

CHAPTER FOUR

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1. Introduction

Humans at their optimal level of functioning are self-motivated, healthy, curious to learn, inspired, extend themselves and master new skills. Research on the conditions that foster positive human potential is theoretically important as well as being able to contribute to the formal body of knowledge of human behavioural causes. It is also significant in the ability to design social environments that optimise people's development, performance and well-being (Ryan and Deci, 2000). According to the humanistic perspective, the basic goal of personal growth is the fulfilment of basic needs and/or the actualisation of unique inclinations and potentialities (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1969; Ryan and Deci, 2000). By identifying the participating mentors' basic needs in the current study, the optimisation of the mentors' personal growth, competence and sense of well-being is hoped to be achieved.

Developmental theories assist in depicting similarities and differences in learners engaged in age-related life tasks. For instance, an individual in middle adulthood may have motivations and concerns very different from an individual in early adulthood. Thus, according to Brookfield (1987), these two types of individuals may need support to meet the differing needs through developing mentoring relationships so that they are able to make the transitions in their lives. Kegan (1994) however, states that although stage theories can be helpful, they are limited in explaining how same-aged individuals faced with the same life tasks may understand the life tasks in different ways. Therefore, the current research will focus on explaining an approach by Drago-Severson (2001) derived from a Piagetian perspective that was developed from studies of adult learners in five models (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky et al., 1986; Kegan et al., 2001b; King and Kitchener, 1994 and Perry, 1970 in Drago-Severson, 2001).

Therefore, two theoretical approaches address the question of mentors' psychological needs. The humanistic perspective focuses on need-fulfilment as a means for psychological well-being and the Self-Determination Theory guides the research on issues of development, performance and a person's well-being. Before these theories are addressed, the concept of adult learning is described, as it can be associated to what was defined in Chapter 2 as a mentor being an individual who is continuously learning.

4.2. Four Levels of Adult Development in Learning

“Many of us recognise that as adult educators we are also adult learners, and that engaging in critical self-reflection about our existing assumptions, values, and perspectives can further prompt our development” (Taylor, 2000, p. 317 in Kegan, 1994).

Level/stage one: The first major stage or way of knowing found in the five models is characterised primarily by the learners' commitment to an absolutist stance toward knowing (Perry in Drago-Severson, 2001). Learners at this developmental level understand knowledge as something directly observable and based on facts that are not subject to multiple interpretations. These learners understand their roles in terms of how well they can obtain knowledge from their educators. Educators (mentors) believe that good learners work hard, follow clear instructions and rules and possess the correct skills. Learners expect their educators to communicate knowledge clearly, giving them the rules to follow to get the correct answers.

Level/stage two: With growth and differentiation, learners begin to review their ideas on their belief of absolute certainty of knowledge. The learner recognises that some knowledge is only partially certain. Baxter Magolda as cited in Drago-Severson (2001) called this transitional knowing, which is brought on by the learner's view that knowledge is incomplete. Learners begin to acknowledge that uncertainties exist in what is known, yet are not in the state of tolerating the unknown. These learners begin to

understand themselves as learners from an internal stance, that is, understanding their attitudes towards themselves as well as understanding the information studied.

Level/ stage three: With further growth, the quality of the learner's feelings and attitudes about knowledge shift from a search for ultimate answers and certainty to openness that reflects provisionally discarding authority. These learners expect their educators to promote and reward independent thinking and value the educators who nurture and affirm their thoughts and values.

Level/stage four: The learner at this stage shifts to appreciating how the context influences the interpretation of the truth. The learner uses authoritative views in a field as potential perspectives on which truth may be built but not as the absolute truth. They are able to construct their own standards for self-evaluation and take responsibility for their own learning.

4.3. Developmental Theory and Career Choices

Lerner (1986) states that there are three basic elements in the notion of development, regardless of philosophical or theoretical orientation. Firstly, that development always implies change of some sort; secondly the change is organised systematically, and thirdly, the change involves succession over time. In the many frameworks constructed, developmental theorists have attempted to draw out phases or stages that learners experience as they “expand their capacity for critical thinking” (Drago-Severson, 2001). For instance, in life cycle and developmental theories (Erikson, 1964 and Levinson, 1978) development is seen as an individual's journey through distinct life phases. The life stages include infancy, childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, middle adulthood and late adulthood (Erikson, 1964). These theorists state that the physical, psychological, emotional and social changes that individuals experience at a given stage of their lives follow a predictable course and are interconnected and dependent on age. According to Kegan (1994), adult learners can expect to have their understanding shift as they engage in learning experiences that challenge their frame of mind. Drago-Severson (2001) argues that an individual's underlying beliefs influence many aspects of his/her life, including

emotions, self-understanding and interactions with others which will in turn have an impact on their learning experiences. Holland (1997) believed that people gravitate towards occupations and work environments congruent with their personal orientations. The choice of an occupation is seen as an attempt to fulfil a desired way of life through one's work. Career choices usually reflect a person's self-perception regarding his or her abilities, values and personality along with assessments of how these individual aspects fit with particular occupations. Two meta-analyses conducted by Barrick and Mount as well as Hough et al. in Guthrie, Coate and Schowoyer (1998) both reported relationships between openness to experience and success in training. Mount and Barrick state that this personality characteristic tends to lead individuals to be active in training others and willing to engage in learning experiences.

Theories in career stages perceive mentoring as a key component in career development (Hall in Ragins and Cotton, 1993). The mentoring stage is viewed as linked to successful performance in the organisation, and is a prerequisite for the next career stage, which is involved with shaping the direction of the organisation (Dalton et. al. in Ragins and Cotton, 1993). Early career stages as pointed by Kram (1985) are involved with gaining a mentor, and mid-career stages are involved with entering the mentor role. An underlying set of motivators steer the individual in a particular career choice (Brems, 2001). The concept of motivation is highly valued because of its end result, in that it promotes action. Thus, individuals in the roles of, for example, manager, mentor, coach, teacher, health care provider and parent, motivation involves stimulating others into action.

4.4. Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)

4.4.1. ELT Defined

Although many deviations of Experiential Learning Theory have been proposed, Kolb's ELT developed in 1984 continues to be one of the most influential theories of management learning (Vince in Kayes, 2002). Experiential approaches to learning focus on how managers acquire and transform new experiences and how these experiences lead to a greater sense of satisfaction, motivation and development (Heron in Kayes, 2002).

According to Kolb, Boyatzis and Mainemelis (1999), ELT provides a holistic model of the learning process and a multilinear model of adult development which is concerned with how people learn, grow and develop. Kolb's ELT is an integrative theory based on different theoretical frameworks, which include Lewin's social-psychology, Piaget's cognitive development, Dewey's pragmatism, Roger's (1969) client-centred therapy, Maslow's humanism and Perl's gestalt therapy (Baker, Jensen and Kolb, 2002; Kayes, 2002). ELT spans the life-cycle of human development from young childhood to adulthood and includes activities such as education, career choice, problem-solving and interpersonal relationships. Based on the humanistic philosophy, ELT purports that humans have a natural capacity to learn.

Action, cognition, reflection and experience represent four interdependent processes, each of which is needed for a holistic integrative learning, where experience plays a focal role in the learning process. Other cognitive theories have the tendency to highlight cognition over affect and behavioural learning theories tend to overlook an individual's subjective experience in the learning process. ELT defines learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984). According to Kolb et al. (1999), ELT is believed to assist individuals to understand learning and flexibility at a deeper and yet more comprehensive level than before. It also provides guidance for applications to helping people improve their learning and designing better processes in education and development.

4.4.2. The Learning Process

Learning involves the interplay between two interdependent dimensions of knowledge: acquisition and transformation. Each dimension requires an individual to resolve a dialectic or a set of competing learning tensions (Kayes, 2002). The knowledge acquisition dimension or the method of gaining experience requires an individual to resolve the tension between Apprehension (Concrete Experience) and Comprehension (Abstract Conceptualisation). Apprehension requires the individual to accept new knowledge through sensory perception and direct experience with the world (emotions).

On the other hand, comprehension occurs when an individual breaks down experience into meaningful events and places them within a symbolic system of culture and society (Kayes, 2002; Baker, Jensen and Kolb, 2002). In the learning process, an individual moves inward to reflect on previously acquired knowledge. Learning then requires the individual to move beyond the self to interact with the external environment.

Figure 2 illustrates the modes of gaining experience as well as two dialectical modes of transforming experience, which are Reflective Observation (RO) and Active Experimentation (AE). In short, concrete experiences are the basis for observations and reflections. These are assimilated and condensed into abstract concepts from which new implications for action can be drawn (Kolb et al., 1999). These implications can be actively tested and serve as guides to create new experiences. Thus, learning describes a continuous process of responding to diverse personal and environmental demands that arise from the interaction between experience, concepts, reflection and action (Kayes, 2002).

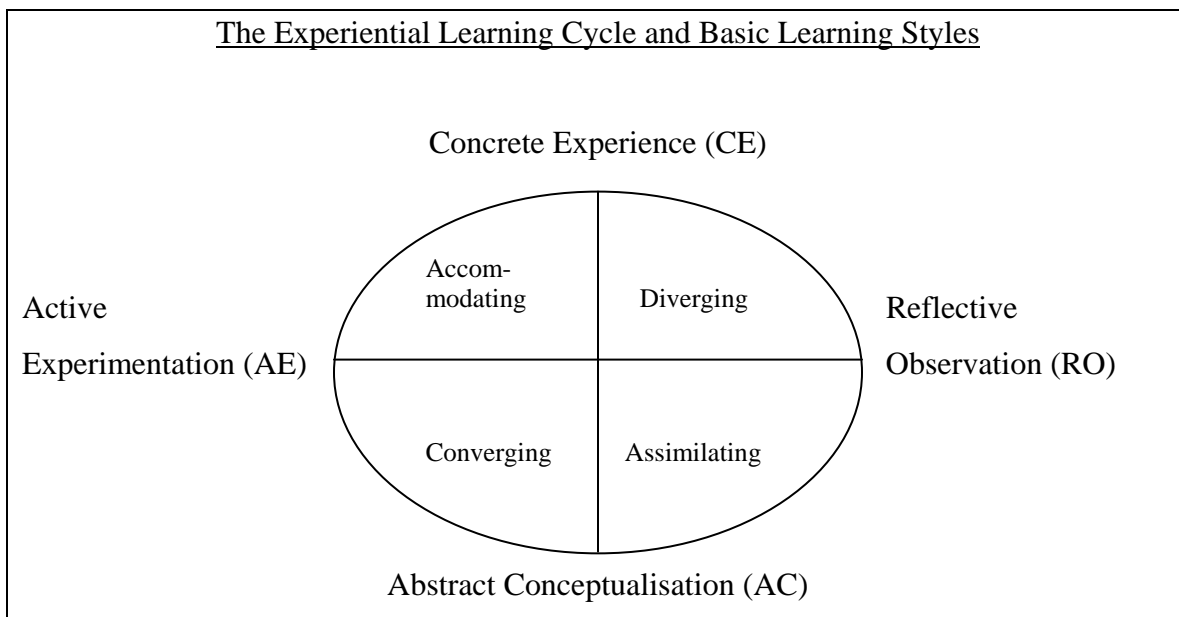


Figure 2

Learning requires abilities that are polar opposites and the learner must continually choose which set of learning abilities he or she will use in a specific learning situation. Some individuals perceive new information through experiencing the concrete, tangible qualities and rely on their human sensory organs. Other individuals perceive new information through abstract conceptualisation, which includes thinking about, analysing or systematically planning as a guide. When processing experience, some individuals tend to observe others and reflect on what occurs while others choose to act in the moment. The individuals who watch, prefer observing reflectively whilst the individuals that do, prefer active experimentation. A preferred way of choosing is based on past experience, inborn mechanisms and the challenges of the present environment. Learning styles are the patterns used to resolve the conflict between the choices made between concrete or abstract and between active or reflective modes of experience. The following summary of the four basic learning styles is based on the Learning Style Inventory (LSI) that was constructed by Kolb (1971). The factors that influence these learning styles have been investigated by Kolb et al. (1999) to be personality types, early educational specialisation, professional career, current job roles and adaptive competencies.

The Diverging style's dominant learning abilities are Concrete Experience (CE) and Reflective Observation (RO). Research indicates that individuals with this learning style are interested in people; tend to perform better in situations that they are expected to generate ideas; have broad cultural interests; like to gather information; prefer to work in groups; listen openly and are open to personalised feedback. The Assimilating style's dominant learning abilities are Abstract Conceptualisation (AC) and Reflective Observation (RO). Research indicates that these individuals tend to be good at placing a large body of information into a concise and logical format. They are interested in abstract concepts more than they are in people. Converging learning style's dominant learning abilities are Abstract Conceptualisation (AC) and Active Experimentation (AE). Individuals with a Converging learning style are more technically oriented than concerned with interpersonal issues and are best at finding practical usage for ideas. The Accommodating learning style's abilities are Concrete Experience (CE) and Active Experimentation (AE). Individuals with this learning style have the ability to learn from

hands-on experience. They tend to act on their intuition rather than on logic and in learning situations, they prefer to work with others in a team.

Movement of ELT toward an integrated learning approach has occurred in recent studies which involves the learner touching on all four learning styles. However, more research needs to be conducted, thus, for the purposes of the current study the integrated ELT approach will not be discussed.

4.4.3. A Critique of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)

Critique in the ELT literature has primarily focused on the psychometric properties of the instrument LSI. For example, in a study conducted in the educational profession, the predictive validity of the LSI was questioned (Kolb et al., 1999). However, in a 1994 study conducted by Iliff in Kolb et al. (1999), the LSI was not intended to be a predictive psychological test but rather as a self-assessment test and later used as a means of construct validation for the ELT. Recent post-modern critique has focused more on the theory rather than on the instrument where ELT is seen as individualistic, cognitive and technological (Vince in Kolb, 1999). ELT has been accepted as a useful framework for learning centred educational innovation which includes life-long learning. However, some criticisms argue that ELT de-contextualise the learning process and provides a limited account of the many factors that influence learning. For instance, psychodynamic, social and institutional aspects of learning are not taken into account (Reynolds in Kayes, 2002). For instance, Vince in Kayes (2002) emphasises power and psychodynamics in the learning process which includes emotions such as anxiety, fear and doubt. These emotions manifest themselves in a variety of learning inhibitors that are accountable to power relations and social contexts. Critics from a social perspective emphasise social activity over emotions (Holman et al. in Kayes, 2002). According to Hopkins in Kayes (2002), ELT fails to account for the process nature of experience and that ELT is structurally reductionistic. Therefore, criticisms of ELT suggest that the theory's emphasis on the centrality of the experience of the individual has come at the expense of psychodynamic, social and institutional aspects of learning. Alternatives that have been proposed to deal with the theoretical limitations of ELT include a reemphasis on

psychodynamics and social processes; replacement of key elements of the theory with critical thoughts and the integration with other theories (Kayes, 2002). However, a possible answer to the above criticisms may be a better understanding of the role of language in the learning process maintains the role of experience in learning while refocusing its aim on the relationship between personal and social knowledge (Baker, Jensen and Kolb, 2002) which will not be addressed in the current study.

Researchers believe in the strength and the practical worth of Experiential Learning Theory (Kayes, 2002 and Kolb et al, 1999). Experiential Learning Theory has been challenged by critics for its emphasis on individual experience and overlooking other factors such as social-political and cultural aspects of learning. However, in response to the criticisms, conversational learning has been proposed to address the social impact on knowledge creation.

4.5. Psychological Well-being Defined

The term fulfilment can be defined as the striving to fulfil basic psychological needs that are common to all people. The fulfilment of those needs is assumed to be very important for successful psychological development and well-being (Maslow, 1970; Deci and Ryan, 2000). From this approach, it follows that leaders are growing to the extent that they are able, as part of their work, to actualise some authentic potentialities and interests that they have (Assor and Oplatka, 2003). Relating this ideology to mentors, they are able to develop their potential in the domain of developing people, or their interest in continuous learning. Maslow (1970) stipulates that the actualisation of potentialities and the gratification of basic needs are likely to result in a high level of mental health and well-being, a state which is attained by very few people. Other researchers in the humanistic tradition like Ryan and Frederick (1997) postulate that actualisation of potentialities and fulfilment of basic needs lead to a high level of happiness and satisfaction, enthusiasm and vitality. As new need fulfilment experiences are integrated into the general image which people hold concerning themselves and others, they become personal resources that help people cope with challenges and allow them to support and nurture others (Assor, 1995). Relating the above to mentoring, mentoring is viewed as a way to foster

career development as well as a forum to boost emotional competence (Goleman, 1998). Judith Jordan, a Harvard psychologist as cited in Goleman (1998), believes that every relationship is an opportunity for both individuals to practice their personal competencies, and in so doing, grow and improve together. It is imperative that motivation is brought to the equation as it is a driving force for participating in a mentoring relationship and it has a direct impact on behaviour, attitude and emotional resilience in mentoring relations (Zachary, 2000). As Zachary (2000) explains, mentors who understand their motivation in involving themselves in specific activities become more committed to the activities.

Ryff (1989) reviewed the characteristics of well-being from various theories and prepared an integrated summary of the concepts of psychological well-being which will briefly be discussed.

Self-acceptance: is a central feature of mental health as well as a characteristic of self-actualisation (Maslow, 1970), optimal functioning and maturity.

Positive relations with others: Self-actualisers are described as having strong feelings of empathy and affection for all human beings and as being capable of greater love, deeper friendship and a more complete identification with others. Adult developmental stage theorists emphasise the achievement of intimacy and guidance.

Autonomy: Qualities include self-determination, independence and the regulation of behaviour from within.

Environmental mastery: This includes an active participation in one's environment and the individual's ability to choose or create environments suitable to his or her psychic conditions.

Purpose in life: An individual who functions positively has goals, intentions and a sense of direction, all of which contribute to the feeling that life is meaningful.

Personal growth: Optimal psychological functioning requires one to continue to develop one's potential, to grow and expand as a person.

4.6. Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

4.6.1. SDT Defined

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of Deci and Ryan (1985) states that human beings have a few basic developmental tendencies and psychological needs, which are essential to well-being. On the basis of empirical study, SDT identified the three basic psychological needs that are prerequisites to well-being that pertain across cultures which include autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These needs as cited by Deci and Ryan (1985, p. 2) are “innate psychological nutrients that are essential for ongoing psychological growth, integrity, and well-being”

Self-determination according to the SDT is defined as a combination of skills, knowledge and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behaviour. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination (Algozzine, Browder, Karvonen, Test, Wood and Children, 2004). According to these researchers, when acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have a greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults. By the culture that organisations ascribe and promote, employees can be alternatively supported or alienated (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Self-Determination Theory provides a framework for understanding these alternatives. This theory focuses on the social and contextual conditions that facilitate the natural processes of self-motivation and healthy psychological development (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Thus, it addresses the study of people's inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs that are the foundation for their self-motivation and personality integration as well as for the conditions that promote those positive processes (Ryan, Khul and Deci, 1997).

4.6.2. Sub-theory of SDT: Cognitive Evaluation Theory

Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) is a sub-theory within SDT and it emphasises the important conditions that reinforce intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000). This

theory stipulates that social and environmental factors can facilitate or hinder intrinsic motivation by supporting or alternatively disturbing people's innate psychological needs. Individuals must experience competence, efficacy as well as the experience that their behaviour is self-determined for intrinsic motivation to be evident (Ryan, 1982). This requires either immediate contextual supports for autonomy and competence or using inner resources that are usually the result of prior developmental supports for perceived autonomy and competence (Ryan and Deci, 2000). In the researcher's 1985 study, it is argued that people have a psychological and cognitive need to feel competent. Furthermore it is found that feelings of competence will not sustain intrinsic motivation unless people have a sense of autonomy or self-determined behaviour. Intrinsic motivation is important for development because it provides self-initiating and self-sustaining drive for continual development (Fallesen, 2004). Intrinsic motivation can be reinforced by the social contexts in which individuals operate when the context promotes active and integrated learning (Ryan and Deci in Fallesen, 2004). As part of the growth process, people fulfil a number of specific basic needs, and the fulfilment of those needs results in a number of highly desirable qualities. Deci and Ryan (2000) posit the existence of three basic needs:

- Competence;
- Relatedness; and
- Autonomy

The need for competence refers to people's striving to feel that they have developed knowledge or mastered skills that allow them to attain difficult outcomes (Deci and Ryan, 1991; Deci et al., 1991). The need for competence often emerges in discussions of academic and occupational growth (Deci et al., 1991). Successful coping, with optimal challenges, is an important means for gratifying one's need for competence, and gratification of the need for competence leads to feelings of well-being and self-actualisation (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Ruohotie, 1996). Consistent with this view, Ribbins & Gunter (2002) state that principals, in the "growth stage", often engage in challenging school changes and academic issues, and, as a result of meeting those challenges feel actualised. Thus, Ribbins & Gunter (2002) describe the pleasure that long-serving

principals gain from facing new challenges, a process that enhances one's feelings of competence.

Cherniss' (1995) work in the area of career development in principals supports the importance of the need for competence in their growth by showing that lack of multiple challenges in the workplace tends to trigger a search for new changes through which role incumbents could continually experience a sense of competence and mastery, and thereby feel more satisfied and less stagnated in their jobs. The need for relatedness encompasses the striving to develop secure and authentic connections with at least some people, as well as to feel a sense of belonging to the larger social context (Deci and Ryan, 1991; Deci et al., 1991 and Maslow, 1970).

The need for autonomy concerns people's striving to feel that they have a voice in determining their own behaviour, and that their actions are emanating from what they experience as their true self (Deci and Ryan, 1991). The need for autonomy has received relatively little attention in research on mentors' development. Future research may address this gap and examine the importance of that particular need for mentors' development. SDT states that an individual is autonomous when his or her behaviour is experienced as willingly enacted and when he or she fully endorses the actions in which he or she is engaged and/or the values expressed by them. People are therefore most autonomous when they act in accordance with their authentic interests or integrated values and desires (Deci and Ryan, 1985 & Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Turban and Dougherty in Guthrie, Coate and Schwoerer (1998) examined the relationship between a particular set of personality constructs (locus of control, self-esteem, negative affectivity, self-monitoring) and the propensity to initiate mentoring relationships. Their results supported their view that employees should be viewed as proactive agents who attempt to influence their environments. The results of their study results also indicates the belief that personality plays a major role in determining who will be proactive in the attempt to influence their social work environment for the purpose of career enhancement.

4.6.3. Critique of Self-Determination Theory

The attention within SDT to autonomy, which Deci and Ryan (1985) describe as the experience of integration and freedom, and an essential aspect of healthy human functioning generated some debate within the field. Some researchers attempted to demonstrate that autonomy is not universally valued, but is rather valued by more individualist cultures and societies. However, Chirkov et al. (2003) distinguished autonomy from several related concepts, for example, dependence/independence; individualism/collectivism, and vertical/horizontal, as a counterattack to the argument.

It has been argued that the sense of freedom of choice is dialectical, as the sense of certainty is lost. Thus, in hoping to achieve self-determination, the set of boundaries that actually enables freedom rather than hindering it should be considered (Ryan and Deci, 2000). This fact coupled with the helplessness theory of depression might lead one to expect clinical depression to be eradicated. Instead, there has been an increase in the amount of people worldwide with depression (Kolb, Boyatzis and Mainemelis, 1999). Schwartz (2000) believes that increases in experienced control over the years have been accompanied by increases in expectations about control. The more an individual is able to master different domains of their life, the more an individual expects to be in control. However, excessive emphasis on self-determination has contributed to the unrealistic expectations which have contributed to a sense of goals not being attained, which in turn leave the individual feeling hopeless and depressed.

4.7. Summary

The choice of career is an attempt to fulfil a desired way of life through work. Thus, career choice and the developmental stage in which the individual is in, has an impact on the underlying motivating factors in becoming a mentor. The personality trait of openness to experience correlates to being a successful trainer/mentor and a willingness to engage in learning experiences. Thus, ELT was used as the theoretical underpinning to indicate how being open to new experiences leads to a greater sense of well-being, motivation and

development. Relating this ideology to mentors, they are able to develop their potential in the domain of developing people, or their interest in continuous learning.

The existence of three basic needs as proposed by SDT, the need for competence, relatedness and autonomy can be linked to what was defined to be an effective mentor in Chapter 2. For instance, an effective mentor plays a supportive role in transferring work-related experience, which is synonymous with feeling competent with their work. The essence of being a mentor is having the ability to be in a relationship with a mentee, which is vital that the notion of relatedness in SDT be fulfilled. Having a sense of autonomy as defined by SDT, is seen as the mentor being able to be goal-directed with actions that are in alignment with their values and interests.

As mentioned in the above section, intrinsic motivation can be reinforced by the social contexts in which individuals operate when the contexts promote active and integrated learning. CET places emphasis on environmental factors which promote or hinder intrinsic motivation. This can be correlated with the supportive environments within a mentor's life, be it on a personal or organisational capacity, that promote learning for the mentor, who is in turn able to transfer the learning onto the mentee.

The literature review attempted to give a synopsis of the components that play a role in the mentorship relationship, the context that impacts on the mentoring relationship as well as theories underpinning mentoring. Given the backdrop of the literature review, the researcher poses questions, which will be addressed in the next chapter. The research questions are:

1. What are the psychological needs of mentors who are currently participating in mentoring programmes?
2. How can current mentor training be enhanced?

The proposed methodology will follow which is intended to operationalise the research questions.