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Submission method:	All written assessments, where practical and possible, must be submitted via Turnitin unless otherwise instructed by the Lecturer. (Please DO NOT put this assessment specification into Turnitin or it will match many similarities with other students' submissions.) Alternative submission method (if applicable): Late submission of the assessment will result in a late penalty mark: Work which is submitted up to 1 week late will be capped at 40% for the first attempt and will be awarded a mark of 0% for re-assessment. Late submission penalties may be lifted only if there is an approved extenuating circumstances claim. Work submitted more than 1 week late will be considered as a non-submission and will not be marked. The work may be considered as a submission for reassessment if offered by an Examining Board or if there is an approved extenuating circumstances claim.		
Academic honesty / referencing:	Academic honesty is required. In the main body of your submission you must give credit to authors on whose research and ideas your work is based. Append to your submission a reference list that indicates the books, articles, etc. that you have used, cited or quoted in order to complete this assessment.		

Video Presentation Link: <https://youtu.be/redFKFV-ZoA?si=loPbQloiKJHYe2PT>

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TASK 1: Identification of a Real-World Business Problem

There has been a home-based cake shop in the neighbourhood for over 6 years now, named “Baked by Shamimi”. The company’s primary items are pre-order birthday cakes, wedding cakes, brownies, cupcakes and other pastries. Despite its length of service and loyal customers, the company is facing challenges in its operations, especially amid the current economic distress.

This business is always affected by rising costs of ingredients, such as butter, flour, chocolate, cream, and milk and dairy products. In the baking industry, it is hard to balance ingredients with quality, as the flavour and texture of baked goods are highly dependent upon the raw ingredients used. Consequently, continuous increases in ingredient prices could increase the business’s operating expenses.

The owner’s feedback is that there is a challenge because of the sharp rise in ingredient prices. The higher the prices of basic ingredients, the higher the price of a whole cake. Prices are important to local clients, so if the owner increases the selling price, they may order less or switch to another home baker. The profit margin may also suffer if the owner decides to keep the original prices to be competitive with other home-based bakeries. Small home-based businesses find it more challenging to maintain themselves over time as a result of this circumstance.

This was an issue I noticed from the owner’s feedback and from my own experience of having been a past customer of theirs. The owner’s comments enabled me to make sense of the cost of the ingredients and how it is affecting a genuine small business in my neighbourhood.

TASK 2: Use of Generative AI and Academic Literature to Define the Problem

I utilised ChatGPT to investigate scholarly literature and gain a better understanding of the primary problem of growing ingredient costs. To help me with the ideas, I used a wide variety of prompts that led me to some appropriate business and economic ideas that might illuminate Baked by Shamimi's situation.

One of them is:

“Describe the important points concerning the increase in input costs in small businesses and the consequences that can be drawn as a result of recent academic literature.”

The AI suggested the following concepts: input cost inflation, operating costs, profit margin, cost management, and business resilience. As I did a study myself on sources about rising input costs and SME profitability, I found that increasing input costs may prove to be a challenge for small businesses. Their profit margins are under pressure. In general, this validated the ideas put out by AI. However, the AI explanation was not very specific and failed to consider the conditions of small businesses or those that are operating from home. More thorough explanations of how smaller businesses could have fewer resources and less flexibility when dealing with increased expenses have been presented by academic research (Adikaram & Surangi, 2025). Consequently, reading the academic literature made it clearer to me that a microbusiness like Baked by Shamimi might find it more difficult to deal with the effects of growing expenses.

I used another prompt to understand how cost, pricing, and customers are related:

“Using recent peer-reviewed literature, explain how the cost of producing a product and service can influence the pricing decisions and the customer's demand in a small business.”

The AI suggested that the pricing strategy, price sensitivity, customer demand, customer affordability, and readiness to pay are all factors that should be considered. It was useful to have these ideas around, as they helped to render the business's situation clear. When setting prices, businesses should also take operating expenses and consumer behaviour into account (Lengow, 2025). However, as Baked by Shamimi's actual experience shows, increasing prices may not be an easy decision to make. Local customers may be cost-sensitive and order less or move to a different home baker if they feel the prices are too high. As a result,

the interview data made it easier for me to comprehend how the theoretical ideas put out by AI relate to actual small-business scenarios.

Last but not least, I used the following prompt:

“What are some of the theoretical concepts that help explain how small businesses can remain competitive with their increasing costs?”

The AI suggested cost control, adapting strategies, and gaining a competitive edge. These notions were also generally supported in the scientific literature, with particular emphasis on the importance of enterprises reacting to the changing environment (EBR Consulting, 2024). But according to Baked by Shamimi’s experience, adapting entails more than just cutting expenses. In order to raise awareness and draw customers, the owner additionally used social media sites like Instagram and Threads. This illustrates the way in which a small business can adjust its spending and be flexible with its marketing efforts.

In general, the AI responses were helpful in generating ideas and providing me with a starting point to research further. Most of the concepts are supported by the academic literature, but sometimes the responses from the AI were too generic. While speaking to Baked by Shamimi, I felt the ideas were practically applicable in an actual local company, however, the responses were more detailed in the academic sources. But I wasn’t just using AI to identify the most relevant ideas, I also used academic sources and the owner’s first-hand experience to validate the ideas that were provided.

Based on the AI outputs and my academic research, this is the final problem definition I selected.

“This has placed financial pressure on home-based food businesses, as the producer needs to consider increased costs of production, pricing, the affordability of the product to the customer and competition. So the problem is not only the increase in costs but how the company will adjust to the increase in costs and keep consumers and be competitive.”

I selected this definition because it encapsulates the academic ideas I encountered while researching it, as well as the experience of Baked by Shamimi. It also provides greater understanding of the issue than simply reporting an increase in the cost of ingredients.

TASK 3: Development of Research Question and Research Approach

Here is the prompt I used with ChatGPT to generate a research question that is realistic and appropriate for this study:

“Based on the problem of rising ingredient costs in home-based cake businesses, please suggest a few focused and realistic research questions that are suitable for a small-scale business research project.”

And AI suggested:

- 1) What impact will increasing the price of ingredients have on the price of the business?
- 2) How will a home business cake shop adjust to increased costs of ingredients and still have customers?
- 3) How will an increase in ingredient prices affect customer orders and price setting?

I selected the second research question, as it is more specific and more relevant to the actual problem that Baked by Shamimi is facing. It is also realistic to study on a small scale, as this highlights how the business reacts to increased costs whilst attempting to maintain customer demand.

Next, I posed a question to AI about what kind of research methodology they think would be suitable:

“Which research method would be most appropriate for examining the relationship between an entrepreneur’s home-based cake company, increasing the price of ingredients and keeping customers’ interest in the product? And then propose a sensible research, data collection technique and sampling process for a small-scale research.”

And AI suggested:

“A qualitative case study design is recommended and the data collection process should include a primary semi-structured interview with the business owner as well as document analysis of social media engagement, which is appropriate for a purposive sampling method.”

I agreed with the need to conduct a single-case study with a qualitative approach for several reasons.

- Qualitative approach: This type of approach is suitable for the research because it is not only to examine the numerical data but also to gain a deep understanding of the choices, strategies, and problems faced by the owner (Lim, 2025).
- Purposive sampling and Single case study: Direct access to Baked by Shamimi is already possible, so a single case study is possible. The owner has experience in managing the business for more than 6 years and is acquainted with the increasing ingredient costs, which justifies purposeful sampling.
- Semi-structured interview: This type of interview allows me to ask further questions to the owner based on the answers she provides during the interview, yet still be able to ask the pre-planned questions (Loxton, 2026).

The research question was clarified to make the study practical and realistic. First, a general question was considered, such as “How does the increase in the cost of ingredients impact the overall performance of the business?” The term ‘business performance’, however, was too broad and could require access to specific sales data and confidential financial information. Therefore, the focus of the study was narrowed down to maintaining customers’ needs and company responses. With the use of data from the company’s Instagram and Threads accounts, the study methodology was also improved to concentrate primarily on the owner. This maintains the study’s compact size, practicality, and realism.

TASK 4: Summary Research Proposal

The main research question of this project is:

“What steps does a home bakery take when it's faced with increasing ingredient prices and still needs to satisfy customers' demand?”

Baked by Shamimi will be the only local case study for this investigation. A few key phrases need to be clarified in order to better comprehend this question. Rising ingredient costs indicate an increase in the prices of basic ingredients, such as butter, flour, and dairy products, that can increase the cost of a cake (Berman & Nunes, 2025). The willingness and capacity of local consumers to purchase cakes at a particular price at a particular time is referred to as customer demand (Hayes, 2026). According to Malik et al., a home-based business is defined as a small production unit with low overheads which operates from the owner's home and normally has a low production capacity compared to a commercial cake shop. Finally, pricing decisions are associated with the owner's attitude towards pricing and the balance between profit and price sensitivity (Alderton Bhudia, 2024).

To ensure that the study is structured and practical, a research topic is purposely designed. The notion of a home business cake is vital in that it enables data to be collected firsthand and keeps the research area small and manageable. It is evident in the sentence, “respond to rising ingredient costs”, that the owner's main concern is top of mind during the interview. In addition, “while trying to maintain customer demand” highlights the company's biggest challenge, which is to stay profitable without scaring customers off with high prices. Use of terms such as overall business performance were dropped because they were too vague, and a microbusiness might be less likely to reveal personal financial details.

The present investigation will be carried out by the use of a qualitative single-case study design. This was a qualitative approach because the main objective is to obtain an understanding of the owner's experience, thinking and decision-making methods, rather than focusing on numerical facts or statistics (Dahal, 2025). By focusing on a single business case study, the study can further investigate the actual situation of Baked by Shamimi.

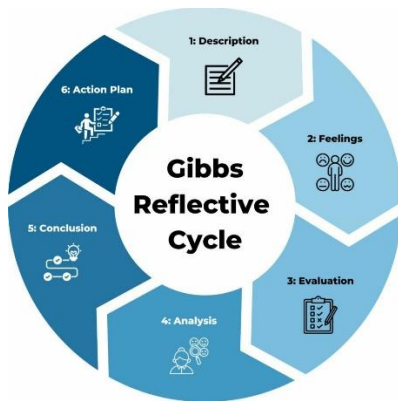
A number of useful actions will be taken to increase the study's validity and reliability. Dependability will be achieved by using a typical semi-structured interview guide with non-leading questions. If applicable, the owner's thoughts in the interview will be verified by Instagram posts, Threads posts, and product photos. Member checking will also be conducted

by showing them back to the owner to ensure that the main points and interpretations are representative of the owner's meaning.

Data will be collected mainly from semi-structured interviews with the business owners. This is suitable because it allows you to have a list of pre-prepared questions, but still allows you to ask more questions if you need them. To give more information about the company, supporting visual evidence will also be gathered, such as screenshots of social media and pictures of the baking area. Purposive sampling will be used for sampling in this investigation. This would be suitable, as the owner of Baked by Shamimi was specifically chosen as she has experience of running a home-based cake business for more than 6 years and has experienced firsthand the rising cost of ingredients.

Data will only be collected and utilised with the consent of the data owner. Before using any images, screenshots or data related to the business in the assignment, the owner will give her consent in advance. No private financial information of any sort will be sought that is not essential, and no data will be used except for academic purposes. The study's scope is limited to one home-based cake business, therefore, the results of this study might not be generalizable to other home-based cake businesses.

TASK 6: Gibbs Reflective Cycle



6.1 Description

I chose Baked by Shamimi, a neighbourhood home-based bakery, as my case study for this Changemakers module. I got in touch with the owner to use a Google Form survey and follow-up interview questions to collect primary data. Through this procedure, I was able to determine that the company's biggest operational concern is growing ingredient costs. In tasks 2 and 3, I developed a targeted research topic and appropriate qualitative approach using ChatGPT and scholarly literature. This served as the foundation for my research proposal and presentation.

6.2 Feelings

When I first approached the business owner, I was anxious because I thought she could turn down my request for an interview. I was relieved when she consented to take part. Later on, though, I didn't understand the distinction between an appropriate research question and an interview question. Verifying the existence of the books and journal papers that AI recommended was one of the most difficult tasks. I felt more assured about the project's course once my research subject was more defined.

6.3 Evaluation

Overall, the procedure went smoothly in a number of areas. I had direct access to a local business owner who gave helpful insight regarding an actual business issue. Additionally, I was able to relate the business's problem to scholarly ideas and research techniques. Nevertheless, I originally confused interview questions with research questions because my initial research topic was too general. Furthermore, concentrating on a single company reduced the quantity of data available, therefore, the results cannot be applied to the entire microbusiness sector.

6.4 Analysis

These assignments taught me that conducting research involves more than just searching the internet for information. A research question must be precise, practical, and appropriate for the study's objectives. I also discovered that while AI can be helpful in coming up with ideas and spotting potential academic notions, its results should always be thoroughly examined to prevent false or inaccurate information. I learned from this endeavour that actual business issues are frequently more complicated than they initially seem. What can really be studied may depend on participant access. I have discovered that a qualitative approach is helpful for gaining a deeper knowledge of the actual experiences, choices, and difficulties experienced by a business owner.

6.5 Conclusion

If I could do this project over again, I would structure my interview questions more thoughtfully and refine my research question sooner. Additionally, I would provide the subject a clearer explanation of the research's goal right away. I would also gather more proof from the company's social media accounts and secondary sources.

6.6 Action Plan

Instead of reviewing AI-generated data and references later, I shall confirm them as soon as I receive them for upcoming research projects. Additionally, I'll make sure that my research question is clear from the start. I was able to comprehend the financial difficulties faced by my own community by conducting research on a local company in Malaysia. My future career in human resources and business-related employment will benefit from the research and critical-thinking abilities I gained from this assignment.

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Appendices



Figure 1: Baking Environment

