THE ROLE OF SOUTH AFRICAN CORPORATE EXPERIENCE IN THE TRANSITION FROM INTRAPRENEURSHIP TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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A research report was submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, Wits Business School, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Business Administration degree.

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DECLARATION

I, Mbalenhle Precious Ngidi, declare this Research Report my unaided work. It is being submitted for the Master of Business Administration degree at Wits Business School, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

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22nd day of January 2025 in Johannesburg

ABSTRACT

This study examines the transition from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship among South African corporate professionals, exploring how they leverage corporate skills and tools to launch independent ventures.

The study used a qualitative approach in semi-structured interviews to gather comprehensive insights. The study participants are individuals with experience in corporate who have transitioned into entrepreneurship or are currently transitioning into it.

The findings of the thematic analysis highlight the opportunities, successes, and challenges of transitioning into entrepreneurship and discuss the tools intrapreneurs within corporations use in pursuit of entrepreneurship. Focusing on the South African context, the study identifies that supportive corporate cultures, financial resources, and effective mentorship significantly influence successful transitions.

Recommendations are provided for corporate, policymakers and entrepreneurial support organisations, offering insights to foster a more conducive environment for South African entrepreneurs.

Keywords: South African corporate, tools, successes, challenges, barriers, skills, experiences, transition, intrapreneurship, entrepreneurship.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my beautiful daughter, Imithayelanga, and my future children. When in doubt, leap anyway.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am forever grateful to God and my ancestors, *"BoNgidi oHlomuka, noSithole amaJobe amahle"*, for giving me the strength and wisdom I needed to pursue this MBA. I want to thank my partner, family, friends and colleagues who have supported and anchored me immensely in this academic journey. I thank my supervisor, Dr Jabulile Msimango-Galawe, for your encouragement and guidance. A special thank you to my daughter, Imithayelanga Uyanda Nkayi, for giving me the time to reach this milestone and for being a warm and happy child.

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NOMENCLATURE

FMCG: Fast Moving Consumer Goods

IT: Information Technology

RBV: Resource-Based View

SEDA: Small Enterprise Development Agency

UNCTAD: UN Trade and Development

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Statement of Purpose

This study examines how South African corporate professionals leverage corporate-acquired skills and tools to transition from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship. The purpose is to explore strategies and support mechanisms that foster successful entrepreneurial ventures in the South African context.

1.2. Background of the Study

In South Africa's corporate sector, intrapreneurs are increasingly recognised for their potential to drive organisational innovation and growth. These individuals use creative and strategic skills to introduce new ideas, processes, and products, ultimately adding value to their companies (Akinbinu & Chiloane-Phetla, 2022; Pinchot, 1985). However, many intrapreneurs face substantial challenges in transferring their corporate-acquired skills to entrepreneurship, with barriers including limited startup capital, lack of structural support, and unfamiliarity with the unique business demands (Urban & Naidoo, 2012). Pinchot (1985); Temkin (2009) recognise entrepreneurship as a solution to the country's unemployment challenges. Mahadea (2012) supports this by recognising entrepreneurship as a crucial tool that can be used to boost the South African economy by contributing to job creation efforts and skills development (Mahadea, 2012).

1.3. Rationale for the study

This research highlights the need for corporate South Africa to foster an environment conducive to entrepreneurship. By addressing barriers and leveraging intrapreneurial experience, corporations and policymakers can support a skilled entrepreneurial workforce, contributing to economic growth and innovation.

Corporate South Africa has long fostered an environment where highly skilled professionals can innovate, solve complex problems, and lead impactful projects (Akinbinu & Chiloane-Phetla, 2022). This skill-building, however, primarily benefits the corporation and seldom translates into entrepreneurial success for employees aspiring to venture into self-employment (Akinbinu & Chiloane-Phetla, 2022). There is an opportunity to harness the intrapreneurial experience by providing tailored support systems to equip these individuals with the entrepreneurial acumen required to launch and sustain their ventures.

Despite their skills, intrapreneurs often encounter numerous obstacles in their transition to entrepreneurship, leading to a high rate of failure and, consequently, discouragement (Ferreira, 2020; Shea et al., 2022). This study builds on the work of Akinbinu and Chiloane-Phetla (2022), who underscore the importance of structured career paths that enable employees to accumulate essential business skills for their entrepreneurial aspirations. This idea is supported by Lee (2021), who highlights the need for entrepreneurship to be understood as a career path, instead, driven by an employee's motivation and decision to explore the field (Lee, 2021). Rider et al. (2019) support this, discussing entrepreneurship as one of three career choices: changing employers, remaining at the same employer, and entrepreneurship (Rider et al., 2019). By addressing these challenges, corporate South Africa can play an instrumental role in nurturing a skilled entrepreneurial workforce that contributes to job creation and economic growth (Mahadea, 2012).

1.4. Problem statement

Skilled intrapreneurs in South Africa face significant challenges transitioning to entrepreneurship due to resource gaps (Urban & Naidoo, 2012), mentorship, and corporate support systems (Herrington & Kew, 2018). This underutilised potential hampers efforts to address unemployment and economic disparities through entrepreneurial ventures.

UNCTAD (2023) highlights systemic challenges in South Africa's entrepreneurial ecosystem, such as lack of access to funding, infrastructure, and mentorship (Kearney et al., 2009), which significantly impact the ability of entrepreneurs to succeed, especially those transitioning from other roles. The research explores whether a practical pathway for this transition could be forged by studying how existing corporate experiences, tools, and skills can be repurposed in entrepreneurial ventures. Akinbinu and Chiloane-Phetla (2022) study emphasises the need for strategic resources and systems.

1.5. Research objectives

The study’s objectives align with this purpose, focusing on the following areas:

1. Investigating the tools used by intrapreneurs to drive innovation within organisations and their applicability to entrepreneurship.
2. Identifying skills and experiences that can be transferred from corporate roles to entrepreneurial settings.
3. Exploring the barriers and challenges intrapreneurs encounter in the transition process.

4. Examining factors contributing to successful transitions from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship within South Africa.

These objectives are supported by research questions that seek to uncover the specific tools, skills, challenges, and success factors that influence intrapreneurs as they move towards entrepreneurship.

1.6. Research questions

1. What tools do intrapreneurs use to innovate and drive change within their organisations that can be used in entrepreneurship?
2. What intrapreneurial skills and experiences gained from South African corporations can be transferred to entrepreneurship ventures?
3. What challenges and barriers do intrapreneurs face when transitioning from corporate roles into entrepreneurship in the South African context?
4. Which factors contribute to the successful transition of intrapreneurs to entrepreneurship?

The study emphasises the practical implications of these findings, suggesting that insights gained could guide business practitioners, policymakers, and support units within organisations (*Table 5.1*). It highlights the potential for corporate-backed support programs to aid in the transition process, fostering a more entrepreneurial workforce equipped to contribute to the economy.

1.7. Delimitations of the Study

The study delimits its focus to South African corporate employees with at least three years of experience. It excludes individuals without formal corporate backgrounds. This approach aims to ensure that the findings are specifically relevant to individuals with substantial corporate experience, making the insights applicable to those contemplating a shift from structured intrapreneurial roles to the unstructured domain of entrepreneurship.

1.8. Assumptions

- Intrapreneurs possess essential skills and motivations for entrepreneurship.
- The South African corporate environment impacts the entrepreneurial transition process.
- The data collected reflects standard experiences within corporate South Africa.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This literature review examines existing intrapreneurship research, focusing on the skills, tools, and experiences intrapreneurs acquire within corporate South Africa and their relevance to entrepreneurship. It explores tools used by intrapreneurs to drive innovation, skills transferable to entrepreneurship, challenges in transitioning from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship, and factors contributing to successful transitions. By addressing these elements, the review provides insights into how corporate and government policies could support a structured pathway from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship in South Africa.

2.2. Background Discussion

Intrapreneurship is described by Pinchot (1985) as an old phenomenon whereby an employee within an organisation takes on the role of an innovator and drives an idea toward profitability (Pinchot, 1985). An entrepreneur is described similarly by Akinbinu et al. (2020) as a venture creator who drives an idea to profitability within their own established entity while depending on their resources to function the business (Pinchot, 1985). An intrapreneur is, in essence, an internal entrepreneur utilising an existing corporation's ‘intracapital’ (existing resources or profits derived from other projects) (Pinchot, 1985) to drive an idea. Intrapreneurs' strengths are their skills, abilities, and experience (Ferreira, 2020).

According to Ferreira (2020), learning is a crucial tool in intrapreneurship, as one gains skills and knowledge on operating within an organisation and what behaviours to choose when doing so. The Social Cognitive theory suggests that humans acquire skills by observing and learning from one another (Brinkmann, 2023; Nickerson, 2024) – a factor apparent in the corporate landscape in formal mentorship programs, line manager support, and goal-oriented development. An individual's behaviour and skills are groomed through constant interaction with others, where one chooses what they would like to mimic through influence (Brinkmann, 2023). Nickerson (2024) highlights that the consequences of various behaviours can also be viewed in corporate environments, offering learnings to others. Intrapreneurs can leverage other colleagues or the support structure around them (Pinchot, 1985). However, once they become entrepreneurs, they are confronted by challenges that could be well addressed with support in a corporate intrapreneurship setting. Ferreira (2020) further draws attention to intrapreneurship as a method to hedge risk for an entrepreneur. Fear of failure is a common characteristic of most intrapreneurs (Ferreira, 2020), who exist in corporations to guarantee themselves a salary and benefits. Entrepreneurship, however, is a crucial tool that can be used to boost the South African economy (Mahadea, 2012). Therefore, there is an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between intrapreneurship and entrepreneurship by identifying transferable skills and resources that contribute to entrepreneurial venture success.

2.3. Framework supporting the study

With the above in mind, the researcher designed a conceptual framework that outlines the transition from corporate experience to entrepreneurial success, emphasising the interplay of internal factors, external challenges, and influences. The framework (*Figure 2.1*) demonstrates how personal, environmental, and external factors must align for a successful entrepreneurial journey.

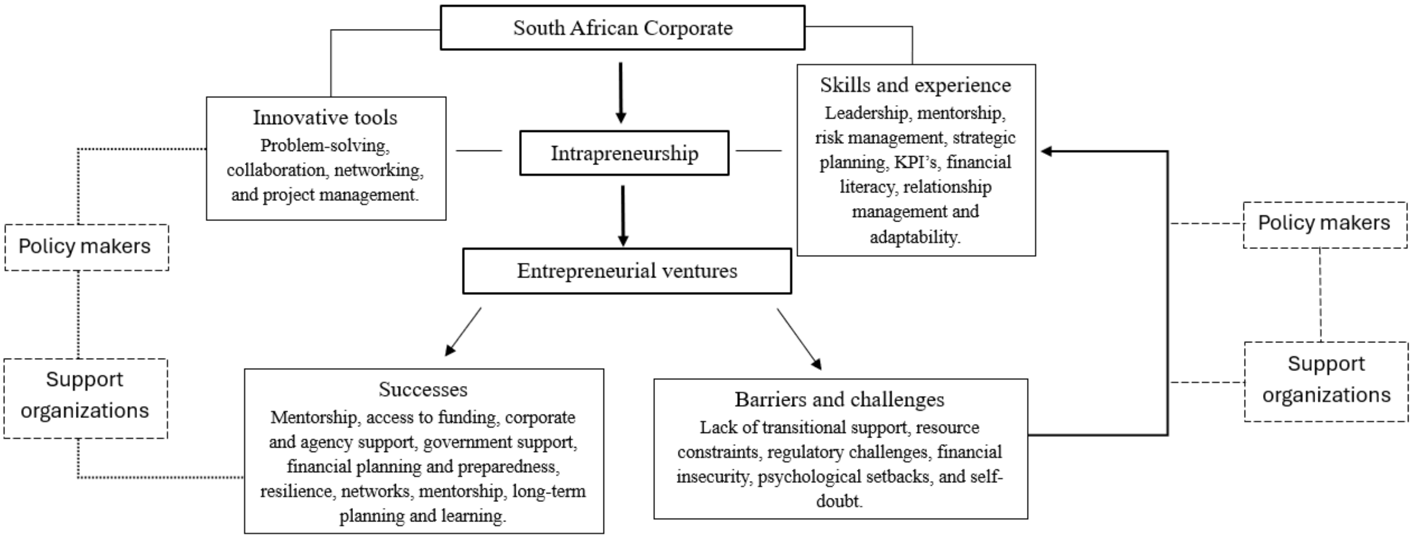

Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework outlining the transition from corporate to entrepreneurship

Source: Researchers own model based on the literature reviewed: (Akinbinu & Chiloane-Phetla, 2022; Ferreira, 2020; Herrington & Kew, 2018; Olawale & Garwe, 2009; Pinchot, 1985; Shea et al., 2022; Zahra, 1991)

Corporate experience is the ***input***. The foundation of entrepreneurial success often stems from corporate skills (Akinbinu & Chiloane-Phetla, 2022; Pinchot, 1985). The tools acquired build professionalism, resilience, and teachability, which are transferable to entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurial transition is the ***process***. This stage is marked by internal motivators, such as psychological resilience and financial preparation, alongside challenges like economic instability, self-doubt, and the steep learning curve of business ownership (Akinbinu & Chiloane-Phetla, 2022; Ferreira, 2020; Herrington & Kew, 2018; Shea et al., 2022). ***External factors*** play a crucial role in the transition. Regulatory barriers (compliance, corruption), socio-economic influences (market access, community needs), and support systems (mentorship, networks) can either enable or hinder the transition. Support organisations and policymakers are key in supporting intrapreneurs in the process (Olawale & Garwe, 2009). Corporate skills lead to sustainable entrepreneurial outcomes (ventures) when effectively applied. This is the ***output***. Overcoming the barriers and challenges builds resilience, enabling entrepreneurs to scale their ventures over time (Zahra, 1991).

2.4. Theoretical Foundations

Two theories are considered that underpin intrapreneurial transitions and highlight the importance of skill transfer in a career change. The Resource-Based View (RBV) emphasises leveraging unique skills and resources for competitive advantage, while Schumpeter's Theory of Innovation underscores the role of creative destruction in economic development. These two theories emphasise the tools that intrapreneurs employ in corporate settings, which lead to success.

2.4.1. The Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory posits that individuals leverage unique skills and resources to gain competitive advantages, a perspective aligned with intrapreneurial skills transfer studies (Barney, 1991). Barney (1991) and Gupta (2023), in a more recent study, highlight these resources as both tangible (equipment, infrastructure, and capital) and intangible assets—skills, experience, and networks—that former intrapreneurs use to differentiate themselves as entrepreneurs. This theory has been particularly relevant in this study, as intrapreneurs transitioning to entrepreneurship brought valuable intangible resources to competitive markets but required additional support to maximise the intangible resources. This has given much larger and tenured firms a sustainable competitive advantage (Gupta, 2023).

2.4.2. Schumpeter's Theory of Innovation

Schumpeter's Theory of Innovation also provides insight into intrapreneurial transitions, emphasising the role of innovation in economic development (Croitoru, 2012). Croitoru (2012) discusses the concept of "creative destruction," where new enterprises disrupt established markets and drive progress. Intrapreneurs often embodied this principle within corporate settings, leading innovative projects that challenged conventional practices. However, studies indicated that without sufficient support, intrapreneurs faced challenges when attempting to replicate this innovation independently. Similarly to the RBV Theory, Langroodi (2022) highlights two resources discussed by Schumpeter's Theory of Innovation that entrepreneurs need to succeed. These resources include 1) technical knowledge to introduce new products – which they possess from acquired skills and experiences, and a commonly complex resource, 2) credit and capital (Langroodi, 2022). In this study, intrapreneurs who successfully transitioned often had key expertise (access to networks and skills development), enabling them to implement innovative business models in their entrepreneurial ventures; however, they lacked financial support and resources to succeed in their ventures.

These theoretical underpinnings are key in the transitional process, encouraging the need for transitional resources such as intrapreneurial readiness, support mechanisms, and financial planning.

2.5. Empirical literature review

2.5.1. Tools in corporate organisations

Previous studies explored the tools and strategies intrapreneurs employed to foster innovation within corporations. Antoncic and Hisrich (2001) suggested that intrapreneurs often applied strategic thinking and problem-solving approaches that fostered organisational creativity and adaptability. Antoncic and Hisrich (2001) found that intrapreneurs used tools like lean methodologies and design thinking to implement novel ideas, streamline processes, and drive organisational change. In this context, design thinking helped intrapreneurs approach challenges with a user-centric perspective, enabling them to generate solutions grounded in user needs, a strategy proven useful in entrepreneurial settings (Covin & Slevin, 1991).

Intrapreneurs also utilised project management tools and cross-functional collaboration to drive innovation. Gapp and Fisher (2007) observed that successful intrapreneurs leveraged collaborative networks within their organisations to gather diverse perspectives and promote knowledge sharing. By coordinating resources and support across departments, they could introduce innovative projects that benefited the organisation. Research by Kesting and Parm Ulhøi (2010) supports these findings, noting that intrapreneurs frequently acted as intermediaries who facilitated communication between departments, which proved valuable for implementing complex projects. This role positioned intrapreneurs well to navigate similar challenges in entrepreneurial environments.

South African research on intrapreneurial tools has shown similar trends. Eniola et al. (2015) highlighted that intrapreneurs in South African companies applied agile methodologies and strategic foresight to adapt to the fast-paced and often volatile business environment. These tools helped intrapreneurs assess risks, prioritise key initiatives, and make informed decisions. In entrepreneurial contexts, these same tools have allowed former intrapreneurs to efficiently manage resources and execute strategic initiatives despite limited budgets and support structures. However, Eniola et al. (2015) also indicated that the constraints of a corporate environment sometimes limit intrapreneurs' ability to realise their innovative ideas fully.

Proposition 1: The tools utilised by intrapreneurs to drive innovation within corporate organisations, such as design thinking, agile methodologies, and collaborative networks, are directly applicable to entrepreneurial settings, enabling effective problem-solving, resource optimisation, and strategic adaptability.

2.5.2. Transferable Skills and Experiences

Numerous studies have examined intrapreneurs' skills and experiences in corporate environments and how these skills supported their entrepreneurial endeavours. Politis (2005) identified leadership, risk management, and strategic planning as core skills intrapreneurs honed within corporations and transferred effectively to entrepreneurship. Jantunen et al. (2008) added that intrapreneurs often developed resilience and resourcefulness, skills critical for navigating the uncertainties of entrepreneurship.

Leadership emerged as a particularly transferable skill, as intrapreneurs frequently led initiatives that required them to influence teams and drive results without direct authority. This experience equipped them to manage the demands of entrepreneurial leadership, where they needed to inspire teams without the structural support provided in corporate roles (Covin & Slevin, 1991). A study by Urban and Naidoo (2012) highlighted that South African intrapreneurs who transitioned to entrepreneurship often leveraged these leadership skills to build cohesive teams, manage stakeholders, and negotiate partnerships essential for sustaining entrepreneurial ventures.

Risk management was another skill extensively researched. Kearney et al. (2009) observed that corporate intrapreneurs learned to assess risks and make calculated decisions. This experience enabled them to balance risk and opportunity in their entrepreneurial ventures. In South Africa, where economic instability and regulatory challenges heighten business risks, the risk management skills intrapreneurs acquired proved particularly useful. Eniola et al. (2015) confirmed that intrapreneurs in South Africa who pursued entrepreneurship were often better equipped to navigate regulatory constraints, access limited resources, and create contingency plans for economic downturns.

Additionally, strategic planning skills acquired in corporate settings were instrumental for intrapreneurs' entrepreneurial ventures. According to a study by Barney (1991), intrapreneurs engaged in strategic planning within corporations were better prepared to identify and capitalise on business opportunities independently. This skill enabled them to create sustainable business models and strategically position their startups within competitive markets. Politis (2005) found that South African intrapreneurs, familiar with planning and implementation processes, applied these skills to assess market demands, develop marketing strategies, and secure venture funding. Corporate-acquired skills and experiences, such as leadership, strategic planning, network building and communication, are critical assets for fostering entrepreneurial success in diverse business environments.

Proposition 2: The skills and experiences gained from intrapreneurship, including leadership, strategic planning, and risk management, significantly enhance an individual's capacity to navigate the dynamic challenges of entrepreneurship, particularly in resource-constrained environments.

2.5.3. Difficulties in transitioning

While intrapreneurs developed valuable skills and experiences in corporate roles, they often encountered challenges when transitioning to entrepreneurship. Antoncic and Hisrich (2001) found that many intrapreneurs faced difficulties adapting to a resource-constrained environment after transitioning from corporate structures with more established support. The shift required them to take on multiple roles with fewer resources, creating a sense of isolation that hindered their ability to innovate effectively. Research by Kuratko and Audretsch (2009) noted that former intrapreneurs struggled to balance operational and strategic responsibilities, which could be overwhelming without the support systems present in corporations.

In South Africa, these challenges were intensified by additional factors such as limited access to funding, regulatory constraints, and a highly competitive market. According to Urban and Naidoo (2012), intrapreneurs in South Africa often struggled with securing startup capital, given the country's limited financial support systems for new entrepreneurs. Without the financial resources available in corporate settings, many intrapreneurs faced difficulties sustaining their businesses, particularly during the early stages. Herrington and Kew (2018) further emphasised that South African startups faced stiff competition in an oversaturated market, where failure rates remained high due to limited access to support services.

The regulatory environment in South Africa presented another barrier for intrapreneurs. Olawale and Garwe (2009) highlighted that South African intrapreneurs who transitioned to entrepreneurship had to navigate complex legal frameworks and regulatory requirements that often delayed their entry into the market. Eniola et al. (2015) found that these regulatory hurdles discouraged some intrapreneurs from pursuing entrepreneurship altogether, as they lacked the resources and networks to manage compliance issues efficiently. Additionally, a lack of mentorship and guidance exacerbated these challenges, as former intrapreneurs struggled to find mentors who could provide industry-specific advice and support.

Proposition 3: Intrapreneurs transitioning to entrepreneurship face barriers such as limited access to capital, lack of mentorship, and regulatory hurdles, which impede their ability to apply corporate-acquired skills effectively in entrepreneurial ventures.

2.5.4. Successful Transitions

Research also identified factors that contributed to successful transitions from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship. One significant factor was corporate support, which provided a foundation for intrapreneurs to acquire entrepreneurial skills and insights while employed. Zahra (1991) noted that corporations with a culture of innovation and intrapreneurial support often fostered future entrepreneurs by allowing employees to develop business ideas with minimal risk. This finding was supported by Eniola et al. (2015), who observed that South African companies with innovation-driven cultures produced more successful entrepreneurs, as employees were encouraged to experiment and pursue new ideas.

Mentorship and access to networks were also critical to successful transitions. Kearney et al. (2009) found that intrapreneurs who received mentorship from experienced entrepreneurs were likelier to succeed in their ventures as mentors guided navigating challenges and building resilience. This mentorship proved valuable for South African intrapreneurs, who benefited from advice on accessing resources and overcoming regulatory barriers (Urban & Naidoo, 2012). Studies indicated that networking opportunities, such as participation in entrepreneurial communities, allowed intrapreneurs to connect with investors and collaborators, enhancing their chances of success.

Government support was another factor that facilitated successful transitions. In countries with strong entrepreneurial ecosystems, government policies offered financial support, training programs, and tax incentives that reduced barriers for new entrepreneurs Zahra (1991). Herrington and Kew (2018) noted that while South Africa provided limited government support for entrepreneurs, initiatives like the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) played a role in offering resources and training to those pursuing business ventures. Eniola et al. (2015) suggested that expanding these programs to support former intrapreneurs could increase entrepreneurial success and foster economic growth.

Proposition 4: Successful transitions from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship in South Africa are facilitated by factors such as strong mentorship, corporate innovation support, and targeted government policies, collectively addressing the unique challenges of the South African entrepreneurial landscape.

2.6. Gaps in the literature

Despite extensive research on intrapreneurship and entrepreneurship (Aina & Solikin, 2020; Akinbinu & Chiloane-Phetla, 2022; Akinbinu et al., 2020; Lee, 2021), a significant gap remains in understanding the transition between these roles, particularly within the South African context. While studies have explored the skills and experiences intrapreneurs acquire in corporate environments, there is limited research on how these skills are effectively applied in entrepreneurial settings. Furthermore, intrapreneurs' unique challenges during this transition—such as navigating resource constraints, regulatory barriers, and the absence of corporate support systems—remain underexplored.

Additionally, existing literature often focuses on general entrepreneurial success factors without considering the nuanced pathways intrapreneurs take when moving from structured corporate environments to independent business ventures. In South Africa, where socio-economic conditions and market volatility create additional obstacles, tailored strategies and policies are lacking to support this transition. Addressing this gap is critical to developing comprehensive frameworks, policies, and support systems that enable successful transitions from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship and foster innovation and economic growth in South Africa.

2.7. Conclusion of literature review

This study proposes that South African corporate environments' structured support and resources can be leveraged to facilitate intrapreneurs' successful transition to entrepreneurship. Specifically, it suggests that the strategic application of corporate-acquired skills, such as innovation, risk management, and leadership, combined with targeted structural support, can significantly reduce intrapreneurs' barriers when establishing independent ventures. The research further suggests that with enhanced corporate and government support, South African intrapreneurs can better utilise their experience and skills, leading to more successful transitions from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The research methodology chapter outlines the systematic approach adopted to investigate how corporate experiences in South Africa can support intrapreneurs transitioning to entrepreneurship. This chapter explains the research paradigm, approach and design method used to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with this transition. The study employs a qualitative approach to gain in-depth insights into participants' lived experiences and the broader contextual factors influencing their journey. By providing a comprehensive overview of the research process, this chapter sets the foundation for the analysis and interpretation of findings, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives and contributing to the body of knowledge on entrepreneurial transitions in South Africa.

3.2. Research paradigm

This study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises the subjective and socially constructed nature of reality. It seeks to understand the lived experiences of intrapreneurs transitioning to entrepreneurship within the South African context. Interpretivism is suitable for qualitative research that explores how individuals make meaning of their experiences, particularly when multiple perspectives and complex social realities are involved (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Scotland, 2012).

From an ontological perspective, the study accepts that multiple realities exist, each shaped by the participant's unique context. Guba and Lincoln (2005) discuss that the epistemological stance recognises that knowledge is co-created through interaction between the researcher and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) which is supported in a subsequent study by (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The research is value-laden (axiology), with the researcher acknowledging and reflecting on their role in shaping the inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This paradigm allows the study to generate rich, contextual understanding rather than generalizable truths, making it ideal for exploring the nuanced process of entrepreneurial transition.

3.3. Research design & approach

The study adopts a qualitative research approach to delve into the challenges intrapreneurs face when shifting to entrepreneurship. As highlighted by Kuper et al. (2008), this method captured rich, real-world insights from participants who were requested to participate *(Appendix 1)*, aligning with the study's objective of understanding the skills, challenges, and motivations associated with this transition. Creswell and Poth (2018) discuss five qualitative research approaches, with the phenomenology approach driving this study.

Phenomenology's core aim is to explore and interpret lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and this research attempts to uncover the shared meaning or essence of the experience of transitioning from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship across participants from various sectors and backgrounds. The study emphasises the perspectives, emotions, challenges, and insights of the individuals involved, seeking to understand their subjective reality, which is a key feature of phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, in terms of the research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted, which included member checks (in later interviews) where the researcher asked sub-questions based on what was collected from other interviews. This, along with thematic analysis, captured in-depth insights, debate and patterns. This design is consistent with the interpretivist research paradigm.

3.4. Research instruments

Data collection involved semi-structured, open-ended interviews. Semi-structured interview guides *(Appendix 3)* facilitated participant responses through probing. However, participants openly provided in-depth personal accounts of their journeys, uncovering shared themes and unique experiences. The interview guide provided a set of questions across the four objectives of the study to gauge participants' views on the four areas: tools, experience and skills, challenges, barriers, and success.

3.5. Population and Sampling Method

The population includes South African professionals transitioning to entrepreneurship. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants whose backgrounds aligned with the study's objectives. Candidates were identified through professional networks, entrepreneurial communities, and referrals. Inclusion criteria required participants to hold intrapreneurial roles within South African corporations for at least three years, have or are launching entrepreneurial ventures during interviews, and represent diverse industries and locations. The final sample size was 11, where data saturation was reached. Participants balanced depth with diversity, ensuring robust analysis across various perspectives. Of the 11 participants, four were in the transitional phase, employed full-time, and seven had transitioned and were fully self-employed.

3.6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

As Clarke and Braun (2013) outlined, thematic analysis was employed to interpret the qualitative data. This approach was chosen for its systematic and flexible framework, which is well-suited for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data. The six-step thematic analysis process of Clarke and Braun (2013) aligns with the study's exploratory nature and aims to understand nuanced transitions from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship.

The researcher reviewed transcripts and notes, and initial codes were then systematically generated to highlight noteworthy features, such as recurring challenges, motivations, and skills. These codes were grouped into broader themes and related sub-themes as needed. They were refined to ensure they accurately captured the dataset, answered the research questions, and aligned with the research objectives. The themes were integrated into a coherent narrative that connected the findings to the study's objectives and relevant literature.

These themes illuminate the motivations, barriers, and success factors influencing entrepreneurial journeys, offering valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between corporate experiences and entrepreneurial ventures. By triangulating these themes with secondary data, the study achieved a more resounding, corroborated understanding of the transitional journey, mitigating potential bias (Scribbr, 2022).

3.7. Quality Assurance

3.7.1. Credibility, reliability, and transferability

To ensure credibility, reliability, and transferability, the study incorporated several measures:

Data Triangulation through collection methods: Interviews, notes, and audio recordings allowed the researcher to cross-check their understanding and delve into the specifics of each conversation, ensuring the data was reliable and credible. Data saturation also indicated reliable consistencies in the data. Credibility was reinforced by cross-verifying insights from interviews and expert opinions, as noted by Scribbr (2022).

Diversity in participant selection further enhanced the study's transferability: Participants represented various industries (i.e., legal, farming, banking, education, and financial services), geographic locations (i.e., Johannesburg and Durban), and levels of corporate experience (averaging 5–10 years). This diversity ensured the broader applicability of the findings Shea et al. (2022).

A structured research design and thorough documentation enhanced dependability, while systematic recording practices ensured transparency and dependable findings (Quantilope, 2024).

3.8. Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were followed, including approval from an ethics committee *(Appendix 2)* and obtaining informed consent *(Appendix 4)* from participants, which outlined anonymity and confidentiality measures. The data collected was securely stored and retained for five years before permanent deletion.

3.9. Limitations

The study acknowledges potential limitations. Although efforts to maintain objectivity were implemented through triangulation of data sources and thematic analysis, the researchers' perspectives on intrapreneurship and entrepreneurship may have affected data interpretation. Efforts were made to include diverse demographic and industry representation; however, the selected sample might not have fully represented the demographic diversity of intrapreneurs transitioning to entrepreneurship in South Africa, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings. The under-underrepresentation of certain groups may have affected the study's findings.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Introduction

This section discusses the tools and skills leveraged by intrapreneurs, the challenges they encounter during the transition, and the factors that contribute to their success, as gathered from the one-on-one interviews. The discussion further contextualises the transition process within broader socio-economic and institutional landscapes gathered in theory. The insights shed light on individual entrepreneurial strategies and highlight systemic barriers and support mechanisms critical for fostering entrepreneurship in South Africa.

4.2. Participants profile

Participants come from diverse corporate roles: finance, manufacturing, built environment, operations, management, Information Technology (IT), and education. They have experience in leadership, client management, and strategy, with careers spanning five to ten years on average. All participants worked in structured corporate environments that provided tools and skills applicable to entrepreneurship, such as financial literacy, strategic planning, and project management.

Eleven one-on-one interviews were conducted virtually with participants who have experience in the corporate sector. Permission from the participants to collect information was obtained before the interviews, and participants were provided with guiding questions beforehand. The interviews aimed to explore the experiences of South African intrapreneurs transitioning from corporate roles to entrepreneurship. The focus was on understanding their motivations, challenges, strategies, and the tools, skills, and support systems they leveraged during the transition. *Table 4.1* provides the profile and demographics of each participant:

Table 4.1: Demographics and profile of participants

Participant	Gender	Race	Corporate sector	Business sector
1	Female	Black	Legal	Legal
2	Male	Black	Banking	Furniture
3	Female	Indian	Financial Services	Social networking
4	Male	Black	Built Environment	Farming
5	Female	Black	Banking	Farming; Cleaning services

6	Female	White	IT	Radio; Events; Podcasting
7	Male	Black	Built Environment	Farming
8	Male	Black	Fund Management	Farming
9	Female	Coloured	FMCG	Baking
10	Male	Black	Education	Education & Training
11	Female	Black	Accounting	Property; Supplies; Accounting

4.3. Findings

During the interviews, participants shared their experiences relevant to the above themes. Specific comments and insights critical to this study are highlighted, emphasising the motivation for their transitions.

4.3.1. Overview of thematic analysis

Table 4.2 provides a synthesised list of the findings from the interviews across all participants, highlighting an overview of the themes and the research questions they relate to. *Table 4.2* highlights the number of mentions for each theme (and sub-theme where relevant) found and the participants who discussed them:

Table 4.2: A count of the various themes found across interviews

Research Question	Theme	Count	Participants
1. What tools do intrapreneurs use to innovate and drive change within their organisations that can be used in entrepreneurship?	Mentorship and professional support	3	1, 4, 11
	Financial planning and resourcefulness	4	5, 6, 9, 10
	Networking and relationship-building	3	3, 4, 5
2. What intrapreneurial skills and experiences gained from South African corporations can be transferred to entrepreneurship ventures?	Resilience and emotional strength	4	6, 7, 9, 11
	Skills transfer from corporate to entrepreneurship	3	1, 6, 10
3. What challenges and barriers do intrapreneurs face when transitioning from corporate roles into entrepreneurship in the South African context?	Transition challenges Sub-themes - Financial Instability - Loss of Corporate Support and Resources	8	2, 9, 10 9, 5 6

	- Psychological and Emotional Challenges - Learning Curves and Skill Gaps		1, 11 7
	Challenges specific to the South African context Sub-themes - Bureaucratic Challenges - Compliance	3	4, 10, 11 11 10
4. Which factors contribute to the successful transition of intrapreneurs to entrepreneurship?	Corporate burnout	4	1, 6, 8, 11
	Starting small and scaling incrementally	3	8, 9, 10
	Passion and motivation for entrepreneurship Sub-themes - Adaptability and evolution - Social and community impact	6	7, 8 5, 3 4, 8, 11

4.3.2. Findings for research question 1

Mentorship and Networking

Mentorship and networking appeared consistently as vital supports for three participants. Participant 4 described the role of mentorship: *"My mentor from corporate guided me through the early stages of setting up my business. They provided not just advice but also encouragement when I doubted myself."* Networking was equally important, as Participant 5 stated: *"The connections I built during my corporate career opened doors for me as an entrepreneur. People trusted me because of the relationships we had built over the years."* These insights underscore the importance of leveraging professional networks and seeking mentorship during the transition.

Financial Planning and Resourcefulness

Financial planning and resourcefulness were critical themes, as four participants faced financial instability during the transition. Participant 9 noted: *"I had to plan meticulously beforehand. Every cent counted because I did not have the safety net of a corporate salary anymore. I created a budget and stuck to it religiously."* Participant 10 emphasised the importance of being resourceful: *"When I started, I could not afford everything I needed. I used what I had and found creative ways to make it work. Just like corporate. You have to think on your feet."* These quotes illustrate how financial discipline and innovative resource management were essential for navigating the uncertain entrepreneurial landscape.

4.3.3. Findings for research question 2

Resilience

Four participants highlighted resilience as a skill gained from corporate, which is a cornerstone of entrepreneurial success. Participant 7 shared: *"There were times when I thought of giving up, but I reminded myself why I started. Corporate taught us that resilience is what keeps you going when the odds are against you."* For Participant 6, emotional strength was key to overcoming setbacks: *"Entrepreneurship is tough. You will face rejection and failure, but you have to pick yourself up and keep moving forward."* This resilience helped participants persevere through challenges and emerge stronger.

Skills transfer from corporate to entrepreneurship

Corporate experiences gave participants a solid foundation of transferable skills crucial to entrepreneurial success. These skills included strategic planning, project management and leadership. Planning strategically and setting achievable goals was a key skill transferred from corporate to entrepreneurship. Participant 2 noted, *"I used to create long-term plans for my team in corporate, and now I apply the same principle to my business. It helps me stay focused and prioritise."* Experience in managing projects and coordinating teams prepared participants for the multifaceted demands of running a business. Participant 3 highlighted, *“Corporate taught me how to break big projects into smaller tasks and manage timelines. That’s exactly how I approach new ventures now.”* Participants emphasised how leadership roles in corporate settings helped them build and manage teams effectively as entrepreneurs. Participant 4 emphasised, *“In my corporate role, I learned to lead by example and motivate my team. That’s helped me establish a strong culture in my business.”*

4.3.4. Findings for research question 3

Challenges Specific to South Africa

The unique challenges of the South African context were particularly significant, with all participants discussing various challenges. Participant 10 spoke about corruption: *"It’s disheartening when tenders go to the connected, not the deserving. It’s a major hurdle for honest entrepreneurs like me."* Compliance burdens were another obstacle, as Participant 2 explained: *"The paperwork and legal requirements are overwhelming, especially when you're starting". It* *feels like the system is designed to discourage small businesses. "*Participant 11 highlighted resource limitations: *"Accessing funding is a constant struggle. Banks want collateral, but how do you provide that when you're just starting? "*These systemic barriers add complexity to the entrepreneurial journey in South Africa.

Transition challenges

Transitioning from corporate roles to entrepreneurship posed several challenges for the participants, with financial instability emerging as one of the most prominent obstacles. Many participants highlighted the difficulty of losing the steady income and benefits of corporate jobs. The unpredictability of entrepreneurial earnings created significant stress, particularly during the initial stages when businesses were not yet profitable. Participant 9 explained, *"I had to adjust my entire lifestyle because I no longer had a regular paycheck to depend on."* Similarly, Participant 10 described the sacrifices required: *"I poured all my savings into the business, which meant there was little left for emergencies."*

Another major challenge was the psychological shift from being part of a structured corporate environment to operating independently. Participants discussed feelings of self-doubt and the struggle to establish credibility outside the corporate identity. Participant 6 remarked, *"It was hard to detach myself from the prestige of my corporate title and realise that I had to build a new identity as an entrepreneur."* The lack of immediate validation and the need to manage multiple roles within their ventures intensified this psychological burden.

Lastly, the absence of corporate resources such as administrative support, IT infrastructure, and professional development opportunities overwhelmed participants. They had to juggle multiple responsibilities independently, from marketing and finance to operations. Participant 3 noted, *"I had to learn everything on my own, and it often felt like there were not enough hours in the day."* Despite these challenges, many participants demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability, leveraging their corporate skills to navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship.

4.3.5. Findings for research question 4

Corporate Burnout

Corporate burnout was the most frequently mentioned theme (discussed by four participants), reflecting participants' dissatisfaction with corporate constraints, lack of flexibility, and limited impact. This theme motivated the transition of Participants 1, 6 and 11. Participant 1 stated: *"I felt like I was stuck in a box, doing the same thing day in and day out, with no room to innovate or make a meaningful contribution. It was draining."* Similarly, Participant 6 highlighted the emotional toll: *"Corporate life was suffocating. The pressure to meet endless deadlines and targets left no time for personal growth or family."* For Participant 11, burnout stemmed from a misalignment of values: *"I realised I was not living for myself anymore. My corporate job did not align with my vision or goals, and I needed to break free."* This widespread dissatisfaction drove participants to seek entrepreneurship as a pathway to autonomy and fulfilment.

Starting Small and Scaling

Starting small and scaling incrementally emerged as a common strategy to succeed among participants. Participant 8 shared: *"I began with what I had—two goats. From there, I reinvested every profit to grow my farming business step by step."* Participant 9 echoed this approach: *"Scaling takes time. You cannot rush it. I focused on building a solid foundation and expanding gradually."* This incremental growth allowed participants to manage risks effectively and build sustainable businesses.

Passion and motivation for entrepreneurship

Passion and motivation emerged as key success drivers for participants transitioning from corporate roles to entrepreneurship. Many described a deep desire to pursue ventures that aligned with their values and aspirations, which were often stifled in their corporate environments. Participant 7, for example, expressed a strong connection to his agricultural roots, stating, *"Farming is more than just a business for me; it is a way to honour my family legacy and contribute to food security."* This passion provided a sense of purpose and sustained participants through the challenges of building their businesses.

For others, the motivation to succeed stemmed from the opportunity to make a meaningful impact on their communities. Participant 10, who launched an education-focused venture, shared, *"I wanted to address the educational disparities I witnessed growing up. My business is not just about profits but about creating opportunities for the next generation."* This sense of mission often differentiated their entrepreneurial endeavours from their previous corporate roles, where participants felt limited in their ability to influence meaningful change.

The autonomy and creative freedom associated with entrepreneurship also fuelled participants' motivation. Participant 3 reflected, *"I was tired of following a rigid corporate script. Becoming an entrepreneur allowed me to design solutions that truly resonate with clients."* This freedom to innovate and build something unique was a significant motivator, particularly for those who felt constrained by the repetitive nature of corporate tasks.

Passion and motivation were the catalysts for the transition to entrepreneurship and the sustaining forces that kept participants focused on their goals to succeed. These intrinsic drivers enabled them to overcome obstacles and remain committed to building businesses aligned with their values and long-term visions.

4.4. Discussion

Across the interviews, several recurring themes emerge that shed light on the journey from corporate roles to entrepreneurship in South Africa. These themes include the challenges of corporate life, the desire for independence, the value of financial diversification, the significance of soft skills, the need for resilience, and the unique barriers within the South African context. Together, these insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the motivations, skills, and challenges experienced by South African intrapreneurs as they transition into entrepreneurial roles. This discussion aligns the themes and findings from the interviews with research questions, drawing comparisons and contrasts with the reviewed literature. By comparing existing theories and insights with empirical data, this analysis highlights the consistencies, divergences, and implications for transitioning from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship within the South African context.

4.4.1. Discussion of research question 1

The literature highlights that intrapreneurs leverage **design thinking**, **strategic foresight**, and **cross-functional collaboration** tools to foster innovation within corporations (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2001; Covin & Slevin, 1991). These tools enable problem-solving and resource optimisation and are directly transferable to entrepreneurial settings (Gapp & Fisher, 2007). In the South African context, Eniola et al. (2015) emphasise the importance of agile methodologies and risk assessment, which intrapreneurs use to adapt to volatile environments.

The findings support this, with participants confirming using similar tools in their entrepreneurial ventures. These tools included **strategic planning** to set long-term goals and **project management skills** to manage entrepreneurial timelines and resources, mirroring the collaborative approaches emphasised in the literature.

However, a notable contrast arises in resource availability. While corporate environments provide infrastructure and support systems to implement these tools effectively (Kesting & Parm Ulhøi, 2010), participants struggled to access such resources in entrepreneurship. This divergence highlights a gap between theoretical potential and practical application, where the absence of support structures limits the full utilisation of intrapreneurial tools in entrepreneurship.

4.4.2. Discussion of research question 2

The literature emphasises transferable skills such as **leadership**, **risk management**, and **strategic planning** as critical assets for entrepreneurs (Jantunen et al., 2008; Politis, 2005). These skills, honed through corporate projects, equip intrapreneurs to navigate the uncertainties of entrepreneurship, especially in resource-constrained environments like South Africa (Urban & Naidoo, 2012).

The findings align with these assertions. Participants cited **leadership experience** as pivotal in managing teams and stakeholders. **Risk management** also emerged as a transferable skill. The findings, however, expand on the literature by emphasising **emotional resilience** as a key skill transferred from corporate roles. While resilience is often discussed as an entrepreneurial trait (Kearney et al., 2009), the participants linked it directly to corporate challenges. This highlights how corporate environments inadvertently prepare intrapreneurs for the emotional demands of entrepreneurship, an insight less explored in existing research.

4.4.3. Discussion of research question 3

The literature and findings underscore intrapreneurs' difficulties in transitioning to entrepreneurship. The literature identifies **resource constraints**, **regulatory hurdles**, and **psychological adjustments** as prominent challenges (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2001; Kuratko & Audretsch, 2009). South African studies further highlight **limited access to funding** and **compliance burdens** as specific barriers (Olawale & Garwe, 2009; Urban & Naidoo, 2012).

The findings corroborate these challenges. Financial instability was a recurring theme, whilst regulatory hurdles emerged as a significant obstacle. However, the findings reveal additional challenges, such as **corruption** and its impact on equitable opportunities. This aspect of the South African context amplifies the barriers discussed in the literature, highlighting systemic issues that hinder entrepreneurial progress.

Furthermore, the psychological shift from corporate identity to entrepreneurial independence, while noted in the literature, was particularly pronounced in the findings. This underscores the emotional challenges of redefining professional identity, a nuance often overlooked in theoretical discussions.

4.4.4. Discussion of research question 4

The literature identifies **mentorship**, **networking**, and **government support** as critical enablers of successful transitions (Kearney et al., 2009; Zahra, 1991). Mentorship provides guidance and resilience, while networking facilitates access to resources and collaborators (Urban & Naidoo, 2012). Although limited in South Africa, government initiatives are noted as potential support mechanisms (Herrington & Kew, 2018).

The findings strongly align with these factors, with participants emphasising the value of **mentorship and networking**. The findings also highlight **incremental growth** as a success strategy, a factor less emphasised in the literature. Starting small and scaling gradually allowed participants to manage risks effectively. This approach reflects a practical adaptation to resource constraints and aligns with the literature's focus on resilience.

However, as highlighted in the literature, government support received mixed responses in the findings. While initiatives like the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) were acknowledged, participants expressed scepticism about their accessibility and impact. This gap between policy intent and practical implementation suggests an area for improvement in supporting entrepreneurial transitions.

4.5. Conclusion of findings and discussion

The transition from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship is a complex journey shaped by unique challenges, valuable skills, and critical success factors. The findings, grounded in theoretical foundations and practical experiences, highlight the nuances of the South African context. While the literature emphasises transferable skills, tools, and systemic barriers like compliance, the findings extend this by spotlighting the pervasive influence of corruption and its demoralising impact on entrepreneurs.

Intrapreneurs transitioning to entrepreneurship bring a wealth of corporate skills, such as strategic planning, financial literacy, and networking, which provide a solid foundation. However, they face significant challenges, including financial instability, resource constraints, and the psychological shift needed to establish a new professional identity. Resilience, adaptability, financial preparedness, and support from networks are essential for overcoming these obstacles, as is a clear vision and strong sense of purpose.

The findings reveal both alignment and divergence between theoretical and practical perspectives. Mentorship, networking, and incremental growth strategies consistently emerge as key enablers of success. However, the disconnect between government policy frameworks and on-the-ground realities underscores the need for more targeted interventions. Emotional resilience, a shift in identity, and the ability to navigate systemic barriers are vital for successful transitions.

This analysis compares the literature and findings to comprehensively understand the transition from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship in South Africa. It underscores the importance of transferable skills, resilience, and mentorship while addressing this journey's structural and psychological challenges. These insights have significant implications for theory, practice, and policy, offering valuable guidance for supporting aspiring entrepreneurs in the South African entrepreneurial ecosystem.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Summary of findings

Across the interviews, several recurring themes emerged that shed light on the journey from corporate roles to entrepreneurship in South Africa. These themes include the challenges of corporate life, the desire for independence, the value of financial diversification, the significance of soft skills, the need for resilience, and the unique barriers within the South African context, such as compliance issues and corruption. Together, these insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the motivations, skills, and challenges experienced by South African intrapreneurs as they transition into entrepreneurial roles.

Corporate experience also highlights the importance of having transparent processes and structures. Participants frequently recognise that even as entrepreneurs, they benefit from creating structured workflows and implementing systems to ensure their businesses operate smoothly. Corporate experience taught them essential business principles, including project management, strategic planning, and financial literacy. Corporate training, particularly in finance, compliance, and risk management, provided a foundation of knowledge that now helps them navigate the complexities of running a business. This suggests that while corporate life can feel restrictive, it also serves as a training ground where future entrepreneurs can develop the skills to establish and grow their businesses successfully.

5.2. Recommendations

The challenges faced by intrapreneurs transitioning to entrepreneurship, as outlined in the problem statement, highlight critical gaps in support structures, skill transfer mechanisms, and access to resources in South Africa. While intrapreneurs possess valuable corporate-acquired skills and experiences, financial constraints, regulatory hurdles, and limited mentorship often hinder their entrepreneurial potential. To address these issues, the following recommendations provide actionable strategies for corporations, policymakers, and industry stakeholders to create a supportive ecosystem that facilitates successful transitions from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship:

Establish Corporate Mentorship Programs

South African corporations should develop structured mentorship programs that connect experienced intrapreneurs with aspiring entrepreneurs within the organization. Mentorship from experienced professionals can guide intrapreneurs through strategic decision-making, risk assessment, and innovation management, equipping them with practical skills and insights transferable to entrepreneurship. These programs can foster a supportive network that encourages knowledge sharing and career growth aligned with entrepreneurial goals.

Implement Structured Career Pathways for Intrapreneurs

Corporations should consider formal career pathways that support intrapreneurs in developing essential skills for entrepreneurship. These pathways could include rotations across different departments to provide diverse business experience, project management training, and leadership development. By allowing intrapreneurs to gain cross-functional experience, corporations can better prepare them for the multifaceted challenges of entrepreneurship, thus increasing their chances of success in future ventures.

Government Policy for Intrapreneurial Transition Support

The South African government should enhance existing policies to support the transition from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship. This could involve providing tax incentives, funding grants, and training programs specifically for individuals leaving corporate roles to start businesses. Tailored support for corporate-trained professionals would help bridge the gap between intrapreneurial experience and entrepreneurial success, enabling these individuals to contribute to the economy more effectively.

Expand Access to Entrepreneurial Funding for Former Intrapreneurs

Many intrapreneurs transitioning to entrepreneurship struggle with limited access to capital. Financial institutions, private investors, and government agencies should create funding mechanisms that specifically target entrepreneurs with a corporate background, recognizing their potential to leverage acquired skills. Providing startup loans, venture capital, and grant opportunities could support former intrapreneurs in overcoming early financial barriers.

Encourage Corporate Innovation Labs and Intrapreneurial Incubators

South African corporations should consider establishing internal innovation labs or intrapreneurial incubators where employees can develop and test business ideas with the support of corporate resources. These incubators would enable intrapreneurs to experiment with minimal risk and gain firsthand experience in venture creation. Companies could offer additional support for successful projects, allowing intrapreneurs to transition to full-fledged entrepreneurs if their projects demonstrate viability.

Foster Entrepreneurial Networks and Peer Support Groups

Corporations and industry associations should facilitate peer networks and support groups where intrapreneurs can connect with established entrepreneurs, investors, and business mentors. These networks would offer intrapreneurs access to resources, advice, and opportunities for collaboration, thus strengthening their professional network and enhancing their capacity for independent ventures.

Develop Training Programs Focused on Entrepreneurial Skills

Corporations should create specialized training programs that focus on entrepreneurial skills, such as financial management, marketing, and regulatory compliance. These programs would address gaps in intrapreneurs' corporate experience, preparing them for the unique demands of managing a startup. Training should emphasize skills essential for independent operation, such as adaptability and resilience in dynamic market conditions.

Promote Government-Industry Partnerships to Support Entrepreneurship

Government agencies should collaborate with corporations to create policies and programs that encourage intrapreneurial transitions. Joint initiatives could include subsidies for entrepreneurial training, co-funded startup grants, and access to public resources for market entry. These partnerships would create a more supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem, contributing to job creation and economic growth.

Establish Metrics to Evaluate Intrapreneurial Success

Corporations should develop metrics to track the outcomes of intrapreneurial initiatives, including successful innovations, new business models, and potential transitions to entrepreneurship. By assessing the impact of intrapreneurial programs, corporations can refine their strategies and better support employees pursuing entrepreneurial paths.

Enhance Awareness of Intrapreneurial Career Options in South Africa

Both the government and corporations should promote awareness of intrapreneurship as a career path with potential for future entrepreneurship. By integrating intrapreneurship into education and early career guidance, they can attract talent interested in innovative roles and contribute to a culture of creativity and business development within the South African workforce.

5.3. Action plan for the application of the recommendations

Table 5.1 presents a guideline designed by the researcher, encouraging a holistic approach to supporting intrapreneurs transitioning to entrepreneurship in South Africa. This blueprint is an action plan, offering recommendations that should be applied by: individuals transitioning from corporate South Africa to entrepreneurship, corporate organisations, policymakers, and entrepreneurial support organisations. The blueprint highlights the stage of transition at which the recommendation needs to be applied to promote awareness, readiness, and success at all stages of the transitional process (pre-, at and post-transition).

Table 5.1: A Holistic Approach to supporting intrapreneurs transitioning to entrepreneurship in South Africa

Entity	Recommendation	Objective/s addressed	Stage at which recommendation is applied		
			Pre-transition	Transition	Post-transition
Individual	1. Building a safety net of emergency funds for personal and business use.	Objective 4: Successes	✓		
	2. Developing a long-term vision and clear goals as a roadmap to stay focused and motivated.	Objective 4: Successes	✓	✓	✓
	3. Leveraging existing networks and seeking mentorship opportunities for invaluable guidance and support.	Objective 2: Skills and experiences; Objective 1: Tools	✓	✓	
	4. Investing in continuous learning and skill development to adapt to market changes.	Objective 2: Skills and experiences	✓	✓	✓
	5. Psychologically preparing for the transition by building resilience.	Objective 4: Successes	✓	✓	
Corporate organisations	1. Empowering employees with entrepreneurial tools such as training and resources to build finance, strategy, and project management skills.	Objective 1: Tools; Objective 2: Skills and experiences	✓		
	2. Encouraging and formalising mentorship structures for employees interested in entrepreneurship.	Objective 4: Successes	✓	✓	
	3. Implement flexible work arrangements such as flexible work and reduced hours for employees pursuing side ventures to enable balance and promote support for containment.	Objective 3: Barriers and challenges	✓	✓	
	4. Developing entrepreneurial exit programs to support employees transitioning to entrepreneurship by offering advisory services, access to resources and financial incentives.	Objective 3: Barriers and challenges		✓	
Policymakers	1. Simplifying compliance and bureaucratic processes by streamlining registration, licensing, and compliance to reduce the administrative burden for new entrepreneurs.	Objective 3: Barriers and challenges	✓	✓	✓
	2. Increasing access to funding and financial education and options for new entrepreneurs by expanding grant programs and subsidised loans and offering education on budgeting, cash flow management and funding options.	Objective 3: Barriers and challenges	✓	✓	✓
	3. Creating public-private partnerships to drive initiatives supporting entrepreneurship through training programs, access to resources, and enabling entrepreneurial environments.	Objective 1: Tools; Objective 2: Skills and experiences	✓	✓	✓
Entrepreneurship support organisations	1. Supporting organisations that address common entrepreneurial challenges like chamber of commerce organisations and business incubators that offer programs on financial management, compliance, and strategic growth.	Objective 4: Successes	✓	✓	✓
	2. Creating sector-specific advisory panels with experts for specialised sectors to offer strategic guidance.	Objective 4: Successes		✓	✓
	3. Creating a community of support to provide new entrepreneurs with insights into overcoming shared challenges.	Objective 4: Successes	✓	✓	✓

5.4. Future Research

Future research on the transition from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship could provide valuable insights into improving support mechanisms and success rates. Key areas for exploration include:

Exploring Industry-Specific Transitions

Future research could focus on industry-specific dynamics in the transition from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship. Investigating how intrapreneurs from different sectors, such as technology, finance, and manufacturing, navigate their entrepreneurial journeys would provide tailored insights into the unique challenges and opportunities within each industry. Examining how corporate culture influences the readiness and success of intrapreneurs transitioning to entrepreneurship could reveal the importance of innovation-friendly environments. Future studies could assess the effectiveness of various corporate strategies, such as innovation labs, entrepreneurial training, and flexible work policies, in fostering entrepreneurial capabilities.

Impact of Corporate Culture on Entrepreneurial Outcomes

Examining how corporate culture influences the readiness and success of intrapreneurs transitioning to entrepreneurship could reveal the importance of innovation-friendly environments. Future studies could assess the effectiveness of various corporate strategies, such as innovation labs, entrepreneurial training, and flexible work policies, in fostering entrepreneurial capabilities.

Evaluation of Policy Interventions

Future studies could evaluate the effectiveness of existing government policies aimed at supporting entrepreneurship, particularly for individuals transitioning from corporate roles. Assessing the impact of tax incentives, funding programs, and training initiatives would help refine policies to better meet the needs of former intrapreneurs.

Psychological Factors in Transition Success

Future research could delve into the psychological aspects of transitioning from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship. Understanding the role of traits such as resilience, risk tolerance, and adaptability would provide a deeper understanding of personal characteristics that contribute to entrepreneurial success.

5.5.Conclusion

Existing literature demonstrated that intrapreneurship provided a solid foundation for entrepreneurial success, offering intrapreneurs valuable tools, skills, and experiences applicable to entrepreneurship. However, the transition from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship posed significant challenges, especially in South Africa, where financial constraints, regulatory barriers, and limited support structures created obstacles. Corporate support, mentorship, government assistance, and networking opportunities contributed to successful transitions by providing intrapreneurs with the resources needed to sustain and grow their ventures. Theoretical frameworks like RBV and Schumpeter's Theory of Innovation underscored the potential of corporate skills transfer but also highlighted the need for comprehensive support systems to foster sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems in South Africa.

The study participants' experiences underscore that entrepreneurship in South Africa is both rewarding and challenging, requiring a blend of practical skills, emotional resilience, and a dedicated support system. For future intrapreneurs considering this path, these insights offer valuable guidance on leveraging corporate skills, preparing for potential challenges, and fostering the traits necessary for sustained success.

The study concludes that the innovative tools utilised by intrapreneurs within organisations can be effectively adapted to entrepreneurial ventures, including problem-solving, collaboration, networking, and project management capabilities gained within their organisations. Corporate-acquired skills and experiences, such as leadership, risk management, strategic planning, key performance measuring, financial literacy, relationship management and adaptability, are critical assets for fostering entrepreneurial success in diverse business environments. The barriers and challenges intrapreneurs face in their transition to entrepreneurship include support and resource constraints, regulatory challenges, financial insecurity, psychological setbacks, and self-doubt. Leveraging key factors, including mentorship, access to funding, corporate and agency support, government support, financial planning and preparedness, resilience, networks, mentorship, long-term planning, and openness to learning, can facilitate seamless intrapreneurial transitions to entrepreneurship in South Africa.

Table 5.1 proposes a holistic approach to bridge the gap between intrapreneurship and entrepreneurship, leveraging corporate experience while addressing systemic challenges. The approach details key recommendations in alignment with the four objectives of this study, encouraging the repurposing of experiences, tools, and skills from corporations to drive entrepreneurial endeavours. The holistic approach formulates a pathway for the transition by offering activities that intrapreneurs should engage in pre-, at, and post-their transition to entrepreneurship. This study offers valuable contributions and suggestions to South African corporations, policymakers, and the government regarding the support mechanisms offered to intrapreneurs at each transitional phase. This support drives the success of entrepreneurship ventures, which play a role in addressing unemployment and economic disparities in South Africa.

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7. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANTS LETTER

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Mbalenhle Ngidi, and I am a Master's in Business Administration student at the University of Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Jabulile Msimango-Galawe. I am conducting a research study about intrapreneurs in corporate South Africa transitioning to entrepreneurship. The study title is ***'Intrapreneurship to Entrepreneurship: Leveraging South African Corporate Experience to Transition.'***

I invite you take part in an online interview. Should you decide to take part, your participation in the research study will take place via the online platform Teams, at a time convenient to you, and will last 1 hour. With your permission I would like to audio or video record the interview. The data will be stored in a password protected computer for a period of 5 years, where it will thereafter be deleted. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

During the interview, I will need to ask for some personal information about you including your age, level of education, years of experience in the formal sector, your skills and your business experience. The interview will remain confidential and anonymous. The results of the research study will not include your name, or any details that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would normally have if you decided not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life. This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website in 2025. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher:
Mbalenhle Ngidi, 2067656@students.wits.ac.za, 076 771 4485

Supervisor:
Dr Jabulile Msimango-Galawe, jabulile.msimango-galawe@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX 2: ETHICS CERTIFICATE

Graduate School of Business Administration
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Wits Business School Ethics Committee
Constituted under the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical)

Ethics Clearance Certificate

Ethics protocol number: WBS/BA2067656/544

This certificate is only valid with a legitimate ethics protocol number and signed by the Researcher (below).

Project title	Intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship: Leveraging South African corporate experience to transition
Investigator / Researcher	Miss Mbalenhle Ngidi
Nature of Project	MBA (Research Article)
Decision of the Committee	Approved, provided stakeholders and participants are guaranteed confidentialty.
Issue Date of Certificate	10/07/2024
Expiry date	Date of submission of the project / research report
Chairperson	Dr Ayanda Magida ☎ +27 11 717 3953 ayanda.magida@wits.ac.za

Declaration by Researcher

One copy must be signed by the Researcher and returned to the Chairperson of the Wits Business School Ethics Committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Mngidi

Signature

11 July 2024

Date:

APPENDIX 3: RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT – INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTRAPRENEURSHIP TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP: LEVERAGING SOUTH AFRICAN CORPORATE EXPERIENCE TO TRANSITION

Purpose: To explore the experiences, skills, and motivations of individuals who journey from intrapreneurship into entrepreneurship, from South African corporations.

Introduction

- Tell me about yourself (Age, race, level of education, citizenship, location).
- Tell me about your career journey in corporate (Start date, industry, role/s, level).
- How many years of experience do you have in corporate? (State years)
- Are you currently a full-time employee in corporate South Africa?
- Are you currently an entrepreneur? If yes, full time OR part-time (transitioning from corporate/side hustle)? How long? (State years)
- Have you attempted to fully transition from full time employment to full time entrepreneurship?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Tools	
What tools do intrapreneurs use to innovate and drive change within their organizations that can be used in entrepreneurship?	1. What is your experience working in intrapreneurial roles? 2. What projects or initiatives are/were you involved in? 3. What resources are/were available to you? 4. What tools have your utilized in your entrepreneurial journey?
Experience and skills	
What intrapreneurial skills and experiences gained from South African corporate can be transferred to entrepreneurship ventures?	1. How have your intrapreneurial experiences prepared you for entrepreneurship? 2. What role do/did your personal characteristics (e.g. creativity, resilience, confidence, tenure) play in your transition? 3. What opportunities does intrapreneurship offer to an individual transitioning into entrepreneurship?

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT – INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTRAPRENEURSHIP TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP: LEVERAGING SOUTH AFRICAN CORPORATE EXPERIENCE TO TRANSITION

Challenges and barriers	
What challenges and barriers do intrapreneurs face when transitioning from corporate roles into entrepreneurship in the South African context?	1. What obstacles and barriers are/have you encountered whilst transitioning from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship? 2. What factors in South Africa are/were potential threats in your entrepreneurial journey? 3. What support is required for individuals transitioning from intrapreneurship to entrepreneurship?
Successful transitioning	
Which factors contribute to the successful transition of intrapreneurs to entrepreneurship?	1. What motivated you to transition from being an intrapreneur into entrepreneurship? 2. If you have transitioned, what opportunities and challenges influenced your decision to transition? 3. What resources and/or networks facilitated your transition, and how important were they? 4. What knowledge, insights and skills acquired in corporate, have been key in starting your own business?

APPENDIX 4: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

INTRAPRENEURSHIP TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP: LEVERAGING SOUTH AFRICAN CORPORATE EXPERIENCE TO TRANSITION

Title of project: Intrapreneurship to Entrepreneurship: Leveraging South African Corporate Experience to Transition

Name of researcher: Mbalenhle Ngidi

I, ………………………………………….., agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please tick the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on	YES	NO

……………………………………… (signature)
……………………………………… (name of participant)
……………………………………… (date)

……………………………………… (signature)
………Mbalenhle Ngidi………… (name of researcher/person seeking consent)
……………………………………… (date)

2024/25