Learning Style and Entrepreneurial Operations: A Small Business Research Study

Carla A. Pacalo

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Marcie Boucouvalas, Chair
Paul Renard, Co-chair
James Akenhead
Pamela Murphy

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ABSTRACT

Americans spent approximately $47.7 billion on pet products and services in 2010, an increase of 4.8% over 2009, making the pet industry a market segment ripe with opportunity for entrepreneurial small business venture (American Pet Products Association, 2013). Small businesses invite innovation, create and provide new jobs, foster entrepreneurial spirit and creativity, and create competition that drives future business endeavors (Hillary, 2001). The pet dog industry is a salient example of entrepreneurial activity in which the pressures of business, economics, and learning coalesce. Because small businesses bolster about half of the private-sector economy and represent more than 99% of all business firms (Small Business Administration, 2013), it is useful for small business owners to learn and prosper as entrepreneurs. "Entrepreneurship is a learning process, and a theory of entrepreneurship requires a theory of learning" (Minniti, 2010, p. 9). However, there is still limited knowledge and understanding of the interaction between learning and entrepreneurship, and such a process remains one of the most neglected areas of entrepreneurial research and thus understanding (Deakins & Freel, 1999). This study explored entrepreneurial decision making by using the construct of David A. Kolb's Learning Style Inventory to examine an entrepreneurial operation in the pet dog-training industry. The researcher worked hand-in-hand with the entrepreneur in a collaborative partnership to explore the phenomenon using narrative inquiry research methods. A

series of semi-structured interviews were used to collect and analyze stories and identify key considerations for learning style in relation to entrepreneurship. The results showed the entrepreneur's preferred learning style aligned with his expressed style and demonstrated a keen sense of operations awareness. Additionally, the entrepreneur had learned how to leverage his strengths over time while recognizing and compensating for his weaknesses. For a novice or someone with a desire to learn more about their own entrepreneurial inclinations, results from a learning style instrument could provide such understandings with helpful implications for small business ownership. Future studies could contribute to entrepreneurial research and add greater voice to the pet dog industry.

Dedication

Mom and Dad: for your everlasting love, encouragement, and support. I am eternally grateful and forever humbled by your kindness and love you for eternity.

Rose Barbara Italiano Pacalo

> "To my ever dearest, loving, compassionate, caring, understanding and . . . she's everything and she's my hero, I love my mom and she will always be special to me." — Unknown

> "My mother is more than a hero, more than a fearless woman, more than a best friend, she's my life. I love her with all my heart and I will never ask for a better mother." — Unknown

Nicholas Pacalo

> "My father to me is kind of like my hero, the strongest guy I ever met in my life so I want to be there for him just like he was always there for me my whole life." — Unknown

> "Dad, your guiding hand on my shoulder will remain with me forever." — Unknown

"B" — for showing me the way to an unrealized passion

> "Fly Dog, fly! I will be your missing eye, and you will be my wings." — Margaret Wild

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To all of you who in some way (or many) offered your help, support, and or affection that propelled me through this journey.

Family

Sister Charlotte Italiano "Aunt Char," Nick Pacalo, Patrick Pacalo, Jack Pacalo, Cathy Pacalo, Eileen Randal Pacalo, John Pacalo, Erin Pacalo, Joe Pitts, and Angela Wade Cline.

> "Family - We argue, we fall out, we make up, we love, we don't speak, we chat for hours, we are family. We may not have it all together, but together we have it all." — Ritu Ghatourey

> "The family. We were a strange little band of characters trudging through life sharing diseases and toothpaste, coveting one another's desserts, hiding shampoo, borrowing money, locking each other out of our rooms, inflicting pain and kissing to heal it in the same instant, loving, laughing, defending, and trying to figure out the common thread that bound us all together." — Erma Bombeck

> "Your brother is always the first male friend you will have in your life. Nobody will ever be able to understand your craziness like your brother and although you don't see each other as much as you'd like, he will always remain your friend and be there for you when you need him the most. While people will come and go in your life, your brother will be in your heart for a lifetime." — Ritu Ghatourey

"Families are like fudge — mostly sweet with a few nuts." — Author Unknown

Committee

Dr. Marcie Boucouvalas, Co-Chair

"Be so good they can't ignore you." — Steve Martin

"The unexamined life is not worth living" — Socrates

"Never lose a chance of saying a kind word."— William Makepeace Thackeray

Dr. Paul Renard, Co-Chair

"Mentoring is part of leadership not part of managing." — Byron Pulsifer

"Don't tell me about your effort. Show me your results." ― Tim Fargo

"Part therapist, part consultant, part motivational expert, part professional organizer, part friend, part nag—the personal coach seeks to do for your life what a personal trainer does for your body."— Kim Palmer

"You don't drown by falling in the water. You drown by staying there." —Unknown

Dr. James Akenhead

"The only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle." — Steve Jobs

"Don't join an easy crowd; you won't grow. Go where the expectations and the demands to perform are high." — Jim Rohn

"Success is nothing more than a few simple disciplines, practiced every day." — Jim Rohn

Dr. Pamela Murphy

"You don't do kind deeds expecting kindness in return. You don't do kind deeds because you deem the recipient worthy. You do kind deeds because it's who you are, and because you understand the powerful difference your gentle hand makes in this dreary world." — Richelle E. Goodrich

"Those who are happiest are those who do the most for others." — Booker T. Washington

"The way you treat people who are in no position to help you, further you, or benefit you reveals the true state of your heart." ― Mandy Hale

Coach, Colleague, and Treasured Friend

Dr. Melissa Mabury Lubin

"God always brings someone into your life that has traveled the same path and knows the rocks you climbed to get to the end of the trail." ― Shannon L. Alder

"Coaching is a profession of love. You can't coach people unless you love them." — Eddie Robinson

"No matter how many mistakes you make or how slow you progress, you are still way ahead of everyone who isn't trying." — Unknown

"At times, we all become overwhelmed. An effective coach, however, has to be able to help people see the end goal, to take one step at a time, rather than being overwhelmed by the issues." — Byron and Catherine Pulsifer

The Team – Patient Librarian, Technical Wiz, Ace Transcriptionist, Editor Extraordinaire, Administrative Rain Maker

Michele Eldridge, Patrick Pacalo, Debbie Cash, Debbie Payne, Kristin Sorensen, Phil Skomra, Neil Braddish, Eric Finlayson, Pat Meneeley, Kristin Gross, Geneva Maher and Kendra Kimball

"No matter how you try to make the world a better place, the first step always starts with helping each other." ― Magith Noohukhan

"People love super heroes. It's true we're impressed by their bravery and fortitude, their supernatural gifts and physical brawn. But the fact is, villains possess these same qualities. So why our admiration for the hero and not the nemesis? Because of virtue. A super hero gives everything to defend what's good and right without seeking praise or reward. Think about it. All the great heroes give without taking; help without grumbling; sacrifice without asking recompense. A super hero's real strength, what we absolutely fall in love with, is his finer virtue." ― Richelle E. Goodrich

"The truist indication of gratitude is to return what you are grateful for." ― Richard Paul Evans

More Amazing People

Donna McDaniel Beames, Chrissy Hickey Milliken, Teresa Hanula, Nancy Jones, Kiersten Hartmann Marcos, Casey Rice Durso, Dawn Moeller

"As we grow up, we realize it becomes less important to have more friends and more important to have real ones." — Unknown

"Friendship isn't a big thing — it's a million little things." — Author Unknown

"In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit." — Albert Schweitzer

"Friends are kisses blown to us by angels." — Author Unknown

"What is a friend? A single soul dwelling in two bodies." — Aristotle

"A true friend is one who thinks you are a good egg even if you are half-cracked." — Author Unknown

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AC: Abstract Conceptualization

ACAAB: Associate Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists Animal Behavior Society

AE: Active Experimentation

APDT: Association of Pet Dog Trainers

APPA: American Pet Products Association

ASPCA: Association for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

ASSIST: Approaches and Study Skills Inventory for Students

CAAB: Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist Animal Behavior Society,

CABC: Certified Animal Behavior Consultant International Association of Animal Behavior

Consultants

CCAB: Certified Clinical Behavior Consultant International Association for the Study of Animal

Behavior

CCPDT: Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers

CDBC: Certified Dog Behavior Consultant International Association of Animal Behavior

Consultants

CE: Concrete Experience

CPDT: Certified Professional Dog Trainer

CPDT-KA: Certified Professional Dog Trainer–Knowledge Assessed Certification Council for

Professional Dog Trainers

CSA: Cognitive Styles Analysis

CSI: Cognitive Style Indicator

ELM: Experiential Learning Model

ELT: Experiential Learning Theory

GSD: Gregorc's Style Delineator

HBDI: Hermann Brain Dominance Instrument

IAABC: International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants

ILSR: Institute of Learning Styles Research

ILSRJ: The Institute for Learning Styles Research Journal

ILS: Inventory of Learning Styles

IRB: Internal Review Board

IRS: Internal Revenue Service

LLC: Limited Liability Corporation

LSI: Learning Style Inventory

LSP: Learning Style Profiler

LSQ: Learning Style Questionnaire

MBTI: Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

MSP: Motivational Style Profile

PEPS: Productivity Environmental Preference Survey

PSI: Pet Sitters International

RO: Reflective Observation

SBA: Small Business Administration

TSI: Thinking Style Inventory

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Small businesses create and provide new jobs, even in the midst of recessions; they invite innovation and foster entrepreneurial spirit and creativity; and they create competition that drives future business endeavors (Hillary, 2001). Americans spent approximately $47.7 billion on pet products and services in 2010, an increase of 4.8% over 2009, making the pet industry a market segment ripe with opportunity for entrepreneurial small business ventures (American Pet Products Association [APPA], 2013). Because small businesses bolster about half of the private-sector economy and represent more than 99% of all business firms (Small Business Administration [SBA], 2013), it is necessary for small business owners to learn and prosper as entrepreneurs. Minniti (2010) pointed out that "entrepreneurship is a learning process, and a theory of entrepreneurship requires a theory of learning" (p. 9). However, there is still limited knowledge and understanding of the interaction between learning and entrepreneurship, and such a process remains one of the most neglected areas of entrepreneurial research and thus understanding (Deakins & Freel, 1999).

This study explored entrepreneurial decision making by using the construct of David A. Kolb's Learning Style Inventory to examine an entrepreneurial operation in the pet dog training industry, thus adding to the body of entrepreneurial research. The study included a series of interviews designed to understand how a business owner's learning style and experience manifest through operationalization and decision making.

D. A. Kolb (1984) postulated the experiential learning theory (ELT) by stating that "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 8). In that same year, Kolb published his learning styles model and developed his learning

style inventory based on his ELT. Cognitive scientists define learning as a means of acquiring information that can be reduced, elaborated, interpreted, stored, and retrieved (Goswami, 2003); however, most management researchers prefer to view entrepreneurial learning as an ongoing social, behavioral, and experiential cycle rather than as an outcome or goal. Learning facilitates the development and enactment of entrepreneurial behaviors and provides perhaps the "only sustainable source of competitive advantage" (Senge, 1993, p. 3) for organizations (Rae & Carswell, 2001). Minniti (2010) maintained that successful entrepreneurs learn two types of knowledge: (a) domain knowledge regarding their technology and/or market and (b) a more generalized tacit knowledge of "how to be an entrepreneur." Learners gain the tacit knowledge experientially by monitoring and filtering outcomes of experiments that test competing hypotheses to successfully operate a small business.

The U.S. SBA (2013) defined small business as companies that employ fewer than 500 employees with revenue less than $7 million. Small businesses numbered 27.8 million in 2012, representing 99.7% of all employer firms, and they employ 49.1% of the private labor force and are thus are crucial to the nation's fiscal condition (SBA, 2013). Most of these small businesses spring from an individual's or small group's entrepreneurship, "a process of exploiting opportunities that exist in the environment or that are created through innovation in an attempt to create value" (Brown & Ulijn, 2004, p. 5). Often, small business start-ups begin with clear ideas about what they want to accomplish yet struggle or fail to succeed. Kanter (1983) suggested that "entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial organizations always operate at the edge of their competence" (p. 23), even though 23 million small businesses in America account for 54% of all U.S. sales. Furthermore, small businesses have provided 55% of all jobs and 66% of all net new jobs since the 1970s (SBA, 2013). The 600,000-plus franchised small businesses in the United States

account for 40% of all retail sales and provide jobs for some 8 million people, and the small business sector in America occupies 30% to 50% of all commercial space, an estimated 20 to 34 billion square feet (SBA, 2013).

The SBA noted that entrepreneurial start-ups in the small business sector continue to grow as corporate America downsizes and the rate for small business failures declines (SBA, 2013). This is supported by a 49% increase in small business growth since 1982 and the addition of 8 million new jobs; whereas since 1990, big business eliminated 4 million jobs (SBA, 2013).

The year 2011 was the second full year of economic expansion since the end of the business recession in mid-2009. Small businesses were at the core of this expansion that saw output, business income, and profits rise while business bankruptcies and unemployment declined. Moreover, although the small business economy is growing, the effects of the most recent downturn are still being felt. The number of business births and their associated employment rate remain below pre-downturn levels, and employment gains have been muted compared with previous downturns. Despite economic challenges, entrepreneurs continue to innovate, develop new business concepts, and move forward with recognizing opportunity, motivation, and willingness to risk financial resources.

Clark (1998, 2004) stated that the term *entrepreneurial* can be used as a characteristic applied not only to individuals but also to organizations as social systems, as well as to projects. The common definition of *entrepreneur* in the literature is "an individual(s) who has founded their own firm" (Forbes, 2011). Small businesses are recognized as key drivers in the United States economy (Atkinson & Andes, 2009), not only for their value to the nation but also for their role in keeping the United States globally competitive. As a nation, the United States recognizes the connection between innovation and prosperity. Entrepreneurship is the act of

pursuing new ways of doing things in a real context or, more concretely, "the essential act of entrepreneurship is new entry" (Dess, Lumpkin, & Eisner, 2006, p. 7). Brown and Ulijn (2004, p. 5) stated, "Entrepreneurship is a process of exploiting opportunities that exist in the environment or that are created through innovation in an attempt to create value." According to Kanter organizations with a true entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial approach quantify themselves not by the standards of the past or rather how far they have come but by visions of the future or how far they have yet to go (Kanter, 1983). Moreover, they do not allow the past to serve as a restraint on the future; the mere fact that something has not worked in the past does not mean that it cannot be made to work in the future (Kanter, 1983). Growth and success of companies do not happen overnight; many entrepreneurs never make it past the idea stage, with only 5 in 100 business start-ups remaining economically viable 5 years later (Kobe, 2007). As the small business grows and expands, so does the complexity of the role of the entrepreneurs and the expectation that that entrepreneur will thrive. The pet dog industry is a salient example of entrepreneurial activity in which the pressures of business, economics, and learning coalesce.

Pet Dog Industry, Dog Ownership, and Dog Expenses in the United States

Consumer behavior continues to support growth in the pet industry, and entrepreneurs continue to create businesses to service this market sector. Pet ownership reached an all-time high in 2011-2012 with more than 62% of American households owning at least one dog (APPA, 2013). This figure implies that there are more than 78.2 million pet dogs in U.S. households, with the number expected to rise. The high prevalence of dog ownership, despite the enormous investments of money and time that it requires, also provides evidence of the importance that many attribute to pet dogs (Serpell, 1986). Dogs are often treated similarly to children in that the pleasure and importance they bring to life are considered by some to be worth the amount of

commitment and expense they require. Like children, dogs can cause substantial financial burden (Beck & Katcher, 1983). According to the APPA, Americans spent more than $52 billion on their pets in 2012 alone (APPA, 2013). Owners endure many annual expenses for their dogs, including food, treats, equipment, cosmetics, beds, toys, and veterinarian bills, in exchange for the love and companionship that dogs provide (Staats, Wallace, & Anderson, 2008). To quantify it further, the APPA survey data in 2013 showed that owners spend more than $1,800 annually for the care, feeding, health, and enjoyment of their dogs.

Individuals put up with toilet training, accidents and destruction in their homes, dirt, illnesses, bites, and other nuisances such as barking because they love their dogs and consider them indispensable members of the family (Johnson & McKay, 2009). As Beck and Katcher (1983) stated, the act that critically defines a pet as a child is our willingness to put up with the excrement of our pets: to handle it, permit it in the house, and accept it in the streets. In essence, it is the bond between man and best friend that provides the reasoning to make such decisions. Dogs provide comfort, companionship, and unconditional love, and we in turn want to provide our dogs with the same level of care (Neimeyer, 2009), which leads dog owners to open their wallets and spend money, thus giving entrepreneurs entrée to open dog-related services and businesses.

For example, dog walking and in-home pet care are popular services for those who work or travel. Owners usually request routine walks but can also opt for more rigorous exercise, play sessions, feeding, medicating, and owner-specified personal attention for one's pet. Overnight pet sitting and vacation pet care services provide in-home pet care such as feeding, walking, exercising, administering medication, and cleaning up pet messes but can also include home care–related activities such as watering plants, retrieving mail and newspapers, adjusting blinds,

and turning on lights to give a "lived-in" appearance to the home. Dog day care is another popular service in which owners drop their dog at a facility that provides supervision, care, and the opportunity to play with other dogs. Many businesses are structured to offer combined day care and overnight services. Yet another service is a pet taxi to take the pet to and from veterinarian appointments, grooming sessions, or other destinations as chosen by the owner. Groomers provide cleaning and hygienic care of dogs, such as bathing, brushing, coat clipping, nail trimming, and application of flee/tick topical repellant. Pet photographers can photograph pets in various locations according to the owners' wishes, retouch photos in postproduction, provide printing and framing services, and coordinate specialty item purchases.

Since the mid-1990s, Americans have embraced dog-centered activities, from group dog hiking, dog park adventures, beach playtime, and unique vacations for owner and dog (Morrisson, 2002). These activities may involve a weeklong or weekend getaway with one's dog set in a rural location with the chance to participate together in recreational activities. Facilities usually include lodging in cabins or tents to allow for dog and owner to sleep in the same unit. Perhaps one of the most common of all the pet dog services, however, is training.

This study focuses on an entrepreneur and his dog-training business, which represents one of the most popular market segments in the pet dog industry. Dog-training services may include individual or private and group training sessions and range from the fundamentals of basic obedience to advance training for complicated behaviors such as agility competitions and shows. Classes are structured by age and skill level to fit both the owner's needs and the dog's developmental stage. Training can include the owner or can be handled by a trainer, where the dog is trained away from the home and returned with new behaviors. This in-boarding or boot camp–type training involves the dog living with the trainer for a designated period of time,

usually weeks to months, to teach new behaviors or solve problem behaviors. Upon conclusion

of the in-house training, the trainer provides an instructional session with the owner to

demonstrate the new behaviors as well as to train the owner to use the proper cues.

The dog-training industry is geared toward teaching owners to communicate with their

dogs and teaching dogs to understand what is expected of them.

> Training pet dog behavior is for two general purposes—"do" and "don't: First is
> training basic manners, or "do"—to perform desired behaviors on cue such as
> "sit," "down," "come," "stay," and walk politely on leash. The other purpose of
> pet dog training is "don't do,"—don't jump, pull on leash, run away, take candy
> from the baby and the like. (Association of Professional Dog Trainers [APDT],
> 2013)

Animal learning is defined as the alteration of behavior as a result of individual experience

(APDT, 2013). The dog-training industry is important to the dogs themselves, as more dogs are

euthanized every year because of behavior problems than for any other reason. Chewing,

digging, urinating and defecating in the house, jumping up, nipping—all of these behaviors are

solvable and manageable with good, consistent training (American Society for the Prevention of

Cruelty to Animals, 2013). There are many approaches to dog training; positive methods are

based on rewarding good behavior to help build confidence, trust, and understanding between

dog and owner. Chapter 2 will further discuss dog training, certifications, and professional

associations as part of the literature review.

While choosing an organization to explore for this study, I was able to seriously consider

four options of small business owner–operated pet dog-training companies. The first was a

company with an 11,000 square foot, climate-controlled facility in Virginia offering a range of

services from behavioral training, day care, and a fitness and wellness center. The center,

equipped with padded sports rubber flooring, also includes a warm water hydrotherapy pool, a

Jog A Dog treadmill designed specifically for dogs, and a self-serve dog wash. The owner-operator is a certified professional DOG TRAINER (CPDT-KA) and, although not necessary for success, holds a B.S. degree that served as a pillar and foundational platform for gained experience. She has enjoyed a long professional career in dog training, behavior modification, and general pet care spanning nearly 30 years and works closely with her staff to teach dog obedience and sports classes using positive training methods.

The second organization, also in Virginia, was established in 1993 to provide counseling and training for dogs and owners. Programs focus on teaching manners using humane, dog-friendly training methods. The company does not own its facilities; it has a unique contractual agreement with a dog day care business to offer complementary but not competing services. The owner-operator is a certified professional dog trainer (CPDT-KA) and also holds a B.S. degree.

The next organization considered for this study was a small dog-training and pet care company in northern Virginia operating from a home office. Services include midday walks, overnight pet care, and training. Group training classes are held at local veterinarians' offices, and private lessons typically take place at the clients' home. The owner-operator is a certified professional dog trainer (CPDT-KA) and holds both B.S. and M.S. degrees. She has more than 20 years in the dog-training and pet care business and has owned and sold previous dog-training and walking companies before starting her current company in 2000. The organization I ultimately chose for the study was Hancock K-9, as described in the next section.

Small Business Owner and Organizational Profile

Hancock K-9 (pseudonym) is a professional dog-training and behavior business located in Ohio. The small owner-operated business was founded in the early 1990s by entrepreneurs Dr. James Beemer and his wife Dr. Eileen Beemer (pseudonyms). Hancock K-9's business is built on the philosophy that learning happens through the development of the human-canine bond, and

services focus on building a positive relationship and using a clearly understood model. Approximately half of the services conducted at Hancock K-9 are performed on an individual basis and scheduled by appointment, where a certified trainer can become acquainted with each dog and handler as a team. This approach permits assistance with behavior development and problem solving for each client's specific circumstances and provides an overview of the organization's specific model for foundation building used by all trainers in all classes and private consultations. After completion of intake and private evaluation, the trainer discusses with the client which group settings and skill-building exercises would best fit for further development. Because the organization focuses on behavior rather than just training programs, they work with many dogs referred because of problems, especially aggression. Training programs include puppies, young dogs to adolescence, adult dogs, and dogs of all ages that will compete in dog shows, trials, and sports. The groups provide multiple levels of agility (dog sports) classes because it helps dogs gain confidence and is an enjoyable activity that keeps clients engaged with their dogs.

Hancock K-9 also offers a range of services including behavior evaluations, private lessons, small-group sessions, therapy dog certification preparation programs, and specialty groups for tracking, reactive dogs, behavior tune-up, and confidence building, The company believes relationship building requires the development of a clear structure for living based on verbal, nonverbal, and symbolic cues that communicate to dogs. Dr. James Beemer stated, "Through clear cues we let our dogs know what we require to reward them with things they want from us . . . food, love, affection, fun, care, and other things that dogs like and which serve as positive reinforcers" (J. Beemer, personal communication, September 2013). Representative topics for training and behavior programs include

- building a canine lifestyle,

- fundamentals of K-9 play,

- house training and supervision,

- socialization and habituation,

- use of symbolism and ritual,

- managing dog bite situations,

- meeting and greeting strangers,

- genetics and expectations,

- equipment types and uses,

- handling and inspecting dogs,

- basic food and nutrition,

- problem-solving strategies,

- understanding training options,

- elementary grooming and care,

- basic commands and cues, and

- confidence improvement.

Private Sessions, Group Classes, Training Facility, and Retail Space

Hancock K-9 offers approximately 15 to 30 private sessions and 12 group classes per month. They offer rate reductions for rescue dogs, for the same dog taking two or more classes per cycle, or for a second dog from the same family. Rates vary according to the age of the dog, with owners paying less for younger dogs to encourage an early start to training. Class rates are higher for advanced level classes or those that require complex circumstances. For example, the

class size for aggressive dogs is reduced because it requires a higher level of adherence to safety standards per owner-dog team, making the class more expensive.

The Hancock K-9 training facility is composed of a 1,900 square foot building constructed by the owners and valued at between $50,000 and $75,000. The space has individual retractable compartments for each owner-dog team and was specially designed for maximum training and safety concerns. The facility can even accommodate aggressive and problematic dogs because of the detailed layout and careful design of the space. Located on the owner's property, the building is personalized with professionally mounted pictures of the owners' dogs, past and present. The facility also houses retail goods including a full range of equipment and training aides such as leashes, collars, muzzles, calming vests, training treats, herbal supplements, books, and CDs of music to comfort canines. Hancock K-9 plans carefully to maintain the right balance of inventory needed to serve clients while not using an overabundance of storage space or laying out large sums of capital. The space includes places for dog and office supplies, a desk, computer, sink, and agility equipment. In addition, there is a variety of types and pieces of equipment that can be stored in the adjoining building or moved in and out for use through large doors. The space is outfitted with both air conditioning and heating units. The main entrance for owners and dogs features a double secure system composed of two individual doors that each dog and owner team must navigate to enter and exit the building. This double-barrier system helps to prevent dogs from escaping. The parking lot is ample for multiple people to park while participating in group lessons and includes a dog potty area.

Staff

The business employs two full-time workers—owners and husband and wife team, Dr. James Beemer and Dr. Eileen Beemer. Mark Beemer, their son, was involved in starting the

business and now serves as vice president of a large canine specialty equipment builder. Approximately three additional part-time certified trainers work at the facility. All trainers are certified by the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT) and some additionally by the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants and other additional certifying organizations. Trainers are compensated based on a mutually agreed upon percentage of the fee charged for a given service. For example, 50% of the fee for a puppy consultation goes to the trainer. Trainers each have their own business listed as a limited liability corporation (LLC). This hybrid type of legal business structure provides the limited liability features of a corporation and the tax efficiencies and operational flexibility of a partnership (SBA, 2013). Dr. James Beemer requires each trainer to have liability insurance through their company to work with Hancock K-9. Furthermore, trainer contracts are prepared in accordance with Internal Revenue Service guidelines and include liability insurance forms. The compensation process necessitates that trainers submit invoices for services performed, and payments from Hancock K-9 to their LLCs are made monthly. State taxes are filed every 6 months, and the required IRS forms are sent to those companies each year for income tax purposes. At the end of the year, Hancock K-9 sends the required tax forms to each contracted trainer, stating the amount he or she has been compensated during the prior year.

Trainers participate in setting the agenda of courses they wish to teach. They are free to turn down the opportunity to teach any course offered. Trainers suggest classes to be added to the monthly agenda and participate in a voluntary monthly meeting where issues of mutual interest including client engagement, course delivery, new techniques, and issues are discussed. Each trainer signs a contract with Hancock K-9 using their individual business as a contract vehicle for services to be rendered, fees to be paid, and schedules for courses and payments.

Either party may dissolve the contract with 30 days' notice or by mutual agreement. As of this writing, it is estimated that a trainer working full-time could earn $30,000 per year. Most trainers choose to work part-time and may typically make $8,000 per year or more, depending on the services they choose to render. It is important to remember that this organization operates in mid-America, and the costs of living and earning for trainers in these states are lower than in coastal states. In eastern, western, and some southern states, both costs would be significantly higher. The Ohio city close to Hancock K-9 was named as one of the lowest cost-of-living communities in the country.

Owner-Operator, Entrepreneur

Dr. James Beemer is recognized as a world-class dog trainer and also holds five earned college degrees including a doctorate in education and research (Ed.D.) and a master's degree in counseling, which includes a background in psychology and behavior theory. Dr. Beemer earned his professional dog trainer certification under the auspices of the Ohio Board of Proprietary Schools. This intensive certification program included laboratory experience, classroom lectures, guest speakers, field visits (i.e., Guide Dogs for the Blind), written and oral examinations, and evaluation of training methods using both videotape and instructor observation. The curriculum also included advanced obedience, assistance dog training, tracking, and protection training. Dr. Beemer is also certified as an Animal Behavior Consultant, Canine Division, by the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants. This organization has divisions that specialize in most pet animals. These certification programs focus on topics such as ethics, organization, legal issues of training, client relations, kennel and training facility operations, health and nutrition, breed origin and purpose, evaluation processes, behavior modification and shaping, research, and problem solving.

Dr. Beemer has taught at the university level, has been recognized as a distinguished graduate of Bowling Green State University, has been included in seven *Who's Who* directories, and, with his wife, Eileen, has been recognized as "business professional of the year" by a local service organization. For more than 45 years, Dr. Beemer has raised and trained German shepherds and has owned spaniels, retrievers, terriers, chows, shelties, beagles, and cross-breeds of all varieties. Both Drs. Beemer have been lifelong learners who have integrated their ability to absorb new methods and practices into their successful entrepreneurial establishment. Furthermore, they implore the use of clear goals and model based on leadership principles in every aspect of their business and personal lives (Appendix A).

Entrepreneurial and Organizational Learning

Hancock K-9's economic success is not atypical in its dependence on continuous learning. Small businesses have a critical impact on the U.S. economy (SBA, 2013). Thus, it is essential for small business owners, including those of pet dog companies, to continually learn how to best operationalize business and become adept entrepreneurial and organizational learners. Entrepreneurial learning relates to the entrepreneur's development of new interpretations through a process of seeking and recognizing opportunities and to the way the business is managed and organized (Rae & Carswell, 2001). Deakins and Freel (1998) proposed that entrepreneurial learning is seldom planned but is the result of a set of reactions to critical events, in which one learns to process information, adjust strategies, and make decisions. Neophyte entrepreneurs learn "by finding out of the best way to reach a desired result or a correct solution by trying out one or more ways or means and by noting and eliminating errors or causes of failure. Cope and Watts (2000) suggested that critical events, or even critical "periods," are especially conducive to the development of higher-level skills needed for both entrepreneurial and organizational learning.

At the core of learning organization theory is the transformation of information into knowledge (Senge, 1990) with an emphasis on the accumulation of tacit knowledge through routine processes of learning by doing, learning by using, and learning by interacting (Diez & Kiese, 2009). Learning in organizations is important in a knowledge economy and usually involves different ways of perceiving, thinking, and behaving (Argyris & Schön, 1996). Levitt and March (1988) explained learning in organizations as the process of encoding inferences from history into routines. These routines guide behavior and become what March (1991) referred to as an "organizational code" and helps to lay the foundation for positive organizational changes. Marquardt (2002) posited that change in the organization system is action whereas change in the individual is learning. Furthermore, the significance of a learner's own experience in the learning process is a distinguishing factor of the ELT—a multifaceted archetype of adult learning theory. Business owners must learn individual and organizational knowledge if they are to understand entrepreneurial know-how.

ELT, Learning Styles, and Kolb

D. A. Kolb's (1984) ELT explored learning as an expression of experiences rather than a purely didactic exercise and captured defining elements from the works of such eminent scholars as Dewey (1938), Lewin (1951), Piaget (1970), James (1907), Jung (1971), Freire (1970), and Rogers (1961). Later, Kolb offered six defining propositions in ELT and continued to expand the philosophy of experiential education and its proliferation to other domains.

Kolb's ELT separated itself from other theories (rationalist and cognitive) by establishing the central tendency of learning as experiential in nature, that is, experiencing learning as a series of processes that bring the abstract world into focus by encountering it and interacting with it as active participants. According to D. A. Kolb (1984), rationalist and cognitive theories traditionally focused on learning as an acquisition, manipulation, and recall of abstract symbols

and from behavioral learning theories that rebuff the role of consciousness and subjective experience in the learning process. ELT is a holistic, integrative perspective that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior. Furthermore, ELT puts emphasis on the process of learning and not the behavioral outcomes associated with learning. The key concept is that learning is viewed as a process by which an individual accumulates knowledge. D. A. Kolb's (2005) ELT captured some of these defining elements that were eventually manifested in his ideologies.

Kolb Model

Learning, as viewed by D. A. Kolb (2005), "is not a bank where teachers deposit information and the pupils hold the information until they are asked to return it back" (p. 22). D. A. Kolb (1984) devised a theoretical model to outline the fundamental underpinnings of experiential learning. Kolb's model is laid out as an orthogonal relationship of ideas that intersect to create learning. ELT rests on two planes representing the broad canvas of learning, which, according to Kolb, are necessary for the experiential learning process. ELT postulates that learners, if they are to be effective, need four different kinds of abilities: (a) Concrete Experience (CE), (b) Reflective Observation (RO), (c) Abstract Conceptualization (AC). and (d) Active Experimentation (AE) These four critical elements are plotted in the orthogonal relation as shown in Figure 1.1 and make up Kolb's ELT model.
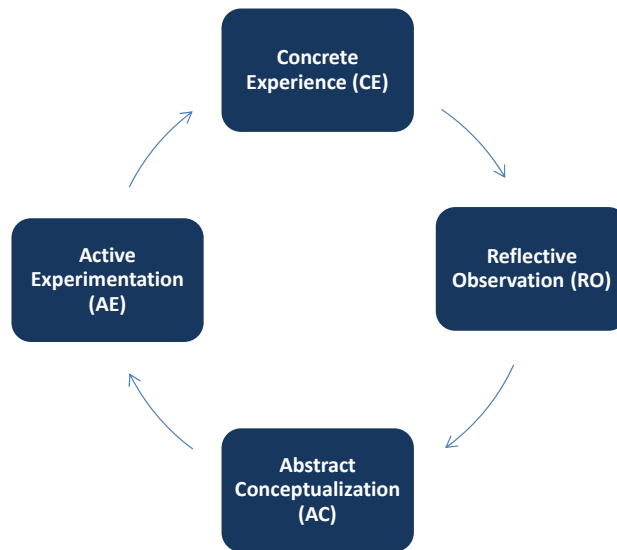
Figure 1.1. David Kolb's experiential learning model (ELM).

The learning process outlined in Figure 1 illustrates the engagement a learner enters into in the experiential learning paradigm. Learners involve themselves fully into new experiences (CE) and are able to reflect and observe their experiences (RO). Learners then create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories (AC) and use these theories to make decisions and solve problems (AE). There are two primary dimensions, or poles, to learning in this model. On one end is the CE and AC continuum, whereas the other pole is categorized by the RO and AE continuum (D. A. Kolb, 1984). I will expand more on Kolb, ELT, and learning style in Chapter 2.

Learning Style Foundations

Keefe (1979) defined individual learning style as

> a consistent way of responding to and using stimuli in the context of learning and as the composite of characteristic cognitive, affective, and physiological factors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how a learner perceives, interacts with, and responds to the learning environment. (p. 64)

Learning styles act as conditions under which an individual is most likely to learn, and thus learning styles are not really concerned with what learners learn but rather how they prefer to

learn (Stewart & Felicetti, 1992). Learning preferences may help entrepreneurs understand how their preferred learning style informs problem solving, teamwork, handling conflict, and communication and help them to develop their learning styles to fit their roles and determine team dynamics to strengthen their overall learning (Hay Group, 2013). Smith (1982) discussed that learning style is based on the concept of need and described it as a way of thinking and problem solving. He continued by saying that learning styles influence the structure of information processing as well as feelings and behaviors toward learning situations and that they involve individual preferences, dispositions, and tendencies.

D. A. Kolb (1984) discussed that learning, by nature, creates tension and is a conflict-filled process; therefore, in the process of learning, one moves in varying degrees from actor to observer, from specific involvement to general analytic detachment. "To learn is not the special province of a single specialized realm of human functioning, such as cognition or perception. Learning involves the integrated functioning of the total organism—thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaving" (D. A. Kolb, 1984, p. 31). Kolb offered his Learning Style Inventory as an instrument to help learners or, in the case of this study, a small business owner entrepreneur to better understand how learning style may affect business operations.

Kolb Learning Style Inventory

The Kolb Learning Style Inventory (LSI), based on Kolb's ETL concept, was designed to serve as a stimulus for an individual to interpret and reflect on learning preferences and their application in different settings. In the model, learning can be described as a cycle made up of four basic processes, with the LSI moving through those processes to provide a better understanding of how learning occurs (Hay Group, 2013). Understanding how people learn can help to target training and development efforts, motivate teams, and make optimum use of

collective time, resources, and capabilities. As seen in Figure 1.3, LSI recognizes individual

learning preferences while encouraging individuals to expand their learning strengths.
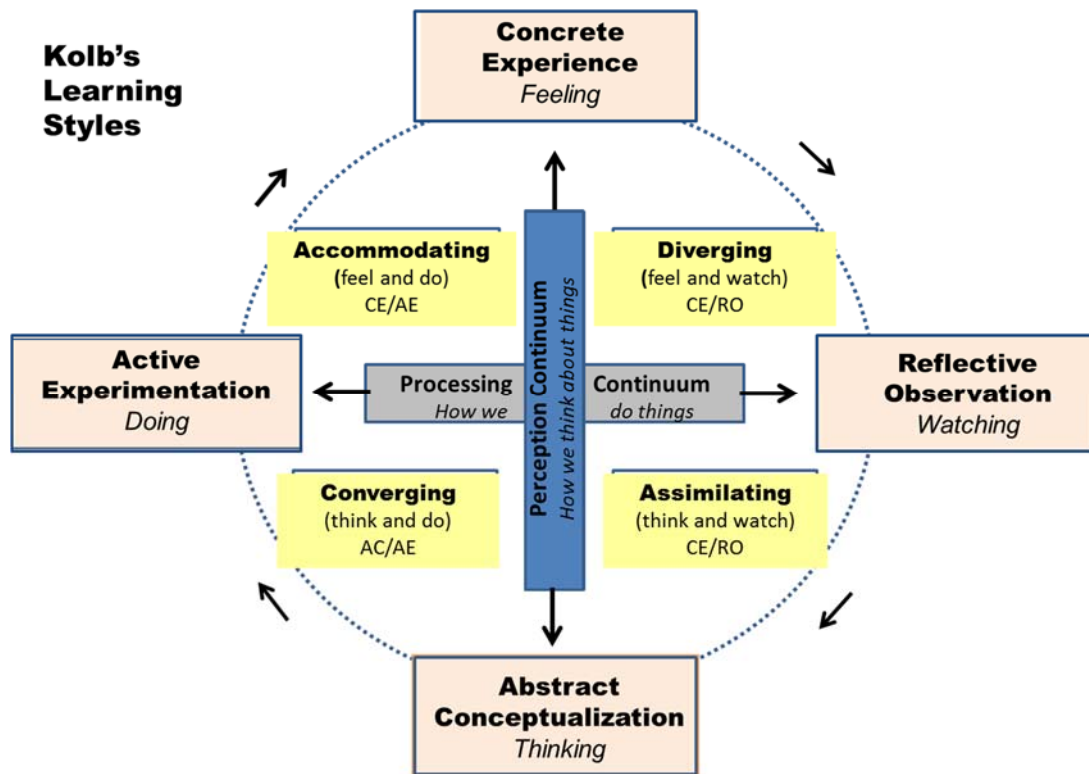
Figure 1.2. David Kolb's experiential learning model on which the Learning Style Inventory is based.

Problem Statement

Small businesses continue to contribute significantly to the U.S. economy, and the

numbers on consumer spending in the pet dog industry indicate that Americans have a

willingness to devote money to dog ownership and training. It may be beneficial for pet dog-

training business owners or entrepreneurs to learn to decode their processes to better understand

operations. This study explored learning style as it relates to one business owner's perceptions of

how he operates his business. By using the Kolb LSI along with semi-structured interviews and

narrative inquiry research methods based on preferred learning style, I queried the business

owner to determine if and how his learning style influences decision making in the running of his small business. There are many ways in which entrepreneurs make decisions; I chose the construct of learning style to better illuminate how decisions may affect the organizational health of business operations in a representative company.

Research Question

How does the entrepreneur's preferred learning style inform the way(s) he operates his dog training small business day-to-day?

Method

I used narrative inquiry research methods as a framework for qualitative study. Narrative inquiry, or narrative analysis, emerged as a discipline from within the broader field of qualitative research in the early 20th century (Riessman, 1993). Narrative inquiry uses field texts, such as stories, autobiography, journals, field notes, letters, conversations, interviews, family stories, photos (and other artifacts), and life experience, as the units of analysis to research and understand the way people create meaning in their lives as narratives (Riessman, 1993). The unit of analysis for this research study is Dr. James "Jim" Beemer and his small business, Hancock K-9. I selected Dr. Beemer and his company based chiefly on his long record of experience along with his organizational and personal success. If one is to intensely study such a venture, understanding aspects of how Dr. Beemer does what he does may help to gain footing in a similar business.

The study began with an introductory interview to discuss the entrepreneur's entry into business. Immediately after the interview, I administered the Kolb LSI to determine Dr. Beemer's preferred learning style and held a debriefing session to discuss the instrument results. Next was a series of semi-structured interview questions to further explore how the entrepreneur's preferred learning style may drive Hancock K-9 operations. Dr. Beemer and I

worked together as co-researchers in a supportive manner to better understand the findings. This approach, also known as cooperative inquiry, involves two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it, using a series of cycles as they move between the experience and reflecting together on it (Heron, 1996). I transcribed the interviews, had him read the transcripts, and had a discussion to gain more input and further augmentation of his story. Lastly, I analyzed the transcripts to prepare themes based on Kolb's learning styles and joined with Dr. Beemer again to share the themes and ask for better understanding and clarification of the narrative.

My background as a researcher includes years of practice in human resources, talent development, and organizational diagnosis and change for two Fortune 500 corporations, which has resulted in deep interviewing and consulting experience. I am also near the certification requirements to be a certified professional dog trainer (CPDT-KA) through the American Association of Pet Dog Trainers and have been training dogs professionally since 2011. These skills coupled with the cooperative research approach served as means of enablement, allowing me to have comprehensive conversations with Dr. Beemer and derive the deepest possible meaning of his experience. These methods are defined further and explained in greater detail in Chapter 3, "Methods."

Summary

This qualitative study explored an entrepreneur's preferred learning style in relation to the operation of his small business. I used a narrative inquiry research framework with Kolb's LSI preferences to explore how, if at all, the co-researcher's preferred learning style informs the way the business owner makes decisions about daily operations. Chapter 2, "Literature Review," reviews the critical points of current knowledge including substantive findings as well as

theoretical and methodological contributions in the literature to support this study. Chapter 3,

"Methods," describes my systematic research approaches and steps to the qualitative study

investigation. Chapter 4, "Results," describes the results of this exploration and provides

evidence in support of the thesis. Chapter 5, "Conclusions, Discussions, and Suggestions for

Further Research," describes and summarizes the research findings from Chapter 4. Chapter 5

offers recommendations for future research based on the study results.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explored an entrepreneur's perception of how his preferred learning style informs the operation of small business, using the D. A. Kolb (1984) LSI (Learning Style Inventory) as a lens to focus understanding of his approaches and methods, specifically the way(s) he operates his small business and makes day-to-day business decisions. This chapter includes a review of relevant scholarly literature beginning with small business and the economy as a way to situate entrepreneurship and the pet dog industry. The review includes a discussion of learning style, the theories involved with its inception, and information related to its criticisms and concludes with a summary before turning to Chapter 3.

Small Business and the Economy

Small businesses are defined by the SBA (2013) as having fewer than 500 employees. Collectively, they have a significant impact on the United States economy, representing 99.7% of all employer firms and employing 49.1% of the private labor force (SBA, 2013). There were 27.8 million small businesses in the United States in 2010 (SBA, 2013). The nation's small businesses employed 55.0 million workers in 2010, with most of the employment coming from firms with 20 to 499 employees (SBA, 2013).

Although the overall employment situation from 2007 to 2010 was weak, and small businesses in the United States had a net job loss, the national unemployment rate in 2010 to 2011 decreased by 0.7%. In 2011, the number of opening establishments was higher than closing establishments, and the net employment change from this turnover was positive (SBA, 2013). Self-employment also improved over the past decade, and minority self-employment fared the best compared with other demographic groups (SBA, 2013). Like Hancock K-9 (the organization

that is the focus of this study), most of the country's small businesses are very small, as 79.4% of all businesses have no employees, and most employers have fewer than 20 employees.

Entrepreneur and Entrepreneurship

Since the 1700s, efforts have been made to formulate a clearer understanding of the role of the entrepreneur and define its meaning more precisely. According to Merriam-Webster, the word *entrepreneur* originates from the Old French word *entreprendre,* meaning "to undertake" (more at enterprise), and is defined as "one who organizes, manages and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise" ("Entrepreneur," Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines an entrepreneur as "a person who organizes and operates a business or businesses, taking on greater than normal financial risks" ("Entrepreneur," OED, n.d.).

Much of the entrepreneurial literature is devoted to the entrepreneurs' inclination and ability to innovate. One reason that entrepreneurship may be difficult to define is the nature of change in the meaning. The irony of the models and research presented is that they highlight the difficulty in defining "entrepreneurship" due to its inherently evolving nature (Pribadi, 2005). Table 2.1. presents an array of assembled definitions from scholars who have made contributions to the entrepreneurial body of knowledge.

Table 2.1. *Entrepreneur/Entrepreneurship Definition Summary Descriptions*

Author(s)	Year	Summary Description of *Entrepreneur/Entrepreneurship*
Cantillon (In Higgs)	1755/1964	Entrepreneurs buy at a certain price to sell again at an uncertain price, with the difference being their profit or loss; entrepreneur as one who bears the burdens of decision making under uncertainty
Schumpeter	1934	The ability to innovate as the single constitutive entrepreneurial function
Schumpeter, Machlup, & Taussig	1936	Entrepreneur as combining resources in new ways
Kirzner	1982	Entrepreneur is the one who bring(s) different parts of the market into coordination with each other
Drucker	1985	The entrepreneur shifts economic resources out of an area of lower productivity and into an area of higher productivity and greater yield
Stevenson	1985	Entrepreneurship is the pursuit of opportunity beyond resources controlled
Hébert & Link	1988	Entrepreneur is someone who specializes in taking responsibility for and making judgmental decisions that affect the location, form, and use of goods, resources, or institutions
Gartner	1985	The term *entrepreneur* is often applied to the founder of a new business or to a person who started a new business
Gartner	1990	Entrepreneurship has eight principal themes: entrepreneur, innovation, organization creation, creating value, profit/nonprofit, growth, uniqueness, and owner-manager
Stewart & Peterson	1985	Entrepreneurs identify and exploit a market opportunity
Gilmore, Carson, & Cummins	2002	Entrepreneurs organize, manage and assume the risks of a business or enterprise
Shane & Venkataraman	2000	Entrepreneurship is the scholarly examination of how, by whom, and with what effects opportunities to create future goods and services are discovered, evaluated, and exploited
Rumelt	2005	Entrepreneurship as the creation of new businesses
Astebro & Thompson	2008	The entrepreneur is a business jack-of-all-trades with substantive technical savvy and a project manager extraordinaire to also integrate systems in 21st-century commercial complexity
Langlois	2007	Entrepreneurship is about the new—new goods and services, but more generally new economic knowledge—and about how the new enters the economic system
Sitkins	2010	Entrepreneur—one who "assumes the responsibility and the risk for a business operation with the expectation of making a profit"; an entrepreneur is further deemed as "the person who decides on the product, acquires the facilities and brings together the labor force, capital and production material"

There is no single agreed upon definition for the role of entrepreneur; however, a columniation of the literature points toward a definition of the term as one who assumes risk, can deal with ambiguity and change, and is motivated toward growth. Most importantly, the term should be constructed to include the aptitude to innovate as a key characteristic with particular attention to the creation of goods and services and the ability to increase market share. The pet industry is one robust example of a market where entrepreneurial endeavor has been used to create, promote, develop, and innovate businesses and services.

The Pet Dog Industry

Americans spent more than $52 billion on their pets per year in support of the human-animal bond (APPA, 2013; Staats et al., 2008). Within that market, more than 62% of American households own at least one dog and spend more than $1,800 annually for canine-related products and services (APPA, 2013). According to *The Atlantic Magazine* (2013), that is more than Americans spend on coffee and bottled water combined. Entrepreneurs continue to create businesses and services that range from day care to dog walking to vacationing and where there were none before.

Our Money, Our Pets

Billions of $ spent on pets in America, 1994-2012

Year	Billions of $
1994	26
1998	33
2002	38
2004	42
2006	44
2008	46
2010	50
2012	53
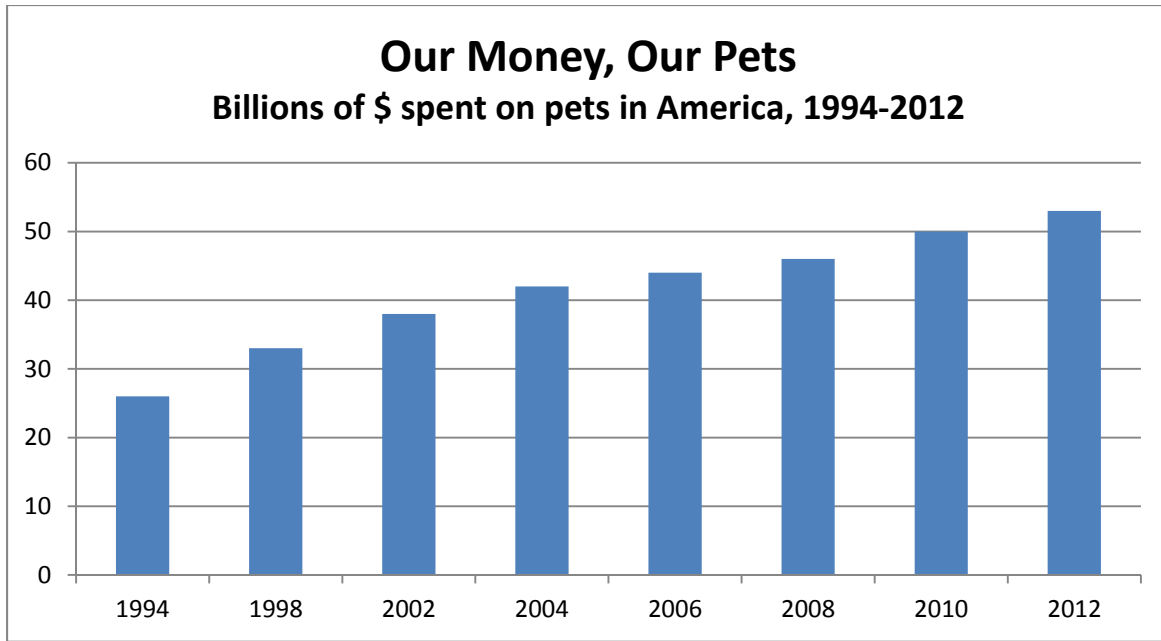
Figure 2.1. Amount of money Americans spent on pets from 1994 to 2012, in billions.

Figure 2.1 shows an increase in spending each year since 1994, culminating in more than $52 billion in 2012 (APPA, 2013). As seen in Figure 2.2, most of the money Americans spent went to food and medicine, and $6.2 billion was spent on grooming and treats, which amounted to more money than Facebook made in advertising revenue the same year (*The Atlantic Magazine*, 2013).

How we Spend on Our Pets
Billions $; 2012

- Animal Purchases, 2.1
- Grooming / Boarding, 4.1
- Vet Care, 13.5
- Food, 20.4
- Over the counter (OTC) medicine/ supplies, 12.5
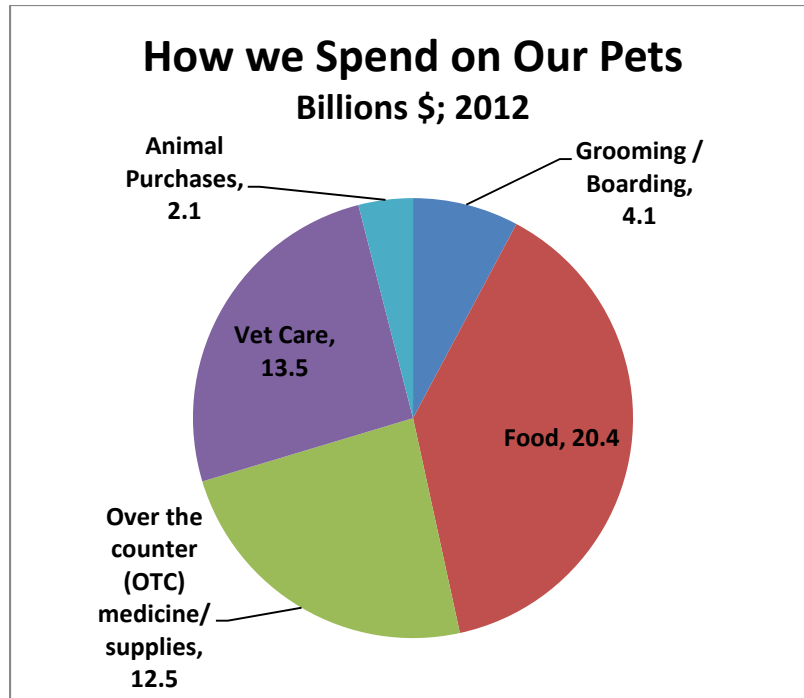
Figure 2.2. American spending on pets by category.

Cottage industries are becoming more popular, as APPA states that nearly 22% of dog owners travel with their dogs, in turn spending money on lodging, air travel, attractions, restaurants, services, and events that include their pet dogs (Knight & Herzog, 2009). Large companies such as Honda have also entered the market by offering vehicle features such as built-in pet beds, pet restraint and seatbelt systems, extendable entrance and exit ramps, and rear ventilation fans and seat warmers. Other pet-friendly features include wipe able rubber floors, easy-to-clean fabric, side doors for comfortable entrance and exit, utility hooks, built-in spill-resistant water and food bowls including more decorative features such as dog-patterned seat cover, and dog-themed exterior emblems (Honda, 2013).

Car companies are not alone in their recognition of the value owners place on traveling with their dogs. Airlines have expanded their services to appeal to pet owners, with most permitting individuals 18 years or older to carry small dogs on board as part of carry-on luggage

(Morphet, 2009). A number of cities worldwide offer pet-friendly attractions and services including off-leash dog parks, dog beaches, dog-friendly restaurants and eateries, dog-friendly shopping plazas, and doggy day care facilities. Owners need not search long before they locate pet stores, veterinarians, pet emergency care centers, groomers, trainers, pet-sitters, and even pet festivals, expos, and events.

Another evolving trend, which reflects the importance of dogs in today's society, is dog-friendly policies in the workplace. In 1999, Pet Sitters International created an annual "Take Your Dog to Work Day" to encourage workplaces to allow owners to work alongside their pets. In 2012, survey results from the APPA (2013) showed that approximately 21% of companies in the United States featured some sort of pet-friendly policy and that among the 3% of owners who take their dogs to work, they did so an average of 17 times each year (APPA, 2013). Surveys of dog owners have shown that pet-friendly policies in the workplace correlate with lower absenteeism rates and increased willingness of employees to work overtime (APPA, 2013). The benefits of canines at work include decreased stress and job strain, increased productivity, improved morale, and increased interpersonal support among employees (APPA, 2013).

As owners continue to establish their dogs as cherished pets, the number of services to support this bond increases. A simple Internet search in most locales will result in numerous dog-walking, overnight, and vacation pet care companies. A brief search in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area of Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia yielded more than 500 pet-related services. Opportunities for owners to include their dog in their everyday life have increased along with owner expectations that their dogs behave properly in those environments. Consumer behavior continues to support growth in the pet industry and dog ownership in particular despite the enormous investments of money and time that it requires (e.g., in training;

Serpell, 1986). Dog-training services may include individual or private and group training sessions and range from the fundamentals of basic obedience to advanced training for complicated behaviors such as agility competitions and shows. Training can include the owner or can be handled by a trainer, where the dog is trained away from the home and returned to the residence with new behaviors. Training typically teaches new behaviors or how to solve problem behaviors. Although there is no shortage of small business ideas and services being created in the pet dog industry, this study focuses on an entrepreneur and his dog-training business, representing one of the most popular segments of the industry.

Honing Dog-Training Skills and Certification

Effective entrepreneurs learn by doing and cultivate both business and technical skills such as certification. Successful entrepreneurs are often thought to have an innate talent that others do not possess, and what looks like genius is often the product of thousands of hours of work (Entrepreneur Media, Inc., 1999). An important way to reach a higher level of experience, learning, and credibility in the pet dog-training industry is through certification. According to the APDT (2013), there is no required certification or licensing to become a professional dog trainer or behavior counselor. Certification, although not mandatory, does, however, imply that a trainer takes his or her profession seriously and is dedicated to continuing professional growth and education for the benefit of both human and canine clients.

Dog-training and behavior certifications and certificates are designed to show that trainers have met a set of standard skills and knowledge in the profession and continue certification through learning (APDT, 2013). According to APDT, the term *certification* is widely used in the field, yet most certifications are in fact certificate programs that do not bear equal significance or rigor (APDT, 2013). Respected organizations in the dog-training industry require professional members to have earned related certification(s) from an approved

organization. Currently, the APDT Board of Directors recognizes seven approved designations from five different organizations. These include the following: CPDT-KA, Certified Professional Dog Trainer–Knowledge Assessed Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers; ACAAB, Associate Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists Animal Behavior Society; CAAB, Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist Animal Behavior Society; CABC, Certified Animal Behavior Consultant International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants; CDBC, Certified Dog Behavior Consultant International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants; and CCAB, Certified Clinical Behavior Consultant International Association for the Study of Animal Behavior (APDT, 2013). The acquisition of new skills and knowledge through certification is important to the role of dog trainer. Interestingly, the body of literature about how we learn or learning style has become an area for further scholarly investigation.

Learning Style

A number of researchers have summarized the learning style literature (Claxton & Murrell, 1987; DeBello, 1990; Hilgersom-Volk, 1987; Pizzo, 1981; Reiff, 1992; Tendy & Geiser, 1997; Toms, 2007). Some of the learning style models they describe are based primarily on theory and others on extensive research.

Levine (2002) defined learning style as the innately natural, cognitive functioning of the brain where learning takes place. This cognitive functioning is the manner in which the brain organizes and brings order to the perceived world (Levine, 2002). Dunn and Griggs (2003) defined learning style as the ability of people to learn and "remember new and difficult information through different perceptual modalities" (p. 4). *Learning style* is a term frequently used interchangeably with *cognitive style* by many scholars (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2004; Flannery, 1993) and more broadly as a distinct dimension of learning

(Bonk & Zhang, 2008; Claxton & Murrell, 1987; James & Blank, 1993; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner (2007); Serrell, 1991; Sternberg & Zhang, 2005). For example, James and Blank (1993) wrote, "We favor learning style over cognitive style because . . . we believe it is a broader term encompassing the entire learning process" (p. 47). In the fields of education, learning, and psychology, learning style appears extensively throughout the literature (Abdulwahed & Nagy, 2009; Vangsnes & Fenn, 2007).

Dr. Maria Martinez Witte and Dr. James Witte have contributed to the learning styles body of knowledge with research in individual learning styles and the assessment of learning. In her 80 adult participant validation study of the relationship of learning styles and mind styles, James Witte studied the Multi-Modal Paired Associates Learning Test III and the Gregorc Style Delineator instruments and determined the instruments measured distinct but minimally related constructs.

Furthermore, Dr. James Witte worked with Dr. Waynne James of the University of South Florida in Tampa and a group of graduate student researching learning style to form the Institute of Learning Styles Research (ILSR) in 1996. The ILSR packaged learning style instrument, created a web presence, developed a conference format for the bi-annual meetings, continued research efforts, and created more publishing and dissemination goals including the accompanying Institute for Learning Styles Research Journal (ILSRJ). The ILSRJ solicits articles on research pertaining to the general topic of learning styles.

Learning style is recognized as one of the elements of learning that is of particular help in understanding learning in both academic and nonacademic settings (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2004). Although no common definition has emerged (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner (2007), learning style has been studied in comparison with other human attributes, including

personality and psychological type (Burris & Garrity, 2008), cognitive style (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner (2007)), and thinking style (Sternberg & Zhang, 2005). The term *learning style* has been aligned with *self-directed learning* (Canipe, 2001), *knowledge acquisition*, and *training modalities* (Buch & Bartley, 2002). "Learning continues throughout the adult lifespan and as adults continue to learn and experience, they develop their own style in which learning is enhanced" (Witte, 1999, p. 2). In more recent literature, learning style has been presented as a more comprehensive concept that included cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social characteristics that combine for different learning advantages in different contexts (MacKeracher, 2004). For the purposes of this study, learning style is defined as the individual differences that facilitate learning based on the learner's behaviors and attitudes in a given situation (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Research in formal education programs has determined that learning styles affect students in areas such as environment, student reinforcement, class structure, and teaching methods (Burris & Garrity, 2008). Garland and Martin (2005) reported that identification of student learning styles facilitated the development of course materials that better engaged students in the learning process. Similarly, Anderson (2007) found an improvement in student response to course material when courses were designed based on the learning styles of students and suggested that students will learn better when their learning style preferences are considered.

Smith (1982) discussed learning style for adults based on the concept of need and inclinations for ways of thinking and solving problems. Learning style influences structure for information processing, feeling and behaving in and toward learning situations, and involves preferences, dispositions, and tendencies. In addition, Smith suggested that the three major

components of style that have an effect on learning are individualized, affective, and environmental.

Findings from the literature review reflect an array of significant research on learning styles in formal education settings, but much less for informal settings and the business context. The research also suggested that developing courses with learning activities that address multiple learning styles should enhance learning outcomes (Burris & Garrity, 2008). Rennie and Johnston (2007) reported that researchers need to be attentive to more than cognitive outcomes, applying a wider range of outcome measures to address the variability of outcomes, "by using measures that see through the eyes of the visitor" (p. 172). In general terms, the literature emphasized the importance of understanding and addressing learning styles in broad terms rather than debating the advantages or disadvantages of one learning style over another.

Criticisms of Learning Style

Divided views on learning style and preferences exist in the literature, and the research base that supports the identification and use of learning style has been criticized. Coffield, Moseley, Hall, and Ecclestone (2004) pointed out that learning style classification is a frequently debated theme in the field of learning styles. Many learning style theorists argued that learning styles are fixed traits, a theory that might lead to labeling individuals, promoting the matching concept of pairing teaching styles to learning styles. Others state that awareness of fixed traits can allow students to develop their weaker preferences to learn in a well-rounded manner. Felder and Brent (2005) cautioned that some controversies abound over the concept of learning styles and the instruments used to measure learning style preferences.

Hengstler and O'Neill (2002) summarized other concerns and points out that most of the research has been done by leaning style advocates, which might create some conflict of interest and also criticized the lack of validation with strong, scientifically based methods. Reiff (1992)

summarized deficiencies in modality research, in particular, but generalized them to learning style. There are, then, numerous other learning style models in the literature that thereby lend support to the conception of style. Using these models, researchers have examined style from a number of perspectives. Unresolved questions, however, involve the use of matching, the ability of teachers to fully assess student style, and the value of using assessment instruments. Moreover, debate continues over the quality of the research base itself.

Furthermore, researchers maintain that the term *learning style* is vague—that learning style models have no theoretical basis and that learning style inventories lack validity and reliability because they are self-assessments that rely on students' honest responses about themselves (Kopcha & Sullivan, 2008; Santo, 2001; Stellwagen, 2001). Santo (2001) asserted that although learning preferences exist, their influence on learning is not conclusively established. Similarly, Stellwagen (2001) arrived at the conclusion that "clearly, teachers who manage their classrooms around learning style instructions are engaging in practice of debatable value" (p. 267). He supported this claim by drawing attention to issues such as questionable reliability and validity of some learning style inventories and the basic misunderstandings about the theoretical basics and use of learning style instructions.

Regardless of the criticism, the literature tends to show that individuals have preferred ways of receiving and processing new information. Many of the critics wrongly assume that the purpose of learning styles is to develop instructions that address every individual learning preference (Stellwagen, 2001). Although this is not always practical, it is necessary to provide a balanced learning environment that would enable each learner to interact meaningfully with the learning content regardless of his or her learning style preference.

Selecting a Learning Style Instrument

The ProQuest Dissertation and Thesis Database cites more than 200 research studies that incorporate learning style inventories. Literature concerning research about the application of learning style theory tends to be multifaceted because of the variety of learning style assessment instruments, the broad range of theory application in terms of the type of learning, the individual learners, environmental circumstances, curriculum, and cultural contexts. Practitioners and researchers today use multiple learning style instruments to access and understand more about the learning styles and to design successful learning experiences. Smith provided a survey of assessed learning instruments as early as 1982, citing name, what the instrument assesses, format, and sources for further information. Below is an adaptation of Smith's survey.

Table 2.2.

Some Learning Style Inventories' Cognitive Aspects of Learning Style

Instrument Name	Purpose	Format
Embedded Figures Test	Field dependence/independence (perceiving and getting meaning)	A booklet with designs hidden in the marble
Kolb's Learning Style Inventory	How an individual adapts or learns from experience	Rank ordering the words in four-word sets
Conceptual Styles Test	Analytical versus relational (thinking and grouping things)	Select two pictures from sets of three
Matching Familiar Figures Test	Reflectivity versus impulsivity	Picture sets of objects, only one of which is identical to the standard
Transaction Ability Inventory	Natural means of transacting with environments	Rank ordering words in four-word sets describing oneself
Your Style of Learning and Thinking–Form C	Tendency to emphasize left or right side of brain (or mixed) when thinking or learning	Multi-item forced-choice questionnaire
Broad-gauged inventories		
Canfield Learning Styles Inventory (CLS)	Preferences for structure, environment, climate, sensory modalities, expectations	Forced ranking of choices in multiple items
Productivity Environmental Preference Survey (PEPS), children's version	How adults prefer to function, learn, concentrate, and perform in occupational or educational tasks	Reaction to items on a Likert-type scale
Grasha-Riechmann Student Learning Styles Questionnaire	Preferred styles: competitive, collaborative, avoidant, participant, dependent, independent	Reaction to items on a Likert-type scale
Excursion Styles Inventory	Tendency to learn and enter into things with imagination/enthusiasm, or logic/practicality	Self-rating on pairs of opposing words
Miscellaneous inventories		
Self-Directed Readiness Scale	Extent of capability for exercising autonomy when learning	Self-report questionnaire with Likert-type items
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator	Preferences for thinking, feeling, perceiving, intuiting, sensing, judging together with extroversion versus introversion	Forced-choice questionnaire with multiple items
Learning Preference Inventory (Adult Basic Education)	Students' preferences when learning tasks, skills, and knowledge	Pictures of learning situations and a set of related questions
IRO-B	Three characteristics of interpersonal relations—behavior expressed toward, and wanted from, others—inclusion, control, affection	Forced-choice questionnaire with multiple items
Learning Activities Questionnaire (Vocational Education)	Preferences for concrete versus symbolic and structured versus unstructured instruction	Self-assessment on Likert-type items
Life Styles Inventory	Twelve basic styles of behavior toward the world	Self-assessment through forced choice
Adaptive Style Inventory	The way one characteristically adapts to different situations—toward concrete experience or reflective observation, abstract conceptualization or active experimentation	Self-description test with items; sets of paired statements requiring a choice to go with each item

Smith (1982, p. 168).

Later in 2004, Coffield, Moseley, Hall, and Ecclestone created a table of some of the more popular learning style instruments.

Table 2.3

Thirteen Influential Learning Style Instruments

Thirteen Influential Learning Style Instruments		
Instrument	**Full Name of Instrument**	**Associated Researchers**
CSI	Cognitive Style Indicator	Allinson and Hayes (year)
MSP	Motivational Style Profile	Apter
PEPS	Productivity Environmental Preference Survey	Dunn and Dunn
ASSIST	Approaches and Study Skills Inventory for Students	Entwistle
GSD	Gregorc's Style Delineator	Gregorc
HBDI	Hermann Brain Dominance Instrument	Hermann
LSQ	Learning Style Questionnaire	Honey and Mumford
LSP	Learning Style Profiler	Jackson
LSI	Learning Style Inventory	Kolb
MBTI	Myers-Briggs Type Indicator	Myers-Briggs
CSA	Cognitive Styles Analysis	Riding
TSI	Thinking Style Inventory	Sternberg
ILS	Inventory of Learning Styles	Vermunt

Note. Modified from Coffield, Moseley, Hall, and Ecclestone (2004).

There are numerous learning style models in the literature; some deal with cognitive factors, others deal with affective, environmental, and psychological factors. In general, however, almost all leaning style models focus on individuals rather than groups (Dunn, 1990) and are concerned with the process of learning rather than the content. Primary areas of debate include the degree to which students are able to flex their style, whether or not a student's natural

style should be matched, whether or not teachers can accurately assess student style, and the use and quality of assessment instruments (DeBello, 1990).

For the purpose of this study, I analyzed four instruments to determine which was most applicable to my research: Honey and Mumford's Learning Style Model, Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator, Felder Soloman Index, and Kolb's LSI.

Honey and Mumford's Learning Styles Model

Honey and Mumford (1989) based their learning styles model on the ELT of Kolb (Herasymowych & Senko, 2006). Honey and Mumford are known for action learning and learning styles research in the United Kingdom, and their views are aligned with D. A. Kolb's (1984) in that learning is seen as continuous and occurring in a spiral nature that affects people to create new ways of thinking, knowing, and learning as they acquire new knowledge. The four learning styles identified by Honey and Mumford—activist, reflector, theorist, and pragmatist— were derived directly from Kolb's learning styles. The activist style corresponded to Kolb's concrete experience stage, the reflector style corresponded to Kolb's reflective observation stage, the theorist style corresponded to Kolb's abstract conceptualization stage, and the pragmatist style corresponded to Kolb's active experimentation stage (Herasymowych & Senko, 2006).
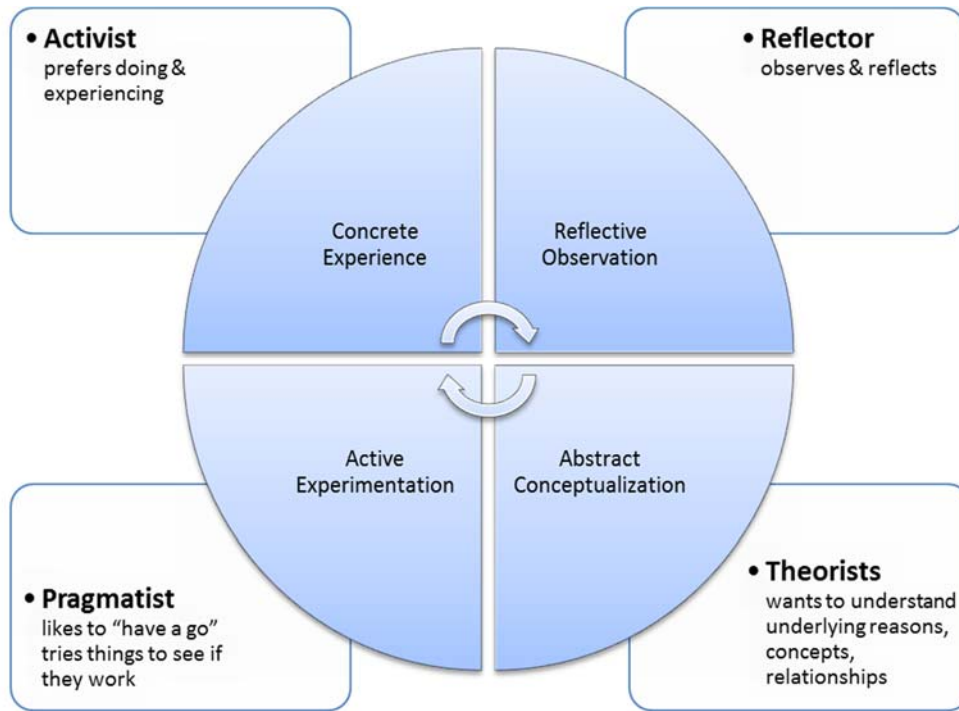
Figure 2.3. Honey and Mumford (1989): Typology of learners.

Honey and Mumford (1989) defined activists as open-minded learners who are enthusiastic about acquiring new knowledge. They are flexible and open to diverse perspectives (Herasymowych & Senko, 2006). They argued that activists thrive on the challenge of new experiences and act without considering consequences, enjoy attention, and seek to be in the center of activities.

Honey and Mumford (1989) described reflectors as learners who observe experiences from many different perspectives. Reflective learners are methodical and systematic (Herasymowych & Senko, 2006). Honey and Mumford noted that reflectors emphasize the importance of collecting data, firsthand and from others, and prefer to think about that data thoroughly before coming to conclusions.

According to Honey and Mumford (1989), the learner is an adapted and integrated observer able to covert complex but logically sound theories. These researchers found that

theorists help people to describe underlying causes to explain why something is or is not effective. Honey and Mumford noted that theorists are perfectionists who like to analyze and synthesize information. Theorists' approach to problems is consistently logical.

Pragmatists, as described by Honey and Mumford (1989), enjoy experimenting with theories and techniques to determine their practicality. They like to work quickly and act confidently on ideas before putting them into practice. They suggested that learners with a pragmatist learning style are willing to practice new concepts and are open to situations that lead to improvement.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI; Myers-Briggs, 1962) was based on the work of Carl Jung, a pioneer in the field of analytical psychology. Jung (1921) suggested that people can be categorized into specific personality types based on how a person relates to the world around them. Jung stated that the four functions of the mind are divided into two opposing functions: Thinking or Feeling, and Sensation or Intuition. These functions are described as opposites to each other: Thinking as opposed to Feeling, Sensing as opposed to Intuition, and Introversion as opposed to Extraversion (Jung, 1921/1971).

Building upon Jung's work, the MBTI assessment was developed by Katharine C. Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs-Myers during World War II to assist in fitting a person to a job and vice versa (Quenk, 2009). The MBTI technique proved to be useful during World War II and has been popular ever since; more than two million MBTI questionnaires were administered during 2006 (Rushton & Walker, 2007). The MBTI classifies individuals by four distinct personality dimensions: Introversion-Extraversion (I-E), Sensing-Intuitive (S-N), Thinking-Feeling (T-F), and Judging-Perceiving (J-P). Strongly based in Jungian typology, the MBTI is

widely used around the world. According to Consulting Psychologists Press, the owner of the MBTI, the test is particularly popular in the business community, where 89% of the Fortune 100 firms use the test in some form. There is a large body of empirical work that supports the use of the MBTI in a variety of psychological uses in nonclinical settings (Hammer & Kummerow, 1996; Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 1998).

MBTI Preferences

preference for the outer world and one's own action and effect on it **(E) Extraversion**	or **Introversion (I)** preference for inner self and ideas to understand and protect or nurture it
gathers information by: focusing on facts within information **(S) Sensing**	or **iNtuition (N)** gathers information by: interpreting patterns, possibilities and meaning from information received
decides by using logic, consistency, objective analysis, process-driven conclusions **(T) Thinking**	or **Feeling (F)** decides according to what matters to self and others, and personal values
in dealing with the world organises, plans, controls, and decides clear firm actions and responses - relatively quick to decide **(J) Judging**	or **Perceiving (P)** in dealing with the world responds and acts with flexibility, spontaneity, adaptability and understanding - relatively slow to decide

Figure 2.4. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator preferences.

According to Myers et al. (1998), more than two million people are assessed using the MBTI personal inventory instrument around the world annually. The MBTI model (along with other personality theories and psychometrics models) is particularly useful for understanding and developing yourself, understanding and developing others, understanding what motivates others, understanding others' strengths and weaknesses, and working in teams (by ensuring that all

relevant necessary capabilities are represented in the team, allocating and agreeing upon tasks and project responsibilities, agreeing upon roles and development with others and for oneself).

Felder-Soloman Index for Learning Styles

Felder, Silverman, and Soloman (Graf, Viola, Leo, & Kinchuk, 2007) designed the Index for Learning Styles (ILS), another learning style instrument that assesses both cognitive and modality learning strengths. This instrument was initially designed for use with engineering students but is currently employed in a variety of circumstances and environments with proven reliability and validity (Felder & Silverman, 1988; Litzinger, Lee, Wise, & Felder, 2007). The ILS identifies learners on four different continua: active versus reflective, verbal versus visual, sequential versus global, and sensing versus intuitive (Felder & Soloman, 1997). The active/reflective and verbal/visual continuums are viewed as indicators of modality preferences, whereas the sequential/global and sensing/intuitive identify cognitive processing and perception.

Sensory Sensory learners prefer concrete, practical and procedural information. They look for facts.	**Intuitive** Intuitive learners prefer conceptual, innovative and theoretical information. They look for meaning.
Visual Visual learners prefer graphs, pictures and diagrams. They look for visual representations of information.	**Verbal** Verbal learners prefer to hear or read information. They look for explanations with words.
Active Active learners prefer to manipulate objects, do physical experiments and learn by trying. They enjoy working in groups to figure out problems.	**Reflective** Reflective learners prefer to think through, to evaluate options and learn by analysis. They enjoy figuring out a problem on their own.
Sequential Sequential learners prefer to have information presented linearly and in orderly manner. They put together the details in order to understand how the big picture emerges.	**Global** Global learners prefer a holistic and systematice approach. They see the big picture first then fill in the details.

Figure 2.5. Felder-Solomon model.

David A. Kolb LSI

D. A. Kolb (1984) suggested that "grasping and transforming an experience are dialectically opposed dimensions that exist on intersecting axes" (p. 41). On one axis, active experimentation and reflective observation are on opposing ends. On the other axis, concrete experience and abstract conceptualization are in opposition. The four quadrants formed by the intersecting axes Kolb identified as the four basic knowledge forms or learning styles (D. A. Kolb & Fry, 1974). The four learning styles are convergent, divergent, assimilation, and

accommodation. According to Kolb, each has specific characteristics that define the different ways people grasp and transform information into knowledge.

	doing (Active Experimentation - AE)	watching (Reflective Observation -RO)
feeling (Concrete Experience - CE)	**Accommodating (CE/AC)**	**Diverging (CE/RO)**
thinking (Abstract Conceptualization - AC)	**Converging (AC/AE)**	**Assimilating (AC/RO)**

Figure 2.6. Kolb's Learning Style Inventory, matrix view.

The process of learning is unique to each person, and D. A. Kolb (1984) claimed that "the complex structure of learning allows for the emergence of individual . . . learning styles" (p. 64). He emphasized that the progression of self-conditioning that occurs from choosing different life experiences determines individual learning style. Some people learn by experimenting or testing different options, whereas others learn best by observing, reading, and researching. Some people enjoy learning in a group environment such as a laboratory, whereas others prefer to study alone. Positive or negative experiences determine the method the individual continues to use, and a person will continue to use the same method for learning if the results are positive. For example, if a person participates in a study group to prepare for an exam and then does well on the exam, he or she will probably continue to use that method of learning in the future. If the person did not do well on the exam, he or she might try a solitary study technique the next time.

D. A. Kolb (1984) identified characteristics for each of the four learning styles: convergent, divergent, assimilation, and accommodation. A person using convergent learning style learns by formulating abstract conceptualization and engaging in active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). According to Kolb, strengths of people with convergent learning style include strong problem-solving and decision-making abilities. These abilities enable them to do well on

standardized tests because they use deductive reasoning to find the correct answer (D. A. Kolb, 1984). He also claimed that people with convergent learning style prefer technical tasks and problem solving to social events and interpersonal relationships.

A person who learns best by divergent learning style has the opposite characteristics from those who use convergent learning style (D. A. Kolb, 1984). Those who use divergent learning style learn best from concrete experiences and reflective observation (D. A. Kolb, 1984). They use a strong imagination to create different perspectives and generate alternative ideas. Kolb suggested that people who are oriented toward divergent learning style are interested in people and are feeling oriented. The individual with a divergent learning style would enjoy role-playing and engaging with other students in a group setting.

The dominant learning abilities of the assimilation learning style include abstract conceptualization and reflective observation (D. A. Kolb, 1984). Kolb claimed, "The greatest strength of this orientation lies in inductive reasoning and the ability to create theoretical models, in assimilating disparate observations into an integrated explanation" (p. 78). The assimilation learning style is similar to the convergence style in that both types avoid people and spend time developing logically sound and precise theories. Kolb pointed out that the difference between the two learning styles is that people who use convergence learn by actively experimenting, and assimilation learners use a less hands-on approach.

People who use the accommodation learning style absorb information best from concrete experiences and active experimentation (D. A. Kolb, 1984). According to Kolb, the strengths of people who prefer this learning style are in doing things, seeking new opportunities, and taking risks (D. A. Kolb, 1984). Kolb described those who learn by accommodation learning style as being at ease with people and having a sensitive and perceptive personality, yet they can also be

impatient. Characteristics of people who prefer to learn by accommodation are opposite from people who learn by assimilation. Similar to people who use the divergent learning style, those who use the accommodation learning style might benefit from role-playing and scenario-based instructional methods.

D. A. Kolb (1984) acknowledged Jung's contribution to ELT for identifying personality types. A person who learns by accommodation or divergent learning style has an extrovert psychological type and actively engages in learning experiences. People who learn by assimilation or convergent learning style tend to be the introvert psychological type and less at ease in social situations. Therefore, students who learn best by assimilation or convergent learning styles may not benefit very much from the role-playing instructional method.

In 1984, Kolb developed an assessment tool called the Learning Style Inventory (LSI) to determine individual learning style. The LSI consists of 16 items that measure how much or the degree to which a person uses the four modes of learning. Statistics from assessments of 1,933 men and women initially indicated that the tool could determine a person's preferred learning style (D. A. Kolb, 1984). Reliability and validity for the LSI indicate that it is a valid and reliable tool for assessing individual learning styles. D. A. Kolb (1984) claimed that early educational experiences shape an individual's learning style and influence their choice of educational specialization.

Table 2.4.

Overview of Four Learning Style Instruments.

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Instrument Name	General	Key Terms/Descriptors	Basis for Design	Reliability /Validity	Common Uses	Assessment Info	Date Introduced
Honey and Mumford"s Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ)	"Flexibly Stable Learning preferences" Not psychometric but construct is a checklist of how people learn	Activist/Reflector-Theorist/Pragmatist	Based on Kolb"s model, with newer terms and aligned with stages in the learning cycle	Some internal reliability has been found, more test/retest needed Validity is claimed by authors	Business - helps managers to set up personal plan for learning Suggestions to help people understand their styles	Is used in Business – needs more testing	1982
Kolb"s learning Style Inventory (LSI)	Flexibly Stable Learning preferences" Learning styles are not fixed personality traits, but are steady patterns of behavior	"Accommodating, diverging, converging, assimilating"	Based on the theory of experiential learning, which incorporates growth and development.	Currently the third version is a bit better, there are debates Construct validity has been challenged.	The foundation provides the framework for design of all learning experiences Business – individuals, teams, etc.	One of the first models developed and still widely used in education and business	1976 1985 1999
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)	Learning styles are one component of a stable personality type A view of the "whole person"	Perceiving/judging, sensing/intuition, thinking/feeling, extroversion/introversion	Based on Jung"s theory on four bipolar scales, and possible 16 types	Reliability of co-efficients are high. The face validity is accepted, but the construct validity is controversial	Career counseling	Discussion on MBTI for being used in education continues	1962
Felder /Solomon Index for Learning Styles	"Flexibly Stable Learning preferences"	Active/reflective, sensing/intuitive, visual/verbal, sequential/global	Based on Felder/Silverman model	Claim to have construct and internal validity	Both in the business and education setting	Free, widely used online	1996

Learning in the Workplace

Globally, businesses, organizations, and private industries are changing to remain competitive in the 21st century. In this, "people expect organizations to continually build the capabilities that keep them on the cutting edge of their profession" (Van Dam, 2004) within their daily environment and infrastructure. Van Dam proposed that informal learning is semi-structured or unstructured learning that is driven by the daily learning and development needs of employees. Van Dam suggested that informal learning is an example of self-directed learning, which accounts for about 70% to 90% of all learning that takes place in organizations: Career-driven learning refers to learning that takes place when people move into different roles or work on new projects that challenge them to work with new teams in different contexts and with different goals. On-demand learning in the 21st century is the quest of people looking for knowledge and information that helps them to perform daily in their jobs.

As Brookfield (1984) stated, "Environments that reinforce the self-concepts of adults, that are supportive of change, and that value the status of learners will produce the greatest amount of learning" (p. 29). As they continue to learn experientially, 21st-century learners who lead organizations may see the need to remain autonomous lifelong learners or become extinct within the organization. As Dewey (1938) posited, "An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his/her environment" (p. 41). Knowles (1989) suggested, "Adults come into an educational activity with both a greater volume and different quality of experience from youth" (p. 58). A. Y. Kolb and Kolb (2005) summarized the following with regard to adult learning in the organization:

- Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes.
- Learning is relearning.
- Adults' ideas must be drawn out, discussed, and refined.
- Learning requires a resolution of dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world.
- Learning is holistic.
- Learning involves interaction between the learner and the environment.
- Learning is constructivist in nature.

D. A. Kolb (1984) also asserted, "Learning is a continuous process that is grounded in experience and knowledge is continuously derived and tested out in the experiences of the learner" (p. 27). Van Dam's (2007) proposition of formal learning, informal learning, career-driven learning, and social learning applies to the 21st-century adult learners in organizations globally. As Van Dam posited, formal learning is structured, curriculum driven, and role-or-level–based learning that is formulated by an organization. Formal learning plays a relatively limited but crucial role in building a person's capabilities in organizations.

Van Dam (2007) stated that social learning is based on Albert Bandura's theory that indicates people learn most effectively when they interact with others about given topics and

because people spend most of their time in the workplace, or an otherwise social environment, it is critical to learn in the workplace. Social learning is defined as "the interaction between two or more people utilizing social media and collaborative technologies to facilitate and exchange in their knowledge acquisition" (Van Dam, 2007, para. 15).

Summary

This review of related literature included information about the small business economy, entrepreneurship, the pet dog industry, learning style, and a review of selected learning style instruments. The learning style review included a criticism of learning style, the models considered for the study, as well as the selection of the Kolb LSI. Although literature on these topics can be found in separate works, there is yet to be one study that combines these subjects in this way for dissertation research. This study hopes to fill a gap in the literature and thus add to the body of knowledge. In the next chapter, I discuss the methods used for conducting this research portion of this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to explore how an entrepreneur's learning style informs the operation of his small business through collection and analysis of his stories as well as to encourage him to identify and address key considerations for others who wish to explore learning style and entrepreneurial operations. This qualitative research study used a narrative inquiry approach to investigation. Narrative inquiry was paired with a co-researcher approach, as I worked hand-in-hand with the entrepreneur as a collaborative partner in the exploration of the phenomenon. This style of inquiry provides the opportunity to discuss key findings from the research and reflect on how those findings might shape the discoveries. It will also further contextualize the study and add greater value to the specific culture, values, and lived experiences as identified by the entrepreneur.

The chapter includes the research question, theoretical framework, entrepreneur selection, a discussion of my background, the Kolb LSI, data collection and analysis, and information regarding the Virginia Tech Internal Review Board (IRB). I will describe the research methods used in the study and offer explanation for the selection of narrative inquiry within the paradigm of qualitative research.

Research Question

How does the entrepreneurs' preferred learning style inform the way(s) he operates his

dog training small business day-to-day?

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research operates from the perspective of finding meaning, "which portrays a

world in which reality is socially constructed, complex and ever changing" (Glesne & Peshkin,

1992, p. 6). Denizen and Lincoln describe qualitative research in their 1994 seminal work

Handbook of Qualitative Research with the following definition:

> Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic
> approach to its subject matter . . . qualitative researchers study things in their natural
> settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings
> people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use of and collection of a
> variety of empirical materials . . . that describe routine and problematic moments and
> meaning in individuals' lives. (p. 2)

This study involved the use of qualitative research as a theoretical framework to explore

how an entrepreneur's learning style informs the operation of his small business. The qualitative

research approach places emphasis on words and descriptive data to illuminate the specific

phenomenon of learning style perception as it relates to his small business operations. The

research included multiple interviews and meetings with the entrepreneur and the administration

of the Kolb LSI 3.1 learning style instrument for the purpose of studying real-world business

operations as they unfold naturally in a non-manipulative, unobtrusive, and non-controlling

environment of inquiry. Characteristically, qualitative research involves a holistic perspective of

the phenomenon under study, purposeful sampling, the researcher as the primary instrument of

data collection, an inductive analysis of thick and descriptive data toward an unanticipated

outcome, and a reporting of data in narrative text (Merriam, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Within the qualitative research paradigm, there are diverse methodological and theoretical approaches; I have chosen narrative inquiry for study design and data analysis.

Theoretical Framework: Narrative Inquiry

Research methods for this study include the narrative approach to inquiry as part of the qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore social or human problems. Qualitative research encompasses a range of philosophies, research designs, and specific techniques, including in-depth, qualitative interviews; participant and nonparticipant observation; focus groups; document analyses; and a number of other methods of data collection (Pope & Mays, 2006). Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter and gives priority to what the data contribute to important research questions or existing information. "The [qualitative]researcher builds a complex holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). The value of evidence from qualitative research to systematic reviews must consider the varied and diffuse nature of evidence (Pearson, 2004; Popay & Williams, 1998).

Within the qualitative spectrum, narrative inquiry is the process of gathering information for the purpose of research through storytelling. The researcher then writes a narrative of the experience. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted that individuals are storytelling creatures who, independently and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world. In other words, people's lives consist of stories. Narratives

are the underlying resources from which people construct specific stories and the tools used to understand the stories that they hear (Frank, 2010).

R. Langer and Thorup (2006) explained that storytelling is the detailed methodology provided to address the ambiguity in other studies. Boje (2008) defined storytelling as a "pattern finding, pattern-elaboration process, or pattern-fitting episode(s) to make sense of wider [organization] processes and relationships" (p. 113). A personal story is not simply a reflection of but also a shaping of one's lived experience (Gergen, 1999). The story adds to the meaning of the narrative and allows others to interact with it. The story is what adds life to the narrative (Frank, 2010). Stories are living, local, and specific (Frank, 2010). Indeed, stories have a social aspect to them (Chase, 2003; Frank, 2010). Stories are intended to be told, which means that there is an intended listener (Chase, 2003). "Stories have a life force, a vital energy, vibrations, frequencies" (Tyler & Blader, 2000, p. 6). The story is a relational act that necessarily implicates the audience (S. K. Langer, 1953; Oakes-Greenspan, 2007). The listener also interprets the story (Frank, 2010; Rosenblatt, 2012; Tyler & Blader, 2000); this process makes the listener a storyteller as well (Randall & McKim, 2008).

Frank (2000) believed that "stories as acts of telling are relationships" (p. 354). The storytelling is relational, not only because one tells and one listens but also because both are interpreting (Frank, 2000, 2010; Rossiter, 1999). The relationship that is formed between the teller, the story, and the listener is itself the space, which is shaped to allow for storytelling and is shaped through the storytelling (Chase, 2003). Storytellers do not tell in order for their stories to be analyzed; they tell to call for other stories of shared experiences in order for relationships to be built (Frank, 2000). Part of that relationship is composed of the interpretation of the story by both the teller and listener (Frank, 2000, 2010). The nature of the story will change as it is told

and retold, new elements are added or emphasized, or other elements are skipped over either in

the telling or the listening. In this manner, the story has life and transformation (Rossiter, 1999).

Listeners (or in my case, the researcher) are co-producers of storytellers, filling in gaps,

providing nonverbal cues, and negotiating meaning (Boje, 2008, p. 107). (This point served as a

caution to me, the researcher, to ensure that I was interpreting the "right" meaning as expressed

by the participant.) The teller is interpreting the original experience, and the listener is

interpreting the telling as well as the story (Frank, 2010; S. K. Langer, 1953).

Furthermore, narratives are an inevitable and unavoidable aspect of social life and, as

such, are integral to the processes of managing and organizing (Polkinghorne, 1995). They are

discursive constructions in which "events and happenings are configured into temporal unity by

means of a plot" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). As Jaworski and Coupland (1999, pp. 29-30)

explained, "Stories or narratives are discursive accounts of factual or fictitious events which

take, or have taken or will take place at a particular time." We construct narratives as structured

representations of events in a particular temporal order.

Although narratives are traditionally associated with face-to-face-interviews, narratives

can also be collected through documents such as diaries, biographies, or ethnographic field notes

(Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). A narrative account could relate to a complete life

story, but equally it may refer to the depiction of a discrete event, such as an experience of

qualifying to participate in the Olympics, which has a distinct beginning and ending. Narrative

analysis has been popular among many disciplines within the social sciences because contexts

such as psychology and anthropology lend themselves more easily to examine through the

internal structure of narratives. The increasing popularity of narrative analysis is reflected in the

publication of a dedicated journal on the method, the *Journal of Narrative and Life History* (first

published in 1991). One of the strengths of using narrative inquiry is that it is a more natural means of collecting data from humankind.

Limitations and Liabilities of Method

Researchers have used a range of qualitative narrative approaches (e.g., autobiography, life histories, biographies, and autoethnographies) to study changing and evolving contexts (Alvermann & Hruby, 2000). Like all methods of study, qualitative research requires careful consideration and planning to ensure that the results are as accurate as possible. Unlike more traditional research tools, narrative inquiry calls into question the notion that researchers objectively "strive to maintain a distance between the knower (narrator) and the known (narrated)" (Alvermann & Hruby, 2000, p. 49). This was particularly important as I navigated the balance between the researcher and co-researcher relationship as well as between subject-matter expert and familiar colleague. Qualitative research is more open to personal opinion and judgment, so it can be more susceptible to providing observations rather than results. These were valid considerations to take into account as I worked to put facts before opinions and add to the collective body of entrepreneurial knowledge. Moreover; narrative inquiry is a mode of inquiry that values individuals' oral and written accounts of events that have affected their lives and lived experiences (Casey, 1996). There is a certain level of depth, detail, and understanding that comes from the use of qualitative methods (Creswell, 2003), which is a compelling reason for choosing this method.

Kolb's LSI

David A. Kolb's learning style research, the ELT, is based on the foundational work of John Dewey and Carl Jung (D. A. Kolb, 1984). Jung's work focused largely on the development of identifying distinctive personality patterns (Felder & Silverman, 1988; D. A. Kolb, 1984). Kolb examined individual behaviors associated with the extrovert-introvert and concrete-abstract

continuums that Jung suggested. It was through the examination of individual behaviors that Kolb developed the idea that experiences build on previous experiences. These previous experiences then influence how future experiences will affect the learner (Felder, 1996; Felder & Silverman, 1988; Felder, Silverman, & Soloman, 1996; A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2005; D. A. Kolb, 1984). The concept of the ELT is defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience." A central concept of the ELT is that "personal characteristics, environmental influences, and behavior all operate in reciprocal determination, each factor influencing the others in an interlocking fashion" (D. A. Kolb, 1984, p. 36).

Kolb's LSI uses a questionnaire in which respondents describe their own learning behaviors based on ideologies about information processing. This study used version 3.1 of the LSI, which is a self-description test consisting of 12 statements displayed in a forced-choice format. The 12 statements require participants to rank four possible endings for each statement before they are allowed to progress to the next statement. Participants select which statement ending is most like them, second most like them, not like them, and least like them (D. A. Kolb, 1993). D. A. Kolb (1984) described learning using four discrete learning cycles: Concrete Experience (CE; feeling), Reflective Observation (RO; watching), Abstract Conceptualization (AC; thinking), and Active Experimentation (AE; doing).

Concrete Experience (CE): "feeling." The CE mode is characterized by an individual's preference to be involved in interpersonal interactions. This learner exhibits strong intuitive decision making as well as functioning well in unstructured situations. These are individuals who are "concerned with the uniqueness and complexity of present reality as opposed to theories and generalizations" (D. A. Kolb, 1984, p. 68) and who desire to be involved in new experiences.

Reflective Observation (RO): "watching." The reflective observation mode is characterized by an individual's preference toward reflection, information collection, and careful observation. According to D. A. Kolb (1984), this learner is good at examining items and concepts from multiple perspectives in order to formulate multiple perspectives. This learner prefers watching and listening and then relying on his or her own observations to formulate a judgment. This individual is often patient, careful, and methodical in evaluation of situations.

Abstract Conceptualization (AC): "thinking." This mode is characterized by individual preferences toward the examination of abstract ideas through logic and the breakdown of concepts. Unlike learners who favor concrete experience, the AC learner uses cognitive thought processes instead of relying on conclusions drawn from emotions. The AC individual tends toward scientific approaches and uses "systematic planning, manipulation of abstract symbols and quantitative analysis" (D. A. Kolb, 1984, p. 69).

Active Experimentation (AE): "doing." The active experimentation mode is characterized by a learner's preference to be involved in the decision-making process to control or influence situations. According to D. A. Kolb (1984), this mode "focuses on actively influencing people and changing situations" (p. 69). This individual tends to learn by being actively involved in the learning process by accepting risk. This learner focuses on doing rather than observing. The AE learner places an emphasis on the practical applications of a situation to produce productive results instead of engaging in reflective understanding of the situation.

The four learning cycles described above interacted to create four different learning styles: diverging (CE/RO), assimilating (AC/RO), converging (AC/AE), and accommodating (CE/AE). The following is a further description of each style:

Diverging/Diverger. The diverger learning style is created through the combination of the CE and RO. According to Lamberski (2002) and D. A. Kolb (1984), these learners' greatest strengths come from their ability to solve problems by compiling various perspectives and generating assorted ideas in such a way as to arrive at a creative solution. Divergers tend to be strong in brainstorming and imagination. They exhibit a tendency toward the arts, humanities, and cultural interests.

Assimilation/Assimilator. The assimilator learning style, according to A. Y. Kolb and Kolb (2005) and Lamberski (2002), is created through the combined modes of RO and AC. These learners favor inductive reasoning and abstract concepts. For assimilators, it is more important that the theoretical basis of a theory is correct than it is working within a practical situation. Assimilators are less interested in socialization with other individuals and prefer to focus on abstract conceptualization.

Converging/Converger. The converger learning style is a combination of the AC and the AE modes. These individuals, like the assimilators, prefer to deal with ideas and items rather than socialization with others. Convergers prefer to focus on specific problems, looking for answers and solutions. This style excels best, according to A. Y. Kolb and Kolb (2005), when there is a single correct answer to a problem. These individuals are often unemotional and commonly choose to specialize in fields such as computer science and engineering.

Accommodating/Accommodator. The accommodator learning style exhibits the highest associated scores in CE and AE learning styles described by D. A. Kolb (1984). Individuals with this learning style preference are described as risk takers who are able to adapt quickly and to excel in situations that require rapid decision-making skills. The accommodator, according to Lamberski (2002), is the polar opposite of the assimilator. Accommodators' employment

preferences are often found in the practical fields of business, education, medicine, or marketing. Accommodators are often willing to discard a concept instead of working from the facts to solve a problem. They will push others to provide additional information from which to work from (Lamberski, 2002) to solve a problem.

The LSI is available for purchase from Hay Group. David A. Kolb continues to serve as a principle for this Boston-based global management consulting firm that works with leaders to transform strategy, develop talent, organize people to be more effective, and motivate them to perform at their best (Hay Group, 2013). Because Hay Group, which controls access to the Kolb LSI, does not allow reprint of these statements, neither the LSI nor individual statements taken from the LSI are reprinted in this dissertation.

Kolb LSI, Version 3.1, Validity and Reliability

The Kolb LSI v3.1 instrument was used for this study as a means to shape, build, and explore an understanding of an entrepreneur's approach to his learning and experience in business operations. The intent of the study was not to collect quantitative or statistical data; however, the question of validity must be mentioned as a matter of scholarship. The LSI has been examined for internal consistency reliability, test-retest reliability, and validity. For example, A. Y. Kolb and Kolb (2005) determined that the LSI v3.1 exhibited "good internal consistency reliability across a number of different populations" (p. 77). This claim was based on the results of seven studies resulting in an average Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .70. In addition, Kayes (2005) concluded that "overall, this study provides exploratory evidence for the internal reliability and validity of the LSI v3.1, consistent with prior research" (p. 255).

An issue discussed in the literature raised the problem of ipsative scores and questionable normative data. Duff (2004) and Passarelli and Kolb (2012) recommended changing the instrument response scale to quell the criticism. Furthermore, Passarelli and Kolb (2012)

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suggested a restructuring the Kolb LSI 2005 (v3.1) to a 48-item Likert survey and a 48-item

Semantic Differential survey. Yet there are more studies that support test-retest reliability,

including two resulting in correlations greater than .9 in one case and .54 in the other (A. Y. Kolb

& Kolb, 2005). The discrepancy in the scores is explained as an ELT hypothesis "that learning

style is situational, varying in response to environmental demand" (p. 196).

Selection of Kolb LSI

Considering the wealth of learning styles and learning style instruments, and the relation

of the instrument to my research approach, the selection of an appropriate instrument for this

research study required careful thought. Diaz and Cartnal (1999) identified three factors essential

to the process of selecting a learning style instrument: (a) consider the purpose of the study, (b)

find an instrument that matches the purpose, and (c) select the most appropriate instrument.

James and Blank (1993) suggested that the selection of a particular learning style assessment

instrument depends on the identified need for such an instrument along with the support of an

appropriate research base and practical considerations for use. Other concerns included taking

into account the validity and reliability of the instrument, basic concepts and design of the

instrument, administration issues, and cost. As recommended by James and Blank (1993), I took

into consideration the appropriateness and soundness of the conceptual base, theoretical

underpinnings on which the instrument was developed, the research data supporting the

instrument, and practical considerations. I approached the task of instrument selection knowing

that many learning style instruments could be used to learn more about designing learning

activities that related to my area of study, business.

While researching instruments, I learned that the Kolb LSI claims it is unique and differs

from other tests of learning style and personality by being based on a comprehensive theory of

learning and development (D. A. Kolb, 2005). That information helped determine my choice for

my research study along with the importance of prominent adult learning educators and theories. This instrument draws on the work of eminent 20th-century scholars who gave experience a central role in their theories of human learning and development and inspired Kolb's ELT. Further, the LSI was developed as a holistic model of the experiential learning process and as a multi-linear model of adult development that has been adapted for use worldwide (D. A. Kolb, 2005). I found different versions of the Kolb LSI instrument including versions 3.1 and 4.0. Research in the Mental Measurement Yearbook (Buros, 2014) yielded entries for the LSI but none for version 4.0 which made selection of LSI version 3.1 an obvious choice for my study.

Another reason I selected the Kolb LSI v3.1 was due to Kolb's premise to openly share information about the inventory, its scoring, and its technical characteristics with other interested researchers (D. A. Kolb, 2005). The numerous updates and instrument enhancements made by Kolb and his team have purportedly included interested investigator feedback in addition to the input from his traditional staff. Additionally, I found hundreds of studies in the ProQuest Thesis and Dissertation database with direct application to business that either referenced Kolb's work or used it as a major element in the research.

Practicality also factored heavily into my selection considerations, as I found that the Kolb LSI v3.1 was available for sale and in an online format. It was quite helpful to pay for the instrument via credit card and gain direct access to the online tool with information sent via email. When it was time to administer the instrument, I simply logged on to my computer email and opened the message with the link for access. Scoring, interpretation, and reporting happened immediately after the test was electronically submitted, and results were discussed during the same meeting. I applied these factors to determine that the Kolb LSI was most suited to meet the purpose of my research study and could be used appropriately to answer the research query.

Selection of Organization for Study

As discussed in Chapter 1, I had four viable options of owner-operated pet dog-training companies and entrepreneurs from which to choose for this study. These were organizations where the founders were willing to work with me as a researcher/co-researcher and share in-depth information about their businesses and operational practices. All were small businesses in operation for more than 10 years with certified pet dog trainers and a track record for operational sustainability. Although each organization could likely yield interesting results, I thought the best research study would come from partnering with the person with the deepest operational knowledge, education, and life experience, Dr. James "Jim" Beemer. Dr. Beemer is the owner of Hancock K-9; he is widely known in the field of dog training and has had a successful career in the public schools system. His background includes five earned college degrees, numerous animal training certifications, and having served in the role of school superintendent in the northeast. This study focused on Dr. Beemer and his perceptions of how his learning style may inform the way he operates his small business.

Background of the Researcher

As the researcher for this study, I bring nearly 25 years of business experience working in large Fortune 500 organizations and midsize companies. These experiences have included work in human resources, training, consulting, organizational development, and operations. My formal education includes a bachelor of science degree in communications and a master's of science degree in management for organizational effectiveness. I might best be described in the business world as an experienced learning professional with a broad talent development skill base that encompasses platform, facilitation, organizational communication, counseling, and interpersonal skills. I also hold certifications in 360-degree performance feedback coaching, leadership development and facilitation, change methodology, and succession planning. My experiences

include extensive opportunities to use the skills of interviewing, including probing and querying that I applied during this study.

More recently, I worked as a private consultant and coach offering resume writing, interviewing, and job placement services for professionals in the Washington, D.C., area. On a different, yet related, note, I became involved with professional pet dog training in 2009 and began offering private and group pet dog-training lessons in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area in 2011. I have been working with two small entrepreneurial enterprises to learn the process of becoming a pet dog trainer and the experience of operating a small business in the pet dog-training industry. I have found that educating dogs and owners employs many of the same consultative and teaching skills I learned in practice as a human resources professional. Similar to academic teaching, pet dog training ignites my passion for being in an active learning environment.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for my study included using the results of Kolb's learning style assessment and employing a series of semi-structured interviews along with multiple meetings and feedback loops with the entrepreneur. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim using a handheld digital recorder and Microsoft Word. I kept a journal throughout the data collection process to jot down field notes, occurrences, and ideas and to compare them with interview transcripts. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) referred to field notes as the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study. Specifically, field notes may include all the data collected in the course of a study, including interview transcripts, official documents, official statistics, pictures, and other materials (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). All of these data can be used to analyze

the text, which involves several tasks: (a) discovering themes and subthemes, (b) winnowing

themes to a manageable few (i.e., deciding which themes are important in any project), (c)

building hierarchies of themes or code books, and (d) linking themes into theoretical models

(Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Designs of qualitative studies involve the combination of data

collection with analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Regular transcription of the interviews

allowed me to stay involved with the data and to be aware of information so that I could probe

more deeply each time.

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I served as the lead researcher and

used a research instrument to systematically review and make meaning of the stories.

Furthermore, I incorporated a co-research approach with the entrepreneur as an investigative

partner. The goal of the co-research approach is to work through a mutually beneficial process in

which there is collective and co-created meaning through the use of collaborative inquiry. Bray,

Lee, Smith, and Yorks (2000) described that within collaborative inquiries, "constructing new

meaning through exploration, research, and individual and group change is the prime concern"

(p. 88). Reason and Bradbury (2001) espoused that "the purpose of cooperative inquiry is to

generate information and understanding that is capable of transforming action" (p. 219).

Theoretically, constructing meaning within a collaborative inquiry (partnership) commences

immediately and occurs through cycles of reflection and action and "involves interpretation,

analysis, reflection, and contemplation" (Bray Lee, Smith, and Yorks, 2000, p. 88).

In addition, Heron (1996) offered the following description of co-researchers:

What the co-researchers are sharing here are their experientially generated data on some
aspect or aspects of the inquiry topic. When they have collated and made further sense of
the data, this may lead them to modify, extend or radically reframe their original account
of the aspect or aspects. Then, in the light of these changes, they can review the overall
launching statement of the inquiry, the one that embraces all its aspects, and likewise
modify, extend or reframe it. (p. 87)

This mutual cooperative inquiry process provided flexibility and the latitude to augment connotations as the research unfolds. Heron (1996) went on to describe a cooperative inquiry (team) as

> one that is busy with transforming practice within a profession [a small business], is a local culture of competence that has two tiers. As a [team] of practitioners [business professionals] within a given field, there is a shared ethos in knowing how to value the newly acquired skills. And as a group of collaborating researchers, there is a shared ethos in knowing how to value the inquiry skills involved in acquiring the new professional skills. (p. 113)

As expected, the inquiry process produced gained experiential knowing, and the data analysis surfaced more simply and with greater ease.

Although I had prepared questions, I was open to the trajectory of the conversations moving in different directions and expected nonlinear expressions of thought and informal accounts so as not to omit information. Ochs and Capps (2001) noted that seeking formal criteria can lead to excluding narratives that may be nonlinear or heavily embedded in shared discourse. I was aware that not all stories unfold through a linear sequence of events; however, events exist within the larger context of the interview and experiences. I expected that oftentimes, the stories being told were larger than a particular section I shared of the interview. As I collected data and analyzed the stories, I foresaw the possibility of multiple implied narratives that wove across our discussions and that the threads connected to pieces in other stories. This was a research project built on a series of stories and reflections, and I invite the reader to "think narratively" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), to think through and about stories.

I found methods of narrative inquiry suitable to my research aims because, as Goodson (1980) noted, "Narrative research offers uniquely valuable insights into a research participant's ideas about events that have helped shape her life up to this point, and it allows participants to

express her or his understandings of events in their own words" (p. 63). I expected to find narrative inquiry to be particularly useful in providing for a depth of complexity and nuance necessary to my exploration. According to Sfard and Prusak (2005), stories narrated by the individual (and their textual representations) are conceived as "reasonably accessible and investigable" (p. 17) performances of identity. This method allowed me, as the researcher, to explore individual stories and personal experiences with a level of depth and rich description (Weiss, 1994).

Following the interviews, I prepared notes in a journal to comment on my overall impression of the experiences. I assigned transcript excerpts to created codes from the Kolb learning styles and included comments and ideas from the interactions. Furthermore, I reviewed each interview transcript with the entrepreneur to augment it for detail and provide further clarification of his story. These notes served as inputs to verify connotations with my co-researcher as they relate to the research question and to separate the data into units of meaning. I also included other data sources such as personal biographies and co-researcher inputs to give greater voice to the story. Throughout the collection and analysis process, I continually reviewed the data for developing meaning and connections.

Once all interviews were transcribed, I began dissecting each one into units of meaning or units of data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) and then bracketed them so that each unit of meaning made sense apart from the other interviews. Each unit was given a code representing the interview number, the date, and the unit of meaning to create an audit trail. The following table depicts the data collection format, activities, and questions I used to guide the research process:

Table 3.1.

Data Collection Through the Interview and Meeting Process

Data Collection Format	Activities	Questions
Interview 1	Conducted introductory interview to collect demographic details and asked five foundational questions regarding the entrepreneurs' journey. This interview served as a baseline and provided initial insights and served to augment meaning in later interviews. Digitally recorded the interview and made notes about important points. Transcribed the interview.	1. Why did you choose to go into business? Describe your entrepreneurial journey to where you are today. 2. How did you learn about entrepreneurship and how to start up, run, and maintain your small business? (operationalize) 3. Describe why you believe your business is a success. 4. Describe what you think it means to be an exceptional entrepreneur. 5. Describe experiences you believe to be critical for anyone pursuing small business ownership.
Meeting 1	Reviewed Interview 1 transcript with the entrepreneur for augmentation and clarification. Edited Interview 1 transcript with augmentation from the entrepreneur.	
Meeting 2	Administered Kolb's Learning Style Assessment version 3.1 to determine entrepreneur's learning style. Debriefed the learning style outcome with the entrepreneur and reviewed for alignment and deeper understanding of his perception.	
Interview 2	Conducted Interview 2. Digitally recorded the interview and made notes about important points.	1. How does (your preferred) learning style affect the philosophy and values you use to operate your business?

Table 3.1.

Data Collection Through the Interview and Meeting Process

Data Collection Format	Activities	Questions
	Made researcher's notes after the interview that included personal observations and reflections. Transcribed the interview. Made additions to transcript from researchers' notes as appropriate.	2. How did your preferred learning style affect the way you chose to locate your business, set pricing, and make decisions about the value and quality of your services? 3. How does (your preferred) learning style affect the way you view your own strengths and weaknesses as a small business owner? 4. How does (your preferred) learning style affect your morale, commitment, and leadership on a day-to-day basis? 5. How does (your preferred) learning style affect the way you manage people (hiring, firing, handling, training, directing, etc.)? 6. How does your preferred learning style affect the way you operationalize your capabilities, competitive advantages,

Table 3.1.

Data Collection Through the Interview and Meeting Process

Data Collection Format	Activities	Questions
		and/or unique selling points?
		7. How does your preferred learning style affect the way you make decisions about the way you allocate resources (financial, equipment, inventory, human, etc.)?
		8. How does (your preferred) learning style affect the way you acquire experience, knowledge, and data?
		9. How does (your preferred) learning style affect the way your manage clients and their dogs?
		10. How does (your preferred) learning style affect the way you market and advertise your business?
		11. How does (your preferred) learning style affect the way you approach your formal and continued education and experience as it relates to your business (accreditations, qualifications,

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Table 3.1.
Data Collection Through the Interview and Meeting Process

Data Collection Format	Activities	Questions
		certifications, etc.)?
Meeting 3	Reviewed Interview 2 transcript with the entrepreneur for augmentation and clarification. Edited Interview 2 transcript with augmentation from the entrepreneur.	
Interview 3	Conducted Interview 3. Digitally recorded the interview and made notes about important points. Made researcher's notes after the interview that included personal observations and reflections. Transcribed Interview 3. Made additions to transcript from researcher's notes as appropriate.	12. How does (your preferred) learning style affect the way you innovate aspects of your operations (based on new trends, technologies, discoveries, services, ideas)? 13. How does (your preferred) learning style affect the way you forecast operations on a daily, monthly, quarterly, or annual basis? 14. How does (your preferred) learning style affect the way you might expand or disband your business in the future? 15. How does (your preferred) learning style affect the way you will choose to determine changes in your products and

Table 3.1.

Data Collection Through the Interview and Meeting Process

Data Collection Format	Activities	Questions
		services in the future?
		16. How does (your preferred) learning style affect what you do about market ebbs, flows, and changes in your day-to-day operations?
		17. How does (your preferred) learning style affect the way you view your reputation, presence, and reach in the marketplace?
		18. Should you choose to sell or transition your small business to another owner in the future, how do you think your preferred learning style will affect the way you pass on important information including reflections, observations, and thoughts about new technologies, services, and ideas regarding your small business?
Meeting 4	Reviewed Interview 3 transcript with the entrepreneur for augmentation and clarification.	

Table 3.1.
Data Collection Through the Interview and Meeting Process

Data Collection Format	Activities	Questions
	Edited Interview 3 transcript with augmentation from the entrepreneur. Analyzed all transcripts and notes for code and themes. Made final edits.	
Meeting 5	Reviewed final transcripts with codes and themes with entrepreneur for final augmentation and clarification. Analyzed data and determined outcomes. Prepared findings, discussions, and recommendations from the data analysis.	

IRB

 I applied for permission from the Virginia Tech IRB to conduct the study. Virginia Tech is committed to protecting the rights of and ensuring the safety of human subjects participating in research conducted by faculty, staff, and students of the university and for research in which Virginia Tech is engaged. This commitment is vested in the IRB and is guided by the ethical principles described in the "Belmont Report" and in applicable federal regulations.

Summary

 This chapter discussed the theoretical framework, techniques, and methods that I used to conduct the research study. More specifically, it provided a view of the research question, presented the use of narrative inquiry within the qualitative research paradigm, and included a discussion of the limitations and liabilities of using these methods. It explained the rationale for selection, information on the researcher and co-researcher approach, data collection and analysis methods, and a detailed table with process steps for the research. Furthermore, this chapter included a full description of the Kolb LSI v3.1 instrument and concluded with my plan for the IRB to ensure ethical research and achieve informed consent. The following chapter will include the results from the data collection and analysis explained in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

STUDY RESULTS

The following research findings are the results of interviews conducted in the winter of 2013 to

2014 with the business owner entrepreneur (Dr. Beemer). This chapter discusses Kolb's model

and Dr. Beemer's results, as well as detailed analysis of the data and discussion of each learning

style with examples where they existed in the interview transcripts, the entrepreneur's story, and

a summary. As described in Chapter 3, I conducted the first step in the research process by

engaging Dr. Beemer in a baseline interview to gain insights into his entrepreneurial journey and

discuss the creation and operation of his small business. Next, I administered the Kolb LSI v3.1

and discussed Dr. Beemer's specific results with him. The next step included conducting a series

of interviews to discuss preferred learning style in relation to his business operations. This

process included interview questions and probes designed to investigate business practices with

regard to learning style and was followed by the data analysis. The analysis included the review

and coding of the transcript data using Kolb's four learning styles as primary sections or core

themes around which to arrange the data: diverging, assimilating, converging, and

accommodating.

The Learning Profile: Learning Cycle

The Kolb model uses a cyclical construct to explain the instrument results. The cycle of

learning results depicts how much the learner relies on each of the four different Kolb learning

modes. These learning modes make up a four-phase cycle of learning—Concrete Experience

(CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualization (AC), and Active

Experimentation (AE)—from which individual learners start at different places. Kolb's model

posits that effective learning ultimately involves all four phases and includes preferences as

represented by the learner's "kite" (see Figure 4.1 for Dr. Beemer's results). The closer the

points of the kite are to the 100% ring on the circle, the more the learner tends to use that way of

learning. In addition, the closer the learner's data point is to the center of the grid, the more

balanced the learning style. Explained further, if the data point falls near any of the far corners of

the grid, the learner tends to rely heavily on a particular learning style. If data points fall near a

corner of the grid in the unshaded area, the learner tends to rely heavily on that particular

learning style. If the data point falls in a shaded area, the learner's style is characterized by a

combination of the two adjoining learning style types.

Learning Style Results for Dr. James Beemer
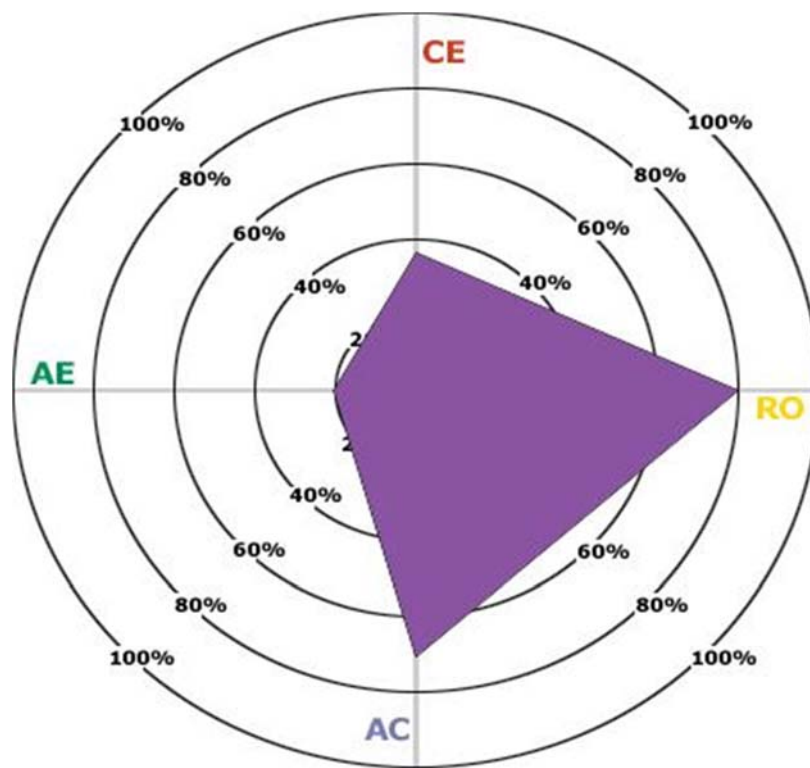
Figure 4.1. Kolb Learning Style Inventory Version 3.1: Dr. James Beemer's cycle of learning
results.

Dr. Beemer's "kite" represents preference for the assimilating style of learning, which combines partialities for reflecting and thinking or the learning steps of RO and AC. The assimilating learning style includes learners who prefer to learn by commonly making references to numerous sources of information and organizing it in a step-by-step format (Kayes, 2005), and they are classified as watchers and thinkers (Chen, Toh, & Ismail, 2005). This type of learner enjoys a systematic approach to teaching, detailed directions, and computer-assisted instruction (D. A. Kolb, 2005).

RO learning by reflecting includes the following (D. A. Kolb, 2005):

- carefully observing before making judgments,

- viewing issues from different perspectives, and

- looking for the meaning from the learning activity.

AC learning by thinking includes the following (D. A. Kolb, 2005):

- logically analyzing ideas,

- planning systematically, and

- acting on an intellectual understanding of the situation

According to D. A. Kolb (2005), assimilators

- are best at understanding a wide range of information and putting it into concise, logical form,

- are less focused on people and more interested in abstract ideas and concepts,

- generally find it more important that a theory has logical soundness than practical value,

- see the importance for effectiveness in information and science careers, and

- prefer attending lectures and readings, exploring analytical models, and having time to think things through in formal learning situations.

The assimilating style learner (who perceives or takes in new information abstractly and processes or transforms it reflectively) is able to assimilate disparate observations into an integrated, rational explanation and thrive with

- organizing information,

- building conceptual models,

- testing theories and ideas,

- inductive reasoning,

- designing experiments, and

- analyzing quantitative data.

As part of the co-research process, Dr. Beemer and I reviewed the results and discussed these findings of the Kolb LSI v3.1. When asked if he was surprised by the outcome of the instrument, Dr. Beemer's answer was an emphatic, "No." Upon further probing, Dr. Beemer reflected, "Over the years, I have had the opportunity to take other experiential learning assessments and the results generally tend to align with one another." Dr. Beemer tends to thrive with the process of inductive reasoning and the creation and execution of models and theories. Whenever possible, he prefers to follow steps, to set goals methodically, and to plan systematically. The next part of the research process included analyzing the interview transcripts to determine where, if at all, Dr. Beemer's mode of business operations aligned with his dominant Kolb learning style.

Data Analysis

After debriefing Dr. Beemer's LSI v3.1 results, we forged onward to conduct the interviews and determine how (if at all) his perception of his learning style preference might influence the way he conducts business. This process involved the systematic coding of the transcript data into categories aligned with Kolb's four dominant learning styles. Each style was coded with a separate color and organized to determine occurrences of each style within the data. Color coding is as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1.

Transcript Analysis Color Coding Using Kolb's Learning Styles

Kolb Learning Style	Learning by	Color Code	Learning Style Characterizations
Diverging	Feeling and watching, CE/RO	Yellow	Idea generation, broad interests, likes information gathering
Assimilating	Watching and thinking, AC/RO	Blue	Clear explanations, logical processes, likes analysis and data
Converging	Doing and thinking, AC/AE	Red	Practical solutions, problem solving, likes technical tasks
Accommodating	Doing and feeling, CE/AE	Green	Hands-on approaches, new experiences, team approaches, likes relying on gut instinct

Diverging Learning Style

The diverging learning style is characterized by learning through feeling and watching; people with a preference for this style appreciate the opportunity to gather information and generate various ideas and approaches (D. A. Kolb, 2005). They are generally interested in and focused on the future and like to experiment or explore possibilities. For example, when asked about preferred learning style in relation to business innovation, new trends, technology, new discoveries, new services, and ideas, Dr. Beemer said,

> I make it a point to look for everything new that comes out to determine if it has potential use for us. Then we talk about it in our colleague group to decide whether we want to take further action.

Not only does this suggest an awareness of "the new," but his comments also support the idea of inclusivity and taking a team approach to decision making. Another example is provided when Dr. Beemer is asked how some of his approaches have changed over time:

> I give the trainers a lot more leeway in how they interpret [the operating model] and how they bring the trainings to bear.

This comment infers that he has a comfort level with team member approaches beyond his own proven methods and is open to new explanations. Yet another example of openness to and exploration of ideas came when Dr. Beemer was asked about resources (i.e., people) that he refers to (i.e., for expertise) on a regular basis.

> It could be a person that works with a university. The person does not have to be a veterinarian or even a dog person. In fact, they may very well be a general scientist who is doing research on cognition.

> Although fewer than a dozen instances of Dr. Beemer's use of the diverging learning style could be found in the data, there was an overabundance of information to support his use of the assimilating learning style.

Assimilating Learning Style

The assimilating learning style is described as learning through watching and thinking (D. A. Kolb, 2005). People with a preference for this style are most comfortable with data, information, facts, and logic. They generally like to weigh all sides of an issue before making a decision and are thorough and introspective when analyzing. The process of collecting and analyzing data is best for providing evidence. The following examples speak to a propensity for comfort with models, trusted sources of information, proven approaches, concise and measured direction, introspection, and attention to detail. There is also evidence for supporting an unyielding, no-nonsense way to accomplishing tasks through proven methods:

When asked the question, "How do you think your preferred learning style affects the way you view your approach to the operation of your business?" Dr. Beemer replied,

> The first thing I always try to do is establish the [operating] model. The idea of using a model as an approach plays right into my learning style. It answers a lot of questions and makes it clear that this is what we want to do, this is the way we do it here and this is why.

When asked about the way in which he honed his dog-training skills during the infancy of his business, Dr. Beemer offered the following:

> We studied the work of people that are known for being the best in the country. That included seminars, workshops, books, and videos. I think we accumulated and read 400 or more books and watched hundreds of hours of video. One video series alone may have included 15, 16, 18 hours of instruction.

He continued to emphasize that learning from the finest in the industry was important, even if it meant going out of the way to do so.

> We would look for the best to learn from and their best work and when possible, we would go to one of their seminars.

During the interviews, we talked about the execution of the dog trainer role, which included the importance of educating clients regarding technical aspects of dog ownership and the potential influence an owner's actions can have on a dog's behavior. For example, when the subject turned to feeding, Dr. Beemer said,

> For animals, food is very important and inherent in nature. So the person that controls the food can have a lot of significance in the dogs' world, especially if that person has some expectations of the animal. In other words, the dog has to meet certain requirements in order to get the food. This begins to convey to the animal that there is a process and a way things will work to get what he wants.

When discussing skills dog trainers need in addition to the ability to work with the animal, Dr. Beemer commented on client interactions:

> Communication with the human is critical. There are a lot of people [dog trainers] who say I am a dog person and I do this work with dogs because I like dogs better than people. The mental image is that people think the job is just playing with

puppies. They think it's all about playing fetch with a cute little dog and so on but the bottom line is you have to be able to deal with people. Dog owners are 50% or more of the issue so your communication skills and problem-solving skills in the dog training world are critical.

He went on to explain about the value Hancock K-9 places on professionalism through personal and effective interaction and problem solving with clients.

Interpersonal skills are so critical that we drill on them. We talk about situations and do examples of [problem solving] in our colleague meetings. We discuss the good results but also talk about when we think we've blown one. It's a perfect learning opportunity to discuss what happened, why, and what we could do differently in the future as a result.

We also discussed that there are various perceptions in the general public about how a dog should behave and be treated. Hancock K-9 uses positive reinforcement–based training. The idea is to teach the animal and reward it for behaviors we want to see rather than use physical force for doing things we do not like. For example, Dr. Beemer stated,

The feeding protocol has nothing to do with beating the animal up. It has to do with what the animal learns and in this case, that there are some behavioral expectations that need to happen in order to get their supper. The idea is to use positive techniques and teach the animal the process of what is expected. So, as the animal meets those expectations day-in and day-out, good things occur. It also assigns a higher level of status to the person who is directing the process. That status carries over to other parts of the behavioral structure and to the home.

When discussing the face and appearance of the business and image, Dr. Beemer said,

First of all, we try very hard to make a positive image. We have a building that looks nice inside and out. The outside is painted and it doesn't look like an old garage that someone is using to try to and get by.

Dr. Beemer gave specific examples about how his attention to detail added up to image, such as consistent neatness.

The building has windows with blinds that are properly adjusted. If you have blinds in your building, you don't want them to appear broken, dirty, or sloppily situated. So, just as an example, you want them all at 1/2 mast or 1/4 mast . . . so the facility looks well-kept and professional from the outside.

Furthermore, the establishment includes proper signage with attention to additional external

details.

> Our [Hancock K-9] business sign is clean and freshly painted, well-lit at night, and our parking entrance has markers. We have ample green grass and several little garden areas around our building that are landscaped with trees, grass, and plants. They are well taken care of by my wife. And we have a nice parking area, which we work really hard to keep up so it doesn't have weeds. The parking blocks are identified with straight lines so when clients pull up to them, they can see the clearly marked spaces.

> When asked about how Hancock K-9 advertises and markets services to the public, Dr.

Beemer stated,

> A lot of people will just go to the dog-training section of the phone book and call everybody that is in there to ask how much they charge and what they suggest.

He went on to talk about providing information to clients that helped to set the stage for

expectations should a dog owner choose to select Hancock K-9.

> We put together an informational brochure that could also be emailed. So we actually gave [clients] valuable information about dog training and behavior and about our business, services, and philosophy. This proved to be educational and serve as an example of the level of professionalism clients could expect when they worked with us. We also referred clients to our Web site with examples of cases including the resolution of unusual situations and the positive comments that clients would make about us as a result.

> As the interview turned to the recruitment and hiring of staff personnel, Dr. Beemer said

that each candidate is interviewed by two people with a specific process.

> Two people meet with the candidate to hold an interview. What we have found is that without seeing each other's scores, our staff ends up with comparable scores—whether those scores are for a potential good hire or a potential not so good hire.

When, I commented that this might mean that team members appear to be on the same page, Dr.

Beemer added,

> I think the similar [interview] results speak to the fact we have a decent setup in terms of identifying what . . . people we need to work well with us and our model.

Everyone on our team understands what we are looking for, the kind of questions we have to ask, and what kind of answers we should expect for the person to fit within our business.

An area of discussion that reoccurred throughout the interviews process was the potential

of an exit strategy should Dr. Beemer decide to move on from Hancock K-9.

We consider these things a lot at our age; we've built what we consider a really good business with a solid reputation but we're not sure how much longer we really want to be in charge of the whole thing. So what do we do? There are so many options . . . shut it down, turn it over to our colleagues, sell it to someone new. Those are very big questions for us right now, and someone starting a business should consider these things from the beginning.

Converging Learning Style

Converging style learners are typically discernible by learning through doing and

thinking (D. A. Kolb, 2005). People with these preferences have a penchant for technical tasks

and are less concerned with people and interpersonal aspects. They are best at finding practical

uses for ideas and theories and can solve problems and make decisions readily. The following

section includes examples of data that support a preference for Kolb's converging learning style.

These data describe someone who is assertive, vigorous, and conclusive. Furthermore, it

demonstrates a preference for steering the course of events, acting with urgency, and inviting

challenge with situations and people.

When talking about the challenge of keeping up with the volume of data, new

information, research, and trends in the industry, Dr. Beemer simply stated,

There might be 15 people weighing in on one topic and I might not have time to look at all 15 but I know whose opinions to pay most attention to.

When asked about market pressures, pricing structures, and finding success through

difficult economic times, Dr. Beemer said,

> The big thing is that we stuck to our knitting and kept trying to improve. We watched our pricing especially in the beginning and tried to price ourselves competitively.

Pricing structure also took into consideration that Hancock K-9 was serving an important segment in the industry or niche that no one else in the geographical area did: training for difficult dogs.

> We didn't automatically rule ourselves out because PetSmart was cheaper. Competing with PetSmart and those places is tough because they have a lot of foot traffic with people going in and out all the time. Customers see low prices and have the opportunity to sign up easily for in-store training. It was harder for us because we were not in a big box store or even a pet shop but off on our own separately. We had to get clients to notice us in different ways, and we made a name for ourselves in doing all training well but specializing in dealing with problem dogs.

> When the discussion of opposing training-related opinions and the potential to

compromise with dog owners came up, Dr. Beemer offered these accounts:

> I can think of two occasions where I basically just wrote a check back [to the client] for their money and I told them I couldn't help them.

> I told another person on the telephone that I could not help her and she was astounded. She was referred to me by a really well thought of veterinarian in the area, but I could tell on the phone that she wasn't going to be able to work in our approach.

Accommodating Learning Style

Those who prefer learning through doing and feeling are known as accommodators in Kolb's model (D. A. Kolb, 2005). Learners with this preference are most comfortable working with people and teams to gauge intuitive decision making. The following examples reflect that those with a preference for the accommodating learning style are keen to allow others to feel important in the decision-making processes and show trust in others based on openness. Accommodators tend to show a focus on relationships and support for people through the use of instinctual means of empathy and nurturing.

When discussing the thought of raising prices for valued clients, Dr. Beemer said,

> Month after month we've discussed increasing prices, but we really struggle with that decision. We hate to do that to such loyal clients, some of which have become our friends.

This response demonstrates a concern for being part of the community, being civically minded, and serving a perceived need in the municipality, but more importantly, it represents a concern for clients as friends.

Regarding the appreciation for the kindness shown to Dr. Beemer as he developed his interest in animals at a young age,

> When I was in public school I thought I wanted to be a veterinarian, so I ended up volunteering to work with the veterinarian who was nice enough to take me along. So at an early age, I was able to have the experience of working with both farm animals as well as other small animals.

When working with the team and discussing a new idea or discontinuing a course of action or procedure, Dr. Beemer said,

> As a team, we discuss the process or approach and decide as a group whether we want to keep doing it or do something else. In most cases we'll keep doing something simply because we think it's an important thing for people [dog owners] even though the general public might not realize it yet. But if we still think it's a good idea, we will keep it going despite the fact that it may not be a big money maker. At the same time, we try to make sure we are doing the kinds of things that people care about and respond positively to.

On the topic of employee development, learning, and training, Dr. Beemer said,

> We believe in providing in-service learning for our team to help them grow in every aspect of dog training, problem solving, and client interaction.

As a follow on, when discussing giving employee performance feedback or dealing with employee problems or concerns, Dr. Beemer added,

> We have an appraisal process which includes problem solving. So if we see something we're concerned about or if the employee has something they're concerned about, we sit down and actually do a step-by-step problem-solving process together.

When communicating with clients with differing and potentially conflicting or

diametrically opposed viewpoints on dog training and handling, he said,

> All clients start with at least one private session before they go into a group
> session. So if there is a difference in philosophy, we'll discover it in a private
> session and can deal with it then.

He went on to say,

> Our staff knows how to deal with potential situations where clients may not work
> well within our value system. We teach our people to be good communicators and
> expect them to be encouraging and let the other person talk and express their
> feelings first. Then we tell them if you still can't resolve the problems and believe
> the client's approach is out of line with ours, there are other options. We basically
> give the client a referral to someone else that may offer services more like what
> they are looking for.

The meaning here implies that Hancock K-9 places value on business practices that treat people

with respect and empathy yet is not willing to compromise its own way of operating.

Analyzing Style Through Story

As the researcher for this study, I found myself situated in Dr. Beemer's lived experience

and the context of small business ownership, operatorship, and entrepreneurship. According to

Clandinin and Connelly (2000), it is not unusual for narrative researchers to find themselves "in

the midst—located somewhere along the dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social"

(p. 63). This implies that as researchers, we enter the story already in progress, with participants

in full motion. Clandinin and Connelly expanded the lens by saying that institutions and

communities as narrative landscapes are also in the midst of stories.

From the beginning, Dr. Beemer considered himself to be a dog person but "more than

someone who just liked having dogs as pets," and he wanted to experience their world up close.

He started the process while in middle school by volunteering for a local veterinarian with

thoughts of one day becoming a DVM but quickly learned that at the time "a great deal of pain"

was associated with farm and small animal medicine. Anesthetic was not readily used, and oftentimes the animals had to suffer through an injury or medical procedure. Dr. Beemer studied education and administration, achieving multiple degrees and progressing in the public school system in which he rose to the role of superintendent. His interest in dogs continued as his personal and professional lives grew, through marriage, family, more education, degrees, and community involvement. He began with German shepherd dogs as pets and then parlayed that interest into breeding and showing German shepherds and later Alaskan malamutes. His attention turned to dog training, as a result of trying to locate a trainer with whom he could work and who had "greater sophistication" and was able to move beyond having the handler and dog "walk in a circle and execute basic commands." The training that he did find was available only during the day while he was working, and not much existed in the way of private training outside of group classes. That is when he took action to solve his own problem by getting certified as a dog trainer. He enrolled in a 7-week residential dog trainer course that involved intense instruction, with in-class textbook-style learning sessions in the morning and "dog work" in the afternoons and into the evenings. The rigorous program ran 7 days a week and included long arduous evaluations and examinations—some lasting as long as 6 to 7 hours. Upon his return from the certification course, Dr. Beemer's' son Mark decided to also become a certified dog trainer and completed the same program soon after. Father and son then decided to join forces to begin a dog-training business, and Hancock K-9 was born in 1995.

The pair started slowly, first at their home and then in small rental spaces. They built their business through a series of methodical steps, which included local advertising, forming associations with veterinarians as a means of referral, and building relationships with clients who not only returned for repeat business but also recommended their friends and family to Hancock

K-9 for dog-training and behavioral services. A typical day for Dr. Beemer and Mark would involve study and skill building during the day and client training in the evenings and on weekends. Dr. Beemer stated, "We made ourselves available when clients wanted services and in the meantime honed our dog-training and certification skills by learning from the best in the field." This included studying hundreds of hours of expert content through books, videos, and seminars. Time passed and the list of patrons grew, and Hancock K-9 shifted to rent larger workspaces. Dr. Beemer made it a point to never borrow money or live beyond his means before making each incremental step. Each time the business moved, they continued to pay attention to important details that ultimately helped brand their business image. Close attention was paid to the look of the building itself, parking availability, and usability of the space. Beyond that, Hancock grew its staff, standardized uniforms with the company logo, and made dress code policies that aligned with the conservative nature of the local population. There was a protocol for everything, including client intake, group lessons, staff interviews, staff training, and performance feedback. Books were balanced, staff was paid, and tax ID status was maintained.

Once business was established with a sustainable customer base and income, the operation ran on predictable schedules. The staff understood what was expected of them in terms of dog-training skills, certification, team meetings and participation, customer relationship skills, ongoing learning, and even details such as appearance and facility cleaning protocol. Dr. Beemer was meticulous about keeping the location neat and clean and took pride in a business "free from dog hair and odor." He often received compliments from clients that his establishments did not look or smell like the typical dog-training places they had come to woefully expect, and "that was a good thing."

Today, the establishment residing on Dr. Beemer's property that started with one building has grown with another sizeable addition. The space is heated, air conditioned, and contains specialized dog-training equipment. All trainers are certified and follow the processes for client interactions, time sheets, meetings, and sanitation protocol. Hancock K-9 continues to be sought after as a leader in dog training by clients, veterinarians, and other trainers from the region. They are specifically known for behavioral work and dealing with problem and aggressive dogs—"often those that no one else will take." The owner, operator, entrepreneur carefully and methodically planned every step of his progression, considering daily business transactions as well as a strategy for marketing and future growth.

Finding 1. **Dr. Beemer's learning style, assimilating, and his style of business operations closely align and confirm what he previously recognized about his preferences.**

Dr. Beemer's preferences include a desire for clear and logical explanations, straightforward processes, well-thought-out models, and an analytical approach to problem solving. He is an unusual entrepreneur in that he has nearly 20 years of practice in small business, a full career as a public school leader, and five earned degrees in counseling and education. Dr. Beemer has learned over time and through the lessons of experience to identify his strengths and use them to his best advantage. His long track record has also provided him with the opportunity to understand his weaknesses and develop strategies for overcoming them. He is a well-seasoned professional with years of knowledge, skills, and know-how. He is comfortable in the way he expresses his core business values such as those involved in working with employees and clients and in his technical approach to areas such as marketing, advertising, and accounting.

Throughout his business operations, Dr. Beemer demonstrated a close adherence to the assimilating learning style while also operating within the best andragogical practices: a reflective and self-analytical approach to his style, strengths, and weaknesses; a strong reliance on self-direction in learning; the ability to leverage his own interests (and those of his staff) into deep learning experiences; and a "facilitator" stance of authority within his organization.

Finding 2. **There is a potential positive connection between the demonstrated aspects of Dr. Beemer's assimilating learning style and improved business outcomes.**

Dr. Beemer's approach to business was made successful through intentional progression and an awareness of a measured approach that he knew would likely work for him from the very beginning. His mode of operation speaks largely to that end and is detailed in this chapter's data analysis. Dr. Beemer is a learner who "prefers structure from high-level to the most specific detail" (D. A. Kolb, 2005). His Kolb LSI v3.1 results indicated a preference for the assimilating style, with five key Kolb-related "learnings" that he has applied to his business.

1. **Continuous communication is critical.** The assimilating learning style leads Dr. Beemer to always seek new information about his field, his business operations, the needs of his staff and clients, and the underlying psychology and physiology of the dogs he trains.

2. **Openness with employees and customers builds strong and long-lasting relationships.** Dr. Beemer's open attitude toward information gathering and input from internal and external sources promotes a positive spirit of cooperation and leads to long-term, positive commitments.

3. **Collegiality and shared decision making improve business outcomes.** Because he is able to gather information from a wide variety of sources and integrate it into a

professionally useful approach to running his business, Dr. Beemer is able to achieve positive business results—when coupled with hard work, a stable economy, and a good location for his activities. His learning predisposition avoids his making impulsive business decisions that are idiosyncratic or unwise as he incorporates the points of view of many people in his business ecosystem and then integrates those points of view into an effective decision.

4.   **Self-knowledge about learning style, when applied to the workplace and integrated with a continuous learning approach for employees, yields tangible results.** Dr. Beemer's self-awareness about his learning style allows him to leverage the positive aspects of the assimilating style (e.g., openness, collegiality, communication) while avoiding the concomitant pitfalls. His decisions become intentional rather than impulsive.

5.   **Attention to detail, when applied appropriately, allows Dr. Beemer to gain better insight into his operations all levels, without overburdening him with too much information.** Effective filtering of information translates into rapid and effective decision making. These, in turn, have translated into tangible business results. For example, he has seen a 15% average gross revenue increase during the past 5 years, with increasing profitability in each of those years from 3% to 20%, in contrast to the early difficult years of the company. Over the past 5 years, only one of his full-time employees has left the organization to start his own business, which demonstrates extraordinary retention. All of his part-time employees have stayed with the business during that same 5-year period, and each of those part-time employees has expanded his client load by approximately 10% per year. He has achieved a success rate of 98% in dog-training

activities measured by anonymous client surveys (with the latest survey conducted in 2013), his own analysis of dog behavior improvement, client referrals, and increased referrals from veterinarians within a 100-mile radius. He has also developed a strongly positive reputation among his clients and his employees, as shown by client retention, second-generation clients, and continued attendance of clients at a variety of classes offered on a monthly basis as well as a social relationship that exists between the clients and trainers.

As part of his assimilating style, Dr. Beemer is currently seeking information about "the next step" for his business, whether this is expansion, sale, or maintenance of the status quo. Kolb has indicated that this is a style that continuously seeks information about a wide variety of options and outcomes and attempts to match the information gained with a set of life goals and economic priorities—in an environment where those may change frequently and radically. His search for information to assimilate and integrate into a successful solution, regardless of whether he is expanding the business or exiting the marketplace, is a hallmark of his learning style and seems to be one of the key factors of his past success.

Finding 3. **The understanding of learning style may have applicability to other would-be entrepreneurs.**

Self-awareness and personal insight can potentially help an entrepreneur take advantage of approaches that might work best for him or her in business. The importance of understanding learning style also means knowing that all styles are valuable and that each comes with associated advantages and disadvantages. A key aspect of this finding is the ability to leverage an understanding of learning style into improved business results. Furthermore, Kolb's LSI is an example of one tool that could help to build a paradigm of self-awareness (including the

development of individual strengths and preferences), but there are many other instruments from which to choose.

Summary

This research project told the story of how one small business owner and entrepreneur in the pet dog-training industry operationalized learning. This phenomenon was examined through the construct of perceived Kolb learning style preferences and hours of dialogue. Hancock K-9 was founded in 1995 by a retired school superintendent, doctor of education, civic-minded leader, dog lover, and successful professional. The family business was built on sound decision making, a planned process, and meticulous attention to detail, as reflected in all aspects of the business. This approach to operations aligns with the assimilating learning style in Kolb's learning style assessment instrument and personified through Dr. Beemer's actions. The next chapter will summarize what was learned and how it can be applied as well as present possibilities for future research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the study and findings, discuss implications these findings may have on the body of literature, and make suggestions for future research.

Summary of Study

I examined entrepreneurial operations of a small business owner's pet dog-training enterprise in connection with David A. Kolb's LSI. I opened with an introduction to the importance of small business to the U.S. economy and the pet dog-training industry as a growing market sector, while highlighting the significance of learning style identification. An interview with the entrepreneur regarding his journey into professional life and business formed a baseline, followed by administration of the Kolb LSI v3.1 instrument to the entrepreneur to determine his learning style preferences and debrief the results. Interviews 2 and 3 included specific questions about business operations in relation to his learning style.

I used the qualitative research method of narrative inquiry to reach the level of detail necessary for understanding these phenomena and paired narrative investigation with a co-research approach to best explore the topic and research question. Narrative inquiry provided a method for exploration through story and personal experience, whereas a co-research approach allowed me to work with the entrepreneur as a partner and gain an even higher level of granularity and descriptiveness.

I used a digital recorder to capture the conversations and transcribed the interviews word for word. Each transcript was then discussed with the entrepreneur to augment the data for increased accuracy and meaning. Next, I analyzed the data by using Kolb's learning styles as

major thematic structures and categorized groupings of data by coding them into each of Kolb's learning styles. This analysis helped me grasp the prevalence of Dr. Beemer's preferred learning style, and I determined that the majority of data aligned with his expressed style. Analysis demonstrated that he had a keen sense of awareness about business and knew how to leverage his strengths while recognizing and compensating for his weaknesses. Through the process, I gained information and insights from his expert opinion so that I could better understand important considerations for success in small business ownership.

The work of David A. Kolb (2005) on identifying learning styles served as the foundation for the study. Learning style was defined as a particular way in which the mind receives and processes information (Chapman & Carter, 1979). Each learning style has advantages and disadvantages; there is no right or wrong style, only individual preference. Most learners, including Dr. Beemer, use more than one style, and most people employ a mixture of styles and preferences.

Preferences may change to suit the context of the situation and unique circumstances, which indicates the importance of an "experiential" factor in the operationalization of learning style. Kolb explained that his focus on experiential learning was informed from his interpretation of the work of James, Dewey, Lewin, Piaget, Rogers, and Freire. These scholars suggested that learning from experience represented a central role in the process of learning. One way Kolb brought the ideas of these works together and gave structure to ELTs was through the creation of his LSI, which was used as a tool in this research study.

The learning preferences and business implications of Dr. James Beemer of Hancock K-9, a small dog-training business established in 1995, was the target of this study. Dr. Beemer is

an experienced and effective dog trainer with five earned degrees, including extensive coursework in psychology and behavior theory, who became an entrepreneur nearly by accident. He realized that dog-training services in his locale were unsophisticated and lacking in depth, so he decided to become a trainer himself and launch a small business with his family. His wealth of experience with dogs, education, and entrepreneurship made him and his business apt selections for the purpose of this study. I incorporated a co-research approach with Dr. Beemer as an analytical partner throughout the research study. Together we formed a collective, co-created meaning of the raw transcript data and reworked it for greater clarification. This mutually cooperative inquiry process provided flexibility and the liberty to reframe inferences as the research unfolded and thus made greater sense of the important aspects of the entrepreneur's story.

Together, we addressed the research question guiding the study: *How does the entrepreneurs' preferred learning style inform the way(s) he operates his dog training small business day-to-day?*

The study determined that Dr. Beemer's preferred learning style (assimilating) permeates every aspect of the operation of his small business, from his philosophy and values to setting prices and making decisions about the way he manages his people and uses organizational capabilities, competitive advantages and unique selling points.

Impetus for the Study: Personal, Business, and Adult Learning Considerations

Personal Impetus

As a researcher for this study, I examined a number of areas that are of particular interest to me and also have relevance in the literature. Since early childhood, I have been fascinated

with animals and specifically dogs. My parents were quick to remind me of the time when I was very young that I found a stray dog, brought him home, and named him "Charlie." Because we already had our own large family German shepherd in the house, I was allowed to keep him safe, dry, fed, and well-loved in the carport. The days passed, my animal-human bond with Charlie grew stronger, and I am told he followed me at every opportunity possible. Then one day, Charlie's family arrived, excited to see him and happy to take him home. I was heartbroken.

Growing up, we had a male German shepherd dog followed by a female, and then for decades I was without a dog. Although I longed for one, my days in corporate America were long, as was commuting time, business travel, and later part-time graduate studies. I realized it would hardly be fair for me to have my own dog only to have him home alone for 14+ hours per day. I could not bear the thought of a dog at home with perhaps only one short visit from a dog walker per day, so I waited.

In 2009, I finished my coursework for the Ph.D. program and thought a good reward as well as an incentive to keep me home to write my dissertation would be to rescue a pup. I spent months reading about different breeds and talking with veterinarians and trainers before attending pet adoption events. I even sat in on a few dog-training sessions to get an idea of what it would be like to own and train my own dog before I made the leap. On Labor Day weekend in 2009, I fell in love.

Thinking I was looking for an adult female dog and visiting many at the adoption event, I found the one. He was a 7-month-old male, with short orange fur and white ticking that insisted on curling up in my lap as I sat down on the sidewalk. I had no idea of his age or breed, but he warmed my heart and made me smile. I tried to remain open as I visited other dogs for potential

adoption that day, but I kept coming back to him over and over again. He was exceptionally sweet and loving, and I brought him home.

As time passed and he grew from 39 lb to 50 lb and more, I began to notice behavioral issues. He would guard his rawhides and get snarky with people whom he believed to be a threat to him or me. Before I knew it, he was 75 lb, a force in full-fledged dog fights, and I was beside myself in bewilderment about how to handle my sweet boy. I spoke with my veterinarian and contacted a trainer, who was a fabulous source of information and encouragement for me as I navigated the problem dog territory and learned how to train and manage my lovable but difficult pup. I took every opportunity to learn any time I could, including through taking private and group dog-training classes while reading about dog aggression and reactivity. I also had my dog evaluated in Ohio when I was there on vacation. I read about and researched dog-training organizations in the area and found that one place came highly recommended by a number of different sources. Although it was about a 40-mile drive from the family house in Ohio, I made the trek to the place known in this study as Hancock K-9 and met Dr. Beemer. I continued my education by participating in more group classes at Hancock K-9 with my dog and took a 3-month-long continuing education course (all theory and no dog) in canine behavior and training taught by Dr. Beemer through the local university. I was now fortunate to be learning from Dr. Beemer in Ohio and my trainer in Virginia.

In 2011, my dog trainer in Virginia told me she thought I had unusually good instincts for dogs and people and that I should consider becoming a certified dog trainer. I expressed great interest, and she quickly took me under her wing as an apprentice and had me training dogs professionally in the Washington, D.C., metro area within that same year. I furthered my learning in the summer of 2012 by dedicating more than 200 volunteer hours to a local animal

shelter, where I worked with rescue dogs to train them and make them "more adoptable" for the general public. The opportunity to work in this field allowed me to combine many of my passions: business; consulting; training of adults, children, and dogs; and the desire to be in a constant learning environment.

That is the story of how I came to produce this dissertation. Once I focused in on a topic, this study seemed logical and the most thought-provoking choice to suit both my personal and business interests. I believe it will have applicability to me and others for years to come, and my hope is that it provides a template or source of ideas for anyone who may have similar desires or interests. In addition, the information that arose from the study about the entrepreneur's learning style and its connection to his approach to managing his business provides a source of data for other emerging entrepreneurs regardless of business domain.

Adult Learning Impetus

My long-standing interest in the theory and practice of adult learning was another factor in selecting the study topic. Because of their relevance to the results of the study, adult learning and andragogy are discussed in this section, and the concepts of self-direction and self-understanding are touched on briefly as they relate to the literature and this research study.

Andragogy, self-direction, and self-understanding. Adult learning concepts informed the activities and analysis of the co-researchers as they explored Dr. Beemer's learning style and his business. At the theoretical level, andragogy, Knowles described that people become adults psychologically when they arrive at a self-concept of being responsible for their own lives or being self-directing (Knowles, 1975). Andragogical theory is a lens that was used by the co-researchers to interpret Dr. Beemer's philosophy, psychology, and activities. Knowles

conceptualized andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn and created six assumptions about the adult learner based on other areas of education. These six assumptions underlying andragogy are (a) self-concept, (b) experience, (c) readiness to learn depends on need, (d) problem-centered focus, (e) internal motivation, and (f) adults need to know why they need to know something (Knowles, 1968). These andragogical assumptions were visible in Dr. Beemer's interviews and practice, but perhaps the ones with the greatest applicability were readiness to learn, problem-centered focus, internal motivation, and the need to know.

Readiness to learn depends on need, and Dr. Beemer had compelling stimuli— observation of suboptimal practices by other trainers and lack of local availability of training— to learn to train dogs at a higher level of competence than what was available to him locally. Those circumstances fed his problem-centered focus, internal motivation, and the need to know. Dr. Beemer's actions demonstrated his determination to solve his own problems and take on the learning required for dog-training certification, which in turn provided him with a reason to learn and immediate application. In short, he had the freedom of choice and the opportunity to see instantaneous practice of his newly acquired learning.

In his business practice, self-direction and self-understanding are factors associated with Dr. Beemer's learning style and his implementation of that style. In self-directed learning, learners take initiative and make use of resources rather than simply react to transmissions from resources, thus helping learners to learn more effectively. The concept of self-directed learning was first discussed in the educational literature as early as the 1920s (Lindeman, 1926). From these writings, a broad description of self-directed learning emerged as a "way of being" in which individuals take the initiative with or without the help of others. This concept was

important to the study because Dr. Beemer demonstrated a high level of self-direction when he took the initiative to become a dog trainer and established himself as an entrepreneur.

Data collection through the process of narrative inquiry, interviews, and discussion gave Dr. Beemer the opportunity to reflect and share his entrepreneurial insights—articulating his self-understanding and the degree to which this influenced his business. Within the framework of the study, a form of study-specific self-understanding occurred for him over time and appeared in the dialogue as he described his actions that led to business success. According to Zahavi (2005), "To form a self-narrative more must be done than simply recall and recount certain life events. One must also consider these events reflectively and deliberate on their meaning to decide how they fit together" (p. 113). In other words, Dr. Beemer participated in an activity to reveal himself to himself, while forming a business and study-related understanding of his specific character, assurances, life history, and so forth.

Business Impetus

The third and final rationale for conducting this study comes from my interest in business and my desire to connect adult learning theory with business operations. My consideration of experiential learning and action learning as conduits for business improvement also contributed to my selection of this study.

Much of adult learning that takes place in the workplace includes the understanding of corporate operations. Knowledge of learning style in business may assist with professional development and incorporation of new skills and continuous learning. Furthermore, it may provide insight into developing individual creativity, innovation, and awareness of the skills needed for customer relationship building, creating new services, or implementing change.

Learning opportunities for adults exist in various settings, ranging from a formal institution to a place of employment or a social/recreational setting. It is important to acknowledge prior knowledge and experience of learners, including their own skills as lifelong learners (Knowles, 1975).There are myriad theories applicable to adult learning in business, but two that particularly resonate in the workplace are experiential learning and action learning.

Experiential learning was discussed at length through this research study and is the theory on which Kolb's LSI is based—the foundation that adults learn best by doing or through their own experiences. Andresen, Boud, and Cohen (2000) provided criteria for experience-based learning and posited that for a project to be truly experiential, some amalgamations of the following are necessary:

- The goal of experience-based learning involves something personally significant or meaningful to the learner.
- Learners should be personally engaged.
- Reflective thought and opportunities for learners to write or discuss their experiences should be ongoing throughout the process.
- The whole person is involved, meaning not just their intellect but also their senses, their feelings, and their personalities.
- Learners should be recognized for prior learning they bring into the process.
- Teachers need to establish a sense of trust, respect, openness, and concern for the well-being of the learners.

Action learning. Pioneered by Revans (1971), action learning comprises working on real problems, characterized by learning and implementing solutions. The idea is that action learning enables people to handle complex issues more effectively and thus accelerate learning. Furthermore, the process integrates research (into what is obscure), learning (about what is unknown), and action (to resolve a problem) into a single activity and develops an attitude of

questioning and reflection to help individuals and organizations change themselves in a rapidly

shifting environment. According to Haan and Burger (2005), action learning benefits include

- having the opportunity to reflect;
- practicing the postponement of judgment, providing an opportunity for new connections and answers to arise;
- receiving support and challenge in relation to specific issues;
- being held accountable for actions and their impact;
- setting goals, developing options, and taking action that would not have been possible working on their own;
- learning to listen carefully, ask powerful questions, and offer ideas, without telling others what to do; and
- learning about group dynamics and how to contribute effectively within a group.

Whether using experiential learning or action learning practices, more and more

corporations are turning to adult learning theories because they are regarded as a means for

transforming culture and providing continuous learning. Some view these theories as the

gateway to performance improvement and the creation of a learning organization.

I incorporated experiential learning and action learning into the study through the

selection of my interview questions. Both approaches support immediate relevance to project-

centered experiences as a way to learn and were readily incorporated into the query design.

Study Results

Dr. Beemer's learning style (i.e., assimilating) and his style of business operations closely

align with and confirm what he previously recognized about his preferences. He has a desire for

clear and logical explanations, straightforward processes, well-thought-out models, and an

analytical approach to problem solving. He is an unusual entrepreneur in that he has nearly 20

years of practice in small business, considering only 26% of small businesses survive 15 years or longer (SBA, 2013). In addition to the business, Dr. Beemer has had a full career as a public school leader and has earned five degrees in counseling and education. He has learned over time and through experience to identify his strengths and use them to his best advantage. His long track record has also provided him with the opportunity to understand his weaknesses and develop strategies for overcoming them. He is a well-seasoned professional with years of knowledge, skills, and know-how. He is comfortable in the way he expresses his core business values such as those involved in working with employees and clients and in his technical approach to areas such as marketing, advertising, and accounting.

Throughout his business operations, Dr. Beemer demonstrated a close adherence to the assimilating learning style, while also operating within best andragogical practices: a reflective and self-analytical approach to his style, strengths, and weaknesses; a strong reliance on self-direction in learning; the ability to leverage his own interests (and those of his staff) into deeper learning experiences; and a "facilitator" stance of authority within his organization. One clear example of his approach comes in the development of his specialty area or niche—working with reactive and aggressive dogs. Dr. Beemer saw a need in the market, had a genuine interest in the service he wanted to offer, honed his skills through certification, and began taking on more clients with problematic dogs. He designed and conducted an intentional and systematic process to build relationships with veterinarians, advertise locally, and gain recommendations from satisfied clients who shared their positive results. He in turn educated his staff on the training techniques for handling dogs with aggressive and reactive behaviors and with the dog owners about handling those issues.

Dr. Beemer has also learned to become more open to ideas with which he may have been less comfortable previously, such as allowing his staff to develop specialties in which he does not have a primary interest. For example, although he has experience with agility and other competitive dog sports, it is not one of his favorite areas. However, he was willing to let his staff design and deliver a series of agility courses. He trusted that his staff members understood the rigor and care involved with creating new course offerings. He also knew they would work within the confines of the behavior model used by the organization, submit new course outlines to the trainer group for evaluation and discussion, and confer with him for final approval—all well-known process steps at Hancock K-9.

Entrepreneurialism and the Study Results

The study produced useful and interesting results that implied a connection between Dr. Beemer's learning style and the dynamics of his business and its ongoing success. The data presented in Chapter 4 show evidence that Dr. Beemer has a deep understanding of how his LSI learning style preferences inform the way he operationalizes his business and makes decisions day to day. Entrepreneurship is often a learning process, yet there is limited knowledge and understanding in the literature of the interaction between learning and entrepreneurship and in particular within the pet dog-training industry as small business.

The allure of becoming a budding entrepreneur may seem stimulating to some people for a number of reasons. The would-be entrepreneur may be enthralled by the thought of learning new skills and gaining knowledge, being his or her own boss, avoiding a commute, or making a sizable salary. It is easy to get caught up in dreaming about the potential of freedom and variety that could come as a result of starting your own franchise, freelance, online, or social enterprise business.

Although the thought of developing a personal business concept allowing for greater self-expression while generating profit is attractive to many would-be entrepreneurs, it also presents obstacles that may not otherwise arise as an employee of someone else's company. By working for an established organization, operations are of little to no concern. A business owner takes on tasks such as budgeting and finances, hiring and managing staff, securing clientele, and conducting market research, to name a few. Thus, it is important to understand that, regardless of business type and services provided, there are pros and cons and inherent risk in becoming an entrepreneur.

Business owners struggle with time management, organization, communication, teamwork, accounting, planning, branding, and marketing design. An equal deterrent to entrepreneurship may be a lack of self-awareness about the level of business skill and know-how one actually possesses. Entering into a new business venture requires an "eyes wide opened" approach to personal strengths and weaknesses and level of professional effectiveness. Moreover, being frank and honest with yourself about key deficiencies could provide key insights into sustaining one's business.

Specifically, the study provided business insights that include the following:

- Setting up and running a business can be all consuming, and it is critical to be mindful of the demands required in operating a company.
- Self-awareness of the entrepreneur's business strengths and weaknesses is an important factor in business success. Dr. Beemer noted,

> It's important to be honest with yourself and know where you shine and where you don't as a business person. The trick is to know what to expect as much as possible and to think about how you can make up for the areas

where you are lacking.

- Create a business structure that makes sense for the way you like to operate. As Dr. Beemer said in the first interview,

> For us, it was important to live within our means from the very start, so we structured our business as such. As we earned more profit, we carefully reinvested money back in the business where it made the most sense. Not many people have a lot of cash to throw around and half of the business start-ups fail within the first 2 years. As an owner, you end up working a lot of hours and being the "Jack of All Trades" because you can't afford to hire someone for all the different things that need to be done.

His learning style bolsters a communications approach that has produced a strongly positive reputation among his clients and his employees, as shown by client retention, second-generation clients (i.e., when former clients return with new dogs and puppies), and continued attendance of clients at a variety of classes offered on a monthly basis as well as a social relationship that exists between clients and trainers (this relationship has the feel of belonging to a club of like- minded thinkers).

- As seen in the post-interview analysis, Dr. Beemer appeared to connect entrepreneurial style with success-related metrics. For example, Dr. Beemer has observed the following:
  - A 15% average gross revenue increase during the past 5 years, with increasing profitability in each of those years of from 3% to 20%. These figures are a stark contrast to the early years of the company, when survival of the business was the main concern and ability to pay the bills was always in question.
  - During the same 5 years, one of his full-time employees left the organization to start his own business, and one of his part-time employees filled that full-time position. One hundred percent of his part-time employees have stayed with the business during that same 5-year period. Each of those part-time

employees has expanded his client load by approximately 10% per year, as shown by increased participation in specialized group classes.

- o A success rate of 98% in dog-training activities measured by anonymous client surveys (the last survey was conducted in 2013, in which 100 clients were surveyed in chronological order from the starting date), his own analysis of dog behavior improvement, client referrals, and increased referrals from veterinarians within a 100-mile radius.

- There is a connection between the attitude about business that underlies the assimilating learning style and the day-to-day activities that Dr. Beemer performs to optimize business performance. These include

- o working cooperatively with his staff in a role more reminiscent of "guide" rather than "teacher,"

- o providing an environment that promotes continuous learning for all full- and part-time employees both within the dog-training domain and in techniques for improving human relations and perception skills necessary to work with the dog owner (i.e., adoption of uniforms and maintenance of a spotless environment where training is conducted),

- o providing a high level of continuous communication (both quantity and quality) about dog training, customer management, public relations (i.e., advertising and participation in welfare activities for saving abandoned dogs), and business-related issues, and

- self-awareness derived through learning style identification may provide benefits toward greater business acumen.

Self-awareness and personal insight can potentially help an entrepreneur take advantage of approaches that might work best in business. The importance of understanding learning style also means knowing that all styles are valuable and that each comes with associated advantages and disadvantages. Furthermore, Kolb's LSI is an example of a tool that could help to build a paradigm of self-awareness (including the development of individual strengths and preferences), but there are many other instruments from which to choose. Although it was not the purpose of this study to show a direct relation between learning style and business outcomes (e.g., profitability, staff retention rate, business longevity, client satisfaction, etc.), I hypothesize that Dr. Beemer's insights into his own learning style, and his consistent application of that style to his business practice, enhance the quality and profitability of his business in measurable and significant ways. I also hypothesize that the results observed with Dr. Beemer have potential meaning for other entrepreneurs who reflect on their learning styles and attempt to integrate their style with their business practices. Such hypotheses, of course, would need to be tested.

Dr. Beemer's results suggest those of a mature learner who is "looking back" over a successful career and who has managed small business operations for a prolonged period of time. A newer, less experienced entrepreneur could use the Kolb LSI results as a means to help him or her "look forward" or plan for future success. Perhaps results from this instrument could generate new insights or "a-ha" moments for those with less experience and, following in Dr. Beemer's footsteps, work to leverage what might be the most successful practices for him or her. For example, although aware that he has a preference for the use of models in general, Dr. Beemer has used them successfully to communicate new and often challenging concepts to his staff. At the same time, Dr. Beemer is open to the idea of staff interpretations of models. A new

entrepreneur could emulate Dr. Beemer's combination of intellectual rigor and managerial openness to achieve more effective results.

Implications of the Findings for Potential Future Research

Deakins and Freel (1999) stated that limited knowledge and understanding of the interaction relating to learning and entrepreneurship exists in the literature, and furthermore speculated that it is one of the most understudied areas of entrepreneurial research and understanding. This study is meant to partially fill that gap. As the researcher of this study, I suggest these possible future additions to the body of literature:

1. **Offering a coalescence of subjects thus far not yet collectively examined in one research study, similar to what I have attempted by combining small business, learning style, Kolb LSI, entrepreneurship, and the pet dog training industry.** Through review of the literature and various studies involving each of these topical areas, I did not find any studies that joined these areas together. My hope is that this study offers something new to the literature and adds to the body of as-yet under-researched entrepreneurial knowledge. The process of combining these disparate elements offers a wide range of possibilities for future researchers in these and other domains.

2. **Serving as a source of stimulus for a researcher to conduct further studies in small business, learning style, Kolb LSI, entrepreneurship, and the pet dog-training industry.** As mentioned above, this is the first study of its kind to unite these topics using narrative inquiry, and my hope is that a future researcher may build from this study. For example, a new study could explore the proliferation of the pet dog-training industry in relation to entrepreneurial competencies by asking questions about entrepreneurship competencies and

determine if the competencies in small business ownership in the pet dog (or virtually any other) industry are the same as those associated with other market segments.

3.   **Offering greater voice to the pet dog-training industry as it matures from vocation to profession, as evidenced by the standardization and certification movement in the field.** According to the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (n.d.),

> Prior to its founding in 2001, there was no nationally available certification process for dog trainers. Since then, CCPDT has expanded to offer knowledge and skills based examinations covering animal training and behavior. Candidates who pass the CCPDT's examinations earn specific designations which may be used after their names. All certificants must earn continuing education units to maintain their designations. They must also adhere to a strict Code of Ethics in their practices.

This study may offer additional legitimacy to the field of pet dog training simply by addressing the topic as part of a doctoral research study and raising awareness with a scholarly audience.

4.   **Conducting further research using David A. Kolb's 4.0 LSI instrument or another similar instrument.** A new study could be conducted to explore the use of the latest version of Kolb's LSI. Version 4.0 expands the learning style typologies from four to nine and introduces the measurement of learning flexibility. According to Kolb (2013), this new measure has greater application for coaching and for deliberate improvement of learning capability. It was created as a deeper level of granularity of learning style and to provide a clearer picture of a learner's response to the inventory.

5.   **Conducting a study to determine if a particular learning style may be identified with those entrepreneurs who are perceived as successful within a set of**

identified parameters. Such studies exist using similar instruments in other professions. In some cases, success has been identified with a particular style.

Conclusion

This study looked at a way to gain potential insights into learning style and preferences that may translate into business applications. For Dr. James Beemer, the study validated what he already knew as a veteran business professional about his learning style and preferences. For someone new or wanting to learn more about their own inclinations, results from a learning style instrument such as Kolb LSI v3.1 could provide such understandings, with helpful implications for small business ownership.

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Appendix A

Dr. James Beemer Model: Personal, Professional, and Leadership Philosophies

Dr. Beemer's operational practices are grounded in distinct goals and leadership principles which permeate each aspect of his business and personal life. The results from the Kolb LSI version 3.1 identified Dr. Beemer's preferences for learning aligned with the assimilator style. His natural inclination is to amalgamate information in to sensible constructs. The following outline represents a manifestation of Dr. Beemer's personal model developed by him overtime and used as his guiding framework day-to-day.

Chapter 1

Every Day You Live, You Lead

Leadership Shows

How Leadership Emerges

Leaders Who Don't Care

Leaders Who Are Politically Correct

Leaders Who Value Others

Chapter 2

What's Fundamental

A Concrete Approach

Prevailing Paradigm

Origin of Ideas

The Biggest Challenge

Chapter 5

Personal Dynamics of Building a Team

Social

Steady

Analytical

Using a Knowledge of Style

Components of Style

Is There a Best Style?

Task Versus Relationship

Style, Comfort, and Competence

Style and Job Expectations

Focus of Communication

Task Management

Leadership and Management

Maximizing Style

Observation and Feedback

Using Instrumentation

Self-Report Instrumentation

Peer-Report Instrumentation

Choosing Instruments

Level of Risk

Budget, Research, and Receptivity

Viability Over Time

Trust as an Issue

Scope of Instrumentation

Chapter 8

Belief Systems

      The Little Voice in My Head

      A Computer-Based Analogy

            The Impact of Growing Up

            Evaluating Our Programming

            Specific Sources of Our Files

            Assessing File Accuracy

      Cultural Awareness

            A Perspective on Diversity

      Correcting a Fallacy

      Just Give Me the Facts

      The Issue of Flexibility

      Impact on Motivation

Chapter 9

Intangible Elements

      General Areas to Be Considered

      Scales for Specific Evaluation

      Directions for Completing the Scales

            Knowledge Rating Scale

            Experience Rating Scale

            Commitment Rating Scale

            Fear Rating Scale

Chapter 10

Information Gathering and Helping Skills

Chapter 11

Stating Positions and Problem Solving

Defining the Playbook

Chapter 15

Maximizing Success and Satisfaction

Chapter 16

A Better Game Plan

Scout the Opposition

Organized Practices

Changes in the League

Dress Rehearsals

Listen to the Players

Players Won't Always Be Happy

Popularity of the Coach

The Coach Succeeds When the Team Wins

Empowering Your Team

Rookie Camp

In Touch With the Owners

Chapter 17

Refining and Expanding Skills

Practice Formats

Small Group Discussion

Dyads or Triads

The Fishbowl

Group Simulation

Audio or Visual Recording

Processing and Debriefing

Action Activities

Real Versus Simulated Issues

3. Identify Elements That Affect the Issue

4. Determine Direction

5. Implementation

6. Follow-up

Where to Focus

Marketing as Manipulation

Spotlight Talent

Celebrate Victories

Chapter 21

Focus Groups and Forums

Size Makes a Difference

Staff Discussion Groups

Introducing the Idea

Selecting Participants

Personal Invitation

Scheduling Sessions

Discussion Format

Follow-Up

Tips on Process

Positive Fallout

Outreach Forums

Inviting Participants

Impact of the Invitation

Don't Fight Losing Battles

Do Some Regular Physical Activity

Work on Your Problems