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Beyond Culture and ‘Guanxi’ Relationships: the Workplace Learning of Malaysian Chinese Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

This study is in response to the call for more empirical studies to challenge the generalization that Chinese culture and particularly guanxi (personal family and clan networks) adequately explains the business success of Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs (the entrepreneurs). The argument of this paper is that it is just as relevant to comprehend how entrepreneurs undertake *workplace learning* as the driver for developing key business and management competencies. The focus of the paper therefore contrasts Chinese traditional culture and especially ‘guanxi’ connections as a way of doing business with workplace learning as the practical means to develop knowledge and key competencies.

Nine case studies found the entrepreneurs to be self-directed learners who viewed learning as a lifelong process. They all indicated that workplace learning contributed significantly to their success. While their formal education and past work experiences were factors that influenced their new ventures, the changing and evolving needs of their business enterprise provided the motivational thrust for the acquisition of new and varied competencies. For example, the entrepreneurs reported that they learned informally through customers and competitors, from industry experts, as well as consultants and other professionals, through mentoring activity with other business people, and by interactions with friends and employees. This direct and informal learning from a variety of people is an effective learning approach for these entrepreneurs. Learning from failures was also significant and they were able to apply the lessons learned to improve their future business ventures’ performance.

Culture and ‘guanxi-family and clans’ network cannot fully explain the business success of entrepreneurs but how they learn can provide an additional interpretation to a multifactor explanation about their overall capabilities to meet future challenges.

Keywords: entrepreneurial learning; experiential learning; workplace learning

Introduction

Cultural and 'Guanxi' explanations to account for the business success of Chinese entrepreneurs' success are no longer sufficient (Gomez 1999, Gomez and Hsiao 2001). First, they mistakenly assume that Chinese entrepreneurs are a homogeneous group. In reality they reflect a wide diversity of business practices shaped by differences in political, social and economic developments in the countries where the Chinese have migrated. Secondly, the explanation takes no account of the role and importance of the learning that entrepreneurs do in their business activities. Much of this learning is directly related to the workplace.

While Chinese entrepreneurs share basic and core business and cultural values, they are interpreted and implemented differently in different countries like China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore and other overseas Chinese communities (Fan 2000). The diverse settings and varieties of influences impacting on the behaviour of Chinese entrepreneurs leads to the insight that they must undertake workplace and professional learning to manage their business enterprise competently.

In Malaysia entrepreneurs have acquired substantial wealth, building profitable domestic oriented businesses by riding on the economic growth of the country and the protective domestic policies of the government that sheltered them from global competition. Until 1997, Malaysia was one of the Asian Tigers with high economic growth that spanned many years, creating a false belief that such high growth rates could be sustained into the long term.

The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis laid bare the structural weaknesses of the Malaysian economy and highlighted the harsh realities of competing in a global context. Globalization requires the entrepreneurs to learn new sets of core competencies to face intensifying competition, continuous cost pressure and to meet the exacting demands of global financial markets. These new core competencies provide a different explanation than the current cultural and 'guanxi' management practices of the Chinese. That is, the success of these early overseas Chinese entrepreneurs cannot be explained only through the formative influence of culture and 'Guanxi' personal relationships network popularized by Western researchers (Seagrave 1998).

Chinese culture is based primarily on the prescriptive teachings of Confucius and it clearly had an influence on the behaviors of these early entrepreneurs. The Chinese values emphasize personal traits such as integrity, sincerity, wisdom, resourcefulness, self-cultivation, and pragmatism, which lead to work attitudes that are described as hard-working, highly committed, thrifty, perseverant, patient, prudent and adaptable.

Arising from these values, Chinese business philosophies tend to be conservative, and value the importance of 'Guanxi' - personal connections and long-term relationships (Fan 2001). While these cultural values are common among the Chinese in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore and other overseas Chinese communities, the interpretation and application of these values are dependent on the individual and influenced by the social, economic and political environments of their adopted home countries.

Chinese culture and the use of 'guanxi' personal relationship networks have undoubtedly played an important part in shaping the success of early Chinese entrepreneurs. However, additional empirical explanations to account for the continued ability of Chinese entrepreneurs to adapt and meet new business challenges are needed. Before introducing the importance of workplace learning, it is useful to briefly review both cultural and interpersonal relationships ('guanxi') explanations of their business and enterprise success.

Cultural explanations for overseas Chinese business success

Arguably, there are great variations in terms of social, political and economic dimensions between mainland China and other places where Chinese culture has a strong presence: Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and other overseas Chinese communities. Nonetheless, Fan (2000) has argued that some core values are held in common by the Chinese anywhere, although there is variation as to how they are interpreted and applied in different contexts. A key factor appears to be the amount of exposure to Western influences, notably through education. Fan (2000) also urged that while culture is important and attractive to explain the differences in management behavior and organization systems, it is only one factor. There is a need to consider the factor of how each individual interprets and applies the values in response to changes in the social, economic and political environment. An obvious starting point is to consider the part played by workplace learning.

'Guanxi' explanations for overseas Chinese business success

The Confucian traditional family oriented culture, coupled with China's long history of political uncertainties, poverty and waves of emigration, provide an environment that supports the development of the unique Chinese 'Guanxi' relationships business networks. Business has traditionally been a key means of survival for Chinese emigrants (Kao 1993). Enterprising entrepreneurs have to work long hours to save and accumulate capital in a volatile environment. This survival mentality and the Confucian tradition form the values of the typical Chinese entrepreneur, defined as one who seeks to control and direct an independent business.

Today, Chinese businesses, many of which are located outside China itself, have been described as the world's fourth economic power (Kao, 1993). Chinese entrepreneurs are said to be operating successfully within a network of family and clan, laying the foundation for stronger links among business across national borders. Kao (1993) referred to this extensive network as the Chinese Commonwealth, primarily a network of entrepreneurial relationships. Chen (2001, p.47) provides a useful working definition: "*Guanxi* relates to specific personal connections defined by trust, reciprocity, mutual obligations and shared experiences, and originates from ancient Chinese social customs where reciprocity and other modes of social exchange were used to build and maintain interpersonal relationships."

Hence, Chinese business is relationship-based in contrast to the Western's transaction-based culture. This explains why, in the business context, Chinese entrepreneurs view relationships as an important asset. Thus, Chinese entrepreneurs,

in general, prefer to do business with people they know or with friends of friends, and both time and energy is expended in cultivating and building relationships with important people. These 'guanxi' practices, which focus on relationships and a shared history, have remained an important social means of characterizing Chinese cultural behavior. In a business context, 'Guanxi' has been used to work around the Government bureaucracy and sourcing information not available through official channels, where having a good source of timely information can make a difference between success and failure for a business (Chen 2001).

Emphasis on learning in Chinese culture

This study of the learning process of entrepreneurs is significant as it links the Chinese cultural emphasis on education and lifelong learning and identifies the importance of workplace learning competencies to support the entrepreneur's firm's performance (Man 2001; Lau, Chan & Ho 2004).

Learning has traditionally been an important core value of Chinese culture and plays a key role in assisting individuals to move up the social ladder. While the importance of learning has been emphasized, an understanding of Chinese entrepreneurs' workplace learning processes is limited. There are a limited number of studies of Hong Kong Chinese entrepreneurs linking their competencies to firm performance and business strategies that have identified learning as important to support the acquisition of relevant competencies (Lau, Chan & Ho 2004; Man 2001; Man & Lau 2000). However, how these entrepreneurs select what competencies to learn, where they source learning from and their preferred learning styles, remain unanswered.

The research focused on extending our knowledge of learning competencies, which has been identified as important (Man 2001). In a study by Man (2001), the competencies were grouped under seven categories: opportunity, organizing, relationship building, conceptual and strategic thinking, commitment, and supporting. These competencies were linked to firms' performances. While this study increased understanding of the type of competencies needed, it did not provide insights into whether all the competencies are learned at the same time or acquired through the course of the entrepreneur's career or influenced by the nature and needs of their business at different stages of growth.

Deakins (1996) has argued that there is little understanding of the way entrepreneurs learn to establish and run a business. He considered it a fruitful avenue to explore how they learn as a means of understanding entrepreneurship as a developmental process.

Recently, there has been an increase in the number of studies of entrepreneurship education (Deakin & Freel 1998; Cope & Watts 2000; Rae 2000; Sullivan 2000; Man & Lau 2000; Man 2001), which have pointed out the importance of understanding how entrepreneurs learn. While a number of Western studies on entrepreneur education exist, such studies on Chinese entrepreneurs are negligible.

Therefore a clear knowledge gap exists which centres upon identifying various forms of workplace learning in relation to the business activities of a small number of Malaysian Chinese Entrepreneurs (MCEs).

Research methodology

More qualitative studies in entrepreneurship research, and the increasing use of case studies to research entrepreneurs' behaviour, have contributed to increased understanding of the phenomena of entrepreneurs' workplace learning. The decision to select a qualitative case study method is appropriate to explore the complexities of Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs' workplace learning processes. In the context of entrepreneurship research, their education and learning is one of the key behaviour factors that influenced the entrepreneur competencies: knowledge, skill and abilities leading to business performance outcomes (Man 2001; Anderson 2000; Gartner et al 1994; Bygrave 1989; Gartner 1985).

While qualitative methods have been widely used in education research (O'Donohue and Punch 2003; Patton 1990), it was only in recent years that more qualitative methods were applied to study how entrepreneurs learned (Rae 2000; Begley 2000). In particular, the case research method has been adopted in recent studies (Wade 1997; Deakins & Freel 1998; Cope & Watts 2000; Ravasi & Turati 2003).

Case research is an appropriate strategy in studies of social phenomena where the 'How' and 'Why' research questions need to be answered (Yin 1994). Case study research is a research strategy that focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings (Eisenhardt 1989, 1991). It is therefore an appropriate research tool for conducting empirical studies of entrepreneurs' learning processes.

Research design

Since the entrepreneur learning process is a continuous non-linear process resembling the episodic nature of entrepreneurship (Shane 2003), the technique of critical incidents was used (Deakins & Freel 1998; Cope & Watts 2000; Rae 2000) to gain insights into how the learning process changed over time, although in this research the participants were asked to reflect on past experiences. Critical incidents feature in three different contexts: the first venture start-up, the most successful venture start-up, and a failed venture. All three were used to understand the entrepreneurs learning processes.

The selection of three critical incidents as indicated below aimed to understand how these entrepreneurs learned and whether their learning experiences changed over time in the context of specific new venture start ups. The choice of critical incidents was to stimulate recall of important events in an entrepreneur's career thus optimizing the interview time to gain relevant insights and allow comparisons among different participants.

This research design allows an approximation method to understand the learning process over a period of time. The use of critical incident techniques has been found to be very effective to stimulate recollection of emotionally laden experiences of the participants (Cope & Watt 2000).

The selection of the final nine participants was aimed at achieving a broad representation of the general population of male and female entrepreneurs from a variety of industry backgrounds and followed a purposeful sampling strategy in combination with snowball or chain sampling approach (Patton 1990).

Research questions

The in-depth standardized semi-structured questions for interviews were constructed with the objective of building an understanding of the backgrounds of the entrepreneurs and their learning processes through three critical incidents of their new venture start ups. The research questions shown below were used to develop the interview guide:

- i. How do entrepreneurs learn to acquire core competencies to discover and exploit new business opportunities?
- ii. Why, when and how do entrepreneurs select and source learning for the competencies selected?
- iii. What is their preferred learning style and does it change with time and context of the specific opportunity?

Each qualitative interview lasted up to two hours. The participants had been preconditioned before the interview through an explanation of the study aided by the use of the information fact sheet. A standardized semi-structured interview guide was developed to assist data collection around identified themes related to the identification of competencies, sources of learning and preferred style of learning in relation to the three ventures. The interview guide appears as appendix 1.

The participants

The nine participants' profiles differ in terms of sex, age, education, business experience, type of business and size. The nine participants are mature entrepreneurs who have gone through a number of years in their selected business and are, therefore, appropriate purposeful samples for this study. The variation in personal characteristics, ownership and industry provides a broad view of the entrepreneurs in order to assess the similarities and differences in learning processes. The common link is that these entrepreneurs come from a Chinese ethnic background, are Malaysian citizens and have experienced similar social and economic cycles of Malaysia.

The nine entrepreneurs consist of seven entrepreneurs who are owners cum managers. Of these seven entrepreneurs, six of them started their own business while the other entrepreneur bought shares in an existing company. The other two participants are general managers or managing directors of two local large companies and are responsible for seeking and developing new business opportunities for their companies. A profile of the nine participants appears as appendix 2.

Research findings

The highlights of the findings are largely condensed through the most apt quotations, starting with an overview of the MCEs learning in general. This is followed by a

summary of business-related competencies. The focus narrows to start-up ventures, through to the growth phase and including some comment on learning from business failure. Thereafter a broader view is taken of their preferred learning styles and more general aspects of business development.

An overview

The MCEs were all self-directed learners. They learnt because they enjoyed it and appreciated the value of learning in contributing to their success in business. The formal education provided the MCEs with an important foundation in technical knowledge, which together with some prior work experience enabled them to venture into business. In addition, a number of the MCEs continued to pursue further studies in business management, indicating a desire to keep pace with modern management skills and thinking.

However, these formal learning sources were found to be insufficient for the MCEs and they complemented their business needs through informal learning from a variety of people such as family and friends, customers and suppliers, business networks, industry experts, consultants and other professionals, trade associations and other entrepreneurs. The choice of learning from particular people was influenced by the MCEs' specific business needs which were both context specific (environment, customer, competition) and time dependent.

It would be no exaggeration to claim that they represent adult learners with a 'zest for continuing learning' depicted by the American educator Cyril Houle many years ago (1980). Furthermore, they have a clear view that learning is the key to business success as expressed by respondents in the following two quotations-

'Through all these years doing business I learned something everyday. It was a continuous learning process; through friends, the press and magazines, whatever. I like to learn a lot of new knowledge, whether it is related to my business or not. You have to keep abreast of the latest happening.'

'Knowledge is important. Learning skills through continuous on-job training teaches me to be adaptable to constant changes and to pass on what I know to others in the business.'

The important point is that the learning is self-driven by a combination of natural curiosity and business imperative drawing from an eclectic variety of sources. Like anyone else in business it is necessary to learn new things. What is special about entrepreneurs is that they take big steps and risks in starting new ventures. In that sense the imperative to learn effectively is even higher.

Business-related competencies

The MCEs' identification of competencies required to succeed was in response to the specific instrumental and functional needs of their businesses. From the data analysis it was evident that the MCEs had a firm grasp of the various competencies needed for business success; such as identifying market opportunities, good communication, staff training and employing people with compatible skills and suitable personality traits, as well as the required business capabilities (all getting a high level of response). The data showed that the MCEs were conceptually aware of the full range of capabilities required for success in business, that is to say, opportunity creation, organizing

ability, 'big picture' and strategic thinking, relationship building and commitment competencies. To a large extent these are the natural competencies required for doing business and long experience had undoubtedly taught them that. Indeed one respondent understood the integrative nature of these competencies, as expressed in the following-

'I think one of the key things is to be able to pick up the changes that are happening around the business and with competitors and quickly form a view about what are the critical success factors to make it right. One thing is to be able to compete at a low cost base. Two is to assimilate new knowledge. Three is to know the retailing side well and understand what people want. Four, this means managing the stock effectively. All these things come into play and one must learn to know them'

Another respondent anchored her understanding of the various competencies around her abilities to-

'Read the situation and to have the right people skills. Because in any line of business it is people driven and the way we manage different people in different circumstances means we have got to show a lot of situation leadership and be open to ideas from others. I have to be creative and innovative in the way I deal with people. Get that right and then we can all communicate our product to customers and provide a good service'

A third respondent emphasized learning how to express certain personal values that enhanced his business dealings-

'I believe it is very important to build up people's trust in my honest way of doing business. Integrity is very important. Once they trusted in my integrity they told me they would invest in my business activities'

What these few comments underline is the inner-directed nature of the entrepreneurial mindset in which learning is deliberately used to focus attention on what competencies as well as personal qualities are needed to achieve results. They had little time for academic discourse preferring to adopt a practical and problem-solving approach driven by the need for survival and the promise of tangible rewards. These attributes are particularly evident in taking on new business ventures.

An overview of learning from business success and failure

Under dynamic and changing business conditions, in addition to learning from people and other people's experiences, the MCEs also learned from the success and failure outcomes of their ventures. The literature tends to focus on the successes of entrepreneurs and there is little discussion on the value of learning from failures. However, in this sample of MCEs, learning from failure was a strong common theme. All the MCEs strongly indicated that they learned from both success and failure outcomes of their business ventures with three of them commenting that learning from failures was far more valuable. Here are four comments about how the MCEs linked learning to business success-

'Nothing is static and things change. Learning keeps me moving forward'

'The ability to learn on the spot was vital in starting a new business'

'You have to learn quickly, assimilate the knowledge and be clear about the direction to take'

'Learning is a continuous process and it is a very important part of my success'

Starting a new business venture

A great deal of confidence is needed to engage in new business ventures. A combination of personality traits, educational background and work experiences influenced their decision and choice. Thereafter they faced a steep learning curve. Business needs had a direct influence on what new competencies they needed to acquire. They either possessed the requisite technical competencies, or had to learn them, or had skilled staff or the management skills to tap into others. These business needs were dynamic and specific to each MCE's business, hence making it difficult to predict the exact competencies to learn in advance.

The continuous process of learning through doing and solving business problems has enabled them to gain specific experiences over time. The immediate need to resolve business issues of start-up and growth led them to adopt an effective learning strategy, which was to learn from the experts or experienced people to whom they had access in time of need.

This general learning competency was a common pattern among the MCEs. As one respondent summarized-

'I think that with the technical aspect of business today I will never acquire these to learn and know things quickly enough to keep up with the competition. I have to make sure somebody else has these skills and I can access them when needed'.

Learning from a new business venture

With new business ventures there was recognition of the importance of informal learning-

'There are various sources to gather information and business competencies. I prefer to use my networks, which are easy and accessible to me'.

For another, this included a professional association, which is a formal body but affording informal means of contact and communication with knowledgeable peers. For another, he reached back to his Chinese family for some sound business practices and a certain kind of service quality mindset-

'My father is a typical Chinese businessman with a long tradition of honoring all credits on time and giving value to customers. We have to be honest, truthful and sincere; this is what I have learned'.

Learning from others has already been identified. One special form of learning is from a mentor-

'I was lucky because I started off having a mentor. He soft-pedaled me through the beginning so I was not thrown into the deep end. As I went through the learning curve I felt I had gained enough confidence to manage things on my own'.

As might be expected, entrepreneurs embrace all kinds of preferred learning styles to make the business work at the start-up phase and later, as will be shown shortly.

Learning during the growth phase

Once the new venture had settled, the need for more advanced learning required accessing formal levels of knowledge, as expressed by one respondent-

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'During the boom period we actually engaged some professionals to give us advice on how to expand the business. It helped me learn new ideas'.

The theme of learning from others seems to apply when business is steady, with time to reflect and learn from others, expressed in the following way-

'I learned from experienced people. I talked to them and really gained something. You need to do this kind of talking all the time, including when business is good as things can suddenly change for the worse. It makes sense to think ahead. I sounded out all the time'.

Learning from business failure

All the MCEs were aware of the risk of failure and some had learned from hard experience. As one respondent put it-

'Well, because of the (business) failure I realized there were things that were not done. There were so many reasons why we failed, although we always tried to turn things around by making a lot of changes. We tried to identify each and every aspect. Some of these involved a lot of investment in management time and money. Because we tried so hard to understand what went wrong, we learned, definitely. I think we learned from the errors'.

Another respondent was able to be more specific about the nature of his failure in the supermarket business-

'There were a number of things we didn't appreciate when we went into the business. Basically we had failed to study and identify the differences between hypermarkets and supermarkets. There are a lot of differences in operations, in strategy and so on. We should have done a proper feasibility study and by jumping in so unprepared the mistake was costly. We didn't learn enough'.

The MCEs showed positive attitudes toward failures and the use of the experience as lessons to build success is indicative of Chinese cultural acceptance of failures as a learning opportunity. As one entrepreneur stated-

'As the Chinese say, failure is the mother of successes'. Another remarked, 'The failed venture was good learning for me. It woke me up. I now know that I have to give business my close and personal attention. I learned that leaders have to be hands-on'. In the same spirit a third respondent commented in reflective mood, 'I learnt more from the failed venture than the successful ones. When you are successful you more or less live in a dreamland but when you have failed you ask yourself searching questions about what caused the failure. You start with yourself'.

The research found that the MCEs openly discussed failures, and all of them indicated that they shared with staff the lessons to be learned. While this small sample size finding is not open to generalization, it does indicate the value of conducting further studies on learning from failures.

Preferred learning styles

The various statements point towards various preferred learning styles. The nine respondents all preferred active learning strategies such as talking to others, on-job learning and observation. Together they represent learning-by-doing as a way of dealing with problems and getting things done. There was a distinct absence of the

use of abstract conceptualizing, although they recognized competencies related to thinking strategically and occasionally adopting a 'big picture' view of the business. Sometimes they spent time doing background reading about the business but this was not a first choice learning activity.

As something of a counter-balance to learning business competencies, at least one respondent emphasized other personal qualities that explain success-

'About 60% of learning has contributed to my success. There are other factors, like diligence, being hard-working, the attitude of never-say-die, taking on new challenges. Apart from learning there is the application of what you learn, and maybe the inherent culture, you know, not wanting to lose face. When you don't want to lose face there is no margin for errors. So these are the things that contributed to the success of the business other than the learning part'.

Even with these factors taken into account, what the respondent implicitly acknowledged was the power of attitude and mind-set in turning learning to business advantage. The Chinese saying of 'walk on two legs' appears apt as it underlines the point that learning has to be accompanied by personal motivation, need and drive to make things happen.

Conclusion

Despite the small number of participants, this study has shown that while culture and 'Guanxi' may have an indirect and subtle influence on the individual learning attitude and business approach, it is insufficient to explain the diversity among these entrepreneurs. The addition of a learning dimension provided a more robust integrative explanation to explain their entrepreneurial behavior.

The study has shown that the entrepreneurs shared common patterns of using an active learning style, learning informally from a variety of people, and from the success and failure outcomes of their business ventures. The findings are valid for this group of participants but, of course, any generalization to the larger population of Chinese entrepreneurs will need further detailed studies.

Another important finding was the continuous feedback loop of the business ventures influencing the entrepreneurs learning choices. While the respective entrepreneur's personal characteristics were important, the basic functional and technical competencies were acquired through formal education and prior work experience. New learning to acquire new competencies was driven by the immediate need to manage their business or to resolve problems. This can possibly explain why the Chinese Entrepreneurs tended to prefer to learn on the job and from the experiences of other entrepreneurs or experts, when the need arose.

The workplace learning from the success and failure outcomes of their business ventures was translated into a positive and concrete learning experience for the entrepreneurs. What was significant was the entrepreneurs' emphasis on the benefits of learning from failures. These failure experiences created long lasting impressions and influenced future behaviour as indicated by one of the entrepreneurs who applied

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the lessons learned to launch a very successful venture after a major failure experience.

Contrary to general beliefs that the Chinese Entrepreneurs only talk about their success stories, these entrepreneurs all shared failure learning experiences with their staff with the objective of reducing the odds of their staff making similar mistakes in the future. This informal method of transferring learning from failures through discussions and meetings reflected a common pattern among these entrepreneurs interviewed.

Taking into account the powerful nature of workplace learning featured in this research, the use of the cultural and 'Guanxi'-family and clans' networks as a basis of success was not sufficient to explain the current behaviour of the entrepreneurs interviewed. The findings indicated that these entrepreneurs had long-established social and business networks that were critical to their past business survival and growth. A possible explanation for this deviation from the past use of the 'guanxi' network is that all of the entrepreneurs represented the current generation, who are competing in new businesses, which did not exist in the past, and the need to acquire new business competencies, which cannot be supported by the old family and clan networks. The importance of workplace learning provides a more satisfactory explanation of entrepreneurial behaviour in a changing business environment.

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Appendix: 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS GUIDE

CODE	SESSION	GUIDE
A. PART ONE : GENERAL UNDERSTANDING		
A1.	Question 1:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can you please describe the current business you are in? Who are your customers and what type of products and services you provide?
A2.	Question 2:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the key core competencies required to achieve success in your line of business?
A3.	Question 3:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How much did your prior work or business experience, contributed to the development and acquisition of the core competencies identified?
A4.	Question 4:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What other new core competencies did you need to learn and acquire?
A5.	Question 5:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did you learn to acquire these core competences?
A6.	Question 6:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In your opinion, how much learning contributes to your success?
B. PART TWO : LEARNING PROCESS TO ACQUIRE SELECTED COMPETENCIES IN EACH NEW VENTURE		
THE FIRST NEW VENTURE START UP		
B1.	Question 1:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Please describe this First New Venture Start Up.
B2.	Question 2:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do you identify what core competencies are needed to succeed in this new venture?
B3.	Question 3:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is your preferred source of learning for the core competencies selected?
B4.	Question 4:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is your preferred learning style to acquire the core competencies selected?
B5.	Question 5:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the external or internal environmental factors that have impacted on your learning?
THE MOST SUCCESSFUL VENTURE START UP TO-DATE		
B6.	Question 1:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Please describe this Most Successful Venture Start Up.

- B7. Question 2: • How do you identify what core competencies are needed to succeed in this new venture?
- B8. Question 3: • What is your preferred source of learning for the core competencies selected?
- B9. Question 4: • What is your preferred learning style to acquire the core competencies selected?
- B10. Question 5: • What are the external or internal environmental factors that have impacted on your learning?

AN IMPORTANT FAILED VENTURE

- B11. Question 1: • Please describe a Failed Venture Start Up.
- B12. Question 2: • What core competencies were needed to succeed in this new venture that you did not identified?
- B13. Question 3: • If these core competencies were important, what will be your preferred source of learning?
- B14. Question 4: • What will be your preferred learning style for these core competencies selected?
- B 15 Question 5: • Of the three ventures (first, most successful and failed), which venture did you learn the most?

C. PART THREE : TRANSFER OF LEARNING EXPERIENCE

- C1. Question 1: • How do you transfer your learning experience to others?

D. PART FOUR : FUTURE LEARNING ORIENTATION

- D1. Question 1: • How do you continue to learn to improve or to acquire new competencies?
- D2. Question 2: • Can people learn to improve success rate in new venture start up?

Appendix 2 Characteristics of Participants

Case	Sex	Age			Years in Position	Highest Education	Business Experience	Core Businesses	Business Turnover (RM' Mil)	Employee Size	Current Position
		<40	41- 50	51- 60							
1	F			√	8	Degree	23 yrs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pharmaceutical marketing and distribution - Retail pharmacy - Consumer retail 	5-10	10 – 100	Managing Director/ owner
2	M			√	20	High School	20yrs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Importer & retailing of fitness equipment 	10-50	> 100	Managing director/ owner
3	M			√	16	Master MBA	17yrs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legal service - Internet company - Training & education services 	< 5	10 – 100	Senior Partner (Owner)

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4	F		√		15	Master MBA	16yrs	- One stop marketing services	10-50	10 - 100	Chief Executive Officer / owner
5	F			√	15	Degree	15yrs	- Corporate secretarial services	< 5	<10	Sole Proprietor
6	M			√	14	MBA	14yrs	- Supermarket & department store	> 100	10 – 100	Group General Manager
7	M		√		7	MBA	10yrs	- Pharmaceutical manufacturing - Retail pharmacy	50-100	> 100	Managing Director
8	M	√			5	High School	7yrs	- Office equipment (including security system)	5-10	10 – 100	Director (Owner)
9	M		√		5	MBA	6yrs	- Value management Consultancy services	< 5	10 – 100	Managing Director/ partner