

**PRETORIA DENTAL LABORATORY'S UTILISATION OF ENTREPRENEURIAL  
PROCESSES AND CRITICAL CAPITALS: A SOUTH AFRICAN CASE**

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# **PRETORIA DENTAL LABORATORY'S UTILISATION OF ENTREPRENEURIAL PROCESSES AND CRITICAL CAPITALS: A SOUTH AFRICAN CASE**

## **Abstract**

Pretoria Dental Laboratory (PDL), established in 1992, specialises in three disciplines, namely Crown and Bridge, Prosthodontics and Orthodontics. PDL represents an interesting entrepreneurial opportunity exploitation case because of its rapid expansion over a relatively short time span of 16 years moving from a stable but small laboratory to one of the biggest dental laboratories in the Tshwane Metropolitan area of South Africa. The purpose of this paper is to outline the theoretical framework and research methodology to be utilised in order to provide insight on how PDL interact with various stakeholders, respond to environmental changes, utilise various capitals (strategic, economic, cultural and social) through a process of business decision making to recognise, prepare and exploit business opportunities in the dental environment of South Africa. The outcome of the research is intended to enlighten entrepreneurialism and its application in a specific specialised environment of South Africa.

## **Introduction**

Pretoria Dental Laboratory (PDL), an influential and successful dental laboratory in South Africa which was established in 1992 specialises in three dental disciplines, namely Crown and Bridge, Prosthodontics and Orthodontics. The goal achievements of PDL are largely determined by the reciprocal socio-economic environmental dynamics between PDL and its suppliers, clients and employees. This reciprocal socio-economic environmental dynamics requires a multi-dimensional and multi-varied research approach in studying entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial processes in PDL in a systematic manner. This view is supported by Groen (2005: 73), who stated that a systematic theoretical view is required in the studying of entrepreneurship for the sake of accommodating the analysis of multilevel networks of entrepreneurs, organizations and environments that could lead to changes in business practices and secondly, to avoid defining theoretical concepts too broadly.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to outline the theoretical framework and research methodology to be utilised in order to provide insight on how PDL interact with various stakeholders, respond to environmental changes, utilise various capitals (strategic, economic, cultural and social) through a process of business decision making to recognise, prepare and exploit business opportunities in the dental environment of South Africa. The outcome of the research is intended to enlighten entrepreneurialism and its application in a specific specialised environment of South Africa.

## **Scope**

The paper is presented in three distinct phases namely:

- A general background of the business that will be researched is provided;

- The principal entrepreneurial theories from which an integrated theoretical framework is deduced is discussed;
- A research design aligned with the theoretical framework is presented; and
- A conclusion and implications for the study are synthesized.

## **Background to Pretoria Dental Laboratory**

The business owner of Pretoria Dental Laboratory (PDL) qualified and completed in-service training as a Dental Technician in 1984 and worked as an employee at Tandtorium Dental Laboratory until 1988. In October 1988 the current business owner bought a 50% share in Sasseens Dental Laboratory in a partnership deal, specialising in prosthodontics and orthodontics. In 1990 it was decided to expand the current field of business to include Crown and Bridge and the first specialist ceramist was employed at PDL. The following three disciplines were performed in the laboratory:

- *Crown and Bridge* - the speciality that reproduces all of the same aspects of a natural tooth, and by using specific materials to reproduce an esthetic, hygienic and functional tooth while a bridge is a process of dental restoration that spans an area that has no teeth, and is connected to natural teeth at each end (Qualitydentistry, 2003).
- *Prosthodontic* - the dental speciality pertaining to the diagnoses, treatment planning, rehabilitation and maintenance of the oral function, comfort, appearance and health of patients with clinical conditions associated with missing or deficient teeth (Adafoundation, 2003).
- *Orthodontics* - the dental speciality that includes the diagnoses, prevention, interception, and correction of malocclusions (improper bites), which may be a result of tooth irregularity, disproportionate jaw relationships, or both (Wikepedia, 2008; Qualitydentistry, 2003).

In 1992 full ownership was obtained by buying the remaining 50% share of Sasseens Dental Laboratory and offering a full associateship regarding crown and bridge work to the specialist ceramist. The name of the laboratory was changed to Pretoria Dental Laboratory (PDL). A second acquisition was made in 2000 when Cradent Dental Laboratory was bought to broaden the client base of PDL whilst the field specialization remained the same.

During 2004 and 2005 another two laboratories were bought namely Tandtorium Dental Laboratory and J&D Dental Laboratory. The first laboratory specialises in Prosthodontics and Orthodontics whilst the second laboratory specialises in Chrome Cobalt.

The PDL entrepreneurial opportunity exploitation case, above the other dental laboratories explored for consideration in the study, is of particular interest because of firstly, its rapid expansion over a relatively short time span of 16 years moving from a stable but small laboratory to one of the biggest dental laboratories in the Tshwane Metropolitan area. Secondly, operating in a high technology, competitive specialist- and professional environment the expansion of services and the transfer of knowledge to build internal capacity and acquiring new technologies to prepare and position the laboratory for current and future challenges is worth analyzing. Lastly, the case could provide valuable information in the development of entrepreneurs in a

developing country like South Africa, as the venture was launched from a highly resource constraint base and due to the fact that the business owner not coming from a renowned entrepreneurial background. To this end, valuable knowledge could be gained for utilisation in entrepreneurial development programmes.

## **Literature review**

In this section some of the principal entrepreneurial theories are briefly discussed to be utilised in the deduction of an appropriate research methodology to be applied in the analyzing and evaluation of PDL's utilisation of entrepreneurial processes and critical capitals.

### ***Interaction or Relationship Theories***

The interaction or relationships theories imply that inter-business relationships are relevant for business success. For the purpose of this study a relationship is considered to imply a "*mutually oriented interaction between two reciprocally committed parties implying mutual orientation and commitment over time*" (Håkansson & Snehota, 1995: 25). If this statement is assumed to be true, then it is important to relate these relationships and its effects on other important business constructs such as business opportunity recognition, preparation, exploitation and utilization of resources. In the next section various interaction or relationship theories are presented and its relationships with important business constructs are briefly explained.

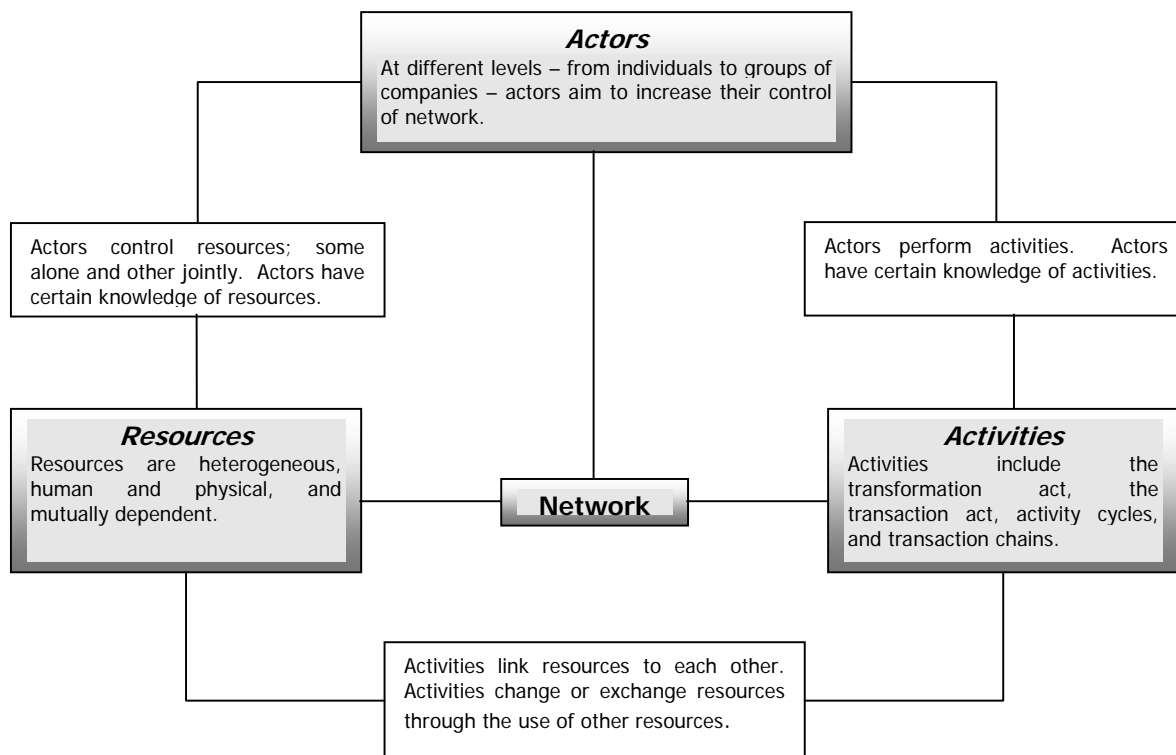
- ***The Structural Network Theory***

The essence of the Structural Network Theory according to Groen (2005: 72) is that patterned relationships (networks) between actors such as individuals, groups or organizations are formed to create amongst others strategic alliances, joint ventures and formalized arrangements. Further, business networks could also be seen as voluntary arrangements between two or more business participants that involve durable exchange, sharing or co-development of products, services or technologies. The networks formed are inter-dependant relationship entities that could not be considered as isolated individual entities, but rather requires the maintenance of several relationships with various actors. Each relationship is therefore embedded and connected to some other relationships. This implies that any analysis of relationships needs to adopt a "relationship view" of the business market as a whole over a time span rather than focusing on a single relationship exchange episodes and transactions (Håkansson & Snehota, 1995). Taking a time span perspective allows a researcher to take into account and capture the forces shaping business relations in a social network.

Håkansson (1989) developed a structural network theoretical approach in which a business is considered part of a network characterized by any configuration that may vary between co-operation and conflict. According to this theory the business forms relationships with other businesses. Through established relationships business are linked into a network structure that prescribes a relationship framework in which every business should operate and adhere to. The motivation for establishing relationships is to handle or manage various kinds of inter dependencies that exist between the businesses generated by the co-existence of three mechanisms namely:

- Activities – the actions performed in this relationship model can be marked as either in-conflict or in-harmony with other businesses because of the simultaneous presence of conflicting or common interests between the actors in the various businesses. Optimising activities in the relationships is largely depended on the ability of the entrepreneurs in the various businesses to co-ordinate activities in terms of
  - Sequential dependencies (some activities must be carried out before others);
  - Shared dependencies (common activities); and
  - Mutually dependencies (achievements are used together).
- Resource structures – the resources represent a necessary but not sufficient condition for all business activities. In essence five types of resources could be identified namely, input goods, financial capital, technology, personnel and marketing. Van der Veen and Wakkee (2002) in similar fashion classify the resource base of a business in terms of strategic capital, economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Resources are always controlled by business actors in terms of resource consumption and processing. Control over resources can be exercised in on of two ways, firstly, direct control over a resource in the sense that the business owns the resource or the right to use it or secondly, indirect control in the sense that the business has a close and stable relationship with a business which possesses that particular resource. The value of any resource in this theoretical framework is determined by how a particular resource combines with the other resources. Evolution and growth of the business is thus depended on optimising the configuration of the resources ; and
- Actors – the actors bring a dynamic element into the business network as they are responsible to generate change and business growth by altering actions or resource combinations directly or in indirectly. The actions of the individual business are based upon the businesses identity in the network. The resultant effect is that each entrepreneur in the network is faced with unique business demands and opportunities in the network.

The above explanation of the theory as explained by Håkansson (1989) could be summarized by figure 1.



**Figure 1 The Structural Network Model**

(Source: Håkansson (1989))

Håkansson and Snehota (1995) have indicated four process concepts by which inter-relationships between businesses could be studied over time, namely:

- Adaptions – this concept relates to how business modify its products, routines and rules of conduct over time in order to function better with each other over time. It also includes adaptations in administrative and logistic activities.
  - Cooperation and conflict – this concept relates to analysing the essence of what makes a relationship worthwhile for the parties involved and while it is worthwhile to seek constructive solutions when conflicts arises.
  - Routinisation - this concept refers to institutionalised routines and implied rules of behaviour that a business maintains with its customers and suppliers.
  - Social interaction – over and above business specific behaviour this concept also investigates the personal bonds and convictions engaged in the relationship.
- ***The Social Identity Theory***

Social Identity Theory, a sub-theory of social cognition, represents a theory of group membership and behaviour with a purpose of trying to understand how individuals make sense of themselves and others in a social environment. As such this theory is also applicable to understand behaviour in business organisations (Korte, 2007). Social Identity Theory suggests that an individual's self concept is made up of a personal identity as well as a social identity.

This implies that people in general defines themselves in terms of individual attributes and interpersonal relationships (things that relates to “I”) as well as in terms of collective attributes of a group to which they belong (things that relates to “we”). A proportion of an individual’s identity is derived from individual attributes whilst another proportion is derived from their memberships and interactions within (in-group) groups and amongst (inter-group) groups (Highhouse et.al., 2007; Korte, 2007; Van Knippenberg and Hogg, 2003; Brunetto, Y and Farr-Wharton, R, 2002).

This theory is of particular importance in understanding the business organization, its influence on the market and the benefits the business could received from the market. In this regard Highhouse et.al (2007) stated that social identity functions to facilitate attitudes to establish identities and to obtain social approval. In the business environment it implies the establishment of a business identity and obtainment of social approval of the business and its activities in the market place. It also implies that people in other businesses having relationships and identifying with a particular business do so as a means of expressing themselves and acquiring social approval. The above represents the foundation of proper self-presentation and a means for the business to put a “best face” forward (Highhouse et.al., 2007).

According to Highhouse et.al. (2007) establishing an identity and obtaining social approval are dependent on two need concerns namely:

- A social adjustment concern – this concern relates to ensuring that the business is regarded favourable with significant others. These concerns are often related to things that are popular, prestigious and successful in the eyes of significant others. The social adjustment concern focuses therefore on issues relating to “fit-in” with important groups or significant others. The effect of social adjustment is that the business obtains social stature in the market place; and
- A value expression concern – this concern relates to ensuring that the business projects an image of wholesomeness, in other words that the business is good, ethical, sincere and respectable. A concern for value expression has to do with the degree of importance places on working for or with a business appealing to pride.

Whilst the first concern (social adjustment) relates to impressing other stakeholders and the second concern (value expression) relates to expressing good values, thus clearly distinct behavioural orientations, one could also expect relationship between the two concerns. A relationship is expected because both dimensions are aimed at self presentation. However the motives behind the self presentations may differ. The more important issue is to determine which of the two concerns dominates in the life of the business.

- ***The Social Systems Theory***

According to Parsons (1964) a social system consists as a plurality of individual actors interacting with each other in a situation which has at least a physical or environmental aspect, actors who are motivated in terms of a tendency to the “optimization of gratification” and whose relation to their situations, including each other, is defined and mediated in terms of culturally structured and shared symbols.

Parsons et al. (1951) also indicates that a social system can be seen as a system of actions which contains the following characteristics:

- Processes of interaction that takes place between two or more actors;
- The situation towards which actors are orientated includes other actors;
- There is interdependence, and in part concerted action to form a function of collective goal orientation.

Primary problems that relates to social systems according to Parson et al. (1951) are indicated as:

- With relation to orientation, the question is asked whether or not the role's mutual relationships to other roles are based on cognitive or appreciative standards. If cognitive, then its chief characteristics do not derive from specific relations to other social objects, and its characteristics do not change so much when depending on interacting.
- In relation to the object side, the question is whether the role is related to other roles on the basis of performance or the quality characteristics of its incumbents.

- ***The Regulatory Focus Theory***

*“Regulatory focus theory delineates how people engage in self-regulation, the process of bringing oneself into alignment with one’s standards and goals”* (Brockner et al, 2004) from a perspective of two components namely in terms of what one wants to be (ideal self) by focusing on things that may cause positive outcomes and secondly, what one ought to be that is tempered by what one should avoid not to create negative outcomes. Applied to a business one may assume that both the promotion (ideal business) and the protection (ought to be business) co-exist and if business processes and utilization of capitals are studied, it is important to analyze to what level alignment processes occurred because of exogenous changes (without changes caused by the marketplace) or because of endogenous changes (within alignment driven by the business itself) to promote positive outcomes and avoid negative outcomes for the business.

### ***The Life Cycle Theory***

The Encyclopedia of Small Business said that the organisational life cycle model proposes that over the course of time, businesses moves through a fairly predictable sequence of development stages. This model was a subject of substantial study over the years, and is linked to the study of business growth and development. This life cycle is based on a biological metaphor, that businesses remind you of living organisms because of the fact that they show a regular pattern of developmental processes. Businesses that went through an identifiable life cycle process are vitally impacted by external environmental conditions as well as internal factors (Encyclopedia of Small Business, 2008).

In Management Sciences (1983) Quinn and Cameron said that the models in general propose that changes that occur in businesses follow a predictable pattern that can be characterised by different developmental stages that are:

- Sequential in nature;
- Occur as a hierarchical progression;
- Is not easily reversed; and
- Involve a broad range of business activities and structures.



The number of life cycle stages has varied considerably over the years, but most models shown an organizational life cycle period in four (Robbins, 1994) or five stages (Kuratko & Hodgettis, 2004):

- Formation, birth, development or startup - this stage consists of activities associated with the initial formulation of the business and encompasses the foundation work needed for creating a formal business plan, searching for capital, carrying out marketing activities and developing an effective business team;
- Growth – this stage often requires major changes in the business strategy, businesses demonstrated significantly more concern for internal efficiency and installed more control mechanisms and processes;
- Business stabilization, maturity – this stage is a result of both market conditions and the business owner's efforts. During this stage a number of developments commonly occur, including increased competition, consumer indifferences to the business's goods and/or services;
- Decline – during this stage the business will because of its rapid growth and expansion, which was the result of initial successes, led to self-deception, inflexibility and shortsightedness that will lead to the final stage;
- Death or renewal – this stage indicate the business's foes through decline and will either die or enter a phase of renewal and development. If the business is able take drastic actions to rectify the situation, it may survive.

Planning is not homogeneous across these stages. The length and specificity of plans should be adjusted according to each stage.

### ***The Transaction Theory***

According to Coase (1937), as quoted by Ndaloma (2007) the transaction theory examines the transaction of goods and services within companies and markets. According to this theory high degree of transactions in the market brings about smaller business sizes whilst a high degree of transactions between businesses (vertical integration) resulted in the emergence of large firm sizes. The transaction theory is based upon two assumptions about human behavior. The first assumption is that human beings are rational, whilst the second assumption is that human beings are opportunistic. The choice between market transactions and business transactions is considered a function of three critical aspects namely, asset specificity, uncertainty/complexity and frequency. Asset specificity means an asset is transaction specific and cannot be redeployed to an alternative use without a significant reduction in the value of the asset. A high level of asset specificity means that the asset is difficult to transfer in the market and internal coordination will occur, which will lead to a larger firm size. The basic idea of this theory is that business size is dependant on human as well as transaction characteristics in a business environment. These characteristics will exhibit changes due to economic or institutional development.

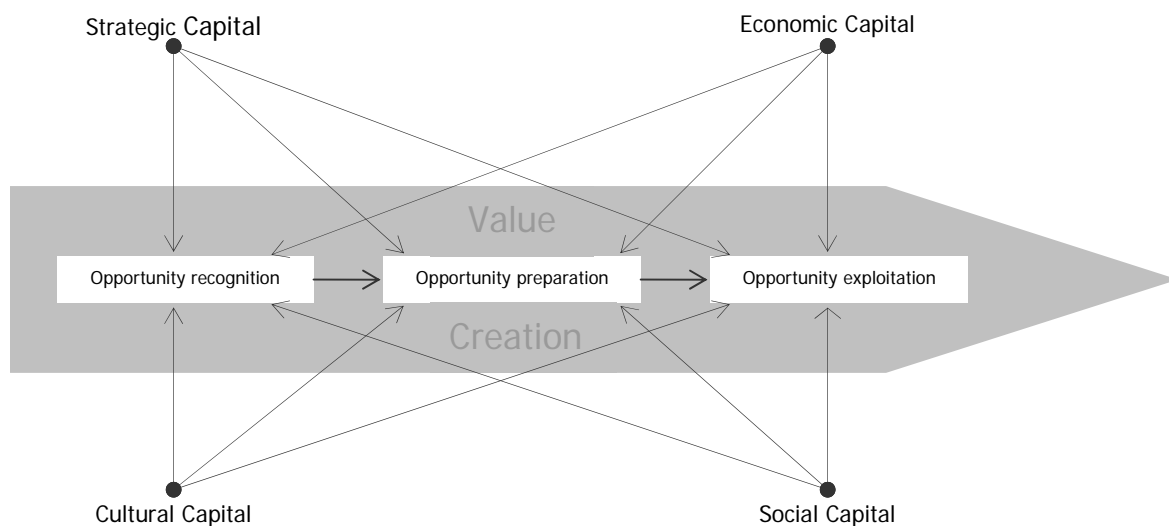
### *The Integrated Entrepreneurial Theoretical Framework*

With an entrepreneurship-in-network approach as viewed by Van der Sijde (2007), an interaction of actors takes place with regards to the recognition, preparation and exploitation of opportunities that which subsequently lead to value creation. This process is not a linear process because changing circumstances may require the entrepreneur to change or re-evaluate decisions made in earlier stages. This indicates that although the model of the entrepreneurial process is opportunity-based, the entrepreneur is still the driving force within these processes. Mechanisms embedded in a definition by Parsons as described by Van der Sijde (2007), shows that interaction between actors, a strive for goal attainment, optimisation of processes, pattern maintenance and institutionalization of shared symbols produced its own specific type of capitals needed, therefore each of these mechanisms related to specific “capitals”:

- Interaction between actors linked to a social network capital
- Goal attainment linked to strategic capital
- Optimisation of processes linked to economic capital
- pattern maintenance and institutionalization of shared symbols linked to social capital

Generally the assumption will be made that all businesses will need sufficient “capital” to be sustainable over time and that all start-up businesses will have to be in possession of sufficient “capital” in all four areas to establish a viable and successful business.

The above explanation of the in-network approach as explained by Van der Sijde (2007) could be summarized by figure 2.



**Figure 2 In-network approach**

(Source: Van der Sijde (2007))

## Study methods and design

The Integrated Entrepreneurial Theoretical Framework will be used to guide the planning, design and execution of the research.

After careful evaluation of other dental laboratories in the Pretoria area, using a criterion based benchmark approach:

- State of the art technology employed;
- Spectrum of dental speciality services provided;
- The four critical capitals of interest in the study and
- The life span of the business to allow for longitudinal investigation

Pretoria Dental Laboratory was selected as the most suitable business to justify the research project. In addition to meet the above criteria justification for selecting PDL could also be found in the “Background to the Company” discussed earlier. The following paragraphs will provide information on how the rest of the research will be executed.

The empirical part of the research will be embedded in a field research design approach using the survey data compilation technique as method to create at least medium level constraint conditions during the investigation allowing the researchers to deduct specific principals, thus promoting internal validity in the research, of how PDL utilizes entrepreneurial processes and critical capitals to achieve business success. According to Graziano and Raulin (2004) the term field research applies to a variety of research methods, ranging from low to high constraints, and observes natural behaviour under natural conditions in the field (Oxford English Dictionary, 2008; American Heritage Dictionary, 2000). A medium level constraint approach was decided upon as defining too strict constraints condition specifications will have a detrimental effect on deducting valid general principles resulting from the opportunity to make observations in the natural or real operations environment of PDL. The researchers’ intention is therefore to opt for a research design that will enhance the making of generalization of results **consistent** in how PDL utilizes entrepreneurial processes and capitals from specific time settings to other time settings in the life-span of PDL. The intention is therefore **not** to make generalizations to a larger population of similar businesses nor is it to make generalizations of the study over time.

For the above reasons an interrupted time-series approach will be followed in which the same suppliers’, customers’ and clients’ responses will be measured under different conditions defined by the different time-series specified by the researchers based upon advice provided by the business owner of PDL, and the business acquisition periods of PDL allowing for multiple measures to be taken and to accommodate variation in how PDL utilises entrepreneurial processes and capitals over time. Using interrupted time-series will enable the researchers to measure change disruptions in the utilisation of entrepreneurial processes and capitals, caused by a multiple of factors in the natural business environment of PDL, several times during a particular baseline observation period.

In this case, the field research design is considered suitable as research variables will be measured at the post-test level such as variables like environmental changes, the different capitals employed by the business owner of PDL, opportunity recognition, preparation and

exploitation will be analysed. This in essence implies that the research approach is ex post facto in nature. The second reason for employing this design technique is because it is suitable for the study of single research entities (Babbie et-al, 2006; Graziano & Raulin, 2004). In this particular case the research entity of interest is PDL and how it utilises entrepreneurial processes and capitals to achieve business success over a period of 16 years.

For the purpose of this study the population will be defined as the business owner, the financial auditor/s, all staff members employed, clients and suppliers over a period of sixteen years within PDL. This will represent the total population size of PDL for the sixteen year time span of this research. The sample frame from which the criteria based sample will be selected constitutes all the above study units that will be available for providing information on PDL since its inception.

The sample units of interest that will be interviewed and whose responses will be analysed from will include:

- The business owner

Interviewing the business owner will provide the researcher with a self description of the owner of PDL on how entrepreneurial processes, capitals and environmental adaption occurred over a period of sixteen years.

- The financial auditor of PDL

This study unit is included to provide objective information of the financial position, history and financial capitalisation of PDL.

- Staff members

Selected staff members will be interviewed to compile data on human and social capital utilisation by the business owner.

- Clients and suppliers

Within this study the term client will represent all dentists that had a work relationship with PDL, at any time, over a period of sixteen years, and the term supplier will refer to all suppliers of materials, equipment, and services of any kind, at any time, over a period of sixteen years. Interviews will be conducted with both clients and suppliers to determine the trustworthiness, reliability, reputation and general entrepreneurial behaviour of the business owner to succeed in a highly competitive dental laboratory market place.

In this study the criteria based sampling technique, will be employed. Sample units will be selected based upon the following criteria. These criteria will be applicable with regards to the staff members, the clients and the suppliers of PDL as these units could only be selected if they meet the below mentioned criteria. It speaks for itself that the business owner and the financial auditor do not have to meet the specific requirements as they are selected because of their respective institutional positions in the business.

Selection criteria appropriate to be applied to all potential respondents:

- Have had a working business relationship with the Business owner for at least one year and respondents will be classified into one of the following categories based on the length of the relationship;
  - more than 10 years
  - 5 – 10 years
  - More than 1 year but less than 5 years

- The respondents in the abovementioned categories will be proportionally selected applying a 3:2:1 ratio. The reason is that more weight will be given to respondents that have a long working relationship with the owner.
- For suppliers and customers the monetary value of business with the laboratory will also be taken into account. Here the 80:20 principle will apply. In other words those 20% of suppliers and customers that contributes to 80% of business revenue will be considered for selection.

Data will be compiled using semi-structured questionnaires evaluating the following concepts: opportunity recognition, opportunity preparation, opportunity exploitation and utilisation of social, economic, strategic, cultural capitals and various component of relationship management over the 16 years of existence of PDL. Independent field workers will be trained and used to administer the questionnaires. A three round Delphi technique data analysis approach will be followed to analyse the qualitative data compiled. This will enable the researcher to reduce error variance and to maximise consensus among respondents. The quantitative data analysis may involve amongst others techniques like regression to the mean in order to evaluate and display how the behaviour of PDL fluctuates naturally over time. Recognition will also be given to the fact that because of the ex-post facto nature of the design, memory illusions may have a negative impact on the epistemology value of the research. Therefore inter-response reliability measurements and special treatment and consideration of outer-responses will receive special consideration. Further, only responses constantly differ sharply (significantly) from a previous period will it be attributed to a change in entrepreneurial processes and capital utilisation approaches and not because of natural fluctuations in the business or business environment of PDL.

The face validity of the research will be promoted by allowing experts in the field and at conferences, like dental technicians, academics and the business owner to critical reflect on the data compiling techniques, the measuring instrument and the findings of the researcher. The trustworthiness of the interpretations will be evaluated in terms of the level of consensus and stability of responses obtained as well as through the consensus seeking method applied in the Delphi technique.

Ethical aspects also require careful consideration. Approval for the conducting of this study by the researcher will be obtained from the owner of PDL and assurance will be provided to the owner not to incriminate him in person or the name of the laboratory. All participants in this study will be advised about the nature of the study being conducted and will be advised that participation is entirely voluntary. Unethical behaviour will be minimised in this research as all field workers, under the supervision of the researcher who will not directly be involved in the field work due to the possibility of creating bias in responses, will be properly trained in the correct administration of the questionnaire, expected ethical conduct during the field work and the treatment of information obtained. Participants will be required to sign and date a consent form indicating agreement to participate in the survey. The researcher will report the findings in a complete and honest fashion, without misrepresenting or compromising the outcome of the study. Confidentiality and participant's privacy will also be protected during the study by making use of a coding system during data capturing to ensure that responses of individuals

could not be identified. The identity of respondents will only be known to the researcher and the fieldworkers.

## Conclusion

Pretoria Dental Laboratory (PDL), an influential and successful dental laboratory in South Africa which was established in 1992 specialises in three dental disciplines, namely Crown and Bridge, Prosthodontics and Orthodontics was selected as study object. The purpose of this paper was to outline the theoretical framework and research methodology to be utilised in the research in order to provide insight on how PDL interact with various stakeholders, respond to environmental changes, utilise various capitals (strategic, economic, cultural and social) through a process of business decision making to recognise, prepare and exploit business opportunities in the dental environment of South Africa. The outcome of the research is intended to enlighten entrepreneurialism and its application in a specific specialised environment of South Africa.

It is envisaged that the research design proposed will yield much stronger and valid research results than applying a simple business startup-to-current-state business (pre-post research design) design in which only one measure is taken at each phase. However, recognition should be given to the fact that history and how it is accommodated in the research measuring instrument may confound results in a study reflecting on a sixteen year business time span. Specific care will therefore be taken to rule these factors out by means of amongst others inter-response reliability measures and careful consideration on how to treat out-layer responses. The Delphi-technique to be employed may also assist in this regard. The research design is also considered appropriate because it will allow the researchers to gather valuable information in a natural business setting.

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