, therefore, addresses the academic problem of the absence of clear mechanisms explaining how motivation shapes and influences behaviour that leads to action. It will explore how intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors shape the behavioural dimensions of the entrepreneurial mindset (EM) within the South African context. Instead of enquiring whether motivation has an influence on entrepreneurship, this study asks how motivational forces shape behaviour, as this is an under-theorised element within literature (Cui & Bell, 2022; Fayolle & Liñán, 2014; Sun et al., 2023)

While studies on EM have alluded to multiple attributes and qualities, a common definition for the construct remains elusive. Daspit et al. (2021) provided an integrated definition of EM "as a cognitive perspective that enables an individual to create value by recognising and acting on opportunities, making decisions with limited information, and remaining adaptable and resilient in conditions that are often uncertain and complex." Extant literature categorises EM into different interrelated aspects and dimensions (Cui & Bell, 2022; Lynch & Corbett, 2021; Pidduck et al.,

2021). However, this study adopts Kuratko et al.'s (2020) model, which categorises EM into three aspects, because it provides a useful framework to understand the interrelated cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions of entrepreneurship.

Although cognitive and emotional aspects of EM have been explored extensively, the behavioural dimensions that comprise decision-making, risk-taking, and adaptability have received less focus, even though they play an important role in entrepreneurial success or failure by translating entrepreneurial motivation and intention into action (Corbett, 2021; Cui & Bell, 2022; Fayolle & Liñán, 2014; Kuratko et al., 2020; Kwapisz et al., 2021; Lynch & Corbett, 2021; Pidduck et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2023). Accordingly, this study focuses on the behavioural aspect of both opportunity and survival-driven first-generation entrepreneurs who navigated various socio-economic and personal challenges in establishing successful, viable and sustainable businesses. The study thereby defines a successful and sustainable business as a business that has been operational and profitable for a minimum period of five years.

To frame the analysis, the study draws on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to examine how internal and external motivational factors influence Entrepreneurial Behaviour (EB) within the EM. SDT has been widely theorised as a foundation framework for understanding motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1980).

The core theoretical problem this study addresses is the absence of an explanation of how the internalisation mechanism of motivation transforms intention into behavioural action (Shir et al., 2019). Existing literature has identified motivation as a key element but has not explained the mechanism through which motivation transitions into sustainable EB (Cui & Bell, 2022), leaving a theoretical gap within the behavioural dimension of the EM.

In the following sections of this chapter, the contextual background and behavioural dimensions of entrepreneurship are elaborated as a basis to frame the problem statement, purpose and objectives of the study.

## **1.2. Contextual background: South Africa's economic challenges and the role of entrepreneurship**

The slow growth of the economy, persistently low levels of entrepreneurial activity, and a high percentage of SMME failure in South Africa reflect the presence of complex systemic challenges that influence both internal and external behavioural elements (Bowmaker-Falconer & Meyer, 2022). This prolonged economic crisis

within South Africa has led to a rising rate of unemployment, inequality and stagnant or declining economic growth (Dybczak & Velculescu, 2025). These conditions are evident in South Africa's statistics, resulting in the highest unemployment rate in the world (Trading Economics, 2023). A snowballing result of the economic crisis is the high rate of SMME failure and increased fear to start a business (Meyer et al., 2024; Mhlongo & Daya 2023).

Despite the results of the economic performance, recent literature reiterates and emphasises the vital role that entrepreneurship plays in impacting economic growth and development (Kim et al., 2022; Tahir & Burki, 2023). Contrary to this, focus has been on increasing start-up numbers rather than deepening the understanding of how motivational factors translate into sustained EB. Thereby, reinforcing the importance of addressing broader external economic pressures while neglecting the role of EB. This study fills this gap by evaluating how the behavioural dimensions of the EM can provide insights into long-term business sustainability.

Existing economic conditions make employment creation through formal and traditional sectors of the economy highly unlikely. Statistics South Africa reported that the official overall unemployment rate for Q2 of 2025 increased by 0,3% to 33.2% and the expanded unemployment rate remained at 42.9% (StatsSA, 2025). Similarly, official youth unemployment results for Q2 of 2025 stood at 46.1% (StatsSA, 2025). A compounding challenge to the limited number of jobs during these difficult economic times is job insecurity resulting from an increased rate of retrenchments, bankruptcy and business closures (Rico & Puig, 2021). These factors, and the statistics, allude to the importance of finding alternative solutions to grow the economy and create more jobs. These factors indicate that entrepreneurship is a necessity to address unemployment; however, the issue is that this does not guarantee sustainable practices.

A behaviour-driven understanding of EM is important for South Africa because the country's necessity for entrepreneurs and job creation exposes a critical limitation of converting behavioural intention to sustained action. In this context, a behavioural entrepreneurial mindset serves as a mediator that transforms motivation into behaviour by enabling individuals to become entrepreneurs as they transition from intention to action (Cui & Bell, 2022). However, motivation fails to be internalised into consistent, sustained behaviour patterns, resulting in many businesses failing despite an entrepreneur's initial motivation. The connection between the

internalisation of motivation and macro-economic performance highlights the theoretical problem this study addresses.

According to Iwu and Opute (2019), one of the options that has become more enticing to unemployed individuals is to establish start-up ventures and businesses. The study, which was qualitative in nature, found that individuals in survivalist circumstances often pursue start-up ventures to generate income and provide for their families instead of pursuing business based on opportunity or innovation. Survivalist entrepreneurs emerge due to their survivalist instincts as compared to opportunity-driven entrepreneurs and ventures (Iwu & Opute, 2019). Thus, as will be elaborated in Chapter 2 below, the motivation and behavioural drivers for survivalist entrepreneurs may be different from those of opportunity-driven entrepreneurs at times. Without relevant knowledge, skills and resources, survival-driven entrepreneurship can lead to an increase in the number of business failures. Therefore, there is a need to understand how internal and external motivational drivers affect and shape the mindset and behaviour of first-generation survivalist and opportunity-driven entrepreneurs in South Africa. The theoretical scope of the study focuses on deepening this understanding by linking different motivational factors to behavioural expression.

The focus of this study is significant since entrepreneurship is recognised as a crucial element of economic development due to its ability to promote innovation, employment, and growth opportunities (Cui & Bell, 2022; Jemal, 2021). Even though entrepreneurship is considered a pivotal part of the economy, South African businesses face a 70-80% start-up failure rate within the initial five years (Adonis, 2022; Meyer et al., 2024; Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). The statistics demonstrate a behavioural gap that could be improved by understanding the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors on EM. This exploration builds on the understanding of how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors influence the EM, to provide insight into the success and sustainability (or failure) of entrepreneurial businesses.

As discussed above, the South African context is dominated by necessity-driven rather than opportunity-based entrepreneur. This pushes individuals into entrepreneurship before their behavioural capabilities are properly developed, resulting in their motivation not to develop and evolve into sustainable behaviour (Kwapisz et al., 2021; Müller et al., 2022). This means that motivation through

necessity alone does not guarantee sustainability, as it requires the motivation to be internalised and expressed as behaviour. This thereby reinforces the need to investigate how motivation influences the behavioural mechanisms that convert into entrepreneurial action for long-term sustainability.

### **1.3. Behavioural dimensions in entrepreneurship**

During periods of economic uncertainty, many individuals prefer to adopt a conservative approach to ensure longevity and sustainability and to maintain their livelihood (Roth & Wohlfart, 2020). However, during such times, motivation is regarded as a key influence on an individual's EM and their willingness to pursue venture creation (Debrulle et al., 2020). This relationship forms the rationale for this study, as existing literature has demonstrated that motivation is a key driver behind EB and action. This is particularly important to the South African context, where many people pursue entrepreneurship for survival reasons due to dire economic challenges rather than for traditional opportunity-driven reasons or basic desire.

The behavioural aspect of EM, as defined by the interrelated behavioural dimensions of decision-making, adaptability and risk-taking, is a key construct of focus as an individual's behaviour is a determinant of a business's success or failure (Neumann, 2020). Since entrepreneurship is an important function to grow the economy during an economic crisis, entrepreneurs must understand how both content and internal behavioural patterns jointly influence the success or failure of start-up ventures.

The literature highlights the role of entrepreneurship in addressing socio-economic challenges because of its role in employment generation (Cui & Bell, 2022; Jemal, 2021, Msimango-Galawe & Hlatshwayo, 2021). According to available literature, (Ordeñana et al., 2024; Tahir & Burki, 2023), an economy will thrive from entrepreneurship if start-up businesses are successful. Maritz et al. (2020) describe entrepreneurship as a stepping stone for growing a country's economy, while Stoica et al. (2020) assert that entrepreneurship (inclusive of early-stage, opportunity-driven and necessity-driven) is a significant contributor to economic growth in transition and innovation-driven countries, albeit the contributions vary. While both assertions are sound and complementary, they focus on broader contextual factors at a macro-level but do not elaborate on the individual behaviour mechanisms that lead to entrepreneurial success, particularly the influence of internal and external motivation on EB, decisions and risks. Nonetheless, Stoica et al.'s (2020) perspective is more holistic and encouraging because it recognises the importance of different types of

venture start-ups but overlooks the risks and complexities of venture creation that contribute to the success or failure of start-ups.

A focus on high-level policy issues ignores the fact that entrepreneurship should not be defined only as business start-ups and the creation and distribution of products or services. It is a calculated approach to meet customers' needs in a manner that will enable a business to grow, thrive and remain sustainable when environmental conditions change (Neumann, 2020). The act of starting a business alone, as noted by Neumann (2020), is not a significant contributor to economic growth because the quality of the venture creation needs to be carefully overseen and managed, as it could lead to failure. Similarly, Msimango-Galawe and Hlatshwayo (2021) argue that many start-up businesses fail because some individuals are not fully equipped to understand the complexities behind starting and operating a business.

These insights highlight that entrepreneurial success is shaped not only by contextual factors but also by the behavioural dimensions of EM as these dimensions are grounded in their motivational drivers (Cui & Bell, 2022; Lanivich et al., 2021). Without understanding how motivation translates into behavioural intent and sustained action, entrepreneurs can make misaligned decisions that may result in the failure of their businesses. These insights suggest that entrepreneurs' behaviour dimensions are key and central points to determining if businesses succeed or fail during their start-up years and subsequent growth periods.

The need to understand the impact of entrepreneurial context, decisions and behaviours demonstrates the role of EM in entrepreneurship. For this reason, research on EM has been increasing; however, the research has focused predominantly on the emotional and cognitive aspects, thus resulting in the behavioural aspect that is critical to entrepreneurial activity being under-researched (Cui & Bell, 2022). The gap created by a lack of research has contributed to a lack of understanding of how motivation drives EB. This is particularly important, especially in South Africa, due to its high unemployment and the need to increase businesses and job creation to strengthen long-term growth.

To address this gap, the study employs SDT, which conceptualises motivation through the psychological needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness. SDT is well-suited as it explains how motivation is internalised and transformed into behaviour through the different psychological needs (Lanivich et al., 2021;

Samuelsson & Witell, 2022; Shir et al., 2019). The application and relevance of SDT in entrepreneurial research is supported by several authors because it provides a framework to contextualise how mind-set, motivation and behaviour link to influence entrepreneurial outcomes. The use of SDT in this study enabled a deeper understanding of how motivational factors influenced the behavioural dimensions of necessity or opportunity-driven first-generation South African entrepreneurs. The results from the study will thus make a theoretical and practical contribution to this underexplored area of research within the South African context.

#### **1.4. Research problem**

Since entrepreneurship is a potential economic contributor, countries should aim to improve the success rate of start-up ventures. However, South Africa is an example where the opposite can be seen, with a failure rate that is higher than the success rate (Msimango-Galawe & Hlatshwayo, 2021). This is counterproductive as, instead of strengthening the economy, entrepreneurship can deepen economic distress on individuals and further reinforce the unemployment rate due to loss of resources invested in failed start-ups.

A contributing factor to start-up failures is attributed to inadequate research and understanding of how an individual's behaviour within entrepreneurship is influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The behavioural aspect of EM, which refers to the entrepreneurs' decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability behaviours or actions, is influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Derfler-Rozin & Pitesa, 2020). However, there is limited research on the behavioural aspect of EM as well as on how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation contribute to EM. The lack of research in these areas undermines the development of theoretical and practical frameworks to enhance knowledge on how entrepreneurs make decisions, deal with risks and challenges and adapt to the economic challenges they are faced with. At the operational level of a business, this weakness contributes further towards poor decision-making, risk-taking and adaptation by entrepreneurs (Cui & Bell, 2022).

Addressing this research gap is essential, especially in South Africa, where there is complex interplay of low economic growth and high unemployment and the undeniable need to increase businesses, job creation and the success rate of necessity-driven entrepreneurs who are confronted with several challenges and uncertainty during the starting-up phases of their businesses. Similarly, Müller et al. (2022) assert that addressing these gaps can strengthen entrepreneurs' ability to

recognise and pursue opportunities whilst also taking informed and calculated risks, which would result in a higher chance for entrepreneurial success. The observations made by these authors emphasise the need for a holistic and integrated approach to entrepreneurship education and the development of the behavioural dimensions of EM.

The research conducted by Zemlyak et al. (2022) confirms that the role of education within entrepreneurship reinforces the need to equip entrepreneurs with insights into how behaviour and motivation can enhance their ability to create successful and sustainable businesses. This assertion underlines the need to address the research gap in academic scholarship and the limited understanding of how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation shape the behavioural dimensions of EM.

To address the identified research gap, the study uses SDT, whose elements include competence, autonomy and relatedness, to determine how internal and external motivational factors influence the behavioural dimensions of EM. The application and relevance of SDT in entrepreneurial research is supported by several authors because it provides a framework to contextualise the mind-set, motivation and behaviour of entrepreneurs (Lanivich et al., 2021; Samuelsson & Witell, 2022; Shir et al., 2019). The use of SDT enabled a deeper understanding of how motivational factors influenced the behavioural dimensions of necessity or opportunity-driven first-generation South African entrepreneurs. The gap, therefore, lies in the behavioural translation mechanism that takes motivation from intention to action. This underexplored translation is the core problem which this study seeks to investigate, as the results from the study will make a theoretical and practical contribution to this underexplored area of research within the South African context.

The business rationale for this study is that entrepreneurship is central to the economic recovery of South Africa, yet the high SMME failure rates demonstrate a gap between Entrepreneurial Intention (EI) and sustained performance (Meyer et al., 2024; Mhlongo & Daya, 2023). Building on the understanding of these behavioural dimensions and how they influence the EM can provide guidance for incubators, training and research, thereby strengthening the potential success and long-term sustainability of businesses.

### **1.5. Research purpose and objectives**

From the discussion on the unresolved theoretical gap, the purpose of this research is to explain how intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors are internalised and how motivation influences the behavioural dimensions of the EM, specifically focusing on first-generation South African entrepreneurs who, despite being confronted by personal and economic challenges, have created sustainable businesses.

The influence of motivational factors on decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability, which are the main behavioural dimensions of EM that is explored in this study because these behavioural dimensions are under-researched, and yet they have a major influence on the success or failure of EB and activity.

The scope of the study focuses on the behavioural dimensions of the EM, while the SDT framework is applied as an explanatory mechanism to clarify how motivation is internalised. The study contributes to the theoretical development of the behavioural dimensions of EM by extending the concept of how motivation is internalised among first-generation South African entrepreneurs into behaviours through the application of the SDT framework.

To address the research purpose, the following were the objectives of the study:

- (a) To investigate the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors on the behavioural dimensions of EM among first-generation South African entrepreneurs.
- (b) To determine the conditions under which internal and external motivational pathways either strengthen or weaken motivation.
- (c) To identify what mechanisms successful first-generation entrepreneurs relied on to sustain their business motivation and mitigate challenges over time.

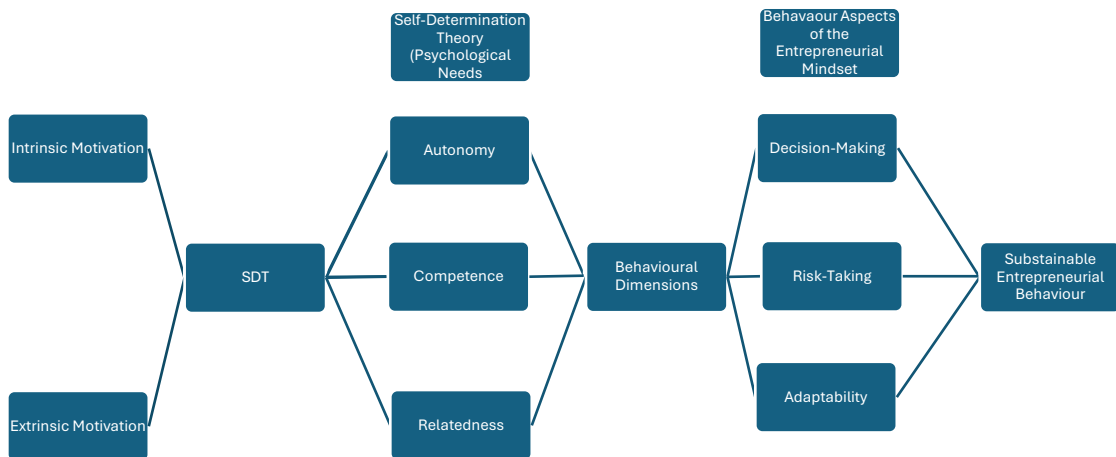
The first research question forms the major crux of this study because it is directly related to the research purpose. The second and third objectives build on the first objective by examining how motivation can be sustained and reinforced for the long term. To ensure a holistic understanding of how motivational factors influence the behavioural dimensions of EM, it was necessary to examine the conditions that strengthen or weaken motivation and the resulting behavioural action.

As stated by Antonioli et al. (2016), understanding the intentions, motivational drivers and behaviours of entrepreneurs is fundamental as it helps to foretell the

entrepreneurial path based on the decisions taken. Understanding the conditions is critical for economies with high unemployment levels, such as South Africa, where entrepreneurship is key in growing the economy and employment creation.

The research purpose and objectives provided the foundation for the overview and conceptual framework for the study, which is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study



### 1.6. Theoretical and practical contributions

This study contributes to EM theory by clarifying how motivation is internalised and converted into behaviour by using the SDT model as an explanatory mechanism. By explicitly positioning behavioural dimensions of EM as the theoretical anchor and SDT as the mechanism that enables the process through which intention becomes action, the study extends the underdeveloped area of behavioural internalisation. Without this clarification, the behavioural dimensions of EM remain theoretically incomplete in explaining how and why some entrepreneurs enable action that leads to sustainable behaviour.

In response to the research gap identified in the available EM literature, the study offers a theoretical and practical contribution in understanding the behavioural dimensions of EM amongst first-generation South African entrepreneurs who succeeded in establishing viable and sustainable businesses. The study's theoretical contribution is two-fold. The first contribution relates to knowledge creation on the

factors that drive decision-making, risk-taking, and adaptability and the second contribution centres around the use of narratives to generate knowledge about the influence of internal and external motivation factors on the EB aspect of EM in the challenging South African context. Fayolle and Liñán (2014) attest to the role of narratives in strengthening the development and application of knowledge on the influence of the behavioural dimensions of EM through a refined curriculum for entrepreneurship education. There is also recognition that narratives and narrative analysis about successes, hardship and failure are critical sources of knowledge for theory building and empirical analysis (Audretsch & Lehmann, 2023; Costa et al., 2023; Larty & Hamilton, 2011). This study moves beyond existing literature by addressing how motivational factors translate into EB as identified in the problem statement.

The study's practical contribution relates to the advancement of personal knowledge through self-directed learning by individuals and curriculum development for entrepreneurial education and training by academic, business schools and other institutions.

The use of SDT to understand the behavioural dimensions of EM has the potential to enhance an entrepreneur's ability to create a competitive advantage through identifying and exploiting new opportunities in an uncertain business environment (Jemal, 2021). This is important because research has confirmed that entrepreneurial education contributes to business success (Dong & Bao, 2024; Lynch & Corbett, 2021; Zemlyak et al., 2022). In demonstrating how the motivational drivers are internalised and shaped into behaviour through the psychological needs, the study provides practical insights into how entrepreneurs sustain their ventures while others fail. Therefore, the study creates an opportunity to extract lessons from successful first-generation South African entrepreneurs that can be used to equip aspiring or emerging entrepreneurs to navigate the entrepreneurial landscape through sound decisions, calculated risks and measured adaptability. This contribution is supported by the importance of having a growth mindset and developing attributes and skills such as motivation, risk-taking and creativity. These behavioural qualities were emphasised in an exploratory study that was conducted by Neneh (2012) to understand the level of entrepreneurial mindset in small and medium enterprises in South Africa. This study extends this work through the explanation of how these behaviours are driven by motivation.

## **1.7. Conclusion**

This chapter contextualised the study by highlighting South Africa's low economic growth, high and increasing rates of unemployment, as well as the high level of business failures within the first few years, which is contrary to the perceived role of entrepreneurship in economic growth and employment creation. An overview of the key aspects of EM was highlighted, and the research gap and problem regarding the role of the behavioural dimensions of EM in entrepreneurial success and the influence of internal and external motivation factors on EB. The chapter also introduced SDT as a theoretical lens through which the study investigates how motivation shapes and drives the behavioural dimensions of an entrepreneur.

In Chapter 2 below, the theoretical framework for the study is developed further through an in-depth review of extant literature on EM, with specific emphasis on the behavioural dimension of EM.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The chapter reviews literature to explore how intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors shape the behavioural dimension of EM for first-generation entrepreneurs in the South African context. Prior research has examined the influence of EM on the success or failure of start-up businesses; however, focus has been on the cognitive and emotional dimensions, while the behavioural dimension is still under-researched (Cui & Bell, 2022; Fayolle & Liñán, 2014). This represents a key theoretical gap because behavioural transition (the point at which intention converts into action) remains insufficiently explained (Fayolle & Liñán, 2014; Sun et al., 2023).

Accordingly, this chapter critically reviews existing literature in the field of EM, with specific emphasis on an entrepreneur's behavioural dimensions: decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability, which are the action-oriented factors associated with the EM (Cui & Bell, 2022; Kuratko et al., 2020; Lynch & Corbett, 2021). This explores how motivational forces transition from intention to EB and how this shapes the behavioural dimensions of EM. This allows the study to address the theoretical mechanisms that link motivation, behaviour, and sustained entrepreneurial action.

By clarifying why the behavioural dimension is central to the EM and how it is positioned within existing research, the study provides a bridge in understanding the transition from intent to behaviour. It also evaluates how IM and EXM as conceptualised in SDT, and how they influence behavioural internalisation.

### **2.2. Entrepreneurship and the economy**

Entrepreneurship is widely regarded as a significant contributor to economic growth in advanced, emerging and developing economies (GEM, 2023; Kim et al., 2022; Tahir & Burki, 2023), of which South Africa forms part of the emerging economies. However, the creation of more businesses does not explain how entrepreneurial activity is sustained over time, because what sustains entrepreneurial activity is the behavioural mechanisms that drive motivation and determination beyond the start-up phase into persistent action (Karami et al., 2024). According to the 2023 Global Entrepreneurship Report (GEM, 2023), entrepreneurial activity is not just important to the people who start and operate businesses; it is also a critical component of economic development, which explains why the key policy objective in most economies is to increase entrepreneurial activity. However, increasing the number of

start-ups does not automatically translate into sustainable business, as reflected by the high failure rate within South Africa (Msimango-Galawe & Hlatshwayo, 2021).

This demonstrates that a key challenge and gap in the literature is that focus should not only be on creating new businesses but the continuation of businesses by focusing on the behavioural mechanisms that convert motivation into action (Fayolle & Liñán, 2014; Sun et al., 2023). This highlights that research has been focused on outcomes within entrepreneurship, but has not focused on the internal processes for sustaining them. This lack of understanding of how motivation is internalised into behaviour is the theoretical gap this study addresses as the missing mechanism within entrepreneurial research.

Scholars have debated the concept and definition of an entrepreneur and what entrepreneurship is for several years, thus resulting in the adoption of different but complementary definitions by different authors and practitioners. Jemal (2021) defines entrepreneurs as individuals or a group of individuals with the desire to open a business based on an opportunity or discovery, all whilst weighing up the risks associated with this journey. A complementary definition is provided by Debrulle et al. (2020), who say that an entrepreneur is an individual with the ability to act when an opportunity is available, instead of leaving it in the ideation stage. Jemal's (2021) definition emphasises the individual's desire to act on an opportunity that has been discovered, while Debrulle et al. (2020) focus on an individual's ability to take the step into business creation. Both definitions explain important aspects of entrepreneurship as the act of starting a business without accounting for the behavioural mechanisms that sustain action over time.

To expand on the earlier critique, reference is made to Zemlyak et al. (2022), who argue that entrepreneurship should not be defined and characterised based only on the action related to starting a business, but also in relation to the creation of something of value for a customer base. This argument is reinforced by Karami et al. (2024), whose meta-analysis study determined that entrepreneurs who focus on value creation have a significantly better chance of being sustainable; hence, value creation is not an optional element for an entrepreneur, but a defining criterion for entrepreneurial success. Karami et al.'s (2024) meta-analysis challenges perspectives by Debrulle et al. (2020) and Jemal (2021), by positioning value creation as a non-negotiable element of entrepreneurship in order to achieve and maintain a

sustainable business in the long term. Value creation is an important element, but it is still viewed as an outcome rather than an explanation for how behavioural mechanisms make sustained value creation possible (Karami et al., 2024). Thus, showing what literature is missing is not whether entrepreneurs can create value, but how behavioural focus enables sustained value creation over the long term (Cui & Bell, 2022).

From a practical viewpoint, anyone can start a business venture; however, there is a reason why many businesses do not survive the start-up stage, like in South Africa (Msimango-Galawe & Hlatshwayo, 2021). (GEM, 2023) reports South Africa has a high start-up rate; however, many businesses fail. This shows that the challenge is not entrepreneurial entry, but the behaviour and persistence to sustain it. The (GEM, 2023) report examined potential external factors that enhance or hinder entrepreneurial activity, including policy and regulatory frameworks, ease of starting a business, access to funding and entrepreneurial education. However, the report does not justify the reason why some entrepreneurs persist while others fail under the same pressures. Ouni and Boujelbene (2023) and Zemlyak et al. (2022) align with this study by demonstrating that the behavioural and motivational dimensions shape sustainability. This shows that focus should be on the entrepreneur's behavioural capacity to act within their environment, as this determines persistence. By enhancing an individual's behaviour, it reinforces the view that sustained entrepreneurship is influenced by one's internalised motivation and adaptive behaviour.

Emerging perspectives from scholars show that the external environment alone does not determine persistence, but the behavioural response completed by the entrepreneur towards the context (Ouni & Boujelbene, 2023; Zemlyak et al., 2022). However, the identified gap highlights the need to understand what drives behaviour and influences an entrepreneur's decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability, thereby directly linking EM to the different behavioural dimensions (Neneh, 2012; Srimulyani & Hermanto, 2021).

As noted by several authors (Basson & Omoruyi, 2025; Fatoki, 2014; Mhlongo & Daya, 2023), various support mechanisms have been put in place to encourage and support entrepreneurial activity in South Africa. However, the failure rate at the early stages of entrepreneurial activity has remained high because of various reasons,

including the view that the support mechanisms are not adequate and they are not aligned to the needs of aspiring and emerging entrepreneurs (Basson & Omoruyi, 2025). Other cited reasons for business failure allude to external factors such as lack of funding, complex regulatory systems, barriers to market access and lack of infrastructure support, while internal contributors to failure include insufficient knowledge and lack of financial and human resource management skills to operationalise businesses. As stated earlier, the internal factors that contribute to entrepreneurial failure or success tend to focus on surface-level elements and generalised desired traits and qualities without delving into underlying drivers of entrepreneurial mindset and behaviour (Celestin & Vanitha, 2018). This again highlights a gap within entrepreneurship studies as the diagnosis of success or failure is through external conditions, rather than the behavioural process to action (Cui & Bell, 2022; Shir et al., 2019). This study is more focused on how the internal and external factors highlighted in this section influence the behavioural aspect of EM through the SDT elements (Samuelsson & Witell, 2022; Shir et al., 2019).

The preceding discussion shows that entrepreneurship is important and it is a multi-faceted phenomenon whose definition and explanation is inherently shaped by its drivers, practice and context. Therefore, the definitions of entrepreneurship should not focus solely on the act of starting a business, but should incorporate the behavioural dimensions of decision-making, adaptability and risk-taking to enhance the success rate and sustainability of start-up and growing businesses within specific contexts. Context, as guided by available literature (GEM, 2023; Mason & Harvey, 2013) is not a specific geographic location or single defining element like a specific industry or culture, but a complex web of systems and factors that have the potential to enable or hinder entrepreneurial activity. This re-emphasises the importance of how context shapes behaviour, and how entrepreneurs interact and respond to their environments and conditions (Mason & Harvey, 2013; Sun et al., 2023).

One of the defining features of entrepreneurship is the act of starting a business or the behaviour behind starting a business; hence, a common question arises; can anyone or everyone be an entrepreneur? (Duong, 2023; Thurik et al., 2023). This alludes to one of the key questions and debates in entrepreneurship on whether the essential skills and traits for one to be an entrepreneur are acquired through nature or nurture. This is an important consideration as individuals differ and they behave differently in different contexts. However, the nature vs nurture debate does not

explain how behaviour emerges from motivation (Shir et al., 2019), thus showing a need for clarity which this study seeks to address.

According to Ouni and Boujelbene's (2023) research, education and knowledge have an influence on EB; however, the ability to learn is equally influenced by an individual's motivation and personality traits. Their research determined that a combination of motivational factors and knowledge is a stepping stone in driving the behavioural dimension of EM. This suggests that individuals need both nature and nurture to fully engage their behavioural dimensions towards a desired or envisioned direction. The research is significant as it shows that neither education nor traits can drive EB alone, but a combination of both drives behaviour. This, as will be shown in the following sections, is aligned with the underpinning principles and interrelated components of SDT (Dirik & Özdoğan, 2025).

In contrast, Zemlyak et al. (2022) argue that EB is driven by entrepreneurs' education, and learning can lead to successful businesses. The research conducted by Zemlyak et al. (2022) suggests that motivation can shape the behavioural dimensions of entrepreneurs, which would lead to business success. Their research is significant as it shows that behaviour is adaptable and can be shaped/reshaped through knowledge and education. The perspectives shared by Ouni and Boujelbene (2023) and Zemlyak et al. (2022) challenge the false dichotomy of nature versus nurture within the context of entrepreneurship and the behavioural dimensions of EM. This study explored this aspect further through the application of SDT to examine how successful South African entrepreneurs were influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

This section identified that although research acknowledges the role of behaviour within EM, it does not explain how EB is able to be sustained over time. The limitation, however, is that literature does not clarify the process by which motivation translates into continued action. The next section takes this review further by focusing on the behavioural dimensions of EM and how they are connected with entrepreneurial action.

### **2.3. Entrepreneurial mindset**

Entrepreneurial mindset (EM) is a fundamental concept in the entrepreneurial environment and serves as a foundational element that shapes how opportunities

are identified and developed to build successful and sustainable businesses (Lynch & Corbett, 2021). However, there is no agreed standard definition for the concept.

Lynch and Corbett (2021) define EM in relation to the totality of the cognitive elements, with emphasis on the willingness to take risks and orientation to learning and adaptation. While Lynch and Corbett (2021) restrict EM to the cognitive dimension, this perspective is contested by Cui and Bell (2022); Kuratko et al. (2020); and Murnieks et al. (2019), who argue that EM should not be limited to the cognitive/mental aspect because feelings and behaviours are also influential factors when entrepreneurs pursue opportunities. Instead, they argue that EM comprises of three interrelated mental aspects: cognitive, behavioural and emotional, in line with Kuratko et al.'s (2020) conception. To this end, Daspit et al. (2021) provides a broad definition that integrates the cognitive and behavioural aspects of EM that enables entrepreneurs to identify and act on opportunities to create value and make adaptive decisions when confronted with uncertainty, resource constraints and other challenges. The study concurs with the view that the three aspects of EM are interrelated because collectively they describe a complex mental and psychological system of processing information and influencing an entrepreneur's action or inaction. A brief description of the three aspects of EM is provided in Table 1 below.

<b>EM Aspects</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Focus</b>
<b>Cognitive Dimension</b>	This refers to <b>how</b> the entrepreneur <b>thinks</b> . It involves the mental models, knowledge structures, and thought processes used to reason through problems and recognise opportunities. This includes metacognitive ability and cognitive adaptability (being flexible and self-regulating in one's thought).	<b>Thinking</b> (e.g., Opportunity Recognition, Critical Thinking, Visioning)
<b>Behavioural</b>	This refers to <b>how</b> the entrepreneur <b>acts</b> or engages with opportunities. It includes the observable actions, skills, and initiatives that characterise entrepreneurial pursuit. Key traits here are pro-activeness, determination, initiative, and the drive to achieve.	<b>Acting</b> (e.g., Risk-Taking, Decision-making, Pro-activeness, Execution,

		Persistent Problem Solving)
<b>Emotional</b>	This refers to the entrepreneur's <b>feelings</b> or affective state throughout the process. It involves the emotional resources and psychological traits that sustain the journey, such as passion, self-efficacy (confidence in one's ability to execute), resilience, and persistence in the face of setbacks.	<b>Feeling</b> (e.g., Passion, Persistence, Resilience, Self-Efficacy)

Source: Developed by the author based on Audretsch and Lehmann (2023), Kuratko et al. (2020).

Table 1: The three dimensions of the entrepreneurial mindset

Recognising interconnections between these three aspects is an important consideration for the study because of the role of all EM aspects, individually and collectively, in the success or failure of entrepreneurship. Although the three aspects are integrated and they have an influence on what entrepreneurs do, why and how, there is recognition that little research has been conducted on the behavioural aspects that impact EM (Cui and Bell, 2022), even though the behavioural dimensions of EM are the foundational elements and major determinants of entrepreneurial action. The study argues that this gap has contributed to difficulties in explaining the connection between the cognitive and emotional processing dimensions of EM and the entrepreneurs' actions (i.e. behavioural dimension). This underlines a key theoretical shortcoming with EM research, indicating that behaviour does not function only as a dimension of EM, but as a mechanism through which intention is converted into action.

This gap, however, is not the result of limited research only but rather of how behaviour has been framed as an outcome rather than a mechanism. This is because behaviour has typically been framed as an outcome of feeling or thinking (Cui & Bell, 2022), rather than a mechanism which drives entrepreneurial action. This limits researchers' understanding as it does not explain how behaviour is influenced and developed over time. Existing literature on EM, therefore, struggles to determine how intention turns into action (Cui & Bell, 2022; Kwapisz et al., 2021; Pidduck et al., 2021), which is a key weakness this study explores to address.

Fayolle and Liñán (2014) and Sun et al. (2023) highlighted a weak link between EB and EI. They conducted studies focusing on intention-based models that can lead to business success and concluded that findings from the studies failed to determine why action is not preceded by intentions that lead to predictive patterns rather than explanatory reasoning. This knowledge gap created integration challenges between the behavioural dimensions and the cognitive and emotional dimensions of EM.

In contrast, Kwapisz et al. (2021), Lynch and Corbett (2021) and Pidduck et al. (2021), are not opposed to framing the issue based on the intention-behaviour gap. They instead argue that EM broadly is an under-researched and underdeveloped phenomenon when compared to other foundation theories. Findings from Pidduck et al.'s (2021) empirical investigation revealed that EM is fragmented and should be defined through individuals' dispositional and opportunity beliefs to determine their behaviours. The research by Kwapisz et al. (2021), as well as Lynch and Corbett (2021), suggest that research has overemphasised the importance of focusing on cognitive processes while neglecting the contextual and motivational forces that shape EB. However, their argument differs from Fayolle and Liñán (2014) and Sun et al. (2023) because it is not based on the weak linkage but rather that the behavioural dimension of EM primarily focus on predicting outcomes. This shapes their argument around predicting behaviour rather than explaining the driving factors that influence entrepreneurs' behaviour and decision-making abilities. The emphasis on 'predicting behaviour' undermines the importance of understanding the complexity of the factors that shape and influence EB, which is the purpose of this study. These contrasting perspectives highlight that EM literature is divided between describing the outcomes and trying to explain the mechanisms. This division reveals the conceptual gap that this study seeks to bridge by exploring and understanding the motivational process through the SDT lens.

Restricting research on EM to the cognitive aspect, whilst overlooking fundamental key capabilities such as efficient decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability, creates serious limitations for entrepreneurship as a practice and field of study. Research focusing only on the cognitive and emotional elements of a human's mindset allows for an understanding of why entrepreneurs think and feel. However, it does not explain how thoughts and feelings are translated into meaningful action. This creates a disconnect between the rationale behind the transition or progression from the entrepreneur's intentions to entrepreneurial action. This study fills this gap

by examining the motivational aspects that influence an entrepreneur to take action and how the behaviours are influenced. In addressing this gap, the study extends beyond understanding why and what entrepreneurs think and feel to uncover why they act in particular ways.

Research conducted by Kuratko et al. (2020) broadens the critique by Cui & Bell, (2022) and Murnieks et al., (2019). This was done by positioning EM as a model through which entrepreneurs can create value from opportunities by leveraging all three aspects simultaneously, rather than just the cognitive dimension. According to Kuratko et al. (2020), the cognitive and emotional aspects alone do not drive behaviours. Accordingly, failure to incorporate all three dimensions misrepresents the linkage between thoughts and actions, especially because the action-oriented part of the behavioural aspect is essential in understanding how opportunities and decisions are pursued. (Kuratko et al., 2020).

The reviewed literature highlights various theoretical gaps and further acknowledges that some elements of EM are well established. According to Lynch and Corbett (2021), EM should not only be viewed through a theoretical elaborative lens, but collectively from an integrated implementation, elaboration, failures and learnings perspective. This will allow for individuals' cognitive mindsets to become adaptive, which in essence will support their decision-making behaviours. Adaptive learning capabilities were also elaborated on by Cope (2011) and Iqbal et al. (2025), who confirmed that entrepreneurial failure should not be viewed as only a setback and negative element, but rather as a learning opportunity that enhances an entrepreneur's behavioural capabilities. Both scholars' research highlighted that entrepreneurs who accepted failure, but ensured corrective action was implemented achieved greater success than those who did not.

The ability to adopt a mindset of learning from previous decision-making behaviours allows entrepreneurs to approach new situations and challenges better, seek and approach risk-taking opportunities, and understand environmental changes and effectively adapt to different situations. According to Caputo et al. (2024), entrepreneurial knowledge gained from both formal and experiential learning can enhance and shape an entrepreneur's ability to take risks during times of uncertainty. However, the view that knowledge can change an entrepreneur's mindset on risk-taking was challenged by Kim et al. (2023). They argued that the ability to deal with risks is a gradual and progressive process that takes time, either through experiential

or vicarious learning. The study argues that these perspectives are not mutually exclusive but complement each other. Together, they show that behavioural impact is not instant, but it is dependent on a continuous process of increasing knowledge, skills, practical experience, reflection and adaptation. This view is supported by Neneh's (2012) assertion that motivation enables entrepreneurs to assess environmental changes, embrace challenges, learn from setbacks, make realistic decisions and adapt. Furthermore, the (GEM, 2023) report says the best entrepreneurs learn from their positive and negative experiences, and they rise from setbacks to pursue their goals. This makes adaptation an integral part of decision-making and resilience for entrepreneurs. This highlights the necessity to examine how motivation operates as an influencer for entrepreneurial action, as the findings reinforce that motivation drives and sustains the behavioural dimension of the EM (Bilal et al., 2021; Cui & Bell, 2022; Ridwan et al., 2024).

The reviewed literature has demonstrated that EM is an evolving area of study within the broader context of entrepreneurship; hence, there is no standard definition. The literature has also confirmed that not all aspects and dimensions of EM have been thoroughly researched, and there are differences among authors on areas of emphasis. However, there is emerging consensus that all EM dimensions are important, and the behavioural dimension is a critical determinant of the success or failure of entrepreneurship practice. The review revealed that EM lacks behavioural understanding of the influences of the motivational process. The theoretical gaps reinforce the need to dive deeper into behaviour as a mechanism through which motivation becomes action.

Key findings from the above overview of research on EM are that motivation plays an important role in entrepreneurial activity; therefore, the section below provides a focused review of the available literature on the influence of motivation on EB.

#### **2.4. The influence of motivation on behaviour**

The main internal (or personal) drivers and inhibitors of entrepreneurship include ambition and aspirations, confidence in one's abilities, ability or failure to learn from (positive and negative) experiences, fear of failure due to the entrepreneur's personal experience or other people's experiences of failure, and attitude towards risk. These factors apply to the South African context.

Motivation is a catalyst for entrepreneurship and EM, and helps to shape EB (Nayak et al., 2024). According to Bandhu et al.'s (2024), motivation drives an individual's desire to complete objectives or tasks and the will to overcome inhibiting psychological factors to achieve the desired results. This view is shared by Cnossen et al. (2019) and Debrulle et al. (2020), who argue that motivation enables people to sustain mental effort and performance even when they are feeling fatigued, and it encourages entrepreneurs to turn their ideas into action. This explains why motivation is regarded as a significant contributor towards a business's entrepreneurial success (Zemlyak et al., 2022). However, as discussed in the previous section, motivation is not seen as a mechanism that drives entrepreneurial action (Pidduck et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2023). This clarification is necessary because without clarifying how motivation shapes behaviour, the explanation for why some entrepreneurs sustain action while others fail, while under the same conditions, cannot be determined.

According to an empirical study by Alam et al. (2019), there is a moderate relationship between motivation and EB. This finding is expanded on by Srimulyani and Hermanto (2021), whose research confirmed that entrepreneurial motivation has a significant mediating influence in business success, suggesting that earlier studies have underestimated the influence of motivation in shaping EM and an entrepreneur's behaviour. Self-efficacy and family support systems, attest Saoula et al. (2023), serve as internal and external drivers or motivational factors for EI and action. These perspectives demonstrate the multifaceted nature of motivation and its ability to influence and be influenced by entrepreneurial activity, hence the reported complex relationship between entrepreneurial motivation and behaviour were explored further in this study.

A nuanced perspective of motivation that expands on Cnossen et al. (2019) and Debrulle et al.'s (2020) perspectives is provided by Damanik and Candrasa (2022). The latter defines motivation as a changing element that supports intentions and behaviours with the goal of achieving the best results. For Damanik and Candrasa (2022), motivation is not stable but dynamic as it is dependent on the circumstances that each entrepreneur is faced with, which is a slight departure from Bandhu et al. (2024) and Cnossen et al.'s (2019) projection of motivation as a psychological force for determining or predicting EB. These different but complementary perspectives conceptualise motivation from a predictable, unpredictable or bi-directional angle and

further highlight the importance of approaching EM from an intrinsic, extrinsic and integrated perspective, as was done in this study.

The study argues that despite differences on areas of focus and emphasis, there is convergence among many authors that motivation is an important element when studying human behaviours and intentions, and it is necessary to understand its links with how and why people act in particular ways (Bandhu et al., 2024). An understanding of these nuances is important for the study because of the high unemployment rate in South Africa and the prevalence of necessity-driven entrepreneurs who are concerned about survival in contrast to opportunity-driven entrepreneurs who, according to Basson and Omoruyi (2025), tend to be growth oriented and not risk averse. While the study is not primarily concerned about comparing necessity-driven and opportunity-driven entrepreneurs, it is important to acknowledge that Basson and Omoruyi's (2025) observations suggest that the different motivational factors between necessity-driven and opportunity-driven entrepreneurs would result in different behaviours with regards to decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability.

Since motivation is a broad concept, to understand it fully requires the categorisation of its elements into intrinsic motivation (IM) and extrinsic motivation (EXM) (Bandhu et al., 2024). However, there is limited research on the role of IM and EXM in entrepreneurship (Antonioli et al., 2016; Debrulle et al., 2020). In response to these limitations, the research conducted by Ridwan et al. (2024) investigated the relationship between IM or EXM and EIs and concluded that IM and EXM are key drivers of digital EIs, but their effect is moderated by the psychological element of self-efficacy (that is, a belief in one's ability to succeed). The moderating role of motivation in the conversion of EI into behaviour was also reported by Alam et al. (2019). In addition, ambition and motivation were noted by Debrulle et al. (2020) as influential factors in decision-making and the strategy adopted to contribute to the overall sustainability of a business.

Interestingly, findings from a recent study by Gómez-Jorge et al. (2025) demonstrated that psychological traits such as self-esteem, in addition to motivation, form an integral part of the behavioural dimension of EM. An integration of Debrulle et al. (2020), Gómez-Jorge et al.'s (2025) and Zemlyak et al. (2022) perspectives shows that the behavioural dimensions of EM (that is, decision-making, risk taking and sustainability) are shaped by a combination of psychological and motivational

factors. The role of psychological factors in EM justified the adoption of SDT as a suitable theoretical lens for the study.

Cognisant of the diverse and complementary perspectives about the role of motivation and other factors in EM, the role of IM and EM in driving the behaviour of entrepreneurs was explored in this study because IM and EXM are regarded as important drivers for entrepreneurs in general, especially start-up businesses (Debrulle et al., 2020). Understanding these elements provided clarity on how different types of motivations can shape the behavioural dimension of EM for both opportunity-driven and necessity-driven entrepreneurs. This positions motivation as directly to EB instead of just focusing on entrepreneurial creation, which is the gap this research addresses.

Collectively, the literature highlights that motivation works as an interconnected driver for EB. The study applies the SDT framework to address this gap in behaviour by explaining how motivation is internalised into sustained action.

#### **2.4.1. Intrinsic motivation**

Intrinsic motivation (IM) is associated with motivation that arises within the individual, which is driven by personal aspirations, satisfaction or interests (Antonioli et al., 2016; Cnossen et al., 2019). For Duan et al. (2020), IM is developed through an individual's internal desire to start and partake in a certain activity. This shapes IM as a personal trait instead of a learned behaviour due to circumstances. This view is contested by Bandhu et al. (2024), who argue that IM is a multidimensional concept that is not only built by internal desire but by incorporating personal desire with spiritual, biological, conation, and cognitive elements. Without contradicting Bandhu et al.'s (2024) view, Di Domenico and Ryan (2017) conceptualise IM as a neurological tendency an individual has, which is often seen as spontaneous.

Arising from these differing perspectives, key questions can be raised on whether personal dimensions or neurological drive affect an individual's behavioural dimensions, and whether IM is a neurological trait, an acquired skill or a combination of both. The study aligned itself with the view that IM is a combination of neurological traits, acquired skill and other internalised influence from EXM, as this is aligned with the perspectives alluded to in the above sections and the following discussions. For example, an integration of Bandhu et al. (2024) and Di Domenico and Ryan's (2017) perspectives would result in an expanded conception of IM that incorporates the

psychological, neurological and other factors. The integration is further supported by Ridwan et al. (2024) who state that IM should not be isolated from EXM, but should be viewed in an integrated manner with EXM because IM emerges from the interconnection of both challenges (external) and enjoyment (internal). The integration of both concepts allows IM not to be treated as a static principle but rather as a dynamic driver that shapes individuals' behaviours in certain situations.

Understanding the debates on whether IM is personal, neurological or a combination of these and other factors is fundamental as this will determine if IM is based on a person's traits only or it can also be enhanced through education and training, experience or adaptation to environmental challenges. However, an elaboration on these debates and answering these questions definitely was beyond the scope of this study, but the undisputed role of IM in entrepreneurship and its interconnection with EXM were central to this study. This view frames IM as an element within the theoretical base for understanding and analysing how internal drivers of motivation shape an entrepreneur's behavioural dimensions (Ridwan et al., 2024).

IM should not be viewed as a static personal trait, but rather as a progressive attribute that evolves through the psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness, which aligns with the theoretical model of this study.

#### **2.4.2. Extrinsic motivation**

Extrinsic motivation (EXM) is associated with motivation surrounding or emanating from external elements such as rewards, recognition or financial benefits and their effect on the individual (Antonioli et al., 2016; Cnossen et al., 2019). Debrulle et al. (2020) note that EXM is an incentive-based driver behind new business creation for entrepreneurs who are motivated by material and financial rewards. Whilst these external elements are portrayed as positive aspects, authors such as Derfler-Rozin and Pitesa (2020) regard EXM as a negative form of motivation as it is viewed as controlling and self-absorbed rather than being authentic. Being portrayed as a negative trait can deter individuals from seeking to better understand EXM even though some external rewards can lead to successful businesses, resulting from better behavioural decisions, adaptability and correct leverage of risk. This creates tension between personal morals behind EXM and the beneficial elements that shape the behavioural dimension of the EM.

Recent research, however, challenges the idea that EXM is associated with negative motivational influence. Research by Bilal et al. (2021) has linked EXM to the relatedness element of the SDT wherein social recognition and desire are regarded as enhancers of positive behaviour. Entrepreneurs should, nonetheless, calculate the level of risk associated with the recognition that will be achieved. Similarly, the observation by Nguyen and Vu (2024) and Zhang et al. (2025) is that EXM has a significant influence on the behavioural performance of entrepreneurs because it requires and encourages risk-taking, innovation and adaptability. But more research is needed to elaborate on this observation and others. The research also showed that EXM has a significant influence on entrepreneurial engagement through a social context, which further drives and influences EB into action. An examination of the positive and negative fundamental elements of EXM would enable researchers and practitioners to understand how decision-making, adaptability and risk-taking are associated with the components of the SDT.

From the reviewed literature, it is clear that the positive or negative contribution of EXM to entrepreneurship and EM is subject to debate. Despite this, there is evidence from the literature that EXM can be a catalyst for positive behaviour and growth, by enhancing an entrepreneur's decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability.

The study thereby positioned EXM not as a secondary motivational element, but rather as an enabler that interconnected with IM to drive internalised, sustainable EB.

#### **2.4.3. Integrated research on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation**

When combining both IM and EXM elements, the environment and circumstances in which the individual finds themselves will enhance or hinder their motivational levels (Antonioli et al., 2016). Based on a regression analysis that was conducted by Damanik and Candrasa (2022), it was concluded that IM had a significant positive effect on individuals' interest levels whereas EXM by itself did not affect the individuals' interest in pursuing entrepreneurship and creating sustainable businesses. Derfler-Rozin and Pitesa's (2020) research provides an alternative perspective as they argue that IM and EXM complement one another and have the potential to impact on an individual's choices and overall business success. This shows that neither IM nor EXM should be more dominant; instead, they must complement each other based on the individual's personal behavioural dimensions and other factors.

The integration of IM and EXM enabled a thorough assessment of the link between motivation and EM using the SDT lens, which is relevant for this study.

## **2.5. Self-determination theory**

The application of SDT in entrepreneurship research is useful in explaining the mind-set and behaviour of entrepreneurs as well as how IM and EXM shape the behavioural dimension of EM through the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1980; Samuelsson & Witell, 2022; Shir et al., 2019). The psychological needs that underpin SDT were conceptualised within a continuum that categorises motivation into 'amotivation', internal or intrinsic motivation and external or extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). There are conditions that enhance or hinder the transition from 'amotivation' to internal or external motivation, and external motivation to internal motivation or vice versa (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Recent empirical studies highlighted how competence and social support act as enablers of internalisation (Yang et al., 2025), with insights on how cognitive dissonance and reflection act as psychological triggers for processing internalisation (Hewett, 2023). This extends how supportive networks and relationships strengthen sustainable behaviour (Schmidt et al., 2025). The mechanism of internalising motivation into sustained behaviour is therefore central to the study because it addresses the gap in EM literature in extending motivation and how it is converted into action.

While lack of motivation (i.e. amotivation) is likely to lead to lack of entrepreneurial effort, research has shown that IM and EXM have an influence on EI amongst students, but EXM has more (Al-Jubari et al., 2019). Equally, research has shown that some behaviours can be externally motivated and they can also be internalised and integrated to influence IM (Taylor et al., 2025; Al-Jubari et al., 2019). This observation explains the continuum between 'amotivation', IM and EXM, proving that motivation progresses through internalisation rather than being static. Therefore, the critical role of motivation in entrepreneurship makes SDT valuable in understanding the psychological underpinnings of entrepreneurial motivation, EI and EBs, as well as understanding the underpinnings of entrepreneurial leadership and followership (Taylor et al., 2025).

The application and relevance of SDT in entrepreneurial research is supported by several authors because it provides a framework to contextualise the mind-set,

motivation and behaviour of different types of entrepreneurs (Samuelsson & Witell, 2022; Lanivich et al., 2021; Shir et al., 2019). The central debate surrounding the application of SDT concerns which psychological needs provide a stronger influence that shapes entrepreneurial motivation and behaviour. This debate highlights the importance of this study because different psychological needs create different pathways through which motivational behaviour changes (Lanivich et al., 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Shir et al., 2019).

Findings from a meta-analysis study conducted by Ntoumanis et al. (2021) found that competence is a more influential driver based on a correlation analysis between the three psychological needs. This suggests that if competence is the driving force, entrepreneurs should be focused on building their innate skills and knowledge to drive their behaviour. On the contrary, Bilal et al. (2021) argue that autonomy and relatedness drive individuals' behaviour more positively and proactively. This is because autonomy and relatedness encourage proactive behavioural patterns. This suggests that entrepreneurs rely on their autonomy and other people for motivation to drive their behaviour. These differences suggest that results emanating from the application of SDT are inherently situational, thereby limiting their generalisability.

Instead of elevating one or two SDT psychological needs over others, Dirik and Özdoğan (2025) argued that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are the fundamental building blocks that influence motivation and create satisfaction. They further elaborated on how the SDT elements create links to meaningful work that deals with uncertainty and risk, which are core to the behavioural dimensions of EM. Unlike Bilal et al. (2021) and Ntoumanis et al. (2021), Dirik and Özdoğan (2025) assert that all three psychological elements of SDT should complement one another to better shape behaviour instead of working in isolation. The study concurs that combining all three needs provides balance and explains the multi-dimensional nature of how behaviour is driven.

Furthermore, Bilal et al. (2021) and Liñán et al. (2020) argue that SDT builds on entrepreneurial education and its capacity to increase individuals' personal drive while decreasing uncertainty. Their research shows how enabling more proactive behaviour strengthens an entrepreneur's decision-making processes. In addition, since globalisation has increased SME trade (Liñán et al., 2020), there is increased demand for entrepreneurial education to motivate and change behaviour in

underdeveloped economies. SDT therefore clarifies how the psychological needs enable the transition of motivation into behaviour, which is the basis for why SDT was adopted as the explanatory mechanism. This is important, but the success of entrepreneurship is dependent on the extent to which the curriculum is effective in addressing some of the identified gaps.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

The literature review outlined different but complementary conceptions of entrepreneurship, whilst emphasising the need to adopt a broadened perspective that integrates the identification of opportunities, translation of intention and opportunity into action, creation of value and business sustainability. The expected and potential role of entrepreneurship in economic development and growth was also highlighted, amidst South Africa's low levels of entrepreneurial activity and the high failure rate of businesses at the early start-up stages.

The three interrelated aspects of EM were highlighted, with specific emphasis on the need to understand the influence of internal and external motivational factors on the under-researched behavioural elements of EM because of its significance in the conversion of entrepreneurial motivation, intent and opportunity into sustainable entrepreneurial action or activity. Furthermore, the review elaborated on the influence of motivation on the behavioural dimensions of EM by explaining and exploring connections between EM's behavioural elements and the SDT psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness.

In Chapter 3 below, the study's research questions are outlined.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The aim of this research, as previously outlined, is to explore how motivational factors, specifically intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, influence and shape the behavioural dimensions of the EM among first-generation entrepreneurs in South Africa. The study was conducted in response to the dominance of necessity-driven entrepreneurs and the high failure rate of start-up micro, small and medium enterprises. Consequently, the study places emphasis on decision-making, risk-taking, and adaptability, while considering the psychological needs of entrepreneurs within the context of the SDT framework.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the reviewed literature does not adequately explain how motivational forces are internalised and transformed into EB. Literature highlighted that while cognitive and emotional dimensions of the EM were well researched, there is a conceptual gap in understanding how motivation evolves into behaviour (Cui & Bell, 2022; Fayolle & Liñán, 2014; Sun et al., 2023). The study draws on the SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980; Samuelsson & Witell, 2022; Shir et al., 2019) as an explanatory lens to position the psychological needs as mechanisms through which IM and EXM evolve into behavioural action.

As guided by varied perspectives from the literature review and the problem statement, the overarching research question for the study is to establish how the behavioural dimensions of EM are influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among first-generation South African entrepreneurs. This theoretical gap directly provided insights into the formulation of the research questions, which were derived from the literature, providing a basis to explore three interrelated sub-questions. This was a position to explore influence (RQ1), how behaviour is influenced (RQ2) and finally how behavioural mechanisms can lead to sustainability (RQ3).

The study identified three research questions that were deemed appropriate for the study's methodological choice, as the research focuses on a change in mechanism rather than an outcome, thus aligning with the exploratory and interpretivist research approach (Bright & Du Preeze, 2023). To address this overarching question, three interrelated research questions were formulated and are discussed below.

### 3.2 Research questions

The literature review, as presented in Chapter 2 of this study, revealed that within the area of EM, there are debates and complementary perspectives amongst researchers concerning, amongst others, the definition and explanation of entrepreneurship and whether the skills, traits and behaviours required for one to be an entrepreneur are acquired through nature (i.e. inborn or innate) or nurture (i.e. education and training) (Bandhu et al., 2024; Debrulle et al., 2020; Gómez-Jorge et al., 2025; Zemlyak et al., 2022). The literature also explored how IM, EXM or a combination of both influence entrepreneurial motivation, and whether some SDT elements have a stronger influence than others on the motivation and behaviour of entrepreneurs (Antonioli et al., 2016; Bilal et al., 2021; Damanik & Candrasa, 2022; Derfler-Rozin & Pitesa, 2020; Dirik & Özdoğan, 2025; Ntoumanis et al., 2021; Nguyen & Vu, 2024; Ridwan et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025).

The literature further revealed that there is a limited understanding of the behavioural dimensions of the EM, despite its importance in explaining the relationship between EI and EB that results in business success. This theoretical gap is relevant and important within the South African context, where necessity-driven entrepreneurship and behavioural persistence are key for survival. Cognisant of these findings from the literature and the overarching research question, the following three research questions were formulated:

**Research Question 1:** How do intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influence the behavioural dimensions of the entrepreneurial mindset (decision-making, risk-taking, and adaptability) of first-generation South African entrepreneurs?

This question is central to the overarching research purpose as it directly addresses the theoretical gap identified in Chapter 2. The question is guided by the limited understanding of how motivation is internalised and transformed into EB. This is due to research focusing on the cognitive and emotional dimensions of the EM, but with a lack of research done on how intention is converted into action (Cui and Bell, 2022; Kwapisz et al., 2021; Lynch and Corbett, 2021; Pidduck et al., 2021). Thereby posing the challenge in understanding the explanation of how and why entrepreneurs behave and react under similar situations.

The literature highlighted different areas of emphasis and the existence of competing perspectives about the actual and potential positive and negative influences of IM

and EXM on the behavioural dimensions of EM (Caputo et al., 2024; Derfler-Rozin & Pitesa, 2020; Di Domenico & Ryan, 2017; Kim et al., 2023). The literature also confirmed the positive influence of EXM, thus leading to the view that both IM and EXM can influence positive decision-making and other behavioural EM elements at the level of individual entrepreneurs and collective entrepreneurial activity in a country (Bilal et al., 2021; Damanik & Candrasa, 2022; Kuratko et al., 2020; Ridwan et al., 2024; Nguyen & Vu, 2024).

This integrated approach is aligned to the broader conception of entrepreneurship that is inclusive of new venture creation, value creation, long-term growth and sustainability (Debrulle et al., 2020; Jemal, 2021; Karami et al., 2024; Zemlyak et al., 2022).

Through this question, the study sought to demonstrate the influence of IM and EXM on the behavioural aspects of EM (as it relates to decision-making, risk-taking and adaptation capacity) based on the experiences of successful necessity and opportunity-driven first-generation entrepreneurs in the South African context. As per the analysis in Chapter 2, existing literature has not determined how motivational elements transition EB into action, which is the behavioural mechanism this research question sought to address.

**Research Question 2:** Under what conditions are internal and external motivational pathways strengthened or weakened?

Currently, scholars debate which psychological needs have a greater influence on the behavioural dimension of EM. While Bilal et al.'s (2021) and Ntoumanis et al. (2021) argue that competence and relatedness are the strongest drivers, Derfler-Rozin and Pitesa (2020) counter this by arguing that all three psychological needs must complement each other to drive behaviour into action. This highlights that Bilal et al.'s (2021) and Ntoumanis et al.'s (2021) perspectives ignore the critical element of autonomy, which correlates to the entrepreneurs' values and direction. These studies, contribute to the limited research on the behavioural aspect of the EM as they focus on ranking the needs instead of focusing on how these needs enable or constrain an entrepreneur's motivation.

This poses a conceptual limitation as the research assumes that the psychological needs are static; however, these aspects fluctuate depending on an entrepreneur's environment and circumstances. This weakness highlights a gap arising from failures

to consider the volatility entrepreneurs face, which highlights the challenges that the South African context faces. Recent literature supports this concept as it supports SDT being conditional rather than static, demonstrating that an entrepreneur's motivational pathways can be strengthened by elements such as psychological safety, social support and feedback (Saoula et al., 2023). The opposite is, however, true as motivation can be weakened through adverse effects such as environmental pressures, emotional fatigue, financial strain and prolonged uncertainty (Kuratko et al., 2020; Nguyen & Vu, 2024).

This research question, therefore, challenges the assumption of stability within SDT, showcasing that motivational pathways are conditional. By investigating how conditional aspects either strengthen or weaken motivation, the study addresses the research gap within existing EM and SDT research on how motivation influences behaviour. Having an understanding of the conditional elements allows for extending the theoretical depth of behavioural elements with EM, showing how they can be reinforced or weakened.

**Research Question 3:** What mechanisms did successful first-generation entrepreneurs adopt to mitigate challenges and ensure business sustainability?

Following research question two by establishing how motivation is strengthened or weakened under different conditions, a gap remains in determining how emerging entrepreneurs can take these insights and proactively apply them to mitigate challenges for future sustainability. Recent literature is venturing into understanding the causes and effects of motivation fluctuation (Derfler-Rozin & Pitesa, 2020; Samuelsson & Witell, 2022). The research, however, does not explain proactive measures that can be taken by entrepreneurs to safeguard themselves. Thereby demonstrating a gap, as there is a limitation in understanding methods to mitigate challenges.

This insight is important, especially within the South African context, where economic pressure and uncertainty are high and are influencing elements for entrepreneurs. The ability to mitigate risk contributes to building entrepreneurial self-awareness, belief and resilience.

This research question, therefore, focuses on identifying the mechanisms that successful first-generation entrepreneurs have identified that would enable aspiring and emerging entrepreneurs to mitigate challenges and ensure business

sustainability. Identifying the mechanisms for success bridges the final gap in exploring SDT, EM and motivational elements by linking fluctuating conditions to influence behaviour and how to effectively apply them to achieve long-term sustainability.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

This section outlined the study's research questions and the rationale for each question. The questions were informed by competing and complementary perspectives that are highlighted in the literature review and the problem statement. In turn, the research questions served as a basis for developing open-ended interview questions. The rationale for using interviews to collect data and other methodological considerations are outlined in Chapter 4, which provides an elaboration on, among others, the research design and strategy, sampling, data analysis and limitations.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this section is to outline the study's methodology and design, which provides the framework needed for understanding how IM and EXM influence the behavioural dimensions of the EM. The methodology is centred on qualitative data collection in answering the research questions identified in Chapter 3.

An overview of the instrument used to collect data from first-generation successful South African entrepreneurs is provided. The process followed to ensure compliance with the research ethics set out by the Gordon Institute of Business Science on behalf of the University of Pretoria, as well as the methods used to identify research participants, ensure quality control and analyse primary data, are explained to demonstrate coherence of the methodological choices (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Finally, the limitations of the research are outlined to ensure the research is presented fairly, transparently and accurately.

### **4.2 Choice of methodology**

#### **4.2.1 Research design**

The research sought to understand how EM is influenced by IM and EXM, which shape an individual's behaviours and decision-making capabilities in the South African context. As the aim was to understand how individual behaviours are driven by various factors (Saunders & Lewis, 2018), motivation in this instance, the study followed an exploratory qualitative research design.

The exploratory design was considered suitable for this study because the link between motivation and the behavioural dimension of EM remains under-researched and conceptually fragmented (Bright & Du Preeze, 2023; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Exploratory research enables new insights to be discovered by focusing on interpretation and meaning rather than hypothesis testing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study explored the participants' lived experiences and their motivations. This aligns with Braun and Clarke (2022) as qualitative research allows for the determination of meaning rather than variable-based answers.

Narratives of participants' experiences were explored within this design, allowing for the articulation of these success stories and how their behaviour evolved throughout

their journeys. Furthermore, it enabled the researcher to clarify how and why motivation drove behaviour within the broader framework of EM, which is the central mechanism for this study. Thereby, justifying the depth and flexibility needed to interpret meaning from research and lived experiences (Daspit et al., 2021; Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

#### **4.2.2 Research philosophy**

The study adopted the interpretivist philosophy, as the research conducted examined the motivation and behaviour of social actors involved in entrepreneurship based on the participants' self-reported narratives, allowing for subjective explanation of data (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Based on the study, interpretivism was the ideal philosophy because it focuses on an individual's personal meaning through the internalisation of motivation into behaviour. This leads to the data being subjective, and the process cannot be examined through observation alone. This justification aligns with Creswell and Poth (2018) as, due to the nature being subjective, the study is context-driven through participants' lived experiences. Thereby aligning with the study's aim of understanding how IM and EXM shape the behavioural dimensions of the EM.

Given the subjective nature of the study does not allow for observation, the positivist philosophy was not appropriate as it requires the researcher to observe the participants' behaviour in their business operations was not appropriate due to the study's time constraints (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Therefore, to understand the behaviours and decisions undertaken by the entrepreneurs who participated in the study and their underlying motivational factors, the researcher placed reliance on the participants' reflections and their understanding of their lived experiences. The interaction between the researcher and the participants enabled the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences (Cnossen et al., 2019; Saunders & Lewis, 2018), what they did, how and why they acted in particular ways in response to various motivational factors.

#### **4.2.3 Research approach**

The study adopted an inductive research approach to contribute to the expansion of knowledge within the field (Alam et al., 2019). The inductive approach was necessary because the study aimed at exploring and interpreting how the process of

internalisation of motivation evolved through the participants' entrepreneurial journey which is a study that cannot be predetermined. Inductive research creates a platform where research can be developed from the foundation and guided by meaningful insights that emerge from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

The inductive approach supports the application of SDT as the theoretical lens in order to assist in understanding how motivational factors influence behaviour. This provides deeper insights into the interpretation than if the study were to test through observation to determine a hypothesis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Thereby positioning the study to extend the SDT by contributing to the theoretical understanding of behaviour influence on the EM. When used in conjunction with an exploratory design in an under-researched area, inductive reasoning offers new conceptual insights instead of just confirming an existing theory and framework (Ji et al., 2019).

Based on the research done by Woo et al. (2017), deductive research would not be suitable for this study because the research was not based on conclusive data, and it was not designed to test a specific hypothesis. Likewise, Woo et al. (2017) noted that abduction would not be suitable because the study aimed to understand the behavioural aspect of EM based on the entrepreneurs' subjective experiences and narratives, instead of generating the most plausible explanation or hypothesis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

#### **4.2.4 Research method and strategy**

Given the exploratory nature of the study, a mono-qualitative research method was adopted and facilitated through semi-structured interviews to get an in-depth understanding of successful entrepreneurs' experiences, which a quantitative analysis cannot provide. Cope (2011) highlights that semi-structured interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of entrepreneurial learning and behaviour through individuals with lived experiences. Since the study sought to understand how motivation is internalised and expressed behaviourally instead of generalising a pattern across a wide range of the population (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021), this method was deemed suitable to address the research purpose and questions.

A narrative research strategy was adopted as the study is not focused on collecting individuals' experiences but evaluating and understanding how motivation was internalised to influence their behaviour. Narrative inquiry allows the research to evolve over time (Creswell & Poth, 2018), thereby showing the link through

experiences rather than focusing on the overall outcome (Fasinu, 2024; Soda & Chinyamurindi, 2024). Through this approach, the interviews focused on the narrative stories of the participants' journeys to understand how their decisions and actions were made and adapted (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

A thematic or phenomenological approach was not appropriate for the study as this would have fragmented the data by restricting it to an analysis of feelings rather than behaviour (Braun & Clarke, 2020a; Braun & Clarke, 2022). Therefore, a thematic narrative analysis was implemented within the study in order to retain the individual's personal story, while allowing for behaviour patterns to be identified.

Narrative strategies such as interviews and storytelling are used to contextualise the motivation transition from EI to EB, which directly supports the study's goal, which is to interpret how motivational forces evolve into sustained entrepreneurial action.

#### **4.3 Time horizon**

Due to the nature of the research having a limited time constraint that is associated with the MBA programme, the study adopted a cross-sectional time horizon for the purposes of collecting primary data. This approach was chosen as it allows for data to be captured at a single point in time rather than over an extend period of time (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) research also shows that a cross-sectional time horizon is suitable for exploratory qualitative studies, where within a time frame, the focus is on understanding the meaning.

The data collection through semi-structured interviews commenced after ethical clearance was received on the 28 July 2025 and was completed in October 2025. The transcription of interviews was done after every interview to ensure compliance with the prescribed timeframes for the completion of the study.

#### **4.4 Population**

Saunders and Lewis (2018) define a research population as a collection of individuals that fit the criteria for assessment. The population identified was South African entrepreneurs who have registered and operated successful businesses. A successful business, as previously stated, is defined as a profitable and sustainable business that has been operating for a minimum of five years.

This focus is informed by the fact that South Africa has a spirited and growing population of entrepreneurs, which can be seen by the 11.1% increase between 2022

and 2023 in early-stage entrepreneurial activity in South Africa (GEM, 2023). However, there are high levels of failures of start-up businesses (Msimango-Galawe and Hlatshwayo, 2021). This is the reason why the target population for the study was limited to participants who are still operating in the entrepreneurial space.

The study further narrowed the population by specifically focusing on first-generation entrepreneurs, as their motivational drivers were self-developed and not inherited, to effectively determine how motivation was internalised over time (Iwu & Opute, 2019; Lanivich et al., 2021). This focus aligns with the interpretivist philosophy, as these entrepreneurs have first-hand experience and can reflect on their motivation and the evolution of their entrepreneurial journeys. This understanding is thereby subjective to the participants' narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

#### **4.5 Unit of analysis**

The unit of analysis refers to the primary participants who were selected for the study (Saunders & Lewis, 2018) and the narratives obtained from their lived experiences. In an exploratory study such as this, the unit of analysis focuses on the narratives that were obtained from the participants through semi-structured interviews. These narratives provided insights which highlighted how participants constructed meaning from their experiences on motivation and behaviour (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lingwati & Mamabolo 2023).

Primarily, the unit of analysis was the individual entrepreneur's narratives obtained from participants who met the requirements to be included in the study because each entrepreneur had a unique and personal story to share about how motivation affects EB or action, specifically decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability.

In view of the adopted inductive reasoning research method and the narrative inquiry strategy, narrative analysis was adopted because it enabled the researcher to capture the individual's story and background (Braun & Clarke, 2020a; Mcleod, 2024). In contrast, a purely thematic analysis was not chosen as it looks for commonalities in patterns within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2020b), instead of understanding the evolution of the participants' motivation to behaviour.

#### **4.6 Sampling method and size**

The study adopted a non-probability sampling method, and a purposive sampling technique were used to identify successful entrepreneurs for the study. Saunders

and Lewis (2018) states that purposive sampling is chosen at the researcher's discretion, as guided by the selection criteria. This technique was thereby chosen because insights would be gained through narrative data collection, not through statistical representation. As previously discussed, more prominent data will be collected through a narrative analysis, as these participants will provide deeper insights on how their motivation was internalised into behaviour. Probability sampling would not provide the depth of experience needed for this study.

The inclusion criteria were that entrepreneurs must be first-generation entrepreneurs (excluding inherited or family businesses); they must be based in Gauteng, South Africa; must have a business that is financially profitable and sustainable with a lifespan of five years and above and should be willing to participate in the interview.

In view of the criteria, the sample size was scoped to entrepreneurs within Gauteng Province, South Africa, for whom this data was easily accessible to the research, especially due to the time constraints of the research. The term successful business was used to refer to businesses that were operational for at least five years during the data collection period and had sustainable and profitable capacity (Lanivich et al., 2021; Zemlyak et al., 2022). To narrow the scope even further, successful businesses needed to be first-generation, thus ensuring the ability to learn from individuals who started their business venture without any prior generational support, as this would provide a relatable base for individuals who are considering a start-up.

Due to time constraints, the researcher used existing networks to identify participants. However, the snowball technique was also implemented as a supplementary strategy to minimise difficulties in finding the required number of participants who meet the selection criteria within a brief period. Since the snowball technique can create a risk of engaging with a uniform group of individuals (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018), the risk was mitigated by seeking out diversity in the participants through gender, industry and age. The researcher planned to interview participants until the point of saturation was achieved, resulting in further interviews not yielding further conceptual development in the internalisation process (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Hennink & Kaiser (2022) finds that narrative saturation is typically reached between nine to seventeen interviews. Accordingly, the researcher planned to interview between 12 and 16 participants to gather enough information and achieve

behavioural saturation. In the end, 13 participants were interviewed, but data from one participant was excluded because the participant did not meet the full criteria, specifically the aspect of being a first-generation entrepreneur.

#### 4.7 Measurement instrument

Primary data for the research was collected through semi-structured interviews. In qualitative research, semi-structured interviews are regarded as effective data collection tools, especially when a researcher seeks to understand a phenomenon from the participant's perspective (Karatsareas, 2022; Saunders and Lewis (2018), as was the case with this study. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to align with the exploratory nature of the research design and the narrative strategy approach. Semi-structured interviews provide the flexibility to ask probing questions (Saunders and Lewis, 2018), allowing the depth of answers surrounding the internalisation process to be enhanced. The open yet guided structure allows participants to immerse in their narratives without constraints (Braun & Clarke, 2022), which is critical for understanding their internalisation process

To execute the adopted research strategy, interview questions (as per Appendix 2) and an interview guide were developed to ensure consistency (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The interview questions were designed to capture data relevant in line with the study's purpose and questions, thereby encouraging participants to reflect on why and how their behavioural choices emerged from their personal motivational elements.

Table 2 below provides an overview of the interview protocol and the theoretical links to the SDT framework

<u>Question</u>	<u>Key Theme</u>	<u>Behavioural Dimension</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
1	Entrepreneurial intent and motivation	Decision-making and risk-taking	Exploring motivational triggers
2	Autonomy and competence	Decision-making	Understanding their autonomy
3	Autonomy and competence	Decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability	Understanding confidence, risk

			tolerance and resilience
4	Competence	Decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability	Self-belief and capabilities
5	Relatedness	Decision-making, risk-taking	Determine the influence of relationships
6	Relatedness and external motivation	Decision-making and risk-taking	Explore how the external environment influenced behaviour
7	Internal and external motivational factors	Decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability	Identify behaviour enablers, inhibitors and motivational factors
8	All SDT needs	Decision-making and risk-taking	Linking intent and motivation to behavioural action
9	All SDT needs	Decision-making and adaptability	Reflection strategies to handle challenges and adversity
10	Motivation and future advice	Decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability	Explore lessons and advice

*Table 2: Interview protocol aligning the psychological needs and behavioural dimensions of the EM.*

The interview guide and questions were piloted during the research proposal stage with a successful entrepreneur to ensure clarity, relevance, reliability and logical flow of the questions. Feedback from the pilot highlighted a third research question being found, and the need to rephrase the original questions to reduce overlap between the constructs. These minor refinements of the guide enhanced the flow and guided the questions better towards the psychological needs that could be identified through the narratives.

A key strength of semi-structured interviews is that they enable the researcher to collect and interpret rich data to understand how the individuals acted and performed (Ji et al., 2019). Another strength is for new insights to emerge that were not previously determined by the research Creswell and Poth (2018), which is essential in understanding an entrepreneur's behavioural drivers.

#### **4.8 Data gathering process**

Secondary data collection in the form of published literature started during the development of the project proposal between January and March of 2025. The literature review was expanded upon between July and October 2025 to incorporate insights from recent publications.

The initial stage before primary data collection, required the researcher to submit a research proposal and other requirements to the Ethics Committee at the Gordon Institute of Business Science. The Ethics Committee granted approval and permission for the researcher to adapt their questions without deviating from the research scope and consistency of the approved questions, failing which the researcher would be required to resubmit the questions for ethical clearance. This was fundamental for ensuring methodological integrity and ethical compliance (Byrne, 2021), as it provides credibility and transparency by establishing an ethical audit trail (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Once approval was granted, the researcher commenced with the data collection process. Of the 12 qualifying interviews for analysis, eight (8) were conducted 'face to face' or four (4) were conducted online via Zoom; this will be based on the discretion of the interviewee.

In compliance with the Ethics Committee's approval conditions, each participant was made aware of the purpose of the research and was provided with the questions and a consent form prior to the appointment time. While interviews were recorded to ensure transparency, the participants were assured of anonymity (Rutakumwa et al., 2019). The interviews were guided by the following procedure:

- 1) Recording of each interview in addition to taking notes where necessary; and
- 2) Verbatim transcriptions of the audio file.

#### **4.9 Analysis approach**

As stated earlier, the unit of analysis for the study was the narratives obtained from participants through interviews (Bright & Du Preeze, 2023; Larty & Hamilton, 2011; Gartner, 2007). As such, narrative analysis was deemed suitable for analysing the narratives (McLeod, 2024; Gartner, 2007). Narrative analysis was adopted in order to gain insight into the participants' behaviours and how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation influenced their behaviour and mind-set.

According to available literature, an inductive, deductive or mixed research approach can be adopted when conducting narrative analysis (Bright & Du Preeze, 2023; McLeod, 2024). The deductive approach uses a predetermined framework that is informed by existing literature, theories and models, whereas the inductive approach allows for the identification of trends or patterns based on the words and concepts used in the narratives, and the subsequent classification or categorisation of such concepts into codes and themes (McLeod, 2024; Lingwati & Mamabolo, 2023). In keeping with the exploratory nature of the study, an inductive approach to thematic narrative analysis was adopted. This combination of thematic mapping and narrative analysis allows the research to evaluate what was said and how the meaning can thus be interpreted (Braun & Clarke, 2020a; Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Thematic narrative analysis was found to be suitable when conducting exploratory studies (Bright & Du Preeze, 2023; Lingwati & Mamabolo, 2023) because it is versatile, dynamic, non-linear and iterative and has the capacity to reveal multiple levels of interpretation and rich insights into human experience (McLeod, 2024; Bright & Du Preeze, 2023; McAllum et al, 2019). This allowed the data to move beyond descriptive to evaluation on how the internalisation process and motivational elements influence behaviour within the EM. Audretsch and Lehmann (2023) contend that some methods of analysing qualitative data turn to focus on surface level descriptions of common themes, personality traits and other characteristics, narrative analysis in entrepreneurship delves deeper into different and the underlying aspects of the story, inclusive of the content, context and dark sides of the stories, such as unethical conduct and mental and emotional challenges).

As part of the narrative analysis, each interview transcript was initially read three times to understand the complete story and to identify concepts and themes within each and across all narratives (Lingwati & Mamabolo 2023). Several authors assert that reading narratives holistically and categorically (that is in small segments) allows

for multiple interpretations of the data (McLeod, 2024; Bright & du Breeze, 2023). The concepts and themes enabled the researcher to create codes to facilitate data capturing and coding using ATLAS.ti (O’Kane et al., 2022). The coding consisted of sub-codes, which were the motivational elements that influenced the participant and main codes which focused on the related SDT psychological need.

The following is an overview of the steps followed in the data capturing analysis:

1. Transcription of each interview by the researcher
2. Review of transcribed interview
3. Read each transcript three times to develop a holistic perspective of each story and to identify key issues and themes
4. Develop subcodes based on motivational elements from the transcripts
5. Code data from transcripts using ATLAS.ti
6. Develop main codes to through the SDT psychological needs
7. Explore the alignment of the sub-themes and themes to the behavioural dimensions of EM and the psychological needs for SDT
8. Report the results and enrich the results with quotations from the narratives

The outlined process demonstrates that in addition to being dynamic, narrative analysis is time consuming and its findings are not generalizable (McLeod, 2024; McAllum et al, 2019), but its benefits far outweigh its benefits.

#### **4.10 Quality control**

Braun & Clarke (2006), Byrne (2021) and Nassaji (2020) state that quality control is assured through the trustworthiness principles of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. In the sections below, the researcher explains how these principles were implemented in this study.

##### **4.10.1 Credibility**

The researcher ensured that only verified participants who met the inclusive criteria of the study were added to the findings to ensure the quality of data is consistent. The participants were made aware of the study prior to and during the interview of the study and confirmed their willingness to share their experiences. The interview engagement with each participant was projected at approximately 45 minutes to ensure the depth guide provided; however, some participants requested a shortened time due to their other commitments

#### **4.10.2 Transferability**

The results from the study were analysed and presented through a combination of themes and detailed descriptions to make them relatable and to provide readers with the ability to utilise the data in other settings which follow the same methodological process.

#### **4.10.3 Dependability**

The research collection and analysis were described in detail and the data was properly stored to create an audit trail of the steps and procedures followed to produce the end results. The interview questions were shared with all participants, prior to the interview to encourage deeper insights and reflections prior to the interview. The time, date and place where the interviews were conducted were also recorded in the researcher's field notes.

#### **4.10.4 Confirmability**

During the interviews, the researcher took notes and confirmed thoughts with the participants to ensure that the narratives were correctly interpreted by the researcher.

All data collected, recordings and verbatim transcription of the recordings were kept and can be made available upon request, without validating the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. As limitations exist within the scope of research as well as the researcher's bias, the limitations of the study are outlined in section 4.11 of the report.

#### **4.11 Research Ethics**

To ensure compliance with the University's code of ethics, this study obtained research ethical clearance through the Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria on behalf of the Gordon Institute of Business Science. This was applied for and approved prior to data collection.

All participants were advised prior to the interview of the expectations of the interview, they were provided with a Consent Form (Appendix 2) and were informed that confidentiality and anonymity would be ensured in how the data is analysed and reported.

## **4.11 Limitations**

### **4.11.1 Time Horizon**

The study, as previously discussed, followed a cross-sectional approach due to time constraints associated with the research period for the MBA degree. As the data was studied over a period of time, it highlights their current motivations as key influencers instead of their behaviour over a period of time. This can lead to different data if compared over a longer period of time

The increase in time could have allowed the research to be conducted with an industry-focused approach instead of being based on which participants were available and willing to participate.

### **4.11.2 Researcher Bias**

It is common knowledge that in qualitative research, the researcher has preconceived notions about the research and the outcomes, which could affect the research findings (Johnson et al., 2020). As the researcher is the only party present for the interviews, this can lead to their own interpretations and assumptions about the data collected from the interviews.

In order to minimise bias, the researcher did not impose their assumptions and judgments on the entrepreneur's narratives. Care was also taken when exploring linkages between the entrepreneurs' reported intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and behaviours.

### **4.11.3 Differentiations between venture start-up times**

Linking to the limitation of the time horizon, the research focused on a sample size that included successful entrepreneurs only that had started during different economic uncertainties. As the research explores external conditions, the start-up times of a venture would have exposed each entrepreneur to different pressures, challenges, constraints and environmental volatility, leaving the experiences unequal. This prevents the isolation of drivers of motivation alone due to conditional circumstance.

### **4.11.4 Selection Bias**

The selection criteria and purposive sampling excluded other entrepreneurs and their narratives of success and or failure. Therefore, the results from the study did not provide insights on real cases of adversity, failure and second or third attempts.

#### **4.11.5 Social Morality**

The study cannot guarantee that the participants provided a factual account of their stories unfolded. The possible limitation of interviewees answering questions or narrating their stories in a manner they think is appropriate socially acceptable cannot be completely avoided (Pidduck et al., 2021). As noted by Gartner (2007), people's stories are never complete because the content of the story is influenced by who tells the story, how the story is told, why it is told, where the story was told and who was present, when was the story told and to whom the story is told. In the entrepreneurial space, the voices or perspectives of family members, business partners, employees and customers can fill gaps in the entrepreneur's story – but this multi-dimensional approach to the entrepreneur's story requires time and multiple approaches to data collection. It is for this reason that Gartner (2007) asserts that the story told by one or a few people is assumed to be complete

#### **4.12 Conclusion**

This chapter focused on outlining the philosophical, methodological and procedural approaches that guide the focus of the study in order to explore how IM and EXM are able to influence the behavioural dimensions of EM among first-generational South African entrepreneurs. In doing so, an interpretivist philosophy was followed as it allows for an understanding of the narrative stories told by participants. The qualitative exploratory research design and inductive approach to data analysis were presented.

In supporting the narrative research method, the procedure followed to prepare for the semi-structured interviews was outlined, and the data capturing and analysis procedures were also presented. Data from the narratives was analysed using a thematic narrative approach, which was enabled through the use of ATLAS.ti to capture codes and identify themes. The following ensured compliance with the University's Code of Ethics and the limitations of the study were also highlighted.

The methodological foundation and research questions contribute to the development of Chapter 5, which presents the findings from the narratives of the participants.

## **CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS**

### **5.1. Introduction**

Building on the research design and methodological approach outlined in Chapter 4, this chapter presents findings from the narratives obtained through semi-structured interviews with 12 successful first-generation South African entrepreneurs who participated in the study. All interviews were conducted in English and transcribed verbatim to capture the depths and authenticity of the narratives. A narrative thematic approach was adopted using ATLAS.ti., which enabled the researcher to code phrases and paragraphs from the narratives according to key phrases and concepts related to motivation. Furthermore, the narratives were also coded according to the behavioural aspects of EM (that is, decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability) as sub-codes. The sub-codes were then grouped into themes based on the psychological needs of the SDT (autonomy, competence and relatedness) because of their relevance in understanding motivation. The approach enabled the researcher to examine the participants' narrative stories and provide an interpretation of how motivational factors influenced the EB of successful first-generation entrepreneurs. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to present and interpret the findings from the participants' narratives, in accordance with the research questions of the study. The next section provides an overview of the interviewed participants to contextualise the quality of the collected data and the analysis.

### **5.2. Participants' overview and context**

A total of 13 interviews were completed; however, only 12 were eligible for the final analysis, as one participant did not meet the selection requirements of being a first-generation successful entrepreneur. The participants' names were changed to pseudonyms as shown in Table 3 to protect their identities and organisations in line with the University's Code of Ethics and assurance provided to the participants during the interviews. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and online, based on the preference of each participant.

The participants represented a diverse group of industries, which includes manufacturing, construction, retail, information technology (IT) and services. The diversity enhanced the findings by covering a broad spectrum of businesses while

maintaining focus on the motivational forces that influenced each entrepreneur's behavioural dimensions.

Table 3 provides a summary of the participants' key characteristics, including their industry sectors, the number of years their businesses have been in operation, and, based on the analysis and researcher's interpretation, their dominant motivational drivers and primary behavioural strengths.

Pseudonym	Industry	Years in operation	Dominant motivational driver	Primary behavioural strength
Individual 1 [I1]	Hair/ Beauty	±35	Intrinsic (Passion and purpose)	Adaptability
Individual 2 [I2]	Paint	±9	Extrinsic to Intrinsic (Survival to opportunist)	Risk-taking
Individual 3 [I3]	IT	±30	Intrinsic (Personal Autonomy)	Decision-making
Individual 4 [I4]	IT	±30	Intrinsic (Self-Determination)	Decision-making
Individual 5 [I5]	Beekeeping	±45	Intrinsic (Passion)	Adaptability
Individual 6 [I6]	Manufacturing	±30	Extrinsic (Providing for family)	Decision-making
Individual 7 [I7]	Retail	±25	Intrinsic (Personal growth and learning)	Adaptability
Individual 8 [I8]	Manufacturing	±40	Intrinsic (Passion)	Decision-making
Individual 9 [I9]	Powder Coating	±25	Extrinsic (Financial Reward)	Risk-taking
Individual 10 [I10]	Manufacturing	±6	Mixed (Passion and Survival)	Risk-taking
Individual 11 [I11]	Retail/ IT	±20	Extrinsic (Financial Reward)	Decision-making
Individual 12 [I12]	Consulting	±30	Intrinsic (Determination)	Adaptability

Table 3: Key participant characteristics

As shown in Table 3, only two participants had less than ten years work experience as entrepreneurs, and the experience for seven participants ranged between 20 and 30 years. The remaining two participants' businesses had been in operation for longer periods. Collectively, the participants represented a diverse range of

businesses that have been in operation for an average of 27 years within South Africa. This average length of businesses' operations attest to the participants' success as entrepreneurs.

While every narrative or story is unique, common themes emerged from the analysis to show how IM and EXM shaped the different behavioural dimensions of each entrepreneur's EM. The following section provides a thematic analysis of the data in relation to the relevant research questions.

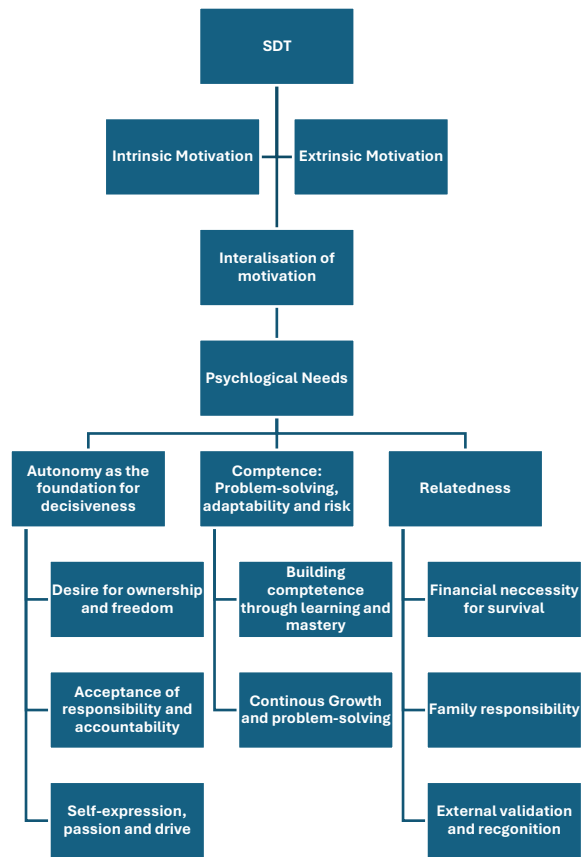
### **5.3. Analysis of results for research Question 1**

*RQ 1: How do intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influence the behavioural dimensions of the entrepreneurial mindset (decision-making, risk-taking, and adaptability) of first-generation South African entrepreneurs?*

The literature cited in Chapter 2 alluded to limited research and understanding of how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation shape the behavioural dimension of EM and the role these behaviours play in entrepreneurial activity and sustainability. Question one, which is core to this study, was designed to address the identified research gap. Therefore, this section presents the findings of research question one by analysing how IM and EXM shaped the EB of first-generation South African entrepreneurs. The psychological needs of SDT provided a structured way of examining the underlying foundations of various motivational factors and the influence of motivation on EB. As discussed in Chapter 2, SDT focuses on the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. These needs represent the foundation through which motivation influences and translates behaviour into action. Since the SDT is strongly linked to intrinsic motivation, the study argues that the SDT needs to operate on both sides of motivation. That is, they can influence intrinsic motivation and a person's response to external motivational factors, which facilitate the internalisation of external motivation to strengthen intrinsic motivation.

The analysis of the data showed that the needs of the SDT model do not exist in isolation, but they are interconnected when influencing an entrepreneur's behavioural dimensions. Equally, the three dimensions of the behavioural aspects of EM are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, the strengths or weaknesses of an individual's motivational factors and their SDTs underpinning are integrally linked with the behavioural dimension of EM, as shown in Figure 2 below.

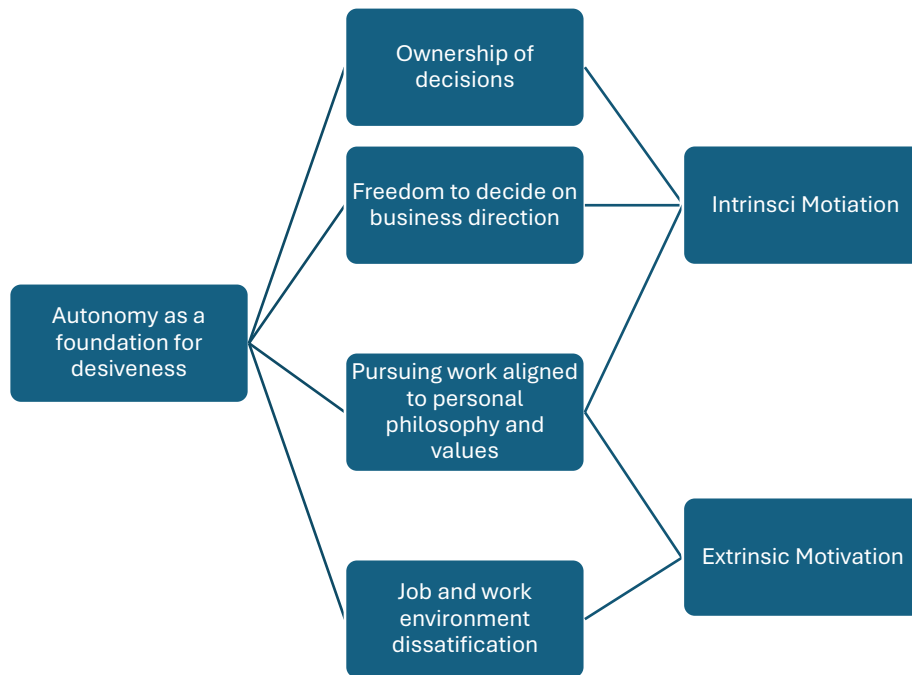
Figure 2: IM and EXM influence on behavioural dimensions of EM.



### 5.3.1. Autonomy as the foundation for decisiveness

The first theme that emerged from narratives is the participants’ willingness to make hard decisions, which reflects the autonomy elements of the SDT model and behavioural EM. Autonomy refers to an individual’s personal philosophy and their need to act with volition over their choices and actions. The analysis of the participants’ narratives revealed that the need for autonomy was deeply embedded in the early stages of some of the participants’ entrepreneurial journeys, whereas for necessity-driven entrepreneurs the need for autonomy developed over time. The participants’ need for and sense of autonomy shaped their behavioural dimensions, which were driven by different motivational elements. As shown in Figure 3, this was illustrated by the participants’ desire for freedom to decide on their business direction, ownership of their decisions, pursuing work that was aligned with their philosophies, and the desire to move from unhealthy work environments. The study argues that varying degrees of risks were integral to the decisions taken in the pursuit of autonomy.

Figure 3: Autonomy's influence on the EM and connecting motivational element



The quotations below provide an illustration of the participants' need for autonomy and the motivational factors that influenced their decisions at different stages of their entrepreneurial journeys

*"The thing that makes me successful is that I love what I do. And that I made a decision to do the job's worth. I am going to do it to the best of my ability" (I1).*

*"So, it is self-motivating, not trying to impress anybody else other than myself and being able to achieve things that most people could not" (I7).*

The elements outlined in Figure 3 and the above quotation frame autonomy as a driver of action as participants start making decisions on their own judgment and direction.

#### 5.3.1.1. **Desire for ownership and freedom**

The narratives revealed that most participants expressed a desire for independence, which led them to seek an environment that supported their freedom to make decisions on their own accord. The analysis further revealed that the participants were determined to make independent decisions without external constraints. The self-determination to create their own destiny was a pivotal ingredient driving their EM as they were able to follow a path that directly linked to their personal autonomy,

which made them accountable for their actions. The desire and determination for ownership of decisions was consistent with their understanding of entrepreneurship as the ability to take full responsibility for the direction of their business choices and the value that they were able to create.

Many participants reflected on the barriers in the corporate environment that limited their personal growth and contribution to their employers' long-term sustainability. This theme shows that the participants' motivation was shaped by a combination of internal and external elements, such as frustration with the work environment, self-determination and the desire to take risks. Together, these IM and EXM factors acted as a catalyst for behavioural change and the realisation of their personal autonomy. The following quotations illustrate the factors that influenced the participant to make entrepreneurial decisions and take risks.

*“Yeah, it wasn’t really my own financial path; it was a decision so that I could make my own decisions. I could work with people that I wanted to work with and make a call for myself and not be told who to work with, from people that I didn’t get on with, and people that I didn’t enjoy working with or being around. So, for my own environment, I think it was the big motivator” (I3).*

*“I was 40 years old when I opened the business. I think over time, you get jaded in corporate, because the problem is, it’s like a big elephant. It’s slow, it’s methodical, you know. It can be frustrating at times.” (I11).*

*“You must either do it, or don’t do it. I quit my job and went into it full-time” (I4).*

*“I wanted to see if I could be successful. And I didn’t want to have the restrictions that working for somebody imposes on you, you know, I wanted to be able to be my own person” (I6).*

*“You know, there was always a ceiling. In my book, there should not be a ceiling” (I11).*

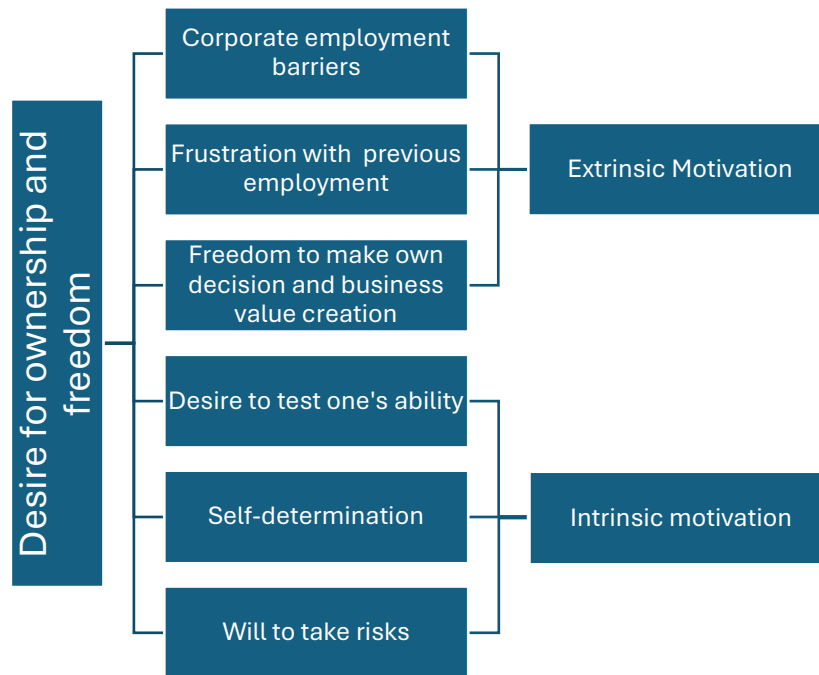
The quotations revealed how self-direction and choice operated as both motivational drivers and behavioural expressions of the entrepreneurs' paths. Taking an entrepreneurial leap allows individuals to be accountable for their own decisions without the bureaucratic constraints that limit the flow of decisions. The bureaucratic limitations and a frustrating work environment allude to EXM and the need for

strategies to overcome such barriers and to foster IM behaviours of determination and risk-acceptance. This reflects how one's desire for autonomy, when aligned with the business purpose, values and belief in one's ability, can influence decision-making and risk-taking. Many of the participants acknowledged that the psychological challenge of transitioning from the safety of fixed employment to entrepreneurship was challenging, as this was the initial behaviour shift towards entrepreneurship.

The concept of freedom was consistently found within the narratives; however, the participants expressed freedom in different ways. The ability to serve their markets in line with their values was a common trait that led to behaviours such as quitting one's job and testing one's ability to start and run a business. The narratives showed that the desire for and realisation of autonomy have the potential to enhance self-determination, which is an intrinsic motivational factor. The results from the analysis showed that autonomy functioned both as a psychological need and a behaviour outcome that influenced the participants' entrepreneurial journeys. The data showed that autonomy represented a psychological trigger, due to the integration of IM and EXM factors, which led to the translation of entrepreneurial intent into action.

As shown in Figure 4 below, the findings revealed that autonomy was regarded by the participants as a central foundation in their decision-making and risk-taking behaviour to fulfil their desire for independence and business control. In addition, insights from the narratives demonstrate how IM factors such as self-determination and freedom to make decisions can convert EI and ideas into decisive action.

Figure 4: Forces impacting entrepreneurs' desire for ownership and freedom



The findings revealed that autonomy was regarded by the participants as a central foundation in their decision-making and risk-taking behaviour to fulfil their desire for independence and business control. Insights from the narratives demonstrate how IM factors such as self-determination and freedom to make decisions, can convert EI and ideas into decisive action.

#### 5.3.1.2. **Acceptance of responsibility and accountability**

While the freedom to make decisions independently was a foundation theme for the participants, it was also interconnected with a deep sense of responsibility and accountability. The entrepreneurs said their desire for independence came with the understanding and need to be responsible for their actions, as this determined how they would handle positive and negative outcomes. Within the SDT framework, autonomy inherently involves self-regulation and the ability to take ownership of one's decisions. Consequently, most of the participants, as reflected in the below quotations, indicated that being accountable for their decisions was a fundamental element to the decisions they made, and the risks associated with those decisions.

*“When you are setting out to do your own thing, you certainly must make the decisions. The buck stops with you, and you make good decisions, and you make bad decisions. And you've got to accept that it's not always plain sailing.*

*The incorrect decisions have quite a profound effect on you as an individual, because they affect your confidence and judgment. But when the decision you make works out, then the reward is great. And so that's a personal feeling of achievement" (I6).*

*"We all have times where we lose it, unfortunately, but it's also just admitting you have made a mistake, apologising for it and trying to rebuild that relationship again" (I3).*

*"You must never be scared to tell us you have made a mistake, because we make mistakes. I mean, everybody is human, and everybody makes a mistake" (I11).*

The above quotations illustrate how accountability functions as both a motivational driver and a behaviour within the EM. From the narratives, it was also clear that independence in decision-making required a level of emotional maturity, as the entrepreneurs recognised that their actions carry inherent risks. This demonstrates how autonomy can be internalised to create a sense of accountability that shapes decision-making behaviour.

The participants also reflected that they were able to admit to making mistakes, which showed that they were emotionally aware of their decisions and surroundings. This is fundamental for the behavioural dimensions to align with the entrepreneur's autonomy, because without being accountable, the participants would not have been able to correct their mistakes. Similarly, the narratives revealed that accepting consequences and learning from mistakes strengthened the behaviours that were needed to ensure entrepreneurial autonomy. The internalisation of responsibility, self-improvement and continuous learning by the participants demonstrated how IM was transformed into a discipline and a drive to influence future decision-making.

While personal autonomy was the most notable primary psychological need, the participants' narratives also demonstrated a link between personal autonomy and elements of self-belief, learning and competence. This connection demonstrated the participants' adaptive learning capacity and behavioural growth, thus showing how the integration of SDT elements, inclusive of self-regulation, influenced the entrepreneur's behavioural decisions to support the long-term growth and sustainability of their businesses.

#### **5.3.1.3. Self-expression, passion and drive**

Within the SDT framework, self-expression, passion and drive represent the internalisation of an individual's personal autonomy, which align with the goals and purpose the entrepreneurs set out to achieve. These qualities create complex connections and dependencies between decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability, and the behavioural processes of autonomy, accountability and responsibility. One participant explained that their entrepreneurial journey, which started in the 1990s, was also inspired by the desire -

*“To build something meaningful, to the welcoming of our country” (I12).*

The narratives provided insights that the entrepreneurial ventures reflected the entrepreneur's passion for a purpose-driven approach to business. The desire for freedom was not only for financial benefit, but reflected the desire and ability to embed one's personality and ideology into the organisation through decisions that were aligned with the participants' personal philosophies.

Passion and purpose were regarded by some of the participants as key elements that drove them to pursue their ventures successfully. The IM associated with these traits enabled them to remain committed to their business, thereby creating sustainable and successful businesses by following what inspired and motivated them more than the pursuit of financial reward. Although financial stability was not always the primary motivator, the participants acknowledged that it remained an external factor which influenced their decision-making. The following extracts serve to demonstrate the importance of being driven by passion and purpose:

*“Follow your passion because your passion will provide everything. Because if you don't have the passion for what you are doing, then there are so many other contributing factors as to why [the business] is not successful” (I1).*

*“I just had a passion for beekeeping and the bees, particularly the bees. But our business has many facets to it. And so, the one would lead to the next. So, my passion for beekeeping was obviously a byproduct of that was honey. It wasn't the honey that motivated me. It wasn't the business that motivated me. It was the passion for bees” (I5).*

The participants' narratives showed that these IM factors, supported by emotional and moral conviction, influenced the choices made and ultimately their behaviours. Insights from the narratives showed that IM factors shaped the participants' EBs and provided a basis to navigate through uncertainty and challenges. Pursuing

opportunities and growth through passion and purpose enabled decisions that were both adaptable and risk tolerant. However, the participants were tested over time by external challenges, showing that passion alone did not sustain their behaviour.

Consequently, the participants demonstrated persistence through their desire to be self-driven and to learn and improve their basic skills and knowledge. These behaviours were central to the participant's IM. The narratives demonstrated that learning was a continuous cycle and an integral part of their EM because success in a specific period did not guarantee future success without constant refinement and growth. While autonomy emerged as a dominant motivational factor and SDT need, the narratives showed that it was strengthened by the entrepreneurs' sense of competence and ongoing development. As confidence deepened, so did their clarity of direction and purpose, which demonstrates how autonomy can be supported and strengthened through competence.

### **5.3.2. Competence: Problem-solving, adaptability and risk.**

Within the SDT framework, competence refers to an individual's need to feel effective, capable and confident with their decision-making ability. Literature attests that the psychological need for competence influences both IM and EXM to shape the risk-taking and adaptability behavioural dimensions of EM. Competence is demonstrated through the ability to solve problems, continuous learning and the ability to overcome challenges.

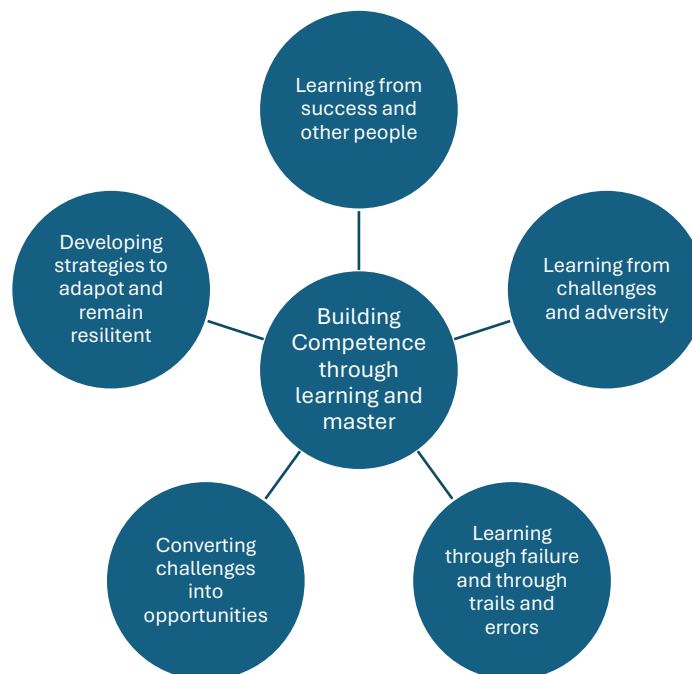
Cognisant of these observations, the participants did not regard competence as an inherent trait but as a skill that could be developed over time through the entrepreneur's self-determination and desire to learn. Competence was thus acquired through reflection, planning and continuous learning as elaborated further in the sections below. This perspective reinforces the behavioural dimensions of the EM.

#### **5.3.2.1. Building competence through learning and mastery**

A common theme among the participants was continuous learning during successful and challenging periods. During challenging times and periods of uncertainty, the participants reflected on how survival pressures served as external triggers or EXM, and in turn acted as a catalyst for learning, growth and self-improvement because failure was not an option. The narratives alluded to learning from success, trial and

error, failure and other people as well as developing or adopting different strategies to adapt to the changing environment. The mechanisms to facilitate the development of competence through learning and mastery are reflected in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Competence development mechanisms



The importance of developing competence through learning from successes and failures is illustrated in the following quotations:

*“A never-say-die attitude when things were going wrong, and this is a very important one. I mean, when things go badly or things get tough, you put your head down and work through it because there are multiple challenges in any business. And so yes, I put my head down and I worked in bad times, I worked harder. I spent more time at work. I would not accept defeat. Definitely not” (I6).*

*“Yeah, it is not pretty admitting if you're wrong. Pay the price for your consequences and never stop learning. That's the biggest, never too old or too clever in any industry” (I8).*

*“So, I think the key thing is you must not be afraid to make mistakes, because you learned from them. And we have refined it over the years in that we don't make as many mistakes as we used to” (I11).*

*“You learn much more when times are tough than when times are going great” (I12).*

Collectively, the data showed that experience and adversity contributed to the development of an entrepreneur’s competence. The reflections emphasised the importance of learning as a continuous process, which is grounded through humility, resilience and reflection. The participants' acknowledgement and willingness to learn and make mistakes demonstrated how competence influenced their behavioural dimensions of EM. The IM to overcome adversity was demonstrated through the entrepreneur’s ability to remain resilient and to convert challenges and failures into opportunities to learn and grow. Overcoming adversity, as an IM, was demonstrated through the entrepreneurs’ ability to remain resilient and driven to convert challenges and failure into opportunities to learn and grow. Adversity also represented an EXM factor due to survival pressure and business instability as a result of competitors and the economic environment, which forced entrepreneurs to adapt quickly. The analysis revealed that as the participants’ competence grew, their ability to evaluate and take calculated risks also improved, thus showing how various IM and EXM factors associated with the SDT element of competence influenced the entrepreneurs’ adaptability behaviour.

Through being adaptable and learning by experience, the participants demonstrated that their learning turned into mastery, which enhanced their decision-making and risk evaluation confidence. This was aptly captured by one participant’s assertion that:

*“You learn all facets of the business, you know what I mean, you learn to adapt... and when you are on your own, you have to learn to manage those obstacles yourself” (I11).*

The main observation from the narratives is that competence is not an inherent skill, but a mindset fuelled by self-belief, self-awareness, as well as determination and willingness to learn and adapt. Competence is not a static and fixed once-off element, but is more of a continuous cycle of improvement and refinement. This means an EM is enhanced by individuals who reinforce their position through continuous learning and development, which is central for growth and value creation.

### **5.3.2.2. Continuous growth and problem-solving**

The analysis in this section extends competence into further dimensions based on data presented from the participants' narrative stories about managing uncertainty through calculated risk-taking. The analysis suggests that self-improvement enabled participants to reduce uncertainty by facilitating purposive decision-making.

“You know, I make decisions every day, all day long on simple things, whether it be HR or finance. I think you have to have that gut feel, but also your bigger decisions never make them at that point in time. If a problem comes across your table, never make that decision there and then. You do a SWOT analysis, you do all of your marketing norms that big businesses say that you should run, you know. You've got marketing 101 that says, this is what you have to do, but I still run a pros and cons exercise. I put my pros in my cons for any major decision-making process that I am taking” (I2).

The above quotation demonstrates the adoption of a reflective approach to decision-making and a commitment to a structured and risk-prevention problem-solving process.. A similar sentiment was shared by another participant as follows:

*“You have got to keep reinventing yourself all the time if you want to be competitive. You can never consider that you have got the right recipe. You do not want to be completely starting again, because that is dangerous. You can spend too much time chasing theories, but you do want to try and constantly improve your competitiveness and productivity to fine-tune it” (I10).*

The narratives demonstrated how self-regulation served as a driving force for competence, which in turn influenced the behavioural dimensions of the EM. The commitment to structured planning was driven by the need for mastery, which an IM, and planning as an EXM that was caused by market pressures. Problem-solving, as an integral part of competence, is not a static and fixed once-off element, but more of a continuous cycle of improvement and refinement. The analysis revealed that within the EM context, competence resonates with self-determination, resilience, responsiveness and environmental changes.

Competence is not only developed through mastery, but it is also internalised through the entrepreneur's desire to learn and navigate through uncertainty and challenging times. This desire builds confidence through reflection and problem-solving as the participants recognised that they could better calculate and manage risks while being adaptable. This highlights that competence directly influences the behavioural

dimensions of EM through decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability, thus taking the uncertainty and transforming it into an opportunity.

The findings thereby show that competence not only shapes how participants evaluated risk, but how their behaviour adapted to the conditions around them.

### **5.3.3. Relatedness**

The final psychological need identified within the SDT framework refers to an individual's sense of belonging, shared purpose and connection with others. Relatedness integrates the need to be valued and supported within their current or future environment. Across all the participants, relationships were a key theme, showing how IM and EXM served as an anchor to EB. Available literature states that relatedness plays a critical role within entrepreneurship, as it shapes behavioural and motivational outcomes through trust, collaboration and mutual respect.

The participants reflected on their relationships with their families, mentors and organisational stakeholders and how those relationships served as emotional and strategic resources that reinforced their goals, drive and purpose. The IM for relatedness is related to the participant's internal desire for a sense of belonging and meaningful connections, and the EXM elements emanated from financial and family pressures, in addition to seeking other people's approval and reputational gain. This highlights how the IM and EXM factors associated with 'relatedness' are aligned with other SDT psychological needs and further allude to their interconnection with dimensions for behavioural enablement within the EM.

#### **5.3.3.1. Financial necessity and survival**

Many of the participants indicated that their entrepreneurial journeys were, in addition to other intrinsic and extrinsic factors, driven by financial necessity due to economic circumstances, retrenchment, job dissatisfaction and limitations for growth in the corporate environment. The narratives showed that even though external conditions were imposed on the participants, they demonstrated confidence in their ability to succeed as they knew the basics and had years of industry knowledge at their disposal. This confidence allowed them to take decisive action and adapt their lifestyle by taking risks to start their businesses, so that they can be more financially secure. The financial pressures and their possible impact on the psychological need to belong and to be recognised is captured in the following quotations.

*“The logic was to provide support and financial stability. To rather, make sure that I've provided for myself financially by working for myself, than working for somebody else” (I4).*

*“I did not have sufficient retirement funding and, you know, there were difficulties at home of not being productive, of sitting and searching for jobs and waiting. It starts to erode your confidence, and it starts to make you feel unproductive and personal dynamics at home with my wife were difficult, it wasn't easy. You know, there are expectations for you to provide. And when you are not able to do that, you know, you're living off income, you're living off savings, and it becomes quite pressurised. So, I perhaps jumped into it, maybe too quickly, but it was, you know, having tried different things and having applied for many, many jobs, around 100 jobs, and only been interviewed for one. Eventually, you think the only path is to develop your own path. So you can afford your own way, make your own business” (I10).*

*“I always worked with other people, until I was retrenched. And then I decided it's time. It's time to do my own thing. I mean, I was 50 years old” (I12).*

The quotations show that external pressures, such as economic instability and job losses, acted as powerful catalysts for entrepreneurial decision-making and EB. For many participants, entrepreneurship was not only an opportunity but a necessity for financial survival. However, the EXM was not based only on economic pressure, but was also relational. Financial survival impacted the participants' dignity, identity and family relations. The data showed how EXM was internalised as a social obligation that motivated the participants to have a sense of purpose and belonging and regain control over their circumstances. It may be argued that the internalisation of the EXM was also facilitated by the participant's IM factors of responsibility and accountability, as discussed earlier. This means in some instances, financial pressure can become a constraint to or a catalyst for EB.

This observation is relevant in the South African context, where entrepreneurship is and should be promoted as a mechanism to mitigate against job losses and financial instability. Financial necessity, when supported by the SDT element, fostered all the key behavioural dimensions of the EM as the participants were compelled to make

calculated risk decisions and to adapt their lifestyle to pursue their entrepreneurial ventures.

#### **5.3.3.2. Family responsibility**

For both opportunity and necessity-driven entrepreneurs, a related dimension of EXM emerged through family responsibility. Several participants indicated that their pursuit of entrepreneurship was not only for financial stability for themselves, but by a relational duty to protect, support and remain connected to their families. The responsibility to care and provide for the family is illustrated in the following quotations.

“So, yeah, that is the reason why we went into it. You have a family, and you have to provide. And I could see that I could not maintain my lifestyle on the opportunities that I could see in the market” (I2).

“So, I decided that I would go on my own, just go make my own way in the business, you know. I also have a very strong desire, or it is my purpose in life, to care for my family. So, although I was working in the family business, I wanted better and more for my immediate family” (I6).

“I had a baby on the way. So, I had to do something to support a newly fledged family” (I9).

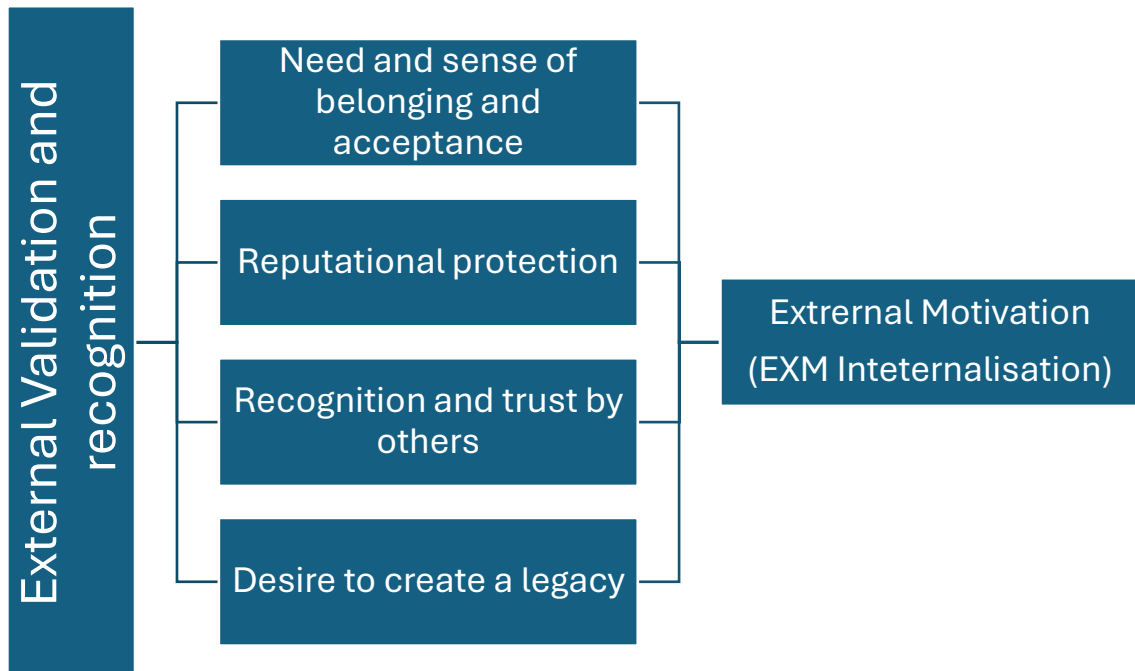
The participants' reflections illustrate that responsibility to their family created a deeper sense of attachment and obligation because providing for one's family reinforced their identity as providers and further strengthened their emotional connection to their families. The narratives revealed that the internal desire for purpose and emotional connection to the family was instrumental in transforming an EXM factor (financial pressure) into an IM.

The analysis further illustrated how financial necessity and family responsibility, as EXM and IM, drove entrepreneurial action through decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability. Specifically, financial necessity and family responsibility as EXM factors were internalised through long-term commitment to the family, loyalty, persistence and accountability. The internalisation of EXM is an important driver of IM in the SDT model, of which IM is regarded as a major determinant for entrepreneurial success.

#### **5.3.3.3. External validation and recognition**

Beyond the motivational elements previously discussed, the narratives revealed that a few participants alluded to external validation and recognition as influential motivation factors. The elements that underpin this fact are shown in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: Influences of external validation and recognition.



Validation and recognition reinforced behaviour which not only established legitimacy but also integrated with a sense of belonging and acceptance within their personal and professional relationships.

*“So, I’ve always liked to please. And for me, my reputation is everything. So, you know, I had a little thing on my desk one day that used to say when I do right, it remembers [but] when I do wrong, no one forgets. And that’s very true, you know, you can be a good man for, 20-30 years and do one thing wrong, people remember you what you have done wrong” (17).*

This reflection highlights that the need to protect, maintain and enhance one’s reputation was a motivational driver for some participants as it influenced their EB. The participants emphasised the importance of relationships and their influence over the business’s long-term sustainability. As key aspects of EXM, recognition and reputation were identified as sources of pride and behavioural influences which shaped EB. According to some participants:

“The trust in the relationships that you build with people is absolutely critical for an entrepreneur. You have to have that trust from your client. If you don't build that trust and it has happened to me on a couple of occasions where the trust was gone from both sides. And that's when you pull the plug and you say no more, and you get out and you carry on” (I3).

“I regard our business as an extension of our clients ' businesses. So you tap into their business model more than anything else, and then you become part and parcel” (I6).

These reflections show how mutual respect and trust strengthened long-term relationships, as the participants were able to leverage their connections for long-term partnerships by consistently delivering on their commitments. This shows that the desire to build and or maintain a good reputation contributed to the decisions and risks taken. For some participants, their motivation was built on creating something which they desired others to be associated with, in turn leaving a legacy.

“I wanted to build something worthwhile. It took something meaningful. Something that left a legacy. I mean, we've been going 30 years now, so hopefully we've left some sort of legacy. And as I said, we wanted to be an important player in building the country. I wanted people who had relationships with our clients, our family, friends, and the broader stakeholders of the community, we wanted them to be proud of the association with us.” (I12).

This statement highlights that building recognition and relationships within the market serves as an external validation for a deeper sense of purpose. The motivation influence over creating a reputation in which others desire to be associated with embodies a behavioural drive by EXM. Within the SDT framework, the EXM factors such as reputation, approval and recognition can drive behaviour to seek validation. Whereas IM is driven through purpose and self-development. The participants' desire for trust, recognition and respect fulfilled the relatedness psychological needs. These needs within the SDT framework play a critical role in motivation as they shape EB. Having support, trust and validation from others reinforced the participants' confidence and emotional maturity to make decisions while being resilient in the face of uncertainty. Relationships allowed the participants to be accountable while providing reassurance, which influenced their decisions.

#### **5.3.4. Summary**

The findings regarding the psychological needs of the SDT framework demonstrate how IM and EXM are connected and influence the behavioural dimensions of the EM, among first-generational South African entrepreneurs. Autonomy provided insights on how independent decision-making and accountability are driven through IM by the participants' pursuit of control and freedom within their decision-making. Competence emerged from their desire to continuously learn, take calculated risks and adapt to uncertainty through their struggles with adversity. Finally, relatedness revealed how EXM, during times of hardship and struggles with financial necessity, family responsibility, and external validation, was internalised with other IM factors. The SDT framework and motivational elements show how behaviour is influenced, driven and transformed into action. The analysis shows that an entrepreneurial venture is not only viewed as a means of survival, but a self-determination process where motivation is central to growth through experience.

#### **5.4. Analysis of results for research Question 2**

<p><i>RQ2: Under what conditions are internal and external motivational pathways strengthened or weakened?</i></p>
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As stated in previous sections, motivation is not constant but is dynamic and context sensitive. This research question explored how motivation evolved over time in response to the entrepreneur's contextual, personal and relational factors. The analysis focused on the internal and external drivers and conditions that evoked this change. As discussed in research question one, motivation does not function in isolation but changes depending on environmental pressures, relationships and feedback, reflection and self-directed growth.

The themes that emerged from the narratives are separated into conditions that strengthened and conditions that weakened motivation. In presenting these themes, emphasis is placed on specific internal conditions and external conditions or circumstances that shaped how participants sustained or adapted during their entrepreneurial journeys. Focus was also on the entrepreneurs' "rebalancing" mechanisms. The conditions that strengthened and weakened the participants'

motivation are summarised in Table 4 below, and they are elaboration in the following section.

Conditions that strengthened participants' motivation	Conditions that weakened the participant's motivation
Supportive (family, business and community) relationships	Financial pressure,
Constructive feedback	Fatigue and emotional exhaustion
Determination and perseverance	Doubt (in one's ability and the business)
Fulfilment from pursuing and achieving personal goals.	Emotional Uncertainty (due to financial challenges and external factors such as a volatile business environment)
Optimism	

Table 4: Conditions that strengthen or weaken the participant's motivation

#### 5.4.1. Conditions that strengthened motivation

The analysis revealed that motivation was strengthened when participants experienced supportive relationships, constructive feedback and personal autonomy when operating in supportive environments. These conditions, as reflected in the below quotation, reinforced the participants' drive to maintain focus and resilience even during challenging periods.

*“In the beginning, when I started, I was confident in my ability, especially when you are in this, on your own. If you haven't got that support in your family, or some sort of guidance in your own business, it's difficult. So, I've been very lucky in my business. I've got a business partner who is a technical support in that business, and she gives me a lot of encouragement. And some days I'll get to work and say, yes, like we failed in this and this in this and you just need that other person to come and say, we just carry on not doing what you're doing” (I2).*

The quotation highlights how social and relational support contributed, drove and sustained motivation. Taking on the role of an entrepreneur can be daunting due to the high level of uncertainty and challenges faced. However, having a support structure builds confidence and resilience, which strengthens motivation to face challenges.

In addition to external support conditions, the narratives highlighted the importance of internal or intra-personal factors such as, determination and fulfilment from pursuing and achieving personal goals. One participant explained how instrumental determination was in their entrepreneurial journey as follows:

*“I was determined that once I'd left, I was definitely not going back. So I said, I think that was a big motivator for me. I'm not going to go back into the corporate world. I think that was a massive kick for me, because I saw people coming back and I thought, I couldn't believe that people had failed so miserably, but then I understood once I started a business, how easy it is to fail. And it is [was easy to fail] but I was determined, absolutely determined, I was not going to go back” (I3).*

Understanding passion, purpose and goals shows how determination and commitment strengthened the participant's motivation to succeed. By setting and implementing defined goals, determination reinforced the motivation to succeed.

*“And if something goes wrong, it's you who must find it and persevere. Go and find a solution to that problem, because it's not copy-paste, and repeat. Every day is a different day. So certainly, perseverance, I will say, is the driving force there” (I9).*

Perseverance is another element that strengthened motivation as it allowed for problem-solving initiatives and creative thinking. Challenges and uncertainty are common functions within entrepreneurship but should be viewed as opportunities to succeed and overcome.

In addition to the IM factors related to competence, acceptance of accountability and the individual's willingness to take initiative, an optimistic mindset strengthened the participants' ability to overcome uncertainty and be resilient.

*“I'm an eternal optimist. I've always believed that things will get better. It's taken a lot longer than I suspected. But it hasn't dampened my optimism. I do believe that eventually sanity will prevail” (I11).*

Supportive relations, determination, fulfilment and optimism are some of the conditions that strengthened the entrepreneurs' motivation. Across the narratives, decision-making quality was elevated and risk acceptance became bolder, allowing for adaptive responses.

#### **5.4.2. Conditions that weakened motivation**

While positive motivation can sustain entrepreneurs during uncertainty, prolonged internal and external pressures can also weaken their morale and motivation levels. The analysis showed that elements such as financial pressure, fatigue and doubt, uncertainty, and emotional exhaustion can weaken motivation and lower entrepreneurial drive.

*“So, part of the problem was that this business sort of absorbed me? It absorbed my life, personal life too” (15).*

This reflects the sacrifice entrepreneurship had on the individual's personal boundaries. Entrepreneurs' personal and professional lives are merged, and during challenging times, this causes motivation to be weakened.

In addition to external support conditions, the narratives highlighted the importance of internal or intra-personal factors such as, determination and fulfilment from pursuing and achieving personal goals. This highlighted the importance of the rebalancing mechanisms. Participants were actively able to restore motivation after dips and circumstances. This was done through tightening routine, corrective action and critical feedback allowing them to mitigate away from failure.

#### **5.4.3. Summary**

The analysis demonstrated that entrepreneurial motivation is context dependent, dynamic and evolves in relation to the impact of supportive and or constraining conditions. From the narratives, motivation was strengthened when the participants had supportive environments, and they were determined, optimistic and fulfilled. On the other hand, motivation was adversely affected by financial constraints, emotional fatigue and overall industry challenges. Uncertainty and challenges can cause doubt in the entrepreneurs' abilities and capabilities, which disrupts their rhythm. The participants reflected on their biggest challenges, but all were resilient and had enough self-belief to push through the tough times.

The results showed that motivation fluctuates according to the circumstances the participants were faced with. The study argues that while change and uncertainty are unavoidable, fluctuations in motivation can have a negative impact on the behavioural dimensions of EM entrepreneurial action.

### 5.5. Analysis of results for research Question 3

*What mechanisms do successful first-generation entrepreneurs adopt to mitigate challenges and ensure business sustainability?*

Having explored the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors on the behavioural dimensions of EM and the conditions that strengthened or weakened motivation, this research question explored the mechanism that successful first-generation entrepreneurs adopted and further recommended should be adopted by aspiring entrepreneurs, to mitigate against obvious and unforeseen challenges and to ensure the sustainability of business ventures. To respond to this question, participants were requested to reflect on their challenges and responses to strategies and provide advice to aspiring first-generation entrepreneurs. An analysis of the participants' narratives provided insights into various areas, ranging from planning, funding and financial management, learning, dealing with compliance requirements and ethical conduct. As shown in Figure 7 below, some of the areas highlight the link between the SDT elements, the behavioural aspects of EM and business sustainability.

Figure 7: Mechanisms to mitigate against challenges and ensure business sustainability



### 5.5.1. Planning and risk assessment

An analysis of the narratives revealed that planning and risk assessment are often taken for granted, and yet they play a critical role in entrepreneurship. According to several participants, it is important to develop a business plan or to simply put the idea and plan in writing so that there is a clear point of reference. The written plan and subsequent revised plans should be stored safely and revisited regularly as part of reflecting on the quality of the plans in comparison to execution experience. In identifying a niche market or simply following one's passion, the plan should determine whether the business venture requires a small or big capital injection and whether it is labour-intensive or not especially because the latter had financial and human resource management implications and related regulatory compliance requirements.

The narratives further alluded to the importance of having a long-term vision as opposed to a short-term vision that is likely to result in despair and failure because the first three to five years of business are characterised by challenges and instability before the entrepreneur can begin to realise growth and profit. An integral aspect of the planning process is risk assessment and risk management. According to first-generation entrepreneurs, some of whom may not be able to conduct adequate risk assessment, should adopt risk assessment strategies or tactics that will provide reliable insights at less or no cost to the entrepreneur. Some of the participants alluded to planning and risk assessment as follows:

*“Put it in writing, do a business plan and take it to a bank, even if you have capital, to test risk and get feedback. ... Revisit old business plans, keep hard copies and study past mistakes.” (I2)*

*“Write down the strengths and weaknesses and revisit them. Start slowly, grow at a measured pace and be cautious as a solo founder (I6)*

*“Hold a long-term vision, be optimistic, do fundamentals consistently ... resilience and patience pay.” (I11)*

The advice provided in this area can be connected to the SDT element of competence and risk, as well as the risk-taking and decision-making behavioural dimensions of EM, as demonstrated by the need to plan and review plans. This is important for the study because it shows that EM can be developed by learning from the narratives of experienced entrepreneurs, thus minimising the risk of failure.

### **5.5.2. Learning and appointing suitable people**

Recognising one's strengths and weaknesses was identified as a precursor to different approaches to ensuring learning. The learning theme emphasised experiential learning, reinventing oneself and the business to stay abreast of technology and other trends, and being flexible and adaptable instead of formal qualifications. Recognising one's strengths and weaknesses and knowing where to augment the latter through external support was considered an important competency.

*"Identify your weaknesses and then hire people who will complement you. Admit when you are wrong and never stop learning, even from juniors." (17)*

Other participants reiterated a similar point as follows:

*"Work to your strengths, recognise your limits and then educate yourself", and then hire people with strengths to complement your areas of weakness. (16)*

*"If you enjoy reading comics, write comics. You don't need a business degree, hire [a person who has] one. You don't have to know everything. (11)*

Another learning strategy that emerged from the narratives relates to acquiring knowledge and skills through formal work employment. Arguably, this is more applicable to people who have never had formal employment and have the potential to secure employment despite the high levels of unemployment in South Africa. Assuming that formal employment is possible, the study argues that the following assertions are worth considering by emerging and possibly young first-generation entrepreneurs:

*"Get corporate experience first to learn how business works and how to work with people. Master the basics. (13)*

*"Build industry experience." (19)*

The analysis in this section alluded to the role of all SDT elements in shaping the behavioural dimensions of EM. Again, the analysis showed that EM can be acquired through different forms of learning, including from entrepreneurial narratives.

### **5.5.3. Funding and financial management**

The challenge of starting a business when one does not have seed capital emerged from several participants' narratives. Banks were also viewed as contributors to this

challenge because of their reluctance to grant seed loans at the initial stages of business start-up, and yet later, when an entrepreneur has managed to get their business operational, banks are quick to entice them with different types of loans.

“It is not easy to fund a start-up when you do not have capital, and banks are hesitant when you need money most, later they push debt when you don’t [want debt]”. (I2).

Participants in this study further cautioned against investing one’s money completely into the start-up, raising capital through short-term loans and using houses or other properties as collateral because of the high costs and risks associated with these strategies. As observed by one participant, “many startups fail after big gambles and over-indebtedness.” (I3).

The narratives further provided guidance on how first-regeneration entrepreneurs should manage their finances once their businesses are operational. The advice extracted from the narratives can be divided into many do’s and few don’ts, as outlined in Table 5 below.

What should be done (the do’s)	What should not be done (the don’ts)
Start small where you are and then expand. (I12) Keep lean and small to stay under thresholds. (I8)	Minimise risk and debt, don’t bet on your house or car. (I3)
Plan for hard times; keep free cash for opportunities and pay cash for short-life equipment. (I2)	Avoid overdrafts for working capital, use equity or long-term loans. (I2)
Budget for hidden costs of hiring staff such as unemployment insurance fund, provident funds and bonuses. (I9)	Choose business models where you can control pricing or margins. (I8)
Keep overheads down, work from home, and no flashy offices. (I10)	
Diversify income, (I7)	
Fund assets from debt (I2) 3 years	

Save aggressively, invest in core business and keep vehicles until you can buy the next one cash. (I2)	
Do the fundamentals consistently, maintain cash buffers. (I11)	

Table 5: The do's and don'ts of funding start-ups and managing finances

The guidance provided in this area cuts across the SDT elements and all behavioural dimensions of EM in an integrated manner.

#### 5.5.4. Decision-making

Few participants' narratives indicated that entrepreneurs must, in addition to planning and assessing and managing risks, be decisive. As shown in the below quotations, decision-making was considered important in ensuring swift responses to environmental changes.

*"Move fast on market gaps, be flexible and adapt quickly." (I10)*

*"Be decisive under pressure, back yourself. Don't sit on the fence. (I9)*

*"SA [South Africa] is a land of opportunity – ignore naysayers – opportunities don't come to you, go get the ball. ... Look to underserved markets (e.g., township retail, micro-franchising) and keep eyes and mind open." (I12)*

The above quotations reiterate the importance of decision-making, which is one the behavioural dimensions of EM.

#### 5.5.5. Staff and customer relations

Building and maintaining good relations with staff, customers and other stakeholders was mentioned by several participants because the success, growth and sustainability of the business is dependent on all these stakeholders. This observation is supported by the following quotations from the narratives:

*"Build strong relationships with staff, suppliers and customers." (I10)*

*"Treat customers like gold, staff will follow [to treat them as such]." (I7)*

*"Trust and relationships are important." (I12)*

In this instance, maintaining good relations is an extrinsic motivator that is strongly linked with the SDT element of relatedness, which was discussed in detail in the

previous sections. The study argues that the desire to maintain good relations has an influence on the entrepreneur's mindset and behaviour.

#### **5.5.6. Managing compliance requirements**

The narratives alluded to the complex requirements, which participants I3 and I8 referred to as "heavy red tape" or simply "red tape", that entrepreneurs in South Africa are expected to comply with. For some industries, the requirements include compliance with the Employment Equity Act (EEA), the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) Act, the Companies Act, unions and collective bargaining as provided for the Labour Relations Act (LRA), tax, import and exports requirements, and many other requirements. Regulations, according to participant I11, make business trading tough and compliance with many of the requirements is expensive (I9), time-consuming and inefficient (I10).

There was acknowledgement from the narratives that entrepreneurs are unlikely to meet such requirements without specialist support; however, such support should only be contracted on a short-term basis because start-ups do not require dedicated capacity for compliance purposes. While several participants grappled with this issue, some participants offered the following advice:

*"Outsource compliance ... to specialists." (I13)*

*Pick markets carefully, focus on niche (areas) within industries. (I15)*

While serving as an external motivational factor, managing compliance requirements demonstrates the influence of the SDT elements of competence and relatedness across all EB dimensions.

#### **5.5.7. Reputation and ethical conduct**

Reputation, which is strongly linked with the SDT element of relatedness and external motivation, was considered a key determinant of business success. As demonstrated by the quotations below, the narratives revealed that ethics and ethical conduct are connected to entrepreneurial reputation and success.

*"Reputation is everything." (I7)*

*"Keep a strong reputation" and "avoid shady deals." (I6)*

*"Oppose corruption by focusing on delivery". (I10)*

From the above quotations and analysis in previous sections, it is clear that reputation was an external motivational factor that influenced the behavioural dimensions of EM, especially decision-making and risk-taking. To establish and maintain a good reputation, entrepreneurs must constantly subject their decisions and risk tolerance to scrutiny, ethics and other standards.

#### **5.5.8. Awareness of local and global context**

Entrepreneurship requires heightened levels of awareness about the local and global context. This includes awareness of existing and changing regulatory laws, pricing and market share competition from local and international companies, and the impact of geopolitics on trading. This level of awareness is dependent on the entrepreneur's competence or the competencies of specialists who are contracted by the entrepreneur. Specialist support is necessary, according to participant I11, especially in the first two to three years of operation, when the business is still too vulnerable to external shock.

This last focus areas can serve as an external motivation influence, and it can influence the three behavioural aspects of EM, provided the SDT competence element is strong.

#### **5.5.9. Summary**

Eight mechanisms to mitigate against obvious and unforeseen challenges and to ensure the sustainability of business ventures were. These include, among others, planning and risk assessment, learning and appointing suitable people, funding and financial management, reputation and ethical conduct, managing compliance requirements and decision-making. Some of the identified mechanisms serve as intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factors and they have an influence on the behavioural dimensions of EM.

### **5.6. Conclusion**

The findings show that the first-generation South African entrepreneur participants viewed the psychological needs as collective, interdependent drivers instead of being isolated needs. This highlighted that motivation is also not a static element but a dynamic force that fluctuates depending on the psychological needs and

circumstances they face. Within research question one, it was identified that motivation has a significant influence on an entrepreneur's behavioural dimensions, while research question two showed that motivation can be strengthened or weakened, resulting in shifts within their behaviours and actions. Finally, research question three revealed that deliberate planning, proactive learning and structured preparedness allow entrepreneurs to be better prepared for uncertainty, allowing them to mitigate risk.

The results collectively confirm that the EM is an adaptive system, which progresses, changes and adapts over time through the internalisation of both IM and EM. This adaptive system demonstrates a willingness to improve, persistence, resilience, and accountability. Thereby showing the findings are a process within the SDT framework that shapes the behavioural dimensions for long-term sustainability.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### 6. Discussion

#### 6.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the analyses from the semi-structured interviews, which were presented in Chapter 5, and interprets the results through the theoretical lens of the SDT, as outlined in Chapter 2. The discussion places emphasis on the behavioural dimensions of the EM and uses the SDT framework as an explanatory mechanism to illustrate why and how EB is either strengthened or weakened. While Chapter 5 analysed what participants expressed as the influencing motivations that shaped their behavioural tendencies, this chapter moves beyond description to interpret how these motivations were internalised and transitioned into action. This is done by comparing the results with the existing literature (Cui & Bell, 2022; Fayolle & Liñán, 2014; Sun et al., 2023), to determine how the study confirms, extends or contradicts prior research. This approach provides a theoretical and practical contribution to understanding the influence of motivation on the behavioural dimension of EM within the South African context.

#### 6.2. Discussion of Research Question 1

*RQ 1: How do intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influence the behavioural dimensions of the Entrepreneurial Mindset (decision-making, risk-taking, and adaptability) among first-generation South African entrepreneurs?*

The first research question explored themes in relation to the participants' entrepreneurial journeys. As will be elaborated in the following sections of this chapter, the results from the participants' narratives alluded to autonomy as the foundation for decision-making, which was demonstrated by, among others, freedom and ownership of decisions, acceptance of accountability and self-expression and drive. The results also alluded to the development of competence through continuous and experiential learning and problem-solving. The sub-themes related to autonomy and competence, as presented in Chapter 5, described how different types of motivation shaped the participants' behaviour and how those behaviours were linked with the desire and fulfilment of the psychological needs of the SDT framework, thus showing that motivation is a process of continuous development that guides action

over time rather than a one-off event. In essence, the results concurred with assertions by various scholars (Kim et al., 2023; Neneh, 2012) that motivation is not a single trigger but rather a process which progressively influences behaviour to act.

Existing literature revealed that in entrepreneurial research, motivation functions as a mechanism that influences the behavioural outcomes of the entrepreneurs' actions (Lanivich et al., 2021; Liñán et al., 2020). The SDT framework helped to explain how motivation was interconnected with the psychological needs and further demonstrated how both IM and EXM can be channelled into driving behaviour through decision-making, risk-taking and adaptability.

The findings further revealed that motivation among first-generation South African entrepreneurs is context-dependent and dynamic, which shows that motivation shifts between IM and EXM based on the entrepreneurs' circumstances. This confirms the view that motivation is a conditional and evolving process (Ntoumanis et al., 2021) and shifts based on the internal and external circumstances that the entrepreneur encounters (Ridwan et al., 2024), making motivational elements interconnected. The results thereby highlight that motivation is not linear, but it is an interactive process shaped by the satisfaction of psychological needs at different points within the entrepreneurs' journeys. The following discussion, therefore, examines how these psychological needs were internalised through the different behavioural dimensions.

### **6.2.1 Autonomy**

Autonomy emerged as one of the primary channels that influenced the participant's motivation during the data collection. The findings further show that autonomy was not a static freedom of choice as framed in the conventional SDT framework (Deci & Ryan, 1980), but rather a progressive and developmental process shaped by the entrepreneur's circumstances and development over time (Kim et al., 2023; Neneh, 2012). The results demonstrated that motivation was progressively internalised within the participants, which translated into behaviour through ownership of and control over the decisions they made within their entrepreneurial journey. This internalisation was formed through a split between passion and survival, illustrating that autonomy can originate from both IM and EXM, depending on the entrepreneur's circumstances. This shows that autonomy not only progresses alongside internalisation, but actively reinforces motivation by enabling self-directed behaviour

(Deci & Ryan, 1980; Bilal et al., 2021; Derfler-Rozin & Pitesa, 2020; Samuelsson & Witell, 2022; Shir et al., 2019).

#### **6.2.1.1. Decision Making**

As per the discussions in Chapter 5, the findings showed that the participants experienced autonomy through their freedom to make decisions and judgments that were aligned with their personal philosophy and business purpose. This interpretation aligns with Shir et al. (2019), who argue that entrepreneurial autonomy, although often triggered by external conditions, is progressively internalised by an individual's moral conviction and value-driven behaviour. Other scholars position autonomy as primarily an IM (Duan et al., 2020; Samuelsson & Witell, 2022; Shir et al., 2019). However, the findings showed that autonomy did not always originate from IM because, for many participants, autonomy was triggered by survival necessity in response to external corporate and environmental constraints. This highlights that autonomy functioned through a split between both IM and EXM, depending on the entrepreneur's circumstances.

The findings extend Duan et al.'s (2020) view that the SDT model views autonomy through integrated regulation by illustrating that the participants' decisions were not always based on an intentional pathway to entrepreneurship but often acted as a mechanism through which internal alignment was eventually integrated and developed. The results showed that autonomy did not simply reflect internalisation but was embedded through adapting to regain control over circumstances. This demonstrates that the freedom to make decisions emerged from either IM, EXM or a combination of both.

The findings further showed that freedom was not expressed through impulsive decisions, but rather through deliberate, self-aware and structured judgments, as the participants had the awareness to bear the outcomes of their decisions. This finding is supported by the literature when stating that autonomy enables self-awareness and guides the decisions that entrepreneurs make (Lanivich et al., 2021; Samuelsson & Witell, 2022). As entrepreneurs gained experience and confidence to make sound decisions, their autonomy was strengthened, allowing them to navigate risks and uncertainty with greater clarity. This illustrated a pro-active stance towards making decisions, risk-taking and adaptability. This development demonstrates how

autonomy adapts from being a protective mechanism to an empowering tool for self-direction, showing a deep integration between motivation and the SDT framework.

The South African context, as discussed previously, is a challenging and uncertain environment which shaped the participants' decisions to progress from survival or passion to a broader purpose of creating value and ensuring long-term sustainability. In this way, autonomy acted as an internal stabilising force within the early stages of the participants' entrepreneurial journeys. Scholars such as Dirik & Özdoğan (2025) and Lanivich et al. (2021) emphasised the role of autonomy as a driving force that stabilises behaviour in uncertain environments. Therefore, the findings from the study are consistent with the literature, but extend the view by showing that EXM can be the originating motivational element for autonomy. A commonality among the participants is that even though risk-taking was a foundation to their journeys, their decisions had to be clearly thought out to maximise sustainability. This illustrates that autonomy is not only a factor in the freedom to make decisions but a commitment to choices that reflect the individual's personal values and purpose.

This discussion highlights that decision-making is a behavioural expression of autonomy that is demonstrated through the internalisation of both EXM and IM factors. This extends the interpretation of the SDT within environments of high uncertainty and challenges.

#### **6.2.1.2. Acceptance of Accountability**

The results presented in Chapter 5 revealed that participants highly endorse accountability within entrepreneurship, as it was described as their internal compass. The participants emphasised that being accountable is realising that they are the responsible party for the decisions they make and that their decisions are driven by an internal responsibility and not through external enforcement.

Literature from Samuelsson & Witell (2022) aligns with the findings, as it reflects that autonomy is self-regulated and guided through the entrepreneur's internal desires. This demonstrates that accountability is a psychological anchor that is reinforced through self-awareness and discipline to follow through on the decisions made in the absence of external governing structures to regulate one's decisions.

The narratives highlighted that accountability was initially viewed as being protective and enabling the participants to safeguard their livelihoods. However, as autonomy evolved, it became more internalised, shifting from its original obligation-based necessity to one that aligned with the entrepreneur's personal philosophy. This is an area of strength as they progressed, as they were able to learn lessons through their decisions, thereby shifting into a deeper personal identity and self-endorsed commitment.

The findings mirror Ntoumanis et al. (2021), Ridwan et al. (2024) and Shir et al.'s (2019) theory on how internalisation grows over time through self-directed engagement and becomes a motivator to learn, allowing the behavioural mindset to lead to action-based decisions. This highlights that accountability is not a negative element but rather a strength that learning and development are for future execution at the entrepreneur's standard of performance. This is because it transitions from an obligation necessity to a self-directed identity-based commitment, which aligns with the internalisation of the SDT process. Reflecting a clear shift from EXM to IM as accountability is aligned to their personal philosophy, demonstrating the shift from external to internal self-governance, and it was not a result of change but rather a driver. Thereby extending the view that accountability accelerated internalisation through self-identity and not by focusing on it as an outcome (Ntoumanis et al., 2021). This demonstrates that there are different variations of accountability, highlighting that it was not an immediate behaviour. This illustrates that accountability is not just an outcome, but a driver of internalisation

This relates to the South African context because first-generation entrepreneurs face many economic challenges, as previously discussed. In such highly uncertain environments, accountability operates key behavioural stabiliser of behaviour, as there is a lack of a corporate structure depicting how the positive and negative outcomes occur and how individuals react to these outcomes (Dirik & Özdoğan, 2025; Liñán et al., 2020) as it allows for self-regulation. The narratives revealed how the participants' decisions influenced their businesses and all stakeholders, and required continued persistence during difficult times and decisions. This highlights that accountability is individually and relationally driven, as the decisions affect not only taken entrepreneurs, but their families and all stakeholders of their business (Bilal et al., 2021).

The findings, therefore, illustrate that accountability was not only a supportive element for autonomy, but rather a foundational pillar to drive internalisation and stability. This extends SDT by repositioning accountability as not only an outcome of IM, but as a primary mechanism for internalisation and self-identity through autonomy within the EM, particularly in an environment such as South Africa.

### **6.2.1.3. Self-expression, passion and drive**

The results presented in Chapter 5 established that passion was a strong motivational factor among most of the entrepreneurs that was deeply embedded in their self-expression, personal philosophy and values as their businesses were driven by their purpose. The results demonstrated that passion was one of the “why” elements behind their businesses as their businesses were an extension of who they are and their values. The finding is aligned with the view that entrepreneurial motivation is effective when it is grounded in purpose and personal meaning (Shir et al., 2019). To this end, many participants demonstrated this within their stories as the internalisation of passion was linked with what inspired them and formed part of the driving force behind the sustainability and success of their businesses (Dirik & Özdoğan, 2025).

The findings, however, showed that passion was not always an emotional starting point in the narratives, but in some instances, it developed as the broader business purpose, personal identity and commitment got strengthened. Passion, therefore, reinforced autonomy, as it aligned motivation with the participants' personal philosophy and sustained commitment instead of projecting passion and business direction as an outcome of external circumstances. This is consistent with the literature by Shir et al. (2019) as IM is driven by having meaningful goals, which, over time, are strengthened through the entrepreneur's persistence in achieving goals that align with their personal philosophy. The findings extend this understanding by showing that passion was not only a factor of inspiration, but a stabiliser that anchored entrepreneurs' behaviour. This enabled direction, value-creation and persistence. This directly shows that passion supports the internalisation of autonomy by transitioning motivation into self-directed identity commitment, as it strengthened the participants' self-belief and confidence to make decisions, take risks and be adaptable where needed which is supported by Ridwan et al. (2024).

The South African entrepreneurial environment possesses external challenges for entrepreneurs; however, passion emerges as an internal and self-sustaining driver for change. It anchors individuals to their personal autonomy and purpose-driven journeys, enabling them to be motivated and focused despite uncertainty.. Thereby showing that passion allows for the behaviour to not be shifted from external conditions, resulting in it being a long-term stabiliser that shapes and drives behaviour.

#### **6.2.1.4. Autonomy conclusion**

The findings and literature confirm that autonomy is not experienced as simply having the independence of making your own decisions, but as an internalised process of self-direction which is grounded through the entrepreneur's personal philosophies, accountability and purpose. These results extend the SDT framework by demonstrating that internalisation operates as a mechanism that strengthens autonomy and is not merely an outcome. Autonomy is strengthened over time as their motivation builds on their confidence and self-belief. This confirms the SDT framework on how behaviour becomes more aligned with the individual's internal values rather than the external environmental pressures.

Within the South African context, the findings confirm that autonomy serves as a stabilising force that enables self-direction and purpose for entrepreneurs while they navigate through challenges and uncertainty.

### **6.2.2 Competence**

While autonomy reflects internalisation of an individual's decision-making and personal identity, competence explains how entrepreneurs enhance sustainable actions through continuous learning, capability development and skills building. The findings showed that entrepreneurial competence is not an innate trait, but is developed progressively through learning, mastery and adaptive problem-solving. The SDT framework views competence as a psychological need to feel effective and capable in one's actions (Deci & Ryan, 1980). It is strengthened through exposure to feedback, challenges and persistence, which enable entrepreneurs to build confidence and endurance over time (Ntoumanis et al., 2021).

The findings from the study demonstrated that learning under constraint conditions emerged as the strongest influence for competence growth. Thereby illustrating that growth is stronger during challenging times instead of periods of ease and convenience. External pressures can lead to EXM within the early stages of a business venture, such as necessity and survival; however, once capabilities strengthen, the motivation becomes internalised into IM through mastery and long-term behavioural performance (Damanik & Candrasa, 2022; Duan et al., 2020). The results from the study, as will be demonstrated in the following sections, align with the literature in that the development of competence is key in expressing the behavioural dimensions as it provides greater confidence, thereby increasing self-belief.

#### **6.2.2.1 Learning and Mastery**

Starting an entrepreneurial venture requires individuals to become competent as they are exposed to new challenges and uncertainty, requiring them to make decisions, be adaptable and take risks. The autonomy part embodies accountability, but this was reinforced through the participants' will and level of competence to learn and master their skills to ensure progress. This is highlighted by Cope, (2011) and Iqbal et al.'s (2025) research on entrepreneurial learning that confirms that entrepreneurs should be able to learn from failure and adversity, as this deepens their judgment, strengthens their capabilities and improves their reflection for future decision-making. Caputo et al. (2024) reiterated perspectives similar to findings from the participants' narratives that showed that continuous learning and confidence in their ability enhanced their awareness and risk evaluation capabilities.

This links to the SDT framework in that being able to improve competence allows for an increase in self-belief and enables entrepreneurs to perform better in uncertainty (Ntoumanis et al., 2021). In addition to aligning with the literature, the findings extend SDT by showing that competence does not just enable confidence-building, but it also contributes to behaviour development as it builds on the participants' ability to adapt, thereby making better decisions and risk assessment. The study extends the SDT framework by illustrating how competence does not simply reinforce motivation but stabilises it by reducing self-doubt and uncertainty, and strengthening self-

efficacy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These capabilities assist entrepreneurs in making better decisions, taking risks, and being adaptable to change

Linking this to the South African context, competence is fundamental, as most participants indicated that they had no financial backing and in the beginning they did not have experience in starting or running businesses, but they had to learn along the way to make it work. This finding, within the current economic climate, demonstrates that competence is a necessity for survival and should not be viewed as an optional area of development. The participants, however, indicated that competence is not developed immediately from a linear process and it is not static, it requires time because it is a progressive mechanism. This finding is consistent with Kim et al.'s (2023) assertion that competence is progressively developed through experiential learning. In a rapidly changing and challenging context such as South Africa, competence becomes a survival mechanism because entrepreneurs cannot always rely on external support structures, but continuous learning is necessary to shift competence to IM through self-awareness, reflection, and self-control/regulation. This assertion aligns with Damanik and Candrasa (2022) and Ridwan et al.'s (2024) view that competence shifts from EXM to IM through the development of an entrepreneur's capabilities and confidence.

The discussion therefore shows that competence is an important function within the SDT model, and it is a behavioural catalyst that impacts behaviours to translate motivation into sustained action.

#### **6.2.2.2 Problem-solving and adaptability**

The analysis determined that competence was not experienced as a once-off innate skill but rather as a progressive capability that evolved over time to strengthen adaptation. The analysis in Chapter 5 determined that the challenges the participants faced were highly important to their journey, as they created an opportunity to learn more than in times of certainty. The analysis confirmed the assertion by Cope, (2011) and Iqbal et al. (2025) that competence is developed through reflective engagement, setbacks, and corrective adaptation to solve problems. This iterative process shows that problem-solving is not an innate skill or talent, but it is developed and strengthened through experiential learning.

The results presented in Chapter 5 revealed that adaptability, which is integrally linked to problem-solving, enabled entrepreneurs to demonstrate competence

through persistence and acceptance of uncertainty, instead of giving up when challenges arise. Competence reinforced the participants' ability to evaluate and diagnose problems more accurately and then create innovative solutions at a quicker rate. The participants' ability to embrace challenges and uncertainty and convert them into purposeful direction reinforces the conclusions made Neneh's (2012) and the GEM (2023) report regarding competence development through learning from successes and setbacks. Thereby indicating that competence drives behaviour within the EM. This shows that competence is built through self-determination, continuous improvement and effective execution under pressure; hence, competence is not only a motivation enabler (Ryan & Deci, 2000), but it is also a behavioural adaptor.

The view that competence is strengthened through internal and external motivation is also supported by Damanik and Candrasa (2022) and Ridwan et al. (2024). The study revealed that the participants' motivation was initially driven by external environmental factors and the need to survive; however, over time, this shifted towards self-belief and building on one's capabilities to solve problems in a more effective position through IM. This triangulates the literature and the findings by showing that competence supports entrepreneurs in overcoming constraints and strengthens their psychological development (Damanik & Candrasa, 2022). This once again reinforces that competence accelerates internalisation through personal development.

Being able to effectively solve problems and adapt is critical within the South African context, as economic uncertainties require participants to be adaptive to overcome the challenges and uncertainty that they face. This shows that being innovative and adaptive was an important survival element for the participants. These problem-solving and adaptive skills were internalised because they are essential to entrepreneurs' resilience and desire for business growth and sustainability. This is supported by Caputo et al. (2024), who maintain that learning to be adaptable enhances an individual's problem-solving and risk-taking capacity.

### **6.2.2.3 Competence conclusion**

The findings and literature confirm that competence is not a static capability, but one that is developed through progression from learning, mastery and problem-solving.

As entrepreneurs become more confident in their abilities and in diagnosing problems and risk, this reinforces the behavioural dimensions of persistence and adaptability, thereby functioning as a behavioural stabiliser. The progression shows how there is a shift from EXM to IM as the motivation becomes internalised through self-development. Competence, therefore, aligns with the SDT framework as the findings illustrated that it acts as a conduit through which motivation is translated into action.

Within the South African context, competence functions as a stabilising and empowering mechanism which reinforces the behavioural role in long-term sustainable entrepreneurial action.

### **6.2.3 Relatedness**

Autonomy and competence reflect how individuals are motivated to have control over the decisions they make and how effectively they execute them. Relatedness demonstrates how behaviours are sustained over time, as it reflects how relationships strengthen motivation through meaningful connections and a sense of belonging, which anchors how behaviour is shaped. The findings show that relatedness was fundamental within their behaviour as it enhanced their identity, loyalty and responsibility to others during uncertainty. This is due to behaviour being shaped by self-direction as well as relationally, the findings align with the literature of Bilal et al. (2021), whose research shows that internalisation is strengthened by relationships. However, this study extends this view by showing that relatedness was also tied to obligation, responsibility and survival rather than just relational and emotional support.

#### **6.2.3.1 Financial necessity and family responsibility**

The analysis highlighted that relatedness was not experienced as only an emotional support, but the commitment and responsibility for survival and belonging that motivated the participants. Many of the participants reflect on their motivation for entrepreneurship being through financial necessity, family responsibility or a combination of both. The sub-themes in chapter 5 were then merged into one theme within the discussion, as the analysis determined that they were interconnected.

This finding contradicts the conventional SDT interpretations as Bilal et al. (2021), Samuelsson & Witell (2022) and Shir et al. (2019), as their literature frames relatedness through emotional connection, validation and belonging. Instead, the findings demonstrated that relatedness was primarily motivated by the needs for survival and commitment to family stability, which functioned as a behavioural obligation that sustained persistence during uncertainty. Over time, this obligation evolved into emotional connection, trust and belonging, illustrating that relatedness acted as a stabilising force for behavioural endurance.

This inverse sequencing reflects the unique adaptation to the South African environment, where entrepreneurship is often a necessity rather than a choice. This demonstrates that behavioural obligation should come before relational obligations. The need to create financial security and family support reflects the initial motivational trigger of EXM. This eventually evolved into IM as it became their identity and purpose. Damanik & Candrasa (2022) and Ridwan et al. (2024) literature aligns with this shift as it shows the shift in motivation through internalisation.

### **6.2.3.2 External validation and recognition**

The final element identified in the analysis was how external validation and recognition were anchored to building relationships, trust and credibility. The participants highlighted that their reputation was fundamental to their success, which was built through integrity and reliability, which opened the door to many opportunities.

The findings extend the SDT framework, demonstrating that recognition and validation were not motivated by a desire for belonging and praise, but rather by the need to be trusted and build a reputation for legitimacy. This contrasts with traditional SDT framing of emotional belonging (Samuelsson & Witell, 2022; Shir et al., 2019). Instead, by building relationships to be trusted within the community and market, the extension showed that these relationships create opportunities to grow and sustain the business for the long term.

This, however, differs from Bilal et al. (2021), as their study framed relatedness through emotional support and social connection. Debrulle et al. (2020) and Samuelsson & Witell (2022) also suggest that emotional closeness is the foundation for behavioural commitment.

The analysis determined that it functioned through an EXM-driven mechanism, which was prompted by survival. Once legitimacy was determined, it formed the need for belonging. This narrative analysis showed that entrepreneurs needed to prove themselves economically before they were accepted relationally, which is the adverse effect within the SDT framework.

Within South Africa, where there is economic uncertainty, it demonstrates that the need for legitimacy, recognition and validation is an important requirement for sustainable success through relatedness. Thereby illustrating how survival conditions are able to influence the psychological needs.

### **6.2.3.3 Summary**

The discussion for research question one shows that IM and EXM do not operate as separate drivers of behaviours, but are interconnected, conditional and continually reshaped through the entrepreneurial journey progresses. Autonomy accelerated internalisation through passion, decision-making and accountability, competence was identified as a stabiliser for motivation through mastery and problem-solving and related reinforced self-worth through obligation and relationship.

The findings were able to provide an extension to the SDT framework, showing how behavioural dimensions are influenced by both IM and EXM elements, depending on the environment and situations that the entrepreneur experiences.

## **6.3 Discussion of Research Question 2**

### **6.3.1 Introduction**

*RQ2: Under what conditions do these motivational pathways strengthen or weaken?*

This section examines how motivation is sustained or destabilised throughout the entrepreneurial journey and compares these experiences to the existing literature discussed in Chapter 2. Deci & Ryan (1980) and Ryan & Deci (2000) argue that motivation fluctuations are caused when the psychological needs are satisfied or frustrated, thereby influencing whether motivation is strengthened or weakened. Thereby influencing whether motivation is strengthened or weakened. While

Research Question One illustrated how motivation becomes internalised through autonomy, competence and relatedness, this section interprets the specific conditions under which IM and EXM were strengthened and weakened, as revealed through the narrative analysis. This is compared to how satisfaction and frustration influence the self-efficacy of an entrepreneur (Ntoumanis et al., 2021; Ridwan et al., 2024). The findings elaborate on the mechanisms that enable or disrupt internalisation, highlighting why and how different environmental conditions influence motivation within the South African context.

### **6.3.2 Strengthening motivation**

The findings indicate that building psychological confidence strengthens motivation, as it promotes better decision-making, risk evaluation, and adaptability through relational and contextual reassurance. The findings further illustrated that motivation was strengthened when participants had social encouragement, experienced visible progress and gained confidence in their ability to navigate through uncertainty.

The first strengthening condition was supportive social structures, which created psychological safety and encouragement for the entrepreneurs. This aligns with Saoula et al. (2023), who show that social support systems encourage resilience and persistence as entrepreneurs do not feel isolated but rather supported with their journeys and decisions. The analysis showed that emotional support was not only a contributing factor that enhanced motivation, but by being accountable reinforced their motivation as it created a sense of responsibility to be better in response to those who believed and supported them. This emotional support builds confidence and self-belief to engage in challenges and uncertainty. The narratives confirmed this, suggesting that support systems strengthened their motivation as they reinforced their determination to succeed and resilience during setbacks. This indicates that relatedness acts as more than social reassurance; it becomes a stabilising pillar that shapes behaviour during times of high risk and uncertainty.

The second condition identified was visible progress and mastery. Srimulyani and Hermanto (2021) found that motivation is strengthened as the participants observed progress and results for their efforts, which provides encouragement and motivation to move forward. This directly correlates with the findings, where participants' confidence, determination and self-belief developed through successful decisions,

as visible progression reinforced their competence and need for satisfaction. This progress highlights how capability builds confidence in an individual's ability to make decisions, take risks and become adaptable to new challenges.

The third strengthening condition was optimism and forward progression. Alam et al. (2019) suggest that progress toward one's goals, desires and achievements strengthens and sustains motivations as they are encouraged in their ability to succeed. The findings support this by demonstrating that optimism provided clarity and direction, linking how autonomy and competence strengthen motivation. However, optimism alone was not sufficient; it was reinforced through visible progress and relational support. Thus, showing that relatedness and competence are integrated in strengthening motivation.

The findings, therefore, contradict existing SDT literature, which positions motivation as primarily driven through IM as self-sustaining (Duan et al., 2020; Shir et al., 2019). In this study, motivation was strengthened through both IM and EXM elements, which strengthen motivation in different ways. This challenges the view that IM is capable of operating independently, because the results show that EXM often provided a foundation for IM to emerge. This supports Ridwan et al. (2024) findings on how both IM and EXM can enhance self-efficacy and persistence, and extends them by showing how EXM to IM can drive internalisation to strengthen motivation over time.

This elaboration plays a key role in understanding motivation within the South African context as entrepreneurs should integrate autonomy, competence and relatedness together to strengthen their motivation, thereby showing that motivation is shaped but multiple conditions rather than through a single trigger.

### **6.3.3 Weakening motivation**

While satisfaction of psychological needs strengthens motivation, the finding also indicate that unmet needs such as emotional fatigue, financial strain and prolonged uncertainty can destabilise motivation and erode confidence, resulting in a lack of decisive decisions.

The first weakening condition was emotional and cognitive fatigue. Kuratko et al. (2020) emphasise how the high demand that entrepreneurship evokes in individuals results in emotional and mental exhaustion, creating an overloaded and stressful

environment. The participants confirmed these findings by elaborating on how there was a struggle for a work-life balance as these two aspects became blurred. This resulted in their drive and determination diminishing through a weakened motivation, which adversely affected how their decisions, risk and adaptability were shaped.

The second condition was financial pressure, which was caused by the risk participants undertook, not only affecting their livelihoods, but those of their families as well. Cope (2011) highlighted how prolonged financial strain causes an entrepreneur's confidence and self-belief, weakening motivation. This was significantly reiterated by the participants as this financial insecurity affected their family, raised doubts, weakened motivation and lowered their risk appetite. The analysis confirms this, reflecting how financial security for one's family exerted immense pressure and occasionally lead to self-doubt.

The third condition was environmental instability. Dirik & Özdoğan (2025) highlighted how external instability negatively affects an entrepreneur's determination and persistence, which ultimately influenced their motivation adversely. Similarly, narratives reflected on how the contribution of external factors through economic struggles, challenges and uncertainties leads to motivation decline.

Within South Africa, this pattern is evident in the economic instability as outlined in Chapter 2. The pressure of limited capital and socio-economic pressure cause entrepreneurs' motivation to be destabilised.

#### **6.3.4 Summary**

The discussion of the results and literature for Research Question 2 demonstrates that there are implications that cause fluctuations in motivation to either strengthen or weaken. This illustrated how this study is able to extend on the SDT by showing that the psychological needs are not static, but dynamic in nature and function through the environmental and personal pressures and relational support that the entrepreneur encounters. This highlights the necessity for entrepreneurs to be self-aware as internalisation is not an innate trait but depends on the psychological needs to be reinforced over time, which shapes their behavioural dimensions.

These findings thereby extend the SDT by demonstrating that the need for satisfaction cannot be fixed, leading to fluctuations. This results in the theory needing to integrate the behaviour dimensions to be adaptable to the environment and

circumstances that an entrepreneur encounters. IM and EXM co-exist, and integrating them purposefully reinforces and grows entrepreneurs' motivation.

#### **6.4 Discussion of Research Question 3**

RQ3: What mechanisms do successful first-generation entrepreneurs rely on to mitigate challenges and sustain their business motivation over time?

Building on the discussion that explained why motivation fluctuates, this research section focuses on how entrepreneurs can actively mitigate challenges with the goal of trying to safeguard motivation and behaviour stability over time. While research question two determined whether the conditions that strengthened or weakened motivation, this section serves the purpose of exploring proactive mechanisms to enhance sustainability.

Derfler-Rozin & Pitesa (2020) and Samuelsson & Witell (2022) identified that fluctuations exist within the EM, but it does not explain how entrepreneurs can proactively translate self-awareness into preventative mechanisms. Thereby, this discussion contributes by demonstrating how first-generation entrepreneurs can translate motivation and behaviour through a proactively approach to enhancing and strengthening their motivation over time.

##### **6.4.1 Strategic Foresight**

Strategic foresight emerged as a strengthening mechanism as it incorporates planning, risk assessment and awareness of the external environment as an integrated mechanism to mitigate challenges through incorporating proactive tools to safeguard sustainability. The analysis illustrated that entrepreneurs achieved this by making decisive decisions through instead of impulsively, documenting and revising plans and staying in tune with local and foreign media. This allows for mitigation as entrepreneurs proactive implement strategies to anticipate challenges and lower uncertainty. Thereby reflecting how both autonomy and competence within one's action can strengthen motivation.

This aligns with Cope's (2011) argument on forward-looking thinking supports this concept as it provides barriers for vulnerability, which allows entrepreneurs to apply lessons from the past, others and external conditions toward their sustainable future

planning. This, however, is positioned primarily based on opportunity-driven initiatives (Samuelsson & Witell, 2022; Derfler-Rozin & Pitesa, 2020). However, this study extends the theory of foresight as survival stabiliser. This resonates with Debrulle et al. (2020) and Fatoki (2014) emphasise how strategic foresight should be a preventative tool against instability. Strategic foresight, therefore, contributes as a motivation and behavioural regulator that is an opportunity-based cognitive planning tool.

#### **6.4.2 Learning and appointing suitable people**

The second mechanism that was identified was building one's capability through learning and appointing competent individuals. As discussed in the findings, learning was more effective through practical and experiential learning rather than formal training. This illustrates that through actively engaging in the behavioural dimensions, the entrepreneurs were able to expand their self-belief and confidence, which allowed them to be better prepared and mitigate risks.

Caputo et al. (2024) findings agree with this concept, as entrepreneurial learning similarly contends that practical experience provides greater insights. The study, however, extended their view by demonstrating that learning needs to be personally aligned and directed to the learning in order to become a motivational safeguard.

Furthermore, while Debrulle et al. (2020) suggest that sustainability should not depend on the individual's competence but on creating an ecosystem that supports the direction. The study extends its findings by elaborating that learning was not solely on the entrepreneur's capability but also having the ability to build an effective team and leverage and learn from their skills. This extension creates a differentiation as the analysis still encountered continued learning to enable skill mastery, but gather support when needed, as decisions should not only rely on the entrepreneur.

#### **6.4.3 Financial discipline**

The third mechanism that emerged was from funding and financial management, which was shown to be a strength and a weakness in motivation depending on the entrepreneur's circumstances, thereby being a protective factor and a potential area of vulnerability. As discussed in previous chapters, South Africa faces economic challenges and uncertainty, causing financial discipline to be a key area of focus for

long-term sustainability. This agrees with Fatoki (2014) as mismanagement of finances is a leading cause of business failure within South Africa.

The findings agree with the needs of financial discipline, but extends the argument by demonstrating that it is not only financial pressure that causes business failure, but the pressure also results in motivational decline, which affects the behavioural dimensions of the EM, thereby accelerating business pressure and decline.

Financial sourcing is assumed to be a motivating force as it is an enabler for business growth and progression (Samuelsson & Witell, 2022). However, the analysis determined that this was partially true, but it provides a contradiction that environmental pressure and uncertainty create strain causing an adverse effect on motivation. To reinforce confidence, the participants provided insights into conservative scaling, retaining cash buffers and ensuring unnecessary debt is not incurred.

Implementing these strategies allows entrepreneurs to provide a safeguard and proactive protection against uncertainties.

#### **6.4.4 Cognitive resilience through decisiveness**

The fourth mechanism that emerged is an entrepreneur's ability to make decisive decisions through decision-making. The analysis in Chapter 5 determined that the participants engaged in entrepreneurship to have the freedom to make decisions, but the analysis also determined that it was a protective mechanism due to environmental challenges and uncertainty.

Caputo et al. (2024) and Lanivich et al. (2021) describe decisive decision-making as a result of IM to make better, more concise decisions. This study extends their research but showing that the participants not only got encouragement from both IM and EXM, but also made the cognitive decision to use decision-making to preserve their intentions and motivations. Thereby creating a stabilising buffer to mitigate both motivation decline and uncertainty. In order to mitigate challenges for long-term sustainability, entrepreneurs should deliberately ensure and utilise decisiveness as a tool to preserve motivation.

#### **6.4.5 Relational governance**

The fifth mechanism that emerged was relational governance, which, as discussed in Chapter 5, as staff and customer relations and reputation and ethical conduct. These relationships are not only a supportive contributor but a stabilising and enhancing element within the entrepreneurial journey. Bilal et al. (2021) and Shir et al. (2019) frame the relatedness psychological needs as a socio-emotional need for belonging. The findings from the analysis extend this framing by illustrating how relatedness also acts as a functional support system that strengthens motivation during challenging times. The results demonstrated that relationships provide emotional reinforcement, business direction and future opportunities and shape an individual's personal identity.

The narratives also highlighted that relationships enhance entrepreneurs through building trust, legitimacy and reliable referrals, which are driving mechanisms for the business. This agrees with Derfler-Rozin & Pitesa (2020), who emphasise how trust and credibility are decisive mechanisms for sustainability during times of uncertainty. Thereby showing that relational governance strengthens opportunities, business growth and personal identity by creating supportive environments.

#### **6.4.6 Summary**

The discussion for research question 3 illustrated a mechanism that the emerging first-generation could utilise to mitigate future challenges. The discussion utilised the lessons learned from research questions one and two in order to highlight protective mechanisms that enable entrepreneurs to implement, thus creating a proactive buffer against uncertainty in order to lower the risk. This mechanism provides strategic foresight to ensure entrepreneurs effectively leverage capabilities through capability building, financial discipline, cognitive decisiveness, and relational governance.

The discussion thereby extends on existing literature showing elements for the stabilisation of motivation through proactive mechanisms rather than the risk of only being reactive. This shows that the SDT needs and behavioural dimension should work interconnected instead of in isolation.

## 6.5 Conclusion

The discussion chapter integrated the findings with existing literature in addressing the theoretical gap identified within the EM. Using the SDT as an explanatory framework, this chapter illustrated how motivation influences the behavioural dimensions of the EM through the psychological needs. The study aimed to determine how these mechanisms shape and sustain entrepreneurial action. The results strongly aligned with the existing literature (Lanivich et al., 2021; Ntoumanis et al., 2021; Samuelsson & Witell, 2022) in confirming that SDT provides an essential framework for explaining how motivation transforms into behaviour. The findings further confirmed Deci and Ryan's (1980) proposition that the psychological needs drive self-determined behaviour when satisfied, yet the study extends this by showing that internalisation is a process of progression that evolves over time.

A key finding concerned the interpretation and stability of motivation. Traditionally, motivation has been framed as an internally driven element which prompts EB (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, the study found that within the South African context, motivation fluctuations when shaped by both opportunity-driven and survival-necessity. These findings extend SDT by illustrating that IM and EXM can co-exist and function interdependently.

The overall discussion determined that the psychological needs within the SDT framework collectively influence motivation towards sustained action. Autonomy enables accountability and self-direction (Shir et al., 2019), competence stabilises motivation through continued learning and being confident in one's ability (Caputo et al., 2024; Cope, 2011), and relatedness reinforces persistence through belonging and trust (Bilal et al., 2021). Together, these mechanisms explain that motivation can be strengthened or weakened, depending on the entrepreneur's conditions and capacity for behaviour adaptation, to provide the foundation for long-term sustainability.

In conclusion, the discussion demonstrated how motivation influences behavioural mechanisms and the significant role it plays within the EM. Building on these insights, the next chapter consolidates the practical implications and theoretical contributions of the study and further proposes a conceptual framework and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7 Conclusion and recommendations**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

Entrepreneurship is widely recognised for its role in shaping opportunities and innovation, as it enables multiple facets that build economic participation and create long-term sustainability for citizens (Roth & Wohlfart, 2020). However, despite being classified as an important pillar of the economy, this study identified that the EM remains an under-researched construct. Existing literature has focused on cognitive and emotional elements, with limited research on the behavioural dimension (Cui & Bell, 2022; Fayolle & Liñán, 2014; Kuratko et al., 2020; Kwapisz et al., 2021; Lynch & Corbett, 2021; Pidduck et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2023) This demonstrates a theoretical gap in understanding how motivation shapes and sustains the behavioural dimensions (Derfler-Rozin & Pitesa, 2020; Samuelsson & Witell, 2022).

In addressing this gap, the study explored how IM and EXM influence the psychological needs within the SDT framework (Deci & Ryan, 1980). By applying the SDT framework as an explanatory lens, the study examined how the behavioural dimensions are influenced by motivation among first-generation South African entrepreneurs.

Recent literature on entrepreneurial action has identified it as a static element rather than one that is progressive and influenced through psychological and environmental influences (Fayolle & Liñán, 2014; Kuratko et al., 2020). However, this study challenges this assumption by arguing that motivation fluctuates depending on the circumstances the entrepreneur experiences (Derfler-Rozin & Pitesa, 2020; Samuelsson & Witell, 2022).

To explore this conceptual gap, a thematic narrative research design was adopted to understand how first-generation entrepreneurs' experiences had been shaped by motivation throughout their entrepreneurial journey through the mechanisms of the SDT framework that support sustained behaviour.

This chapter presents a synthesis of the research findings from the analysis and discussion to outline behavioural insights that emerged from the study. The chapter introduces a proposed conceptual framework highlighting the practical and theoretical implications of the behaviour mechanisms.

## **7.2 Research Findings**

South Africa faces many internal and external challenges (Bowmaker-Falconer & Meyer, 2022), which are reflected in the high unemployment rates discussed in section 1.2. These challenges have resulted in numerous business closures and job loss (Rico & Puig, 2021), prompting entrepreneurship through both opportunities and necessity (Iwu and Opute, 2019). However, statistics show a high percentage of early-stage business failures (Meyer et al., 2024; Mhlongo & Daya 2023), thereby emphasising the importance of understanding how the motivational mechanism shaped behaviour and persistence under uncertainty.

Accordingly, this chapter presents the findings of the main research question, which examines how IM and EXM influence the behavioural dimensions of the EM among first-generation South African entrepreneurs based on the SDT framework.

### **7.2.1 Research Question 1: Influence of motivation on behavioural dimensions**

The influence that IM and EXM have on the behavioural dimensions of the EM is demonstrated within the findings of Chapter 5. Contrary to recent research, evidence indicates that motivation should be viewed as a continuous and evolving process of psychological internalisation rather than an isolated driver, because different contextual facets within business influence entrepreneurs (Derfler-Rozin & Pitesa, 2020; Lanivich et al., 2021; Samuelsson & Witell, 2022).

Chapter Five determined that the SDT psychological needs functioned as a behavioural catalyst for change, which supports the theory of the SDT framework (Deci & Ryan, 1980). However, the findings also illustrated that these psychological needs did not function as independent mechanisms but operated as interdependent channels through which motivation was progressively shaped over time.

The findings determined that the psychological needs worked dynamically, allowing for relatedness to sustain commitment over time, competence to reinforce confidence and self-belief and autonomy to provide a direction aligned to their personal goals. This aligns with Ntoumanis et al. (2021) and supports Lanivich et al. (2021) and Liñán et al. (2020), who argue that motivation should not be viewed as contextually progressive rather than fixed. These findings demonstrate that the SDT framework enabled motivation to be translated into sustained behaviour by

strengthening and reinforcing the needs as a collective rather than in isolation, offering a theoretical explanation for how motivation becomes behaviour.

Overall, the study positions the SDT framework as an integrated behavioural system rather than three isolated psychological needs. In doing so, the internalisation process can better support and reflect the behavioural dimension and how they are influenced and shaped by motivation.

### **7.2.2 Research Question 2: Conditions that strengthen or weaken motivational pathways**

The findings from Research Question Two revealed that motivation is not a stable or fixed construct, but is a context-dependent process, as relational, personal and contextual factors cause motivation to fluctuate, either strengthening or weakening motivation. These fluctuations are driven by pressures that the entrepreneur experiences, which either reinforce or diminish their behaviour (cf. Chapter 6). This aligns with Lanivich et al. (2021) and Liñán et al. (2020) who argue that motivation is dynamic, not fixed.

Motivation was found to be reinforced through supportive relationships (Saoula et al., 2023) and through the development of competence within their capabilities, building confidence and self-belief (Ntoumanis et al., 2021). The findings confirmed that these factors acted as reinforcing mechanisms by creating a psychologically safe environment and the drive for continuous learning and self-development. This enabled entrepreneurs to make better decisions, evaluate risk more strategically and become more adaptable through self-belief and clarity of purpose.

Conversely, evidence also highlighted how motivation was adversely affected when the SDT psychological needs were undermined by emotional fatigue, financial pressure and economic challenges and uncertainty. Such conditions erode confidence, weaken autonomy and lead to more conservative decisions (Kuratko et al., 2020; Cope, 2011).

Overall, the findings emphasise that motivation is circumstantial, and a preventative process should be established in order to ensure motivation is not undermined and sustained under pressure. This therefore links to Research Question Three, which explores strategies and mechanisms to sustain motivation.

### **7.2.3 Research Question 3: Ways to mitigate challenges**

As previously discussed, motivation fluctuates in either a positive or negative manner, thereby influencing an entrepreneur's behaviours, which was also acknowledged by Derfler-Rozin & Pitesa (2020) and Samuelsson & Witell (2022). The study determined that addressing these fluctuations requires understanding how entrepreneurs are proactively safeguarding their motivation. This thereby expands on the theoretical value of this research by identifying mechanisms that can be adopted to mitigate challenges and ensure behavioural sustainability.

Cope (2011) highlighted the importance of entrepreneurs to have strategic foresight. This serves as a protective mechanism as it allows for long-term thinking, thereby preparing for uncertainties and reducing risks. The study supports this and extends their insights by showing that strategic foresight is not only a planning tool, but a mechanism for a motivational stabiliser that protects an entrepreneur's competence and autonomy. This is done by strategically planning a sense of direction before a challenge arises.

Mastery and progressive learning were also identified as mechanisms of improvement (cf. Chapter 6), aligning with Ntoumanis et al. (2021) and Caputo et al. (2024) as methods to reinforce competence. The findings found that by continuously strengthening competence, entrepreneurs are able to protect their motivation from eroding and turn these challenges into growing opportunities. This also links directly to decisiveness, structured planning, and reinforced competence, and autonomy allow for entrepreneurs to make more strategic decisions through self-awareness.

Financial discipline also emerged as financial strain causes doubts, pressure and accelerated levels of uncertainty, causing the entrepreneurs' behavioural dimensions to be influenced, as this not only affects them but their families, which weakens both autonomy and relatedness (Fatoki, 2014). The findings determined that financial behavioural planning and governance act as a psychological and structural buffer as it ensures that entrepreneurs influence their finances instead of being controlled by them through cash buffers, debt evacuation and investing in realistic capabilities.

Finally, relational governance was identified as the findings determined that all the participants elaborated on how both personal and professional relations create emotional support as well as create increased opportunities. This extends studies that highlight that relationships are primarily influenced by emotional belonging (Bilal

et al., 2021; Shir et al., 2019) by demonstrating how relationships provide a multi-dimensional support structure for entrepreneurs.

### **7.3 Proposed Framework**

The research findings revealed that IM and EXM are key elements for shaping behaviours within entrepreneurs. While both motivations play different roles in behaviours, the findings determined that they shaped behaviour by being interconnected rather than isolated.

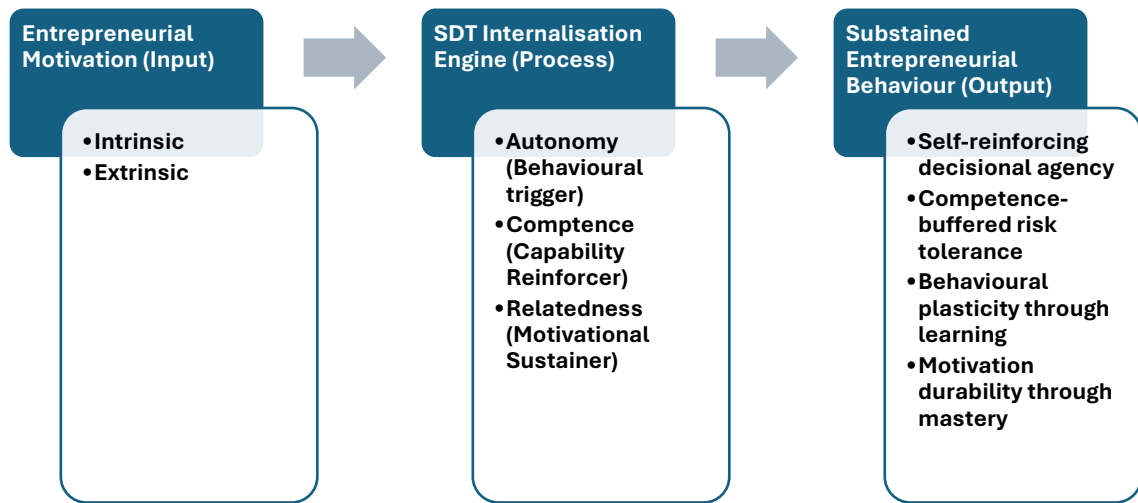
Proceeding on these findings, motivation shapes behaviour, but only once it is internalisation. Once internalisation takes place does intention transform into action. The internalisation is developed through the psychological needs of the SDT framework through autonomy, competence and relatedness.

Through determining the factors that influence and shape behaviour, these needs were demonstrated as behavioural mechanisms that converted motivation into sustainable action through the behavioural dimensions of the EM.

This is particularly important in contexts like South Africa, where there are environmental challenges, high levels of uncertainty, personal pressure and resource constraints. More importantly, the findings highlight that internalisation acts as an enabler for persistence and motivation renewal over time, offering practical and theoretical insights on how entrepreneurs can continue despite facing adversities.

The model in Figure 8 below provides an overview of the identified motivational factors, their integration with the SDT psychological needs and practical insights to ensure business success to guide first-generation entrepreneurs.

Figure 8: Behavioural framework for sustaining the intention to action process



## 7.4 Entrepreneurial and Practical Implications

Through the collective findings and discussions of this study, this section translates the behavioural mechanisms identified into practical recommendation. The recommendations are built on the theoretical studies of strengthening the psychological needs sustaining behaviour. The recommendations were grounded by the SDT framework as these are influenced by motivation, which drives the behavioural dimensions of the EM.

### 7.4.1 Behavioural self-regulation to reinforce autonomy

Autonomy was a behavioural driver through the control of one's own decisions, and accountability and personal purpose

Entrepreneurs who follow a purpose and drive strengthen their will to succeed, which enables them to adopt behavioural self-regulation routines. These routines consist of reflective decision tracking, goal-setting, journaling and consist alignment with the strategic objectives. These were discovered through the codes generated from the narratives, reinforcing how transforming behaviour can lead from intention into action.

### **7.4.2 Active reflection and learning to strengthen competence**

Competence emerged as the stabilising behaviour mechanism through confidence, mastery and purpose-driven objectives. Entrepreneurs need the dedication to understand their weaknesses and take the initiative to develop them into skills. Behavioural reinforcements are achieved firstly by understanding the need to learn, then the willingness to learn, and finally by adapting mastery-oriented learning routines. Entrepreneurs should engage with industry experts, request reflective feedback and criticism and progressively learn more about the industry. This prompts adaptability and confidence within the basics, leading to sustained EB.

### **7.4.3 Networking and sustaining relationships to build relatedness**

Relatedness served as a behavioural anchor for motivation through social accountability and emotional connectedness. Entrepreneurs should directly engage in networking events that they have built, as well as the legitimacy of their reputation and trustworthiness within the market. Building up a trustworthy network and reflective peer mentorship or structured reflection opens the doors to new partnerships.

### **7.4.4 Conclusion**

These recommendations provide actionable insights into how entrepreneurs can strengthen their behavioural mechanisms that sustain motivation over time. By taking the initiative to reinforce autonomy, consistently evolve and develop competence and build relationships and support through relatedness, entrepreneurs can internalise their motivation more effectively.

## **7.5 Limitations within the research**

The study adopted an exploratory thematic narrative qualitative research design to explore and extend understanding of the behavioural dimensions of the EM, addressing the theoretical gap identified in previous literature. In conducting the study, several limitations must be acknowledged.

- **Researcher bias limitation:**

Semi-structured interviews can lead to bias as the narratives are interpreted through the research perspectives, which is one of the major limitations of qualitative research. To minimise this, the researcher tried to clarify and reflect

their understanding of the participants' answers to ensure the narrative insights were aligned as much as possible.

- **Gender limitation:**

All the participants who consented to be involved in this study were male first-generation South African entrepreneurs. As a result, the interpretations of the psychological needs reflect the behavioural mechanisms based on a male perspective.

- **Time Horizon and Geographic limitation:**

A cross-sectional study was conducted as the interviews were conducted at a specific point in time. The timeframe for the interviews was limited due to the nature of the MBA study.

Furthermore, data collection was restricted to Gauteng-based first-generation South African entrepreneurs due to the time constraints, limiting the findings to a geographic scope.

- **Theoretical scope:**

The study determined that cognitive and emotional dimensions of the EM have been researched significantly, with a lack of research on the behaviour element. This results in a limitation as the focus of the study is specifically on the behaviour dimensions that shape how motivation transforms into action but excludes the cognitive and emotional dimensions.

- **Economic condition and timeframe limitation:**

Data collection was conducted from various individuals who have all been entrepreneurs for many years. However, this does not consider the current global and local economic climate, so new first-generation entrepreneurs will experience different challenges and uncertainty.

## **7.6 Suggestions for future research**

Based on the findings and discussion of this research study, the following recommendations for future research are suggested:

- **Gender and behavioural diversity**

As discussed within the limitations, the study focused on first-generational entrepreneurs from Gauteng, South Africa. Future studies should expand across provinces and include both female and mixed gender entrepreneurs. This provides deeper insights into how the psychological needs are

internalised and how behavioural mechanisms of motivation vary across gender and region.

- **Longitudinal analysis**

The study focuses on successful first-generation South African entrepreneurs. This provided narratives based on success stories when the participants were well into their entrepreneurial careers. Future research could adopt a longitudinal research design to explore how motivational fluctuations and the behavioural dimensions evolve.

- **Economic and situational**

The South African economy, as well as the world, is in a constant state of change and uncertainty. Future studies should examine how the behavioural mechanisms adapt under the current economic conditions, thereby collecting updated data on how IM and EXM sustain EB.

- **Dimensions of the EM**

This study explored into understanding of a theoretical gap within the dimensions of the EM. Further research should investigate how the interconnectedness of all three dimensions of EM (cognitive, emotional and behavioural) to determine how the dimension can collectively contribute to sustained entrepreneurial activity.

## **7.7 Conclusions**

This study contributes to research deepening the understanding of how motivational factors shape and sustain the behavioural dimensions of the EM. Using the SDT framework as an explanatory lens, the study explored that the psychological needs are core behavioural mechanisms that influence entrepreneurial action. The findings identified that motivation is an evolving and progressive process of internalisation, which enables intention to be transformed into sustained action. The mechanisms were revealed to be interconnected with the behavioural, illustrating how motivation can be strengthened or weakened depending on the circumstances the entrepreneur encounters. Thereby, establishing a foundation for future studies to extend the findings across different timeframes, regions, genders and economic conditions.

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**Appendix 1: Consistency Matrix**

<p><b>TITLE: Understanding the Entrepreneurial Mindset: How Key Motivational Factors can impact an individual's Behavioural Dimensions in decision making through a South African context.</b></p>	<p><b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b></p>	<p><b>DATA COLLECTION TOOL</b></p>	<p><b>ANALYSIS</b></p>
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<p><b>Research question 1</b></p> <p>How do intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influence the behavioural dimensions of the entrepreneurial mindset (decision-making, risk-taking, and adaptability) of first-generation South African entrepreneurs?</p>	<p>Deci &amp; Ryan, 1980 Fayolle &amp; Liñán, 2014 Cui &amp; Bell, 2022 Pidduck et al., 2021 Samuelsson &amp; Witell, 2022</p>	<p>Question 1 Question 2 Question 3 Question 4 Question 5</p>	<p>Thematic Narrative Analysis - Coding</p>
<p><b>Research question 2</b></p> <p>Under what conditions are internal and external motivational pathways strengthened or weakened?</p>	<p>Derfler-Rozin &amp; Pitesa, 2020 Cope, 2011</p>	<p>Question 6 Question 7 Question 9</p>	<p>Thematic Narrative Analysis – Coding and theme identification</p>

<p><b>Research question 3</b></p> <p>What mechanisms did successful first-generation entrepreneurs adopt to mitigate challenges and ensure business sustainability?</p>	<p>Cope, 2011</p> <p>Fatoki, 2014</p> <p>Bilal et al., 2021</p> <p>Ntoumanis et al., 2021</p>	<p>Question 8</p> <p>Question 9</p> <p>Question 10</p>	<p>Thematic Narrative Analysis – Synthesis of data collected</p>
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## **APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Good Day

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.

I am conducting research focusing on how your behavioural dimensions are influenced by different motivational factors, thereby impacting your Entrepreneurial Mindset. Our interview is expected to last about an hour and will help us understand your entrepreneurial journey and what motivational dimensions contributed to your success.

**Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.**

All data will be reported without identifiers. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

*Researcher Name: Byron Hamilton*

*Research Supervisor Name: Manoj Chiba*

*Email: Byron.Hamilton96@gmail.com*

*Email : ChibaM@gibs.co.za*

*Phone: 071 891 0351*

*Phone : 082 784 5769*

Signature of participant:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please can you tell me about the story behind opening the business
  - a. What motivated you to take that step?
2. Did you have any personal goals or motivations that made you seek out entrepreneurship
  - a. What were they?
  - b. Was this related to your personal autonomy?
3. As an entrepreneur, do you feel like you have control over your direction and decisions?
  - a. Why or why not?
4. Were you confident about your ability to succeed as an entrepreneur back then?
  - a. What may have led or not led to this confidence?
5. Would you say that your motivation is related to relationships. Like employees, families or mentors?
6. Did you have any external contributors or pressures that made you seek out entrepreneurship?
  - a. What were they?
7. What would you say were key elements that contributed to your entrepreneurial success?
8. Is your decision-making influenced by behaviour dimensions
  - a. How?
  - b. What influences them the most?
9. What was the biggest challenged you encountered and what or how did you push through it?
10. Looking at South Africa and our current economy, what advice you would give to someone who is starting up a business?

### APPENDIX 3: ATLAS.TI CODING

Code	Grounded	Code Groups
○ Access to Capital Barriers	30	Autonomy
○ Accountability	33	Autonomy
○ Acknowledgement of Failure	26	Competence
○ Age Barrier	2	Autonomy
○ Business Pivot	44	Autonomy
○ Business Sacrifice	20	Autonomy
○ Capacity Limitations	27	Competence
○ Choices	5	Autonomy
○ Competence	1	Competence
○ Confidence in Basics	39	Competence
○ Conflict	8	Relatedness
○ Continuous Improvement Mindset	90	Competence
○ Corporate Exclusion	7	Autonomy
○ Customer Focus	74	Relatedness
○ Decision-Making	14	Autonomy
○ Desire for Independence	62	Autonomy
○ Determination	54	Competence
○ Dishonest Supplier	4	Relatedness
○ Education Limitation	1	Relatedness
○ Efficiency Focus	56	Autonomy Competence
○ Entrepreneurial Identify	79	Autonomy
○ External Shocks	25	Competence
○ Failure Experience	15	Competence
○ Family Survival Pressure	27	Relatedness
○ Fear	10	Autonomy
○ Financial Stability	49	Autonomy
○ Generational Transition	2	Relatedness
○ Hard work	28	Competence
○ Humility	10	Relatedness
○ Independence Pressure	8	Autonomy
○ Industry Knowledge	43	Competence
○ Inequality in Business	9	Relatedness
○ Intuition	14	Autonomy
○ Job Dissatisfaction	15	Autonomy
○ Job Insecurity	17	Autonomy
○ Leadership	22	Autonomy Relatedness
○ Learning from Experience	63	Competence

○ Lifestyle Alignment	18	Relatedness
○ Listening	19	Autonomy
○ Long-Term Vision	48	Autonomy
○ Low Financial Outlay	4	Competence
○ Market Adaptation	56	Competence
○ Market Awareness	69	Competence
○ Market Differentiation	4	Competence
○ Market Risk Exposure	60	Autonomy
○ Mindset	8	Autonomy
○ Moral Compass	33	Autonomy Relatedness

○ Need for encouragement	12	Autonomy Relatedness
○ Non-financial motivation	7	Autonomy
○ Opportunity Recognition	93	Autonomy
○ Passion	26	Autonomy
○ Patience	4	Competence
○ Perseverance	13	Competence
○ Personal Achievement	21	Autonomy
○ Personal Autonomy	67	Autonomy
○ Planning	19	Autonomy
○ Positive Relationships	47	Relatedness
○ Problem-solving	38	Competence
○ Quality Focus	21	Competence
○ Reflective Decision-Making	49	Autonomy
○ Reinvestment Strategy	9	Autonomy
○ Relational Boundaries	12	Relatedness
○ Relational Support	68	Relatedness
○ Reputation	20	Relatedness
○ Resilience After Failure	45	Competence
○ Risk Awareness	65	Autonomy
○ Risk Evaluation	63	Competence
○ Risk-Taking	4	Autonomy
○ Robust Economies	5	Relatedness
○ Self-Awareness	24	Competence
○ Self-Belief	65	Autonomy Competence
○ Strategic Acquisition	6	Competence
○ Survival Instinct	36	Autonomy
○ Trust	27	Autonomy Relatedness
○ Uncertainty	14	Autonomy
○ Understanding of Business	23	Competence

○ Unreliable Partners	2	Relatedness
○ Value	9	Autonomy Competence
○ Work-Life Pressure	16	Relatedness